

I PULL INTO MY DRIVEWAY AND CUT THE ENGINE. I SIT THERE **ALONE** FOR A MOMENT, BREATHING QUIETLY, HESITANT TO LEAVE THE SANCTITY AND SOLITUDE AN AUTO-MOBILE CAN OFFER. MY RIGHT HAND, I NOTICE, IS **TREMBLING** SLIGHTLY.

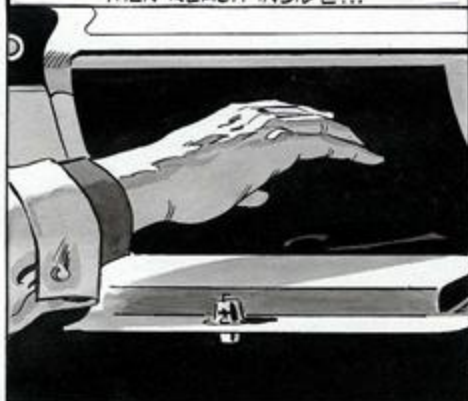


MY EYES **FOCUS** ON THE SUN-BAKED WOOD OF THE **GARAGE** DOOR. ABSENTLY, I REMEMBER GWYN ASKING ME TO **PAINT** IT. I PULL IN A RAGGED BREATH. IT WILL **NEVER** GET PAINTED NOW.

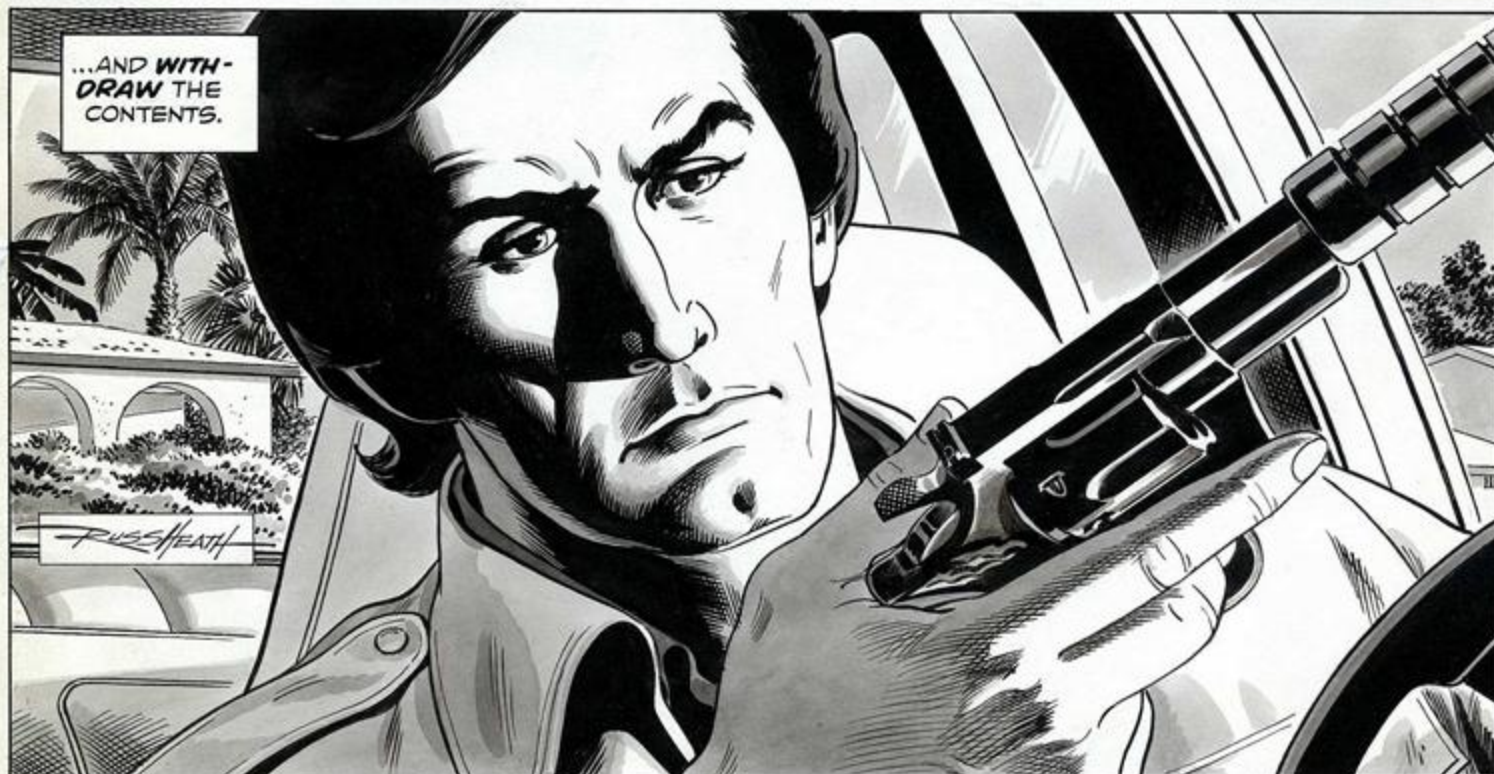


MY THROAT MOVES CONVULSIVELY. THE DULL BEGINNINGS OF A **HEAD-ACHE** PECK AT THE BASE OF MY SKULL. I NEED A **DRINK**.

"QUIT SITTING HERE **THINKING**," MY MIND SAYS. "THIS LOOKS **SUSPICIOUS**." I REACH OUT MY HAND **CAREFULLY** TO THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT AND OPEN IT. MY FINGERS **HESITATE** A MOMENT, THEN REACH INSIDE...



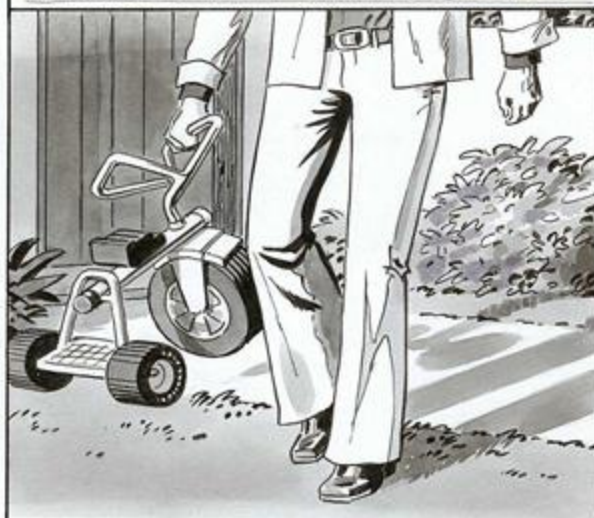
...AND **WITH-DRAW** THE CONTENTS.



I SLIP THE .45 **QUICKLY** INTO MY TROUSERS AND SWING OPEN THE DOOR. THE FRONT WALK FEELS **ALIEN** UNDER MY FEET...IT'S SOME-ONE ELSE'S **SHOES** I'M WALKING IN. I'M ASLEEP. I'M **DREAMING...**



I NEARLY **COLLIDE** WITH RICHARD'S ROCKET TRIKE. ANOTHER EVENING I WOULD WALK **A-ROUND** IT, **CONFRONT** RICKY LATER AND GIVE HIM A LECTURE. TONIGHT I PLACE IT CAREFULLY ...**LOVINGLY** ON THE GRASS BESIDE ME.



MY HANDS **TREMBLE** VIOLENTLY AGAIN AS I REACH FOR THE DOOR-KNOB. THE WORLD GOES SUDDENLY **WHITE**. A WEDGE OF **FEAR** DRIVES INTO MY STOMACH. I CAN'T **DO** THIS! I **CAN'T!** I **CLOSE** MY EYES TIGHT, **GRITTING** MY TEETH, TRYING TO CONJURE UP **IMAGES** OF MADGE...TRYING TO FIND **HER** STRENGTH...



THE MOMENT **PASSES**. I **FORCE** ANOTHER BREATH AND ENTER THE HOUSE. THE **GUN** IS A LEAD **BRICK** AGAINST MY STOMACH.



GWYN MOVES **CLOSE** FOR A KISS. MY HEART NEARLY **THUNDERS** THROUGH MY CHEST--THE **GUN!** SHE'LL **FEEL** THE PROTRUDING BULK OF THE--



WELL! THAT WAS **NICE!** PRELUDE OF THINGS TO **COME?**

I...I **MISSED** YOU, IS ALL.

SAY, SOMETHING **SMELLS** GOOD! COULD THAT BE **ROAST BEEF?**





RICHARD AT THE KILPATRICK'S-- THAT'S GOING TO BE A **PROBLEM**. WELL, I'LL JUST HAVE TO **CROSS** THAT WHEN I **COME** TO IT... QUIETLY I OPEN THE DOOR TO THE NURSERY AND **LOOK** IN ON **JENNIE**.



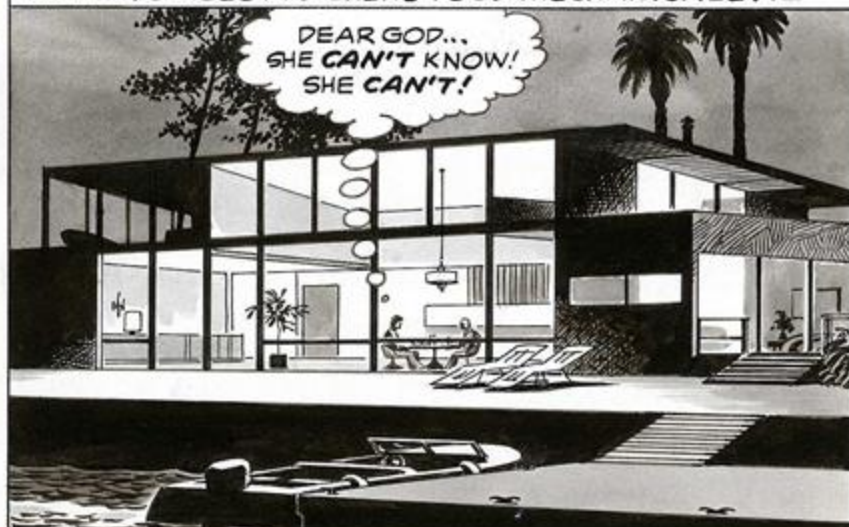
I **STARE** AT THE SMALL, HUDDLED FORM OF MY **DAUGHTER**. THE **TEARS** WELL UP WITHOUT WARNING, HER IMAGE **BLURRING**...LIFE **WITHOUT** JENNIE IS UNIMAGINABLE.



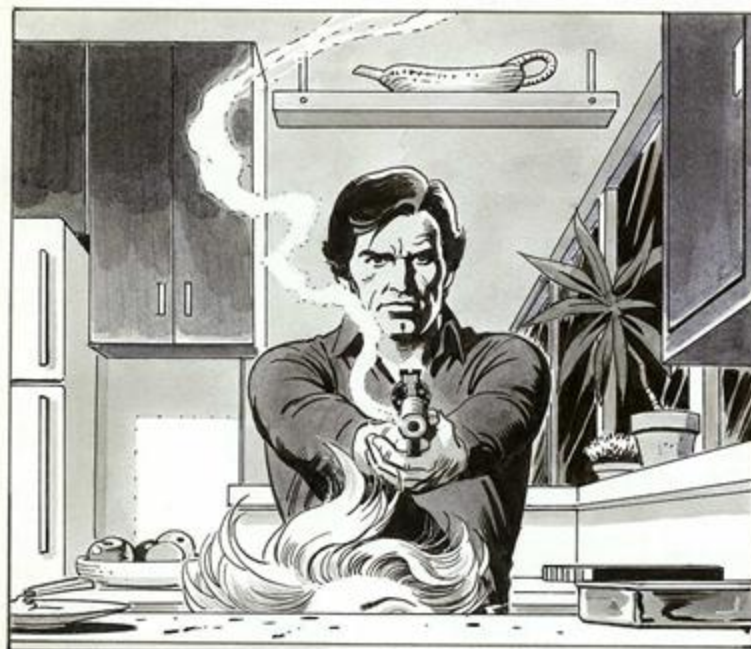
I **WIPE** THE HEEL OF MY **PALM** ROUGHLY ACROSS MY **EYES**. I WON'T **BREAK** NOW! I **WON'T**! I TURN ON THE **FAUCET** IN THE BATHROOM AND **STARE** AT THE LISTLESS EYES IN THE MIRROR. I DON'T KNOW **THIS** MAN... HE'S A **STRANGER** TO ME... A LIFE-LESS **SHELL** THAT TALKS AND MOVES. THE WATER **BURNS** MY HANDS.



DINNER IS AN **AGONY**. MY APPETITE IS VAPID. YET I **MUST** MAKE AN **EFFORT**... MUST KEEP UP APPEARANCES. THE **STRANGER** IN MY CLOTHES LOOKS ACROSS THE TABLE AT MY WIFE, **SMILES** AND CHEWS FOOD **MECHANICALLY**.







IT'S OVER. I'VE DONE IT. SHE'S GONE. AND INCREDIBLY MY FIRST THOUGHTS AREN'T OF REMORSE OR GUILT OR SHAME...IT'S THE TERRIBLE **RECOGNITION** OF THE AWFUL **POWER** I FEEL...TO BE ABLE TO **SNUFF** OUT A HUMAN LIFE THAT SIMPLY!



RICKY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE AT THE KILPATRICK'S!

JERRY GOT SICK...THEY SENT ME HOME. IS MOMMY SICK TOO?



MOMMY'S... MOMMY'S JUST RESTING.

YOU GO UPSTAIRS AND GET READY FOR BED. I'LL BE UP IN A MINUTE...

I LOOK AT MY **WATCH** DESPERATELY. MADGE WILL BE **WAITING** FOR ME. RICKY SHOULD HAVE BEEN IN BED BY NOW. I HADN'T WANTED TO DO IT LIKE THIS...



...BUT AT LEAST HE'D COME HOME ON HIS **OWN**. THAT WAS A **BREAK**. OTHERWISE I'D HAVE TO HAVE GONE TO THE KILPATRICK'S **MYSELF** AND GOTTEN HIM. THAT WOULD HAVE MADE ME ALL THE **LATER**.



WILL YOU TELL ME A **STORY** TONIGHT?

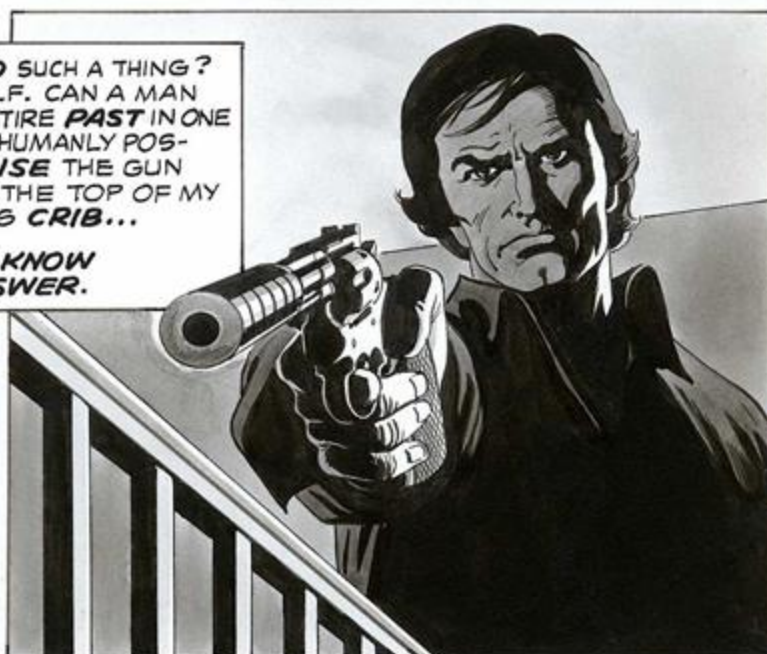
HAVE YOU **BRUSHED** YOUR TEETH?

OH... AWRIGHT...



CAN A MAN **DO** SUCH A THING? I **ASK** MYSELF. CAN A MAN **ERASE** HIS ENTIRE **PAST** IN ONE **NIGHT**? IS IT HUMANLY POSSIBLE? I **RAISE** THE GUN EVENLY OVER THE TOP OF MY DAUGHTER'S **CRIB...**

...AND I **KNOW** THE **ANSWER.**



MADGE IS **WAITING** IN THE PARKING LOT BEHIND THE GAS STATION AS **PLANNED**. I'M **LATE** BUT SHE WON'T **COMPLAIN**. MADGE **NEVER** COMPLAINS. SHE'D BEEN THE BEST SECRETARY A MAN COULD WANT, AND I NEED HER NOW... MORE THAN I EVER DREAMED I'D NEED HER.

