

Special Advertising Section

IRISH SWEEPS DERBY

THE IRISH SWEEPERS DERBY IS THE MOST ANTICIPATED EVENT OF THE IRISH SWEEPERS DERBY

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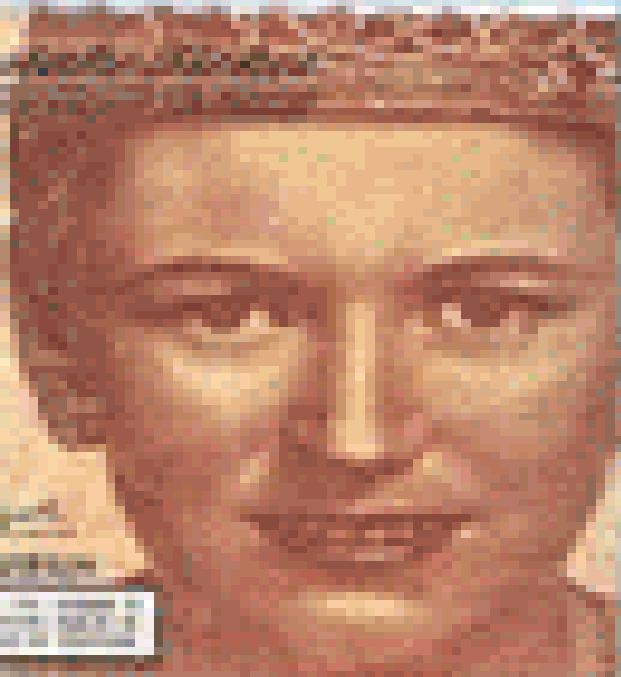
ADULTS - \$10.00
CHILDREN - \$5.00

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Gorden Schweers

SWEEPSTAKES

Madame Providence said, There is no such thing as coincidence, you know that.

Waking in the torn arms of a derelict sofa, Arnie Tossup stared across the cold room to the kitchen where piles of dirty dishes cluttered the counters on both sides of the sink. Well, he reasoned, perhaps the pile on the left has been washed and the pile on the other side is actually the dirty pile. But as his mind cleared from the dream he had just had of getting lost in a crowded department store, losing contact with Arlene and Sullivan in the process, he had to admit to himself that he had not washed any dishes for the last week. It was in fact his policy to avoid washing any dishes until all of them were dirty, the cupboards bare, and only then would he reluctantly clean up the accumulation of soiled pots, pans, cutlery and china ware. Some of the pans had mold growing inside of them by the time he got around to cleaning up after himself. Then too, in the basement, there was the issue with his laundry. His washing machine had broken in early September, just when the schools kids returned, and left him wearing the same soiled coveralls to work every

evening. While working late one evening, the vice principal had approached him and asked, Mr. Tossup, is there something wrong? No, he had told her, Why? She hesitated to come right out and say what she was thinking but he noticed her looking at his dirty wrinkled clothes and volunteered, Oh, it's nothing, my washing machine is getting fixed. But he had no intention prior to his awakening of fixing anything in his life, let alone the stupid washing machine.

Suddenly, waking up in a cold room that had not been cleaned in weeks, Tossup had enough moral rectitude left to admit it was time for a few changes, radical ones if necessary. His pattern consisted of coming home late, near midnight, and after eating cold left overs and popping down a Pilsner or two, watching a late night movie or talk show. But somehow he had fallen asleep in the TV room with all of his clothes on, and had spent the night in that position, with his fly open and his back half upright with his two feet, like the legs of a fold down table, holding his distended belly in place.

The thing called Arnie Tossup had fallen apart when Arlene died and he was left with his regrets and Sullivan to raise by himself. He had lost track of the number of

people at the funeral who assured him they would be there if he needed any help but the help never materialized. A month later, his eyesight went with the strain, and left Tossup without his job as a tool and die maker. To keep the wolves away, he had taken work with the school board as a janitor, cleaning the latrines and the classrooms for school children. It was evening work, and overtime in the summer months, polishing floors until they shone like sheets of ice. This was work he hated but still at least it was a job and brought in a working man's wage.

Then, even Sullivan left. The boy had grown up it seemed too quickly and was married now to some haughty young woman, Cathy, who detested her father-in-law. She acted that way too whenever they met, and at times her hostility boiled over and her mouth poured out one rebuke after another at him while Sullivan begged his shrew to hold her peace.

Okay, he repeated, it's time for a change. First he turned off the TV and used the cord on the drapes to open them up to the grey sunshine of an October morning. In the kitchen he sorted through the piles of dishes, and ran

hot water in to the sink with plenty of liquid soap swirling around at the bottom of the basin. With those all clean and stacked in the rack and on the table, he swept the floor after finding the broom in the back veranda, amazed at how much dirt had accumulated in such a short time. He made his bed too, for the first time in weeks, finding a few old socks wrapped inside the blankets, and raised up the venetian blinds for the first time in months, tepid light pouring in to the bedroom. Looking around, he had to admit the walls desperately needed a new coat of latex. They had faded like some prisoner who had gone anemic for want of sunshine. But when he went down the narrow stairs to the basement, his new resolve dissolved with the sight of the washing machine standing disabled like a one armed crab. Still the laundry had piled up and Tossup was facing defeat until he decided to load everything he could find in the house and take it down to the local Laundromat. It took several trips back and forth to his car before the back seat was loaded full of dirty towels and clothes.

Once the machines had been feed dozens of quarters and his clothes were getting tossed around be-

hind clear windows in soap filled whirlpools, Tossup made the discovery of his life on the bulletin board in the Laundromat. In amongst the advertisements selling used furniture, appliances, or begging for employment as a baby sitter and/or manual laborer, he found the one ad that promised to change his life forever. It electrified him when he first saw it in amongst countless other ads and offerings. It read inside its gold embossed border

MADAM PROVIDENCE – Fortune Telling and Astrology. Palm Reading and Tarot Divination. Call 604-396-2974 for appointment.

Small tags with the phone numbers hung down from the card, several of which had already been snapped off. Tossup paused for a split second before tearing off the tab. With twenty-four minutes left on his machines, he ran down the block looking for a phone booth. On the main road, adjacent to a garage that reeked of fumes, close to the intersection where the traffic was controlled by street lights blinking and flashing green, yellow, red: green, yellow, red; Tossup finally found a phone booth and made the call to Madam Providence's business. The

phone rang forever it seemed as he stood out in the street, feeling as if everyone on the entire block could hear his conversation. Finally a woman's husky voice responded.

“Hello, Madam Providence – This is Arnie Tossup,” he confessed in to the receiver as he tried regain his breath as if after a long run. “Hello,” he said again when there was no response. Finally the woman asked, “How can I help Mr. Tossup?”

“I just found your card,” he said. “On the wall of the Laundromat.”

“Do you want an appointment then?” the woman's voice asked with a seductive inflexion.

“Yes, yes,” volunteered Tossup. “This is the one thing I have been looking for and now, just by sheer coincidence, I've found it! Today is the day Arlene died twelve years ago.”

“Found what?” asked the fortune teller.

“Found your ad,” replied Tossup. And then he went on to tell her of all of the misfortunes that had fallen upon him in his life, starting with the death of his wife, the departure of his son, the loss of his career from stress, his washing machine not working and so on. “I woke up

this morning after working late and knew I had to find the courage to make some big changes in my life – and then I found your card!”

The woman considered her options and then, not wanting to lose a customer, said, “I can tell you what your future will be. What you do with that information is your own business.”

“Yes, of course,” Tossup replied. “Planning ahead is far more important than having no plan whatsoever.”

“How old did you say you were?” the fortune teller asked.

“Fifty three,” he said. “How far in the future can you forecast? I mean do you have a scale for a five years in to the future, or a ten year or even fifteen year forecast?”

“The future does not have a time frame,” she replied.

“Yes, yes,” he interrupted her, hardly listening. “Can we talk to my dead wife at the same time? Can you ask her if she is happy now?”

“When do you have the time to come over? Perhaps early next month? Just wait, I have to look up

my appointment schedule,” she said, shuffling through the pile of papers on her kitchen table. “What time are you free?”

“I work in the evenings....” he cautioned.

“What is your favorite number?” she asked.

“My favorite number?” he repeated, straining to hear her question as a motorcycle roared past him on the street. “I don’t think I have one.”

“When were you born then?” she asked.

“Born?” repeated Tossup to the receiver.

“Yes, born. I can tell you a lot just by knowing your birth date. And,” she added casually, “there will be no charge for this initial consultation on the phone.”

It had not occurred to Tossup that he had to pay for the upcoming psychic séance but once suggested, he agreed whole heartedly to her prices. Nevertheless, first he asked what she intended to charge.

“The first consultation will be \$75,” she said. “The following sessions are \$200 each for the first four visits. Thereafter it’s \$325 per visit. Usually however my clients are fully satisfied after the first visits. I’ve never lost a client yet,” she added proudly.

Tossup had no hesitation in accepting her quotes and added, “I was born on March 9th 1916.”

“That’s excellent,” she said scrambling to find the book on her table which described the different personalities for the Zodiac sign of Pisces (the fish). While still talking, she flipped the book open and began to read from the first page that had appeared. “You have been working on a creative innovation, it seems, and now, with this phone call, you are going to see the results of your effort in the coming year. Your ingenuity will pay off dividends. Your lifetime accomplishments won’t go unnoticed. The feedback you get will seem overwhelming yet appropriate.”

Madame Providence quoted from her Book of the Zodiac, noting that she had just read from the page that correctly belonged to Sagittarius, the half man/half horse sign and not to Pisces, the fish sign. But no matter, she tossed out her line and waited for her latest dupe to take the bait. Of all things that could be said of this woman who had once been the madame in a brothel, she read people well with their foibles and weaknesses. Following her hunch about this bottom sucker, she volunteered, “You are 53. This means that all of the

planets have aligned with your third month of birth and the ninth day. This year 1-9-6-9 has multiples of 3's in it and therefore in terms of numerology you are in a outstanding position to change your life."

"I thought so myself," Tossup said, feeling as if an enormous weight had been lifted from his back.

"You've taken the first step," she insisted, "by finding my card and calling me. There is no such thing as coincidence in this life, you know that!"

"Yes, I believe that too," he confided. Then they made an appointment. Madame Providence assured him her prices would remain the same even on the weekend. She only worked nights, she informed him, giving an appointment for the last Saturday of the month at 7 PM. She would be ready for him. In the meanwhile she would send around a questionnaire for him to fill out so that she could learn more of his background for her séance and his psychic consultation. "Please," she asked him, "be honest with me when you fill in the questions and return them as soon as possible. The less time we take initially the sooner you will again come in contact with your precious darling."

With the phone call over, Tossup was left standing in the busy street feeling elated, convinced that his life was about to change. He could not explain why or how he felt this way. Only that he had a predilection that his life was about to get a whole lot better. When he got back to the Laundromat, his wet clothes were clean again, squeezed by the pressure of the spinning tank against its perforated walls.

Tossup was so excited by the turn of events that he almost forgot to dry his wet clothes in the huge propane fired kilns next to the washing machines. He was half way to his car with a wet load when he realized his mistake and laughed to himself for a change, rather than calling himself a brainless idiot.

Then with his clothes whirling around the dryers like acrobats, he engaged one of the other people in the Laundromat on several different topics until the man asked him, pointedly, “You win the lottery or something, buddy?” Tossup was struck speechless. This was his second encounter with his future. *There is no such thing as co-incidence.*

Clean dishes, clean clothes, and a new start, he assured himself as he slipped out of the Laundromat and

headed home with several piles of dry clothes. Once home, he called his son for the first time in weeks. He talked for a long time until his son begged off, saying that he had to put Tracey to bed, read to her first, as it was his night to do so. “That little girl of mine still have stars on the ceiling above her bed?” Tossup asked his son. “Yes,” said Sullivan. “That was really nice of you to send those over for her birthday, Dad.” “No sweat,” Tossup said in reply. “She’s such a sweet kid, looks just like her mother too.” “Sure, Dad. Thanks for the call.” Click.

Though it was dark when Tossup arrived at the door of Madame Providence’s bungalow he noted the dilapidated nature of the neighborhood in which she lived and ran her business. Most of the houses were identical in this part of town, having been constructed for the veterans returning from the war, in an effort to stop the economy from stagnating. With so many houses looking the same, he had to be careful to find the right address. At one point he had gone to the wrong house. The door opened slightly and the unshaven face of an immigrant in a sleeveless tee shirt stared out at him. ”Is this Madame

Providence's residence", Tossup asked, afraid that it was in fact her home. The man however grunted a negative reply and the door was shut tight, leaving him standing on a dark porch. Returning for a flash light from his car, he discovered that he was on the wrong street. Leaving his car parked in the darkness, he walked a block over to find yet another identical house on the next street. Fortunately, this one little house had the porch light on and a tiny sign in the window TAROT READINGS. He tapped the door gingerly, softly, half afraid that once again he had chosen the wrong house. At first there was no response, only a curtain on the window getting pulled to one side as the intruder was carefully scrutinized. A small caged window on the door was opened. A blood shot eye was staring out at him when he looked back at the door again and a disembodied voice from the other side of the door asked him to identify his business. "I have an appointment with Madame Providence," he replied, "Is this the place?"

Several locks were unbolted quickly and the door opened. Tossup was shocked to see an elderly corpulent woman dressed like a fakir in silks, wearing a white turban with a green glass emerald fastened to its crown.

She looked as if she was attending a Halloween party dressed as an obese Nubian. His shock was partly his own fault. During the interval from that first call to this point in time, his mind had conjured up images of a svelte woman who resembled in many ways his Arlene when they first married. Madame Providence however wore layers of makeup to conceal her fissures and wrinkles, and chose clothing that toned down the years of decay that had layered her once curvaceous figure with indulgent amounts of calories. Before he could resist the shock, Madame Providence greeted him warmly and ushered him in to the room. “Yes, yes, do come in. It’s cold out there.” She reached out to him and with a great deal of warmth, welcomed him in to her living room.

“Let me take your coat,” she insisted, helping him slip out of his heavy winter jacket, talking with her his hat and scarf. Left alone for a few moments, Tossup looked around the dim room which had been transformed in to a parlor of some sort, with low chairs and circular table, and a shrine in one corner of some sort with candles burning before images of elephants dancing with buxom naked maidens. She noticed him staring at the

fresco when she returned and said, “It is from India. It was a real treasure and I could not resist.”

“And the snake?” he asked, staring in disbelief at the stone carving of a cobra which glowed in the dark.

“That one was from Egypt, a real treasure from a stand near the Cheops pyramid.”

“You’ve been to those places?” he asked.

“Yes, of course. We all have destinies we must fulfill. Mine was to fall in love and follow my dreams to the Far East.” Then she added, carefully. “I apprenticed under the great master psychic, Rabbis Dharma.”

“How do we start?” asked Tossup, feeling overwhelmed suddenly.

“By paying me, cash only please,” she replied. When he handed her the bills from his wallet, she watched carefully as he counted out the five bills and after handing them to her, watched her as she snapped them one after the other, stuffing the roll in to the divide between her large breasts. Tossup blinked.

“Now, sit down,” she insisted, ushering him in to the room and his place at the table where he knelt on his knees, his perspiring hands resting on the red table cloth. All the other lights in the room were cancelled. The

candles at the shrine danced softly on the walls while a small spotlight on a track from one wall tossed its weak light across the red table cloth. Tossup strained his eyes in the darkness, trying to remember the first image of an elderly Madame Providence. Yet in the subdued atmosphere where she took her position across from him, the eyes that looked back at him were imbued with clarity and power.

“We are about to enter our journey as novices. This first step may elate and terrify at the same moment...”

Tossup held his breath and listened intently. Madame Providence touched a button under the table that sent up a veil of incense, filling the room with its scent of mountain air and wild flowers in Spring. Lifting a set of symbols from the table which until now Tossup had not noticed such that he imagined they had appeared from nowhere, Madame Providence began to chant a series of chants she had learned from her superficial dalliance in a variety of exotic eastern religions, beginning with OMMMMM, PADRE OMMM and continuing to NAM YO HOH RINGEY QUO; then ending in a prolonged OOOOOOMMMMMM which Tossup tried to share, closing his eyes and praying in his own way for the

strength to follow a clear shining path towards a better less heart breaking life. Before him, on the table in the pool of light, a stack of cards was tossed which left Tossup dumbfounded. He interrupted the ambiance of the moment to ask her pointedly, “Are we going to get in contact with Arlene!”

Madame Providence arched one stenciled eyebrow at him, turning her head slightly as if to focus all of her powers on him through her strongest green eye. “These are the gateway to your bliss,” she said in a prepared speech, indicating the Tarot cards on the table before them.

“Of course,” said Tossup. “But what about Arlene. What about...”

“The Arlene you speak of belongs to your past,” she said, having read in to his responses to her questionnaire which Tossup had filled out with the enthusiasm of a naïve college student. “This method we are about to commence on will take us to the clear shining path where you will regain the bliss you shared with Arlene. She will be there. Trust me, Trust me, Arnie Tossup. Trust me...Oooooommm,” she ended off her discussion with a soft chant and flipped over the first

of the Tarot cards on the table, letting out a gasp as the Fool card appeared out of the stack of twenty two cards. Tossup gasped too, not knowing what the card meant nor what his guide had seen or experienced. “What is it?” he cried out.

“Nothing,” she said. “It’s just – as you might expect, the beginning of a new life cycle for you, Arnie Tossup. Even I am surprised!” she concurred, looking up from the table to his haggard swollen face. Even as they sat together, he had aged ten years with the anxiety and fears racing through his blood stream.

“Yes, but how...”

She continued with the cards, tossing up one and then another. First the Chariot appeared but inverted, representing adversity. Then came the Wheel of Fortune, representing effortless success. Madame Tossup let out another gasp and spoke of her incredulousness at his impending good fortune.

But when the card with the hanged man appeared, Tossup saw it and was disturbed. “No, no,” Madame Providence assured him, the card’s message was a positive one representing the devotion to a good cause. Again, a card prophesied that Tossup was to face drastic

change. “You are coming in to a large amount of money, and soon,” she told him. He stared at the cards laying on the table. “How do you know this,” he asked, completely stupefied. She showed him several more cards. First the one representing the World which she said signified fulfillment, which taken with the next card – she flipped over another card showing the Star – showed that he was to have fresh hope and renewal. “Now,” she reassured him, “these cards are a catalyst with your already existing predisposition. That is why I had you fill out my questionnaire. Obviously, money will solve countless numbers of your problems and anxieties. These cards, foretelling the future, have told me that your financial problems will be resolved”. She passed her hands in circles over the cards splayed out on the table before them but said nothing. The mood in the room was intensified. Tossup was forced to think deeply of the promises she was making to him. He looked in disbelief at her cold determined stare and then at the cards on the table, and back again into the green whirlpools of her eyes.

“What should I do?” he asked in confusion.

“Good,” she said aloud, involuntarily.

“What’s good about it?” Tossup stuttered.

“You need the courage to see these changes through to the end. Even having large sums of money given to you will present a challenge. But neither the Death card nor the Devil card appeared in your portfolio. One represents a lack of commitment (which you obviously do not have otherwise the Death card would have appeared and as you saw it did not).

“And the Devil card?” he asked.

“Ah yes, that terrible card. Believe me, I have seen that card appear before me with some of my most prestigious clients. There is no hiding from the Tarot truth! That odious card represents the desire for physical and material things. Lust. Sexual obsession. Hoarding money. Thank heaven that you are facing a windfall in monetary gain but lack the vices represented by the Devil card.”

“I’m overwhelmed,” Tossup blurted out.

Madame Providence collected the cards, shuffling them expertly in her two hands, like a professional.

“I..I still don’t know what to do?” he stuttered.

“Buy a ticket to the upcoming Irish Sweepstakes,” she told him, “just to be sure.”

“But I don’t gamble!”

“Life,” she said, almost spitting the words out on to the table before them, “is the ultimate gamble.”

She then repeated her explicit directions to him, pronouncing each word at a time so that he would follow through with her manipulation. “Go – And – Buy – A – Ticket – To – The – Irish – Sweepstake.”

Tossup stared down to the cards before them as if an any moment they would rise off the table and like some tarantula attack him. But he conceded, saying, “Alright, as soon as possible.”

“I will phone you on Monday to ensure you have the ticket,” she told him. “Monday!”

Thus ended their first session together. There was one in a billion chance he would win the Sweepstakes but nevertheless it was a technique she had used on several other greedy clients who dreamed of changing their cheap skate lives. But, she imagined, if any did win, they’d of course say that it was foretold by Madame Providence and she’d have the publicity she desired more than anything else. Tossup woke up the next morning, on Sunday, a new man. He was up in time to attend Church

services for the first time since Arlene's funeral. The suit he had worn back then no longer fit him around the waist and he was shocked by the amount of weight he had gained in twelve years. No matter, he had clean clothes in the closet for a change. On his knees in St. Mary's, Tossup prayed to have the strength to spend his new wealth wisely.

Back home again, he called Sullivan and talked until the young man begged off, saying he had promised to take Cathy and Tracey down to the Park for the day. Click. For once, Tossup stood looking at the receiver, piqued that his son was so abrupt with his dear old dad time and again. "Piss on you," Tossup said in to the dead receiver. "You think I need you, kid!" he said to the empty walls of his house.

However this mood changed once again as the thought of becoming rich flooded his blood stream with adrenalin. Being a precise and methodical machinist in his prime, Tossup made a list of the things he was going to spend his money on. With that list narrowed down to twelve items, he then began to search magazines for pictures to accompany each of the twelve wishes. Next

to #1 for instance, he cut and pasted the picture of a fancy motor home perched in front of a North Shore estate. Beside #2 he pasted a picture of an expensive BMW motorcycle with a naked woman straddling the seat in a fur stole. For #3 he found the picture of a yacht sailing through the Caribbean sea. And so on, one item after another finding its match in the stacks of magazines he had discarded in the basement after Arlene had passed away. It was almost time for dinner when he had finished, with the twelve items pasted on the walls around the house (one item for each year of her death) starting in the hallway and working themselves around the house like a procession of greedy extravagance.

Once Tossup finished his dinner, he cleaned all of the dishes immediately, laying them away in the cupboards which he noted, needed, as with most things in the house, washing down followed by a new coat of paint. It was extraordinary how things went to pot after just a dozen years. He remembered spending time with Arlene dressed in white coveralls that were too large for her, her hair wrapped up in a red bandanna, and a paint brush dripping all over her hand while she stood there, staring at the kitchen wall after its first coat. They had

more or less just bought the house, after being tenants for a year or two. A familiar knock on the front door disturbed Tossup's memories in the kitchen. Throwing the kitchen towel over his shoulder, he danced lightly down the hallway and greeted his son, Sullivan.

“Good Gawd,” he said to his son, “what’s happened to you?”

“Its nothing, Pops,” Sullivan replied. “The kids are raving about this new British band called the Beatles. Rather than fight change, I changed my hair style. They love it and it makes my teaching easier.”

“You look terrible,” Tossup said, though it was just his way of keeping his influence with his son alive. As Sullivan slipped passed him, Tossup saw that Cathy was in the car with their daughter in the back seat. He waved to his daughter-in-law but she just looked sullenly back at him with no response. He motioned for her to come in the house only to have her look away in the other direction. It was the usual cold shoulder but this time, Tossup said, “Bitch!” under his breath. Sullivan was popping the cap off of a beer by the time Tossup caught up to him in the kitchen.

“What’s up?” Tossup asked him.

“Just passing through, Pops,” he said casually, looking perplexed around the kitchen which was clean for the first time in a year’s worth of visits. “I got another raise this last month and so Cathy and I are out hunting around for a larger house.”

Tossup snorted. “You mean a larger mortgage.”

“Maybe,” his son replied, as the master of his own fate.

“What’s wrong with the place you are in now? You’ve got the rent from the downstairs basement suite to help you pay off the mortgage.”

“Its not a legal suite. I already told you that.”

“Legal or not, the city is not bothering you in the least.”

“Don’t sweat it, Dad, okay?”

“You kids,” Tossup said disdainfully. Rather than look back at him however, Sullivan’s attention was taken by one of the papers taped to the wall in the kitchen. It was marked #6 and the one on the opposite wall near the fridge showed the back yard of a high end modern home with a swimming pool in the shape of a guitar. That picture was marked #7. After a moment of silence,

Sullivan asked pointedly, “What’s with the pictures?” Tossup went back to stacking the clean dishes and pans in their proper places in the cupboards, saying over his shoulder, “Those are my next purchases. Nice eh.”

Sullivan laughed, almost choking on the flat taste of the beer he had swallowed. He moved closer to the picture with the new Cadillac convertible, a woman in a white fur bikini draped along the rake of the back fin, with its tail light looking like a red rocket launcher. “You have nice taste in fur bikinis apparently, but I suggest you check out the price tag on the caddy and the cutie before you leap.”

“No sweat,” said Tossup.

“No sweat,” repeated Sullivan. “You aren’t serious, Dad, are you?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” his father retorted.

Sullivan lingered in the kitchen for a brief moment of reflection, and said, “Its nice to see you cleaning up this place for a change. It was really going downhill. You too.”

“Not anymore,” Tossup grinned.

“Ummm, I have to be going...Is there something happening to you? Maybe you want to share?”

“Like what?” asked Tossup. But Sullivan had wandered out of the kitchen and was inspecting the other pictures that were tacked along the hallway and in order around the walls of the TV room. Those pages were also numbered. #1: Motor home. #2: Full skirted BMW motorcycle. #3: Yacht. #4: A fully equipped machine shop with a home built two seater aircraft sitting outside the front folding doors. Sullivan pointed at the plane and asked, “The purpose of this one?”

“Once I win the sweepstakes, I’m going to make a homebuilt plane in my own workshop.”

Sullivan started to laugh but stopped when he realized that his father was serious. This wasn’t some gag. Nevertheless when Sullivan saw a man standing over a gigantic dead grizzly, proudly sporting the fully scoped Savage rifle he had used to take the bear down from a mile away, he burst out laughing.

“What the fuck is this!” he laughed.

“It’s none of your business,” Tossup retorted, “what I do with my winnings. With a wife like you have, you should be surprised to find that I can still be generous – but only after I’ve done the things I always wanted to do.”

“Like kill bears?” Sullivan laughed.

“Rich people live well,” he said.

“You aren’t rich, Dad, not by a long shot.”

“I will be when my horse clears that last hurdle on the way to the finish line.”

Sullivan put down the half finished beer he had been carrying around the room, from picture to picture, as if he was in an art gallery, examining with the acumen of an art critic masterpieces by contemporary painters. “I like to see you get this place in order for a change – but this stuff,” he pointed to the numbered papers on the walls, “is –ah- strange. Really strange, Dad. Are you okay?”

“Fine,” shrugged Tossup. “You’ll see things differently once I win the Irish Sweepstakes this coming Tuesday.”

“Who says so, Dad?”

“Madame Providence says so, Sullivan.”

“Who’s....Madame Providence?”

“The best fortune teller in this whole god damn city, that’s who she is.”

Sullivan burst out laughing while his father stood looking disgruntled. “You went to a gypsy and she told you - you’d be rich! Ha, ha, ha. This is priceless, Pops!”

“No, it’s the truth. You’ll see for yourself. This coming Tuesday. It’s a done deal.”

“Just don’t quit your job before Wednesday, alright Dad!” Sullivan made his way to the front door, pointing at the pictures taped along the hallway and laughing.

“I don’t appreciate your sarcasm, okay!” he shouted at his son as he tripped lightly down the worn porch stairs towards his parked car. “That hairdo you have sucks, kid.”

“It’s alright, Dad,” Sullivan shouted back. “You’re not hurting anyone.”

Tossup slammed the door, refusing to watch his son leave the curb like he usually did, waving at his daughter-in-law who never, not once, returned any of his attempts to be civil and friendly. Just you two wait, Tossup said to himself once he was back in the kitchen and alone. An hour passed before he was able to regain his buoyant mood. After getting the washing machine working again last week, he had continued washing his own clothes,

hanging them on long strings he had stretched across the cluttered basement. I'm gonna get all of this crap, he said, looking across the piles of cardboard boxes stacked haphazardly in the basement, out of here and to the nearest junk yard. And he did, in fact, the very next day. First he rented a small truck from the nearest UHAUL. Next he backed it up to the back basement door and with the ramp extended, he worked up a good sweat filling the empty cavern of the covered van with the boxes full of old utensils, tools, magazines, clothes and toys left from Sullivan's childhood. But he also came across the photo albums of his life with Arlene. They were stiff black cardboard binders of good quality which Arlene had filled with individual notations beside each picture. It was all done in chronological order. Yeah, said Tossup, it was all in order except for her death. She didn't plan on that happening! The depression held him for a few moments as he flipped through the pictures, one showing Sullivan having his first tubby in the kitchen, standing in six inches of water with Tossup wrapping a towel around him while the infant smiled back at the camera held by his mother. Tossup snapped the album shut and wondered what he should do with the two dozen other

albums of their happy marriage and family life. It was all gone now. In a blink. All he had left, Tossup thought, pitying himself, was an empty cold house, waking up alone each morning in a cold bed, and a son who laughed at him just when things were turning in his favor. Okay, he said, these go too!

It took many trips back and forth, up the ramp to the back of the truck box, but in the end all of their family albums were thrown in to the truck along with hundreds of other useless boxes of accumulations. Tossup went in to the kitchen to pop down another of his favorite brand of Pilsner yet something told him he should not drink, even one beer, and get behind the wheel of a loaded rental truck. Instead, for the first time in a dozen years, he planned his route ahead of time so that he would not get lost in the labyrinthine streets of the city. The map showed a circuitous zig zag route to the dump yard. He penciled it in with a red pen, directly on to the map, and followed this up by writing a second list which he placed on the seat next to him when he hopped in to the driver's seat in the truck. He had a sense of tremendous relief when he turned on to the main road from his residential avenue, knowing that he was getting

rid of so much useless tripe from his past. Driving carefully, watching for his opportunity to change lanes well in advance by using the long vertical mirrors suspended from each side of the doors, he navigated his way to the city's dump yard. He was on the road, turning right and then left, and right again, until he came to a fence and kiosk that surrounded the dump area. The attendant weighed the truck and told Tossup he would be charged for the difference in weights when he returned. "Follow your road to the right; wait in line (there's ten trucks ahead of yourself) and then dump what you have in #12 bin for household trash."

"Gottcha, buddy," Tossup called back to him as he released the emergency and slowly drove around the curve that was defined by a barrier of young evergreens on either side of the asphalt. Just as the attendant had said, he had to wait forever it seemed for the trucks in front of him to enter the dump areas. At the same time, more trucks came in behind him which he scrutinized in his side mirrors. It felt as if they were on some sort of a pilgrimage, waiting for the gates of the shrine to open, for space to be made for the new devotees while other penitents made their offerings and left again, resolved

that their prayers had been answered and their sins absolved. Finally, it came to be Tossup's turn to enter the inner sanctum. A sour looking attendant, wearing a fluorescent hard hat and waving a baton, directed his truck forward. Charon, thought Tossup, not without a tinge of humor.

Before him, on entering the area, was a scene reminiscent of the frenzied activities of an ant colony. Dozens of trucks moved around the area, backing up, moving forward, leaving and coming. In amongst the trucks, giant tractors like prehistoric metal triceratops moved around mounds of trash, dumped on the asphalt by the garbage caravans. The tractors pushed the city's trash forward with enormous blades of steel. Tossup stopped for a moment, looking with amazement at the scene. Enormous stalls stood two stories high and were crammed full of garbage. Belching white and black smoke, the tractors pushed the piles into the various bins, depending on the contents of the delivery. One truck dumped an enormous load of newsprint on to the tarmac in front of bin #2. A tractor rushed forward, its scoop sparking on the roadway, and pushed the mound as far in as possible to the bin. Another bin was apparently

dedicated to the contents of household garbage cans, collected weekly by the city. The truck vomited its contents by raising up the front of its full trailer. The contents slid like a river of refuse out of the truck's back gates. Tossup had never seen such a volume of garbage in his life before and could not imagine the purpose of such waste. Most of what was being discarded had at one time been made or manufactured by the human race for their own consumption. Now it was being spewed back out again, discarded in a massive volume that would be burned or buried in some distant site. But another fluorescent hard hat and another baton came charging at Tossup's stalled truck, demanding that he move along. He moved along slowly, doing as he was told, remembering the first attendant had said that he was to proceed to bin #12. It was the final bin of the upright silos. With his truck pushed back against the avalanche of refuse, he began to toss out his years of accumulated trash on to the pile that was for household junk. Standing on the raised platform of his rental, he threw the old boxes as far as he could. In the stall next to his, another truck was dumping off old couches and chairs, rugs and broken garden equipment. Tossup looked over the couches, chagrinned

that the ones he had at home were in worse condition than the ones that were getting discarded next to him. But a sign said, over all twelve bins ‘NO PILFERING – NO PILFERING – NO PILFERING’ and so with his contents finally discarded from the back of the trailer, he stepped down. Only he noticed that one of the family albums he had discarded had fallen open, spilling out the pictures of his earlier family life. Again, Tossup felt a stab of angst to have turned his back on to his past life, and the pleasure he had as a father and husband, but it was too late. Instead as a final gesture, he picked up two black and white pictures from the pile. One Polaroid showed Arlene and Sullivan with a group of friends, surrounding a table where Sullivan’s birthday cake burned four candles. The other picture had been taken on their honeymoon. Tossup had his arm around his new bride. They were both beaming, blissful on the first few days of their marriage. With the two photographs stuffed in to his jacket pocket, Tossup climbed back in to his truck. After paying at the kiosk on his way out, he returned the truck to the rental outlet. Back home again, he had some satisfaction in doing his laundry in an uncluttered basement. He hadn’t won the money yet but

still, with some determination, he was getting his life back in order. It had taken him twelve years and a visit to Madame Providence to enact the changes.

By the time Tuesday arrived, Tossup was too excited to eat anything. The horse he had chosen for the Sweepstakes was called *Throw Away*. With eight other horses in the long race, the BBC commentator on the radio commenced with a quick description of each of the gallant mounts, giving some history of the jockeys who rode each horse. The horses came from the best stables in Ireland and England, the commentator said, giving a short pedigree of those establishments. Then, the bell rang for the start of the race, sending an electric shock through Tossup from his feet to his headache. The names of the horses spewed out of the commentator's mouth as he described the race in vivid terms, the horses flying around the course, jumping over high hedges, fences, across barriers with moats of water on the other side hidden from the view of the riders and horses. One and then another horse was disqualified. Another two were in a collision, with the commentator beside himself, describing the mess the horses made upon contact, their

jockeys becoming airborne with the impact. But throughout this, Tossup listened intently as his own horse was mentioned again and again as the lead animal. The commentator was almost hysterical, shouting, “Its *Throw Away* up the stretch; Its *Throw Away* in the lead, *Renegade* trailing by several lengths; *Throw Away* has cleared the highest barricade – What form this horse has!”

No longer able to contain himself, Tossup leapt up from the chair and danced a jig. He was half way through his second pirouette when the announcer yelled, “*Throw Away* has thrown his jockey! The fellow’s scrambling to get out of the moat and here comes *Renegade* – My God – he was almost trampled but is okay it seems – *Renegade* is in the lead – its *Renegade* over the finish line. *Renegade* wins! *Renegade* wins!”

Tossup’s mouth lost its strength, sagging down under the weight of a tremendous disappointment. Not only had his horse lost, but shortly thereafter, the winning ticket was read out with numbers that matched nothing with those that he held in his hand. Tossup was incredulous. He stood staring at the blank wall of his living room for a long time until the mirage of wealth

was replaced by the scorn of a fiasco. He could hear Sullivan's laughter again, like a bitter stab deep in his back. Something was terribly wrong. It had all started on the anniversary of Arlene's death, October 16th, twelve years to the day of her unjustly terminated young life. Tossup was furious at himself, at Madame Providence, at those god damn cards laying under the light of her séance. Lies, Tossup said bitterly, all lies. A soft knock interrupted him.

It was so soft, so unassuming on the front door of his porch that he should have never have heard it at all. Yet he went to the door in any case and opening the door was surprised to see his daughter-in-laws father, James Scallen, standing on the porch in his expensive wool overcoat. He had his felt derby in his hands in a posture of the utmost respect. Tossup had not seen or talked to Mr. Scallen, nor his wife (not even a Christmas card), since the wedding when they stole away Sullivan from him. Now this reprobate was standing on his front porch. Before he could say anything, Scallen said –

“I thought I should be the one to tell you, Arnie. It's a great loss to all of us.”

“You’re not joking,” Tossup said, referring to the fortune he had just lost. Scallen looked shocked for a moment then asked, “Has anyone told you?”

“Told me what? What do you want?”

“It’s your son, Cathy’s husband – Sullivan.”

Tossup stared back at his intruder. He wanted to say, “You think I’m not good enough for you? That daughter of yours hasn’t once treated me with any respect.” But there was a wild look in Scallen’s eyes that did not belong there and bewildered Tossup.

“Sullivan has died,” he finally told the other man, breaking in to tears. He stood there, longing to reach out and hold Sullivan’s father in his arms as a gesture to bring the younger man back to life.

But the five year chasm of completely different lives and social standings prohibited such a gesture.

“I’m sorry,” Scallen said, apologizing for himself as much as for Tossup’s tragic loss. He turned away, ashamed of the shallowness of his own character.

Tossup stared at him for a few moments until he could interpret a few of the danger signals that had suddenly appeared before him. Before Scallen could reach his Mercedes, Tossup was pulling him back by his

arm, demanding to know what he meant, what it meant, to say that Sullivan was dead. Scallen still could not bring himself to reach out to the other man whom he considered a derelict waste of life but he managed to tell him that Sullivan had had a severe attack of asthma in front of his house, on the way home, in the car. With all the car doors locked, no one could get to him, and so he had died, in the car, with Cathy and the neighbors watching while he turned blue for want of oxygen. The inhalator crew had broken in to the car but it was too late. Sullivan was dead.

“Where is he?” Tossup shouted. “Where is my boy?”

Scallen composed himself and said, “I came to get you. Cathy is in the hospital with him. You should come.”

Tossup glanced back at his house for a second. He had left the front door open but it mattered little. Wearing his house slippers, he got in the car and sat next to Scallen in silence, hardly seeing the world around himself any longer, asking only, “Are you sure?”

Scallen answered, “Arnie, I know we have not been close to you. Its been our own fault. You needed more

support than we could give you. But now, with this terrible tragedy, I want you to know we are there for you.”

There for you. Tossup had heard those very same words at Arlene’s funeral and nothing had come of it. What a joke. More lies.

In the hospital, Tossup was allowed to see his son’s body, laying in state in a back room. When he entered, Scallen stepped away to allow him to grieve on his own. Cathy Scallen was there too, with her eyes streaked with tears, but when she saw the old man enter the room, she too withdrew.

At the funeral, the podium was left open for the congregation to speak about Sullivan Tossup, the extraordinary young man who had touched each of their lives in a special way. First Cathy took the podium, speaking of the love and compassion she had experienced from Sullivan, how he held her hand when she gave birth, holding Tracey’s wrinkled curmudgeon little face up to her for the first time in the delivery room. With a heart breaking sob, she told family and friends for the first time that she was pregnant with their second child. Now

Sullivan would never know the joy of holding his second baby. Minister Whalen gave Cathy a reassuring hug and whispered something privately to her before she returned to the front pew. Then her father took the microphone.

Scallen spoke of how fortunate the Scallen Family had been to have had Sullivan at their table and in their hearts for five all too short years. He spoke of how impressed he had been with the intelligence of the young man, his gift with mathematics, and how one day he had been hoping to offer him a place in his firm of accountants. Scallen reminded those at the funeral that he too had no son, and now with the loss of Sullivan, it was as if he had lost his only son. Perhaps, he added, Cathy's unborn child will be a boy and they can welcome him in to the Scallen Family just as they had the privilege to welcome Sullivan.

Next Mr. Laurier spoke as the principal of Lord Bing, the high school that Sullivan had attended for four years. Mr. Laurier described how impressed he was of this boy's thirst for knowledge, his boundless energy at sports, and his ability with mathematics. The teaching profession, Mr. Laurier stated, was fortunate to have people like Sullivan who could have easily acquired

tenure at a quality university, but instead chose to teach young people who were in their ‘turbulent teens’. Mr. Laurier reminded the congregation that Sullivan had attended four years of university under a full scholarship, after placing first in the provincial exams.

Several teaching colleagues spoke at length of the dedication he showed to his profession, and the respect he instilled in the students for all of the disciplines, not just his own. He was a gifted person, Jessica Reynolds reminded each of the people at the funeral, and his greatest gift was the way he inspired young people to strive towards a goal in their lives. Your education, he had told his students, is your friend in the desert.

A few brief moments passed before the podium was taken by an attractive young woman in her late teens. Her voice was broken as she described how ashamed she was of the mess she had made of her life, that when Sullivan came in to her life as a teacher, she was addicted to a cocktail of drugs and alcohol. “I look back now and see that I was suicidal, and I think Mr. Sullivan knew that, just as he knew how so many of his students felt about themselves and their problems. He got me the help I so desperately needed and did so never asking for

anything from me – not like the others in my life who always wanted something off of me, and it always ended up breaking my spirit and determination. With Mr. Sullivan, it was different and he was different. I owe him my life and my happiness. It breaks my heart all over again to see he has died so senselessly.”

Arnie Tossup sat in the midst of strangers. His son’s closed coffin was sitting in the middle of the aisle. The more he heard of the accomplishments of his son, the love others had for him, the more Tossup was numb. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to see Minister Whalen in his white surplus leaning towards him. “Are you Sullivan’s father?” Tossup nodded. “You should say something,” the minister whispered.

Getting up off the pew, it felt as if he had bricks of lead on his shoulders. His back hurt and his soul was parched. Nevertheless, he turned at the podium and started to talk to the sea of expressionless faces that filled the church. “I’m Sullivan’s father,” he stammered, almost as an apology. “When my son was born, I was holding him at the window of the hospital in the morning. The sun was coming up and I wondered what I could possibly teach my son.” His mind went blank a moment

later when he saw Sullivan's widow, Cathy Scallen, staring up at him with the utmost hatred in her eyes. She was accusing him of some imaginary crime against his son with that stare. It shook Tossup's resolve to the core. His mind went blank and he stammered out, "Arlene died. My wife..." He could not continue, describing how he had lost contact with the young boy after years of mourning. He wanted to say how relieved he was to hear that somehow, by the strength of his own character, Sullivan had become the mentor of so many people. It was astounding. But, instead, Tossup let the hate filled stare of his daughter-in-law accuse him in silence, and he sat down without saying anything further. Outside the church, he wanted to slip away, but Mr. Laurier approached him and said, "I'm the executor of Sullivan's Will. You'll have to come to it, Mr. Tossup."

The congregation was standing around in the snow in groups. Tossup was hardly listening to the comment when he said to Mr. Laurier, "Who is that man?"

Laurier turned to look across to where Cathy Scallen was talking to an athletic looking male with a blond crew cut. Tossup had been looking at the man, trying to place him, in the church. He had no idea why

but the man seemed to be someone he knew or should have known, like his son's best friend. Cathy and The Athlete were talking and then, unexpectedly, the man embraced Cathy for a moment in her sorrow. Mrs. Scallen reacted from across the court yard, staring at her daughter with rage in her eyes. Click.

“I think he's the boarder that Sullivan and Cathy have in their basement suite. Nice guy,” Laurier said. “Works ten days in, and five days off.” Click.

“Thanks,” said Tossup. “But I'll pass on the Will thing.”

“No,” replied Laurier, “you'll show up if I have to issue a court order to get you there.”

A week later he appeared at the meeting. The Scallen clan had assembled in the room and were mystified to have Tossup walk in the room. Worse, he was still dressed in the same clothes he had worn to the funeral and had not shaved for a week.

James Scallen rushed over to him and asked, “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I'm doing what I was told to do,” he replied. “As always.”

Then Laurier called the meeting to order. A dozen people in fold down chairs looked towards the small platform where Mr. Laurier had spread out a collection of papers on the table. He commenced by reading out Sullivan's last will and testament. Everything he had, for the most part, passed to his wife.

The house, the car he had died in, and his personal property passed directly to his wife, Cathy. Tossup was sitting in the back, watching Cathy's head of long blonde hair bend backwards, as if on hearing of her new wealth, she was looking through the ceiling and up towards her secure future. But it was not over. With the hesitation shown by the Executor, Scallen looked nervously in to the eyes of his wife, and then back, at Laurier. Tossup was about to get up and leave when Laurier said, "The proceedings are a bit complicated and that's why..." he looked over the throng towards Tossup, "I've asked for some of you to appear at this meeting." Then he looked back at James Scallen who had folded his arms and was staring up at the executor. Continuing, Laurier said –

"Two matters need to be resolved. One is the supplementary death benefits attached to Sullivan Tossup's career as a teacher. Those have been put in a

trust in the name of Tracey Sharon Tossup, for when she enters college in the future.”

“What?” said Scallen aloud.

Laurier looked over his reading glasses and showing the paper in the direction of Scallen and his wife, said, “It was all done legally, through the law office of Carrick & Associates.”

“But – what is this nonsense?” said Scallen. “My daughter is pregnant with this guy’s second child and he signs away her money!”

“No,” corrected Laurier, “Sullivan is taking care of his first child. With this money invested at 6% by the time she is ready for college, she’ll have an all expense paid trip through the halls of higher learning.”

“You said there were two matters,” countered Scallen.

“Is the first matter settled?” Laurier said, looking at Cathy Scallen.

“Let’s hear of the second matter before we go making any further commitments.” Scallen insisted.

Laurier waited for a response to his question from the widow and proceeded-

“The second matter concerns Sullivan Tossup’s life insurance policy. The policy has certain stipulations which render it null and void if it they are part of the insured party’s death, such as suicide. Since this is not the case, the policy pays out double indemnity.”

“How much?” demanded Scallen.

Laurier picked around the papers on the desk for a few seconds. Finally finding the figures he was looking for, with his reading glasses propped on his nose, he read out, “Two hundred and forty-four thousand dollars...”

It was as if the room inhaled with a single gasp. Even Tossup was taken aback. After Arlene’s death, he had started that insurance policy for his son, but when he failed to keep up the payments, Sullivan had taken over the policy, paying off the premiums each year with his paper route money. It was so long ago that Tossup had all but forgotten. Now, it was back again. His son had the foresight he lacked.

The win for the Irish Sweepstakes was to have been close to the same amount and would have irrevocably changed his life had it materialized. Now the Scallen beauty Sullivan had married would ride the winning thoroughbred to the finish line even if her horse collapsed

and died a split second later. Once the shock subsided, the room was silent again, waiting for Laurier to continue. He cleared his voice.

“The said Life Insurance Policy has been written out with Mr. Arnie E. Tossup as the sole beneficiary.”

“What?” screamed Scallen, jumping to his feet. “That’s nonsense!”

Laurier was unperturbed. “No, its not nonsense. It was done legally. This was signed by two lawyers with two witnesses from the same firm. Its very legal. Believe me, I did my homework since this is so unusual.”

As the news sunk it, heads were turned towards Tossup as he sat in the back row. The first head he saw turn towards him belonged to Cathy. Her hate filled stare sliced in to Tossup but it was nothing new. Scallen had meanwhile crossed over the room and was saying to Laurier, “Give me that paper,” but Laurier told him, “I’m in charge here, Mr. Scallen. Sit down, Sir!”

People in the room were discussing this sudden change in circumstances when Laurier asked for silence once again. “Alright,” he confessed, “I can understand that the news has upset some of the people in this room. But please remember that these are the written wishes of

the deceased. In that context, for whatever reason Sullivan took this action, we must respect – no, we are bound legally to respect – his wishes.”

“Are you sure about this,” demanded Scallen.

“Absolutely,” replied Laurier.

“When was that policy written up in its present condition?” asked Mrs. Scallen.

“I’m not in a position for obvious reasons to disclose any previous beneficiaries,” replied Laurier.

“When was the present beneficiary named then on this policy? Recently or when?” she asked again.

Laurier looked for the most recent date on the policy on his desk and said, “October 16th.”

Tossup was stunned by the announcement. There was that date again!

“And what year?” asked Mrs. Scallen.

“This same year,” replied Laurier. “October 16th, 1969.”

“I thought so,” replied Mrs. Scallen.

With the meeting finished, Tossup tried to leave but was forced to wait while the elevator came to the fourth floor. Scallen arrived at the same shut doors and commenced

threatening Tossup. “If you think you’ll get away with this, you’re dead wrong, buster.”

Tossup looked dispassionately at the Scallens. As far as they were concerned, with Sullivan at their table, they had skimmed off the cream from the top of the churn, leaving Tossup to sour at the very bottom. They even cracked jokes about him behind his back during family gatherings.

“You heard what Laurier said,” Tossup said, turning his back towards the elevator doors.

“My daughter’s pregnant!” Scallen said. The light about the elevator doors went “Ding”.

“With someone else’s kid,” said Tossup. A roar of protest went up from the crowd. The doors of the elevator opened but no one stepped forward in to the confined space. For once, Arnie Tossup was going to see this right through and then some.

“Nice try,” said Tossup to Cathy Scallen. “But you couldn’t resist going down to the basement suite when my son was away at school, could you!”

“How dare you talk to my daughter like that,” shouted James Scallen. But then Mrs. Scallen stepped forward. Intervening, breaking between the building

conflict between the two men, she said, “Cathy, tell your father the truth.”

“It’s none of his god damn business,” shouted their vivacious spoiled daughter. “And none of yours either!” she said to her mother. In an instant, Mrs. Scallen slapped her daughter’s face, leaving a red streak across one cheek. Mr. Scallen asked his wife, “What’s going on?”

“I suggest you ask the whore you have for a daughter,” she said.

Cathy Scallen tossed back her refined features, saying, “What I do with my own body is my own business.” Again the elevator doors opened and an empty confined space was presented to the crowd in the hallway. Tossup stepped forward at this moment, and turning around, stood staring at the Scallen Clan until the doors shut. He looked overhead, standing alone in the elevator, imaging great cables dropping him down through a long tunnel to the underground parking lot beneath the building.

His jealousy was tucked away amongst the great circular pylons supporting the building above the cave with its countless numbered stalls and vehicles. Tossup of course

could not remember where he had parked and had to walk around and down, as if inside a concrete cork screw, until he found his car again, on the second subterranean tier. Fumbling for where he had tucked his car keys, wondering for the hundredth time if he had lost them, he pulled out instead the two pictures he had saved from the dump. Suddenly his son, Sullivan, as a small boy at his birthday party was radiating a smile at him. Tossup let out a gasp of anguish. *There is no such thing as coincidence, you know that.* In spite of losing those twelve wonderful years with his son's life after Arlene's death, Sullivan had just told him that –

Its alright, Pops. I loved Mum too and knew what you went through. Each of us grieves in our own way. Enjoy the money!

Tossup flipped over the second picture and Arlene's picture was there also. He had never noticed but she had her arm around him. As he stood in the underground honeycombed parking lot, he felt that arm around him again, if only briefly, telling him she still loved him. The sensation was so intense, he let out a small cry of terror

and it was gone again but never to be forgotten. Slowly, he folded the pictures in to a coat pocket for safe keeping and finally found his car keys. The drive home should have taken him thirty or forty minutes, depending on the traffic, but as darkness came he was still in his car, driving around the city, worried about going back to his house and being haunted by those same memories all over again. The globes suspended on the street lights clicked on simultaneously in the dusk. Tossup followed one string of them down a long open street until he was at the foot of Simon Fraser. The streets were still covered in dirty piles of snow from the last snow storm. He turned away from the hill where he would become stuck, his wheels spinning on the night ice. But now he was on the Barnet Highway, that unlit stretch of wilderness roadway that ran out along the side of the inlet, past the refinery, and then back in to the suburbs, New Westminster and Port Moody. Tossup nervously checked his gas gauge as his car raced after its own two headlamps. First a few flakes and then hundreds flecked his headlights. The roadway ahead slowly disappeared as a white corridor flanked by forest. He slowed down as

the storm intensified. He couldn't go any further and pulled off the side of the road.

Out of the darkness, tens of millions of flakes tumbled down against his windshield. Tossup sat staring up in to the darkness, like the first of his Race staring up in to the impenetrable mystery of a night sky.

He wasn't going to go home again, he suddenly realized. He'd pull in to a hotel along the way and spend the night there instead. Further, it was time to change his occupation. Though he wanted to continue as a tool maker, the work was too demanding. Instead he wanted to drive long haul trucks across North America. Looking up out of his windshield, the storm pressed its darkness down upon him, and he stared upwards, fascinated as any child, searching for the endless source of the creative force of his life and the life and joys of those he had loved. Tossup was overjoyed to be alive, reveling in the mystery that had overtaken his vehicle. Finally two head beams of a large truck lasered in on his review mirror. He'd follow the truck's tail lights through the storm and back to the streets and stop lights. He'd never be alone again in his life. *There is no such thing as coincidence.* You know that.