

5. THE HENDERSON METHOD

Donny has some business in Kentucky. On the way back, traffic looks a little heavy. They are doing some work on the bridge. So he stops in at a bar for a drink. He orders a beer. After a few sips, he decides that he needs to use the washroom.

While in the bathroom, he notices some handwriting that looks vaguely familiar.

“I fucked your wife while you were away.”

The *t* seems to be exactly how his wife would write it. He suspects it is mere coincidence, but it does send a chill through him.

He wonders what she’s up to. Probably just getting through with her work at the plant. She’ll probably beat him home if she’s heading there first. Donny imagines catching her with her lover. He’d pull a bat from his truck and just smash up the fucker’s place.

In his fantasy, his enemy is Skip Newsome. What a weird idea.

He really feels like a couple of more beers. But it’s been long enough. And his suspicions are getting the best of him.

When he hits the road, the traffic has all died down. He watches the guy in front of him pull into the casino. He heads onto Evansville and I-164.

He’s gliding along the highway when he notices blue lights in his rearview. He takes quick glance at his speedometer. He’s not even doing the speed limit.

“What is it now officer? I was hardly moving.”

“Oh, it’s you Don.”

Donny’s dealership supplies police cars to force. He gets out and starts to talk to the officer.

“I saw that old truck, and I thought that you were running drugs. We’re looking for a meth lab somewhere off of exit 3.”

“I can’t help you this time.” Both men laugh. “What is this city coming to?”

“It’s growing up.”

“I was just over in Kentucky. You should see Skip Newsome’s place. He getting those new cars soon.”

“Damn if he isn’t taking your business.”

“You haven’t heard anything about the city?”

“There supposed to order a new fleet.”

“Don, you’re set.”

“I just get paranoid.”

“They’re committed to Fords. And you’re still our guy.”

“Next time, don’t give me a scare like that.”

“Sorry about that. We’ll have to go out for some beers. Maybe do some hunting in the fall.”

“Maybe!”

Donny is only thirty and already running his dad’s place. He first met his wife when she was only seventeen. That was five years ago. She was just out of high school and one wild thing. And he was the big shot of Evansville. Heavens knows that he’s quiet down quite a bit in those few years.

He still swears that she ran around with his rival Skip Newsome when she was in high school.

“That’s impossible. He’s got to be older than you are.”

“Did you tell me that you had the same penmanship course in the third grade or that you were in kindergarten together?”

“I wouldn’t know Scott if you pointed him out.”

“You’re getting his name wrong. It’s Skip. I’m sure that you’re getting it wrong on purpose.”

She knows that she can’t look back as her past is gaining on her. Even the past that she never lived.

“You were a little too over the top in those years.”

She defends herself, “Sure I got drunk now and then. I don’t think that I would have gone for you if I hadn’t. You were the one smoking dope. I thought you were a dealer.”

“I don’t do that shit anymore.”

“I know. I’m just reminding you.”

Maybe everything has become too respectable in their lives. The pressures of being in Evansville all the time are drowning her. Just to cross that bridge and stand in Kentucky might be the beginning of something different. A little change.

“Don’t you resent the fact that you’re a waitress at Jilly’s, and I manage a car dealership?”

“I don’t work as a waitress. I’m a line supervisor at the Whirlpool plant.”

“Making stoves. Really. Sister you’re getting ahead of yourself.”

“No, you are. Have you been smoking crack? You were working as a mechanic at Skip Newsome’s place in Kentucky. And he was having a rough time making a go of things. Cars haven’t been moving as fast. So you got laid off.”

“Isn’t Skip that guy who went out with you in high school?”

“Skip is old enough to be my dad.”

“No, he’s not. You went to grade school together. You took penmanship together. And if you hold your hand steady enough, you can forge his signature.”

“A lot of good that’s going to do me. I don’t think that I could hold my hand steady for more than a few seconds.”

“It’s all the meth that you do. You’re always skittish.”

“I don’t do drugs. Not at all.”

“When I found you in that parking lot of the K-mart, you were smoking grass.”

“I smoked until I realized that it was fucking up my life.”

“When was that, darling? Last week.”

“So what’s all that garbled shit about Skip Newsome’s signature.”

“We could get a hold of a check and sign it for him.”

“How am I going to do that? I don’t even think that we could cash that thing at the bank. They’d be on the lookout for that sort of thing.”

“You could get a job over there.”

“I like my job.”

“Get me some more waffles, darling”

“I’m not a waitress. I work at Whirlpool.”

“Look at yourself. You’re barely twenty five, and you look eighty. You don’t work no Whirlpool. You hang around Jilly’s and talk to the woman when they get off their shifts. You’ve never even been inside that plant.”

“I’ve got my ID to prove it.”

“If you’ve got an ID, you’ve taken it off some girl at the restaurant. Are you still a thief?”

“I never took a thing in my life.”

“Your mamma never wanted you to have makeup so you you’d steal it at the Walgreen’s. You got caught, and they were going to send you to jail, but you let the manager feel you up.”

“That is the most ridiculous story. Was that something that happened to one of your sisters?”

Donny laughs, “It actually happened to me. Only it was a woman. And it was more than a little touch here and there.”

“I know who that woman was. She looked like my brother.”

“I don’t care what she looked like. That doesn’t help us now. We need some money, and we really haven’t figured out a good scheme to come up with any.”

“You could go back to selling meth.”

“You could go back to turning tricks out of the casino. But that ain’t going to amount to much. Not now.”

“I’m not going to let you sit back and be a pimp.”

“We’re not very good with coming up with a scheme.”

“You could get another job as a mechanic.”

“I don’t think that there’s anywhere else to try. No one is hiring.”

“I saw a sign for the Thornton’s in Henderson.”

“What were you doing in Henderson?”

“Meeting Skip Newsome for a little rendezvous.”

“So why don’t you get your lover to give you some cash.”

“I’m into it for the tenderness, not for the money.”

“Seriously, that’s not a bad plan.”

“I am not going to sleep with Skip Newsome.”

“That’s not the question. That boy has money. He’s not going to sleep with any girl. He just brought in a mistress from Paducah. His wife doesn’t know a thing.”

“It’s not as if he lives in Memphis. Word gets around a small town like that.”

“Word would probably travel over here.”

“So what are you saying?”

“There’s no way that he’d ever sleep with you. Even if you wanted him to. You’re not the queen of Central High any more.”

“Every man is available.”

“I don’t know if you could get one of those guys from Whirlpool.”

“I’ve got you.”

“We don’t sleep much together.”

She hates for Donny to remind her of the truth. Maybe the years have taken their toll. She looks in the mirror. It’s her hair. She has to adjust her hair.

When she goes into the grocery stores, guys are still checking her out. She wears those

hip huggers nice and low. She can see them tracing their fingers in their minds.

Maybe it's time to do some changing. A little exercise. A makeover. Some new clothes. Donny is never going to give her the motivation that she needs.

If she could just live up to her dreams. It's fun to pretend that they are both more than they are. She always imagined Donny running his own place. Selling cars. When they first met, he had plans. He had already learned everything there was to know about engines. And he had a job as a mechanic. Who knew that times would get so desperate?

"Pretending isn't going to do any good. You've been fired."

"I can get another job."

"You've been saying that since it happened."

"I shouldn't have followed the straight and narrow. I should have dealt drugs like those kids that I was hanging out with. Then no one could have told me when and where I had to come."

"Aren't they all dead or in jail? This is just a setback."

She can't imagine them surviving much longer on her salary. She is still young. She could find someone else. Her life seems limited as long as she stays with him. Love will only take you so far.

After a while. It all goes downhill. Either you create paradise, or you have to fake it. And you can only hang on for so long on pipe dreams. She needs to get out on her own.

She's not sure what she's got herself into.

"I can't find the damn place."

"It's off of exit 3. You can see the subdivision from the interstate."

She tries to focus. Shit, there it is.

It's a new apartment. But they have already made a mess out of the place. This mangy pit bull walks around the living room.

"A little protection. But he's friendly."

She pets the dog.

"My family has some dogs like this."

"Fighters?"

"No."

She is nervous as she waits in the living room. Her top reveals her midriff. One of the guys is staring.

"Sorry, Mam. You do look fine!"

"What are you saying?"

"We could really make a deal."

"He's not in charge here."

She wonders if anyone really is in charge. Everyone freaks her out here. What would it take to set one of them off.

"Honey, why don't you sit down? Have a beer. The dog won't harm you."

"I've got some Kentucky whisky if you want it."

She is losing it just trying to concentrate. She feels as if they are throwing too many options at her all at once.

"Let me just get the stuff and go."

“You are jonesing girl. Settle back, we can take care of you.”

She is panicking. She’s not sure how she can make it out of here.

“I need to use the bathroom.”

The minute that she goes in the bathroom, she is looking for the soap. The light seems harsh. It makes her look more desperate. She wants to leave. Maybe she’ll just walk out. Skip the buy. Her partner might be pissed.

“You’ve got my money, honey.”

She pulls the money from her back pocket. Her eyes are on the exit. She can still run with the best of them if she has to. The three guys seem a little slow. And she has surprise on her side.

It only gets tenser as she waits for the lead guy to return. The other two are now staring intensely.

“You shouldn’t be such a spoil sport.”

“Stay and party. We might cut you a deal.”

“I already told you that I’ll pass.”

“We don’t like it when girls aren’t appreciative what we can do for them.”

“I know everything that you can do. And I do appreciate your hospitality. It’s just that I’m a little sick. I don’t want to embarrass myself.”

“Just call me the doctor. I can do whatever it takes to make you feel good.”

The boss comes back and gives her the package. He can see that things are getting a little out of hand.

“Just let her go boys. If we’re nice to her here, she’ll be more than likely to return.”

As she makes here way by, the dog brushes by her leg. She doesn’t pet him this time. She’s glad to make it out of there with her life.

She wants to take care of business in the car. She only lives a few exits away. But she doesn’t think that she can hold on. But this is the worst place to be a casualty. She believes that they’re still watching her, and she’s not going to wait around to find out.

At work, the next day, they are asking her a lot of questions. It has to be because of the way that she looks. She’s trying to hide it. But maybe, she’s just not that good at holding it in. During her break she smokes a couple of cigarettes. It still doesn’t quiet down her nerves.

Her locker mate has all stuff laid out on the counter. It would be so easy to lift her wallet. Everyone would think that it was Barbara, the new girl. There are already enough suspicions.

After work, she pulls the wallet out and looks at her prize. She goes over the theft again. She is sure that the camera saw nothing.

There’s some money in there. Enough to tide her over for the night. Donny is sure to be gone somewhere. He still hasn’t found work. And he’s willing to do anything to make things different. It’s just that he hasn’t done much to make up for the mess of his life.

“Sister, you are looking bad.”

“I had a rough day at work.”

“I don’t think sleep is going to cure what you have.”

“We both know that. I just need a little medicine for the soul.”

“Sometimes that’s in short supply. I should know.”

“If you’d quit spending all your time doing dope with your buddies. Just get some kind

of job.”

“It’s not easy.”

“Donny, I can’t take this. All these guys come on to me. Guys with great jobs.”

“Who are you talking about? Those losers at the plant.”

“No. That guy who I know from high school who has the auto dealership.”

“No one that you know has an auto dealership. You’re getting worse than I am.”

“At least I get up in the morning. I go to work.”

“How long is that going to last? We barely have enough money now. What are you doing with your money?”

“I’m spending it on this place. And on food.”

“That I doubt with all your little trips down I-164.”

Her life is heading down that road. She feels that she is slipping down that sink-hole. She looks at the empty wallet. It still has the ID in it. This could be the new her. She thinks about what she has to do to transform herself.

In the mirror, the drag is showing. She smiles to make up for the run-down feeling. But it doesn’t seem to help.

Today is her day off. She heads across to Henderson. This might be the day for a change. She finds a bar just off the main road.

“Honey, you’re going to have to pay for your drinks here.”

“I’ve got money.”

The bartender stares at her. She wiggles her ass for a businessman at the bar.

“I’ll get her something to drink.”

“Skip, she’s trouble.”

“I’ve never ran away from trouble.”

Half the time, he finds that he is chasing his tail. But that hasn’t stopped his success.

For now, he is her ticket. And he just keep the drinks flowing. He is out-drinking her. It isn’t her intention. It’s working out that way.

He give her this deep look in her eyes as if he is taking her soul. She thinks nothing of it. But she lets him play his game.

The next time that Skip comes in the bar, he has a story to tell.

“So what happened to you?”

“That girl.”

“I told you that she was trouble.”

“I really don’t remember much of what happened. I don’t even remember leaving here.”

“You were drinking twice the amount that she was. Maybe more than that.”

“You’re kidding.”

“It was worse than that. I tried to warn you. So you just woke up the next day and that was that.”

“I have these vague recollections. She was dancing on the coffee table. I remember that much. And she pulled off her blouse. She still had her bra on. She was shaking every part of her body. I was going crazy.”

“Then what happened.”

“I have no idea what happened after that. I woke up on the ground.”

“I guess it could have been worse.”

“It was worse. All my money was gone.”

“At least you’re rid of her. That should be a lesson.”

“I had at least eight one hundred dollar bills.”

“You were throwing around a lot of money when you were in here. You bought a round for everyone.”

“She got at least six hundred.”

“She’s not from around here.”

“She’s probably one of them pole cats from Evansville. You have to watch what comes slithering over the Ohio.”

“If I find her, she’s going to be one dead cat.”

“She’s long gone. You gave her the ticket out of this place.”

Everything is getting a little tense at the plant. She’s trying to hold on to her job as supervisor. Donny is having a rough time, and they really need the extra money. She has been called in early for work. The factory is abuzz today. Somehow the plans for a new oven have been compromised. Perhaps they have been pilfered and fallen into the hands of a competitor.

“The designs weren’t supposed to be available here. They were exclusive to the research division.”

“But the computer access is universal. All you need is the right codes.”

“But no one in this division should have had those codes.”

“They’re readily available from the advanced supervisory site.”

“But no one except the director of operation should have had those codes.”

“Someone compromised her site.”

“I think it was just a computer glitch.”

“You’re telling me that no one did this intentionally.”

“We can’t be sure about intention. Only that a problem has occurred.”

“Is this going to shut down any operations.”

“No. But we’re going to have to inspect the records of every department.”

Maybe other things will be discovered. Things that have nothing to do with the error.

“I don’t think that they want to look at our division.”

“What are you saying?”

“Just take my word for it. There’s also been some theft going on the floor. There’s that new girl, Barbara. We’ve got her on camera.”

“Is it incriminating.”

“Not in itself. But with the reports from the other girls.”

“She seemed so nice. I’m not sure what we can do.”

“I’m not going to fire her yet. I want you keeping an eye on her. I know that you already have enough to do. Just think that it’s all for the best of the company.”

“I just hope that I get that raise.”

“The sales figures have been down. I don’t think it really matters anymore what happens at the factory.”

“Production numbers have been up.”

“And you’ve been doing a great job. I’ve been passing over those recommendations.

You may even be transferred out of this city.”

She wonders what a transfer would mean. It’s just getting a little too crazy to worry about that now. She wonders if she should be concerned about the missing designs. It’s nothing that she really knows about. She has enough to worry about.

The theft on the floor is another question. Barbara seemed like such a down to earth girl. No one who would do something like that. If they could just play the tapes, it would all be clear. Too bad they can’t do the same with the computer. They have no idea where the compromise occurred.

“What if it was you? What if you were the one?”

“What are you talking about. I wouldn’t even know what to make of the designs.”

“You probably could make a pretty penny on them. Maybe even a million.”

“Would it really make that much of a difference.”

“If they sold enough ovens, that would be a drop in the bucket.”

She starts rolling the number around in her head. Maybe she’s got it all wrong. How long would it take to amass a million in this place. Three hundred years.

“I don’t have that time!”

“What are you talking about.”

“I don’t know. I was just thinking. If I could just speed up time.”

“Speed. That’s what we’re all after. I think that’s why people take drugs, to get to the reward quicker.”

“It never works.”

She’s having trouble finding this street in Henderson. It was easier picking up stuff in Evansville. Just a couple of exits to go.

“I could give you a discount if you want.”

“I’m not really into the habit of that kind of thing.”

“You have barely enough to get in the door. How did you think that you were going to leave here with anything.”

“I could make you a deal. I could help you move the stuff.”

“What make me think that I can trust you.”

“I could prove it to you.”

“You’re going to have to prove it to me anyway.”

“I told that you that I was married.”

“I don’t see a ring. I don’t see a husband. Let’s go into the bedroom.”

“I’m not going to do that!”

“I don’t have to threaten you, doll. You just don’t have enough to make much of anything.”

“If it’s going to be a threat, so be it. I know guys who can fuck you up.”

“Want to borrow my cell phone?”

“You are a monster.”

“We both want a piece of paradise.”

“All your looking for is a piece of ass.”

“What made you so tough? I already told you that you don’t have enough to afford to play. So what are you going to do to help out.”

“Give me some cleaner, and I can wash out your bathtub.”

“I already did the chores this morning.”

“I can lick it clean.”

“That ain’t all you can lick.”

“I’m getting out of here.”

“In your state, it don’t look like you’re going much of anywhere.”

She still can’t figure out how she’s going to work through this one. She needs a few more options if she’s going to make sense out of any of this.

“What do I have to do for you to set me up? I can sell.”

“I’m looking for a live in lover.”

“I’m not about that. Besides, I’m allergic to Kentucky.”

“Smart ass!”

“I could give you a back rub.”

“That’s not all that you can rub.”

“I can move some stuff for you.”

“Not in your condition. You’d use it all, or lose it somewhere.”

She’s only been married a few years, and already Henderson, Kentucky has a special appeal for her. She knew Skip back in high school. He’s come up in the world since then. Now he works at a car dealership. He’s the number one salesperson.

He lives in a bungalow just off the main drag. He’s not that far from work.

“Come on by for a barbecue, sweetheart.”

Donny is away on one of his runs. By the time dinner is finished, she is flying.

“You drank a lot more than I did.”

“I guess that I was thirsty.”

They both laugh at the cheap humor.

“Come over on the couch with me and cuddle.”

“Skip, I’m married.”

“So that’s why you wore the low-cut blouse and short skirt.”

“I wear what I like.”

“And you’re wearing what I like. I’d like it a lot more if you took it off.”

He puts on some music. She starts dancing around the room. She kicks off her heels and jumps on the table.

“Do you like it, baby.”

“Shake it for Daddy.”

She pulls off her top and wave it around. She still has a bra on.

“Skip, I want you to remember this.”

She turns around and shakes her ass for him. He takes a sip of his beer.

“Why weren’t you like this in high school.”

“You were such a shy boy.”

“The shy boys know all the tricks.”

The liquor is going to her head. She feels a little sick and falls from the table. She almost goes over on the floor.

“I better go.”

“If you’re in no shape to dance, then you’re not OK to drive.”

“If I’m in no shape to dance, then I’m in no shape to fuck.”

She covers her mouth as if she has just said something bad. “Things are getting a little out of control.”

She gathers up her stuff and begins to rush out. He blocks her at the door. They are both precariously close. Her breath is hot. He leans over to her.

“It’s dark outside.”

“I can make it home.”

“If your car went off the bridge, I’d blame myself for letting you go.”

“If I stay, I’m going to do something that I don’t want to do.”

“You knew what you were going to do from the minute that you came over here.”

She sees it as an opportunity. He sees it as the same. He only lets down his guard more.

All this time, he has tried to control his liquor. She has seemed all the more out of it.

Much worse than he was.

Now he seems to be catching up. He has tried to lodge his protest. But he doesn’t have much will for himself.

The minute that he passes out, she snaps out of her stupor. Most of it was an act to throw him off.

She looks among his stuff for his wallet. It’s in his jacket, and it’s still full of crisp one hundred dollar bills. He clearly thought that he could buy a good time.

This won’t last her long. But it’s a great beginning. She’ll fill up her gas tank at Thornton’s and be off.

She sneaks into the men’s room of the gas station.

“I’m the one who fucked your wife while you were away.”

She laughs as she closes the door behind her. Maybe Donny will see her message on the wall. If only he could have read the writing sooner.

Another week, and she feels the mirror would have cracked. For now, she still has her looks. Whatever that means. She couldn’t imagine another day working at Jilly’s. It’s not as if she could ever concentrate on an assembly line. Waiting is just enough of a profession.

She’s made guys who wanted her to dance for a living. She wonders where guys get off. If her ex could have, he would have pimped her out. He’d just stay at home getting high, eating pizza, and watching TV.

Fortunately, she got a meal out of Skip. She opens the wallet that she stole from a girl at work. She won’t miss that either. Barbara will probably think that her live-in lover took the wallet.

That’s a new name for her. Barbara. She likes how it sounds. This is a new beginning. When she crosses Veteran’s Bridge, she feels as if she is beginning to lead a new life.

Maybe, she’ll stop at home to get some clothes. Just something before she takes off for good. No reminders of all the shit of her past. Good times ahead.

As she jumps on I-164, she just lets loose. There is nothing in her way. She’s heading for her chance at redemption. Something so that she won’t sink any deeper than she already is.

When she hits 64, she’s not sure if she wants to keep going or should she get off at 41. Route 41 has always had a romantic appeal to her. Maybe head up to Chicago. Or cut over

through Illinois. Get out of this godforsaken state once and for all.

As she passes a truck, she can feel something give. Then it seems as if she gets hit. It's a blow out. She does everything that she can not to go down a ravine. Here she is on the side of the road without a prayer. She can't go back. She doesn't want the cops asking questions.

She rolls out the spare. This is going to be a bitch. She sees a pick up pull in behind her. This is the last thing that she needs at this time.

"Darling, you look like you need some help."

She could use a sucker at this moment. He tries to size up her body as she distracts him."

"I had a blow out. I'm not sure if I can get this spare on."

"No problem."

She reminds herself that she won't even have to get her hands dirty.

"Maybe after this we could go for a drink."

"Love to."

There is no way that he is getting anything out of this. He's given her enough dirty looks to fill a book.

"I recognize you."

"You do."

"We went to high school together. Your name is Barbie."

"I'm not sure."

"I am."