

# **The Course of the Bow**

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Patrick King

The Course of the Bow

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## **Dedication**

To Bob Stewart for the inspiration for the story.

To Linda Rubenstein for everything else.

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## First Things First

A few soft and muffled claps accompanied Alban Wozzeck's entrance from the wings. He hesitated at first, gripped his violin by its neck and, without looking back at the two stage hands directly behind him and the cluster of other backstage figures whispering behind them, raised the instrument in a gesture that, had any of them noticed, may have passed as a thank you or, at least, an approving nod. Their collective attentions instead were devoted to the chatter in the headsets and other anticipated signals coming from lighting, sound, and rigging until the stage manager twirled her hand above her head and forced a silence across the intercoms with the cue, "He's on stage."

Wozzeck strode quickly into full view, his eyes fixed on his mark, center stage. His lips were pursed, upturned slightly at the corners of his mouth in the way someone might smile from nervousness, embarrassment, or even regret. As if to stir the air and perhaps signal a claque to rev it up, he swiftly drew the bow that he had up to this point cradled daintily in the bend of his elbow and whirled the tip vigorously away from his body. With each step he took, the audience's response rapidly grew brighter and crisp, punctuated by complements of loud whistles and howls until finally the amphitheater was full of the rush and thunder of applause. Wozzeck tensed his grip and clasped the bow and violin tighter as if to keep him upright in the midst of tornado or stampede. When he at last reached the lone spot marked for him at center stage, he staggered slightly.

He brandished the bow playfully now like a sword in the direction of the footlights until he felt another sharp prick in the pad of his index finger. He tried to ignore it and, with a quick turn of his hand and an even quicker glance at it, which altogether formed like a clamp onto the frog of the bow, he was sure he spotted blood. He was

certain of the meaning. An icy sensation raced through his body and he jerked his head upward toward the audience, glaring at someone, perhaps everyone, then suddenly mouthed something no one could hear above the din, something resembling a groan or a curse. Just as suddenly, his face grew wan, and, as the applause continued to drown out any other noise, his knees crumpled and he collapsed in a sprawl that consumed his instrument beneath him and sent his bow, now the loudest sound in the concert arena, careening and whirling like a loosed propeller across the stage toward the hush and murmur where the applause had been.

## The Body Report

Having watched a day  
break, an other-faced  
man rears his head  
and will freeze, as if  
to say nine more minutes  
whether he looked forward  
and teetering back.

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Bitlieux "Betty" Wendt, Sergeant, Reserve, on temporary assignment, Department of Public Safety, Arizona; 09:51:00, Wednesday, February 29, 1984:

Summary of incident, per interviews with detainee and personal observations . . .

I had fixed trouble on the detainee the very first time only that morning as he was standing on the side of the road by his motorcycle. He was just standing. I'd clocked about 160 miles from Phoenix and making my return. The local team could have investigated without interference, but Captain White insisted I check out the incident at the Casino. He'd gotten a call from Duck Waddly, chief of security, asking for a favor.

"Wrap it up quickly," he said.

That's what I was doing, and had just turned onto AZ-72E from AZ-95S. The detainee could have been suffering the influence of hallucinogens or opioids, quiet and dazed as he was, but fixing hard on him I could tell he was just disturbed—deeply, I expect—not by unnaturally induced causes, not certainly by drugs. I suspect it was the deceased on the side of the road.

The sun was just coming up and he was standing straight up in this kind of red-blue desert sunrise, arms stiff at his side and his whole body quite still, even as he was

craning his neck to one side trying to get a good look at something, I supposed. It was probably the body of the deceased. He said his name was Chass Weir. He even spelled it for me without prompting: W-E-I-R. Then he said he was watching the sky come up and move a different direction from the earth, kind of the way a ball inside another ball might go in an opposite direction from one another. But it wasn't hallucination the way he made it make sense; that much I figured. No; in my best estimation, he was just off balance, probably, again, from the deceased.

He had told me later that while it was still dark he got on his motorcycle to ride and not recklessly, either. Even though he nor the deceased had helmets. He had read somewhere how Lawrence of Arabia rode a motorcycle, no helmet, and not recklessly. He was, he says, T. E. Shaw then, hiding out in an assumed name, pretending no one could discover his identity. This Shaw had swerved to avoid hitting some young chaps, as he called them, on bicycles on a country road in England and had hit something else, dying on the spot. Weir said Old T. E. rode a Brew, which sounded like—well, you know—a come-on to me, the way he pronounced it and kind of smiled when he said it. But then he spelled it: capital B, lower case r-o-u-g-h and claimed that Lawrence rode lots of them before he died. It was the fastest motorbike in England. But he didn't ride it because it was faster than anything around. Weir was certain of that. He knew better. There were lots of fast cars that were faster than any Brough. Somebody doesn't ride a motorcycle because it's faster. A person rides a motorcycle because it's sooner. That's what Chass Weir said, "because it's a lot sooner." It takes off faster, accelerates faster sooner than anything.

So early this morning Mr. Weir got on his Harley to ride. Not very fast. Not like the devil. Just one up, two

down, one up, and he was up to speed pretty soon thereafter.

I naturally escorted him down to where the body of the deceased was found, where he'd placed it sometime shortly after she died last night—a sight I would have liked to see: Weir rolling down the road with a curled up, frail woman breathing her last and holding on so that they could get going back to Phoenix, too. I would have seen them that much sooner had I come up on the 72 instead of from Quartzsite.

He said, "She just let go."

He didn't mean she fell off the motorcycle because there were no signs of that kind of trauma. He meant she died. I'm no pathologist, but I'd say it actually looked like she let go peaceably. But Mr. Weir didn't make that at all clear. That's why we still have him—to clear up and corroborate all of the evidence.

So while he was standing next to the body, I was crouching down on one knee inspecting the area and the body for any sign of violence or harm. I even looked closely at Mr. Weir, who was trying to unfurl the twist I'd put in his collar. I'd done it to grip him when I escorted him from where he was standing on the road to where the body lay. I wasn't supposed to touch anything or spoil any kind of evidence. That's why it was kind of weird for Weir to be standing there that close to evidence—a possible crime scene and all. But that's what Captain White wanted once he was on the scene. He was mad that he'd had to come all that way.

"Wendt," the Captain barked, never at a loss for loudness, "is the doctor or forensics on their way? What about the photogra—"

"I've got a camera in the front seat," I interrupted.

"What about our photographer, Wendt?" he yelled again, this time sounding a bit impatient. I guess I was a

bit impatient, too. I had this camera already in the front, I mean, back seat of my vehicle.

“I can get—” I started to say before he cut me off, again as loud as he could, if only silence could hear—I mean talk, because he didn’t say anything; he just yelled my name and glared at me. For some reason Captain White doesn’t warm up very easily.

## Is It Murder?

“Is it murder?”

“I don’t know. Murder is something for you and lawyers.”

“Cause of death then?”

“His heart stopped. He had some blockage in the arteries, but I would guess not enough all by itself to bring on cardiac arrest. Certainly not enough to kill him as quickly as it did. I would say it was heart failure, but it makes me suspicious. Something with very fast acting properties may have been introduced directly into the blood stream. Look here at the pad of the index finger on his right hand. See? There’s a small cut.”

“And . . .”

“The skin is broken and he was bleeding at the time of his death. The wound still contains traces of a waxy substance that only further tests will tell if it had anything to do with what killed him. Have you found the bow yet?”

“No, not yet. Why?”

“Could be nothing at all. Forensics could shed some light on this. It’s likely he was holding the bow in his right hand. Find the same substance and traces of his blood on the bow, you know, and it might point to the weapon that killed him. If a weapon was involved. If you’re looking for murder and not just natural causes.”

“I’m looking for answers!”

“Well, I need more tests.”

## What Do You Think?

“We think he was murdered. We think the bow may have been the weapon.”

“Wozzeck was murdered? Couldn’t have happened to a more deserving fellow. And with his bow. I’d say that’s ironic, but it’s more like poetic justice. I think he must’ve stole the bow, at least didn’t pay for it, if I know my Wozzeck. But I’d heard he collapsed on stage. How did the bow do it? I’d like to know. Bows can be temperamental. But murderous? That’s something new in their evolutionary development.”

“Right. Well, we’re not sure how. He was holding it just before he died, and he had a cut on his fingers. Pathology thinks that some kind of poison got in the wound. Is it possible some part of the bow could have been used like a fang to pierce the skin and poison him?”

“Like a snake? Interesting analogy. Well, it’s possible I suppose. I don’t see how. There’s nothing on the bow that is sharp enough to pierce the skin. Unless the bow was broken into jagged fragments. Or if he had a cut already, a tight grip of the bow could possibly open a cut and make it bleed. Are there any traces of poison on the bow?”

“We haven’t found the bow he was using. Apparently, it slid off the stage. We think it’s possible someone found it and left with it.”

“No chance it’s still lying hidden where it fell? Or is it laying? I can’t ever remember.”

“Not a chance.”

“Was it his Peccatte? He’d as like be using it for a performance.”

“These two are the only ones we found other than the one that’s gone missing. They were back stage with some of his other belongings. What’d you mean you think he stole it?”

“I mean these two. Neither of these are a Peccatte. I made them. They’re a Wooden. That’s a bit pretentious of me to suggest some kind of posterity for something I made, but I did make them. The name is also something of a pun. I’m . . . I mean they’re mostly wooden, but they’ve got my name on them. See? Here and there. Were I Peccatte, I may have hidden the name or rather a code for the maker’s identity under this piece of leather or something like that. But these are Ron Wooden bows. Can’t be worth more than what I sold them for to Wozzeck. I don’t hide my name. He agreed to \$200 a piece. I actually sold him a few. And Wozzeck still owes me. It’s like him to leave them lying around. Laying around? Oh, what the—”

“There were no other bows found.”

“Especially the Peccatte? Well then, someone has a very expensive souvenir from the show. Someone who probably knows something about bows and probably took all the rest. It doesn’t make sense that Wozzeck had only these two bows among his things.”

“Right. How many would there be? And just how expensive is a Pecc—what you said?”

“Peccate. I’m sure they would have returned it if they thought it was just a bow, especially if they thought it was one of my bows. Or destroy it if it was a murder weapon. But where are the other bows? He had to have at least five. I hope they haven’t destroyed the Peccate. It’d be like destroying the Tecchler.”

“The what?”

“The violin that Wozzeck usually played. It’s an antique probably close to 350 years old”

“Oh, that was smashed when he fell on it.”

“Smashed? The Tecchler? All of it?”

“A lot of it. Whatever he was holding kind of broke in half.”

“Is the body intact?”

“Wozzeck’s body is still in the morgue. An autopsy has already been done. But yes intact. Why?”

“No, I mean the violin’s body. If it’s not damaged, that’s still a very valuable violin.”

“Oh. Well, I’m not sure.”

“I’d love to know. Wozzeck can die, but to lose a Tecchler. It was the Tecchler? That’s priceless. Well, a hundred or two thousand dollars at least. The bastard. Maybe that’s a sign the bow was destroyed, too, unless, as I said, it was saved by someone who knows bows. I’d say, in terms of value, it’s like the Tecchler. And if you had to put a price one it, I’d start at least for around \$150,000.”

“For a friggin bow?”

“Not just any bow. A Peccatte with tortoiseshell. I serviced it for him. He still owes me for that, too.”

“What kind of service does a bow require?”

“New horsehair, some polishing, checking the pad. Some bows you check the camber. Things like that. Hey, would that be a motive? He was killed for the bow?”

“Anything’s possible. Any oil or waxy substance of any kind that goes into servicing a bow? Would Mr. Wozzeck have had any reason to use oil or grease?”

“Only if he was a fool. Well, he was a fool, but he knew better about his instrument. He wouldn’t have done anything more than apply some rosin to the bow hair and wipe the bow down with a cloth. He’d leave anything else to me.”

“Rosin. Can that become oily or waxy?”

“Oh, no. Rosin is almost like a rubber eraser. You know, fairly hard and dry. It could make the violin or the bow a little dusty. That’s why he’d wipe it like dusting. Were his fingers dusty?”

“Dusty?”

“From the rosin. I doubt that anything oily would have come from the bow. I don’t use anything oily. I

polish with beeswax, but very sparingly. And that goes for violins, too.”

“Could the violin cut him? It was a cut on his right hand.”

“No. He’d have to have gotten a cut from something else, I’m sure.”

“You didn’t like him much, I take it. Just for the record, where were you the night of the concert?”

“Am I under suspicion? I can name lots of people who didn’t like him much. And I was certainly not at the concert. If I knew what would happen, I would have killed him before he could fall on that Tecchler or lose the bow. But I can check my calendar. Dates aren’t my strong point. Most likely I was right here working or getting drunk or both.”

“Drunk? Is that standard practice for you.”

“Well, not standard, but I have been known . . . when it’s routine, I can have a few drinks. Can’t get into anything intricate. That requires a steady hand and clear vision. Yes, here I am. I was here. And I think I was drunk.”

“Any witnesses? Anyone who can verify you were here?”

“Just me and the shop.”

“Right. Well, thank you Mr. Wooden. We may need to talk some more. Don’t go anyplace.”

“Yes. I’ll do that. I’m . . . I mean . . . no, I won’t.”

“Call Wendt here. Wendt give him your number. Give us a call if you think of anything else that might be important.”

“Well, there is one thing. Will I be getting my bows back? They weren’t paid for. Like I said. I’d like to try and get something for them if I can find another buyer. They might even be worth more now that they’re part of a murder investigation.”

“I can’t say. Right now they’re evidence of a sort and will have to remain with us.”

“Just like the broken violin, I assume?”

“Right.”

“Okay. Have to wait for the trial, then?

“If it’s at all possible, we’ll let you know.”

## Why Weir?

“He pronounces it Wire,” Sergeant Wendt was explaining; “he spells it W-I-, uh, W-E-I-R.”

“Wire?” Captain White repeated.

“I can write it down for you, Sir,” Wendt offered, then drew a small notebook from her back pocket.

“W-E-I-R.” She spelled the name again as she wrote it; then with a snap tore the paper out and handed it to the Captain.

“WEIR. Okay,” the Captain nodded pensively, looking at the piece of paper and for a moment seeming to be judging it for its weight or its color or its uneven tear. He turned it over and examined its backside and looked again at the body on the ground. Then he crumpled the paper in his hand and tossed it with enough force so that it bounced near Sergeant Wendt’s feet and rolled across the coarse desert floor until it lodged comfortably between the ground and the bushy tentacles of a nearby creosote.

“Tell me you’ve got something, Wendt.” This time he was impatient. “What’s in your report? You wrote that down, too, didn’t you?”

Sergeant Wendt broadened an already wide smile and proceeded to flip forward in her notebook. Her lips moved slightly as she did this, as if she were counting the pages she was turning—a kind of mantra or paean celebrating the Captain’s request. The Captain, on the other hand, unsuccessfully suppressed a grimace and let out a sigh.

“Yeah,” Wendt at last said. “Chass Weir. He says he had saved her. Let’s see . . . He had been her hero. He kinda described it this—”

The Captain’s jaw clenched and he snatched the notebook out of Wendt’s hands.

“—way.”

Sergeant Wendt puzzled briefly at the Captain's action and his tensed expression, but did not react and quite naturally and immediately reached to the notebook the Captain was now holding and riffled ahead several pages in a kind of formal demonstration of the length of the report the Captain had asked for.

"Okay, okay," Captain White said, relenting and handing the notebook back to Wendt, "let's hear it. Tone it down, Wendt. Okay?"

Sergeant Wendt had already cleared her throat and began. "He kinda described it like this."

*The morning winter sun was melting a patch of frost, which like a summer dew was moistening an otherwise dry and small stony clump of tall brittle golden grass that, had they spanned an acre thick or more, would have resembled a field of wheat ready for harvest. Long trident shadows from some nearby saguaros lay wrinkled and twisted across thick clusters of grey scrub brush and a scattering of rusted derelict pieces of cars that had perhaps long ago traveled and shed, like great molting beasts, remnants of themselves. The shadows crisscrossed and overlapped and in all ways covered the body of B.J. Wertute as it nestled in a crumpled fetal-like form on its side. But unlike its surroundings her body was, alas, newly arrived and yet to dissolve into a natural setting. A slightly damp pair of red and white high-top Converses, also slightly caked in sand, covered the woman's feet, and a blue baseball cap, fastened to the head by a saffron-colored scarf tied under the chin, partially hid her face with its beak, shielding the face, it seemed, were shielding needed, from the long morning angle of the sun. She was in the open, unprotected but for the shadows, on a spot of hard, bare, stony ground. Frost had formed like a shroud and lately clung only in patches to her shoulder and arm and part of her hip and thigh as it had begun to melt and soak through the*

*earthtone cotton sweats covering her legs, the full length of her arms and torso.*

“The decedent’s name was B.J. Wertute. That’s all I got. Except – oh, yeah – except he had saved her. He had been her hero.”

“What are you talking about, Wendt? As usual, you told me absolutely nothing. What’s this hero shit?”

“I didn’t ask him,” Wendt replied; “he kinda blanked out on me.”

“Is that Weir?” the Captain demanded, pointing to a figure standing on an embankment next to the road.

A slender, dark-haired man, Chass Weir stood at the side of the road, facing the sunrise. His bare head was bowed and his eyes squinted to avoid looking straight into the sun. His figure cast a long, ever more slender, shadow that hooked slightly behind him onto the road. His hands hung at his side, his shoulders hunched a little, and he stretched one foot in front of the other and repeatedly punched the ground with the toe of his jack boot.

“Right, Captain,” Wendt responded and began writing again in her book.

Captain White immediately batted Wendt’s pen away from the notebook and shouted: “Get ‘im down here, muy pronto, Wendt. I want to hear his own thoughts before they become any more of yours.”

## If It's Nothing

“There’s nothing here,” Captain White complained, standing and walking around his desk toward Wendt. “Doc’s got nothing. Forensics nada. We don’t even have a murder weapon. Just a small cut on a finger. It had to be a coronary. “

“But what about the missing bow?” Wendt’s question struck the Captain a little like protest. “It’s still missing. Wooden said it’s a very expensive bow. Who would’ve just walked away with it? And those other bows, if there were others? Who would’ve been there just by chance? Couldn’t it have been planned?”

He grabbed the file folder Wendt was holding and tossed it onto the Sergeant’s desk.

“Stop asking so many questions, Wendt,” he insisted unapologetically. “We’ve got the answers we need for now.” He sighed, then softened his reproach. “There’s nothing there. And we’ve got this other business with—with what’s his name—Weir to sort out.”

“Weir. Right. Spelled with an ‘e’ ‘i’,” Sergeant Wendt beamed, then offered: “He’s still only talking in riddles.”

“Get the lab report on the victim. I want to know what killed her and how. Has he been evaluated yet?”

“Last I heard there was somebody coming to see about him.”

“There is.” One of the officers approaching Wendt from the front desk interrupted. “She’s waiting in the lobby. Should I send her back?”

“Who is she?”

“Identified herself as a Chass Weir’s co-worker . A Julie Wisnosky.”

“No. That’s not who I’m waiting for. What’s she want?”

“Didn’t say. Just wants to talk to somebody about Weir. Send her away?”

“No, no. We’ll talk to her. Yeah. Send her back.”

Wendt nodded at Captain White for his approval. He nodded back and the two of them looked toward the door to see the officer pointing them out to a woman noticeably older than any one of them. She wore a simple get up of vanilla colored short-sleeve blouse, white belt cinching a pair of green slacks around a slender waist. Upon closer inspection, she had no rings on her fingers, a thin gold—perhaps golden—bracelet around her right wrist. Her hair color smacked of gold, too, styled in what was perhaps a tight permanent of short, thick fluffy waves that for their length barely touched the collar of her blouse. As Wendt would later observe, her eyes were blue.

“Miss Wisnosky, I’m—” Captain White began to say.

“Mrs.” She interrupted.

“Ah, yes. I’m Captain White. This is Sgt. Wendt.”

Her eyes passed from one to the other, nodding in a slight nervousness at the two.

“I understand you worked with Chass Weir.” Captain White stated, mispronouncing the name. “Is that right?”

“Weir,” Julie corrected immediately. A reflex or habit the two detectives supposed. She added in an apologetic tone, “It’s always too much like weird if you pronounce it the way it’s spelled.”

“But you do work with him?” the Captain asked after pausing briefly, making it clear in his tone that the name was becoming a nuisance.

“For about five years now,” she responded, her eyes gazing downward at her hands, the fingers of each interlocked at the tips.

“Would you like to sit down?” the Captain finally offered.

“Thank you. I think Chass Weir only knew B. J. Wertute from the College. I never quite knew what the B.J. stood for. We weren’t that close. Friendly, but mostly professional with one another. I wasn’t even sure Chass knew her. Knew her as well as I did. It wasn’t that he couldn’t have known her. I just never saw that they had much contact or any at all.

“The College?” Captain White asked.

“S-C—I mean Scottsdale Community College.”

“Oh. Yes, I should have guessed. Well—what do you know about the deceased?”

“B.J. was likable; she was friendly when friendly got her on the receiving side. Mostly she was demanding and knew she could be. Is that what you mean?” Julie hesitated, then continued without waiting for a response.

“She was tall, a sort of imposing tall. She had frosted hair, kind of cropped short and thick, and she had a pretty face—a kind of Eleanor Parker look. You know, the Countess from *Sound of Music*. Not everybody liked her all the time. She could be nasty and say things that could hurt. B.J. could—not the Countess. Well, the Countess could, too, I guess.”

Captain White grimaced for the digression, and Julie sensed his impatience. She hurried the pace of her description.

“She could take things. I mean just demand something and take them like they were hers or supposed to be hers. Poor Irma Woosley, another English instructor. B.J., well, stole her setups all the time. She’d barge into Irma’s classes and say something like, ‘Irma, I need this right now.’ And before Irma could say anything, it was gone with B.J.”

“What are these setups you’re talking about?”

“Oh, yes. Sorry. The movie projectors, tape players, phonographs, and equipment like that. That’s what we did; we, Chass and me, delivered them and set ‘em up.

And, boy I tell you," Julie continued with an excitement in the pace and pitch of her voice, "B.J. was trim and very sure that what she had for looks was what everyone wanted. She all the time told me to change my glasses for something other people would want. 'Stay in fashion, Julie,' she'd joke. Only, I never thought she was really joking. I mean, when's the last time anyone asked you where'd you get your clothes in a way that sounded like why'd you wear that?

"I don't think B.J. thought much about other people's feelings. So I'd just stay quiet when she'd tell me things. Except for the time she told me she had lumps."

"Lumps?" the two detectives said in unison, Sgt. Wendt cocking her head slightly sideways as if an involuntary reflex to a puzzling revelation. Julie realized she may have said the wrong thing.

"I mean, it was just that it was a shock. She'd never told me anything like that before—I mean about herself. And she wasn't really telling me as much as asking me. She was really just asking me if I worried when I had my lumps.

"I guess I shouldn't be telling you this."

Captain White, too, looked puzzled, first in Sgt. Wendt's direction, then back at Julie.

"I'm not sure I'm following you, Mrs. Wish—"

"Wisnosky," Julie offered.

"Yes. Mrs. Wisnosky. Are we talking about something she wore?" Captain White asked.

"Well . . ." Julie paused. "I had a lump on my breast. Turned out to be benign. B.J. said she had them in her breast. Said all over. Whatever it was, I was surprised."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Wisnosky. But this relates to this case how?" Captain White sounded curious, but annoyed.

“Oh, yes.” Julie was beginning to tremble slightly, her voice quavering.

“Chass had just come back from delivering some equipment and was checking the schedule book for other deliveries. He was standing over by the door at the counter. I’d been in the back fooling with a projector that was eating film and had only just gone into my office. I was a bit flustered because I don’t really know much about fixing projectors. I know how to load the film and rewind and unjam the thing when it starts to jam. And then that’s it.

“B.J. walked in right past the counter and into my office. Chass must’ve seen her. She closed the door and sat down. I was still standing and she motioned for me to sit, like it was her office. She looked anxious, almost nervous. I thought she was maybe angry about something—maybe a broken projector or an undelivered film to her class and she had to let her students go early because of it. That’s happened before and, boy, I hear about it.”

“Yes. Okay. But it has to do with what?” Now, Captain White was merely annoyed.

Julie looked first at him then turned to Sgt. Wendt as if for sympathy.

“She blurred out, ‘My boobs are like rocks.’” Julie lowered her eyes, embarrassed, but did not stop.

“She blurred it out, looking straight at me to see—I kind of thought the way she was looking that she just wanted to see what kind of reaction I’d make. I could see through my office window that Chass was heading for the back room to have a look at the projector I’d been trying to fix.

“I almost laughed because, the way B.J. said it, it was like she was telling a joke, a joke about women’s breasts that she didn’t want anyone but me to hear. But I

was kind of angry myself, her coming in to my office and acting like it was hers.

“Come on, B.J.,’ I said, noticing that Chass was certainly not going to hear this. ‘That’s not funny.’

“But then I noticed she was serious and all of the sudden she became quiet, just as sudden as she blurted out what I thought was her boob joke. Only it wasn’t a joke. It was like she was shy or embarrassed, which I’ve never seen before.”

She paused for a moment, lowering her eyes and in a hushed voice added, “you know, from her. I mean her head was down and she was looking at her hands, which she was pulling at, one in the other, right across her chest. Like this . . .” Julie demonstrated, her voice again at full strength. “Her elbows were set on the arms of the chair she was sitting in.

“You found a lump, didn’t you, Julie?” she asked, looking up at me and looking like she was asking me to say something nice.

“I said I did—about two years before. She didn’t let me finish, but said it’d been about a year since she’d found hers and that now they were like rocks.”

“The lumps?” Sgt. Wendt asked.

“No; she meant her whole breast, both of them.” Julie cupped her breast in her hands and pushed her chest toward Sgt. Wendt, whom she was primarily talking to at this point, wincing as she did so. For an instant, Sgt. Wendt raised her hands in a motion that implied she was about to touch them, then quickly lowered her hands, restraining her impulse, and awkwardly nodded to acknowledge the meaning of Julie’s actions.

“She said she hadn’t seen anyone for them,” Julie continued, apparently undeterred or at least taking no heed of Sgt. Wendt’s or Captain White’s reactions.

“She wanted to know what I thought. I thought she should go to a doctor right away, is what I said. Now, of

course.” Her voice had become shrill. She looked first at Sgt. Wendt, then quickly turned her eyes on Captain White, searching for some reflex to the urgency that was in her voice.

“Now, she’s dead,” she continued with a quieter, calmer tone. “And I hear that Chass was with her. I probably should have known, but Chass never said anything to me. I know she walked back to Chass and said something, but I didn’t hear it. Then she left, going quickly out the back of the Center.”

“The Center?” Captain White was again looking very puzzled.

“The Media Center. That’s where Chass and I work,” Julie clarified.

“I didn’t notice he said anything to her. He just looked at her and watched her leave. He’d been playing with that projector, turning it on and off and such, trying to get it to work. After B.J. spoke to him and left, he just kind of stood there not doing anything. I called him into my office and told him about what B.J. had said. I don’t know why I said anything, but I guess I needed to tell someone. Chass kind of jerked around in the direction of where B.J. had gone out. He didn’t say anything. When he turned back around, I asked him how he made out with the broken projector. All he said was that it had a broken sound sensor—or burned out I guess. He said he’d go to Wiggins Supply for a new one. He turned back around and I thought he was staring at the projector. Maybe it was something else. Do you think it was something else?”

Julie looked first at Sgt. Wendt, then Captain White. And when Captain White did not respond or give any kind of signal, Sgt. Wendt offered, “We’re not sure what to think at this point, Mrs. Wisnosky. How long ago did this take place?”

“Oh, let’s see. I think it was about six months ago. I know B.J. was in the hospital around about then, which

was not too long after I'd seen her. I heard that she had a double mastectomy and a hysterectomy and I think she lost her hair in treatment. I never saw her again, though. Everything was just about that fast."

"Do you know if Mr. Weir—ah, Chass ever saw her again? Before just recently, that is?" Captain White asked.

"I just don't know, Captain," Julie responded. She was shaking her head and looking down at the floor. "You know he didn't ever talk about much other than things he would do for work. Once in a while I could draw him out, but nothing about any of this. I only heard about this business today and really only came down here to see if you could tell me. I mean, did he have something to do with her death?"

"We're still investigating, Mrs. Wisnosky." Captain White said, becoming quite formal in his tone. He looked at Sgt. Wendt and nodded, which was more of a you-take-it-from-here nod than any attempt at confirming the two were in sync. "So thank you for your concern and for coming in. Sgt. Wendt will take your statement."

He was already walking away when Julie asked, "Can I see him? Are visitors allowed?"

"Not a good idea at this time," he said abruptly without slowing his pace. "Wendt, please take care of Mrs.—," he shouted, hesitating at Julie's last name.

"Wisnosky?" Sgt. Wendt filled the awkward pause in the form of a question.

"Yes; Wisnosky." Captain White said louder still as he continued out the room.

Sgt. Wendt watched him as he left then turned to Julie and smiled. She explained that she would type up Julie's statement and have her sign it. It would take about another half hour. Could Julie wait? Or would she prefer to come back at a more convenient time?

Julie offered that she could come back and Sgt. Wendt walked with her to the exit.

“You needn’t even ask for us. Just tell the Desk why you’re here and they will get you taken care of.”

“I wasn’t much help, was I?” Julie finally said apologetically as she and Sgt. Wendt reached the door out.

“Any piece of this puzzle is helpful, Ma’am,” Sgt. Wendt offered. “And it’s quite a puzzle.”

Julie mustered a weak smile and nodded.

“Don’t forget to come back,” Sgt. Wendt called out as Julie walked away. “Your statement won’t be much good unless it’s signed.”

Julie looked back at the sergeant and nodded, then hurriedly squeezed out the door as a heavy-set uniformed officer holding a bundle of folders entered, politely excusing himself for the awkwardness.

## Anaphylaxis

“What kind of substance?”

“It’s nearly untraceable, Captain, and almost got away from me. It was in that waxy substance. That may be the only reason it didn’t get away.”

“Yes; okay, okay. But what was it?”

“The stuff that bees make.”

“You’re not . . . honey?”

“Please, Captain, such intimacy. No, it’s not honey. That would be wrong, so you’re right. It’s beeswax, probably from eucalyptus, which I understand is rare around here and rarer still that anyone would be allergic. But apparently Wozzeck was. I’m not even sure he knew it; it’s that rare. It gets even weirder.”

“Don’t tell me. He’s not really dead? Where are you going with this? I just want to know was this an accident or deliberate.”

“Well, it’s certainly curious. The beeswax was mixed with a substance like Woop, which accounts for the smell of oranges.”

“Woop?”

“Yes. You know, the hand cleaner mechanics will use. Woop it up, goop it off? No bells? It’s very effective on removing grease and, I suppose, a substance like beeswax. I’d say it was mixed equal parts with the beeswax. It had to have been placed on his index finger somehow. The most likely candidate is the bow. And as near as I can ascertain, the lesion to his finger occurred almost simultaneous to contact with the beeswax concoction. Find the bow and we may find the modus operandi. You see, it’s what I was about to say. His heart attack was very likely caused by an arterial spasm and its subsequent myocardial infarction; that is, a severe decrease in blood flow to the heart. As I said this is rare, but not unheard of as the sole and deadly reaction to the

anaphylactic shock that would have occurred because of an allergy to the beeswax.”

“Why not an allergy to this . . . this—what’d you call it?

“Woop?”

“Yes. This Woop.”

“Could be, but a more likely candidate for anaphylaxis is the beeswax.”

“Would you say the presence of this beeswax concoction is more than coincidence?”

“It appears so, and the most likely point of entry into his bloodstream was the small cut to his finger where we found what we’ve now ascertained was the beeswax mixed with the Woop for just the right viscosity and fluidity. So we need that bow.”

“Okay. That’s an intriguing analysis, but a bit of a leap, isn’t it? Suppose we do find the bow and discover this beeswax stuff all over it and that the bow somehow cut open his finger so the stuff could kill him. How do we prove it was deliberate if, as you say, this thing—this beeswax allergy—is rare and Wozzeck may not have even known he was allergic? If Wozzeck didn’t know it, how would anyone know it?”

“Good question. The proof is probably not that it was murder. Perhaps it was an attempt to sabotage his playing. Gum up the works, so to speak. His death being an unintended consequence. Maybe that’s all you got here. Still a crime, right?”

“You’re certain he died of an allergy?”

“As certain as I can be. Bee. Beeswax. Hmm. Not bad. Yes; I’m certain.”

## Mom

“Mom wasn’t the easiest person to know or get along with,” added Sandra, affecting a sigh with a puff of air before pursing her lips and drawing them slightly off-center until the asymmetry of her face reflected the puzzled expression on Captain White’s.

“Well, that wasn’t quite what I was getting at, Miss Vi-.” Captain White hesitated, then looked at Sgt. Wendt, who merely offered a sympathetic shrug.

“Why do I have you around?” he finally said, then turning to Sandra asked again, “I’m sorry, how do you say your name?”

“Sandra Viedt. Mrs. Sandra Viedt.” She formed a smile and nearly laughed. “I know, it’s not easy. I should’ve married someone whose name everyone can pronounce. Should’ve had parents with a pronounceable name, too. Wertute is not easy, either.”

She leaned back slightly, her chin tilted upward. As she pursed her lips again, her eyes briefly closed. “God!” she growled as if to no one through clenched teeth, “you might’ve made my choices a little easier.”

Then, looking at the Captain as if to assure him, she smiled. “Anyway,” she continued, “I tell everyone to think of wheat, like the grain. That’s how you say it. Mrs. Viedt.”

“Yes; thank you, Mrs. Viedt.” Captain White was glaring at Sgt. Wendt as he spoke. “We’ll try to remember that.” Turning back to Sandra, he asked her again, “Can you tell me when you last saw your mother?”

Sandra screwed up her face and contemplated her answer, moving the fingertips of one hand across her forehead in slow strokes. “Uhm, hell, I’m not sure,” she said hesitantly.

Struggling not to let his impatience show, Captain White looked back at Sgt. Wendt. At that moment, Sandra

stopped stroking her forehead and pushed her opened hand into the air toward the two detectives, much as an obvious signal for everyone to freeze. .

“Wait,” she said emphatically. Raising their eyebrows in unison and involuntarily, Captain White and Sgt. Wendt exchanged looks that tacitly conveyed their confusion and amusement over Mrs. Viedt’s gesture.

Sandra Viedt appeared to be in her late twenties, slender with shoulder-length naturally wavy blonde hair. Her eyelashes and brows were fashionably darker, her lips colored a light, glossy red, all of which combined to highlight the green in her eyes. Sgt. Wendt had put in her notes that Sandra was approximately 5’ 7” in height. She didn’t hazard a guess at Sandra’s weight and left that detail to future opportunities for gathering facts should, of course, it be necessary. At the moment, Captain White and Sgt. Wendt merely needed Sandra to tell them something relevant about her mother that might shed some light on how B. J. Wertute came to be dead in the desert while Chass Weir stood by.

“Yes, I can,” she continued. “It was at the hospital about two, three months ago. I’d just dropped her off.”

“Scottsdale Memorial?” Sgt. Wendt asked.

“Yes. That’s where she was being treated for the cancer. I took her to the ER. Got her into a wheelchair, and some orderlies or maybe nurses, I don’t know, took her from there.”

“Inside? To the ER? What did you do?” Captain White asked.

“Did I go in, you mean? No, I couldn’t just leave the car there. Besides, she was terminal. I’d been with her from the beginning. I didn’t want to be with her at the end. As I said she was hard to be around, and that was even before the cancer. Don’t get me wrong. I love my mom. Just couldn’t be around her anymore. So I just drove away. No, didn’t go in.”

“Do you know her doctor’s name?”

“No. Wait. Yes. Walt Wendell. I don’t know if he’s in that hospital. I’d take Mom to his office for her visits with him. He’s at Miller & Thomas. I can’t think of the address or number. He was treating her for the cancer. She had another doctor, the one who did all the surgery, but I can’t remember his name. I think it was Waite. Yes, Waite.”

Sandra began looking around, looking for a clock that could tell her the time.

“Hey, listen,” she said, “I’ve got to get going. Is there anything else you need from me?”

Captain White looked at his watch. “It’s not quite 2:00 o’clock,” he offered. “An appointment somewhere else? Because there are certain articles that belonged to your mother. Someone should probably claim them.”

“Oh, Christ,” Sandra exclaimed, and began bobbing slightly on tiptoe as she alternately shifted from one foot to the other. “I do have to be somewhere. Can I do that later?”

Captain White and Sgt. Wendt were at first surprised by Sandra’s little dance, unsure whether she was exercising bladder control or expressing some nervous anxiety.

“I’m sure that can be arranged, Mrs. Viedt,” Captain White at last said. “Just one other question. How well do you know Chass Weir?”

“Who?” Sandra stopped moving. The question seemed to surprise her.

“Chass Weir. He was found at the scene where your mother’s body was found,” Sgt. Wendt explained.

“Oh, him.” She said, sounding disappointed. For a moment she stopped moving. “Yes, I think I know who you’re talking about. But, look, I’ve got to go. I’ll call you about all Mom’s things.”

She turned and began walking away. “About Chass,” she added, spinning around to face the two detectives while still moving toward the exit. “He’s not a bad guy. Just a weird guy.”

## Motorcycle

At last he had his scooter, even though in pieces. All the pieces, he hoped. Elmer Wische had taken it apart, man, about . . . a . . . three years ago with every intention of putting it back together. But each year since is a long time, and 1100 bucks a lot of money for a few boxes of Harley parts that may or may not make a motorcycle whole anymore. And Chass had at least 1100 bucks and a hankering for a scooter, a big one like Elmer's. And he had time, maybe even another year if that's what it takes. So he took another year, and Elmer helped him get the knocking—a simple timing adjustment—to stop . . . for an extra 300.

Elmer was a whiz. He had other Harleys, but this was the biggest he had in pieces that he could spare. Said it was a shovelpan 1200cc, shovelhead to those who don't know. He'd already chopped it, and was including a very cool hi-lo seat in case you ever got some leg with you. Yeah, man, that was one very cool bike.

He rode it over to B.J.'s. She was still in the hospital, but he said he'd watch her place for her. She had told him her husband had left almost as soon as she was diagnosed, before the surgery. Her daughter had left, too, she guessed. She hadn't heard from her since not too long after she ended up in the hospital. Even the pigs, she'd heard, were gone.

“Fuck ‘em. I wish I were the one going somewhere,” B.J. exploded.

“Can you ride a bike?” Chass asked.

“Does the Pope shit in the woods?” She glared at him, but not with defiance. Her eyes had begun to tear. “Christ, this hurts,” she gasped, inhaling and shuddering for the pain.

“Well, I meant with me when you're ready. I can take you on my bike.”

## Were It True

“She liked pigs,” Chass offered.

No one had asked, and Captain White clenched, girding defensively against a supposed insult. Sgt. Wendt reacted without the clenching, but slightly shuddered as if overcome by an involuntary twitch. “How do you feel about—“ She decided against saying the word, and after a moment pressed the issue calmly with a different question. “What’d you say she liked?”

“Yeah. Pigs,” he went on, apparently unaware of either the Captain or the Sergeant’s reactions. “Not too much people go to that length, but B.J. swore they kept rattlers away. The fangs can’t pierce the hides, so the pigs don’t care if they get bit. Makes the snakes nervous, especially when the pigs dig in the dirt with their snoots. So she says they just get out of the way and don’t hang around. Works pretty good. Yeah. Works pretty . . .”

His voice trailed off and, without moving his head, pointed his eyes at his hand. He had started chipping at the edge of the table with a finger nail. When Captain White tapped on the table and quizzically called his name to draw his attention, Chass yanked his hand away as if he’d received a jolt of electricity. His head jerked up, his shoulders back, and he crossed his arms and stiffened in his chair. He was now looking across the interrogation table at the space between Captain White and Sgt. Wendt. His conversation was, in the parlance of polite society, a tad one-sided, prompting Sgt. Wendt to move closer to Captain White and put herself into Chass’s line of sight. At the same time she, too, called out, as if from a distance, “Mr. Weir. Chass.”

It apparently worked. His gaze gradually settled on her.

“Pigs? You mean the farm animals, right?”

“Ahh,” Captain White sighed. He nudged Sgt. Wendt from her place and moved into Chass’s gaze. “Are there pigs in this story, Chass?”

Balancing his elbows at the edge of the table he dropped his chin into his hands. “We decided it would work,” he muttered.

Then lifting his head and without making eye contact, Chass resumed his gaze onto the spot Captain White now occupied. And, still with a hushed voice, continued: “We would stay together and not another word about it. No vows or promises. ‘Are we in love?’ I guess B.J. said. I put it in my head that we are. We share what we have, even what’s not. And she seemed to want to know if it was love. She said, ‘It’s everything we have. Or need to have.’ I touched her cheek and said, ‘Right there.’ And she smiled. B.J. smiled. ‘We aren’t going to have any babies, you know? I’m not going to get any more pigs.’ She never named the pigs she had. And I said, ‘Don’t you care?’ I don’t know. She didn’t say anything more to that, then took hold of my arm and said, ‘You don’t care, do you?’ That’s when I put it in my head: ‘Don’t need to care.’”

Captain White loudly slapped the palm of his hand onto the table. Sgt. Wendt immediately stood up as if by reflex and stared down wide-eyed at her superior as he roared, “There’s a body in the morgue, Mr. Weir, because you cared enough to leave it in the desert. I’m told Mrs. Wertute was dead before you put her there. But you put her there, right?”

Chass did not react to the Captain’s outburst.

“Someone let the pigs go, I guess,” is all he said in a voice even more hushed than before.

The Captain stood up and walked to the door. He didn’t look back. As he turned the knob and pulled the door open, he made what could be characterized as a passing shot: “He’s either fucking acting or he’s headed

for a padded cell. You see what you can make of those  
damn pigs, Wendt."

## Unloosed

Nearly everyone was standing and, as quickly as Alban Wozzeck had fallen, froze in silent bewilderment. The stagehands from the wings and an assortment of well-dressed off-stage guests rushed out into full view and pressed in a kind of huddle around the body while two of them crouched down on their knees in an effort to administer aid. Slowly, a commotion of voices and an exchange of confused looks among the audience, more like the agitation of water in a tub than wonder, eventually spread throughout the arena. Chass Weir and B.J. Wertute began to rise cautiously from their front row seats, but not before B.J. had slumped forward as if she, too, had collapsed. Chass grabbed hold of her arm. She glanced up at him and smiled; then, stretching her other arm down to the floor, she clasped the bow that had just a moment ago grazed her leg in the course of its whirling trajectory and now rested at her feet. Righting herself with Chass's help, in a meticulous, cautious, and slightly clumsy stealth, she concealed the bow in the folds of her jacket. No one else had seemed to notice. All of the attention was directed at the stage and the continuously swelling commotion of people around the spot where Wozzeck's body lay. A cacophony of voices, both from the stage and in the audience, filled the air until, finally, an announcement over the loudspeaker appealed for calm and understanding and requested that everyone proceed to the nearest exit.

“Would the ushers please assist anyone requiring assistance,” the announcement concluded.

B.J. handed her jacket to Chass. He clutched it under his arm, confident he knew that he was helping. He tapped her at the elbow with his hand, as if cuing her to the direction they needed to go. Instead, she turned to him and with a faint smile nodded that she understood. She raised her hand to his arm to keep him from moving.

“I’m not sure I’ll make it through a crowd,” she explained, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. “Is there a way we could get out behind the stage?”

Chass looked around and noticed that the ushers who would usually stand guard to prevent entry to the stage were not at their stations. Probably in the crowd assisting people, he thought.

“There,” he said, motioning to the steps at the far end of their row. “This way.”

They were soon standing between the amphitheater and the river. B.J. marveled that no one had seen them. “That was like being invisible.”

She relaxed her arm, which she had held tightly entwined in his while they navigated up the steps to the stage and through the labyrinth of props and equipment that they encountered on their way to the exit at the back of the stage.

The twilight of the sunset was long past and a sliver of moon was rising. The only real light, a yellow hue, came from a lamp on a pole between them and the river on the other side of the paved lane from where they were standing. “You wait here,” Chass whispered to B.J., stroking her arm as he let go of her and her coat. “I’ll get my bike and bring it around. Won’t be long,” he assured her.

B.J. was weak. She was anxious. She couldn’t wait. Chass and his motorcycle, she mused almost aloud and with a tad bit of petulance. She moved slowly and clumsily around in what she thought was a tight circle as she tugged at the cap and scarf that she had stuffed in the outside pocket of her coat. The cap was, of course, easy to put on her head. Wrapping it in the scarf and then tying the scarf under her chin, however, proved loathsome and extremely tiring. Had she the strength to scream, she reassured herself, she would have.

It was then that she sensed she was having trouble seeing. Chass, the light. She froze and attempted to take in her surroundings. There did seem to be light, but it seemed to be behind her and she trembled, she thought, from sheer exhaustion. She took the bow out from where she had concealed it in her coat and held it up close to her face, looking for anything that might prove— what—something. It was as if she understood about bows, about the parts: the tip, the frog, the stick; about the strength of the wood and the subtle way it's bent toward the taut ribbon of hair. Yes, that's camber. She put the bow up to her ear as if to listen to the melding of its separate parts into a whole of searing, caressing, soothing, rough and coursing strokes of music. She felt the water at her feet and realized she had somehow waded into the sandy edge of the river.

## A River Afloat

The Edgewater Amphitheater, according to her notes, exists as an afterthought at the Chemehuevi Casino Resort. Along the Colorado River on the Arizona side about two miles north of Parker, the Casino or Chem, for short, had very little competition until Fort Mohave constructed a larger, grander, newer casino some 70 miles upriver. It became much more popular with the Lake Havasu tourists and weekend boating enthusiasts, who had, up to that time, reasoned that there was greater economy and access to a nightlife a mere 45-minutes away at the Chem. The benefit of bigger, perhaps better, and more abundant parking for boats and trailers and other kinds of recreational vehicles for just another 20 minutes more on the road in the opposite direction, and the prospect of nearby Laughlin, Nevada, gave Fort Mohave an advantage. Edgewater Amphitheater was the Chem's effort to regain, well, that edge, and strived to appeal with evenings of live entertainment.

Alban Wozzeck was one of those evenings, although very few had heard of him outside of a circle of concert violinists. That is, until he made the news when he recovered a million-dollar violin he'd left on a bus in London. That was just last year, Sgt. Wendt added to her report. His story sparked interest in hearing a priceless violin played by an absent-minded man who knew how to play it. The Chem was cashing in. Apparently, so was Wozzeck, who had arrived almost direct from London by way of Santa Fe and Phoenix to London Bridge in Havasu.

Sgt. Wendt was recording these pertinent details and all in long hand, to boot. She noted, too, that they were cashing in on the same violin he'd fallen on when he collapsed on stage. It was uncanny, especially as Mr. Wooden had explained how the violin could be just as valuable crushed . . . well, damaged.

The bow, in fact, was an afterthought to the investigation until Ron Wooden explained its value. It could have been quite an elaborate, sophisticated, albeit convoluted, theft. Bitlieux “Betty” Wendt was forming an elaborate, sophisticated, albeit convoluted, theory. It never was the bow; it was the violin. It stands to reason that a priceless violin, especially a damaged one, could always be made priceless again, and then some. And Wozzeck could have been killed for a chance at that violin. That it was priceless would not have been a deterrent to a thief who could have already had a buyer, so its true value was never really the point. Yes; it could have been the violin. But how did he—you know, it could be a she? Who could have known about Wozzeck’s allergy? Apparently, Wozzeck didn’t even know. And, after all, the violin is still safe. Yes, damaged. But in protective custody. That means it could have been the bow, just the bow he or she was after. The bow is missing. Alas, her theory was working its way out. Better not tell it to the Captain just yet.

## Onto the Bike

The beam of his headlight flickered on the black surface of the water then straight ahead as Chass swung his bike around the curb and into the lane behind the amphitheater. B.J. was not there. He rolled to a stop near the lamp post where he had left her, put the bike in neutral, and eased off the clutch. He twisted in his seat, jerking his head first toward the river then behind him. Pulling the bike backward on the pavement to turn it perpendicular to the edge of the lane, he pointed the light squarely at the river and caught a glimpse of a figure lying on a slip of beach at the river's edge.

Chass adjusted his headlight until it combined with the light from the nearby lamp post to spread a flat yellow oval across B.J.'s body. She had her feet in the water. The back of her head rested on the coat, which she had folded into a makeshift pillow. Her hands were at her side while her fingers gently raked the sand.

"Hey," Chass called to her.

"Hey," she responded in not much more than a raspy whisper.

"You okay?" he asked, dropping onto his knees beside her.

"I think it's time to go," she managed to say, her eyes closed and her fingers still raking the sand.

"Hotel tonight?" Chass took up her hand in his.

B.J. opened her eyes and turned to look at Chass. She closed her hand on his hand as tightly as she could.

"Are you in pain?" Chass asked, scanning her body with his eyes.

"No. Just go," she said, breathlessly drawing out the words.

"Me? Are you sure?"

"No. Just let's go."

He shifted to one knee and tugged gently at her hand, putting his other hand under her head and tugging at it too.

“I’m going to lift you up. Is that okay?” He said.

“Yes,” B.J. sighed, lifting and bending her knees to drag her feet out of the water. “You know I’m not whole anymore,” she grunted as Chass pulled her up against his own body. “This can’t be—“ she had to pause for a breath—“any fun for you.”

Standing and holding her in his arms, he, like B.J., was breathing heavily. A brief and awkward burst of laughter, stifled by a gasp for air, broke almost as the pop of a balloon from Chass as he tightened his grasp of her. Attempting to be as gentle as he could, he shifted her body in his arms with a quick jerk and slowly turned toward the motorcycle. She grimaced and tried to wrap her arms around his neck. After several heavy steps, he sidled up to the bike and lowered her into a standing position. While she gradually slid her arms around his shoulders, he pulled her by the small of her back until she was firmly pressed against him. Finally catching his breath, he pressed her even more firmly into his embrace.

“You think you can sit on the bike?” Chass had not yet let go, but was motioning with a turn of his head toward the motorcycle. “We made it this far. Think you can make it back home tonight?”

She turned her head sideways into his chest and between hushed, staccato breaths that sounded more like gasps muttered what Chass heard as, “Thanks, Hero.” She, of course, had simply said, “I can’t hear you.”

## Naturally

“Where?”

“At the bottom of the river. Well, just at the shoreline just behind the Chem. There was a coat lying in the sand that drew us to the spot. The bow was in about a foot from shore, under about six inches of water and about half buried.”

“No shit. How in the hell did it get there? It’s the Peccate all right.”

“That’s the really expensive bow, right?”

“Yeah. The Peccate. Wozzeck’s luck is holding out. You know he lost his violin about a year ago. How someone loses a priceless violin. But he got it back. Now he loses his bow. And he gets it back. That’s gotta be goddamn blind luck. I mean someone finds it and at the bottom of a river. How lucky is that.”

“Is the bow all there? We know the coat belonged to a B.J. Wertute. It’s a bit sketchy, but we suspect she took the bow from the amphitheater and left it in the river. We’re not sure why. Knowing whether it’s all there or what’s missing could shed some light on all this.”

“Well, let’s see. Wertute. I know that name from somewhere. Okay, let’s see. Under water how many days?”

“We found it yesterday afternoon. So, if it went in the water the night Mr. Wozzeck died, that would make it about 36 hours.”

“The frog, the tip, the plugs are good. Even the tortoise shell made it. The thumb leather is coming up a little. That’s easy. Hmm. How’s the stick? Good, too. Soaking in water shouldn’t have done any harm. This is a very hard, impregnable wood, from the Brazilwood tree. The hairs aren’t going to be any good after all that time in the water. No point in trying to save them. They’re easy enough to replace.”

“Anything at all missing or out of place?”

“All I really see is the thumb leather sleeve.”

“Did this Wertute character tell why he took it?”

“No. B.J. Wertute is a woman. Was a woman. She’s dead.”

“Murdered?”

“We don’t think so, but we’re still investigating. The man she was with—ever hear his name? Chass Weir, pronounced Wire. He claims he saw her take it out of the arena when Mr. Wozzeck died.”

“Oh, that’s lucky, too. Should’ve hung on to it. But how’d it get in the river?”

“That we’re not sure of. Mr. Weir doesn’t seem to know or, as far as we can tell, care. As I said, we’re still investigating. But you don’t see anything missing or not right about the bow? I remember you said there wasn’t anything that could make a puncture wound, but what about that little needle right there.”

“I don’t—Oh. What the fuck is this?”

## Ride

The bike's engine idled with a metric of rapid drum-like thumps, and Chass gently eased B.J. backward onto the seat so that she sat sideways. He then quickly straddled the seat and put himself behind her, pressing her body into his, much as he had done while they were still standing. B.J. was silent except for the deep, raspy noise she was making as her breathing had progressively become a struggle.

Earlier in the evening on their way to the Casino, she had sat behind him, straddling the seat and securing herself by wrapping her arms comfortably and almost playfully around his stomach, occasionally laying the side of her head on the back of his shoulder. She had rejected his offer of a helmet, cried out almost angrily that she wanted to feel the wind in her face and didn't want to have to remove her cap and scarf. Chass had laughed and also refused to wear a helmet.

Now, he was holding her in his arms. He cautiously let go and reached for the handgrips, stretching his arms like guardrails on either side of her to keep her from falling. Her feet seemed jointed to her ankles like a marionette's and rolled limply and indifferently onto the pavement when Chass tilted the bike to snap the kickstand into its holster. The high top Converses she wore were still damp from the river and caked in partially wet sand. When he tilted the bike back to square it with the ground, he brushed away with the toe of his boot as much sand as he could, then angled his right foot like a shovel and gingerly lifted her feet to keep them from slipping or spilling into the lane.

He fixed his balance on the bike's footrest, making sure B.J.'s feet remained securely braced atop his boot, and eased the bike around in a semi-circle until he had it pointing in the direction of the parking lot. In what seemed like no time at all, Chass had maneuvered his motorcycle

around the several curves leading to the exit and had put the Chem behind them. Even sooner it seemed, he and B.J. were on the highway.

“Holding up okay?” he shouted above the rush of air and the rumbling noises of the bike and the road.

When he got no response, Chass slowed the bike and tapped B.J. lightly on her cheek. Her head, cap and scarf and all, by this time was loosely tucked in the deep curvature between his raised arm and his breast. She didn’t react to his touch. He eased the bike to a stop in the gravel off to the side of the pavement. Releasing his hold on the handgrips, he shifted in his seat and popped the kickstand in place. B.J. shifted, too, by mere force of gravity and nearly fell to the ground.

Quickly, Chass leaped from the bike, pulling B.J. with him. It was a clumsy move; his feet slid out from under him and, before he could regain his footing, he was lying on his back pressed in place by the weight of B.J. who followed him in his fall and lay face up on top of him, her head, the back of it this time, nestled against his shoulder.

## In His Hair

“In the hair?” Captain White began scratching his head, then stopped, self-conscious of his action. With his other hand, he briefly positioned the phone receiver in front of his face and mouthed some form of expletive. “We’re talking about Wozzeck’s hair, right, Wendt?” he at last said into the receiver while he put it back in place to hear what Wendt was saying.

“Wozzeck’s bow’s hair. Right, Captain,” Sgt. Wendt continued. “We found a tiny needle-like strand of wire camouflaged in the hair. Someone must have put it there when the hair was replaced. I’m here with Mr. Wooden at forensics where they’re going to take a look and see if it’s anything.”

“Okay, and Wooden’s there?”

“It’s a very old bow and he’s anxious about it. He says he can help get it taken apart without hurting it.”

“Good, but don’t let him touch anything. At least watch him closely if he does. I’ll be right down.”

“You must have done this lots of times, Mr. Wooden,” Captain White offered as he entered the room. Ron Wooden quickly turned around to face the Captain, smiling in acknowledgement of the remark. He held in his hand a tiny instrument that appeared much like a miniaturized ice pick. Sgt. Wendt and the forensic technician were on the other side of the counter from Mr. Wooden where the bow lay in something like the sanitized repose of an autopsy. Ron was about to demonstrate how best to remove the plug that held the horsehair and the incongruent tiny strand of what appeared to be bare metal wire.

“Before you proceed, can I ask you some questions?”

“Of course.” Ron Wooden placed the small pick back into the pocket-sized case he had spread open on the

counter and zipped it shut. He then brandished the case in front of the Captain, explaining almost nervously, "My tools."

"Yes," Captain White said, pointing to the counter and gesturing that Ron lay the case down again. "We may have a need for that."

"I was just about to show Sgt. Wendt and Mr. Williams here how to safely get at that piece of wire."

"Before we get to that, thanks for coming down. It saves me from looking you up. I do have some questions."

"So you said, Captain."

"You worked in Albuquerque before setting up shop in Phoenix, right?"

"My shop is actually in Tempe, just off the 105 on Rural."

"Yes, my mistake. Who'd you work for?"

"Wright and Sons, for about five years."

"Is that how you met Alban Wozzeck? You did some work for him there?"

"The Wrights had been servicing his equipment for several years before I met him. I'm not sure why you're asking."

"I'm not sure either. But I spoke to Alexander Wright this morning. He didn't have very many good things to say about you. In fact, he didn't have anything good to say about you."

"Oh, yeah. Well, Wright and I didn't get along toward the end there. His son started pushing for him to fire me. A family thing is how I viewed it."

"He thinks you stole some of his customers, Mr. Wozzeck being one of them. He accused you of taking some supplies—"

"He owed me money that he refused to pay." Wooden was growing more agitated, shooting nervous looks at each of the men in the room. "I only took what I figured was owed. This is the first I've heard that he's

pressing charges. I'm . . . this is what all this is about, isn't it?"

"Oh, no. I'm just making inquiries, trying to establish motive and . . . , well, you'll understand in a moment."

Presuming to read Captain White's signs, convinced there were signs, Sgt. Wendt moved around the counter toward Wood. She looked puzzled, but intent on being ready for any eventuality, according to her report.

Wooden noticed her movement and grew more agitated: "Wozzeck followed me. I didn't steal anybody or anything. Wright is a cheap bastard and not even a very good luthier."

"Luthier? Is that a cult?"

"Luthier! Fuck! That's what we call ourselves: bow makers, violins, guitars, you name it."

"Right."

"I trained a long time and with some of the masters. And then he goes and gets on my case to overcharge and to do as little as necessary for the customers. A practice that has evidently made him rich and certainly no great luthier. Lessening the trade as I see it. He said I always took too long on my work. But I did things right. I wasn't going to stoop to his level. So I left. He owed me money. Get it? He owed me. So I took some materials to make up for that. And when I left, Wozzeck quit him, too. I don't think he paid Wright everything owed and I think, when he switched all his business to me . . . shit, does Wright think I owe him what Wozzeck didn't pay?"

"So everybody owed somebody something?" Captain White was glaring at Sgt. Wendt as he spoke, then with a cursory wave of the hand signaled her to back up. "Wozzeck didn't ever pay Wright? Did he ever pay you?"

"No, not everything. He said he could bring me lots of business. But he wasn't in the States much in the last

couple of years. When he was, he thought he had a tab with me, which I never collected.”

“What are we talking about? A few hundred dollars?”

“More like a few thousand. I made him several bows with different camber and textures of hair. I’d taken care of this one,” he said turning and nodding at the Peccate on the countertop. “I took care—“

“I’m sorry, you’re losing me. Camber?”

“Yes. The strength and bend of the stick, the wood. How the bow bounces on the strings of the instrument. Gives it stability.”

“Right. And you were the last one to, as you say, take care of the one lying here?”

“He brought it to me just before he died, along with the Tecchler violin.”

“You serviced the violin, too?

“I changed strings, polished it. Tuned it up, you might say.”

“Why, if he owed you that much money . . . and you agreed to do it?”

“These were his prized possessions. He knew I could tell everyone that I worked on his Peccate and Tecchler. That was the barrel he had me over. I was an easy mark, I guess.”

“Mr. Wooden, why’d you put that little wire in the bow? It was intended to harm him, wasn’t it?”

“It wasn’t to kill him.” He looked around, then settled his eyes on the Peccate. “Just to quite literally stick it to him, the way he’d been sticking it to everybody, especially me.”

## Stop

At the beginning, Chass Weir had been thinking he had saved her. He had been thinking he had been her hero. Then, nature took over. He had acquiesced and laid her body out. But Sergeant Wendt had arrived, asked Chass some questions, and had bowled her way down the road's embankment across the outcroppings of calichi and through some brush to B.J.'s remains. Nature had not yet started in. It was then that Chass began thinking of other things.

Wendt was on the heavy side and naturally donned an expansive reflective jacket that bobbed easily and airy in contrast to the loping, cautious steps she employed when returning to the spot where Chass was still standing. The Sergeant had made sounds like crushing ice with her footsteps. For Chass, who had been watching her movements, Sgt. Wendt was evolving into a very large noise.

She coughed he thought, and Chass began getting distracted by other sounds. He had closed his eyes and began thinking that there was something he had read. He could still see B.J.'s body. There was no mistaking it. He could hear Sgt. Wendt, too. But he was thinking something else. He was thinking that he had read too much, that he had always thought in his reading that he was right. He had always thought in his reading, for example, that zounds rhymed with sounds. Then he recalled that wounds and wounds were different—different sounds. And thinking that was easy. But a fellow on a Harley had told him that he was wrong—had pulled up right behind him just a little while ago while Chass stood beside his Harley at the shoulder of the road. This fellow was looking for a place to pee and had told him he was wrong—had told him zounds and wounds was right. “Read and read is easy,” he had said, “just got to think of it’s easy.” These sounds are what must have gotten Chass into trouble. Zounds and wounds

was right. He had been B.J.'s hero. And this fellow didn't go pee after all. "Just wanted to shake it," he, at last, had grinned.

Suddenly, Chass jerked and stiffened his back upright. Wendt was pulling him down the embankment and into the spot where the body lay, and the Captain was speaking. It was still all noise for Chass. Wendt was breathing in quick, labored breaths, just as B.J. had. The Captain was asking questions in hurried breaths and snapping something—his fingers perhaps—while pointing at B.J.'s body. And Chass could hear, he thought, what had been wrong.

It wasn't but soon after that his nose was itchy, awfully itchy. More noise—like shouting in hushed voices—were filtering in. But it must have been days before, for his nose was awfully itchy.

"Gugh!" was it ever, he thought. "Just got to think," he spoke to himself, inaudibly moving his lips.

Someone was writing—scratching on paper.

Wendt?

Someone was asking everything and putting it down, recording it all.

It was Wendt?

*Noises and itches were always like alarms; a difference would be a chime, a sweet tingling sensation. A difference would be a great relief. And he could feel and hear the differences, and he could see it mattered to notice these differences. He could see it now—differences, he was thinking. He wondered, of course, where he was in the midst of all these differences, these sounds, these sensations, and he wondered whether that was different at all. If he were in a forest, say, then people were busily moving back and forth among the trees and brush. Or in a field of grasses—tingling. He was not on a motorcycle now. Perhaps he was in a church. Every which way torpid*

*bodies and branches of pine or oak or something folded in supple blades or needles passed noiselessly, no one touching another. It was turbid. This he noticed. It was certainly different. A hush—if there were such a thing—and the faces of all sorts through the threaded branches and leaves or stain-glass windows were awash in a light that shone like a moon—an old moon, he decided, for it was dim and bleached and blank and curiously reflecting a sun that had been set somewhere out of sight on the other side of a large window. It meant that it was not a forest or a field; it was not a moon. And the trees and the brush and the grasses were but the noise and the hush of the soft diffuse lighting from the stage, which was certainly not different. This he noticed, too . . .*

“Mr. Weir. Chass. Are you here?” came one of the hushed voices that he was sure was calling him and writing it all down.

*. . . which could have been an altar. He began to notice everyone was singing, crossing in front and behind one another, noisily . . .*

“Mr. Weir?”

*. . . separately, unevenly, some one of them was singing his name. “I can see it now,” he uttered quietly, perhaps easily, rhythmically, smiling, and itching all over. A violin. And that was different. Then he wiped his face, which was red and itching—of nothing; and he rubbed the palms of his hands on the desk, where he sat, and soon closed his eyes. It was not an altar or a stage. In the next moment, his lips moved as if to the lilting course of the bow across the strings: “It wasn’t murder; it was none.” Another branch or blade or pass of the bow brushed nearby without touching. It wasn’t too awfully different . . .*

“Mr. Weir . . .”

Chass Weir was admitting to nothing, nothing—knowing that what he had already said was not supposed to be a confession or a plea. He was in the dark, alone in a room. He was smiling, but of nothing. It was not supposed to be an attitude. He was not flying above it. Not a voyeur on wings, he was confident. He was sitting beside a window to another room, sleeping where he was sitting perhaps. And he was waking into a soft light that shown on him in a swath of white molded opaque rectangles from the window that peered into another room; it, of course, was not supposed to be a revelation uttered irreverently. He was not supposed to be concerned.

But, he gathered, the room, where he was, was supposed to be quiet. Of course. So he hushed, remembering not the moon or the trees or other dreams, but the dark altar where he was seven or eight and the two brightly lit crying rooms at the back behind the last pew on either side of the main aisle. A statue of St. Joseph stood on one edge of the aisle next to the window of one of the crying rooms. Joseph was smiling, too. A statue of Mary cradling her infant Jesus while stamping on a serpent’s head with her foot stood on the other edge of the aisle before the other window of the other crying room. Mary was smiling; the serpent’s maw gaped in anger or anguish or even hunger—which was not apparent. It was there in the last pew that light was jagged and transparent as it spread its fingers onto the backs and shoulders of the congregation. The statues were separately lit by the flicker of small candles tiered in a panoply of even rows at the base of the statues’ pedestals. The candles’ light and the church’s light were similarly like the bright cracks of a sunset with sharp, long, full shadows that lasted until a rear door was opened and somebody came in or went out and

caused the whole of the audience to brighten differently from what it was. And, of course, the sinewy fingers of light disappeared into these moments until gradually the room grew dark again as the door slowly swung back into place.

Blunnnnk—it would at last shut in a solid, swift, muffled sound. And nobody seemed to move or, what's worse, to hear it close.

It was always quiet. The concert had not yet begun. The muffled sounds of bodies sliding on and off and around and in their seats and the occasional thud of somebody's knee into the wood of the bench or the rattle of beads—rosaries, most likely—across the back of a row of seats where the only noises, which had a way of reverberating softly and in contrast to the otherwise staid and confined silence, were not always apparent. Because nobody noticed. Nobody noticed but Chass. He would turn his head in the direction of everything he heard, which meant he would turn all around. And it was when he turned around and spied what was behind him, looking for noise, that it seemed he could even hear the loud, red faces on the other side of those soundproof windows of the crying rooms, faces agape with wails and shrieks and trembling. Silent faces admitting nothing, either. Faces that only he could see or hear.

He was smiling and the shadows from the other room passed through the window and crossed in front and behind him, falling onto his own face and shoulders—intermittently in the way—he was hesitating for an answer—in a way a road in a forest could riffle light across the asphalt and appear like people standing on the side.

The light would have to be outside in the night under a moon. All the people, of course, would stand stuck in thick clusters, anxious, it seemed, but not eager for Chass to stop his motorcycle. And the violin's piercing

notes warned him of too much reverie for the course of the bow.

The light was being thrown, discarded as unloosed and unfurling pages of a book—no longer like the sun or moon or a forest or an altar; a candle's flame was much too subtle by comparison. No; this light would flutter and swirl along a flickering track as if getting lost behind his motorcycle, page after page. And in each of these passes of a white, jagged shape, the light trembled and coursed over the arms and the backs of Chass's hands, now straddling handgrips as if they were in place only to hang on. He tightly gripped, for Chass sensed that he was only holding on. It was not anything unusual; it was not the same.

“Where are you?” the light, or was it the sun this time, was saying, humming as it moved across him.

Then Chass stiffened and hummed, too, admitting nothing except the light and the music of the violin that he remembered.

He stopped, relaxed his own fingers from their grip and stretched his body, pushing his legs straight out before him and forming a kind of L-shape with his arms. As if rousing from sleep, he yawned, then groaned; his fingers flailed, brandished really, stiffly, for stretching and began to tap a rhythm with his fingertips on what had become the top of the table he was leaning on. He sensed the surface was flat and not a part of a dream. He suddenly knew where he was. With his tapping he was breaking a silence that he also sensed was becoming long, branching across a moon, across the strings like a bow. Someone else was listening. But just as quickly as he had begun, he stopped tapping. He stopped.

Sergeant Wendt stood across from him, at first clicking the plunger on her pen in one hand and with the other flapping the pages of the notebook she was waving pensively in the air. She had stopped writing momentarily to pause and scrutinize the tapping of his fingers on the

table. Putting the pen and notebook down, she then began looking at her own hands, examining the palms and then the backs of each, looking, she thought, for something she could say that may coax Chass out of his apparent daze.

“Why were you asking me about my breasts?” She finally said. “You said that was what you asked B.J.”

Chass was somewhere else, suddenly last year. He looked at Julie, then puzzled at her remark. He had been working for Julie nearly four years, delivering things—mostly films Julie had scheduled for the classes around campus. He delivered other things, too. Equipment. Slide projectors, sometimes portable PAs. B.J. was one of the college instructors on the receiving end of Julie’s schedule. She had lumps.

“What?” Chass asked, still trying to listen for all the noise. He was listening to his own voice, to its callowness.

Julie’s voice was, of course, sad and careful, even annoyed.

“I told her about a lump I found—oh, some time ago. I can’t remember that I did, but she remembered.”

At once sounding stronger—stronger than Chass, he was certain—she looked at him. Her look showed little of what she had just said and quickly glowered in a triumphant way, an undefeated look.

“Chass—Come here, Chass,” she insisted.

Julie had turned to go into her office at the Media Center. She was co-director. It was May or late April and it was hot, but not as hot as Scottsdale gets in summer. The Media Center, of course, was cool and dry, refrigerated.

“Come here, Chass,” had been the summons, and so Julie was finished with B.J.; it was on to the business of equipping classrooms with audio-visual aids.

She was ready to retire. She was already sixty-two and had been at the College nearly ten years and before that had raised a family, had lived in Springfield, Illinois, had given up a career to get married way back during WWII.

Her husband had carried post and ruined his back and his feet. He was cold in Illinois and grumpy—had insisted he retire in a warm climate. Julie had acquiesced and couldn't wait for her own retirement when she didn't have to get up every morning and shower and get into her stationwagon to drive to work. Her husband would give in then. He was too old, too frail and dependent not to. They would go back to what she wanted then. He could stay indoors, which is all he ever did in Arizona. It was just too damn hot.

She couldn't wait until she could settle again around the friends and family she had had to leave, but had never ceased to follow in letters and phone calls. She was homesick and tired of grumpy, sad men. He was getting petty and moody, besides—forced to give up smoking and taking long walks.

At last, she didn't think about B.J. again. She thought mostly of getting closer to Springfield. Any real task was now something she could get Chass to do.

And Chass could do anything. It was, as a matter of fact, up to him.

So Chass got on his motorcycle to ride. He got B.J. to ride until she had to stop.

## Travel Bag

“Everything was in the bag. That’s where we found the can of beeswax. Look at the label; you can see it’s from Australia.”

“When was he in Australia?”

“The agency that he used for his touring schedule is in Australia. I wired them and they said he hadn’t yet played there, but he’d visited before playing the Chem, apparently just to set up concert tours. Not sure why. I could call and try to get more info.”

“No, I don’t think it’s that important. So you think this can of beeswax came from eucalyptus?”

“Yeah. Yes, sir. Wooden was wrong about Mr. Wozzeck in that respect. He didn’t send his bow and violin out for everything. The evidence seems to indicate that he did his own polishing, using beeswax.”

“Why was it mixed with—what did Windy say—Woop?

“Well, let’s see. Yes. Here it is. We didn’t find any containers of Woop, but, as near as I can tell from my notes, it wasn’t mixed. Maybe just mixed up. The substance found on him had Woop, but it was probably used to help him get the beeswax off his hands. For some reason—maybe he was rushed—I don’t know, but he didn’t get all the beeswax off or all the Woop. When the wire pricked him, as Wooden had hoped it would. Well, the allergic reaction did the rest.”

“Okay. You did your homework on this one, Wendt. Thanks.”

“Glad we cleared it up. You know, it also says here that Wooden did know Ms. Wertute. She was in Albuquerque several years ago and had visited Wright and Sons looking for a gift for, as she described it, someone who has everything. Wooden talked her into a bow, a kind of joke gift and very expensive one. She wanted the

person's initials etched in the frog. So he made it up special for her."

"Who was she going to give it to? Did her daughter, her husband play?"

"Says, Wooden doesn't know. Weir doesn't seem to know, either. She, apparently, never said, apparently, but the initials were A. W."

END