

CHAPTER 2

After the Festival (1984)

The reason Adrian was wearing the hat, his sobbing boyfriend would later tell the police, was because he had won it at the Pitch Til U Win stall on the Bassey Park fairgrounds just six days before his death. He was proud of it. 'He was wearing it because he loved this shitty little town!' the boyfriend, Don Hagarty, screamed at the cops. 'Now, now — there's no need for that sort of language,' Officer Harold Gardener told Hagarty. Harold Gardener was one of Dave Gardener's our sons. On the day his father had discovered the lifeless, one-armed body of George Denbrough, Harold Gardener had been five. On this day, almost twenty-seven years later, he was thirty-two and balding. Harold Gardener recognized the reality of Don Hagarty's grief and pain, and at the same time found it impossible to take seriously.

This man — if you want to call him a man — was wearing lipstick and satin pants so tight you could almost read the wrinkles in his cock. Grief or no grief, pain or no pain, he was, after all, just a queer. Like his friend, the late Adrian Mellon. 'Let's go through it again,' Harold's partner, Jeffrey Reeves, said. 'The two of you came out of the Falcon and turned toward the Canal. Then what?' 'How many times do I have to tell you idiots?' Hagarty was still screaming. 'They killed him! They pushed him over the side! Just another day in Macho City for them!' Don Hagarty began to cry. 'One more time,' Reeves repeated patiently. 'You came out of the Falcon. Then what?' 2 In an interrogation room just down the hall, two Derry cops were speaking with Steve Dubay, seventeen; in the Clerk of Probate's office upstairs, two more were questioning John 'Webby' Garton, eighteen; and in the Chief of Police's office on the fifth floor, Chief Andrew Rademacher and Assistant District Attorney Tom Boutillier were questioning fifteen-year-old Christopher Unwin. Unwin, who wore faded jeans, a grease-smeared tee-shirt, and blocky engineer boots, was weeping. Rademacher and Boutillier had taken him because they had quite accurately assessed him as the weak link in the chain. 'Let's go through it again,' Boutillier said in this office just as Jeffrey Reeves was saying the same thing two floors down. 'We didn't mean to kill him,' Unwin blubbered. 'It was the hat. We couldn't believe he was still wearing the hat after, you know, after what Webby said the first time.

And I guess we wanted to scare him.' 'For what he said,' Chief Rademacher interjected. 'Yes.' 'To John Garton, on the afternoon of the 17th.' 'Yes, to Webby.'

Unwin burst into fresh tears. 'But we tried to save him when we saw he was in trouble . . . at least me and Stevie Dubay did . . . we didn't mean to kill him!' 'Come on, Chris, don't shit us,' Boutillier said. 'You threw the little queer into the Canal.' 'Yes, but — ' 'And the three of you came in to make a clean breast of things. Chief Rademacher and I appreciate that, don't we, Andy?' 'You bet. It takes a man to own up to what he did, Chris.' 'So don't fuck yourself up by lying now. You meant to throw him over the minute you saw him and his fag buddy coming out of the Falcon, didn't you?' 'No!' Chris Unwin protested vehemently. Boutillier took a pack of Marlboros from his shirt pocket and stuck one in his mouth. He offered the pack to Unwin. 'Cigarette?' Unwin took one.

Boutillier had to chase the tip with a match in order to give him a light because of the way Unwin's mouth was trembling. 'But when you saw he was wearing the hat?' Rademacher asked. Unwin dragged deep, lowered his head so that his greasy hair fell in his eyes, and jetted smoke from his nose, which was littered with blackheads. 'Yeah,' he said, almost too softly to be heard. Boutillier leaned forward, brown eyes gleaming. His face was predatory but his voice was gentle. 'What, Chris?' 'I said yes. I guess so. To throw him in. But not to kill him.' He looked up at them, face frantic and miserable and still unable to comprehend the stupendous changes which had taken place in his life since he left the house to take in the last night of Derry's Canal Days Festival with two of his buddies at seven-thirty the previous evening.

'Not to kill him!' he repeated. 'And that guy under the bridge . . . I still don't know who he was.' 'What guy was that?' Rademacher asked, but without much interest. They had heard this part before as well, and neither of them believed it — sooner or later men accused of murder almost always drag out that mysterious other guy. Boutillier even had a name for it: he called it the 'One-Armed Man Syndrome,' after that old TV series *The Fugitive*. 'The guy in the clown suit,' Chris Unwin said, and shivered. 'The guy with the balloons.' 3 The Canal Days Festival, which ran from July 15th to July 21st, had been a rousing success, most Derry residents agreed: a great thing for the city's morale, image . . . and pocketbook.

The week-long festival was pegged to mark the centenary of the opening of the Canal which ran through the middle of downtown. It had been the Canal which had fully opened Derry to the lumber trade in the years 1884 to 1910; it had been the Canal which had birthed Derry's boom years. The town was spruced up from east to west and north to south. Potholes which some residents swore

hadn't been patched for ten years or more were neatly filled with hottop and rolled smooth. The town buildings were refurbished on the inside, repainted on the outside. The worst of the graffiti in Bassey Park — much of it coolly logical anti-gay statements such as KILL ALL QUEERS and AIDS FROM GOD YOU HELLHOUND HOMOS!! — was sanded off the benches and wooden walls of the little covered walkway over the Canal known as the Kissing Bridge. A Canal Days Museum was installed in three empty store-fronts downtown, and filled with exhibits by Michael Hanlon, a local librarian and amateur historian.

The town's oldest families loaned freely of their almost priceless treasures, and during the week of the festival nearly forty thousand visitors paid a quarter each to look at eating-house menus from the 1890s, loggers' bitts, axes, and peaveys from the 1880s, children's toys from the 1920s, and over two thousand photographs and nine reels of movie film of life as it had been in Derry over the last hundred years. The museum was sponsored by the Derry Ladies' Society, which vetoed some of Hanlon's proposed exhibits (such as the notorious tramp-chair from the 1930s) and photographs (such as those of the Bradley Gang after the notorious shoot-out). But all agreed it was a great success, and no one really wanted to see those gory old things anyway. It was so much better to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative, as the old song said. There was a huge striped refreshment tent in Derry Park, and band concerts there every night. In Bassey Park there was a carnival with rides by Smokey's Greater Shows and games run by local townfolk. A special tram-car circled the historic sections of the town every hour on the hour and ended up at this gaudy and amiable money-machine. It was here that Adrian Mellon won the hat which would get him killed, the paper top-hat with the flower and the band which said I § DERRY! 4 'I'm tired,' John 'Webby' Garton said. Like his two friends, he was dressed in unconscious imitation of Bruce Springsteen, although if asked he would probably call Springsteen a wimp or a fagola and would instead profess admiration for such 'bitchin' heavy-metal groups as Def Leppard, Twisted Sister, or Judas Priest. The sleeves of his plain blue tee-shirt were torn off, showing his heavily muscled arms. His thick brown hair fell over one eye — this touch was more John Cougar Mellencamp than Springsteen. There were blue tattoos on his arms — arcane symbols which looked as if they had been drawn by a child.

'I don't want to talk no more.' 'Just tell us about Tuesday afternoon at the fair,' Paul Hughes said. Hughes was tired and shocked and dismayed by this whole sordid business. He thought again and again that it was as if Derry Canal Days ended with one final event which everyone had somehow known about but

which no one had quite dared to put down on the Daily Program of Events. If they had, it would have looked like this: Saturday, 9:00 P.M.: Final band concert featuring the Derry High School Band and the Barber Shop Mello-Men. Saturday, 10:00 P.M.: Giant fireworks show. Saturday, 10:35 P.M.: Ritual sacrifice of Adrian Mellon officially ends Canal Days. 'Fuck the fair,' Webby replied. 'Just what you said to Mellon and what he said to you.' 'Oh Christ.' Webby rolled his eyes. 'Come on, Webby,' Hughes's partner said. Webby Garton rolled his eyes and began again. 5 Garton saw the two of them, Mellon and Hagarty, mincing along with their arms about each other's waists and giggling like a couple of girls. At first he actually thought they were a couple of girls. Then he recognized Mellon, who had been pointed out to him before. As he looked, he saw Mellon turn to Hagarty . . . and they kissed briefly.

'Oh, man, I'm gonna barf!' Webby cried, disgusted. Chris Unwin and Steve Dubay were with him. When Webby pointed out Mellon, Steve Dubay said he thought the other fag was named Don somebody, and that he'd picked up a kid from Derry High hitching and then tried to put a few moves on him. Mellon and Hagarty began to move toward the three boys again, walking away from the Pitch Til U Win and toward the carny's exit. Webby Garton would later tell Officers Hughes and Conley that his 'civic pride' had been wounded by seeing a fucking faggot wearing a hat which said I § DERRY. It was a silly thing, that hat — a paper imitation of a top hat with a great big flower sticking up from the top and nodding about in every direction. The silliness of the hat apparently wounded Webby's civic pride even more. As Mellon and Hagarty passed, each with his arm linked about the other's waist, Webby Garton yelled out: 'I ought to make you eat that hat, you fucking ass-bandit!' Mellon turned toward Garton, fluttered his eyes flirtatiously, and said: 'If you want something to eat, hon, I can find something much tastier than my hat.' At this point Webby Garton decided he was going to rearrange the faggot's face.

In the geography of Mellon's face, mountains would rise and continents would drift. Nobody suggested he sucked the root. Nobody. He started toward Mellon. Mellon's friend Hagarty, alarmed, attempted to pull Mellon away, but Mellon stood his ground, smiling. Garton would later tell Officers Hughes and Conley that he was pretty sure Mellon was high on something. So he was, Hagarty would agree when this idea was passed on to him by Officers Gardener and Reeves. He was high on two fried doughboys smeared with honey, on the carnival, on the whole day. He had been consequently unable to recognize the real menace which Webby Garton represented. 'But that was Adrian,' Don said, using a tissue

to wipe his eyes and smearing the spangled eyeshadow he was wearing. 'He didn't have much in the way of protective coloration. He was one of those fools who think things really are going to turn out all right.' He might have been badly hurt there and then if Garton hadn't felt something tap his elbow. It was a nightstick. He turned his head to see Officer Frank Machen, another member of Derry's Finest. 'Never mind, little buddy,' Machen told Garton. 'Mind your business and leave those little gay boyos alone. Have some fun.' 'Did you hear what he called me?' Garton asked body. He was now joined by Unwin and Dubay — the two of them, smelling trouble, tried to urge Garton on up the midway, but Garton shrugged them away, would have turned on them with his fists if they had persisted.

His masculinity had borne an insult which he felt must be avenged. Nobody suggested he sucked the root. Nobody. 'I don't believe he called you anything,' Machen replied. 'And you spoke to him first, I believe. Now move on, sonny. I don't want to have to tell you again.' 'He called me a queer!' 'Are you worried you might be, then?' Machen asked, seeming to be honestly interested, and Garton flushed a deep ugly red. During this exchange, Hagarty was trying with increasing desperation to pull Adrian Mellon away from the scene. Now, at last, Mellon was going. 'Ta-ta, love!' Adrian called cheekily over his shoulder. 'Shut up, candy-ass,' Machen said. 'Get out of here.' Garton made a lunge at Mellon, and Machen grabbed him. 'I can run you in, my friend,' Machen said, 'and the way you're acting, it might not be such a bad idea.'

'Next time I see you I'm gonna hurt you!' Garton bellowed after the departing pair, and heads turned to stare at him. 'And if you're wearing that hat, I'm gonna kill you! This town don't need no faggots like you!' Without turning, Mellon wagged the fingers of his left hand — the nails were painted cerise — and put an extra little wiggle in his walk. Garton lunged again. 'One more word or one more move and in you go,' Machen said mildly. 'Trust me, my boy, for I mean exactly what I say.' 'Come on, Webby,' Chris Unwin said uneasily. 'Mellow out.' 'You like guys like that?' Webby asked Machen, ignoring Chris and Steve completely. 'Huh?' 'About the bum-punchers I'm neutral,' Machen said. 'What I'm really in favor of is peace and quiet, and you are upsetting what I like, pizza face. Now do you want to go a round with me or what?' 'Come on, Webby,' Steve Dubay said quietly. 'Let's go get some hot dogs.'

Webby went, straightening his shirt with exaggerated moves and brushing the hair out of his eyes. Machen, who also gave a statement on the morning

following Adrian Mellon's death, said: 'The last thing I heard him say as him and his buddies walked off was, "Next time I see him he's going to be in serious hurt."' 6 'Please, I got to talk to my mother,' Steve Dubay said for the third time. 'I've got to get her to mellow out my stepfather, or there is going to be one hell of a punching-match when I get home.'

'In a little while,' Officer Charles Avarino told him. Both Avarino and his partner, Barney Morrison, knew that Steve Dubay would not be going home tonight and maybe not for many nights to come. The boy did not seem to realize just how heavy this particular bust was, and Avarino would not be surprised when he learned, later on, that Dubay had left school at age sixteen. At that time he had still been in Water Street Junior High. His IQ was 68, according to the Wechsler he had taken during one of his three trips through the seventh grade. 'Tell us what happened when you saw Mellon coming out of the Falcon,' Morrison invited. 'No, man, I better not.' 'Well, why not?' Avarino asked. 'I already talked too much, maybe.' 'You came in to talk,' Avarino said. 'Isn't that right?' 'Well . . . yeah . . . but . . . ' 'Listen,' Morrison said warmly, sitting down next to Dubay and shooting him a cigarette. 'You think me and Chick here like fags?' 'I don't know — ' 'Do we look like we like fags?' 'No, but . . . ' 'We're your friends, Steve-o,' Morrison said solemnly. 'And believe me, you and Chris and Webby need all the friends you can get just about now. Because tomorrow every bleeding heart in this town is going to be screaming for you guys's blood.'

Steve Dubay looked dimly alarmed. Avarino, who could almost read this hairbag's pussy little mind, suspected he was thinking about his stepfather again. And although Avarino had no liking for Derry's small gay community — like every other cop on the force, he would enjoy seeing the Falcon shut up forever — he would have been delighted to drive Dubay home himself. He would, in fact, have been delighted to hold Dubay's arms while Dubay's stepfather beat the creep to oatmeal. Avarino did not like gays, but this did not mean he believed they should be tortured and murdered. Mellon had been savaged. When they brought him up from under the Canal bridge, his eyes had been open, bulging with terror. And this guy here had absolutely no idea of what he had helped do. 'We didn't mean to hurt 'im,' Steve repeated. This was his fall-back position when he became even slightly confused.

'That's why you want to get out front with us,' Avarino said earnestly. 'Get the true facts of the matter out in front, and this maybe won't amount to a pisshole in the snow. Isn't that right, Barney?' 'As rain,' Morrison agreed. 'One more time,

what do you say?' Avarino coaxed. 'Well . . . ' Steve said, and then, slowly, began to talk. 7 When the Falcon was opened in 1973, Elmer Curtie thought his clientele would consist mostly of bus-riders — the terminal next door serviced three different lines: Trailways, Greyhound, and Aroostook County. What he failed to realize was how many of the passengers who ride buses are women or families with small children in tow. Many of the others kept their bottles in brown bags and never got off the bus at all.

Those who did were usually soldiers or sailors who wanted no more than a quick beer or two — you couldn't very well go on a bender during a ten-minute rest-stop. Curtie had begun to realize some of these home truths by 1977, but by then it was too late: he was up to his tits in bills and there was no way that he could see out of the red ink. The idea of burning the place down for the insurance occurred to him, but unless he hired a professional to torch it, he supposed he would be caught . . . and he had no idea where professional arsonists hung out, anyway. He decided in February of that year that he would give it until July 4th; if things didn't look as if they were turning around by then, he would simply walk next door, get on a 'hound, and see how things looked down in Florida. But in the next five months, an amazing quiet sort of prosperity came to the bar, which was painted black and gold inside and decorated with stuffed birds (Elmer Curtie's brother had been an amateur taxidermist who specialized in birds, and Elmer had inherited the stuff when he died).

Suddenly, instead of drawing sixty beers and pouring maybe twenty drinks a night, Elmer was drawing eighty beers and pouring a hundred drinks . . . a hundred and twenty . . . sometimes a hundred and sixty. His clientele was young, polite, almost exclusively male. Many of them dressed outrageously, but those were years when outrageous dress was still almost the norm, and Elmer Curtie did not realize that his patrons were just about almost exclusively gay until 1981 or so. If Derry residents had heard him say this, they would have laughed and said that Elmer Curtie must think they had all been born yesterday — but his claim was perfectly true. Like the man with the cheating wife, he was practically the last to know . . . and by the time he did, he didn't care. The bar was making money, and while there were four other bars in Derry which turned a profit, the Falcon was the only one where rambunctious patrons did not regularly demolish the whole place.

There were no women to fight over, for one thing, and these men, fags or not, seemed to have learned a secret of getting along with each other which their

heterosexual counterparts did not know. Once he became aware of the sexual preference of his regulars, he seemed to hear lurid stories about the Falcon everywhere — these stories had been circulating for years, but until '81 Curtie simply hadn't heard them. The most enthusiastic tellers of these tales, he came to realize, were men who wouldn't be dragged into the Falcon with a chainfall for fear all the muscles would go out of their wrists, or something. Yet they seemed privy to all sorts of information. According to the stories, you could go in there any night and see men close-dancing, rubbing their cocks together right out on the dancefloor; men french-kissing at the bar; men getting blow jobs in the bathrooms.

There was supposedly a room out back where you went if you wanted to spend a little time on the Tower of Power — there was a big old fellow in a Nazi uniform back there who kept his arm greased most of the way to the shoulder and who would be happy to take care of you. In fact, none of these things was true. When folks with a thirst did come in from the bus station for a beer or a highball, they sensed nothing out of the ordinary in the Falcon at all — there were a lot of guys, sure, but that was no different from thousands of workingmen's bars all across the country.

The clientele was gay, but gay was not a synonym for stupid. If they wanted a little outrageousness, they went to Portland. If they wanted a lot of outrageousness — Ramrod-style outrageousness or Peck's Big Boy-style outrageousness — they went down to New York or Boston. Derry was small, Derry was provincial, and Derry's small gay community understood the shadow under which it existed quite well. Don Hagarty had been coming into the Falcon for two or three years on the night in March of 1984 when he first showed up with Adrian Mellon. Before then, Hagarty had been the sort who plays the field, rarely showing up with the same escort half a dozen times. But by late April it had become obvious even to Elmer Curtie, who cared very little about such things, that Hagarty and Mellon had a steady thing going. Hagarty was a draftsman with an engineering firm in Bangor. Adrian Mellon was a freelance writer who published anywhere and everywhere he could — airline magazines, confession magazines, regional magazines, Sunday supplements, sex-letter magazines.

He had been working on a novel, but maybe that wasn't serious — he had been working on it since his third year of college, and that had been twelve years ago. He had come to Derry to write a piece about the Canal — he was on assignment

from New England Byways, a glossy bi-monthly that was published in Concord. Adrian Mellon had taken the assignment because he could squeeze Byways for three weeks' worth of expense money, including a nice room at the Derry Town House, and gather all the material he needed for the piece in maybe five days. During the other two weeks he could gather enough material for maybe four other regional pieces. But during that three-week period he met Don Hagarty, and instead of going back to Portland when his three weeks on the cuff were over, he found himself a small apartment on Kossuth Lane. He lived there for only six weeks. Then he moved in with Don Hagarty.

8 That summer, Hagarty told Harold Gardener and Jeff Reeves, was the happiest summer of his life — he should have been on the lookout, he said; he should have known that God only puts a rug under guys like him in order to jerk it out from under their feet. The only shadow, he said, was Adrian's extravagantly partisan reaction to Derry. He had a tee-shirt which said MAINE AIN'T BAD BUT DERRY'S GREAT! He had a Derry Tigers high-school jacket. And of course there was the hat. He claimed to find the atmosphere vital and creatively invigorating. Perhaps there was something to this: he had taken his languishing novel out of the trunk for the first time in nearly a year. 'Was he really working on it, then?' Gardener asked Hagarty, not really caring but wanting to keep Hagarty primed. 'Yes — he was busting pages.

He said it might be a terrible novel, but it was no longer going to be a terrible unfinished novel. He expected to finish it by his birthday, in October. Of course, he didn't know what Derry was really like. He thought he did, but he hadn't been here long enough to get a whiff of the real Derry. I kept trying to tell him, but he wouldn't listen.' 'And what's Derry really like, Don?' Reeves asked. 'It's a lot like a dead strumpet with maggots squirming out of her cooze,' Don Hagarty said. The two cops stared in silent amazement. 'It's a bad place,' Hagarty said. 'It's a sewer. You mean you two guys don't know that? You two guys have lived here all of your lives and you don't know that?' Neither of them answered. After a little while, Hagarty went on. 9 Until Adrian Mellon entered his life, Don had been planning to leave Derry.

He had been there for three years, mostly because he had agreed to a long-term lease on an apartment with the world's most fantastic river-view, but now the lease was almost up and Don was glad. No more long commute back and forth to Bangor. No more weird vibes — in Derry, he once told Adrian, it always felt like thirteen o'clock. Adrian might think Derry was a great place, but it scared

Don. It was not just the town's tightly homophobic attitude, an attitude as clearly expressed by the town's preachers as by the graffiti in Bassey Park, but that was one thing he had been able to put his finger on. Adrian had laughed. 'Don, every town in America has a contingent that hates the gayfolk,' he said. 'Don't tell me you don't know that.'

This is, after all, the era of Ronnie Moron and Phyllis Housefly.' 'Come down to Bassey Park with me,' Don had replied, after seeing that Adrian really meant what he was saying — and what he was really saying was that Derry was no worse than any other fair-sized town in the hinterlands. 'I want to show you something, my love.' They drove to Bassey Park — this had been in mid-June, about a month before Adrian's murder, Hagarty told the cops. He took Adrian into the dark, vaguely unpleasant-smelling shadows of the Kissing Bridge. He pointed out one of the graffiti. Adrian had to strike a match and hold it below the writing in order to read it.

SHOW ME YOUR COCK QUEER AND I'LL CUT IT OFF YOU. 'I know how people feel about gays,' Don said quietly. 'I got beaten up at a truck-stop in Dayton when I was a teenager; some fellows in Portland set my shoes on fire outside of a sandwich shop while this fat-assed old cop sat inside his cruiser and laughed. I've seen a lot . . . but I've never seen anything quite like this. Look over here. Check it out.' Another match revealed STICK NAILS IN EYES OF ALL FAGOTS (FOR GOD)! 'Whoever writes these little homilies has got a case of the deep-down crazies. I'd feel better if I thought it was just one person, one isolated sickie, but . . . ' Don swept his arm vaguely down the length of the Kissing Bridge. 'There's a lot of this stuff . . . and I just don't think one person did it all. That's why I want to leave Derry, Ade. Too many places and too many people seem to have the deep-down crazies.' 'Well, wait until I finish my novel, okay? Please? October, I promise, no later.'

The air's better here.' 'He didn't know it was the water he was going to have to watch out for,' Don Hagarty said bitterly. 10 Tom Boutillier and Chief Rademacher leaned forward, neither of them speaking. Chris Unwin sat with his head down, talking monotonously to the floor. This was the part they wanted to hear; this was the part that was going to send at least two of these assholes to Thomaston. 'The fair wasn't no good,' Unwin said. 'They was already takin down all the bitchin rides, you know, like the Devil Dish and the Parachute Drop. They already had a sign on the Bumper Cars that said "closed." Wasn't nothing open but baby rides. So we went down by the games and Webby saw the Pitch Til U Win and

he paid fifty cents and he seen that hat the queer was wearing and he pitched at that, but he kept missing it, and every time he missed he got more in a bad mood, you know? And Steve — he's the guy who usually goes around saying mellow out, like mellow out this and mellow out that and why don't you fuckin mellow out, you know? Only he was in a real piss-up-a-rope mood because he took this pill, you know? I don't know what kind of a pill. A red pill. Maybe it was even legal. But he keeps after Webby until I thought Webby was gonna hit him, you know.

He goes. You can't even win that queer's hat. You must be really wasted if you can't even win that queer's hat. So finally the lady gives im a prize even though the ring wasn't over it, cause I think she wanted to get rid of us. I don't know. Maybe she didn't. But I think she did. It was this noise-maker thing, you know? You blow it and it puffs up and unrolls and makes a noise like a fart, you know? I used to have one of those. I got it for Halloween or New Year's or some fuckin holiday, I thought it was pretty good, only I lost it. Or maybe somebody hawked it out of my pocket in the fuckin playyard at school, you know? So then the fair's closin and we're walkin out and Steve's still on Webby about not bein able to win that queer's hat, you know, and Webby ain't sayin much, and I know that's a bad sign but I was pretty 'faced, you know? So I knew I ought to like change the subject only I couldn't think of no subject, you know? So when we get into the parkin lot Steve says, Where you want to go? Home? And Webby goes, Let's cruise by the Falcon first and see if that queer's around.' Boutillier and Rademacher exchanged a glance. Boutillier raised a single finger and tapped it against his cheek: although this doofus in the engineer boots didn't know it, he was now talking about first-degree murder.

'So I goes no, I gotta get home, and Webby goes, You scared to go by that queer-bar? And I go, Fuck no! And Steve's still high or something, and he says, Let's go grease some queermeat! Let's go grease some queermeat! Let's go grease . . . '

11 The timing was just right enough so that things worked out wrong for everyone. Adrian Mellon and Don Hagarty came out of the Falcon after two beers, walked up past the bus station, and then linked hands. Neither of them thought about it; it was just something they did. It was ten-twenty. They reached the corner and turned left. The Kissing Bridge was almost half a mile upriver from here; they meant to cross Main Street Bridge, which was much less picturesque. The Kenduskeag was summer-low, no more than four feet of water sliding listlessly around the concrete pilings. When the Duster drew abreast of them (Steve Dubay had spotted the two of them coming out of the Falcon and gleefully

pointed them out), they were on the edge of the span. 'Cut in! Cut in!' Webby Garton screamed. The two men had just passed under a streetlight and he had spotted the fact that they were holding hands. This infuriated him . . . but not as much as the hat infuriated him. The big paper flower was nodding crazily this way and that. 'Cut in, goddammit!' And Steve did. Chris Unwin would deny active participation in what followed, but Don Hagarty told a different story. He said that Garton was out of the car almost before it stopped, and that the other two quickly followed.

There was talk. Not good talk. There was no attempt at flippancy or false coquetry on Adrian's part this night; he recognized that they were in a lot of trouble. 'Give me that hat,' Garton said. 'Give it to me, queer.' 'If I do, will you leave us alone?' Adrian was wheezing with fright, almost crying, looking from Unwin to Dubay to Garton with terrified eyes. 'Just give me the fucker!' Adrian handed it over. Garton produced a switchknife from the left front pocket of his jeans and cut it into two pieces. He rubbed the pieces against the seat of his jeans. Then he dropped them to his feet and stomped them. Don Hagarty backed away a little while their attention was divided between Adrian and the hat — he was looking, he said, for a cop.

'Now will you let us al — ' Adrian Mellon began, and that was when Garton punched him in the face, driving him back against the waist-high pedestrian railing of the bridge. Adrian screamed, clapping his hands to his mouth. Blood poured through his fingers. 'Ade!' Hagarty cried, and ran forward again. Dubay tripped him. Garton booted him in the stomach, knocking him off the sidewalk and into the roadway. A car passed. Hagarty rose to his knees and screamed at it. It didn't slow. The driver, he told Gardener and Reeves, never even looked around. 'Shut up, queer!' Dubay said, and kicked him in the side of the face. Hagarty fell on his side in the gutter, semiconscious. A few moments later he heard a voice — Chris Unwin's — telling him to get away before he got what his friend was getting.

In his own statement Unwin verified giving this warning. Hagarty could hear thudding blows and the sound of his lover screaming. Adrian sounded like a rabbit in a snare, he told the police. Hagarty crawled back toward the intersection and the bright lights of the bus station, and when he was a distance away he turned back to look. Adrian Mellon, who stood about five-five and might have weighed a hundred and thirty-five pounds soaking wet, was being pushed from Garton to Dubay to Unwin in a kind of triple play. His body jittered and

flopped like the body of a rag doll. They were punching him, pummelling him, ripping at his clothes. As he watched, he said, Garton punched Adrian in the crotch. Adrian's hair hung in his face. Blood poured out of his mouth and soaked his shirt. Webby Garton wore two heavy rings on his right hand: one was a Derry High School ring, the other one he had made in shop class — an intertwined brass DB stood out three inches from this latter. The letters stood for the Dead Bugs, a metal band he particularly admired.

The rings had torn Adrian's upper lip open and shattered three of his upper teeth at the gum line. 'Help!' Hagarty shrieked. 'Help! Help! They're killing him! Help!' The buildings of Main Street loomed dark and secret. No one came to help — not even from the one white island of light which marked the bus station, and Hagarty did not see how that could be: there were people in there. He had seen them when he and Ade walked past. Would none of them come to help? None at all? 'HELP! HELP! THEY'RE KILLING HIM, HELP, PLEASE, FOR GOD'S SAKE!' 'Help,' a very small voice whispered from Don Hagarty's left . . . and then there was a giggle.

'Bum's rush!' Garton was yelling now . . . yelling and laughing. All three of them, Hagarty told Gardener and Reeves, had been laughing while they beat Adrian up. 'Bum's rush! Over the side!' 'Bum's rush! Bum's rush! Bum's rush!' Dubay chanted, laughing. 'Help,' the small voice said again, and although the voice was grave, that little giggle followed again — it was like the voice of a child who cannot help itself. Hagarty looked down and saw the clown — and it was at this point that Gardener and Reeves began to discount everything that Hagarty said, because the rest was the raving of a lunatic. Later, however, Harold Gardener found himself wondering. Later, when he found that the Unwin boy had also seen a clown — or said he had — he began to have second thoughts. His partner either never had them or would never admit to them. The clown, Hagarty said, looked like a cross between Ronald McDonald and that old TV clown, Bozo — or so he thought at first. It was the wild tufts of orange hair that brought such comparisons to mind.

But later consideration had caused him to think the clown really looked like neither. The smile painted over the white pancake was red, not orange, and the eyes were a weird shiny silver. Contact lenses, perhaps . . . but a part of him thought then and continued to think that maybe that silver had been the real color of those eyes. He wore a baggy suit with big orange-pompom buttons; on his hands were cartoon gloves. 'If you need help, Don,' the clown said, 'help

yourself to a balloon.' And it offered the bunch it held in one hand. 'They float,' the clown said. 'Down here we all float; pretty soon your friend will float too.' 12 'This clown called you by name,' Jeff Reeves said in a totally expressionless voice. He looked over Hagarty's bent head at Harold Gardener, and one eye drew down in a wink. 'Yes,' Hagarty said, not looking up. 'I know how it sounds.' 13 'So then you threw him over,' Boutillier said. 'Bum's rush.' 'Not me!' Unwin said, looking up. He flicked the hair out of his eyes with one hand and stared at them urgently. 'When I saw they really meant to do it, I tried to pull Steve away, because I knew the guy might get banged up It was like ten feet to the water' It was twenty-three. One of Chief Rademacher's patrolmen had already measured. 'But it was like he was crazy. The two of them kept yelling "Bum's rush! Bum's rush!" and they picked him up.

Webby had him under the arms and Steve had him by the seat of the pants, and . . . and . . . ' 14 When Hagarty saw what they were doing, he rushed back toward them, screaming 'No! No! No!' at the top of his voice. Chris Unwin pushed him backward and Hagarty landed in a teeth-rattling heap on the sidewalk. 'Do you want to go over, too?' he whispered. 'You run, baby!' They threw Adrian Mellon over the bridge and into the water then. Hagarty heard the splash. 'Let's get out of here,' Steve Dubay said. He and Webby were backing toward the car. Chris Unwin went to the railing and looked over. He saw Hagarty first, sliding and clawing his way down the weedy, trash-littered embankment to the water. Then he saw the clown. The clown was dragging Adrian out on the far side with one arm; its balloons were in its other hand. Adrian was dripping wet, choking, moaning. The clown twisted its head and grinned up at Chris. Chris said he saw its shining silver eyes and its bared teeth — great big teeth, he said. 'Like the lion in the circus, man,' he said.

'I mean, they were that big.' Then, he said, he saw the clown shove one of Adrian Mellon's arms back so it lay over his head. Then what, Chris?' Boutillier said. He was bored with this part. Fairy tales had bored him since the age of eight on. 'I dunno,' Chris said. 'That was when Steve grabbed me and hauled me into the car. But . . . I think it bit into his armpit.' He looked up at them again, uncertain now. 'I think that's what it did. Bit into his armpit. 'Like it wanted to eat him, man. Like it wanted to eat his heart.' 15 No, Hagarty said when he was presented with Chris Unwin's story in the form of questions. The clown did not drag Ade up on the far bank, at least not that he saw — and he would grant that he had been something less than a disinterested observer by that point; by that point he had been out of his fucking mind. The clown, he said, was standing near the far bank with

Adrian's dripping body clutched in its arms. Ade's right arm was stuck stiffly out behind the clown's head, and the clown's face was indeed in Ade's right armpit, but it was not biting: it was smiling. Hagarty could see it looking out from beneath Ade's arm and smiling. The clown's arms tightened, and Hagarty heard ribs splinter. Ade shrieked. 'Float with us, Don,' the clown said out of its grinning red mouth, and then pointed with one of its white-gloved hands under the bridge. Balloons floated against the underside of the bridge — not a dozen or a dozen dozens but thousands, red and blue and green and yellow, and printed on the side of each was I § DERRY! 16 'Well now, that surely does sound like a lot of balloons,' Reeves said, and tipped Harold Gardener another wink. 'I know how it sounds,' Hagarty reiterated in the same dreary voice. 'You saw those balloons,' Gardener said.

Don Hagarty slowly held his hands up in front of his face. 'I saw them as clearly as I can see my own fingers at this moment. Thousands of them. You couldn't even see the underside of the bridge — there were too many of them. They were rippling a little, and sort of bouncing up and down. There was a sound. A funny low squealing noise. That was their sides rubbing together. And strings. There was a forest of white strings hanging down. They looked like white strands of spiderweb. The clown took Ade under there. I could see its suit brushing through those strings. Ade was making awful choking sounds. I started after him . . . and the clown looked back. I saw its eyes, and all at once I understood who it was.' 'Who was it, Don?' Harold Gardener asked softly. 'It was Derry,' Don Hagarty said. 'It was this town.'

'And what did you do then?' It was Reeves. 'I ran, you dumb shit,' Hagarty said, and burst into tears. 17 Harold Gardener kept his peace until November 13th, the day before John Garton and Steven Dubay were to go on trial in Derry District Court for the murder of Adrian Mellon. Then he went to see Tom Boutillier. He wanted to talk about the clown. Boutillier didn't — but when he saw Gardener might do something stupid without a little guidance, he did. There was no clown, Harold. The only clowns out that night were those three kids. You know that as well as I do.' 'We have two witnesses — ' 'Oh, that's crap. Unwin decided to bring on the One-Armed Man, as in "We didn't kill the poor little faggot, it was the one-armed man," as soon as he understood he'd really gotten his buns into some hot water this time. Hagarty was hysterical. He stood by and watched those kids murder his best friend. It wouldn't have surprised me if he'd seen flying saucers.' But Boutillier knew better. Gardener could see it in his eyes, and the Assistant DA's ducking and dodging irritated him. 'Come on,' he said. 'We're talking about

independent witnesses here. Don't bullshit me.' 'Oh, you want to talk bullshit? Are you telling me you believe there was a vampire clown under the Main Street Bridge? Because that's my idea of bullshit.' 'No, not exactly, but — ' 'Or that Hagarty saw a billion balloons under there, each imprinted with exactly the same thing as what was written on his lover's hat? Because that is also my idea of bullshit.' 'No, but — ' 'Then why are you bothering with this?' 'Stop cross-examining me!' Gardener roared. 'They both described it the same and neither knew what the other one was saying!' Boutillier had been sitting at his desk, playing with a pencil. Now he put the pencil down, got up, and walked over to Harold Gardener. Boutillier was five inches shorter, but Gardener retreated a step before the man's anger.

'Do you want us to lose this case, Harold?' 'No. Of course n — ' 'Do you want those running sores to walk free?' 'No!' 'Okay. Good. Since we both agree on the basics, I'll tell you exactly what I think. Yes, there was probably a man under the bridge that night. Maybe he was even wearing a clown suit, although I've dealt with enough witnesses to guess maybe it was just a stewbum or a transient wearing a bunch of cast-off clothes. I think he was probably down there scrounging for dropped change or roadmeat — half a burger someone chucked over the side, or maybe the crumbs from the bottom of a Frito bag. Their eyes did the rest, Harold. Now is that possible?' 'I don't know,' Harold said. He wanted to be convinced, but given the exact tally of the two descriptions . . . no. He didn't think it was possible.

'Here's the bottom line. I don't care if it was Kinko the Klown or a guy in an Uncle Sam suit on stilts or Hubert the Happy Homo. If we introduce this fellow into the case, their lawyer is going to be on it before you can say "Jack Robinson". He's going to say those two little innocent lambs out there with their fresh haircuts and new suits didn't do anything but toss that gay fellow Mellon over the side of the bridge for a joke. He'll point out that Mellon was still alive after he took the fall; they have Hagarty's testimony as well as Unwin's for that. 'His clients didn't commit murder, oh no! It was a psycho in a clown suit. If we introduce this, that's going to happen and you know it.' 'Unwin's going to tell that story anyhow.' 'But Hagarty isn't,' Boutillier said.

'Because he understands. Without Hagarty, who's going to believe Unwin?' 'Well, there's us,' Harold Gardener said with a bitterness that surprised even himself, 'but I guess we're not telling.' 'Oh, give me a break!' Boutillier roared, throwing up his hands. 'They killed him! They didn't just throw him over the side — Garton

had a switchblade. Mellon was stabbed seven times, including once in the left lung and twice in the testicles. The wounds match the blade. Four of his ribs were broken — Dubay did that, bear-hugging him. He was bitten, all right. There were bites on his arms, his left cheek, his neck. I think that was Unwin and Garton, although we've only got one clear match, and that one's probably not clear enough to stand up in court. And so all right, there was a big chunk of meat gone from his right armpit, so what? One of them really liked to bite. Probably even got himself a pretty good bone-on while he was doing it. I'm betting Garton, although we'll never prove it.

And Mellon's earlobe was gone.' Boutillier stopped, glaring at Harold. 'If we let in this clown story we'll never bring it home to them. Do you want that?' 'No, I told you.' 'The guy was a fruit, but he wasn't hurting anyone,' Boutillier said. 'So hi-ho-the-dairy-o, along come these three pushholes in their engineer boots and they steal his life. I'm going to put them in the slam, my friend, and if I hear they got their puckery little assholes cored down there at Thomaston, I'm gonna send them cards saying I hope whoever did it had AIDS.' Very fiery, Gardener thought. And the convictions will also look very good on your record when you run for the top spot in two years. But he left without saying more, because he also wanted to see them put away.

18 John Webber Garton was convicted of first-degree manslaughter and sentenced to ten to twenty years in Thomaston State Prison. Steven Bishoff Dubay was convicted of first-degree manslaughter and sentenced to fifteen years in Shawshank State Prison.

Christopher Philip Unwin was tried separately as a juvenile and convicted of second-degree manslaughter. He was sentenced to six months at the South Windham Boys' Training Facility, sentence suspended. At the time of this writing, all three sentences are under appeal; Garton and Dubay may be seen on any given day girl-watching or playing Penny Pitch in Bassey Park, not far from where Mellon's torn body was found floating against one of the pilings of the Main Street Bridge. Don Hagarty and Chris Unwin have left town. At the major trial — that of Garton and Dubay — no one mentioned a clown.