**Week 5 Assignment**

It was the cold that finally forced Charlie out of bed, the cold and a full bladder. He’d had trouble getting to sleep; the sound of sirens and heavy engines from a nearby street had lasted late into the night. Another garage fire, not unusual in this neighbourhood, especially over this last summer, but everyone had thought they’d stop now that fall had arrived. And during the night, the cold had disturbed him a couple of times, and, though he knew he should get up, to either to close the window or to find an extra blanket, he’d been too tired, too lazy and instead he’d adjusted the thin summer-weight comforter around him, and eventually drifted off to sleep.

Feeling more awake after a long, hot shower and a shave, Charlie threw on an old jacket, picked up a bag of old clothes for the goodwill shop and headed for the door. He lived on the top floor of a large house in Wolseley, long since converted into three good-sized apartments; all original oak trim, plaster cornices, draughty windows and creaking floors. He locked his apartment and walked down the narrow twisting stairs, taking care to step near the edge to avoid the worst of the creaks.

The streets were quiet. The cool, thick mist, filled with the smell of wood smoke, absorbing most of the early morning sounds; he could just make out the faint hiss of tires on wet road as cars passed down Westminster. The covering of damp leaves muffled his footsteps and he walked the streets like a ghost. His morning circuit, not a fixed route, but a two or three mile loop through the neighbourhood ending at the coffee shop at the bottom of his own street. Today, across Westminster, up Canora and through the park, empty now, flowerbeds cleaned out and dig over. Then along Portage to the small strip mall where the drop-off bin for the goodwill sat in the corner of the driveway, the handle to the swing door wet and cold, as he opened it open and dropped in his bag. He rubbed his hands dry on the outside of his jacket and walked on, with a more comfortable gait now that he could swing both arms.

The light from the coffee-shop window lit the mist with a welcoming glow, bringing a smile to Charlie’s face, as he pushed open the door, and heard the jangle of the string of bells hanging above it’s frame.

“Morning, Charlie,” said the woman behind the counter, “your usual?”

“Yes please, Sandy,” he said, looking around the room; it contained about ten tables of different shapes and sizes, with a similarly odd mix of chairs, each painted in bright pastel shades; and along one wall, built-in bookshelves filled with used books; and in the far corner, to one side of the front window, a padded bench with an old coffee table in front of it, Charlie’s favourite spot.

“Thanks, Sandy,” he said, taking his coffee and toasted bagel, he weaved his way over to the corner.

‘Morning gorgeous! Large, English breakfast, please. Morning all! Hi Charlie!”

Charlie smiled; Frank had arrived. There goes the peace and quiet, he thought, as he settled into the corner of the bench, and waited for his friend to join him. Charlie couldn’t remember having such a good friend, certainly not since high school, and it continued to amaze him, that now, edging into his sixties, he would have one again. Especially one like Frank; where Charlie was quiet and contemplative, Frank was, well, loud; loud and impulsive.

“Another fire down your street, I see,” said Frank.

“Next street over, I think, maybe two, though it was too foggy to see much this morning.”

“Bastard kids.”

“Probably. We need some snow to keep them indoors.”

“So, you ready for this afternoon? Two days, I reckon, no more than three and cash in hand. Beauty.”

Charlie laughed. Since they’d first met, Frank had been picking up odd jobs; window-cleaning, small renovations, yard work, painting; and Charlie had been roped in, not unwillingly, on many of them; and if it was one thing that brought a sparkle to Frank’s eye, it was getting paid in cash. Charlie new that this was pure theatre; Frank had long ago admitted that he had more money than he needed, a good pension after twenty-five years in the navy and more as a civil servant; but what he had even more of was spare time, and Frank needed to fill his time with activity, anything physical. So he’d take on odd jobs, often from old people and small charities, but really anyone he deemed as worthy; and he’d barter hard, starting at a ridiculously low price, and working down, and ending with a final reduction for cash. This afternoon we were painting the basement hall of St. Martin’s, where they ran a food and clothing bank Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

“You done with your plate, Charlie?” said Sandy, as she lifted it with one hand and wiped down the table with a damp cloth.

“Thanks, Sandy.”

“I hear, the police were down your way early this morning.”

“Really? The fire, I guess.”

“No - drugs, at least, that’s what Jean, over at the bakery, said. Lots of police cars, streets blocked off, yellow tape, the works.”

“It’s the wild west out your way,” said Frank, who lived no more than three blocks away, “pretty much since you arrived, hey, Charlie? Is there something we should know?” He said with a wink.

“That’s right Frank. I’m taking over. Say ‘lo to my leetle fliend,” I said. We watch as Sandy weaves her way through the tables back to the counter.

“She fancies you, you know.” Said Frank.

“Right.” I said, drawing the word out, watching as Sandy prepares a new pot of coffee.