

## 2. MISTAKEN IDENTITY

I have just finished the third semester at community college. I am about to start another semester when my mother gets a call from an old college roommate. She has the perfect opportunity for me.

Gwen calls my mother, “Francine, my dear friend Steffe is in the music biz. He’s got a studio in his house. And he’s going to Mexico on business for a couple of months. He needs someone to watch his place”

So Steffe arranges for me to come out to California.

“I don’t know if recording really interests you, but you may want to see what I’ve got.”

Indeed he has a pretty good set up. Isolated rooms, great out board gear, powerful speakers. He’s got it all. I’ve already worked with ProTools. And I’m also quite proficient on the board. So he pretty much leaves me to work on my own. He figures that his stuff will be in good hands.

He shows me my room down in the basement adjoining the studio. He even has an extra car that I can use. A Red Lexus sportscar. It’s a couple of years old. In mint condition. This seems too good to be true.

Steffe advises me, “You have to be sure that your fantasies are based in reality.”

I feel as if his reality is based in his fantasy. He doesn’t really know how the other half lives.

Steffe does some film work. And he has recorded some local bands. But he gets most of his work in advertising. He is quite obviously very successful. I feel that I can learn a great deal from him. He realizes that Gwen has provided him with a trustworthy house sitter. He explains the alarm system to me.

“I really don’t mind you entertaining here. Just don’t overdo it.” Then he adds, “My house is yours.”

Of course it is. I am going to make myself at home for the time being. Steffe leaves early the next morning without waking me. He leaves a list of things to take care of. I am now on my own. Steffe realizes that I will have some expenses out here. He leaves some money. It is all part of the deal. He suggests that I try to budget for the two months that I am out here. There is already loads of food here. There is a cooler stocked with various things as well. Steffe has a great HDTV. I spend my first night alone watching DVD’s. I am learning about his fantasy life. And I am trying to make it my temporary reality.

On my first day alone, I gorge myself on pizza and beer. I fall asleep while watching a movie. The next day I feel wiped out. It’s a warm afternoon. I stretch out by his pool. This is the life. Why wasn’t I born into this? I start thinking about how it might be cool to get some models to come back here for a party. I know that I am letting my fantasy already get out of control. This is what happens when you have enough money to indulge your dreams.

The next evening, I leave my palatial surroundings to head into the storm. I find a bar on the strip. It has that sleazy appeal that seems perfect for my darker intrigues.

“Is that your car in the parking lot?” one of the patrons asks.

I am hardly the only car that is parked outside. But I guess that he has me in mind.

“Yes, it is my car. Did someone run into it or something?”

“No it just looks like a car that I had.”

I ask him, “You’re not threatening me with auto theft.”

“Not at all. Just curiosity. Sorry that I startled you that way. Let me buy you a drink.”

His tells me that he is a friend of Steffe’s.

“My name is Stony. Not stoner, it’s Stony.” Stony is a drummer who’s done some session work with Steffe.

“I don’t want to make it seem that I’m unreliable. But Steffe and I did have a bit of a row.”

Stony is one rough dude. He’s a real veteran of bar fights. He’s worked as a stunt man. He rides a Harley. He’s also an accomplished photographer. There’s a real bizarre side to him as well. He has something strange going on about him. I feel that he’s been doing some real weird shit, criminal stuff.

Stony can be this really nice guy. He feeds me drinks all night. But he’s also the kind of guy that you don’t cross. He has more than a casual connection to Steffe. He’s been over to the house more than a few times. He sort of gets the party going. I’m not sure what all this means. I know that he can handle anything that’s a little shady.

As the night wears on, it’s clear that Stony attracts some really questionable women. This is all part of that bizarre side of his. Rank porno girls. Rocks girls who do too much meth. Strippers from some real dives.

It might sound as if I am jumping to conclusions with this guy. I’ve practically reserved a cell for him in San Quentin, and we’re just hanging out for the night. He’s been a real prince to me. He has my back if there’s any sort of trouble. And he’s a friend of Steffe’s. I just have this feeling.

He wants to bring a couple of girls over to the house to keep the party going. I have to say that I’m a little tempted. But I am still new to LA. And I want to get more of the hang of things before I start taking chances. I have no doubt that Stony knows Steffe and that he’s been to the place. I just take a rain check with him.

I talk to Steffe the next day. I tell him that things are going well.

“There was this weird coincidence, Steffe. I met this guy Stony. He told me that he was a friend of your.”

“Stony is one weird mother. You didn’t bring him buy to the house.”

I reassure Steffe, “No, I’m cautious about who I bring by.”

“Good,” Steffe informs me. “That Stony was involved in the disappearance of some girl. He even brought her to the house.”

This is starting to take a twisted turn. I start off doing a favor to my mom, and now I’m involved with this psycho. He even knows where I’m staying. I’m already freaking out a little. I was having so much fun. It was pure freedom. And now this!

That night I’m afraid to even leave the house. I’m not sure what I’m going to find on my own. By the next day, I realize how silly I’ve been.

I head over to Whole Foods for a snack. It gives me a chance to look at the fit and upscale as they turn grocery shopping into a fashion event. That evening I go see TV on the Radio play a show at a club in Echo Park. I park the car where it is safe. No marginal types approach me while I am in the bar.

The singer of the band is definitely in his own world. He almost seems like this wild prophet. The one guitar player is a stoic. He just works himself up by sheer concentration. The other guy is stooped over. He is so absorbed in what he is doing. This girl next to me is a little distracting. She is trying to hit me up for a drink. She tells me that she knows the guitar player from back in New York,

“Cool,” I say.

I buy her a drink. I’m thinking that I might get to hang out with the band. Nothing doing! She goes off to find another more willing type. By the time that she disappears, the band is done. It’s still not that late. But it’s not like they have clubs open until 5 here. I just go back to the house.

I am a little groggy in the morning. Maybe it was from watching TV when I came home. I prop myself and look next to me.

“Shit!”

It’s that New York girl from last night. She’s in the bed next to me. I jump up out of bed. I am freaked. She isn’t even moving. I wasn’t that drunk that I’d forget about something like that.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!”

I want to get back into bed and just lie still and this will all go away. What’s happened? Has Stony snuck in while I was out?

I know that I am a sound sleeper. But I would have heard something if it was going on next to me. Even if someone was in the house. I am already paranoid enough. And little sound would have awakened me. I sit down on the ground and just look at the bed.

Then I really wake up. I just lie there for a good five minutes. My dream has seemed so real. I pull the covers down just to make sure. Good—no body. I am safe.

My dream has really freaked me out. I’ve seen this kind of shit in a movie. But that kind of stuff doesn’t happen to people like me. Sure, I deviate a little from the norm. However, I’m not in the abnormal zone. Not quite.

I’m thinking twice about looking in Steffe’s cooler. I know that my imagination is getting the better of me. That’s the way that it goes.

That night I have to get out. I head for the club where I saw TV on the Radio. There are some local bands playing—Interpol clones. I get a beer and stand by the bar. Wendy is giving me the eye. She is in a polka dot dress. It is a little warm, but she is dressed up. She is very friendly. I think about taking her by to the place. I have to do more work to get her in the mood.

“Wendy, do you want another drink?”

I get her a gin and tonic. She does graphic design. She has a job making cartoons. She is doing well in the city since moving here from Iowa.

“It was a little scary at first. I could barely make my rent payments. But then everything started to fall into place.”

She is bopping to the band. There is a quaint appeal to her moves. She turns to me and whispers something in my ear. I can barely hear what she is saying. I try and get into the band. The singer drones on. He takes himself so seriously. He is trying to gesture dramatically.

Wendy seems so sweet. I am staring at her lips. She puts on a charming face and looks back at me. I put my hand on her shoulder. After the band finishes, she is getting restless. I want

to stay with her. I don't want her to disappear into the darkness. I am so clumsy. I feel as if I am going to crush her. She is too much for me. She really likes being with me. But I have no social graces to smooth things over. I don't want to appear too eager.

When I walk her to her car, she gives me her hand. I can already sense a closeness. At the car she pauses and reaches up to me. I kiss her. Neither of us wants to let go.

She tells me, "I don't want to rush things. We can hang out again. You're going to be here for a while." She gives me her number. I go back to my car.

As I am driving home, I check my watch. It is a little before 2. I stop at a drive through for a taco. I am waiting for my food and enjoying the night. I am riding the high from her kisses. When I finally pull away from the drive-through, I am hardly in a hurry to get home. There is no one there waiting for me. I just pull to the side of the road and take a breath. I don't want it all to pass by too fast. This is my time. I finish my food. I am a little tired. Maybe it's a good time to head home.

As I pull up to the house, there is something strange going on. The gate is open and the lights are on. I feel like I should call the police. I want to see what is really happening. I slowly wind my way up the driveway. I am a little cautious. Things freak me out when I see a bunch of cars in the driveway, and the door is open.

It is pretty clear that it is the police who are doing an investigation. It seems so strange for them to be here at this moment.

"Who are you?" he blocks me from going in.

"I'm living here for now."

He calls to one of the other plainclothes officers. "It's the guy who lives here."

The lead detective comes over to me. "I'm Lieutenant Fitzgerald. You're Steffe, aren't you?"

"No, Steffe is out of town. What's happened here?"

"There was a girl murdered here. We got a tip and decided to investigate. Steffe, just hang on."

"I'm not Steffe," I tell him. He doesn't hear me, as he goes to talk to one of the other officers.

I try to get in, but my way is blocked. "You won't be able to get in here tonight," the officer tells me.

"Where am I going to stay?"

Fitzgerald comes back to hear the tail end of the conversation. "You're going to have to find a hotel room. I also want to ask you some questions. Hold on, I need you to come down to the station with me." He has me sit in the patrol car with a uniformed officer. I feel like I'm under arrest.

"Am I under arrest?" I ask the cop. He doesn't answer my question. One of the plainclothes officers says something to him. Then he speaks to me.

"Just hold on!"

I sit in silence while they go about their business. It seems like they are taking forever. They still have work to get done, but the Lieutenant wants me to come with him to his office. He finds his partner, and he rides me downtown in his car. I am sitting in the back. I am not wearing handcuffs.

I explain to the officers, "I haven't even been in all night."

"That's OK, Steffe. We'll ask the questions when we get downtown."

At the police station, I'm led to an interrogation room. I sit there alone for about twenty minutes. Just long enough to feel a little anxious.

When Fitzgerald comes back, he tells me, "I just want to ask you a few questions. Then I'll let you go back to the house to get your car. You can arrange to stay in a motel. I'll have a uniformed officer accompany you to the motel.

"I'm not a suspect. I don't even know what happened."

"A girl was killed at your place tonight. Rachel Anderson. Cute girl. Real cute girl."

He shows me her picture. It's her license shot. They've blown it up.

"You were with her tonight?" he asks.

"I was by myself. I went out to a bar in Echo Park. I had a few drinks. I met a girl named Wendy. And then I went home." I show him Wendy's card.

"You didn't stop anywhere on the way back," he questions me to be sure.

"I wanted a taco. I stopped at a drive-through. I wasn't in a hurry to get home so I pulled to the side of the road to eat my food. The garbage is still in the car."

"Have you ever brought Rachel to the house before?"

"I don't know any Rachel, Detective Fitzgerald. This picture is the first that I've ever seen her."

"Really, she made herself pretty comfortable at your place. It looks like she was skinny dipping in your pool."

"It's not my place."

He looks at me. "Really, Steffe. You're registered as the owner of the house."

"My name isn't Steffe."

He's pulled up the license photo of Steffe.

"If you cut your hair, it would look a lot like you."

I have to admit that he has a point. It seems pretty freaky. He goes on about all this for an hour or so.

I ask, "Do you have anything else to tell me? You're not going to charge me with anything. I'd like to go."

Fitzgerald answers, "We have what we need for now. The officer will take you back to get some things and then follow you to a motel. We want to know where you are. You're not working tomorrow."

"No."

The officer puts me in the back of his car. I don't really say anything on the way back. The investigators are still there. I get some underwear, a change of clothes, my toothbrush and my razor. I already have enough money. It's too late now to call my mother. I don't want to worry her, but one of her friends got me in this predicament.

In the morning I call my mother. I try to calm her down.

"I'm probably going to need a lawyer."

She asks, "You didn't do anything wrong?"

"Not at all, Mom. Call Gwen. I need you to ask her some more questions about Steffe."

After I get off the phone with my mother, I call Steffe. He isn't answering his phone. I get

some breakfast, and then head back to watch the meager TV fare at the hotel.

Lieutenant Fitzgerald decides to haul me down for another day of questioning. This time he has photos to go along with his interrogation. He nods his head up and down, and then he rubs his nose. He stretches his thumb and his forefinger over his lips until they meet at his chin.

“It doesn’t look very good at all.”

I react. I am shocked. I squirm a little in my chair, “That’s terrible.”

He notices my reaction, “You look surprised. “

”I am surprised. I’ve never seen anyone like this before.”

“Were you a little drunk that night? Maybe you forgot about a few details.”

A few details. This is hardly a few details. This is grotesque. I hold my stomach just looking at the first picture. But Fitzgerald gets a perverse delight in shoving it in my face. Then he shows me a shot of her face.

“It looks like you hit her on the head here. You don’t remember doing that?”

I answer, “I don’t remember doing that because it never happened.”

He shakes the picture in front of me, “It never happened. What do you call that?”

I know exactly what I call it. He is trying to shake my confidence. I barely let him phase me.

“I never saw anything like this before.”

He continues, “So it freaked you out a little as it was all happening.”

I just want to leave at this moment. But I am going along with his exposition. The sooner that he is finished, the sooner all this will be over, and I can leave.

He moves a little closer to me so that his face is almost up against mine. “It looks like you used a board on her. Just slugged her in the head. You can tell by the blood and the bruising.” He points at the photo. If this was something that I actually did, it would be hard to deal with any one of these occurrences. It is just too much thinking of what this must have been like. He is getting a kick out of his further exposition.

I tell him, “I need to stand up for a moment. I need some water.”

He motions outside his office. “The water is coming. I just need you to concentrate. Maybe you can tell us something that might help in the investigation.”

I play detective, “Did you find the board? Did it have her blood on it?”

He half smiles as if he has made a breakthrough, “So you hit her with a board.”

“If I recall Lieutenant, those were your words.”

He pauses, “I guess that you’re right. So it looks to you like these wounds were made with a blunt object, most likely a 2-by-4.”

“I’m not an investigator. You have to tell me. You’ve seen the body.”

He is trying to rattle me. “Pretty nasty stuff.”

I nod, “Yes, indeed.” I feel like a drink. Not just some water. Some alcohol. I am sure that they have turned up the heat in this room. Slowly so it just comes over a person. Fitzgerald has already taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.

I ask again, “Is my water coming?” I know they are distracting me. I should be asking for counsel. I’m just trying to hold myself together.. I am definitely on edge. I want to say something. I feel angry. Angry at whomever did this. Angry at Fitzgerald for holding me.

He is pacing himself. He has used his second photo. He wants to make maximum use of

its effect before he continues on. He won't let the heat affect him in the same way as it is affecting me. He has nothing to hide. That's what he tells himself.

The next shot shows where her neck is broken. It is not as gruesome as the shots of the face. But it does display the sheer force with which she was subjected. I cringe just looking at it.

"We're still theorizing which came first. We suspect that her killer hit her on her head first. And when she fell over he banged her on the neck. Look at how the skin is bruised to show the impact. Again, she was hit by the beam of wood which the assailant swung down." He dramatically brings his hands down on the table. I jump.

He is still in my face. I respond, "If she was already down on the ground, that is just sheer sadism to hit her again. The guy seems to have been enjoying all this. He's just one sick puppy."

Fitzgerald is almost touching me now, "That's what we've been thinking. Just a raging lunatic. Tell me, how could one possibly do that?"

I ask, "Didn't you just demonstrate for me what must have happened?"

There is an aspect of glee in his face. It really frightens me. "I guess that I did. I feel like a smoke."

He is trying to goad me by suggesting that his needs somehow mirror mine.

I remind him, "You were going to get me some water."

"Yes, I was. I can't get it myself. But I signaled someone to bring some in. Let me do it again."

I feel as if I have said too much. I am trying to review what I have actually said. He is playing his nonchalance. He shuffles the photos back and forth. He again shows me the shot of her face. He is seeing if my reaction has changed. I still have to turn my head. I fold my hands together. He thinks that he has his desired reaction.

"What did you do after you saw her slumped over like that? You threw her in the pool, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Look at the blue quality of her skin. That's from being underwater." He is stern, "She still wasn't dead after you had hit her those two times. Just incapacitated. And in the pool water, she would be unable to breathe. You just tossed her in there. There was a bit of a sneer on your face as you dropped her in the water. Just let her go down, plop!"

Try as he may, I am not buying his version of things. But he wants to deform my story ever so slightly so that it begins to resemble the chronology that he has created. He is a masterful story teller. I marvel how he has taken these details and constructed a scenario. And he wants to fit my character right in the center of it all

"You know what happens to a person's stomach when they drown. You know what that last feeling of pain is like." He is looking in my eyes. He believes that any reaction on my part is an admission of guilt.

"How long did you wait until she didn't move a muscle? Until the last fits of the body, that automatic response just came to a close. Ever stepped on a cockroach. You know that feeling of power. You get off on that."

He has hit the climax. He is moving in for the kill.

"There she was at the bottom of the pool. And you were feeling a little gleeful. I mean, you finally had your way with her. And then you threw her in the pool."

He is adding another detail. The sexual assault. It is the one element that he has left out until now.

“That’s how it all started. Your motive. You drugged her. Then you induced her to come over to your place, Steffe. She was pretty much submissive by the time that you got her in the car. It took a little convincing, but she climbed into the car with you. Even in her drugged state, she was impressed by your sportscar. She’d never ridden in a Lexis convertible before. And she slid down into that seat.”

Fitzgerald keeps on, “She was still in a daze by the time you drove her back to your place. Through the gate and up the hill. She was helpless. She just went along. She was even a little impressed by your pool. Still she was so helpless, you knew that you could have your way with her. At first, she was compliant. Maybe she wasn’t all that fucked up that she didn’t go along with your first advances. But then the drugs started to wear off. She realized what was happening. . At that point, she wanted to leave. But you didn’t bring her this far just to let her leave. You couldn’t let that work go to waste.” He can sense the sick thrill as he outlines the story.

He continues on, “Things started really crazy. They were turning violent. She tried to resist. She didn’t want to give in to you. But you were so incensed, you wouldn’t give up. You were so excited. You were going to have her no matter what. She was so appealing. Rachel was so appealing. You had to have her.”

Fitzgerald won’t let go. He feels that he has his prey in hand, “You had her hands on her. You wouldn’t let go. You were hurting her. She started to yell. And you wanted to make her stop. You hit her and knocked her down. And she was still moving when she fell to deck. So you swung that beam down on her. She just lay there immobile. That was your chance, what you had been waiting to take her.”

He proceeds to describe the sexual assault. He is lording over me. He hopes to intimidate. He wants to provoke a reaction in me. If I just get angry, I will reveal myself. Then he knows that he can take advantage of me for good. At that point, I will be ready to admit to anything.

“You sat there on a deck chair waiting for her body to sink to the bottom. This was her punishment for resisting you. Now there was nothing that she could do. No one that she could tell. But you coveted certainty so you sat there until that last delectable moment when she gave out.” Fitzgerald has been so precise in his presentation. The photos are now spread across the table. It is his reminder to me.

Fitzgerald is at the other end of the room.

He is again calling me Steffe, “Steffe, you’ve been doing this thing for years. Luring girls to your pad. But this time, it all got out of control. And it all happened so fast. Just a burst of anger. And then you realized what happened. You just panicked.. You didn’t know what to do, who to call. You couldn’t stay there. You needed to leave, to go somewhere and get a drink. You wanted to forget what happened. So you drove away. You left her dead at the bottom of the pool. There was nothing that you could do for her anymore. You just left her there.”

He repeats his final words. He wants to emphasize their impact. He hope that he has got under my skin.

“Steffe, I know how you feel. You really liked that girl. You hadn’t known her that long. But you wanted her to be your friend. Rachel. But it didn’t happen the way that you expected.



Things turned wrong.”

He just wants me to crack. To admit the least thing. And then he will drive a wedge into my story. I just want the water that he has been promising me. I have told him too much already. I should have asked for a lawyer first thing. But he has distracted me. He seems even more convinced than before.

I look up at him, “Are you going to charge me? If you’re not, I’m not going to stay.”

He points to the photos. “Take a look at them. See what you have wrought. That strength of yours. Don’t you feel the least bit sorry for her?”

I can’t look at the photos another second. I am ready to scream. I can barely whisper, “I need to go.” I work to speak louder, “Is it OK if I leave?”

He becomes more frank, “We want to charge you.”

I am a little too clever, “If you wanted to charge me, you wouldn’t have put me through that ordeal. You want a confession.”

He looks at me square on, “Do you realize what you have admitted?”

I need to talk to that lawyer. It is pretty late in the day to get anyone. I make a plan to do it all in the morning. I spend another day at the motel. They tell me that it will be OK to go back to the house tomorrow afternoon. That will give me time to see the lawyer. My mother tells me that Gwen has someone who can help. Gwen tells my mother that everything will work out. Steffe is a trustworthy guy. There has to be an explanation for all this. I hate to think what that might be.

The next day, I don’t see the cops at all. I find the address of Gwen’s lawyer. I tell him my story.

Sherman tells me, “I’m going to have to do a little investigation of my own. You have nothing to worry about. This just sounds like a case of mistaken identity.”

I chuckle to myself. If it was just that simple.

When I go back to the house, everything has been cleaned up. I feel a little freaked out to sit by the patio.

I really need a drink. I know that it must look strange to want to go out at a moment like this. I call Wendy up. She is a little frightened by my story. She makes an excuse why she can’t come out. I need to make other plans.

I head to the bar in Echo Park again. It seems like a natural choice. I had thought about trying to catch a band at the Viper Room. But this is the best that I can do.

It’s amazing what a good lawyer can do to get off even the most hardened criminal. It’s not as if the legal system is that observant for the rights of the defendant. It only takes a perceptive intellect to break down the systematic abuses that beset his client.

“Jim, are we on for golf next week,”

“Of course, Sherman.”

“By the way, my boy is the victim of a terrible case of mistaken identity.”

The district attorney takes a quick look at the brief submitted by my lawyer.

“Don’t worry, Sherman. This won’t even go to trial. It’s obvious that there is a terrible mistake here. I’m only sorry that the kid had to endure such an inconvenience.”

The official version is created to account for all the details of the case. It seems that Steffe has a friend Sly. Sly comes over to the house with his friend Rachel. He tells her that they can go

skinny dipping. Sly is inside getting a drink. And he passes out. Meanwhile Rachel decides to take a dive off the board. She is an expert diver so she is trying something a little tricky. Only she is taking a prescription for a sore shoulder. And mixed with the alcohol, it dulls her reaction time. As she comes down, her head hits the diving board. This slip then causes her to flip over and hit her neck on the side of the pool. She then bounces in the water and helplessly floats to the bottom. She is already unconscious from the broken neck and the blow to the head. When Sly wakes up, he finds her dead at the bottom of the pool. He panics. There is really nothing that he can do. He feels as if he has killed her and will be arrested for her death. So he runs. But he decides to call the police from a phone booth.

I don't really believe the official version. I suspect that Stony and Steffe are working together. Stony has probably doing this thing over and over again. He's brought girls over to the house before. Engaged in rough trade. Only this time, things went awry.

Rachel is definitely no diver. Maybe a stripper. Or a porn actress living in a bungalow in the Valley. She's done this for money many times. She usually knows when to tell the guy to stop. But this time she has been drugged, and her judgement isn't what it usually is. Stony pushes too far, and she doesn't know when to say when.

I decide to leave LA after the legal problems clear up. I haven't talked to Steffe. Sherman has been working for him all along, just trying to keep his name clean. He has been deliberately unavailable. I just spend his money and eat his food.

It is my last week in LA. As I leave the house my car is blocked by another vehicle. Lieutenant Fitzgerald climbs out of the car.

"Well, there you are, Steffe. I see that your shyster lawyer got you off."

I tell him that I am not Steffe.

"I know that you did it. And I'm not going to let you get away with it. I'm going to be dogging your every step."

I tell him gleefully, "Lieutenant, I am going back to Atlanta. So there is really nothing that you can do to disrupt my life."

In all this time in LA, I have not been able to use the recording studio. I feel that my time here has been a waste. What can I do to salvage the experience?

Assuming that Stony was actually at the house that night, where did they find this Sly to take the fall? I assume that he may hang out at the same bar on the Strip. I may be pushing my luck, but I need to see for myself what is going on. Stony is nowhere to be seen. And it's not like I know what Sly looks like. But I have become pretty familiar with Rachel. And she is sitting at the bar talking to some guy. This makes no sense.

I consider that it may be another girl. But that would imply the complicity of the police. How did they work this one out? Fitzgerald would have to be involved as well. The girl was obviously dead at the house. But she wasn't Rachel. What has been the interest in trying to make me believe that it is Rachel.

I think to myself. Maybe it is Wendy. That would only make sense. That's how they involved me.

Rachel has her own version of the events. She needs one if she's going to stay alive.

"So they have this kid staying at Steffe's place. And he meets this girl Wendy at a club in Echo Park. He brings her back to the house. He passes out. And she runs out. Next thing he

knows, this cop is at the house with a dead body floating in the pool.”

She takes a drink and winks at the guy next to her. “So I pose for the cop. And he gets all kinds of shots of me with all these bruises. And the kid thinks that it something that he did to Wendy before she passed out.”

I listen to her story. Then I interrupt her and her friend. “Wasn’t that the skit that you did in acting class?”

Rachel acts as if I am intruding on her life. I’ll see Rachel later.

I meet Wendy for lunch.

“I’m taking acting lessons. And they have me do a scene from this film script. I am playing a girl named Rachel who gets killed in this guys’s swimming pool. It’s a pretty intense scene.”

“Were you alive for the whole scene?” I ask her.

“I was at first. But then I’m just supposed to lie there as if I’m dead.”

I ask Wendy, “Are you good at playing dead.”

“I do my best. It’s not the sort of part that I can wrap my teeth around. I mean, what can I do besides lie there.”

I say, “I think that it’s all about the kind of face that you put on. You know the death mask.”

She looks back at me with a funny face. I laugh at her.

“Wendy, you are a good actress,” I tell her.

“You don’t know how good!”