

# **MISSING BOY**

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**CALUMET  
EDITIONS**

Minneapolis



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FIRST EDITION AUGUST 2015

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Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover and interior design: Gary Lindberg

ISBN: 978-1-939548-36-8

# Chapter 1

**V**ery few people knocked down all the bottles, even after three tries. Martin figured that had everything to do with how they were set up. When there were no players and Meatstick wasn't looking, Martin held a ball up to the bottles. In order to hit the outside bottles, the ball had to hit perfectly in the middle of the bottom row.

Martin Lisk had worked at the baseball-throw booth for two weeks. At sixteen years old he felt lucky to have a job. He spent eight hours a day setting up milk bottles when people knocked them down and thought working at the Freak Show across the Midway would be a lot more fun. His boss, whom he knew only as Meatstick, treated him like he was stupid, taking way too much time explaining that the bottom row of three milk bottles had to go exactly on the circles. Then he had to balance two bottles on top of those and one more on the very top, making a pyramid. For that he got paid five dollars an hour.

On his second day at work, Martin had kept track of how many people played and won by making a tiny notch in the wooden counter with his fingernail. Sixty-three people played—only six won. The next day, he moved the outside bottom bottles off their circles, just a little closer to the center bottle. Of the first twenty people to play, five won—far better than the day before. When two in a row won an hour later, Meatstick came over with a scowl on his face. With

big shoulders and biceps, arms covered with tattoos, and a big scar on his cheek, the scowl on his face only added to Meatstick's tough look. He was someone Martin didn't want to anger.

"Hey, kid. Lemme see you set up the bottles. You puttin' 'em on the circles like I showed ya?"

"Yes, I am, Mr. Meatstick. I'm very careful about that."

Meatstick watched and then shook his head. "Givin' out too many prizes. Must be a lucky stretch." He pointed his finger at Martin. "Make sure those bottles aren't coverin' up the lines."

After that, Martin set up the bottles inside the circles. But if there was a pretty girl next in line, he moved them in a little.

Martin got a fifteen minute break every two hours and he used it to explore the park. Riverview Amusement Park was one of the most popular attractions in Chicago. With over thirty rides, including five roller coasters, every kid in town wanted to visit the park. But Martin's family didn't have much money and the park was on the north side. He lived on the south side, so he hadn't been there until now. When one of the boys in his apartment building got a job at the park and told him how wonderful it was, Martin applied and got a job. It took him an hour to get there on the bus. His parents worried about him being out by himself late at night but had decided to let him do it. His mother always looked so relieved when he got home.

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**T**he lights started to come on at dusk, Martin's favorite time. The Midway lit up in a marvelous display of colors as thousands of light bulbs on the rides came alive. Laughs and screams from people on the rides filled the air. People came here to forget their cares and live out the motto of the park on the sign by the entrance: "Laugh Your Troubles Away".

Martin took his last break of the day at eight-fifteen and strolled up the Midway toward the river. Employees could ride for half price but Martin saved his money for Skee Ball. He was saving his win-

ning tickets to get something nice for his mother. But once he got something, he wanted to ride the Fireball and see the Freak Show. Meatstick yelled at him sometimes because he was distracted by the display across the Midway as the barker for the Freak Show tried to lure people in with a tease of the Bearded Lady and the Snake Lady. Martin longingly watched the Fireball and then weaved through the crowd back to the booth.

The park officially closed at ten, but sometimes earlier. Meatstick told Martin that the managers would ride the gondola and see how big the crowd was. If the crowd was small, they would close early. Martin's last duties were to pack up the milk bottles and balls and help Meatstick close the booth. A little after nine, Meatstick told Martin to start cleaning up. A few minutes later he turned to ask Meatstick a question, but Meatstick wasn't there. When Martin turned back around, the barker from the Freak Show was leaning on the counter.

"Hey, kid, come on over here."

Martin walked up to the counter and the man explained he was one of the managers.

"Meatstick tells me you're a real good worker. How would you like to work on one of the coasters, maybe the Bobs or the Fireball?"

With wide eyes, Martin replied, "Sure! That'd be great!"

The man nodded. "Okay. Come with me to the office and we'll fill out the papers."

"Sure, but I have to close up the booth."

"That's okay, kid. Meatstick will do it."

Martin vaulted the counter and joined the man, who bought him some cotton candy.

With sticky mouth and fingers, Martin followed the man into the shack under the first drop of the Bobs. The room was dark and he could barely make out a woman sitting behind a rickety wooden desk. As Martin took a bite of candy, the man grabbed his collar and roughly led him to the desk where the woman sat with a notebook. A bracelet on her wrist sparkled as she wrote. With a bored look, she asked him what his name was.

With a shaky voice, Martin said, “Martin Lisk. Is this where I get the job?”

As she stared at him with a blank expression, the man reached around from behind Martin with a rag that smelled funny and clamped it over his face. Martin struggled for only a few seconds.

The screech of the roller coaster got louder and louder until it was deafening. It roared past the shack and climbed the last hill, leaving behind the happy screams of the passengers.

## Chapter 2

**H**er lips were moving so there must have been words coming out of her mouth. But all I could hear was the constant snapping of her gum. Each snap was a spike driven into my brain. When her lips stopped moving, I told her I would call her and thanked her for coming.

The year 1984 had started out cold and snowy with me wondering if George Orwell was paying attention. As spring had started to raise its head, I had bought a building on Montrose to use as an office. It consisted of a storefront that used to be a music store with an apartment on the second floor that I'd rent out at some point. I had a large room divided into a reception area and a separate office for me. Next to the office was a hallway that led to the back door, passing the bathroom and a closet. The only thing hanging on the wall was a plaque that read: "I Don't Believe in Coincidences".

I needed a secretary and had been interviewing candidates for the last week. The gum snapper was the latest reject. She was far from the best of the group, but amazingly she wasn't the worst. I had two more appointments, the first in an hour—Miss George.

The office was ten blocks from the police station, only a twenty minute drive from home, and even less to McGoon's, my favorite Irish pub. A few pieces of furniture had been delivered yesterday morning, and a sign company had stenciled "Spencer Manning,

Private Detective” on the window to the left of the door. There were two parking spaces on gravel behind the building off the alley.

Fifty minutes later, a tall blond drifted through the door.

“Miss George?”

“Yes. Mr. Manning?”

“I am.” I motioned to the chair. “Please have a seat.” She crossed some very nice legs and handed me a folder.

“Here’s my resumé. My father and I just moved here from Georgia. I worked for a lawyer as his office manager. I had a pretty nice package. I assume you offer benefits?”

I smiled and opened the folder. She seemed a bit pushy, but she was the best I had seen by far and I was tired of interviews. I assumed that if I hired her the legs would be a fringe benefit.

“Do you have relatives here?”

“No, we don’t know anyone.”

“Then what brought you to Chicago?”

As she started to talk, the door opened again and another woman walked in.

“Oh, am I early?” She stuck out her chin and walked up to the desk. “I didn’t know there would be someone else.” She gave Miss George a dirty look.

“Yes, you are early, Miss...?”

“Perkins. I...”

“Miss Perkins. I’m in the middle of an interview, so if you’d come back in, say, a half hour?”

She gave me a look of dismay and ignored my request. “So, I assume you’re going to do some decorating because this place is pretty boring I’ve worked in boring before and I just wouldn’t last do you expect me to sit in that chair?”

“Do you always talk in run-on sentences?” I asked. She had no idea what I meant.

“How much vacation is there?”

I waited but just heard silence. Evidently vacation was something that needed an answer. She was looking at me defiantly.

“There is no vacation.”

“You’ve *got* to be kidding.” With hands on her hips, she looked like a petulant five-year-old.

“No, not kidding.”

She stuck out her chin again. “Well!”

And she walked out in a huff. Problem solved.

“Miss George, I’m so sorry.”

She laughed and uncrossed her legs. “That’s okay. But I have a question.”

“Sure. But if I may, I made up the part about no vacation.”

“I thought you might have. Quick thinking.”

She cocked her head and hesitated. “So, *are* there any benefits?”

“Well, I really haven’t given it much thought. If you’re willing to work it out as we go, I think you’ll be okay.”

She smiled and folded her hands in her lap. “You look trustworthy. Sounds good to me.”

“Great! Would you wait here for a minute while I make a few calls?”

“Of course.”

I called her two references from my office. One was the lawyer, who spoke highly of her—efficient and pleasant. He was sorry to lose her. The other was a jewelry store owner who was just as positive. The hunt was over. We chatted about pay and benefits and she agreed to start in the morning.

“Please pardon the office,” I said. “It’ll get better.”

She smiled and waved a hand. “Not a problem. I’ll be glad to help.”

I watched her walk out and let out a deep breath. Interviewing had been no fun.

I had started unpacking another box when I noticed a woman looking in through the window. She made eye contact and then turned and started to walk away. I was thinking of going out when she stopped, straightened her shoulders, and walked with great determination back to the door. A few seconds later my first customer walked in. I had dreamed of a beautiful, sultry blond walking through my door ever since I had opened my first office across the yards from Beef’s diner.

With brunette hair down to her shoulders and brown eyes, she didn't match my dream, but she had her own brand of beautiful, the kind fifties singers found in the girl next door. She looked somewhat shy and nervous, but there was also that spark of determination that had made her open the door. I motioned to the wooden chair in front of the desk and invited her to sit down.

"I'm Spencer Manning. Please pardon my clutter. I'm just getting settled."

She smiled tentatively and sat on the edge of the chair. "I know," she said. "I live in an apartment across the street and I've been watching you move in." She looked around. "I was wondering what business it would be."

I sat behind the desk. "Well, nice to meet you, Mrs....?"

"Baker. Caroline, but I go by Carol. And I'm not married. My husband died a year ago. Just me and my son, Billy."

"Nice to meet you, Carol. Do you work in the neighborhood?"

"No, I don't work, Mr. Manning. I take care of my son."

Wondering how she survived, I gave her a friendly smile. "Please call me Spencer."

She nodded.

I broke an awkward silence with, "Well, nice meeting you, Carol. Thanks for stopping in."

But instead of showing signs of leaving, she said, "I'm not sure what detectives do."

A friendly chat would be nice at some point, but I had boxes to unpack and I hadn't had any lunch.

Looking off to the side, she made it a question.

"Almost anything. But I'm trying to get unpacked. Maybe we could have lunch one day."

The mailman came in and welcomed me to the neighborhood. As he started telling me about my neighbors, I glanced back and saw Carol unpacking a box. She had made three neat stacks of files on the desk and separated the pens and pencils from the rest of the supplies.

"That's more work than I've done all day," I said with a smile after the mailman left.

“Oh, I hope you don’t mind. I get nervous when I don’t have anything to do.”

“Not at all—thanks. Don’t go away... I’ll be right back.”

From inside the bathroom I heard the phone ring and thought the hell with it, they’ll call back. But it only rang twice and then I heard: “Spencer Manning, Private Detective Agency, how can we help you?”

## Chapter 3

**B**y the time I got out Carol had hung up and was making notes on a yellow pad.

“That was a man named Johnny. He wouldn’t give me his last name—said you’d know who it was. He’d like you to call back.”

“Thanks, Carol. I’ll call in a bit.”

She looked hesitant. “I don’t mean to tell you what to do, but he sounded anxious. I can wait.”

“Okay, thanks.” While I was dialing, I wished I hadn’t hired Miss George. Carol was doing a great job.

Johnny Ray was the bouncer at the Blue Note, the club where Dad had introduced me to jazz. Johnny answered on the second ring.

“Hey, Johnny, people behaving themselves?”

“Spencer. If they don’t, it never happens again. I heard you were gettin’ yourself a real place of business. Hadn’t heard about the secretary.”

“Neither had I.” I watched Carol picking up a box.

“Don’t mean to bother you Spencer, but I’d like to run somethin’ by you.”

“Whatcha got, Johnny?”

“Well, I don’t know if there’s anything in it, but my sister called, worried that her kid hadn’t come home last night.”

“Is that your godson?”

“Yes. Martin. He went to work on Monday and didn’t come home.”

“Has she checked friends?”

“She has. He often stays overnight with someone if he’s workin’ late, but he always tells her. She checked with the friends and no one’s seen him.”

“Where’s he working?”

“Riverview.”

I was a bit surprised. Riverview amusement park is on the north side of the city. Johnny and his sister live on the south side.

“Long way for the kid to travel,” I said.

“Yup. That’s why he sometimes stays with friends up by the park.”

“Did she call the police?”

“They’re looking, but it’s only been a day. They told her to call friends. They say they get a lot of calls about kids who just forgot to tell their parents what they were doing. But that’s not like Martin. He’s a great kid.”

“What would you like me to do?”

“Would you check with the lieutenant?”

“I will, Johnny. But give me your sister’s number. I’ll give her a call too.” I turned to look for a pencil and saw Carol with one already in her hand. She wrote as I repeated the number out loud.

“I’ll make some phone calls and look around and get back to you, Johnny.”

“Thanks, Spencer. Probably nothing, but...”

“I know. Try not to worry.”

I hung up and looked at Carol.

“What?” she asked, with raised eyebrows.

I shook my head and smiled. “I’ve been interviewing people for a week, looking for a secretary. Coulda saved me a lot of trouble if I had known she was right across the street.”

She laughed and her gaze went to my left as she squinted.

“What?” I asked.

“I may be mistaken, but I think an unmarked police car just stopped in front.”

I turned around. “Oh crap, only been here a few days and already they’re looking for a donation.” I folded my arms across my chest and waited.

Sporting a worried look, Carol sat down as the cops came in.

Ronny Steele held the door for Rosie Lonnigan—my two favorite detectives. The noise of car traffic increased.

“Well, well,” Rosie said, “a new gumshoe in town.”

“You guys have nothing better to do than harass hard-working citizens?”

“We’re the welcoming committee,” said Steele without a smile.

“Well, welcome me and get back to fighting crime. I pay your salary, you know.”

Carol looked nervous.

“Mr. Manning,” she said slowly, “perhaps I should go. I...”

Rosie held up her hand. “No problem, ma’am, we’re leaving.” She turned to me. “Are you about done?”

I scrunched up my lips. “About.”

“Good. Give it to him, Steele.”

Carol tensed in the chair.

Steele reached into his back pocket and pulled out a magnifying glass with a red bow around it.

Carol’s jaw dropped and she looked confused.

Rosie came over and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Good luck, Spencer. Door’s always open.”

“Thanks, Rosie.” I looked at Steele.

“You think I’m going to kiss you, you’re nuts.”

Everyone laughed except Carol. She was trying to figure this out.

Rosie nodded toward the door.

“If you guys have a minute...” I said.

“Sure,” Rosie replied.

“I got a call from Johnny over at the Blue Note. His nephew didn’t come home Monday night after work at Riverview. You guys have any missing kids?”

Rosie looked at Steele who shook his head. “I’ll check with Missing Persons when we get back to the station.”

“Thanks. I’ll call you tonight.” I looked at them through the magnifying glass.

Rosie laughed and headed out.

I turned the magnifying glass on Carol. “I’m detecting that you could use an explanation.”

She smiled a pretty smile. “You’re really good at your job.”

“Yeah, I’m a genius. Short story is my dad was a chief on the south side. I’ve known Rosie for a long time and I have a lot of friends on the force.”

Her smile got bigger. “Well, at least two. Is there a long story?”

“Yup. If you accept my offer, I’ll tell you over dinner.”

“What offer would that be?” She looked worried again.

I sat on the edge of the desk. “I’m going to take a ride over to Riverview this afternoon. If you’d like to come, we could get something to eat.” I looked around. “And I need to do something to pay you back for organizing my office.”

She blushed. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. You’re wonderful. I wish I had met you an hour ago—you’d have a job.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, but I’m not really looking for one, and I have my son.”

“Where’s your son now?”

“He’s with my sister. Her son is the same age as Billy.”

“When do you get him?”

“Sometime after dinner.”

“Can I have you until then?”

She shrugged. “Sure. Sounds like fun.”

“Great! Have you had lunch?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. I’m going to grab a sandwich from the deli and make a few calls. Can you come back in a half hour?”

“Sure. See you then.”

I called Martin’s mother, Gloria, and told her the police would do all they could. As we chatted, I asked for the names and numbers of his friends on the north side where he stayed after work and if

she knew where Martin worked in the park. She didn't. I hoped one of his friends would know. I also asked her for a recent picture of Martin in case I needed to spread it around the neighborhood. She said she'd get one to Johnny.

Carol was back right on time. I locked up and ushered her out the back door and into my baby-blue Mustang.

## Chapter 4

**R**iverview Amusement Park was located on Western Avenue, between Belmont and Roscoe, just south of Lane Tech High School. Dad had taken me there at least once a summer since I was four or five. My goal in life had been to grow tall enough to be able to ride the roller coasters. That took five years. Wherever we went on vacation, Dad had me go to the library and learn about the history of the place. Riverview was no different. So, while we drove, I shared some of the local history with Carol.

“The park opened in 1879 and was originally called Sharpshooters Park.” We stopped for a taxi letting out a passenger.

“Strange name for an amusement park,” she said.

I pulled around the taxi and explained. “The land, which used to be a garbage dump, was bought in 1879 by William Schmidt, a wealthy baker. He invented the soda cracker.” I turned onto Western. “He used the land as a shooting range for his friends and set up targets in the Chicago River, which ran along the western property line. Every Sunday, he and his friends would shoot and drink.”

“So how did it become an amusement park?”

“Well, the wives complained their husbands were never home on Sunday. The men weren’t going to give up their shooting, so they cut a deal. William built a picnic area and put in a carousel for the families to ride.”

“So, another case of women changing history,” Carol said with a smirk.

I laughed. “Yup, but then his son, George, became interested in amusement parks. He convinced his father to lease out six acres to an east coast syndicate for an amusement park, and in 1904 the park became Riverview Sharpshooters Park. By 1910, it was the largest in the world.”

I moved into the right lane and turned into the parking lot.

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**A**s we looked for a spot, Carol asked what I hoped to find. “Nothing in particular. So far, this is the last place we know of where Martin was. You can learn things just by keeping your eyes open. Let’s just walk around and see if anything pops out.”

I got a spot in the first row right next to the special parking area for motorcycles, paid, and we walked through the arched entrance gate which was painted with red, white, and blue stripes. “William was quite the entrepreneur. Before each season he mailed out free entrance passes to get people into the park, where they then had to pay for the rides and food.”

“Smart.”

“In the 1920s he also paid the streetcar fare for kids. The car ran down Western Avenue and stopped at the park. The fare was only a couple cents but that was a lot to people back then.”

We stood inside the gate and talked about a plan. I asked Carol what her favorite ride was.

“Well, I don’t know. I’ve never been here.”

“Really? Well, then we’ll just have to go on all of them!”

She laughed. “Hmmm. Don’t know about that. Unless you want to take a chance on being thrown up on, I suggest we skip anything that spins around. And I’m not too thrilled about dropping out of the sky in a parachute.”

I laughed. “Okay. We’ll stick to the merry-go-round. But the best way to see the park is on the train or the Space Ride.”

“What’s the Space Ride?”

“Kind of a gondola that travels over the park.”

She gave me a nervous look. “Let’s stay on the ground.”

“Okay, the Riverview Chief it is.”

The station was to the left, not too far down the Midway at the edge of a park. We started in that direction, but Carol stopped in her tracks when we turned a corner and saw what I had always called the evil genie. It was the huge, wicked face of a smirking genie with a beard, thin moustache, wide eyes, and turban. When we were kids we used to say that if you looked at the face, the genie would get you in the middle of the night.

“What the heck is that?” asked Carol.

I laughed. “Officially, Aladdin’s Castle.” I told her about the evil genie. We stopped and watched the crowd gathered in front of the entrance.

“You have to walk through the castle where nothing is as it seems.” I told her about the maze of screen doors with no handles you had to go through to get into the castle, the distorted mirrors that made you thin and tall or fat and short, the dark passages, the tilted floors, and the magic carpet that whisked you out of the castle over bouncing rollers.

She told me she could live without all that.

“Well, not if you were five.”

I nodded toward the crowd. “What do you notice about the crowd?”

She cocked her head, scanned the fifty or so people in front of the entrance, and shrugged. “Nothing special.” Then she squinted and looked confused. “I would think they’re waiting to go in, but they’re not in line—they’re just watching, but nothing’s happening. Is there some show?”

“Sort of. What else?”

After a few seconds, she said, “They’re almost all men.”

“Exactly!”

She looked confused again.

“Keep watching.”

In a few minutes, two couples walked up to the ticket booth, bought tickets, and started up the stairs, which went up along the genie's beard to the entrance door at the left of his face. The murmur from the crowd stopped. Near the top, one of the girls screamed as a blast of air blew up from the stairs, blowing her dress up around her waist. The crowd howled.

Carol looked shocked. "These guys stand around waiting to see some girl's underwear?"

I laughed. "Evidently. Pretty cheap thrills."

"To say the least. How did that happen? Did she step on something?"

"Look behind you."

She turned toward a minaret on the other side of the Midway from the castle. "So?"

"So, there's a man in there who triggers the air when a girl gets to the right step."

"You've got to be kidding. Some guy's job is to blow up women's dresses?"

"Yup. Wanna try?"

"I think not, Mr. Manning!"

The crowd started to thin out and we headed for the train station.

"So, what does this kid look like?" Carol asked.

"Like a kid." I had only met him once and described him as best as I could.

We sat in the first of six cars, right behind the engine, and started the trip around the park.

As the train started, we chatted about growing up in Chicago. I held up my hand as we passed the Bobs roller coaster. It was screeching around the last turn and I couldn't hear her over the screams of the happy passengers.

"Are you up for a roller coaster?" I asked.

"I think so, but perhaps one of the others. I heard the Bobs actually leaves the tracks at some point."

I laughed as we made a turn that put the Parachute Drop directly in front of us. "Well, the Bobs covers more than a half mile in a

little over two minutes, but I think it stays on the track the whole time.”

“Just the same, I’ll work my way up.”

The train whistle blew as we came up to a walkway crossing, and we swung around a curve where the tracks started to follow the river.

“The land you’re on now wasn’t part of the original park and the river wasn’t where you see it. They rerouted the river so they could expand the park.”

She nodded, took a deep breath, and looked up at one of the other roller coasters. I asked about her family.

“My mom died a few years ago, and Dad several months after. I think he died of a broken heart. They were like Siamese twins. I miss them a lot.” She looked sad.

I knew how she felt.

“My husband died not long after that in a car accident,” she said.

I resisted the urge to take her hand and tried not to think about car accidents. “Sorry to hear that.”

She nodded. “Thanks. Billy was devastated,” she said as we entered a tunnel.

Thirty seconds later we came back into the sunshine and I asked how she got by.

“Oh, there were insurance policies and a small legacy from my folks... enough to make ends meet as long as I watch it. But I get lonely and bored when Billy’s not there. I can’t imagine what Martin’s folks are going through. If it were Billy, I’d...”

I touched her arm.

“What do you think happened?” she asked.

“I have no idea. There are so many possibilities.”

“So how do you find him?” She looked hopeless.

“I start talking to people here and asking questions and crossing off possibilities.”

The horn sounded as we came to a crossing.

“Do you think you’ll find him, Spencer?”

“I have to assume that I will. The plan is to be successful.”

“And how often are you?”

I smiled. “So far... every time. But I’ve only been doing this for three years. Given time, the odds will catch up with me.”

“Well, I hope you have at least one more time before that happens. If there’s anything I can do, just ask.”

“Thanks.”

As we rounded a curve, she pointed toward the merry-go-round. “Now that I can handle!”

“Great! We’ll get off at the stop coming up and go take a ride. And then we’re going on my favorite ride.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Well, okay, but remember the throwing up part.”

I laughed. She didn’t.

As we walked away from the station I told her about the merry-go-round. “I already told you it was originally installed to appease the wives. The horses were hand-carved and painted wood, and the organ music was from paper music rolls. Other animals were added over the years and the wooden horses were replaced by aluminum ones. Dad got us a tour of the sheds where a few of the old horses are stored. They’re wonderful.”

We got on and flew around and around at fourteen miles per hour.

As we made our way to the exit, Carol asked, “So what’s this favorite ride?”

“You’ll see,” I said with a smile.

We cut across the center of the park through the game arcade, and as we reached the east side I could see the top of the Shoot the Chutes. I was pretty sure Carol wouldn’t agree if I told her that’s where we were going.

When we reached the entrance, I took her hand and led her into the line. She looked at me like I was crazy, but she kept walking.

As we stood in line I told her about the ride. Boats were lifted to the top of a tower by an elevator where they then ran down a water chute to splash into a lagoon at the bottom. I explained that the first

chutes ride was at Chutes Park on the south side. When that park went out of business in 1906 the ride was built here at Riverview.

After ten minutes we were first in line for the next boat and we'd be able to sit in the front row, my favorite spot. But, while she was willing to go on the ride, Carol insisted on sitting near the back so she wouldn't get wet.

She held tightly to the bar in front of us as we rode up the elevator. When we got to the top she gave me one quick look of apprehension and squeezed the bar all the way to the bottom where the boat splashed into the lagoon, throwing up a wall of water. Everyone got wet, especially those at the back.

She turned to me with a look of amazement and asked, "Can we go again?"

I broke out laughing as the boat was funneled back to the loading platform. "Well, all the rides except this one have a second ride for half price deal. We'd have to stand in line again."

"Then let's come back sometime when Billy's tall enough."

As we walked back to the entrance, Carol asked about my dad.

"How about I give you the long story over dinner?"

She accepted.

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I took Carol to an Italian restaurant on Clark Street. After we ordered, I told her about the "car accident" that had killed my mom and dad. It was no accident and was meant as a warning to back off from a drug case Dad was working on. It was just supposed to scare him. But the kid who was driving lost control of his car and ran Dad off the road and into a tree that killed my folks.

"Oh, Spencer, I'm so sorry."

"Thanks." I took a drink of wine.

"Was that the drug story about the race track?"

"Yes."

"Manning. I remember. Was that you who figured it out?"

I laughed. "Well, I had a hand in it. But I had a little help."

She squinted. "There was something strange about that time."

"There was? What?"

She buttered a roll. "At the same time there was a very bizarre story about the mayor's wife. Seemed like she just disappeared."

I nodded. "It did seem that way, didn't it?"

She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye. "Why do I get the feeling you know something about that?"

I shrugged and swirled the wine in the glass. "Perhaps because you are a shrewd woman."

Taking a bite of roll, she asked, "And are you going to explain?"

"Maybe someday when I'm old and gray."

"I'll look forward to that."

"Well, don't hold your breath. I doubt I'll live to be old and gray."

She laughed. I didn't.

As we ate, she said, "I can't stop thinking about Martin. I wish there was something I could do."

I thought about the photo. "Well, I'm getting a photo of Martin and I'll make posters to put up around the neighborhood. If you'd like to help spread them around?"

"I'd love to. And Billy can help."

She looked excited. It's always good to have something to do. Helpless is a bad feeling.

We finished eating and I drove her to her sister's to get her son, Billy, a sandy-haired eight-year-old who beamed when he saw his mom.

Carol hugged him and introduced me to the family.

I gave them a ride home and Billy shook my hand when we said goodbye. When Carol put out her hand, I gave her a hug. She hugged back.

"Thanks for a lovely day, Spencer. I had a great time."

"Me too. Drop in any time."

"I may just do that. Don't forget about the posters."

I watched her disappear into the stairway.

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**A**t a quarter to nine, I turned my Mustang south on Ashland and headed for chez Stosh. Lt. Powolski greeted me with his usual loving charm.

“Another peaceful evening shot to hell.”

“Good evening to you, too.”

“I knew I was in trouble as soon as I heard the rumble of that Mustang.”

“If you mean because I’d go to the kitchen and get two beers to save you the trouble of getting up, you are correct.”

I handed him a Schlitz as he turned down the volume on the Cubs game. They were leading the Cards six to one.

“To what do I owe this visit?”

“To your charming personality.” I took a long drink. “And to my having some questions.”

“Of course.” He sighed. He waggled his beer bottle at me. “Whaddya got?”

“A missing kid.”

“Check with Stengel in the morning.”

“Rosie already has and I’ll call her later.”

“So what do you need me for? I was watching the Cubs win for a change.”

“The kid is a nephew of Johnny Ray.” That got his attention.

“Okay, tell me about it.”

“Sixteen-year-old kid named Martin. Got a job at Riverview a couple weeks ago. Lives on the south side and takes the bus to work.”

“Long way to go,” he said as he took a drink.

“Jobs aren’t easy to come by.”

“Yeah, glad I’m not a kid these days. But they weren’t so easy when I was a kid either.”

“You can remember back that far?”

“You’d be surprised what I can remember. If you want me to dig up some of your childhood and share it around the water cooler, just keep it up.”

“Okay, truce. You ever have any trouble at Riverview?”

He took another drink, set the bottle on the table, and pulled his recliner upright.

“Not usually anything we need to get involved with. They have their own police force.”

That surprised me. “How official are they?”

He shrugged. “They handle everyday things themselves. They can’t make arrests, but they can detain someone and wait for us. I have a feeling they handle problems themselves in ways we don’t.”

“You mean strong-arm tactics?”

“Don’t know what I mean. But there are rumors about troublemakers being dealt with.” He spread his hands out, palms up. “We’ve never had a complaint.”

“Hmm. Who’s in charge?”

“Ex-Chicago cop named Tommy Walters. He made sergeant and then started to throw his weight around; he quit after being written up too many times for his liking... and ours. He complained about what he called the ‘kid gloves’ method of running the department.”

I emptied the bottle. “Hence the rumors about tactics.”

“Yeah, could be. But he did get the job done and he isn’t going to put up with any crap, wherever he is.”

“I think I’ll have a chat. Can I mention your name?”

“Sure, we got along. Mine’s about the only one that’ll get you anywhere. But don’t expect that to buy you a friend.”

“Just a foot in the door is fine. I have plenty of friends. Why are you on his good side?”

Stosh laughed and emptied his bottle. “I wouldn’t call it a good side, but I had an opportunity to help him at one point.”

He saw my raised eyebrows and continued.

“Walters got things done, but that sometimes involved bending the rules, not unlike someone else I know. I was able to cover his back when one particular bend ended up with questions, but also bad guys in jail.”

“Sometimes the end justifies the means.”

He nodded. “And sometimes not. Speaking of friends, did you ever have a chat with Rosie?”

“I always have chats with Rosie.”

“Sure. I’ll take that as a no. I repeat—she cares about you. You need to tell her.”

“I know, Stosh. Just waiting for the right time.”

“Okay. I won’t say any more. Game of gin?”

“Sure.”

We played for an hour and ended with him up only a dime. But anything on the winning side made him happy.

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I called Rosie when I got home. Missing Persons had the report on Martin but had no leads.

“When’s your next day off, Rosie?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Perfect. How about a day at Riverview? My treat.”

“Only if we can skip Alice in Wonderland. The rabbit scares me.”

“Okay. We’ll do the Tunnel of Love.”

“You scare me too. What’s your plan?”

“With the Tunnel of Love?”

“Nope.”

“Just want to nose around.”

“And you think you can do more than the Chicago Police force?”

“I have in the past.”

“You don’t wear modesty well.”

“Just giving the facts, ma’am. Pick you up at nine-thirty. Wear one of your summer dresses.”

She laughed one of her laughs filled with smiles. She and Maxine had laughs that could fix the world’s problems.

“Hey, I know about the castle—nice try.”

“Party pooper.”

“See you in the morning, hot shot.”

I had no idea what I would find at Riverview, but I knew that just stirring pots sometimes got people excited. I did want to walk

through Alice in Wonderland. Mom had read the stories to me when I was five. I thought they were wonderful, especially the silly poems. And when I was under forty-two inches tall, the only things I could get into were Kiddieland, the castle, and Alice. I loved Humpty Dumpty and Tweedledum and Tweedledee. I never stopped to think they were just small people in costumes. And I wouldn't mind a trip through the Tunnel of Love. Then somewhere along the way I'd have a chat with Rosie and get Stosh off my back. A year of his nagging was getting on my nerves.

## Chapter 5

I woke to an early morning thunderstorm a little before six Wednesday morning. I made breakfast and listened to the radio for the weather. Storms were supposed to move through by mid-morning, so my trip with Rosie was still on.

Miss George—I wondered if I should call her by her first name—was waiting at the front door when I got to the office at five to nine. Prompt—I liked that. I asked if I could call her Samantha.

“Of course,” she said with a smile.

While we talked about what to do with the office, it crossed my mind that both of her names could be men’s names—Sam George. The rest of her wasn’t manly at all. I gave her a key and wished her luck.

I left at nine-thirty to pick up Rosie and drove west down the alley so I could drive back east on Montrose and look at my office from the street. I got kinda choked up seeing my name on the window and wished Mom and Dad could have seen it. I got excited when I noticed Sam on the phone. Business was booming!

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**A**s we walked to the main gate, Rosie asked if I had a plan.

“Of course! I always have a plan.”

She gave me a skeptical look.