

The Hole in the Rabbit

By

Amy Sewell

PART I – Heritance / Downers Grove, Illinois. 1970s

Chapter 1 – BANG

The car comes around the corner faster than it can handle. Screeching. Goodyears burning skid marks into the road. Our heads, as if on bobbing pivots, swivel fast, and our bodies trail in slow motion, jackknifing any and all ability to maneuver quickly, if at all. We are able to do absolutely nothing but be stormed by the old clunker of a car, bouncing like a boat on shallow-troughed whitecaps, ferrying neighborhood hoodlums. The driver regains control in enough time to come to an alarming halt, shaking the chassis and shuddering the rusted steel panels that pass for coupe doors.

The barrel of the gun suddenly lifts, cocks, steadies, and aims.

CLICK.

“BANG!” someone yells.

We throw our bodies directly backward, vertically, propelled by a self-imagined force, blasted down by a firehouse hose. Our limbs flap out front, too late to the game, rag dolls riveted by bullets (that never come). Our tail bones hit earth first, our heads whipping back and then forward. Once down, we strain to prop onto our elbows, to witness our last breaths, and to take note of who took them from within the big ol’ turd of a car.

Laughter. *Laughter?* Loud, horrifying, bullying, bold, forced cackles come from the car.

Wind-knocked torsos, our tailbones hold hostage a stinging pain until we think the “coast is clear.” Our ears ring, dizzy, nauseous. Our bodies splay out, legs sprawl wide, chests up and out. Our retinas fight to focus, focus, focus.

The blur clears—four panting, shaggy-haired heads, their mouths wide open. Each with its own collection of crooked teeth stands as a monument to trouble and slow decay in all ways.

They grin. They laugh. *Laughing.*

“Motherfu. . .” Pam exhales, out of breath. All that comes out of me is a short gasp of air, hardly enough for my inhale to help me catch my breath.

“Pussies! Look at the pussies!” one of the idiots blurts out.

“Fuck yeah,” another idiot confirms.

“Fuck you,” Pam hammers back.

“Fuck YOU!” comes back from the first idiot.

“Motherfucker,” Pam says as she leans forward and begins to crawl methodically on all fours. Panting. Panting. Panting. “Do. . . you. . . know. . . who my motherfucking brother is?” she hisses out as she stalks toward the car, a lioness approaching prey.

“Holy shit, step on it!” says Idiot #1.

“Fuck! Johnny’s. . . it’s. . .” says Idiot #2.

“Ha!” Idiot #3, in the passenger front side seat, laughs. “No, no, don’t go. Let’s see what she does.”

“Come on Scott! Don’t mess around!” says Idiot #2.

Pam is getting closer. Her red, frizzy hair appears to light up and then expand out, resembling the hairs that stand up on the back of a dog when threatened. Her green eyes narrow, locking in, collecting info.

“Nah, you come on. Now who’s the pussy?” laughs Idiot #3, who we discover is “Scott,” the one who shot the gun.

“Aw shit, man,” says Idiot #1.

The driver is silent, unruffled, and amused, his jet-black hair and dark eyes holding court above his very precise and well-cared-for Fu Manchu. More detached than the others, he watches Pam out of the corner of his eyes. He keeps the car idling.

A couple of feet from the car, Pam stands up, placing her hands on her hips as she begins to take a mental inventory. Pam earned herself a bit of a reputation as a crazy bitch and her older brother John, most definitely as one bad dude—not to be messed with. Johnny ruled the West Side. When he dropped out of high school, he became a culinary kid-wonder at a local hotspot, but even this remained a side hustle, second to the much more lucrative and exciting world of cocaine.

I am no living angel, and I have cache due to my brothers, (mostly Billy) and my sassy sister, Marilyn. Where Pam has balls, I have restraint. I hold back to calculate the situation, as I am all too well aware that things can flare south awfully fast, so I try to err on the side of calm and cool.

“Let’s see, we have Scott and Dean. Hey Dean,” Pam addresses the driver. Dean gives her a nod. Scott smiles at such an intimate exchange embellished with mutual respect.

She continues, “Idiot #1 in the back is Steve? Steve Grayden? Am I right? And you,” she says pointing to Idiot #2, “. . . you’re Beth’s brother, right? Rich? Rich Kessler?”

“It’s cool, Pammy,” Scott says.

“Is it Scott? Is it?” asks Pam.

“All good fun,” says Scott.

“What?” asks Pam.

“Good fun. It’s not loaded,” Scott says. He waves the gun around, back and forth, his way of gesturing it is not loaded.

Pam turns to look at me, a literal red line of flush flowing up and through her face, from chin to hairline.

“Jesus Christ. You’re fucking kidding me,” she mumbles, shaking her head in disbelief. “It’s not loaded! It’s not loaded!” She mimics Scott in a whiny voice,

Pam turns back to the bandits, hands even more firmly planted, her nails digging into her pelvic bones, “That’s really fucked up. F-u-c-k-e-d UP!”

“Ah, come on. It was nothing Pammy,” Scott purrs.

“You’re still gonna pay,” Pam seethes.

“I’m sure I will. Just not now. Not today. Johnny doesn’t need to know. . .” Scott replies with an upward inflection as if he’s asking a question. Then, without moving his head off Pam, his eyes suddenly shift over to me. His glare strikes me, equivalent to a shock. My heart pounds. I feel the heat.

There is a long, unusual pause. It’s the slice of space and time, an adjustment between opposite sexes. Boys, “men,” can’t help it. Their brains are relooping from fucking around to actually fucking. You can see it if you catch the pause. If you watch closely, the slight squirming. Their overheated, sweaty balls in need of rearrangement. The intrusion of new thoughts glazed with testosterone. Here they come. Who will be first? Here it is, the icebreaker!

“Who’s your friend?” Scott asks.

Pam turns and looks at me. I am standing about six feet back. She throws a hitchhiker's thumb my way, smirking in wonder at what the hell Scott was asking.

“Who . . . her?” Pam asks, bewildered. “You know who she is, Scott. Don’t be dumb.”

“I think . . . uh . . . Grac . . . ?” he tries to muster.

“Don’t start thinking Scott, you ass-wipe, might be dangerous!” Pam says, holding her hand up flat as a crossing guard would to keep traffic stopped, signaling to keep still and say nothing.

“Sheesh. Idiot. It’s Mar—” Pam says, giving him a break.

“Ah, yeah, right. Marilyn’s sister.” Scott interrupts Pam, catching himself thinking out loud, slinking a bit in embarrassment of being “less than,” at one time, to the hottest girl in high school.

“Yeah, ha, you’ve *been there*,” Pam slips in, her snide remark sending the pent-up backseat boys into an outburst of whoops and hollers.

“Righhht,” Scott says, resigning himself to the half-baked memory of a time not so great. Marilyn was a lot. His defeated tone indicates he couldn’t please her. No one could. No one can and I wasn’t going to let him in on that. As we “pussies” have few weapons in our arsenal, we have to guard each other’s power.

“Idiots,” Pam says while brushing the grass from her hands.

I catch Scott glance my way again, insecure. I find it amusing that he still didn’t get my full name out. I am always the little sister. At this juncture, it doesn’t matter. As usual, it is the Pam Show now.

“Johnny’s gonna love . . .” Pam continues, a pitch higher, close to yelling.

“Alright Pammy,” Dean cuts in, impatient, bored, “let’s make this right. Can we take you ladies somewhere?”

“We’re waiting for friends,” Pam says.

“Okay then, you need a smoke? A toke? What’s your pleasure?” Dean says, whispering seductively, rattling off his wares.

Pam stares at the ground, thinking. A genuine and thoughtful moment.

“What about you two, maybe a few other friends too, if you want, come to Tony’s party Friday night?” Scott breaks in. Idiot #2 hems, protesting from the backseat, but Dean glares at him in the rearview mirror. He bows his head and settles reverently.

“That’ll work,” Pam declares. “We want carte blanche with the party offerings.” She turns and looks at me, “Whattaya want to drink?” Par for the course, as usual, without waiting for my answer, she turns around and says, “A fifth of Seagrams and a six-pack – make that a twelve-pack of Molson. Golden. Si. Vous. Plait.”

“Ehhh, y-y-ou got it,” Scott replies. He turns to Dean who gives a nod. “We’ll see you ladies later then.”

Ladies?

Scott hits the side of the door twice with his hand, a “giddy up” to Dean, who takes two fingers to his forehead, offering a loose, military-like wave as they peel off, screeching louder than when they came, reinforcing the skid marks, which serve as neighborhood reminders of who rules the roost.

“Cool, right?” Pam turns to me, smiling, eyebrows up as if she just bagged a cat.

“Totally,” I reply, enthused in agreement, but I wiggle a little, physically in discomfort due to having peed my pants a little.

The clunker speeds off. Next stop, to the house of the guy we get pot from sometimes, to catch a quick hit before school. He recently bought this new electronic or mechanical bong—something new and enhanced in the world of “bongography.”

The buzz from the shot of whiskey Pam and I downed before we left my house has been scared away by the wanna-be outlaws. We wait for a few more of our friends, moving in slow circles around each other, touching each other's shoulders, and running our hands down each other's arms. A little dance, weaves in with a little bored, waiting, as if nothing happened. Nothing really to talk about at that age (fifteen) in those times (the seventies). Everything is as it is supposed to be. Anything that is not will soon settle to that next level of midwestern-bred malaise, carried in the air and spread like pixie dust. It keeps everyone moving along in life.

###

Chapter 7 – CRUNCH

“There is no sense in pretending. Your eyes give you away. Something inside you is feeling like I do. We said all there is to say,” we belt out, top of our lungs, really loud, really bad, on our way to this tiny little dive in Chicago’s Old Town. Because the day is beautiful, the kind of beauty that makes one mindless, feeling like floating on air, we get lost on side roads detouring into and through the South Side to take in its colorful and soulful, if not slightly precarious, ambiance. It is the kind of neighborhood where you keep the windows down and music blaring to display your sense of assumed connection with *that* community, but the click of the auto-lock on the doors keeps that link in its proper place in reality. Autumn brings with it a crispness to promote bulky sweaters, jean jackets and weathered leather boots.

“Baby Breakdown, go ahead and give it to me. Breakdown honey take me through the night. Breakdown now I'm standing here can't you see. Breakdown, it's alrighttttttt. It's alrighttttt. It's al–”

CRUNCH!

Screeching and swerving. My head bobs, whiplashing, the force of no control. I hear Scott yell, “Ff-F-F-FUCK!”

“S-S-S-SCOTT!” I scream, not fully grasping whether this actually comes out of me or is in my head. My tongue is sticking to the back of my front teeth, my lips purse, glue together tight in fear.

Pam and Dean are in the back seat.

I never hear them scream.

Chapter 8 – CLICK-TICK

Click-tick. Click-tick. Click-tick.

I open one eye. I feel a coating on my face. A veil. A sheer curtain. It feels dusty, but thicker, small shavings of trimmed hair from a quick haircut. My clenched jaw allows only a sliver of my mouth open to exhale. I blow off the “hairs.” It’s a major effort for barely any breath. What I see hit the air is light and clear and in crystal form.

Glass.

I inhale through my nose, with care and caution, and exhale harder this time, pushing my lower lip further out to make sure my breath funnels right up over my face. Larger shards take flight and drop fast. My lap is covered in even bigger chunks of glass. My right eye does not open so I glance, carefully, with my left. I see Scott’s head tilted back, bleeding at the forehead. I cannot turn my neck around to see Dean and Pam. I don’t need to.

Pam is up on the side of the road. Her body contorted beyond any hope. Disjointed arms. Her leg wrapped behind her, backwards, with a foot twisted another ninety degrees further. Her face is one glassy sheet of fresh blood. She is scalped. Made of steel, never to be messed with, now all a facade, a betrayal beyond her body; one of her soul.

I do not see Dean.

Click-tick. Click-tick. Click-tick.

That sound. The turn signal is jammed.

The other car is tossed up onto its side, in the ditch that separates the road from the Jack-In-The-Box at that intersection.

I see three guys in that car and there is a fourth, outside the car, in a white shirt soaking quickly to red. Blood. Face planted, body bent, legs broken backwards. A smaller car than our Caddy, a beat up clunker, completely totaled.

Sirens, from afar, grow louder. In no time we are surrounded by three patrol cars, a fire engine, and last to arrive, two EMS trucks. Everyone gets to work quickly. Roping off the roads, diverting traffic, triaging the situation. I sit still, in silence. I let go. Of everything. I have to. I have to let go of everything. I need to breathe. I need to sleep. I need to let go. At the same time that I am relaxing, to let go, to let someone help me, I am remembering one thing. One important thing.

It is the first time I experience, “there is nothing we can do about it.” And in truth, since “it” is every moment in life, I’m surprised we don’t live like that all the time.

Pam died instantly.

Dean survived but lost a leg and suffered from severe, chronic back issues. He leaned heavily into relieving the pain before he overdosed five years to the day after the accident.

The police were “nice” enough, knowing Scott’s father, who is a labor union negotiator, well known to the Chicago Boys in Blue. They disregarded the trunk full of guns and ammo, passing it off with a comment that we got lucky we were not hit from behind as it could have been “a real shit show,” “explosion-city,” “mother-fucking lights out.”

The kid thrown from the other car died instantly. His body just as splayed out, damaged, twisted into deformity as Pam's and Dean's but mind was not paid to him. He would be inventoried later.

No witnesses. No other evidence. Those other three kids, from the South Side, just on the other side of what everyone referred to as "the boundary," the driver, will be tried for manslaughter, and later convicted. The two who survived will not have stories told about them. Border mishaps get buried due to the same conclusion for the 'others' all too often.

Scott saw the red light.

I saw the red light.

We both saw the red light. The only ones who saw it, too late. We never spoke of it, ever.

Click-tick.

###