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about 6,930 words

HAPPIES

By James Thacher

Chapter 1:

Charvin never had to choose between life and death. He didn't believe in the out of the body experiences people talked about. *That was before the accident.*

Drifting above and anchored below. Looking down at himself, the twisted body, the dark pavement, the bright white crosswalk lines. A trickle of red blood flowing from

his nostrils. A crowd gathering, seven men and five women, in slow motion. Then in real time, the golden retriever slipped through the crowd, wagging its tail.

"Is this a dream? Is this real?" Charvin asked himself.

And as soon as he asked he knew. He saw every motion. He heard every sound. He felt every moment past and present.

"NO!"

Charvin lifted a tempestuous voice from deep within himself and without the surrender of a final battle cry given when the Almighty sword plunges the heart and the body's last breath expels, a voice so powerful with urge and conviction that demanded victory and would allow no other alternative.

"I think he's alive!" a woman's voice was saying. " I think he's breathing!"

Charvin heard the wail of sirens off in the distance. Cold sounds echoing between cold city buildings. He felt the cold city street seeping life back into his body.

A warm intoxicant scent of whiskey and tobacco and staled perfume aroused his senses.

"You hang in there now honey. They're on the way," the woman was saying with her young, soft and alluring voice. A

warm assuring hand touched his shoulder then stroked his forehead.

Charvin opened his eyes just long enough to get a glimpse of the wasted and ragged and sorrowful looking woman knelt down beside him and the golden retriever that sat next to her.

At that instant the cold light went to warm and black.

As a winter storm raged towards Narragansett Bay, an hour before the fierce northeastern winds rushing out of Canada and sweeping over New England would reach Providence, Rhode Island, large snowflakes fell downy from the dark night.

Angel relaxed outside in the hot tub, trying to catch a snowflake with her tongue. One of the few things she loved about winter. She loved her fur coats and her tight leather outfits and all those expensive gifts her clients gave her over the holidays. She loved being able to come in

from the outside cold and into the warm sanctuary of her cozy and comfortable Bristol Bayside home and snuggle in the overstuffed cushions and pillows on the living room couch and look out the windows at the view of the bay and the northern tip of Prudence Island out in the middle and across the five mile stretch to the west shores and away from the harsh cold of her other world.

The men and women in Angel's systematic circle, a circle that she was tutored into, where sex and drug and alcohol fantasies were the keys that opened forbidden doors to hidden desires, was a long way from the world of the homeless child left to fend on her own, fifteen years ago when the woman, named Jane Doe by the Providence Police Department, had been found naked and bloated, floating ass up, as the husky words of the anonymous guy making the phone call into emergency dispatch had put it.

"Providence Police Department. How may I place your call?"

"Place it anyhow ya want lady. I just seen some broad floatin' ass up downtown in the Providence River. Just doin' my public duty. Lettin' ya know. Ya know?" The guy hung up.

Twenty minutes later Officer Rego found the body, flowing in with the tide, when he looked down from the

Water Park bridge. The Water Place sidewalk café across the river, on the other side of the stone throw crossover, was busy with the usual laughing and boisterous crowd.

Music of a solo guitarist filled that warm summer's night air, mixing with the sweet aroma of marijuana. Rego was minutes away from being off duty and out among the moon and the city stars when he grabbed his radio from its belt holster. His three to midnight shift was about to go into overtime.

"Dispatch. This is Officer Rego on site at Water Park. Located victim in river. Over."

Angel found out two days later, on her ninth birthday, that Darley Folcrelli was dead.

To a stranger, Happies was just another old dark bar room. No different from any other dive joint along Rhode Island's Ocean Drive. The south beach shoreline was a popular getaway from the city hustle and bustle for eleven

out of the twelve months of the year. A regal paradise for the ebb of young and old that flocked here, in migratory fashion, following the seasons within themselves that pushed them always in search of the pains and pleasures of reality and ecstasy.

February cold transformed wild and cagey beachfront villages into what appeared to be at first glance desolate ghost towns of abandoned dreams along dead-end roads.

With most of the college students gone home, or somewhere warm, for winter break, the seasonal businesses, resorts, summer cottage developments and marinas all shut down, in hibernation mode; only the almost three hundred locals remained and the usual handful of stragglers that the locals called strays. It was a welcomed quiet time of private rejuvenation.

Again broken promises could relish in new favor.

Billy Haplinck's place, a hand-me-down from Gramps to Dad to Son, seemed to have always been there, a sheltering harbor for those in need, even before opening its doors forty years ago when Gram and Gramps named the place Happies. Some pretty wild stories about them good old days and what rebels Gram and Gramps were: love, peace, drugs, 1969 and all that, are common folklore now. The beachfront clam cakes and chowder shack that stood next to the

Atlantic Beach Amusement Park and along the southern Rhode Island sandy shoreline of Misquamicut State Beach was transformed in 1968 to a rowdy rock n' roll haven.

Happies' huge hand-carved wooden front door was the first thing that amazed all who entered through it, and had been nick-named the magic bridge during that first grand opening Memorial Day weekend in May of 1969. The intricate sculpturing was a gift from William 'Dances In The Sun' Woodman. A good luck blessing from the man whose life was saved twice by Gramps when they served together in the armed forces and fought in the Viet Nam jungles, side by side for two years. The gift created in the ceremonial spirit and custom of the Quanochohtaung Indian tribe was a narration in bas-relief of the forest and all its inhabitants, and images that came to William 'Dances In The Sun' Woodman, as his enabled hands brought forth by divine guidance the love and respect he felt for all things. Not a single day went by without someone taking notice of the intricate entry and then turning to walk towards the rear glass patio doors that opened out to the east, to the ocean, to the beach, and stood thankful for the panoramic views they then held so dear.

Chapter 2:

Charvin woke dazed and confused. Remembered nothing. His half opened eyes were the only parts of him that he could move. Blurred images appeared.

"Is this a bed? A room? A hospital?"

A memory of a car squealing around the corner, heading right for him, caused him to jolt and set off the alarm signal. Adrenaline ran through Charvin as he tried to call out and to raise his arms to protect himself. He was not aware of the tubes in his mouth, in his arms, in his groin or of the male nurse and the female nurse rushing into room 108 of the intensive care unit and around to each side of the bed. The woman reached up and silenced the loud alarm.

"Just a dream son. Just a dream," the man was saying, "You've been sleeping for quite awhile. How's it look over there Irene?"

The small oriental looking man hurried at reinserting and readjusting the left arm tube and strap, checked the catheter, while on the other side of the bed the younger

female nurse, reached over the stainless steel safety rail to inspect the right arm tube and strap. They were okay.

Charvin read the female nurse's nametag as she leaned over him.

"Irene?" he said confused, trying to remember where the pieces of his puzzle fit. "That was her name." *Her who? Highschool? Girlfriend?* "We were going to get married. I was going to marry every girl I fell in love with. That's the trouble with Quanochontaug warriors. We are born lovers of all things." Charvin mumbled incoherent words.

"I'm alive Irene. I'm alive!" He tried so hard to say.

Irene wiped the drool and the tears from Charvin's face as the sedative took him dancing, by the ocean, in the sand, in the sun.

After twenty minutes in the steaming hot tub Angel was cooked. The snow was coming down fast and hard with the wind pushing its way into the city. Standing up and

stepping out of the steaming water and onto the snow-covered flat stone patio, her body holding onto the heat, her feet melting the soft snow in seconds, Angel stood and welcomed the wind and the snow and the cold and beckoned them to become her. *She wondered why Charvin hadn't called her yet.*

"Tell me how beautiful I am and I will tell you how I love you," she told them all.

Across the yard a light flashed, for just a moment, as if someone was taking a quick look before stepping from rocking boat to rocky beach. There were four beachfront homes broken into and burglarized in the last month. Sandy Point residents were on the lookout for anything or anyone suspicious. Authorities said the burglar was a professional.

Angel stepped backward towards the house and into the basement, watching for another flick of light. *Maybe it was my imagination. What kind of thief would come on a night like this to a jagged beach with a ten-foot tall scrag rock cliff seawall?* She watched and saw no light. *Maybe it was lightning.* The basement ceramic tiled floor sent an ice-cold shiver through her body.

Making the, "blrrrrrrrrr," *I'm fucking cold*, sound with blubbering lips and deciding there was no intruder on the

windy ragged beach, she went running upstairs to throw on some warm clothes, thinking that then she would hurry back down and go outside to cover the Jacuzzi before the storm got any worse. Halfway up the stairs she added another thing to do to her list.

"And don't forget the fuckin' gun," she told herself out loud. Loud enough for any thief to hear, just in case one was listening.

When she got to the top of the stairs the phone rang twice. *Andries' signal? Charvin?*

Billy was busy, washing, rinsing, wiping, hanging, stacking beer mugs, wine glasses, pitchers, taking an occasional drag from the cigarette he had dangling between his lips. Because he waited so long between puffs a long ash would fall into the dishwater at every inhale. If he wasn't alone the cigarette would be burning unattended in an ashtray. Somebody would be telling him that those things

are no good for you. Tommy for instance, who just walked in.

"Tommy! How's it going buddy?"

"Hey Billy. Good. Things are good. Give me two drafts and two shots of Brewers. Same ole. Hey! Not for nuthin' but this place smells like a god damned ashtray. I thought you was quittin'. You of all people should know....."

"Yeah. Alright. I....." Some lady walked in the front door so Billy stopped, shook his head.

Tommy turned around and looked at the lady walking towards him.

She sat on the barstool next to Tommy. Gave his leg her left hand squeeze.

"Beer and whiskey. My favorite breakfast," she said and sucked them down in one gulp each.

The squeeze whispered something in Tommy's ear, stood up off her stool, walked across the dark bar room towards the Ladies bathroom door, weaving her way between the antique wooden tables and chairs and pushed the squeaky hinged door open.

"So what do you think of that lady, Billy?"

"Classy," Billy said and went back to finishing up with washing glasses for a few minutes.

Tommy fiddled with his beer glass and gave the place the once over, thinking the same thing he always thought when he stopped by, that the mixed collection of local Indian artifacts and the one of a kind seven sea's nautical oddities that adorned every window, wall and shelf, made the joint look more like a museum than a drinking establishment.

"Met her last night at Shakey Legs," Tommy said when he got tired of waiting for Billy to ask.

The Ladies bathroom door hinges squeaked and the classy lady came walking back to her bar stool, her hard heels sounding like a drum beat on the old hardwood floors. Her posture said something seductive to the two men eyeballing her. Her smile promised them what her posture proposed.

"Kavette, this here's Billy," Tommy said, his hands gesturing. "Billy.....Kavette."

Chapter 3:

As if the Intensive Care wing of the hospital gave flight to a whirlwind, the on-call physician flew room to room assessing his patients.

"Mr. Cormorosky? Charvin? Are you awake son?" were rapid words like bullets ahead of him.

Charvin had been awake for the last few hours. Had watched the graying day turn night.

"My name is Doctor Bennett. How are you feeling?"

"I was groggy, from whatever it was that they gave me for pain. Other than that I feel okay now. I feel like getting out of here. And hungry. I think I smell eggs and toast."

Doctor Bennett smiled in a way that radiated genuine concern. His silvery eyes sparkled with an alertness that painted the old man young. The same way that the city lights Charvin had witnessed earlier, out of his hospital room window, had alerted the old city of Providence of a new day to be painted on the promise of tomorrow.

"Well, from what I see on your charts, there appears to be no internal injuries other than some minor lumps and bumps. You've suffered a slight concussion. A few minor scrapes and scratches on your forehead, your hands and your knees. A bloody nose. For someone who had just, hmm,,, eleven hours ago gotten run over by a speeding hit and run

automobile you've actually fared quite well. You are a very lucky young man."

"I don't feel very lucky. I feel very hungry," he told the doctor in a snooty tone.

"Wonderful! Words of recovery. I'll have the kitchen send up some poached eggs on toast and a cup of hot tea. I recommend a light diet for a few days. The nurse will bring you a list of the foods that will be easy on your stomach. And you should take it easy on yourself for the rest of this week." Doctor Bennett wrote something on his clipboard, looked at Charvin and smiled.

"I didn't mean to be cocky Doc. I just want to go home. I still can't believe what happened."

"Let's have you stay put for the night, and if things go all right you'll be out of here in the morning. Are there any questions Mr. Cormorosky?"

"Yeah. Did it snow last night?"

Before Doctor Bennett could answer, an emergency alarm sounded across the hall.

"No! Tonight they're saying! A nor'-east blizzard! I think it may have already started!" Doctor Bennett was shouting as he flew off towards the call of duty.

Angel sat on the bed, her loaded .38 caliber pistol beside her. She watched herself getting dressed in the floor to ceiling mirrored closet doors that covered almost the entire length of the eighteen-foot bedroom closet wall across the room. While admiring herself she slipped into her powder blue sweat pants and the matching zip up sweatshirt and a thick pair of gray wool socks.

Blowing herself a kiss in the mirror as she stood up.

"Well darling," she said to her reflection in her well practiced Newport accent, "I dare do say that it certainly looks like we'll be staying at home tonight. No naughty-naughty."

Angel did a modeling twist and turn, touching her new hair-do with her left hand. With the gun in her right hand she felt gangstery and her new short styled cut she felt like a tough guy.

Like a dike brute brunette.

"No bang, bang, bang," she sulked with pouting lips.

As if unplugged, Angel was finished with her foolery and hurried through the house. When she reached the kitchen and slowed her pace a little so she wouldn't slip on the new slick marble floor, she took a look out across the open dining room, living room areas, towards the outside window wall. A full sheet of white covered every inch of the glass. Howling winds pushed and packed snowflake on top of snowflake. There was no view south towards the Atlantic Ocean and Point Judith Lighthouse, or west across the bay to the shores of the city of Warwick and its neighboring city of Cranston, and not even a hint of the large second story wrap-around sun-deck that had some wild and bizarre stories to tell. Taboo kinds of stories that would make every grandmother in every town for miles around roll over in their graves.

Opening and closing the basement door and struggling the twelve feet to the jacuzzi was like a bronco busting a tornado. The jacuzzi cover was nowhere to be found, blown away and buried somewhere in the blinding storm. The steamy hot tub would have to fend for itself tonight.

Angel rode the storm back to the basement and stood back inside, this time in soaking wet clothes, covered in melting snow and out of breath from the struggle with closing the basement door against the wind. She removed her

wet clothes and as they fell to the floor the house lights flickered and her world went dark.

Tommy gulped down his shot of whiskey and finished the rest of his beer while Kavette and Billy gave each other a smile and a complimentary nod. Kavette smirked when she noticed that Billy's eyes had screeched to a halt on her tits. She paid a lot of money for her boob job and got the return she expected from her investment. She was one of Shakey Legs' top attractions.

The high-class escort services kept trying to recruit her but she felt safe at Shakey Legs.

Being behind closed doors with total strangers scared her. She'd heard some of the stories and knew some of the girls who had gotten caught in bad situations.

She was a dancer not a call girl.

"I am pleased to meet you Billy," Kavette said in her hypnotic accent while extending her arm for a handshake. "I

am at a pleasure to thank you," she added and looking into Billy's gold and busy eyes Kavette shook his large warm hand, licked her lips and just for a test added, "I am such a thirsting girl," while blinking her eyelids for special effect.

Kavette could smell the strong scent of musk aftershave fill the air space between her and Billy and she knew that she had succeeded in raising his interest in her with so little effort.

"And the pleasure is mine as well!" Billy told her while holding her hand and admiring her slender arm, feeling her soft palm and long fingers and wondering if her lavender nail polish that matched her lavender lipstick and her lavender eye shadow was also on her toenails and if her undergarments were lavender. He was holding on more than a little bit too long, and feeling a little creepy about that, then relieved when he saw that Tommy was looking the other way, across the room towards the pool tables. Billy released Kavette's hand, noticing that she made no attempt to pull away at all.

"Hey! How about another drink you guys? Compliments of Happies!" Billy offered.

When Tommy heard the words relating to free booze he returned his attentions back to the bar, commenting on the

weather. "I heard there's a big storm coming up the coast. The weather lady on the radio says it's supposed to hit us tonight." Tommy was watching Billy fill Kavette's whiskey glass and when he saw Billy's eye catch his he gave Billy a look to indicate that he could use a refill too. "I can sense when it's going to snow, the air has that wooden barrel full of ice cubes and unopened beer cans' smell to it. You know what I mean? Like a frozen party just waitin' to happen. I love that smell." Tommy laughed alone.

Billy filled Tommy's empty glass while smiling at the corny guy and the corny comic quip.

Kavette browsing the artifacts and oddities said, "This is some crazy place you got here Billy."

Chapter 4:

After eating the milk toast that Dr. Bennett had the on-duty nurse order up from the kitchen, Charvin lay with his head snug upon the pillow. His thoughts drifted away to Strawberry Fields. To the eight room two story farm house

with the covered front porch that looked out to the airport across the street, to where the house had sat, thirty five years before, in the middle of the Norton family strawberry farm, before Charles Vincent Norton passed away and poor old Mrs. Charlene Anna Norton, unable to run the place without her husband, had lost everything.

The state took it all away for non-payment of taxes.

Mrs. Norton died two years later. She had wandered from the Greenwood Nursing Home and caught the ten a.m. commuter train that was passing through Kent County on its daily trek from Hartford, Connecticut to Providence, Rhode Island. The train conductor said the woman jumped up from and ran out of the tall golden rye grass that grew in the fields along the sides of the railroad tracks and then she stood waiting, then leaped right out in front of the oncoming train.

"At first I thought that it was a deer, or a dog, run out from them woods over there," Bobby Brodder told the reporter while pointing towards the stand of oak trees across the field. "I was bug-eyed shocked when I saw it was some elderly woman. I lost my god-damn breath. She was holding her arms out, like this..."

Bobby held his arms up and out.

"...Like when you're going to give somebody a hug. You know what I mean?"

The reporter shook her head yes.

"And she was god damn smiling, for the love of God. Kind of like she was crazy in the head."

Tiny Suzanne Kendall thanked the goliath Bobby Brodder and gave him her business card.

"Call me at this number anytime. It's my direct line right to my desk. If I don't answer the receptionist will pick up and take a message. Okay? Thanks again Bobby."

Suzanne walked away wishing he would call her tonight. Wishing there was more to the story. Wishing it was proper for a girl to ask a guy for his phone number and that the springtime of 1934 was as modern as it was claimed to be.

Suzanne went about twenty feet and stopped to look back. Bobby waved and smiled.

"If you think of anything else Bobby Brodder and need to call me I'll be working until nine tonight. Right at my desk. Okay?"

Suzanne returned the wave and the smile and felt like she was walking ten feet taller on her way to the car.

Timmy Falco, the photographer who was driving, had noticed the exalted smile on the pretty new girl's face and felt a twinge of jealousy. "You and the gorilla guy. The

giant and the midget. Crazy man crazy," he was saying as she got in the passenger side front seat.

She didn't hear a word that Timmy Falco said.

"Okay! I will!" Bobby was yelling as Suzanne waved and the car pulled away. "Eight o'clock!"

The words of Bobby Brodder were in print later in the day and in the front-page story of the Evening Edition of The Providence Gazette. Printed along with the story was a solemn picture of Mrs. Charlene Anna Norton that the nursing home had taken for her file when she became a state-placed resident there less than one year ago. The same ghostly image that Charvin would see on many a night in years to come. The spirit of Mrs. Norton moving about the ailing relocated farmhouse.

"Charley? Charley? Are you here, Love?"

Mrs. Norton spoke soft words. As if she were in a dark and sad place where only whispers could be spoken.

Charvin considered his lady ghost as a friendly ghost, like Casper the friendly ghost in the Marvel comic books. He was never, except for that first time, spooked by the sad ghost lady's presence. He tried to talk to her but she seemed not to see him. He left her cookies and milk on the dresser but she never touched them. He approached her one night and reached out to her and grasped at something that

couldn't be grasped. She had appeared the very first night they moved into the old farm house and reappeared not every night but on so many nights at different times that Charvin lost count of her visits over the two years to the day she never came again. The last day Charvin saw his friendly ghost was also the last day that he had seen his mother.

The same picture printed again, thirty-five years later, next to a picture of Charvin's mother, the day after she too had killed herself by jumping in front of the ten a.m. commuter, was enough of a likeness side by side to send a shiver up Charvin's spine and a sudden insight into his mind of how complex life would be if he didn't stop believing in the impossible.

The March 20th, 1969 Providence Gazette Morning Edition headline read, 'Strawberry Fields Forever.' By Suzanne Kendall Brodder.

This time the story was on page two. Suicide news wasn't what it used to be but always made a good filler for between the advertisements.

Charvin reread the archived story just the day before yesterday. Something happened and he needed to fill in the blanks. *What the hell happened? What blank?*

"Hello Mr. Cormorosky. Time for medication. Two pills to help you sleep."

Angel stood alone in the pitch-black darkness of the basement, holding the gun tight with both of her hands, her right index finger ready to pull the trigger and the raging storm sounding like it was trying to rip her house apart, when she had the sudden and chilling thought, *'was Norman really going to kill her? Damn that Andries and her brilliant ideas. Sex for drugs just never works'*

Norman Palucci saw himself as a non-conformist. He considered himself spiritual, but not religious. He was proud of his political awareness without affiliations. As a non-tax paying entrepreneur who lived hidden in the rot-wood jungle of the south Providence slums and in what he of himself called un-godly opulence, Palooch thought of himself as a wise man with a gift of vision and a knack for attracting what he wanted from life. At twenty-four years old he had acquired more wealth from illegal drug dealing than his father had acquired by working at the Pontiac

Fabric Mills as a machinist mechanic for the past forty-two years.

Norman saw his father as a loser who had wasted his life working in the dark and dank factories that shadowed and polluted the Pontiac River and the Pontiac skies and his father's Pontiac mind. A mind that never went nowhere.

Herman Allen Palucci died of cancer at the age of fifty-eight. The illness had taken not only the life of a sad and lonely man but also the meager savings from his Greenwood Credit Union account and the few valuable possessions he and his wife Katey sold for pennies on the dollar.

Then those six months before the life of Herman Palucci ended, the car went, the house went and the heartbroken and dispirited Katey went, from living in sad sanctuary in a not so bad middle class suburban subdivision, to living in poverty in a third floor apartment, in a low-income neighborhood of south Providence.

A section of the city known as Hump Town.

In spite of how she felt, Katey was, at fifty-four years old, quite an attractive woman, and one day on her walk to the South Side Market she accepted the two-hundred dollar offer from the handsome gentleman in the white BMW.

It had been three months she'd been living here and poverty was really starting to piss her off. She told him her name was Sweetie.

It was foggy the next morning when Billy opened Happies' doors at 8 a.m. Almost two hours later, when Tommy and Kavette arrived, sunlight had followed them in and as the door closed behind them the sunlight ran back outside and stood waiting for them by the front window.

When Billy looked towards the two foot tall by twelve foot wide front window to the right of the hefty hand carved wooden front door and saw the morning sunlight that reflected off of the plate glass doors and windows of the three story motel across the street shining through an open space in the middle where the curtains offered a peek in or a peek out and then to the back patio doors with their curtains drawn almost completely shut but open just enough to show that the patio and the beach were bright and sunny,

he asked while scratching his head and yawning, " A big storm?!!! Seems more like springtime than winter to me Tommy!"

Kavette put a cigarette between her lips, causing Tommy to give her a look of disgust and Billy to light her a match, get her an ashtray and refill the shot glasses with whiskey.

"Them things ain't no good for ya' Kavette," Tommy said as if she had become his responsibility and his condescending tone would exemplify his noble intentions.

Kavette rolled her eyes and looking at Billy she said, "I'm a big girl Tommy. I do whatever I want, whenever I want and with whomever I want." Smiling and winking at Billy, who in response walked to the other end of the bar to where the barometer hung on the wall exactly where Rina placed it eight years ago.

"The barometer says snow. I'll be ding donged. Maybe the weather lady on the radio ain't so dumb after all."

Tommy didn't want to get on the subject of Rina. Her death was heartbreaking and Billy almost lost his reason for living after his wife was gone.

"Hell Kavette! We gotta git goin..." Tommy said. He stood up off of the barstool and looking towards Billy but avoiding eye contact added, "Gotta beat the storm. Thanks

for the hospitality my friend." Tommy slapped a twenty-dollar bill down on the bar.

Kavette stood and reached over to stroke Billy's arm which was out of her reach. She gave him a pleading look.

Billy came forward and shaking both of her hands said, "Thanks Tommy. Pleasure Kavette. You guys take care. See ya's soon. I hope."

Kavette stroked the palm of his hand with her fingers. Gave Billy another wink.

Chapter 5:

The dream brought Charvin back fifteen years. He was nine again. A tall slinky kid with a quick wit and the imagination of a wizard. He went climbing over the clanky six-foot tall chain link fence that surrounded the Greene State Airport. The place that used to be, way back when, Charley and Charlene Norton's 'Meadowbrook Strawberry Farm.' *Strawberry Fields Forever.*

The United States Air Force, stationed there since the summer of 1944, replaced the ponds and streams and forests and meadows, the fruit trees and flower beds and vegetable gardens and strawberry fields, with military constructions of massive hangars that housed fighter and cargo planes. With barracks and maintenance facilities. With storage warehouses. With a mess hall that fed a thousand troops and more daily in its prime during the 1950 to 1953 Korean War.

It was July 1969 and the Viet Nam War that began in 1959 and would last until 1975 was nothing more than an adventurous television movie to Charvin. He conceived none of the war's harsh realities. It was a time of change with talk of peace and brotherhood and sisterhood, but to Charvin it was just the same as it ever was. Peanut butter and jelly. Christmas and Easter. Happy birthday cake and presents. Fireworks on the 4th of July. And the wonderful world of Disney.

Charvin scaled the chain link fence on that warm summer night those fifteen years ago and ran like the wind across the airport. Too fast to be sighted by imaginary armed guards. Too fast for the imaginary land mines to explode under his weight. His feet ran swift and silent. Red Ball Jets sneakers strode thick green grass. When he reached the runway landing strip he dove belly down,

scanned out the area in all directions and rolled over onto his back, catching his breath while looking up at the star-filled sky and enjoying the cool soft grass that he felt through his sweaty tee shirt. The fresh cut grass was a summer smell and the way the grass tickled his bare legs from the bottom of his shorts to his ankles was a summer sensation and the sounds of crickets chirping were summer sounds, but still just three of many things that he would love and remember forever in his soul, in his heart, in his mind, and in all his summer's dreams.

An airplane approaching from the northwest over Providence, with its red and green blinking wingtip lights, its red blinking tail tip light and its red blinking belly light was gliding UFO-like in its slowing descent from the heavens to earth. Charvin watched as the craft circled east over the bay. Then finally, the tarmac exploded in a blinding flash of runway strobe lights.

Norman Palucci heard about his mother from Lisa, one of the local girls that he sold to. Drug dealers heard everything. Even the shit they didn't want to know. Now he had to replay that day when his old man threw him out on his eighteenth birthday. How his mother just stood there and did nothing. Said not one word.

"Take your piss-poor life and get the fuck out of my house!"

These were the last words Norman heard from the loser. His father found the hidden stash. Again.

"Happy fucking birthday to me! You fucking loser," was all Norman could come up with in reply. He flipped them each the middle finger and walked away with his head held high and his chest flexed taut. Furious that his privacy had been invaded.

The guy in the white BMW became Katey's regular. Monday, Wednesday and Friday, she would be waiting on the

corner, one block up from the South Side Market and Dell would be pulling up next to her at two o'clock. They'd take a ride out to the Route 44 Inn, rent the room in the backside of the motel. Always room 141. Dell knew the guy who owned the place. Corky saw to it that Mr. Folcrelli always had his favorite room available. The boss gave specific orders to Corky that Corky carried out without any questions. Never ask politicians to explain themselves. That was how the last guy who ran the no-tell motel lost his job. Disappeared.

"So this is our third date Sweetie. Lets do something a little different this time," Dell had suggested.

"Like what? What's in the suitcase?"

"Let me just show you," Dell said as he put the suitcase on the dresser and opened it.

Katey was obedient. Dell scared the living daylights out of her but never really hurt her.

Later when he dropped her back off on Pine Street he gave her five hundred instead of two hundred.

"You okay with this Sweetie? I'll see you Monday? Two o'clock? Okay?" If she said no she wasn't okay with this Dell had another five-hundred bucks waiting in his back pocket.

Katey shook her head yes.

"See you Monday."

And she walked away feeling a little nervous about getting home with the money before a dick came by in an unmarked and figured out that she was what she was. It was just starting to get dark. The snow flurries were getting heavy.

The white BMW with Connecticut licence plates was being photographed as it slowly drove off towards the South Side Market. The photographer who took the digital surveillance pictures from the third floor window across the street and worked for Norman Palucci liked what he saw of the lady who got out of the car. He hurried at packing up his equipment and down the three flights of stairs hoping to catch up with her and nonchalantly start a conversation.

Billy watched Tommy walk a few steps ahead of Kavette to the front door. Kavette turned to look back before she stepped out into the sunlight.

"Vow Billy! Diz door iza verk oart!" Kavette said using her on again off again accent.

The heavy wooden door slammed shut and Billy was left alone thinking that Happies was a dark and a lonely place and maybe it was time to open the curtains.

Looking behind him at the digital clock that sat on the shelf behind the bar, Billy saw his middle-aged reflection in the mirrored wall. He saw what Kavette saw. An athletic guy with short blonde hair, a friendly smile and a twinkle in his eyes. *Maybe not a movie star but I could of been.* And then he smiled, remembering the September night about five months ago when the Hollywood Typhoon, Anthonio Quinthiento, who was nicknamed for the whirlwind of film after blockbuster film over the last decade, had come in with his buddy, the mayor of Providence.

Anthonio had that gorgeous brunette Angel hanging all over him and the Mayor with his date, Andries, with her long straight jet black hair, seemed to be doing all right for himself too.

Once the buzz word got out that the Hollywood Typhoon and Mayor Taylor were signing autographs and getting publicly slushed and sloshed down in south county at Happies, the media showed up and had the parking lot looking like a world shaking major event was about to take place. The bodyguards stood outside and kept the hound dogs at bay.

Red digital numbers changed from 10:59 to 11:00 and Billy snapped out of his trance. The shelf clock was an antique replica of an old beer wagon drawn by Clydesdale draft horses. One of the popular brewery sales promos from back in the good ole days.

The stocky replica of a mustached man at the reins actually looked like Gramps.

With an hour to go before the lunch crowd arrived Billy put another cigarette in his mouth and was just about

to light it up when the front door opened and in walked Banjo.

Banjo always came in whistling a catchy tune that Billy hadn't heard in awhile.

Banjo stopped whistling just long enough to say, "Billy. It seems awfully dark in here today."

Zippity do dah zippity aye.

Chapter 6:

When the on-duty nurse took a peek in to see how the patient in room 108 Intensive Care was doing she smiled, envious of the young mans slumberous repose. Charvin was laying on his back oblivious to the winter blizzard that raged outside the window. Novella Nelson tip toed into the room and looking at the patient chart that was hanging at the foot of the bed she saw that Mr. Cormorosky had been given a sleeping pill forty five minutes ago at 7:45 p.m. She took his vitals without waking him up and imagined him floating on a cloud and looking down at the world.

He looked so darling to the woman that she couldn't resist bending over and giving him a motherly kiss on the forehead. As Novella straightened back up she sensed someone behind her and heard a soft sad whisper. She turned around startled and for a moment thought she had seen someone, but there was nobody there. She tried to dismiss her spooky jeepers creepers, but her goose bumps felt like ghostly fingers in the dark room. The hospital night shift workers were always talking about some apparition and how the old hospital was definitely haunted, especially here in the intensive and emergency care wing. She hurried out of the room and into the lighted hallway where she stood looking back into room 108 and the handsome young man and then up and down the long hospital corridor, not sure of which direction the footsteps she heard were coming from.

Angel[...]

END.