

Excerpt 5 of 6 “Blackened By Fire” I

Then Rick recalled the impending deadline for the magazine article and his heart sank. He'd hardly written a word. He'd thought about trying to write about the experience from Andre's point of view to expedite things, though he knew it was only right that he actually interview Andre. But, when he tried to decide what to ask, the questions always veered from the article's ostensible subject, to their relationship. If Andre didn't blame him for wanting to go to the demo, why hadn't he kept in-touch after that summer, after the police attack? For Rick, the biggest anti-war demonstration in US history all came down to do one incident, an incident he hadn't even witnessed.

He grabbed his army surplus rain poncho and mounted the stairs to the upper deck. It was already drizzling when he entered the centerfield camera cage, flipped back the lens cover and prayed for the weather to kill the game.

She didn't see him at first when she came into the open and sat down heavily on one of the bleachers. Though she had rain gear over her guard uniform, strands of her hair were limp and wet on her face. She had no makeup and her lips were pale. She stared into the distance at the heavy sky.

“Are you okay?”

She looked at him and then away. Her eyes were red. Her breathing was uneven.

“I need to get away from here, for a while,” she said still not looking at him.

“The game will probably be cancelled. I guess the storm is obvious.”

“Do you know how much it cost to get to Canada?”

“A couple of bucks for Windsor, just the other side of the bridge. You got relatives there?

“I hope not. How long can you stay there? Do they check your ID? They must check it, right?”

“Sometimes, they ask to see your license. Just don't act too suspicious.

“You got a car, right? I know you got a car.”

There were four or five cars ahead of them in the toll line for the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor when he decided to pull out some change for the booth. He smiled at her, the polite type of smile people exchange when they bump accidentally.

He was staring out of the hotel window back across the river at Detroit, taken with the view: sail boats and freighters, the rotund Cobo Center like a fat gear of glass and steel on its side, clouds above the dark towers of the Renaissance Center. It was a post card view of the city he wished he could have while he was in the city.

In his quasi-reverie, he didn't notice her agitation. She had covered herself for the first time since they'd undressed and cast about the room looking for something. She suddenly knelt by the bed, darted her arm beneath it, pulled out a backpack and tossed it on the bed.

"Hey!" she almost shouted.

"Yeah, I'm right here."

"Uh, you uh, said something about ...could you look at this?"

She took a pile of spiral notebooks from the backpack, at least a dozen. She flipped through them. Every page, front and back, was filled with writing and all the notebooks were worn or damaged. The one she decided to hand him had been blackened by fire.

They took the baby out of her

They took the knife out of her

They took her from the side of the road

They took her to jail

They took her from the crib

They took her over and over

When they got to zero

They started teaching her

About negative numbers

He stared at her in a way that made her a little frightened.

"You wrote this?"