

## Footage II

He couldn't stop thinking about that phone call for months. The case had been closed five years ago, and he'd moved to Surrey a year before that.

*They have footage, they have footage*, a little voice chanted in the back of his mind, over and over.

All through the summer weeks, the white nights of late June, into the waning sun of August as it angled lower in the sky, and the nights closed more quickly, the little chant continued. *Footage footage footage*. His life had settled into a pattern of work, eat, sleep, repeat, as simple as he could manage it, just to keep going. *No complications. Steady as she goes, hand on the till, easy now*. His apartment, the mechanic work, a few guys he worked with that he chatted to. None of them knew where he'd come from, or why.

He talked to Andrea every now and again, when she called first. He wanted no more to disrupt her pattern, whatever it had become and whatever it looked like, than she did his, and so their conversations were spaced a bit too far to mask the strain that started every call. He did not ask her if she had received the same call from the Crown Attorney. He suspected that she had. He held nothing against her. What couple could have survived their tragedy? No one. He looked at the framed pictures of Andrea and Becca on the shelf next to his bed. *He'd had a family once. It really had happened*. He turned off the light, and rolled over to sleep, dreaming of the Kamp's slouching barn and the field stubble.

The following day at the garage dawned a day like any other. Fall was well on its way, and the rain with it. Fallen leaves mulched wetly on the pavement. He clocked in on the old Kronos machine ("I like to keep my men honest," the owner had said with a smirk) and picked up the clipboard with his job list for the day. Two transmissions, a radiator, a muffler. Fair enough. Mrs. Wilson wanted a call back about her brake job from last week, said it hadn't lasted. He'd leave that one for someone else. An old boombox in the office blared the greatest hits of the eighties, nineties, and today.

He was elbow deep in a greasy transmission box when he heard a low voice behind him. "Well, Frank," she said. The back of his neck prickled. He turned around.

Her smile lit up the dim garage, her sparkle and shimmer palpable, from her face, from her fingers. "Didn't hear me come in, did you? That's okay. I'm quiet like that."

He wiped his hands on an old red rag. He hardly knew what to say. She looked like she'd come from that cabaret on Davie Street. Was she - a man? Did it matter?

"I know how that little voice just ... won't seem to stop," she continued.

“Who are you?” Frank asked, swallowing. “How do you...”

“How do I know?” She erupted in a musical laughter. “I know a lot, but I don’t know everything. Let’s just say, I have my ways.” She touched the silver stud under her lower lip. “A way, or two.”

Taking a breath, she reached for his hand. He could not take his eyes off her getup, that dragonfly tutu, her grace. She was clean, and smelled wonderful. Perhaps she was not a drag queen. “Frank, tell me your heart’s desire. I already know it. I need you to say it out loud, or this won’t work.” She waited. “Tell me, Frank. You can just say it.”

*It’s a cruel, cruel summer ...* floated out from the office.

Frank took a breath, then snorted. “This is ridiculous. I don’t even know you - you come in here and - ?”

“Frank, shhh.” She placed an index finger on his lips, a long magenta nail almost reaching his nose. “Shhh. Just tell me.”

He fidgeted with the zipper at the top of his jumpsuit and looked toward the door, its window blocked into graph paper with its steel grill.

“Just tell me,” she whispered.

He took another breath, and breathed, “I want to see my family.”

Her eyes grew large with empathy. She nodded. “We can do that. Oop! Nothing, not a word from you, sir.” She pulled him by the hand to the back of the garage, between two fifty-gallon drums, by the steel cellar door in the floor. *How did she know about that*, he wondered. But he could not speak. She loosened the nested handle and pulled the door open, turning around to face him and lowering herself into the storage space on the steep stairs.

“Come on,” she said softly. He followed her down.

When his foot touched the ground, he turned around. The pegboard of blister-wrapped car parts and fan belts had been replaced by a faint blue light, and a distant horizon. The sprite took him by the hand, and they both lifted effortlessly from the ground. As they floated toward the blue light, everything seemed to become lighter and sweeter. For the first time in years, Frank focused only on the scene in front of him. Not thinking about last year, or the year before. Not all the tragedy he might have prevented. But only this moment, as it unfolded before him. The small voice had ceased its tormenting chant.

Soon, he and the sprite were coursing over the entire province, the mountains and their coddling clouds, a snowcap here and there, giving way to expanses of farms and fields after the range ended. He held her hand all the while, and knew he was loved. He trusted her infinitely, without reason, beyond reason. After what might have been mere moments, or perhaps hours, they began to descend, slowly and gently, until they were standing in the stubble by the Kamp barn.

“Good, Frank. Good. You’re doing so well.” She nodded encouragingly. From behind her back she pulled a slim toy, handing it to Frank. “One sound from this, and you’ll all be here,” she said.

“How - what? Where did you get this from?” he asked. Tears blurred his vision. “That silly tin whistle we gave her for Christmas when she was five... I said it was too old-fashioned, but Andrea said it reminded her of one she used to have. How did you? Where? ...”

“Oh, Frank,” the sprite giggled. “You are hilarious.” She gave him an admonishing look. “Blow,” she ordered good-naturedly.

Frank put his lips to the whistle and pulled its sliding stick out in a *woooOOOOooo*. From the stubble, like a mirage, materialized first Andrea, then Becca, smiling. They were both smiling. They were real, weren’t they? Weren’t they? Frank took a tentative step forward, afraid of the truth a touch might bring.

“Daddy!” Becca screamed, and ran forward to clasp him tightly.

Andrea was right behind her. “Finally. We were both here wondering how long, how long you’d be.”