



WHAT IS MISSING

THE NIGHT AFTER THE BOY WAS KIDNAPPED A GROUP of teens got high and formed the Ministry of Pre-Emptive Memorials. The Minister of Stuffed Animals, the Minister of Flowers and the Minister of Signed Letters and Anonymous Poems embarked with the others in pairs to locate the goods they'd been assigned to gather. Their work was finished by dawn, and they photographed it, though the memorial lacked the contribution of the Minister of Wreaths, who had been arrested lurking naked in the meat section of an all-night supermarket. The memorial did not bear witness to the boy. What the friends had prepared was meant to brace the world against a calamity yet to come. To keep it ready.

But the next morning a woman who had knit a toque for the kidnapped boy mistook these flowers piled with crucifixes and homemade cards as a gathering undertaken for him; she added her offering. She had seen footage from the mall's security camera, on TV first, then online, and it doesn't look like a kidnapping.

A figure emerges from the crowd of holiday shoppers. They share a few exchanges, man and boy, and then vanish down a hall, hand in hand. A comment posted online describes the uncoloured blur of their encounter as two ghosts in the afterlife meeting again for the first time. The woman only knew how to knit toques, which was fine; the days were getting shorter. She promised the boy if she learned to knit mitts she would leave a pair to match the hat.

The boy's father had already destroyed the memorial created for his missing child. Neighbours had started it at the entrance of a local park. The boy's father shredded hand-drawn laments and snapped stems as he shouted, "He isn't dead!" Gathering the debris into a pile, he ignited it using gas from a jerry can and his car's cigarette lighter.

The boy's father also had reservations about the candlelit vigil organized by their church, but he was too busy keeping pressure on the police to imagine the proper protest. His wife spent the whole vigil onstage, though she wasn't really there. Eyes closed on the encouragement each speaker extended to the crowd, eyes closed on the glow of the crowd's flickering support, the boy's mother did what she could to keep close to her son. She sent herself into him. If it had to be this way, it had to; she alone in her love would be the last thing he sensed or saw.

In the passing days, she kept this up, increased her efforts tenfold, even as she and her husband held press conferences, gave interviews to reporters and local talk-show hosts. Their boy became a lesson to other children – the don'ts and dos of strangers. Many of these children, this ancient tale new in their ears, wondered what it would be like to be the boy's friend or cousin or sibling or – their stomachs twisting at the thought of it – what would it be like to be that, taken away? A pastor told the story of Christ's empty tomb and said the boy, like that abandoned burial, reminds us of the power of what is missing. One parishioner wondered if this reminder was worth the boy's loss before deciding it was; as the pastor said, the boy teaches us to hope. He will be found. It all will have been for the best.

WHAT IS MISSING

By then the boy was dead. The death had not been a part of the kidnapper's plan. Before finding the boy, the kidnapper had taken pictures of different spaces in his own home. He had secretly poured over the photos at work, trying to decide where in his house the boy would live. To him, great men coined new absences, removed whole peoples, their paces, from the world's endless racing. The room had been right. The boy had not. He would never be a great man but that was okay. Soon he would find another boy. Soon he would find another time to take another life and hold it. Soon, in another room, if need be.

Soon the boy was gone from the headlines, gone from small talk, gone from all the streams and feeds. Other events overtook him. The sun's rays grew more dangerous. Rebels barricaded themselves in a classroom of first graders. A stewardess birthed mid-flight a little one she wasn't even aware she'd conceived. One octogenarian, though, did wake in the night months later with the urge to pray for the safety of that poor kidnapped boy she had read about in the news. She pushed through the papers piled in the kitchen, searching for something with his name. But the page was gone, and the boy's name with it. She resigned herself to saying her prayer not for him alone but for all the lost little boys, and for all the lost little girls, which she sometimes believed she was, looking in the mirror, because inside, inside living felt the same, but outside, my God, what happened?



1 DOG, 1 KNIFE

EPISODE 1: "THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING THING"

IT WAS TERRY'S SECOND TIME TAKING FRESHMAN

English, his first with Miss Havergam. She was new: three years out of university and heading classes of her own for the second time. The bad kids rolled in late, if they bothered showing. The okay kids played video games at their desks or flipped through thick decks of Pokémon cards. Mr. Brock, who normally taught English, Shop and Woods, had been put on stress leave after a kid snapped the band saw trying to cut an old laptop in half and Mr. Brock took a swing at him with a two-by-four.

Terry's movies needed to be more current. Miss Havergam told him so.

"Not just current," she added. "Real. Current and *real*."

He typed her every word on his iPad, which the Maplewood High administration had provided him because his handwriting was illegible to his teachers and himself.

Miss Havergam was the only teacher to give him the extra attention the counsellor said he needed to realize his true potential. When they met to chat, she shared some of her lunch with him, squares of Caramilk bar, Hickory Sticks and, on that day, his own napkin piled with Nacho Cheese Doritos. The chips left a pinkish film atop the misspelled words the iPad corrected, changing *finegr* to *finger* and *pols* to *pulse*.

The serialized movies Terry made were not for Miss Havergam's class, but his teacher watched each weekly instalment. He met with her at lunch hour on Wednesdays and she shared her thoughts on the twists that worked and the mysteries that remained too mysterious. He answered questions about his process and intentions, reminding her his action figure actors remained boxed in their packaging because his dad said they would be worth more that way in the years ahead. His movies took place in the near future. That was how he explained away the packaging: protective gear. In this future, the air was lethal.

His mom gave him little gifts to pass along to Miss Havergam to help him show his appreciation: Ghandi quotation-bordered stationery, which Miss Havergam kept on her desk; dried apple chips, which she stuck in her drawer, winking at him, saying, "Treat for later"; a hand-knit scarf, which she wore all winter, bought at a local farmers' market; and organic doggy treats, picked up from the same market for Miss Havergam's rough collie, Buffy – treats Miss Havergam told him to tell his mom "Buffy absolutely hoovered."

Miss Havergam had begun watching Terry's movies at the start of the term, after he announced in class that he ran a YouTube channel, *The Smarthead Files*, where he posted the serialized exploits of his ace detective, Chuck Smarthead, PI. Terry had invited everyone in class to subscribe, though only Miss Havergam,

who had written the name of the channel on the board, accepted the invitation. Miss Havergam was supportive like that. She also organized volunteer opportunities for Maplewood students at the humane society and ran the Creative Writing Club at lunch hour on Tuesdays. Terry attended the club for two weeks before he and Miss Havergam saw no one else got *The Smarthead Files*. The one-on-one meetings had been her idea.

At the beginning of each of these meetings, Miss Havergam told Terry he had “quite the imagination,” but she also reminded him his type of movies weren’t necessarily her cup of tea. Miss Havergam repeated herself often. At least once a week she said she’d been given her dog, Buffy, as a birthday present when she was the same age as Terry’s classmates, a year younger than him. Buffy herself was a daily topic, a figure in grammar quizzes and “quick as the wind” when acting as an example in a simile.

Miss Havergam’s cup of tea was National Geographic documentaries, *The Voice* and *Dog Whisperer*. Those were all daily topics, too. The girls in class fluttered right into recaps of the singing contest, while the boys groaned. The boys called Miss Havergam “Miss Massive-Cans” behind her back because, as one of the jokers put it, she had knockers the size of oil drums. Another kid bet two dwarves were dozing in hammocks under her blouse. Terry was the only one not to elaborately describe the fluids he longed to shoot on, rub into or lick from Miss Havergam’s breasts. Miss Havergam was one of the eight subscribers to his YouTube channel. She had earned the loyalty of his silence.

During that day’s lunch hour meeting, when he had finished transcribing Miss Havergam’s remarks, Terry puzzled over them briefly and then came right out and asked her what she meant by his movies needing to be more current and real. Miss Havergam said she guessed she meant he needed a bit more of that thing in a movie people connected with, right now, in the moment, that warmed their hearts or, she added with a wink, broke them. He thought about this and then typed. The iPad changed *brake* to *break*.

“But why isn’t my work current and real?” he asked.

Miss Havergam gave him a nod he knew meant “good question.” She pushed the last few fingers-full of broken Doritos into her mouth and thought.

Terry was buoyed by this nod, as though he had stuck a secret key in a hidden lock and heard the thing click.

She had the answer. His sense of certainty had something to do with the way she wore her hair pulled back too tight in a bun, the way her broad forehead and round cheeks puffed up above her hairline. She smiled at him through her chewing. He smiled at a place above her inflated forehead, so overcome by anticipation he could not return it directly. His fingertips quivered above his iPad’s sticky screen.

“Why isn’t your work current and real?” Miss Havergam asked herself under her breath.

The chip bag crackled. Her fingers searched its inner-reaches for crumbs.

There was something more to her. There was a deeper, secret being inside her that no one had ever glimpsed. Terry witnessed this in the mask-like swelling of his teacher’s face. His eyes lost focus from staring so intently, and it looked as though this woman before him had been scalped, releasing the slick, black, perfect plastic surface of the true self hidden beneath, freeing its skin to glisten in the open air.

“There’s just something missing,” she finally said, shaking her head.

“What?” Terry coughed, her answer punching the breath right out of him.

“I don’t know what else to say, Terry,” she added, scrambling. He could tell by the way she sought his attention she knew she had let him down. “There’s this thing, and it’s not there.”

She tilted her head back and quickly dropped the mound of crumbs and flavouring into her mouth. A spot of the bright orange mess remained caked to her chin, below the corner of her lips, after she had anxiously licked her fingers clean.

He wanted his smile to look as real and as current to her as her reassuring smile looked to him. But his disappointment, the queasiness he experienced, trapped by the intense gaze of the Doritos stain, prevented any genuine gratitude from materializing. It stretched his lips into a surgeon's mask – flat and blank.

Terry looked away from the moist, glowing smudge and down at his iPad.

He did not type a word.

The spot of Doritos continued to affect him though, and his deep disappointment transformed into something else. An oddly warm intensity, a swirling like oil and water shaken together in a sealed jar, roiled away in his gut. The flavouring on her face was the same flavouring she had consumed. The same flavouring she had put into herself was the same substance he had taken into his own body. That Doritos dust bound them. He might as well have stood, dove over the desk and licked the spot from her skin with his drying tongue. That act would not have brought them any closer. Their bond, through the chips, was already complete. And this was the bond – their link, the thing – he needed to capture in the next instalment of *The Smarthead Files*. The bell sounded.

Its ringing, he knew, could not break the bodily throbbing that umbilicated them. He was free to be consumed by their connection everywhere else.

He stood without looking up.

"Thank you, Miss Havergam," he said, and started for the door.

She called him back. "I hope I didn't hurt your feelings, Terry."

"No," he said, seeing with relief she had wiped the Doritos from her chin.

"Here," she said, reaching for her desk drawer. She withdrew a half-eaten Dairy Milk bar and broke him off two squares. Taking them, he glanced down into the drawer's open mouth. There were dozens of plastic bags inside, filled with what looked like shrivelled human ears. They were apple chips, all the uneaten goodies he had given her.

EPISODE 2: "THE SWEET FEEL OF KILLING KILLED"

At his desk in the back corner of his fourth period Biology class, Terry avoided the glare of the blank page of his iPad. He watched Mrs. Pardinas as she explained the process by which plants bent to face the sun. He watched the leaves of the trees outside the window for evidence of this process. He reread the shots fired in the battle taking place between the anonymous students who shared his desk during different periods. His iPad's screen remained void.

The desk fight had started last week. The student whose penmanship reminded Terry of soap bubbles had written, "What do you want?"

"For you to blow me," a student had replied in all caps.

"Me, too," the next student had added in slanted letters.

Terry did not have a pencil or a pen. He could not interrupt the clash and ask, "How can I make my next movie real?"

Mrs. Pardinas explained that plants do not exactly "turn." Instead, the cells of the plant nearest the sun shrink, while the cells farthest from the sun grow. An animation in her PowerPoint demonstrated this swelling of the cells in the shadow, the effect of this force. The two most recent remarks in the desk war were, in all caps, "Suck my balls faggot," and, in soap bubble penmanship, "Once your dad teaches me how."

Terry returned to that first question: "What do you want?"

He wanted Miss Havergam.

"Miss Havergam," he typed.

A smoke-soft tingle drifted up from the letters as he typed them. This smouldering travelled through his hand, up his arm to his shoulder, rising from his neck into his ears, which pulsed with sound, as though a winged-thing's egg laid there long ago had finally hatched. Her name contained her. It diminished her to a size he could protect. He wanted his movie to protect her, what he felt for her.

He was a massive glass dome lowering over her city before the great flood came to wipe out the world. Sharks would swim

on the other side of the glass as life went on, schools of sea horses, great whales. He licked his fingers and wiped out the war of words the desk had preserved. The great whales of possible movie scenarios – from the basest, ageless murder plots to an epic journey to the centre of the sun – swam in hulking, sense-clouding masses through his brain. He licked his fingers again. He erased everything but the question, the first words.

He never consciously made up his movies.

They played in his mind.

He transcribed.

In that moment, though, none of the films projected inside him met Miss Havergam's criteria. But what could be more current than his experience, dipping his head into the stream and extracting gold? What could be more real?

Each of the serial killers Smarthead had brought to justice had arisen in an effortless flash, from the Silver Screen Killer (who murdered his victims by mimicking the death scenes from Hollywood blockbusters) to the Google Killer (who found his victims using a search algorithm designed to locate the most anti-social individuals) to the Look-Alike Killer (whose victims all resembled C-list celebrities) and on and on and on.

These same visions told him why Tony Stark's moustache and wry grin made him perfect to play the PI. They told him how to compose his packaged toy actors before the filming frame. They told him which voice to use in post-production to bring to life the different *Arkham City*, *Chogokin*, *The Clone Wars*, *Power Rangers*, *Minimate*, *Minifig*, *Transformers* and *Band of Brothers* figures who peopled his world: the serial killers, their victims and the rest of the cops, worried parents, cruel parents, politicians, drug dealers, street people and orphaned children, who either sustained the whole sick system or suffered at its hands.

The birth of Smarthead's catchphrase was another example. Terry had been down in the basement, escaping the roar of the neighbour's lawn mower. Those sorts of loud things, unrelenting, undid him. He had pressed the two pillows tighter to his ears, and then he heard

it: "Your days of killing have just been killed." The final episode of each story arc ended with Smarthead delivering this guarantee. The phrase turned a tap in his mind, releasing the sweet feeling of "justice served" into the fist and jaw and spine. It signalled to Terry's current ten to twenty-five viewers to stay tuned next week for a new case. In the future, he was certain, thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of viewers would receive this signal from this same killer line.

By his fifth period Health class, Terry had settled on an idea. Miss Havergam had once mentioned she was half-English and that her grandfather still lived in an English village near the sea. What if she went to visit her grandfather and discovered everyone she knew there, including her grandfather, had vanished? What if the village was in ruins? What if a mysterious corporation had taken possession of the fishery?

The idea to add a corporation came from Mr. Roy. In their first class, he admitted he was being forced to teach Health because of cuts to the Fine Arts budget. As was their daily ritual, Terry's classmates had easily coaxed Mr. Roy off the topic of self-esteem and into one of his rants against banks and corporations.

Terry opened up the browser on his iPad. Following Miss Havergam's advice, he wanted to find the name of a real corporation to serve as his movie's bad guy, preferably a company currently guilty of the sins Mr. Roy condemned. Instead, he found the real subject for the film he would make for her. The top headline on the *Star's* website read, "Luka Rocco Magnotta Sought as Body Parts Case Turns into Horror Show."

It felt like a current. Was that why she had used that word? The real facts swept him away in a surge: the brutal murder; the murderer's brutal propagation of his poor victim, through the mail and the video "1 Lunatic, 1 Ice Pick"; the murderer's surgically modified face; his lifelong quest for fame; his ever-changing appearance; his failed reality TV stardom; the fact that the owner of Bestgore.com kept the snuff film posted because "people had the right to see the truth, reality without censorship"; the fact that the killer was still on the loose; the fact that the killer could kill again.

What if Magnotta killed again?

A scenario struck Terry, projecting from the ether beyond the iPad screen onto the screen in his mind. From this vision, he transcribed his script. He remained in his desk after class until the custodian kicked him out. He typed on the bus, at the dinner table, so enraptured his mom had to remind him to take his pills. Switching from his iPad to his MacBook after dinner, he continued beside his parents who made him watch a televised spelling bee with them, on the edge of the tub while he pretended to bathe, and at his packaged-action-figure-cluttered desk. When he crawled into bed at 3:30 a.m., his script was finished. He faked sick the next morning, and then filmed, edited and mixed sound all day and into the night. An hour after his mom kissed him good night, he finished "Episode 1: The Message Inside the Murder," the first instalment of *The Case of the Custom-Made Killer*.

"Episode 1" was composed of four scenes. In the first scene, Chuck Smarthead, PI, receives a taunting phone call from Luka Magnotta. Magnotta promises he will kill again and suggests he has hidden clues to his next victim's identity in the video of his first crime. The second scene takes place in Miss Havergam's classroom. Miss Havergam, played by the *Arkham City* Catwoman, and Terry, played by a Minimate Batman, discuss with excitement their upcoming class trip to the zoo. Smarthead scours Magnotta's gruesome video for clues in scene three; his search is fruitless. In the fourth and final scene, Magnotta enters his hideout. He is played by one of *The Clone Wars* clones, though he does not retain this form for long. He enters his Instant Plastic Surgery Machine and exits as Terry, the Minimate Batman, a tinfoil knife taped to his packaging. Magnotta, in his new guise, hisses, "Enjoy the zoo, Miss Havergam, because this visit will be your last!" The episode ends with his twisted cackle.

Terry, as was his ritual, watched the episode as soon as it was uploaded, giving the piece its first official YouTube view. It gave him chills. The cliffhanger left even him wanting to see what was going to happen next. And having watched the video on the web, in the world, coming to him from out there, he was more impressed

by his inspired decision to include an actual clip from Magnotta's "1 Lunatic, 1 Ice Pick" as Smarthead searches the sick artifact for clues. In the clip, the victim, bound, is straddled. That's it. No visible violence. The horror is in knowing what is to come.

Normally, Terry would have waited for Miss Havergam to find the first instalment on her own. For this one, though, he could not wait. He sent her an email with the subject line "One Thousand Scarves for You (and a Thousand Treats for Buffy)." He sincerely thanked her for her wisdom. The reward promised in the subject line would not cover his debt; he hoped the latest instalment of *The Smarthead Files* could.

He wanted to witness her view registering, but the count remained at one no matter how many times he hit Refresh. She might have been in bed already. She lived on the second floor of a surprisingly rundown four-storey apartment building. If she was asleep, he could throw rocks at her balcony window and wake her and tell her to watch. It was an hour-and-a-half walk from his place, though it might have been shorter. The one time he had done it he had trudged through a foot of snow. Back when they were first getting to know one another, he had tracked down her address in a PDF on the humane society website.

Exhausted by a full day of work, and running on a few hours of sleep, he barely had the energy to keep refreshing his browser. He slouched in his chair and watched his email inbox for the arrival of her thankful reply. None of the numbers he wanted to change changed. His head lolled away from his MacBook's glow.

EPISODE 3: "THE CASE OF THE CLIFFHANGER THAT WOULD NEVER END"

Terry arrived at school early. There could be no delays. He needed to ask Miss Havergam, as soon as he could, "What do you think of what I made for you?"

The class was empty. He took his seat in the back, not wanting to appear too eager by waiting at her desk. Two girls from

the Creative Writing Club arrived first. One of them flipped on the classroom lights, while the other made a comment about how creepy it was to sit alone in the dark. He glanced up from his iPad with each new arrival. The video had a total of three views. One of the viewers had to have been Miss Havergam, but her usual view-signalling Like was absent. The Like button could not contain what she was feeling.

He watched the door intently, waiting for this feeling and its lovely bearer to enter the room. The bell rang. A balding man with a light bulb-shaped dome slid into the class with a celebratory, "Made it." He wore a blue velvet jacket and one of those pointy, well-trimmed chin beards Terry associated with science-prone supervillains. Before the man could say a word, Terry exclaimed over the class's quieting din, "You're not Miss Havergam."

"That's right," the man grinned, eyeing up Terry. "I'm your substitute teacher, Mr. Weiss. You must be the sharp one."

The class erupted. No one but Terry asked where Miss Havergam was. His question went unanswered.

"Since you're so sharp," Mr. Weiss said, "I bet you can help me find someone I'm looking for." Mr. Weiss glanced down at the paper in his hand and read Terry's name.

"That's me," Terry said.

"Should have guessed. The principal wants to talk to you, pronto."

He wished for a cliffhanger. He wished for a week to pass between the moment he rose from his desk and the moment he reached the threshold of the door. He slumped weakly through the hall, nauseated, wishing his life was one of those shows where the fans voted for who lived and who loved in next week's instalment. He wished he could cast the deciding vote. He had no idea what awaited him in Principal Drummel's office. Worse, he could not help but imagine the impossible: Miss Havergam waiting in the principal's place, her fingers blouse-button-perched, eager to set free all her pain-erasing flesh.

The secretary pulled the door closed behind him.

"I want you to know right off the bat, mister," Principal Drummel said, "that if it was entirely up to me, I would expel you."

Terry dropped into the seat by the door, unable to make it to the chair Principal Drummel pointed to in front of her desk. He felt his mouth dangle open, convulse, like he was coughing up an eel. His initial suspension would last a week. Principal Drummel glared down at him as she advanced.

Words finally formed: "What did I do?"

"What did you do? You made that sick threat against your teacher and your school."

"What?"

"Your movie!"

A deep sense of relief spilled through him. Principal Drummel went on about this type of intimidation not being tolerated, and the necessity of police involvement. He barely heard a word. It had all been a misunderstanding. There were hands that could reach from the shore and rescue him from the current that threatened to sweep him away.

Did Miss Havergam know what was happening to him? She was more than likely sick at home with the flu, curled up in bed with Buffy and her laptop. She was re-watching his movie. With the whole day ahead of her, she would re-enjoy his life's work. Buffy would nuzzle closer for a scratch, and scratching her life-long companion Miss Havergam would sigh, "I wish Terry was with us." She was seconds from sending him an email: "I wish you were here."

"I need to talk to Miss Havergam," Terry said.

"You have no right to talk to her."

"But she can explain the movie. It was her idea."

Principal Drummel swallowed whatever she was about to say. Her looming face tightened with puzzlement.

"Terry," she said, "Miss Havergam is the one who reported you."

It returned.

The current.

The hands meant to save him from drowning revealed themselves to be the watery force. Miss Havergam dragged him under. She was as endless as violent waters. In her deception, his betrayer was endless. It did not take a Chuck Smarthead to see her fingerprints all over his punishments. She was his punisher, his puppeteer. He was a packaged-action figure in her beefy paws. How many others had she seduced to control?

Miss Havergam, disguised as Principal Drummel, took away his iPad. If the police found grounds for a criminal complaint, she promised, he would be expelled. If no charges were laid, she would force him to transfer to an institution better able to handle him.

Miss Havergam, speaking through the zombified minds of his parents, took away his MacBook, iPod, Xbox, PSP, microphone and camera. His future internet use, if the courts did not ban him for good, would be strictly monitored.

"No more YouTube, ever," Miss Havergam spit through his mind-controlled dad. "And that channel of yours is gonzo."

He stood to protest in the name of his subscribers, to object to the erasure of the views he had worked so hard to earn. His Miss Havergam-ed dad, who would normally not lay a fingertip on him, pushed him with both hands so hard his chair tipped away from the kitchen table. His mom wept. Miss Havergam allowed her tears, but nothing more. He bawled on the floor and his mom did not move to hold him tight.

His dad, red-faced, barked question after question:

"What did you think would happen if you threatened to kill your teacher?"

"What if this maniac had seen your video and came here to hurt me and your mom?"

"What are this murdered kid's parents supposed to feel when they hear you were making light of their son's death?"

His dad sent him to his room to think about these questions. But he did not think about any of them. The question he wanted to ask was: Why?

That question, to begin, was a syllable. It was a sound to make – as good as any other – when he bawled. His pillow muffled it, made it senseless. The meal he picked at in bed barely interrupted its sputtering. His mom silenced its verbalization as she stoked his back and said, “Hush now,” and he pretended to fall asleep.

In those hours of sleeplessness, something so simple and yet so profound dawned on him. He had invented Chuck Smarthead, PI. This fact wiped all of the despair and self-pity off that “why” and made it an actual question. It was a question he, the real Chuck Smarthead, could answer.

Why did she do it? Like every good PI knew, to answer that question he first had to ask: How? At his desk, he wrote out his theories in a notebook half-filled with math homework. He tested those theories on page after page, distilled the facts and compiled them. Everyone was involved: the Creative Writing Club, Principal Drummel, the Maplewood High administration, YouTube. More: his viewers, his non-viewers (them especially), his parents, the Maplewood High custodians, the sub, Mr. Brock, the kid who had cut the laptop in half and gotten Mr. Brock fired.

His writing was so messy that the notes he had written at 1:00 a.m. were unreadable by 3:00. The 4:00 a.m. epiphany – underlined, starred and circled – was, by 7:00, nothing more than a hammer-smashed hieroglyphic. His writing resembled strands of knotted spiderweb, a fact he found so perfect because what he had revealed in his words was the pattern of the web in which he was ensnared. His mom brought him breakfast, which he pretended to eat to get rid of her, and then he mapped out the web, writing down the name of each body his betrayer had wielded against him and drawing the line that connected each body back to her. Really, they were each as much of a mosquito as he was. They had not stirred enough to realize they had been caught in her web.

He knew the answer. Why bring all of these forces together and wield them against him? Because he could make what she never could. She had seen his serials before coming to Maplewood,

marvelled at how masterfully he worked with the form. She had arranged the job opportunity so she could earn his trust, encourage this and advise against that, until he made the perfect cliffhanger. And he had finally done it, and she had ruined him.

She had downloaded the movie before shutting down his YouTube channel. She had posted it on her own channel. It was already going viral under her name. But she was not doing it for the fame. There was something more sinister at work. He could feel it. By silencing him, she had set something monstrous free in the world: the cliffhanger that would never end. The world would screech to a halt as the cliffhanger spread via shares and retweets and old-fashioned word-of-mouth recommendations. Its endlessness would lead to endless re-watching, endless speculation on what would come next, endless inattention to all the basic world-sustaining tasks.

The world was going to end.

He needed to save it.

He needed to finish *The Case of the Custom-Made Killer*.

The script would have to be entirely rewritten. With the mix of rage and fear he felt at Miss Havergam's horrific plan propelling him, he saw the crime that perfectly expressed the breadth and depth of her evil. His lack of sleep and, as he wrote the day away, his lack of sustenance from the lunch and dinner he barely touched, aided him, intensifying his vision.

The movie begins with Magnotta dying after exiting his Instant Plastic Surgery Machine, and Miss Havergam leaving Maplewood to return to her position as CEO of the Havergam Corporation. Meanwhile, somewhere in Africa, a young man returns home after four years at university to find his family, friends and neighbours have all vanished. The empty village is an unrecognizable ruin and the Havergam Corporation now owns the village's oil wells. The young man hires Smarthead to solve the case.

After some top-notch sleuthing and escaping multiple attempts on his life by Miss Havergam's serial killer henchmen, Smarthead discovers the horrible truth. Miss Havergam had invented the

twenty-first century's first true horror, which she gives different names in different scenes: ethical colonialism, ethical genocide, ethical ethnic cleansing. A dome that sped up the passing of generations, named the E-Geno Dome, had been placed over the village. Inside the E-Geno Dome, the people were well provided for, autonomously ruled themselves and experienced time passing at a normal pace. In truth, though, one E-Geno Dome century was relative to one real world hour.

"In less than a day," Miss Havergam enthusiastically explains to a cuffed and bound Smarthead, "the domed society spends generations adapting, centuries flourishing and dies off in its own natural way."

Later, in the serial's final scene, Miss Havergam dangles from a rope above a hole in one of her E-Geno Domes. Smarthead pilots his chopper with one arm and holds the rope with the other.

"But I am good," Miss Havergam half-pants and half-screams, desperate for Smarthead's mercy. "Everyone wins. We gain access to resources the world desperately needs. The people receive real-time reparations. And the lifespan of their society runs its natural –"

The rope snaps under Miss Havergam's weight and she disappears into the E-Geno Dome.

"Your days of killing," Smarthead smirks, piloting his chopper against the backdrop of the setting sun, "have just been killed."

EPISODE 4: "THE BLOODY KNIFE"

The ladder was perfect. Another surge of strengthening joy rushed from his gut to his limbs as the rubber-covered top of the aluminum ladder found stucco and another piece of his plan snapped perfectly into place. The ladder reached four feet above the metal rail of Miss Havergam's balcony. Stepping from the ladder to her balcony to the inside of her apartment would be a breeze.

Thinking ahead to his entry into her apartment, he pulled off his shoes and socks. Quiet, as he knew from working on

Smarthead, would be key. He judged the weight of the camera bag slung around his shoulder and then struggled up the ladder. Everything he needed was in the bag: the camera, a flashlight, zaleplon-stuffed sausage chunks, a butcher knife, garbage bags, duct tape, a pocket pry bar and a hammer.

This feeling of fortifying joy had been his companion as he snuck through the night to Miss Havergam's, the joyous surge a low hum each second he remained unseen and then bursting when he found the perfect ladder sticking out of the grass beside a back alley garage. He drew a similar ecstatic strength from Miss Havergam's cherished pet, Buffy. He was there for her. The excellence of his casting of his new script made him feel the way God must have felt casting that first sun from light and, admiring its glory, musing, yes, more.

Buffy was to be one of the stars of his rewrite of *The Case of the Custom-Made Killer*. He knew a good spot in River Park. The clearing would not make an ideal Africa, but it would offer him lots of cover and the park resided halfway between Miss Havergam's apartment and his home. He had decided to cast Buffy as all of the villagers wiped out by the Havergam Corporation's selfish ends. A garbage bag would play the E-Geno Dome. The only camera he could find did not shoot video, but it would have to do. It was his dad's old point-and-shoot digital, a long-term resident of the abandoned electronics drawer in the entertainment room.

His plan had been to step onto the balcony's concrete lip then swing his leg over the rail like a sheriff swinging his leg over his stallion. The rail, though, was too high, so he climbed up another two rungs. His mind geysered visions of what he was going to make. He stepped his bare left foot onto the balcony's top rail. If he caused Miss Havergam one one-thousandth of the pain she had inflicted on him, he would be satisfied. The railing gave under his weight. It swung in as the loose bolts pulled right out of the stucco. One confused thought caught him: balconies don't work like this.

He pushed away from the fall, aiming to find his balance again on the ladder, but he pushed too hard. The ladder tipped. He went down with it.

Something returned – a small point of visibility and sound. A light came on in the window of the ground-floor apartment above him. The curtains did not move. The light went out. He was on his back in the grass. It was night. He sensed more, but the more his senses returned, the less he could see. The pain overtook his experience. His forehead throbbed like a squirrel had crawled inside to feed. His right foot was a blazing mess. A stilled meteor had merged with it. His pinkie toe had snapped back. It dangled from a shred of skin. He vomited at the sensation and the sight.

When he tried to sit up, his stomach screamed and his hand reached for the agony, palmed blood-soaked hoodie. Tearing off his hoodie, he found more blood, more pain. Ripping off his T-shirt, he discovered it: the hole. It was in his left side. It was the size of the mouth of a life-sized baby doll, opening. It ran in a neat vertical line below his rib cage. He reached for his camera bag. The butcher knife had sliced through the leather when he had hit the ground. By the blood on the blade, he guessed the thing had driven three inches into him. He hoped not. The wound drooled more blood.

He cried, but he refused to let himself cry out for help. He whispered the word in the sobs he muted as best as he could: help help help help help. He did not want Miss Havergam to see this. He did not want her to hear him cry out in defeat. She would have left him there anyway, even if he had called to her, even if he had begged, Please, let's take it all back. That thought made him cry harder, tears of rage mixing with tears of sadness and pain. She would have stepped out on the balcony and spit something cruel about how stupid he was for not having tested the railing before stepping on it, or she would have glanced down at him like he was a turd in a toilet bowl before flushing him from sight.

He did not want her to see what he did to deal with his mangled foot. He did not want her to witness him dressing his wounds

with a combination of duct tape and shreds of his hoodie. He did not want her to behold him nearly faint when he stood, catch himself, then make the climb, his efforts eased by the busted rail, and crouch before her sliding balcony door. He wanted her to have to guess, to have to test the limits of her imagination to grasp what he was capable of when she woke in the morning and her dog was gone and she found in its place a bloody, mangled toe.

**EPISODE 5: "THE RETURN OF THE MYSTERY
OF THE MISSING THING"**

He peered into her apartment through the sliding door. His injured foot could handle zero pressure, so he sat with his right leg extended. He was surprised by the sparseness of her things. Only the entertainment stand, filled with a widescreen TV and packed with DVDs, matched his vision of her world. He had anticipated heaps of furniture and masses of blankets and loads of framed pictures filling every free inch. Three rectangles dotted the bare walls. The one half-visible in the light of a distant street lamp was a photograph of Buffy. There was no other sign of his star.

He worked the pry bar under the sliding door. He had learned this trick on the internet in the winter when he had thought of leaving Miss Havergam a surprise bouquet. He covered the exposed end of the pry bar with a bundle of T-shirt to mute the sound of the hammer. He waited for Buffy's growling face to appear at the window, or Miss Havergam's face transitioning from sleepy annoyance to incited shock, or the faces of the officers who would put him away forever. His head throbbed with an oddly seductive pain, a hand passing gently over his eyes to summon sleep. Each time he tapped the pry bar too hard, the stab torched his side, jolting him back to attention. The window remained free of faces except his own determined reflection.

Once the pry bar was snug under the door, he gave it a hard clockwise turn with both hands. The lock popped out. His hand shot into his bag, and with a wince he slid the door open and

tossed in a handful of pill-stuffed sausage bits. He counted on their aroma catching Buffy's attention before she spotted him and barked so wildly she woke the whole building. He retrieved the butcher knife, just in case.

He waited. The blood overwhelmed his bandages. He scratched the knife gently across the glass, hoping to draw the dog out. When his foot spasmed in pain, it squished inside his shoe, like he had emerged from a flooded basement. The waistband of his jeans soaked up the blood leaking from his side. He tapped the glass. Buffy did not show.

He slid the door open. He left everything on the balcony but the knife. The pain in his foot was worsening so he had to crawl in on all fours. He had not imagined entering like that, or being hit with the thick, sour odour of boiled turnips, or hearing Miss Havergam snoring out a cranky snarl in her bedroom.

He caught his breath at the coffee table. He sprawled across it, his need for a recharge outweighing his worry about leaving blood. He listened closely to Miss Havergam's snoring and thought he heard Buffy's snore whining underneath it, a tin whistle accompanying a motorcycle engine. Both sounds might have been Miss Havergam. He hoped so. If Buffy was asleep with her in bed, he was not sure what he would do, what he might have to do. He leaned forward to retrieve one of his sausage bits from the rug.

He froze.

Buffy sat at attention at the entrance of the hallway. He could make out her silhouette as his eyes adjusted to the dark. She stared at him intently from beside the entertainment stand. He remained leaned forward, clutching the sausage, though his nerves raged and his shoulder quivered, growing weak. He had not heard her approach. As his vision adjusted, he could see the bedroom door was closed. Buffy had most likely been curled up there. After all Miss Havergam's talk of love and loyalty and companionship, he was surprised she would not share a bed with her best friend.

On the verge of collapsing, he braced his right side against the coffee table and lifted the treat off the rug. Buffy did not flinch.

He judged the distance and tossed the sleep-inducing treat. Right away he could tell he had overshot the mark. In anticipation of her attack, his right hand tightened on the knife, and a second surge of energy diminished the chorus of his injuries, diminished his body's incessant request to sleep.

The treat struck Buffy's nose and dropped to the carpet. Buffy did not budge. Cautiously, he lowered his body to the floor, and when she still remained at attention he crawled to her as fast as he could. He released the knife to speed his approach and allow him, as he rose to his knees to meet her gaze, to grab her with both hands.

Buffy was already dead. She was not completely dead. She was stuffed, alive in appearance. There was no heat to her body, but there was life to her lush pelt, in the solidity of the tooth that poked his cheek as he reached to brush her bushy tail. He sensed this life as he stroked her in disbelief, holding back the laughter that threatened to erupt in a full, carefree, barking flourish. Buffy smiled, ready to laugh with him.

The moment was alive with possibility. He could carry her to the woods, as planned, and film the opening scene for his movie. He could break into Maplewood and leave Buffy on Miss Havergam's desk for her students to see the real state of her oldest friend. He could give Buffy to his parents and Principal Drummel as Exhibit A in his case against his accuser. She was not fit to judge him. He could head straight into her bedroom with Buffy in tow and prove to her she was not fit to accuse him, to teach him, to own his love.

Whichever possibility he chose, he would have to pick Buffy up. He tried, hugging her, embracing her under the gut and muzzle. Every inch of his body begged him to leave his head buried in her soft fur, to take a quick nap to recover, but he willed his hands to keep searching for an adequate hold. Then the thought hit him: this would make a great cliffhanger. Once Smarthead went global, and all the major producers finished bidding over the rights to his life story, this moment would make a perfect ending to episode

number one, or to the first movie. Everyone in the audience would need to know: What would happen next?

He wondered how he looked, grabbing Buffy in this way and that. He stopped searching for a hold, needing to wait for the pain in his side to subside, and he thought about this, leaning his full weight into her fur. He shut his eyes. He tried to see himself from the point of view of a lens set up on the threshold of the balcony's open door, from the perspective of the director's chair he would occupy in the decades ahead.

How would he describe it to the actor? Move like a police officer checking for weapons. Move like a doctor searching for a pulse, searching a whole body for deadly growths or signs of life. He would tell the kid playing him to try it all as they rehearsed before shooting. Do it like you are exhausted in the night and hunting for your lover's ear, even if you do not speak your lover's language. Do it like you are probing for the mouth of an alien life you are certain is about to starve, even if you do not know the creature's poison from its food. It did not matter. What mattered was that one day he would finally get to say what he had never said when making movies in his room, or, truth be told, what he did whisper sometimes to launch a scene, faking the snap of the clapperboard with his hands, even though there was no one outside of himself to hear his words: action, okay now, go.