

Don't Get

Caught

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DON'T GET CAUGHT

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HE NEVER SET OUT TO BE A SERIAL KILLER; it was a role fate thrust upon him. The realization hit him with the force of a Biblical revelation, an epiphany. He didn't know he had stopped moving until someone bumped into him. He started to walk again.

He looked about, uncertain where he was, and felt relief to see that he was less than two blocks from his house, and surprise that a cold rain had turned to snow. He had not noticed it before that moment, but he had noticed practically nothing for such a long time that he felt as if he had been in a void, that he now could see that the world was still all around him, long unnoted but present. He was present for the first time in how long? He didn't know the number to insert. He walked faster.

His sister Wanda met him at the door. "My God! You're covered with snow! You must be freezing. Phil said it was snowing an inch an hour and I have to start for home or I'll be stuck here overnight. I packed a bag for you." She was pulling at his jacket as she spoke, trying to open it as he tried to move away from her hands. "Hold still, Tommy. We'll just get you in something dry and leave—"

"Wanda, back off. What do you mean you packed a bag for me? I'm not going anywhere."

“Tommy, I can’t leave you alone this weekend. The power might go off or something. You’ll come home with me. Just a couple of days until the snow melts. I made lamb stew but we can take it with us. Phil doesn’t have to eat it if he doesn’t want to.” Her husband bred sheep and sold the lambs, but refused to eat them, as did their two sons. Wanda, very fond of it herself, always prepared lamb dishes on her weekly visits to her brother. “I put it in that casserole with a good lid so we can take it with us. Our treat.” She continued to fumble with the fasteners of his jacket.

Thomas took both of her busy hands in his and held them. “I’m not going home with you. I have firewood if the electricity goes. And you’d better start now before the roads get bad. I don’t want to think of you driving if it starts accumulating.”

Her eyes widened as she stared at him, taking a step backward to get a better look. “What happened? You’re concerned about me? You’re... I don’t know what. Different.”

“I came in out of the fog,” he said. “Think of it that way. I stepped out of the fog, and now I need to think about the future. My future. I’ve been gone a long time and I need to make plans.”

“Tommy!” she cried, and threw herself against him, her arms around him. “My God, Tommy! Thank God! I’ve been so worried, scared, terrified. I thought at first you were losing your mind, that you’d get a gun or something, do something crazy, and I was so glad that Atherton was all the way out of the country, out of reach. Nobody would have blamed you if you’d gone after him, but you would have spent the rest of your life in prison. We knew that but you didn’t seem to know it, or anything else. Then you turned into a zombie, that’s it, a regular zombie, dead to the world, dead to us, me and Phil, to everyone. I haven’t seen a light in your eyes for three years! Now it’s back! It’s back. You’re alive again! Thank God!”

He disengaged himself and pulled off his jacket. “Go dry yourself,” he said. “You really have to get going. It’s probably snowing harder out in the county than here in the city. Leave the lamb stew, my dinners for the next night or two.”

Wanda continued to study his face. “Promise me, Tommy. Just promise me that you won’t start brooding about the past, what happened, any of it, that you’ll really just make plans for the future,

your future.” She was wiping her hands on her jeans as she talked, and brushing snow and water drops from her sweater.

“I absolutely promise. I’m already starting to think only of the future.”

“Thank God! It’s an answer to our prayers. We’ve been so worried, both of us. Phil kept saying you’d snap out of it, but...”

Although he wanted to wrap her coat around her and throw her out into the snow, he restrained himself until, some minutes later, she was finally gone, talking all the while, on the front porch, on the sidewalk, no doubt inside her car. He closed the door, pressed his forehead against it, and drew in a long breath of relief. Future plans, he thought then. He had future plans to consider.

First thing to do was to make sure Atherton was in Portland. He went to the telephone and, after looking up the law firm where Atherton was a partner, started to punch in the numbers, then cut the connection. Shaking, he backed away from the phone. That would have been stupid. Too many phones had call-back features, the telephone company kept records of calls. He had to wait until Monday, use an assumed name, a public telephone, just say he needed an appointment, nothing more. That would work and he’d know.

He took his jacket to the kitchen and draped it over a chair to drip, removed his wet shoes and left them on newspapers, then went to the bedroom and changed from his suit to sweats and slippers. Although his movements were measured, precise, his mind was racing too fast to keep track of the many things he had to consider. Finally, with a light drink, scotch and water, he settled in front of his computer, but when he turned it on and started to open his word processor, he stopped again and drew back. Leave no trail, he told himself. If they ever suspected him, they would seize his computer. He drew out a notebook from the desk drawer.

Leaning back in his chair he surveyed the room, the second bedroom which they had turned into a study/library. The walls were lined with floor-to-ceiling shelves and, although there were many books, enough space remained for that many more. Nothing new had been added for years, not since— He shook his head hard. The whole house was fourteen hundred square feet, compact and

utilitarian, what the real estate agent had called a starter home, and it had been good for them, now was ideal for him alone. Of course, if they came to search, they must find nothing incriminating. He would have to examine the books, get rid of any that might be damning in their opinion. Although he knew exactly what his own books were, history, biography, reference books on a variety of subjects, serious non-fiction, he knew little about the many volumes of fiction. He never read fiction, but he would have to evaluate them to make sure they were not in any way incriminating.

Then he made a note: Don't Get Caught. Writing fast, he began to sort out and jot down the myriad ideas that had swarmed into his mind: Question Every Move; Examine Every Assumption; Take Your Time; Don't Leave a Trail.