

**JC**<sup>INC</sup>  
NOVEL

**JOHN CLARKSON**

**AND**  
**JUSTICE**  
**FOR ONE**

*The most tolerable  
sort of revenge is for those wrongs  
which there is no law to remedy.*

—FRANCIS BACON

# CHAPTER 1

The alarm clock shrieked a nasty little electronic beep.

It finally annoyed Jack Devlin out of his hazy, hung-over sleep. He kept his eyes shut hoping to suspend his awareness that it was someone else's alarm clock, that he was sick with a hangover, and that he had buried his father yesterday.

But it all came pounding back—the funeral, the reception at his brother George's house, the drunken night out.

The woman next to him finally reached over and turned off the alarm, but Devlin didn't open his eyes. He remembered the frenzied drunken sex, the kind only two strangers can have, but he didn't want to open his eyes and see her. He just wanted to stumble out of there while she slept and leave it behind. The alarm killed that chance. She was awake now. She gently attached herself to him. A long naked thigh nestled into his crotch. An arm wrapped around his chest.

Devlin had to leave, but she wasn't letting go. He had to go back to the apartment where he was staying and find his brother George waiting for him there.

He kept his eyes shut, cleared his throat, and asked, "Did you tell me your name was Helen?" knowing full well it wasn't.

"What?" She lifted her head. "What did you say?"

"Hold on a second. Where's your bathroom?"

"Down the hall."

Devlin gently extricated himself, swept the sheet off, and swung his legs to the floor. The room was air-conditioned down to a chilling cold.

He clenched his teeth, stood up, and squinted at the piercing pain in his head. It had been a long time since he'd drunk so much. With one eye half-open, he left the bedroom and walked into a short hallway that led to the bathroom. The hallway felt hot and stuffy after the air-conditioned bedroom. He ducked into the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Devlin opened both eyes. The bathroom was cleaner than he expected. Very neat actually. Three string-bikini panties hanging on the shower rod were bright white.

He reached into the shower and turned on the hot water. The tub was sparkling clean.

He opened the medicine cabinet looking for something to ease his pain. She had a bottle of Excedrin. He swallowed four with a handful of water, hoping to get the pulsing spike out of his right temple.

He checked the contents of the medicine cabinet while he waited for the shower to warm up. There was a typical assortment of products, plus two vials of prescription medicine. One was a half-full bottle of Penicillin VK. The other was Valium, 5 mg. Both were for Daryl Austen from a Dr. Vincent Colonia. The address on each was 166 E. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street.

The shower water was steaming. Devlin adjusted it with cold water and stepped in. The soothing water washed over his head and face and ran down his muscled belly. He filled his mouth with water, swirled it around, and spit it out.

He lathered all over twice, shampooed his hair and shaved with a Lady Bic razor he found in the shower. He dried himself off with a clean, blue towel and walked back to the bedroom. The bare wood floor felt clean under his bare feet.

Daryl was sitting up in bed with her arms crossed under her breasts. In the dim light that leaked around the window shades, she looked a lot better than Devlin expected. A hell of a lot better. He sat in a chair next to the bed and looked right straight at her. Her breasts were nearly perfect. There wasn't an ounce of fat on a stomach just

on the verge of showing some muscle. One long leg, uncovered by the sheet, was casually crossed over the other. The white sheet just about bisected her at the crotch.

She had a friendly, quizzical look on her face. A long, slim nose, full lips, and streaked blond hair that was permed into the crinkly style that made some women look sexy and others just look messy. On Daryl, it worked.

Maybe that's what you call a wry look, thought Devlin. He tried to see the color of her eyes in the dim light and decided they were probably blue.

Devlin liked the way she didn't seem at all bashful about being naked with a stranger.

"Did you ask me if my name was Helen?"

"Yes."

"You don't remember my name?"

"It's Daryl. Daryl Austen."

"Why'd you ask me, then?"

"I don't know."

"Were you thinking of someone else?"

"No. You get up this early every day?"

"Yes. Who was drunker last night, you or me?"

"I figure me."

"Did you tell me your name?"

"You don't remember my name?"

"No, are you insulted?"

"Yeah."

"Really?"

Devlin stood and began gathering his clothes. "No."

She asked, "How old are you?"

"You don't remember my age either?"

"You didn't tell me."

"How would you know?"

"Come on," she asked. "How old are you?"

“Thirty-eight, how old are you?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“I’m too old for you,” Devlin told her.

“The hell you are, with that face and body. So what *is* your name?”

He leaned over the bed and shook Daryl’s hand. “Jack Devlin. She shook his hand and looked at his swaying cock. “Not too shy, are you, Jack Devlin?”

“No.”

“Guess you don’t have to be, Jack.”

“Guess you don’t either, Daryl.”

“Thanks. See, if we keep repeating each other’s names, we’ll remember them.”

“I’ll remember yours. Daryl.”

“Is it too personal to ask where you got those interesting scars?”

“Yes.” Devlin found his underwear on the floor and stepped into it.

“I see. Well, Jack, how about that tan? How did you get such a dark tan so early in the season? You look like you’ve got a white bathing suit on from behind.”

“I was in the islands for a while.”

“Doing what?”

“Vacation.”

“Uh-huh.” She waited for more from Devlin, but it wasn’t coming. “Well, I see you’ve showered and all. A couple more minutes you’ll be dressed, and you can get the hell out of here without any more morning-after chitchat.”

Devlin looked to see if there was any anger in her, but she still had that crooked smile.

“I’m sorry, but I do have to leave.”

“Well, don’t leave before I tell you that I don’t usually go to bed with strange men I meet in bars.”

“I don’t see why you’d have to.”

“I don’t.”

“Why did you?”

“Because my fucking bastard of a boyfriend broke up with me, and I was angry and depressed, and I figured it would do me good to get laid.”

“Did it?”

“Yes, but I don’t like this hangover. And I don’t like the feeling that you want to leave as fast as you can.”

He told her, “It’s not because of you.”

“Why, then? You have to get to work?”

Devlin’s face twitched. He picked up his pants from the floor and stepped into them.

Daryl watched and waited for an answer.

Devlin said, “No, I’m not going to work. I kind of ran out on my brother back at that bar. I want to catch up with him.”

“That big guy you were with was your brother?”

“Yeah.”

“And you said you two were out drinking because . . .” She stopped herself and put her hand on her mouth. Then she asked, “Were you telling me the truth about your father?”

“Yes.”

“You really were?”

“Yes.”

“Oh shit. I’m sorry.”

Devlin was dressed except for buttoning his shirt. Daryl got out of the bed and walked quickly to her closet. She pulled out a robe and slipped it on with her back turned to him.

“Do you want any coffee or anything?”

“No. Thank you.”

“Come on. It’ll take another five minutes.”

“Okay.”

She left the bedroom, suddenly seeming remote and far away from him. As he put on his socks and shoes, he kept thinking about Daryl Austin’s smooth, sleek belly that curved so nicely down to the dark patch between her legs and her interesting quizzical smile that

had disappeared so quickly when she remembered why he had been drinking so fiercely.

They didn't talk much while they drank the coffee, but Devlin was glad he'd stayed. Daryl didn't ask him any more questions or push at him. She was quiet and respectful of his loss. She said she was sorry about his father and even told Devlin he'd better hurry and see about his brother.

By the time Daryl walked him to the door, Devlin felt off balance. It had been a long time since someone had been so understanding. He started to say something, but Daryl told him, "Don't say anything. My number is in the book if you want to see me again."

He nodded once and turned to find the elevator. He didn't look back when he heard Daryl's door shut.

When he walked out onto the street it was 8:25 A.M. Traffic was already building on Third Avenue, along with the New York summer heat and humidity. It was the middle of July. A patch of hot, humid air had descended on the city that wouldn't leave. It just sat there getting foul with carbon monoxide and the hot breath of eight million sweating people.

Devlin slipped on a pair of sunglasses he'd worn during the funeral to fend off the glaring daylight while he hailed a taxi.

He sat in the cab and smelled stale cigarette smoke and sweat on his clothes. At least the hangover was subsiding under the coffee and Excedrin.

He hoped George had remembered to leave his keys under the doormat. At the pub on Second Avenue, somewhere uptown in the Seventies or Eighties, Devlin had tried to explain the convoluted instructions for opening the doors in the loft building, unlocking the elevator, and hiding the keys.

They had been fiercely drunk. Black drunk, like men can get when someone they love dies. The drinking had started right after the funeral Mass in the church up in Larchmont. They drank with the family and friends throughout the afternoon, then into the evening.

So many in the family hadn't seen Jack in so many years that his presence became almost as much an event as his father's death.

When everyone finally left, the brothers dropped their polite faces and sat together in George's backyard, still drinking but more slowly—without the urgency of sadness, or anger, or the pressure of guests and family standing around them.

They sat side by side on two mildewed chaise lounges in George's backyard and talked to each other with a bottle of Jameson Irish whiskey sitting on the grass between them. As the warm summer daylight seeped away, George's kids came down one by one in their pajamas. They each got a drunken kiss and a rough hug from their daddy.

George was so big, the kids seemed to disappear for a moment when he hugged them. Jack sat quietly and watched the nightly ritual.

Jeanine was six. Brian was eight. Mary Margaret was ten. Mary Margaret was old enough to know her father had been drinking. It made the child worry. She didn't like it, but she respected her daddy too much to say anything.

By the time the last kid was in bed, there was no more daylight in the July summer sky. George's wife, Marilyn, had come out twice offering them food. George waved it off. Jack gently refused it.

Jack admired Marilyn. She was one of the few people who had his respect. In his boozy reverie, he started to idolize her. It took a good, confident woman to let them keep drinking and not try to force or cajole them out of their misery. She let them wallow comfortably in their recollections. She let them share their alcohol-tinged memories of their father and their temporary brotherly camaraderie.

"Did you think much about Dad dying some day?" asked Jack.

George pulled himself up and answered, "Sure. Guy gets to be eighty you think about it."

"You felt close to him?"

"I guess. I saw him at least once a month. Half the time the old bastard insisted on driving himself over here from Jersey.

"Dad really loved you, George."

“He loved you, too, Jack.”

“He thought I was okay, but he really loved you, George. You were such a damn good kid. Everybody loved you.”

“Aw, come on. Dad was proud as hell about you.”

“I know. He was one of the good guys, George.”

“Sure was.”

He was tough, but I liked him. I respected him. He was a gentleman. Worked hard all his life. Stuck with Mom. Sat next to her bed and took care of her for the whole year it took her to die.”

George nodded. “He sure did.”

He died well. Fast and neat. He hated worrying about needing someone to take care of him.”

George asked, “You talk to him much?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact.” Jack reached over and clutched his brother’s meaty shoulder. “I’m sorry I haven’t kept in better touch with you.”

“Ah shit, Jack, you don’t have anything to be sorry about.”

“No. It’s not good.”

“Why? You’re running around working for that outfit of yours. I’m here with the family. How we gonna see each other?”

“I could call. When was the last time I called you?”

“I could call, too. I know you’re out there if I need you. All I have to do is call that number for you, and your company finds you. Where were you?”

“Grand Cayman.”

“When I called about Dad, they got you in less than an hour. I could call more. What the hell were you doing in Grand Cayman?”

“Sort of a working vacation.”

Doing what? What does that company do?”

“Pacific Rim?”

“Yeah. What do they do?”

Jack waved his hand, “They use to call them detective agencies. Now they’re ‘security companies.’ Pacific Rim has lots of clients

based in the Pacific. Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese. Big electronics and manufacturing outfits. Lot of American clients, too.”

George asked. “What do *you* do for ‘em?”

Devlin shrugged, suddenly tired of all the whiskey in him. “Information. Protection. Security.”

“You like working for foreign clients?”

“I don’t work for the clients, really. I work for the guy who runs it. He’s smart, and he’s honest, and he has guts.”

“Who’s that?”

His name is William Chow. I met him when I was in Vietnam. He ran a supply service for the CIA. Had his own planes, trucks, the works. He never existed, but he knew everybody and everything.”

“Hooked in with the spooks.”

“Yeah, but not anymore. Not that I know of. He’s got his own organization. At a certain point, you got to have an organization behind you.”

“How come you left the Secret Service?”

“Had enough of the rules and regulations. Same with the military. They have tremendous power, George. Incredible resources. You wouldn’t believe what they can do. And then a bureaucrat somewhere makes a policy decision, and it all goes to shit.

“That ain’t the only place that happens.”

“In your job?”

“Sure.”

“What is it, Bristol-Myers?”

“Bristol-Myers Squibb now.”

“They merged?”

“Yeah, like everybody else.”

“So what do you do for ‘em, George?”

“Information. Protection. Security.”

Devlin laughed gently. He rubbed his face to push away some of the drunken haze. “Ah, George, we have to get together more often. We don’t even know how each other earns a living.”

“You’d be bored if I told you, and everything you do is a secret.”

“Hmm.” Devlin looked at the first stars appearing in the east, then turned again to his brother. “Mom’s gone. Dad. It’s just us now, George.”

“I guess so.” George took a thoughtful sip out of the Jameson bottle. “You going back to L.A.?”

“Soon.”

“You staying in Manhattan?”

“Yeah. A couple more days I guess. Got the company apartment.”

George looked at his brother. “What are you so fucking serious about?” He reached over and put his big hand on Jack’s arm and said, “I know you’re there. You know I’m here. You’ve got your life. I’ve got mine. It’s fine.”

“I know it’s fine. I know. You have a lovely life, George. You should be proud.”

George settled his head back on the chaise. “Yeah, why not.”

“You have those beautiful kids. They love you like a hero. Marilyn. She’s great.”

“It’s just like a billion other families, Jack.”

Devlin swept up the bottle from the lawn and thought about how soft his brother’s voice had become. “I guess so, George.” He took a burning swig and looked at his brother. “Last of the Mohicans, George.”

George looked back at him.

Suddenly Devlin stood up. “Come on, George, let’s get the hell out of here. I’m taking you to dinner.”

“Shit. I can hardly stand up.”

“Bullshit. Let’s get the hell out of this backyard and just do something away from this goddamn funeral.”

“The funeral’s over, Jack.”

“Not until I’m away from here it’s not. I’m not letting you shake my hand, pat me on the back, stick me in a cab, and make some promise to stay in touch. We’re going to spend at least one damn night together away from all this.”

George blinked once and said, “Okay.”

Devlin called a car service. He swore to Marilyn they wouldn’t drive, and twenty minutes later they stumbled out the door and into the black limo waiting at the bottom of George’s driveway.

Devlin took his brother to Palio on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. They had a drink in front of the great Sandro Chia murals in the downstairs bar while they waited for a table. Their Italian dinner sobered them enough to prompt a new round of drinking that took them up the East Side through more comfortable bars.

They were two big men talking about a dead father they both loved and missed deeply. Two brothers bumping along down the street not caring very much about who didn’t like it. Two sincere drunken men telling each other private things and making promises that both might later acknowledge but never actually keep.

And then, at the third bar, Devlin saw the blonde, and he was drunk enough not to ignore the sudden overwhelming urge for sex. He wanted to get close to her and take her home and strip and go as deep into her as he could. Go as deep as it took to turn aside the loss and stave off the emptiness.

There was so much power and energy in his good looks and boozy sincerity that when he asked, the girl just said, “Why not?”

He ambled over to George, who was playing darts with three other men. When Jack told him he was leaving, George at first looked confused and disappointed. But as soon as Jack pointed to the blonde, George smiled and slapped him on the back wishing him luck. George listened carefully while Jack gave him his keys and described how to get into the loft apartment.

In the hot light of the morning-after, the memory of George’s big drunken smiling face haunted Jack. He willed the cab to hurry down Second Avenue.

The street door to the loft building where he was staying was open during the day because of the commercial lofts on the first two floors. Security started in the elevator. Each floor had a lock. Jack had told

George to leave the seventh floor unlocked. That way the elevator would take him to his floor, and George could hide the keys under the mat outside the apartment.

The taxi driver dropped him off, the lobby door was open, and Devlin stepped into the elevator. He punched seven at the same moment he saw the floor was locked.

“Damn!”

He stepped off the elevator and looked up at the lobby ceiling as if he could see through it and up to the loft on the seventh floor. He pictured George dead asleep in his bed.

He walked out of the small lobby and turned left on West Broadway. His watch said ten minutes to nine. The hell with it, he thought, I’ll just have to wake him up.

Five rings and the answering machine came on. After the beep, Devlin yelled into the phone, “George, it’s me, Jack. Wake up!”

Nothing.

“Come on, George, wake up. I’m locked out. You have to let me in, George. Come on!”

Nothing.

He thought about it. The answering machine is in the living room. He’s in the bedroom. Maybe the door is closed.

“Shit.”

Devlin yelled louder, “Come on, George, wake up!”

People across the street stopped and looked at him. He stuck his head farther into the half-phone booth. “George!”

Nothing.

He could see his seventh-floor window halfway down the block. It seemed very far away. Nobody is in there, thought Devlin. Now what the hell do I do?

## CHAPTER 2

By nine o'clock, Marilyn Devlin was thinking the same thing. Her call had put her through the same anxious progression. From a first attempt to gently rouse the brothers, to an angry shout at the answering machine, to worry and confusion.

In the end, she decided to sit and wait. The kids were in school until three o'clock. George was taking the day off after the funeral. She didn't have to be anywhere until three when she had to pick up the children. She couldn't imagine not seeing George or at least hearing from him by then.

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Devlin sat in the Elephant & Castle restaurant on Prince Street getting annoyed at the Mozart playing softly in the background and sipping his tea. He didn't touch his omelet. He carefully ticked off the logical explanations in his head. Whatever explanation he came up with ended with him calling George's house. But what if George wasn't there? Marilyn would be going crazy.

He got up and went to the payphone in the entrance foyer to the restaurant. He had to call information for George's number. Marilyn answered on the first ring.

"Yes?"

"It's Jack."

"Where are you? I've been worried sick. There's no answer at your apartment."

*George wasn't there.* "I know. I'm locked out."

"What happened?"

"I gave George my keys. We got separated. I think he's up there sleeping, and he forgot to put the keys under the mat for me."

"What do you mean you got separated?"

"Look. Don't worry, Marilyn. Sit tight. I'm going to call a locksmith and get in there. I'll call you from the apartment."

"Jack, I don't understand. What's wrong? What's going on?"

"Marilyn, don't worry. I'll call you back."

He hung up before she could say anything more.

#

The locksmith pulled up in front of the building an hour later. He was in his fifties. His disheveled black hair flecked with gray. He had on green khaki pants and a cheap short-sleeved shirt. He looked as if he had seen a million broken doors and busted locks. "You Devlin?"

"Yeah."

"Tough night, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Lost your keys, huh?"

"Right."

"I should ask you if you have any verification that you have the right to enter the premises I am about to break into."

The words sounded serious, but the look on the locksmith's face wasn't. It was a pro forma sentence he recited to protect himself. Devlin took out his wallet and showed him a driver's license.

"That ain't even a New York license."

"It's a company apartment."

The locksmith shrugged. "Well, you look like a citizen. Don't worry about it."

Devlin said, "You got a license in case anybody asks?"

The locksmith looked at Devlin with a mixture of surprise and pleasure. "Absolutely. In nineteen goddamn years, no one has ever

asked to see my license. Once somebody asked me what I was doing drilling and pounding and banging open doors. And that one time all I said was ‘I’m a locksmith,’ and they backed right off. Never asked to see my license.”

He pulled out a well-worn wallet and started to thumb through a fat pocket filled with cards and papers. “You know I carry a copy of my license, figuring some cop or some super is gonna ask me for sure, but no one ever does. Well here you go, pal, licensed by the State and City of New York to wreak havoc on any and all locks that stand in my way.”

The license was copied on old Photostat paper, the kind copy machines used fifteen or twenty years ago. Devlin looked at the thick oily piece of paper. It had been folded in a wallet so long it would never flatten out. He peeled it open. Devlin had only asked as a joke, but now he wouldn’t dare not look at it. The locksmith’s name was Alphonse Lettieri.

“Well, Mr. Lettieri, it looks official to me. Let’s go.”

“Fuckin’ right it’s official.”

Lettieri drilled out the cylinder lock on the elevator and the Medeco lock on the front door in minutes. The inexpensive lock above the door handle gave him the most trouble. The drill started to turn the whole cylinder, and Lettieri had to pry away the collar protecting it and then pull out everything.

Devlin stood watching wondering he would do if his brother wasn’t in there, already knowing he wasn’t. Not even George could sleep through this break-in.

A quick look around the apartment told Devlin that George had never been there. It was 10:48 A.M.

A cold flash of anger and worry hit Devlin’s stomach. He walked quickly to the bedroom and saw the telephone answering machine blinking with messages.

He pushed the button, impatient for his brother’s voice to come on and tell him where he was and what happened. The machine beeped and played back his own voice and Marilyn’s instead.

“Christ, now what?” Devlin muttered to himself.

He sat on the edge of the bed. He wanted to start calling hotels, but he knew the first calls should be to the police and hospitals.

Lettieri came back from his truck with a new set of locks for the front door. Devlin had an absurd urge to ask him what to do. Lettieri looked at Devlin and knew something was wrong. “What happened?” he asked.

“My brother was supposed to stay here last night. I gave him my keys. Apparently, he didn’t make it here. Might have decided to stay at a hotel instead.”

“Guy doesn’t show up in this fucking city, you’ve got to start checking.”

“I’d better get on the phone.”

Lettieri ambled back to the front of the apartment. Jack reached under the table next to the bed and pulled out the White Pages. He turned to the back. A map showed the boundaries of each police precinct.

The last bar they had visited was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Precinct. He dialed the number. A woman’s voice answered mechanically, “Nineteenth Precinct, Collins.”

Devlin asked if there were any reports or contact with a man named George Devlin. When asked why, he explained that George Devlin was missing. He was connected to another officer who took Devlin’s information and put him on hold.

Lettieri walked back into the bedroom.

Devlin asked, “Done?”

“Yeah.”

He handed Devlin a set of keys. “Here’s your new keys.”

“How much do I owe you?”

From his back pocket, Lettieri pulled out a rectangular metal case. He took out a form and tore off the first copy. He handed it to Devlin, stowing a pink and yellow copy in the back of the case. Devlin looked at the total—\$401.60.

Lettieri saw his expression and said, “Expensive night out.” Devlin started to read the itemized entries. The locks, keys, labor, collars, tax. It added up. He took four one-hundred-dollar bills and a fifty out of his pocket. Just then the voice from the police precinct came back on. He held the bills and listened.

“No report on any Devlin. If he doesn’t show up in two days you can file a missing persons report.”

“Two days?”

“Right.”

“Okay, thanks. If you get any information, can I give you a number to contact me?”

“Yes, but until a missing persons report is filed any number you give me won’t automatically cross-check with the computer reports, so it won’t do much good.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Devlin hung up the phone and handed the bills to Lettieri. “Here you go.”

Lettieri started to fish for change. Devlin told him, “Keep it. I appreciate the fast service.”

“You’re welcome. Hey. It’ll work out. He’ll turn up. He’s probably sleeping it off in some broad’s apartment.”

Devlin looked at Lettieri and realized the whole thing was so goddamn typical even the weathered locksmith had figured it out. Trouble was, he had the wrong brother shackled up in some broad’s apartment.

# CHAPTER 3

Susan Furlong's apartment was cold. The air conditioner was set too low. No one else was there to turn it up, and the cold kept her wrapped up in her bed. Outside it was 91 degrees at four-thirty in the afternoon.

In the last eight years, she had been Susan Franklin, Sandra Frost, Susan Frisch, and Sarah Freund.

Susan Furlong was a brunette, as was Susan Frisch. Sandra Frost was a light redhead. Sarah Freund had been blond, which was closer to Susan's real color—light brown.

And the real Susan was Susan Ferlinghetti. Although the problem right now in the twilight moment from sleep to consciousness was whether or not there was a real Susan Ferlinghetti anymore.

Sometimes Susan had to stop and convince herself she had it right. That happened too often, and it never failed to remind her of the day not too long ago when she woke up with a nose bleeding from snorting too much cocaine, not knowing the name she was using, where she was, or how she got there. And not being able to completely sort it out for almost five minutes. That was truly terrifying.

That was the day she determined that she would never let her life slip so far away from her again. It had only taken about four years for it to get out of control. But the process had started a long time before that. Probably at the moment she first realized she was so beautiful, so extraordinary that with the right smile or raising of an eyebrow or direct gaze with her piercing green eyes, she could get most of what she wanted.

By the time she was twelve, Susan knew she had an almost frightening power over boys. There wasn't one of them in the entire seventh grade who would refuse her anything. The smart ones gave her their homework and answers to tests. The tough ones gave her protection from anyone who would dare bother her.

Susan was the kind of girl that boys would stare at and not care if they got caught. She was the kind of girl who drove Sister Mary Agnes Theresa crazy. The nun constantly yelled at her for being brazen. She snatched at the belt on Susan's school uniform, pulling it and loosening it so it wouldn't emphasize Susan's figure, which was already fuller and more stunning than many women's.

And Susan was just there, not even trying. She took her looks and her body just as they were. She accepted the power she had without really thinking about it. She had other things to think about. She had her mother, Marie, who had to work like a slave because her worthless husband was either gone, or drunk when he did show up. And she had her sister Rosalie, who was the smartest kid in school but was also skinny and nervous and frail. And she had Cecilia.

In those days, kids like Cecilia weren't called special kids or disadvantaged or Down syndrome kids. They were called Mongoloids, or just dummies.

Ceece never meant to cause any problem or pain, but even when Susan was twelve, she knew that someday, someone would have to take care of Ceece.

And Susan loved Ceece too much to let anything bad happen to her. Susan had loved Ceece from the day she was born. She was so cute. So sweet. Susan and Rosalie would play with her for hours. And for years, Ceece stayed tiny and playful and funny. Like a little monkey. A toy. A doll. Susan used to think, if Ceece could have only stayed that way, so tiny and cute, someone would always love her and care for her.

The nuns let Ceece stay at St. Cornelia grammar school through the eighth grade. Most of the time the kids treated her well. While

Susan was in the school, no one dared make fun of Ceece. If anybody made Ceece cry, there were plenty of older boys ready to prove to Susan no one could get away with that. Ceece had her place in the school and the neighborhood for a good long while. After grammar school, Ceece stayed home with Marie. And after Marie . . . Susan knew it would be up to her to find a place for Ceece.

By high school, Susan was very pragmatic about her beauty. She used it to cultivate the right guy. Get to the right parties. Ride in the best cars. There was always a look that made every boy sit up and do her bidding.

But Susan knew that was kid's stuff. She knew that someday her body and her face and piercing eyes and shining hair would have to earn enough to take care of Marie and Ceece. Especially Ceece.

When she was sixteen, Susan figured her best shot was to become an actress. A movie star. When she told her mother her plan, Marie treated it like everything else . . . just something happening at the moment that would soon pass. Rosalie wanted to get on American Bandstand, Ceece wanted to fly in an airplane, Susan wanted to be an actress.

"Fine," said Marie. "After you finish high school and enough college to earn a living, then you can be an actress."

Susan was too smart to argue. She sat and listened to her mother, but she knew what she was going to do whether her mom liked it or not.

Susan did finish high school. Then she enrolled in Manhattan Community College, and Marie let her get an apartment in the city. Within six weeks she stopped going to class and started working full-time.

By January she had enrolled in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts on Madison and 36<sup>th</sup> Street, and she was on her own, pursuing her dream.

Too late for Marie or anybody else to do anything about it because Susan had her own place and her own money and she made

sure to send fifty dollars of it back home every month no matter what. If she had to survive on one can of tuna fish a day and pay the rent late and wash her clothes by hand, she sent Marie and Ceece that fifty dollars.

The dream kept her going. It seemed so easy to make that dream start to happen. She remembered exactly how she felt when Lloyd Cuttler, the director of the Academy, told her she had passed her audition and handed her the contract to fill out. A contract. She was already signed up to be a star. February 1979. The movie just hadn't hit the theaters yet.

She was so excited the day she enrolled that she had to sit down at a Chock Full O'Nuts on Madison and order a cup of coffee. She glowed. She wanted to laugh. She couldn't stop smiling. The waitress who served the coffee stared at her.

The dream and the excitement lasted about two months before it all started to turn sour.

Her apartment was on the sub-ground floor of a townhouse on 38<sup>th</sup> between Lexington and Third. When you first walked in, it could almost seem charming, but after you'd lived a couple of weeks in the gloom, the charm was gone.

And the money to pay for it was difficult to accumulate every month.

Susan worked as a waitress, a sales clerk at Macy's, then at Bloomingdale's, then as a waitress again. She worked all day. Hard. Then she went to classes at the Academy four nights a week.

It didn't take her long to realize that just about anyone who could walk and talk would have passed that *audition*.

And for some reason, her instructors seemed to make a point about not letting Susan think she was special. She purposely held back directing the "look" at her instructors. She wanted to be recognized for her talent. She knew they watched her. She knew they were looking at her face and her body, but it seemed they were paying less attention to her because she was beautiful. It was as if the ugly girls were going to be the real actresses, and she was just going to be some bimbo.

Her classmates were even worse.

Susan worked hard in her acting classes, but she always felt as if she were struggling upstream against a constant flow of egos. Every gesture, every word, before, during, and after class was from someone trying to get attention. No one had any desire to pay anyone else any attention because they wanted it all for themselves. It was very different for the girl who had always been the center of attention without really trying.

Outside, of course, there was plenty of attention paid to Susan Ferlinghetti. Outside the men were there, and that saved Susan and condemned her at the same time.

In the restaurants where she worked owners, bartenders, and waiters came on to her. As did the customers. At Macy's and Bloomingdale's, it was male bosses and customers. The men who tried too hard to meet her while she was waiting on them were usually the most fun—and the biggest pains in the ass. The bosses were generally good for the best meals. Fellow workers were invariably the worst.

During that first year, Susan carefully picked out a steady set of three men. One was William, a wealthy married man who bought her the best meals, lots of clothes, and sometimes even jewelry. Once in a while, a weekend away.

Richard was her second steady. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. She picked him up. He was dining alone and reading a book while he ate. Richard turned out to be gay, which was a relief.

She never had to sleep with Richard, but he was always willing to keep her company. Richard taught her more than any man she had ever been with.

Their dates were generally Saturday or Sunday afternoons. Parts of the week that Susan hated to be alone. They went to museums, galleries, and theater matinees. She learned how to gossip with Richard. She learned who was in, what was hip, and how to make the right

cutting remark or shrug something off. Susan even learned how to read *The New Yorker* from Richard.

The third steady was Bruce. He appeared to be normal. He was single. He was handsome. And there was no reason at all that Susan shouldn't relax and enjoy being with him. Unfortunately, Bruce was an alcoholic who refused to admit it.

Dates were Knicks games or movies or dancing in the latest place. But every date started with dinner, and every dinner ended with Bruce drunk enough to keep himself firmly separated from reality. Bruce even mixed a half-pint of Jack Daniel's with his Coke in the movies. Bruce was the only one who was really exciting in bed. He would do anything. The booze made him wild.

Interspersed with her steady three were occasional flings with men who could provide her with what she needed at the time. A meal. A ticket to a play she wanted to see. A limo ride home. A gram of coke. Entree to the hottest club. Sometimes a couple of hundred-dollar bills. She had to pay the rent after all. And send money to Marie and Ceece. And pay Ceece's increasing medical bills. And fill out applications for state schools. And hope Marie would hang in with her arthritis and congestive heart and swollen ankles for long enough until Ceece got into a good state school. They said the waiting list was five years.

Eventually, Susan stopped her acting classes. She gave up on the endless auditions. And gradually gave up real jobs. Without thinking about it or planning it, Susan Ferlinghetti had become a soft hooker. And if she had any doubt about that being the hard truth, Robert Wexler taught Susan what she had become once and for all.

Susan checked the clock next to her bed. The red digital numbers said 5:27 P.M.

Wexler would be coming to pick her up for dinner around eight-thirty. They would eat at some restaurant by ten. After dinner, Wexler would visit various clubs and nightspots until about three in the morning. By three-thirty, Susan would be in place as the hostess

in Wexler's after-hours club. By that time, he would essentially be done with her, and she would have consumed a sufficient amount of alcohol to greet the guests. She knew the alcohol had replaced the cocaine habit. But she told herself she was controlling it. And she wouldn't get a hole in her nasal septum from drinking.

Susan Furlong got out of her bed and began the ritual of putting herself together for Robert Wexler.