

Prologue: "Scotty"

Comment [RH1]: Don't put your own titles in quotes. Remove them here (on every chapter) and from the titles in the table of contents.

It was ~~an-one of those~~ early spring days when life filled your nose. ~~Spring finally pushed~~
~~The season had finally sprung~~ though the dank of winter, pushing aside last year's leaves and reaching upward.

A ~~rouge-rouge~~ wind with a thin chill ~~pushed~~ ~~made its way~~ across the top of The Drop as ~~Michael-Mike~~
jockeyed his bike to face the ~~quarter-quarter~~-mile descent.

Comment [RH2]: You used "push" three times in two sentences. Use a synonym here.

Comment [RH3]: See my comment on p. 7

Beside him, his best friend Scotty assumed the same position.

"Think you can make it the whole way without wetting your panties, girlie man?" Scotty taunted.

Comment [RH4]: Same ¶ as above; focus is still on Scotty.

The Drop was the biggest hill on their side of the county. A massive thing, it ended with an old wooden bridge that still smelled of creosote. Legend said it was the final resting place of Wilson, a habitual wife beater and drunk. Legend also said if you came off The Drop fast enough, you could jump the whole span. ~~Michael-Mike~~ and Scotty had been trying off and on for ~~years~~, but today Scotty added a homemade ramp at the bottom of The Drop.

Comment [RH5]: Years? The next ¶ says two.

They waved at Father Drew, a local minister as he sat on his front porch

"You are bat shit crazy. There's no way that ramp will hold you," ~~Michael-Mike~~ said. Scotty snorted. They had been best friends for two summers, and had done everything ~~14-fourteen~~ year old boys were supposed to do together; ~~filched~~ fireworks and shot them at each other, tromped through woods with BB guns, pretending they were special forces; ~~and~~ stared ~~wide-wide~~-eyed at a rumpled copy of a Penthouse magazine Scotty lifted from his older brother.

~~Scotty~~ was the more adventurous of the two; ~~always~~ holding the firecracker until the last second before he tossed it to ~~Michael-Mike~~. ~~Mike~~ ~~was more like his sister than Scotty.~~

Comment [RH6]: Same ¶ as above; focus is still on boyhood deeds

Comment [RH7]: Does this work as a way to foreshadow Rachel and her effect on Michael?

"Nah, I braced it from the backside. Let's do this before a car comes." Scotty stood up, balancing the bike perfectly. "3 . . . 2 . . . 1!" He gave a tremendous lurch and ~~Michael-Mike~~ pushed off a ~~half-half~~.

1 second later. ~~Michael-Mike~~ pedaled madly, leaning over the handle-bars and into the wind. The air cooled
2 the faster he went, flowing over his freshly cut hair. ~~Michael's-Mike's~~ dad was in the Army, stationed at Fort
3 Mac, and every two weeks Mike got a regulation flattop administered by his mother. The feel of wind was
4 still new enough he noticed it whistling around his ears.

5 Ahead of him, Scotty was pumping his pedals, almost two bike lengths ahead of ~~MichaelMike~~.
6 ~~Michael-Mike~~ moved to the right and pedaled harder, trying to catch up. He would let Scotty jump first,
7 ribbing be damned. If the ramp failed, one of them would need to go for help.

8 ~~Michael-Mike~~ had come within a few feet of his friend when Scotty hit the ramp and went airborne.
9 ~~Michael-Mike~~ could hear his gasp as the bike left the ramp. Craning his head up, ~~Michael-Mike~~ watched as
10 his friend sailed through the air. ~~A-halfHalf a~~ second later, ~~Michael-Mike~~ hit the bridge, the smooth asphalt
11 giving way to the uneven planking. Ahead of him, Scotty started his descent, just clearing the bridge. His
12 bike landed and wobbled with the impact, but Scotty brought it upright, and laid on the brakes, swinging the
13 back tire around and leaving a strong black mark on the pavement.

14 As he ~~faccd turned to face~~ ~~MichaelMike~~, his eyes were wide over a bloodless face. ~~Scotty's-His~~
15 cheeks bloomed as he took a deep breath, ~~and then he~~ said in a rush,

16 "~~Ohmyfuckin'goddidyouseeTHAT!-?'~~" On the last word, Scotty's voice broke, and he and ~~Michael~~
17 ~~Mike~~ collapsed in gales of laughter, supported only by their bikes. "That was ~~friggen'-friggin'~~ awesome! I
18 must have been ten feet high!"

19 ~~Michael-Mike~~ shook his head as he said,

20 "~~No way. You were barely to my shoulder. But you went forever. I never~~ thought you were never
21 coming down."

22 "I also left a gnarly skid mark. Look at that, it must be ~~12-twelve~~ feet long-," Scotty said. He was
23 right; the skid mark was a perfect J shape, remaining visible for years. Even after the county repaved the

Comment [RH8]: Same ¶ as above.

Comment [RH9]: Same ¶ as above.

1 road, ~~Michael~~ would think of that perfect skid mark, sealed forever under the layer of asphalt. "I'm surprised
2 I have any tread left." Scotty peered over his shoulder, looking at ~~the~~ his back tire.

Comment [RH10]: Here I'm leaving Michael because he will be an adult then, and it hints to his "adult" name.

3 They slowly pushed their bikes up The Drop, talking excitedly about the jump, the next jump, and
4 all future jumps. The conversation moved to girls, to cars, and then back to girls. Scotty asked,

5 "~~I~~ Do you think Rachel will be there when we get back to your house?" He thought Mike's older sister
6 was hot, and kept trying to invite himself over if he knew she was there.

Comment [RH11]: Same ¶ as above.

7 "Nah. She's too wrapped up in the school thing. She wants to go to school for medicine or
8 something," ~~Michael~~ Mike answered.

9 They had almost reached the top of The Drop when an unmuffled roar rolled across the hills.

10 ~~Michael~~ Mike ~~unconsciously~~ subconsciously moved his bike onto the shoulder. Scotty looked up,
11 interested.

12 "Sounds like Dickey got his SS running." Dickey Richards was a few years older than them, and
13 had recently turned ~~46~~ sixteen. Dickey Dick to his auto shop buddies, he was a terror to ~~Michael~~ Mike and
14 Scotty's group of friends. His family lived in a trailer surrounded by junked cars and his father was a shade
15 tree mechanic. Dickey seemed to be following in the same footsteps and carried an eternal air of menace
16 around him, sweetened by oil, grease, and stale tobacco smoke. ~~Michael~~ Mike and Scotty made wide
17 detours whenever they could.

18 The sound of the car rose and fell as Dickey raced up and down North Road. ~~Michael~~ Mike and
19 Scotty had almost reached the crest of The Drop when Scotty noticed a beer box at the bottom of the ditch
20 closest to ~~Michael~~ Mike. Several unopened beers spilled out, glinting in the sunlight.

21 "Holy shit, lookit that! Hey, grab them! We can take them when we go camping next weekend."

22 ~~Michael~~ Mike glanced at Scotty, standing astride his bike, just onto the pavement. Scotty was grinning, and
23 the wind ~~pushed~~ tustled his ~~friend's~~ hair across his forehead. The band Nirvana had just hit the scene, and

Comment [RH12]: Or a different synonym. The personification of "pushing" wind has been used too often, I think.

1 ~~Michael-Mike~~ knew Scotty was trying to grow his hair out. For a split second, ~~Michael-Mike~~ paused, almost
2 ignoring him. Instead, he dropped his bike, and slipped down into the ditch.

3 ~~As~~ he hit bottom, he heard an engine roar and tires squeal as Dickey laid rubber at the nearest
4 stop sign. Only when the engine got louder did ~~Michael-Mike~~ realize he had turned their way.

5 There were four beer cans in the box. ~~Michael-Mike~~ scooped them all up, and ~~just~~ stood when
6 Dickey's engine shifted just enough for Michael to hear a dull crump. ~~Michaels'-Mike's~~ stomach dropped
7 and his body popped out in sweat as he heard Dickey's ~~tires-squeal~~car scrape to a stop on the road above
8 him. ~~Michael-Mike~~ scrambled out of the ditch, clawing his way up, beer cans falling, ~~and~~ rolling back to the
9 bottom of the ditch. When he got to the top, Dickey's car was perpendicular to the center line, smoke
10 drifting up from the rear tires. A litter of glass sparkled across the blacktop, and ~~Michael-Mike~~ could see
11 Dickey's face in the driver's seat. His mouth was a perfect O and their eyes met across the space.

12 "Oh, my bike . . . she's gonna be so mad." Scotty's voice was low, and ~~Michael's-Mike's~~ stomach
13 lurched again, rebelling at what had happened. He saw his friend standing on the ~~far~~-shoulder of the road
14 nearest him, looking ~~down into the ditch~~back toward the road. As ~~Michael-Mike~~ walked to him, he heard the
15 clunk of the car door opening, pushing against bent metal. Scotty was standing, looking at the crumpled
16 remains of his bike. Scotty moved slowly, his eyes wide.

17 ~~"Oh, man, Mike, what happened? All of a sudden I saw the car, and then my bike. My mom's~~
18 ~~gonna be so pissed."~~ ~~Scotty said.~~

19 Mike found his voice. "How did it miss you? Did you jump?"

20 Scotty paused before responding, as if he had a hard time hearing him. He shrugged.

21 ~~"I~~ guess. Oh, my poor bike. Do you think Dickey's gonna buy me a new one?" ~~Michael-Mike~~ looked
22 at his friend. In the background, he heard Dickey's shoes slapping the road as he ran uphill toward them.

23 The day went still, in the moment that Scotty turned and looked at ~~MichaelMike~~. The hum of the
24 day stopped, and everything paused for ~~a-the~~ fraction of a second that their eyes met. There was no sound

Comment [RH13]: Same ¶ as above.

Comment [RH14]: Same ¶ as above.

Comment [RH15]: Same ¶ as above.

1 | but Dickey's feet and ~~Michael's~~Mike's harsh breathing. Sweat kept popping out of Mike's skin ~~and~~
2 | ~~being~~only to be -dried by the wind. Scotty seemed paler than normal, and moved slowly. He seemed
3 | dazed, unsure of what was going on. Scotty's eyes moved from Mike's face to a point above his shoulder
4 | as Dickey ran up beside ~~Michael~~Mike.
5 | "Oh you shitty dweebs . . . what was he doing just standing there? What the fuck were you doing?"
6 | Dickey's hand shot out and cuffed ~~Michael's~~Mike's shoulder. Dickey saw the bike, and ~~Michael~~Mike heard
7 | him retch. "Oh my ~~god~~God, it that his bike? Is he? Did I?" Dickey grabbed ~~Michael's~~Mike's shoulder,
8 | painfully digging into the muscle above his collarbone.
9 | ~~Michael~~Mike wretched away, and said, "No, you didn't, he's standing right there," at the same time
10 | Scotty said, "Man, you really messed up my bike."
11 | Dickey stared at ~~Michael~~Mike as if he'd spoken in Hebrew. "No, you . . ." Dickey whispered.
12 | ~~Michael~~Mike continued, "He jumped somehow, and you just got his bike." In support, Scotty
13 | nodded, "Yeah, I'm gonna need a new one, Dickey." Dickey ignored Scotty as if he ~~wasn't~~weren't there.
14 | Dickey reached out and grabbed ~~Michael's~~Mike's shirt, dragging him face to face. With a growl, he shook
15 | ~~Michael~~Mike like a rag doll, his face contorted.
16 | From up the hill, they heard ~~Father~~Pastor Drew open his porch door and let it slam. "Boys . . ." he
17 | yelled. He started running, his jacket flapping with the motion. "Boys, I've already called . . ." The rest of his
18 | words were drowned out by Dickey's growl as he shook ~~Michael~~Mike. He drew back, and threw a punch
19 | that caught ~~Michael~~Mike square in the nose. It went pop and ~~Mike~~Mike felt wetness dripping down his lips.
20 | The next punch was stopped by the pastor as he ran up and caught Dickey's arm. Dickey released him
21 | and as ~~Mike~~Mike dropped, limp to the ground, he heard Scotty say,
22 | "Now why'd you hit him, Dickey?"
23 | Pastor Drew slapped Dickey smartly across the face, and Dickey's eyes cleared. He started
24 | babbling immediately.

Comment [RH16]: I didn't realize your use of Pastor/Father until you mentioned it in an email. I think the two terms are interchangeable, right? Then perhaps Pastor in the narration and Father in the dialogue, for variety?

Comment [RH17]: First use of Mike – have you intentionally shifted? Wouldn't he have been Mike before now to his friend?
... or ... Maybe he SHOULD be Mike in the prologue with his friend, then be Michael as an adult after he loses his innocence (so to speak) here? – especially since his friend is Scotty and not Scott...

Comment [RH18]: Same ¶ as above.

1 "I swear, I didn't see him, he was standing in the middle of the road, and then I felt it hit him, and
2 then I was stopping." Dickey's word trailed off as his jaw started quivering and his eyes began watering.

Comment [RH19]: Same ¶ as above.

3 ~~Michael~~Mike felt a laugh begin bubbling up. Mindless of the future consequences, he turned to
4 Scotty and said,

5 "You scared Dickey Dick so bad he's almost crying!" The pastor raised his eyebrows at

Comment [RH20]: Same ¶ as above.

6 ~~Michael~~Mike's words, but lowered a blubbering Dickey to the ground. Rage crossed Dickey's features for a
7 moment, but dissolved back into a crying rictus.

8 ~~Michael~~Mike realized what he had said, and in front of who, and stammered.

9 "Scotty's fine, ~~Paster~~Father, he's right here. It was close, but he must have jumped." Mike felt his
10 nose; after the initial burst, the blood seemed to have stopped.

Comment [RH21]: Same ¶ as above.

11 Pastor Drew didn't even spare a glance for Scotty and he slid down the bank, moving past the
12 destroyed bike to a bundle of rags laying further down the road.

13 ~~Michael~~Mike left Dickey blubbering on the road and followed slowly behind Pastor Drew. He didn't
14 see Scotty following him, but felt his warm presence clearly behind him. ~~Scotty was like a warm presence,~~
15 ~~and Michael~~Mike could have ~~pointed directly at~~reached out to touch him with his eyes closed. Pastor Drew
16 was approaching the bundle of rags, and as Michael got closer, the rags transformed into his friend's body.

17 At the same time the realization hit him, Scotty said,

18 "Oh man, is that me? Am I hurt?"

Comment [RH22]: Same ¶ as above.

19 ~~Michael's~~Mike's mind tried to combine the two pictures, ~~and but~~ failed. On the ground, Scotty's
20 head and back were turned awkwardly, in a position and at angles that should have been impossible. As

21 Pastor Drew felt for a pulse, Scotty's head rolled toward ~~Michael~~Mike, and Scotty beside him, ~~Scotty~~.

22 ~~Michael~~Mike felt his mind compress under the pressure as he gazed into his friend's dull eyes.

23 Beside him, Scotty whimpered. On the ground, Father Drew began muttering in Latin.

Comment [RH23]: I like the use of Father here; it speaks more directly to the "Forgive me, Father..."

24 "Mike, why is he giving me the Last Rites? Mike, what's happening?"

1 | Mike found his voice. "Scotty, you're ok. It's just . . . just . . ." At that moment, words failed him, and
2 | Scotty sighed.

3 | "The rites made me feel better, Mike. I think I'll be okay; I just need to sit down. Maybe rest for a
4 | minute."

5 | From the hill above them, a siren echoed in the distance. ~~Father Drew~~The pastor was standing. His
6 | jacket was now covering the bundle of rags at the bottom of the hill. He gently took ~~Michael's~~Mike's arm.

7 | ~~"Come on, son. Let's go back up to get out of the road,"~~"~~the pastor said.~~

8 | ~~Michael~~Mike looked over his shoulder as he was led away. Above them, the siren wheezed to a
9 | stop. Scotty turned and watched them climb back up the ~~hill~~road, but didn't follow. Their eyes met, one last
10 | time, and then were hidden by the crest of the hill.

11

Comment [RH24]: Same ¶ as above.

Chapter 1: "The New Girl!"

The silver doors pushed open, emitting a ~~two-two~~-tone chime lost in the jangle of ringing phones, slamming doors, and various conversations. Groups of cluttered desks were shoved together without a pattern, each stacked with strata of paperwork. Chaos was in this room where men chased killers, but to Sandy Cooper's eyes there was a pattern among the madness.

A long board dominated the right hand wall, sectioned off into categories and covered in scrawl. That would be the rotation board, and she resisted the impulse to find her name. A path wandered through desks, shoved face to face and side to side. In the back of the room was a ~~glasses-glasses~~-in office, her destination, but there was an order to things.

When the door swung shut behind her with a wheeze, the noises died down as a dozen sets of eyes swiveled, scanned, and evaluated her. She felt a flush rise up her chest as she squared her shoulders and approached the nearest cluster of desks. Of the three men in that group, one grabbed a desk phone and started punching in numbers, and another busied himself at a file cabinet. This forced her to talk with a portly man with a stained tie.

Even though the air conditioning was already fighting the Atlanta heat, sweat beaded the detective's forehead. His shirt was rumpled, his tie was crooked, and his eyes kept darting from Sandy's face downward, trying to check her out without being obvious.

Sandy extended her hand, steeling herself against the expected ~~clammy hand~~ clamminess. "I'm here to see Michael Bennett, please." As she thought, the pudgy hand that grasped her was fairly sopping with moisture. She ~~schooled set~~ her ~~face~~ expression, and forced herself not to scrub ~~it her~~ hand dry when he released it.

Comment [RH25]: 12 people; see next comment

Comment [RH26]: This means there are 9 women, yet these three are surprised at Sandy's female presence.

Comment [RH27]: New ¶! If I just hit "enter" where the new ¶ starts, you don't get a red mark in the line, just the vertical line in the left margin, so when you see that situation, just right-click at the end of the earlier paragraph to accept the change. That will keep the comments cleaner for you.

Comment [RH28]: Same ¶

Comment [RH29]: Or ? (I don't like schooled) schooled means taught...

1 "Miss Rae? I'm sorry for your loss...." ~~he~~the portly detective started to say, and one of the other
2 detectives coughed, loudly and badly. ~~The portly detective~~He flushed, and said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, I thought
3 you were someone else. Detective Bennett isn't in right now, ~~miss~~Miss- ~~But~~but I'm Detective Johnson; is
4 there anything I can help you with?"

5 "I'm his new partner." As she said the words, she moved the hem of her jacket to the side to
6 display her new gold shield as well as her holstered pistol. His eyes switched from her navel to her gun and
7 back, and Sandy took a large measure of satisfaction in the slight widening of his eyes. The other men in
8 the cluster ~~obviously~~suddenly stopped what they were doing, and turned new eyes on her.

9 Sandy ~~schooled~~held her face still as she waited for the information to process. She hadn't spoken
10 quietly, and the general noise died down as her words rippled among the staff. Despite ~~being~~having been
11 in law enforcement six years, she didn't look the part. A shade over 5'6", ear length dark hair, and deep
12 brown eyes had fooled more than one criminal. She may have been shorter than most officers, but ~~45~~
13 fifteen years as a gymnast had paid off when a larger man thought to simply overpower her. Running the
14 sidewalks of Peachtree Street kept her in shape, and her ~~24-24~~hour gym offered ~~self~~self-defense and
15 sparring partners.

16 Detective Johnson blinked a few times, and said,

17 "Well now, congratulations! Come on back, Detective. . . .!" he let the question hang as he swept his
18 hand back toward a row of ~~glassed~~glassed-in offices at the back of the bullpen. He walked around the
19 desk, and Sandy followed. As they passed each group of desks, Sandy ignored the speculative looks.

20 "Cooper. Sandy Cooper." She stepped up beside him, rather than falling into line behind him. He
21 shuffled to the side, stepping over and around the various obstacles in his path.

22 "I'll take you back to Captain Grant. He's probably expecting you. The Reaper ~~---~~... uh
23 Detective Bennett, typically works an overlapping shift." Even though they had only walked a short
24 distance, Johnson was almost out of breath. Sandy put a light tone in her voice, and replied,

Comment [RH30]: Nicely phrased!

Comment [RH31]: flicked?

Comment [RH32]: I still don't like this word, and now you've used it twice! You keep using that word... I do not think it means what you think it means... :-)

Comment [RH33]: Same ¶

Comment [RH34]: One period, then three ellipses