

CHAPTER ONE

A HEATWAVE lay over Baltimore like a shroud. The leafy suburbs were cooled by a hundred thousand lawn sprinklers, but the affluent inhabitants stayed inside with the air-conditioning on full blast. On North Avenue, listless hookers hugged the shade and sweated under their hairpieces, and the kids on the street corners dealt dope out of the pockets of baggy shorts. It was late September, but fall seemed a long way off.

A rusty white Datsun, the broken lens of one headlight fixed in place with an X of electrician's tape, cruised through a white working-class neighbourhood north of downtown. The car had no air-conditioning, and the driver had rolled down all the windows. He was a handsome man of twenty-two wearing cut-off jeans, a clean white T-shirt and a red baseball cap with the word SECURITY in white letters on the front. The plastic upholstery beneath his thighs was slippery with his perspiration, but he did not let it bother him. He was in a cheerful mood. The car radio was tuned to 92Q—'Twenty jams in a row!' On the passenger seat was an open binder. He glanced at it occasionally, memorizing a typed page of technical terms for a test tomorrow.

THE THIRD TWIN

Learning was easy for him, and he would know the material after a few minutes of study.

At a stop light, a blonde woman in a convertible Porsche pulled alongside him. He grinned at her and said: 'Nice car!' She looked away without speaking, but he thought he saw the hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth. Behind her big sunglasses she was probably twice his age: most women in Porsches were. 'Race you to the next stop light,' he said. She laughed at that, a flirtatious musical laugh, then she put the stick shift into first with a narrow, elegant hand and tore away from the light like a rocket.

He shrugged. He was only practising.

He drove by the wooded campus of Jones Falls University, an Ivy League college much swankier than the one he attended. As he passed the imposing gateway, a group of eight or ten women jogged by in running clothes: tight shorts, Nikes, sweaty T-shirts and halter tops. They were a field hockey team in training, he guessed, and the fit-looking one in front was their captain, getting them in shape for the season.

They turned into the campus, and suddenly he was overwhelmed, swamped by a fantasy so powerful and thrilling that he could hardly see to drive. He imagined them in the locker room—the plump one soaping herself in the shower, the redhead towelling her long copper-coloured hair, the black girl stepping into a pair of white lace panties, the dikey team captain walking around naked, showing off her muscles—when something happened to terrify them. Suddenly they were all in a panic, wide eyed with dread, screaming and crying,

SUNDAY

on the edge of hysteria. They ran this way and that, crashing into one another. The fat girl fell over and lay there weeping helplessly while the others trod on her, unheeding, as they tried desperately to hide, or find the door, or run away from whatever was scaring them.

He pulled over to the side of the road and put the car in neutral. He was breathing hard and he could feel his heartbeat hammering. This was the best one he had ever had. But a little piece of the fantasy was missing. What were they frightened of? He hunted about in his fertile imagination for the answer, and gasped with desire when it came to him: a fire. The place was ablaze, and they were terrified by the flames. They coughed and choked on the smoke as they milled about, half naked and frenzied. 'My God,' he whispered, staring straight ahead, seeing the scene like a movie projected on to the inside of the Datsun's windshield.

After a while he calmed down. His desire was still strong, but the fantasy was no longer enough: it was like the thought of a beer when he had a raging thirst. He lifted the hem of his T-shirt and wiped the sweat from his face. He knew he should try to forget the fantasy, and drive on; but it was too wonderful. It would be terribly dangerous—he would go to jail for years if he were caught—but danger had never stopped him doing anything in his life. He struggled to resist temptation, though only for a second. 'I want it,' he murmured, and he turned the car around and drove through the grand gateway into the campus.

He had been here before. The university spread across a hundred acres of lawns and gardens and

THE THIRD TWIN

woodland. Its buildings were mostly made of a uniform red brick, with a few modern concrete-and-glass structures, all connected by a tangle of narrow roads lined with parking meters.

The hockey team had disappeared, but he found the gymnasium easily: it was a low building next to a running track, and there was a big statue of a discus thrower outside. He parked at a meter but did not put a coin in: he never put money in parking meters. The muscular captain of the hockey team was standing on the steps of the gym, talking to a guy in a ripped sweatshirt. He ran up the steps, smiling at the captain as he passed her, and pushed through the door into the building.

The lobby was busy with young men and women in shorts and headbands coming and going, rackets in their hands and sports bags slung over their shoulders. No doubt most of the college teams trained on Sundays. There was a security guard behind a desk in the middle of the lobby, checking people's student cards; but at that moment a big group of runners came in together and walked past the guard, some waving their cards and others forgetting, and the guard just shrugged his shoulders and went on reading *The Dead Zone*.

The stranger turned and looked at a display of silver cups in a glass case, trophies won by Jones Falls athletes. A moment later a soccer team came in, ten men and a chunky woman in studded boots, and he moved quickly to fall in with them. He crossed the lobby as part of their group and followed them down a broad staircase to the basement. They were talking about their game,

SUNDAY

laughing at a lucky goal and indignant about an outrageous foul, and they did not notice him.

His gait was casual but his eyes were watchful. At the foot of the stairs was a small lobby with a Coke machine and a pay phone under an acoustic hood. The men's locker room was off the lobby. The woman from the soccer team went down a long corridor, heading presumably for the women's locker room, which had probably been added as an afterthought by an architect who imagined there would never be many girls at Jones Falls, back in the days when 'coeducational' was a sexy word.

The stranger picked up the pay phone and pretended to search for a quarter. The men filed into their locker room. He watched the woman open a door and disappear. That must be the women's locker room. They were all in there, he thought excitedly, undressing and showering and rubbing themselves with towels. Being so close to them made him feel hot. He wiped his brow with the back of his hand. All he had to do to complete the fantasy was get them all scared half to death.

He made himself calm. He was not going to spoil it by haste. It needed a few minutes' planning.

When they had all disappeared, he padded along the corridor after the woman.

Three doors led off it, one on either side and one at the end. The door on the right was the one the woman had taken. He checked the end door and found that it led to a big, dusty room full of bulky machinery: boilers and filters, he guessed, for the swimming pool. He

THE THIRD TWIN

stepped inside and closed the door behind him. There was a low, even electrical hum. He pictured a girl delirious with fright, dressed only in her underwear—he imagined a bra and panties with a pattern of flowers—lying on the floor staring up at him with terrified eyes as he unbuckled his belt. He savoured the vision for a moment, smiling to himself. She was just a few yards away. Right now she might be contemplating the evening ahead: maybe she had a boyfriend, and was thinking of letting him go all the way tonight; or she could be a freshman, lonely and a little shy, with nothing to do on Sunday night but watch *Columbo*; or perhaps she had a paper to deliver tomorrow and was planning to stay up all night finishing it. *None of the above, baby. It's nightmare time.*

He had done this kind of thing before, though never on such a scale. He had always loved to frighten girls, ever since he could remember. In high school there was nothing he liked better than to get a girl on her own, in a corner somewhere, and threaten her until she cried and begged for mercy. That was why he kept having to move from one school to another. He dated girls sometimes, just to be like the other guys, and have someone to walk into the bar on his arm. If they seemed to expect it he would bone them, but it always seemed kind of pointless.

Everyone had a kink, he figured: some men liked to put on women's clothing, others had to have a girl dressed in leather walk all over them with spike heels. One guy he knew thought the sexiest part of a woman

SUNDAY

was her feet: he got a hard-on standing in the women's footwear section of a department store, watching them put on shoes and take them off again.

His kink was fear. What turned him on was a woman trembling with fright. Without fear, there was no excitement.

Looking around methodically, he took note of a ladder fixed to the wall, leading up to an iron hatch bolted on the inside. He went quickly up the ladder, slid back the bolts, and pushed up the hatch. He found himself staring at the tyres of a Chrysler New Yorker in a parking lot. Orienting himself, he figured he was at the back of the building. He closed the hatch and climbed down.

He left the pool machine room. As he walked along the corridor, a woman coming the other way gave him a hostile stare. He suffered a moment of anxiety: she might ask him what the hell he was doing hanging around the women's locker room. An altercation like that was not in his scenario. At this point it could spoil his plan. But her eyes lifted to his cap and took in the word SECURITY, and she looked away and turned into the locker room.

He grinned. He had bought the cap for \$8.99 in a souvenir store. But people were used to seeing guards in jeans at rock concerts, detectives who looked like criminals until they flashed their badges, airport police in sweaters; it was too much trouble to question the credentials of every asshole who called himself a security guard.

THE THIRD TWIN

He tried the door opposite the women's locker room. It opened into a small storeroom. He hit the light switch and closed the door behind him.

Obsolete gym equipment was stacked around him on racks: big black medicine balls, worn rubber mats, Indian clubs, mouldy boxing gloves, and splintered wooden folding chairs. There was a vaulting horse with burst upholstery and a broken leg. The room smelled musty. A large silver pipe ran along the ceiling, and he guessed it provided ventilation to the locker room across the corridor.

He reached up and tried the bolts that attached the pipe to what looked like a fan. He could not turn them with his fingers, but he had a wrench in the trunk of the Datsun. If he could detach the pipe, the fan would draw air from the storeroom instead of from the outside of the building.

He would make his fire just below the fan. He would get a can of gasoline and pour some into an empty Perrier bottle and bring it down here along with some matches and a newspaper for kindling and that wrench.

The fire would grow quickly and produce huge billows of smoke. He would tie a wet rag over his nose and mouth and wait until the storeroom was full of it. Then he would detach the ventilator pipe. The fumes would be drawn into the duct and pumped out into the women's locker room. At first no one would notice. Then one or two would sniff the air and say: 'Is someone smoking?' He would open the storeroom door and let the corridor fill with smoke. When the girls realized something was seriously wrong, they would open the

SUNDAY

locker room door and think the whole building was on fire, and they would all panic.

Then he would walk into the locker room. There would be a sea of brassieres and stockings, bare breasts and asses and pubic hair. Some would be running out of the showers, naked and wet, fumbling for towels; others would be trying to pull on clothes; most would be running around searching for the door, half blinded by smoke. There would be screams and sobs and shouts of fear. He would continue to pretend to be a security guard, and yell orders at them: 'Don't stop to dress! This is an emergency! Get out! The whole building is blazing! Run, run!' He would smack their bare asses, shove them around, snatch their clothes away, and feel them up. They would know something was badly wrong but most of them would be too crazy to figure it out. If the muscular hockey captain was still there she might have the presence of mind to challenge him, but he would just punch her out.

Walking around, he would select his main victim. She would be a pretty girl with a vulnerable look. He would take her arm, saying: 'This way, please, I'm with security.' He would lead her into the corridor then turn the wrong way, to the pool machine room. There, just when she thought she was on the way to safety, he would smack her face and punch her in the gut and throw her on the dirty concrete floor. He would watch her roll and turn and sit upright, gasping and sobbing and looking at him with terror in her eyes.

Then he would smile and unbuckle his belt.