Why Men Lie

LINDEN MACINTYRE

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About the Book

Effie Gillis is a history professor teaching at a major university. She is also a survivor – of a troubled childhood, two failed marriages and numerous relationships which, for the most part, ended badly. In her maturity she finds herself a source of solace and an object of desire for men who, like her, have aged but who, unlike her, remain obsessed by all the insecurities and superficial needs of adolescence.

Now, out of her past, arrives a man who is familiar and yet mysterious; mature, wise, and full of youthful energy. His presence is a reassurance, but he also carries with him an aura that is menacing. Slowly she becomes dependent on a relationship that's rich in truth and promise – but doomed by the lie that gave it life.

Drawing on both minor and major characters from his two previous novels, *The Long Stretch* and *The Bishop's Man*, *Why Men Lie* is a story of longing, love and loss in middle age.

About the Author

Linden MacIntyre is one of Canada's most distinguished broadcast journalists. He has been involved in the production of documentaries and stories from all over the world. He is the author of four previous books, including his first novel, *The Long Stretch*, and a childhood memoir, *Causeway*, both of which were critically acclaimed; the latter won The Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction in 2007. His most recent novel, *The Bishop's Man*, was awarded the 2009 Scotiabank Giller Prize, and two Libris Awards. It was also longlisted for the Dublin IMPAC Prize. MacIntyre was born in St Lawrence, Newfoundland, and grew up in Port Hastings, Cape Breton. He now lives in Toronto.

Also by Linden MacIntyre

THE LONG STRETCH WHO KILLED TY CONN (with Theresa Burke) CAUSEWAY: A PASSAGE FROM INNOCENCE THE BISHOP'S MAN For my daughters ELLEN, MAGGIE, CIORSTI



WHY MEN LIE

LINDEN MacINTYRE



Jonathan Cape London

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Seles.

Time present and time past Are both perhaps present in time future, And time future contained in time past. T.S. ELIOT, "BURNT NORTON," *FOUR QUARTETS* <u>1</u>

FOR A PERSON who was rather private, it was startling to hear her name in such a public place.

"Effie Gillis?"

The tone was tentative, bordering on disbelief. She could have ignored it, but she turned, out of curiosity or anxiety. She was in the St. George subway station, heading home, Christmas shopping finished. It was December 19, 1997, another detail she'd remember.

She knew him right away though she hadn't set eyes on him for decades. Campbell, JC Campbell. He was standing near the end of the east-west platform, a newspaper in his hand, smiling. She noted the glint of silver in the hair around his temples.

"My God," she said.

They shook hands.

"It's been, how long ..."

"Twenty years, at least," he said.

They fell silent briefly. She remembered that he'd taken a job with a television network in the United States. Something about his passport, she recalled; American employers loved the Canadian passport. It travelled better than their own because it was less likely to provoke an inconvenient attitude at certain border crossings. She recalled a drunken farewell party at her house. It was in the Beaches, so yes, it would have been 1977. Twenty years ago, 1977, the year of raised voices, slamming doors, her child cowering underneath the kitchen table. The farewell celebration was a kind of respite.

She remembered him as being tall, but he was maybe five eleven, only slightly taller than she was. Still slim. She remembered black-framed glasses, longer hair, a mullet, maybe. Hockey player hair, they used to call it. Now the glasses were gone, presumably replaced by contact lenses. The hair was cropped short. He had the same emphatic hairline, with a hint of widow's peak. He had the look, she thought, of a sober single man.

He smiled, narrowed his eyes. "And yourself, you and Sextus ..."

She felt the blush but didn't mind, knowing that it made her seem younger.

"Yes and no," she said. "One of those things. There's been a lot of water under the bridge since ... when was it? Seventy-seven, I believe."

"Seventy-seven it was when I went off."

"We split up after that," she said. "But, miracle of miracles ..." She laughed.

"I was glad to hear that you were back together," he said. The statement seemed cautious, speculative. "Sextus and I have stayed in touch, sporadically. I felt bad when he told me you two split, back then. But he's still—Sextus living in Cape Breton?"

"For now. We're trying to come up with a plan."

"Your brother, Duncan. Still in the priesthood, I imagine?"

"Yes and no again," she said. "He's here in Toronto now. But still a priest. A rarity."

"I haven't seen Duncan since university," he said. "And yourself, still in academe, I gather? I think Sextus told me that you got a doctorate. Tenure and the whole nine yards. Would be kind of hard to give that up."

"And do what?" She laughed.

"Just look at you," he said, arms held wide. "You look fantastic."

Now he blushed. Her eyes drifted to his left hand. He was wearing gloves.

"So you're back here now, are you? The last I heard, I think you were overseas or in the States, working in the news."

"Still in the news, but back home," he said. "Speaking of home, I'm just heading there. I bought a little place in lower Riverdale."

She could have told him that she lived just three blocks away from the St. George station. It would have been appropriate, reciprocal disclosure, but something stopped her. She felt a certain freedom here and she wanted to enjoy it for a moment.

She was living in a duplex she'd rented, the ground level and second floor of an old Victorian mansion close to everything. She'd sold the big house on the Kingsway, and the transaction left her relatively wealthy. She'd been able to complete the renovation of her old home in Cape Breton, and even after that she had a nest egg that would supplement the inevitable academic pension. Or buy another house. But she didn't want to go into that with him, how she lived or where or why. She felt oddly stimulated, talking to a stranger who was still familiar. The gloves, the haircut, the cashmere overcoat marked him as a man of style. He could have been from anywhere, the attractive man before her. She felt a mild excitement trying to recall their common past.

"So you were Christmas shopping, I imagine," he said. The easy smile was yet another feature that was unfamiliar.

"Just on my way home," she said. "I live nearby. So you've got all the shopping done already?"

"Well," he said, "my shopping is pretty limited."

"Yes. You reach a certain age."

They fell silent. He was nodding, thoughtfully it seemed. And it might have ended there, but he suddenly suggested going for a drink around the corner on Prince Arthur, and she couldn't think of a single reason to resist.

At the pub there was a Christmas party in full swing, old-timers getting plastered. He seemed to know most of them. Reporters, he confided. She had a glass of wine. He had a Guinness.

"So the man himself," he said. "I imagine he'll be coming up for Christmas. Or will you go down?"

"You mean Sextus?"

"Yes. Wasn't there talk of himself moving back to the city?" His brow was furrowed, eyes innocent.

"Neither of us likes to travel much this time of year," she said, not really answering what he was asking. "I think way too much is made of Christmas anyway. You know, it's a manufactured feast at best ... to seduce the pagans from their superstitious rituals."

"New Year's was the time," he said. "*Oidhche Chaluinn*." "Ah. You know about it."

"Well, of course."

And when the waitress offered them a menu, he didn't answer, just stared at her, waiting.

"We might as well," she said.

JC Campbell was part of the clique from home when she and Sextus Gillis first came to Toronto, back in the early seventies. She was a fugitive. That was how she saw herself. She needed the distractions of the unfamiliar city and would have been much happier if she'd been able to blend into an entirely new society of total strangers. But Sextus was part of an odd assortment of construction workers, miners and newspaper reporters with nothing much in common except Cape Breton and what seemed to be a mutual belief that life would always be more or less the way it was just then, a serial ceilidh with brief interruptions for recovery and as much employment as was needed to sustain it. They all seemed to be in their mid- to late twenties, all prosperous enough to have sufficient money for the basic necessities and enough left over to nearly satisfy voracious appetites for fun. Some were single, all were childless, though she was pregnant at the time.

Maybe she'd begun to notice JC Campbell in those frantic early days because he, like her, seemed to be on the periphery of everything. He seemed to be just a little bit more serious about work, a little less inclined to be unconscious at the end of every social function. He often helped her with the cleanup after the other men had stumbled home or off to temporary sleeping arrangements. Back then she thought he was from Halifax. She'd suspected, for a while, that he was homosexual, that his remoteness came from a feeling of exclusion. But Sextus told her that he probably held himself a little apart because of fallout from an incident when he was still a student. JC had secrets, but he definitely wasn't gay.

That evening, December 19, 1997, they parted after dinner with a hug. It was almost fraternal, but it left a lingering sensation oddly similar to reassurance, and it stayed with her, as did certain moments in their conversation.

The next time she saw him he was on television. There was sunshine. He was talking to a camera. He had told her that he preferred to be the guy behind the scenes, the producer or the writer. But there he was, speaking to the world. She found herself staring without hearing what he had to say.

Effie Gillis had by then achieved just about as much as she aspired to in terms of her career and her life. She was into healthy middle age, she was a department head at a major university. She was published and looked forward to perhaps a peaceful decade contemplating parts of history she deemed to be important, conveying insight with poise and credibility to her students and her peers. She and Sextus were rebuilding a relationship that she'd convinced herself might now provide stability even if it fell short of the intimacy she still craved. It was easy in such circumstances to forget the fragility of expectations. The reminder, when it came, was brutal.

After the initial shock wore off, she would be able to recall with some amusement that it came on a Palm Sunday, a week before the end of Lent, when warm spring days and all the old familiar stories of redemption lift the spirits. Her brief encounter in the subway station months before had all but faded from her mind. Then her brother called. His words were blunt, especially from a priest: "The miserable quiff is having an affair with Stella Fortune."

"Who are you talking about?"

"You know who I'm talking about. That sleazebag Sextus."

In the background she could hear dishes rattling, human babble, raucous laughter.

"Are you there?" Duncan asked.

"Yes, I'm here," she said.

"Well, say something."

"What do you expect me to say? That I'm shocked? That after all the years I've known him, anything he could do would come as a surprise, especially involving women? Wake up, Duncan."

"Effie, I thought Stella had more sense than that. Sextus Gillis. Of all the goddamned people she could have—"

"You thought Stella had more sense than your sister," she said tightly, anger rising.

"I didn't mean that."

"No?"

"I feel like an idiot," he said. "I told her things ..."

"Presuming you were dealing with some higher sensibility."

"I'm sorry I called," he said. "I should have left you in the bloody dark."

He hung up, and afterwards she felt sorry for the selfishness of her reaction. She could picture her brother standing there alone, slouched against the wall beside the pay phones, misery personified.

Duncan had moved to Toronto in the fall of 1997. He told her only that he'd been granted a sabbatical to work the streets in what he called a rescue mission. Saving lost street people while rescuing his ministry, he said. Trying to redefine his priesthood, to give it relevance, or, maybe, in the end, to give it up entirely. Effie hadn't been aware that Stella Fortune was a factor, though she'd known that they were friends when he was pastor in her parish in Cape Breton.

Duncan called later to apologize. "You're the one who should be pissed," he said.

"No," she said. "You didn't deserve me lashing out."

"I feel it's my fault," Duncan said. "If I'd been paying more attention ... But I thought she had more ... character."

"We don't know the whole story," Effie said. "One thing Stella has is character. But character sometimes gets trumped by needs."

"I don't think I want to know the whole story," he said, and laughed briefly. "You didn't have a clue?"

"I didn't. How did you find out?"

"Stella phoned. Apparently he just started dropping in on her. Then he made it clear to her that he wanted a more intimate relationship."

"So she came to you?"

"She wanted my advice."

"My God, Duncan," Effie said.

"What?"

"I can't believe how thick you are. Do you really think it was *advice* she wanted?"

She told herself she was too old for heartache, but not for embarrassment. Privately she knew it was her smugness she regretted most; it bothered her that she had let her guard down, as if past mistakes could ever immunize a fool from future foolishness. All the years she'd known Sextus, all the old betrayals, now weighed heavily upon her. She realized she didn't really mind the now inevitable solitude. She'd learned to think of it as independence. What bothered her was this reminder that there was, never far beneath the surface of her poise, a yearning (dare she call it loneliness).

It took about three days for the embarrassment to ripen into an unspeakable anger.

On day four, which was Holy Thursday, Sextus called her.

She hung up.

He phoned again that same day and left a message: they needed to talk; he'd made a huge mistake; he wanted to explain; he knew she'd understand if only he could have a moment. Nobody understood him better than Effie did.

She erased it.

Her smugness, she now realized, had come from the certainty that male behaviour could never catch her by surprise again. It was a small reward for all the years she'd spent coping with the turmoil men cause. Father. Brother. Husbands. Live-in partners. Even her neurotic male colleagues at the university. There was no excuse this time. It was entirely her own fault. She could and should have seen it coming. Her brother had disapproved of her renewed relationship with Sextus from the outset, but she really didn't need a warning. Sextus Gillis had been dazzling and disappointing her since childhood. She dumped a husband for him, eloped and married him, tried to raise a child with him, tried to rise above his infidelities —and eventually threw him out and got over him successfully.

She should have had the sense, based on past experience, to avoid another entanglement from which there could be no constructive disengagement. But she was home when they started up again, back in Cape Breton where, she concluded afterwards, most of her worst life lapses had occurred.

She was vulnerable (God, how she hated to admit that), but, it seemed, he was too. And it shouldn't have been totally far-fetched to think he'd changed a little at middle age, grown perhaps. Except it *was* too much to hope for and certainly too much to ask for. And here she was, messed up again.

Then it was day five, Good Friday, and JC Campbell was on her doorstep.

"Well, well, well," she said. "I didn't think I'd be seeing you again."

"I'm a reporter," he said. "I have ways of tracking people down. May I come in?"

She stepped back to let him in, then closed the door behind him. Stood there, mind blank.

"What a great spot," he said, hands on hips, taking in the room. He walked over to a bookcase and studied a shelf of Gaelic volumes, murmuring more compliments. She was at a loss. To ask abruptly what he wanted would sound unfriendly. He was an old friend of sorts, but then again he was a stranger and, more to the point, one of Sextus's friends. She felt vaguely threatened.

"I was going to pour a drink," she said.

"So, what are you having?"

"A Scotch," she said.

"Single malt or blend?"

"Single," she replied.

"No ice in mine, then." He was smiling.

He still had his coat on, sitting at the corner of her kitchen table, sipping his drink. "You probably don't realize that I am on a mission."

"It hadn't crossed my mind," she said.

"Well. It's awkward. And I make it a policy to stay away from personal ... situations. But you know Sextus."

She stood, walked away from the table, then turned. Leaned back against the kitchen counter, arms folded. "What about him?"

He raised a protective hand. "I know, I know. But I said that I'd drop in on you to say what he hasn't had a chance to say himself."

"He hasn't had the chance because I don't want to hear it."

"Fair enough," he said. "I'll keep it real short. Whatever it was he got involved in—I don't know the other party, whatever her name is. It was a fling. He said you'd understand the difference: a 'fling' as opposed to an 'affair' or a 'relationship.' Personally *I* don't quite understand the difference. I'm just saying what he said."

"So you can report back. You said it. Mission accomplished."

"Sextus," JC said, shaking his head and smiling. "Sextus never changes. He actually thinks it was Duncan's fault. Really. Duncan left some woman dangling, the way Sextus sees it. She was lonely. He had no choice. He had to respond. Damsel in distress and all that. He actually blames Duncan."

"I don't think my brother should hear that part of the story. He'd tear Sextus's head off. Not that it would be any great loss." She laughed, for the first time in days, and felt a momentary ping of joy.

"I hear you," he said. "Yup. I hear you loud and clear." He drained his glass and stood. "That's not bad. What is it?"

"Highland Park," she said. "My brother turned me on to it."

"Well, I'd best be on my way," he said. "I've done my thing." For the first time he seemed to be embarrassed.

"I'm going to freshen mine," she said. "Do you have time for another?"

"If you twist my arm."

Before he left her place on Good Friday, even though she barely knew him, she invited him to dinner Easter Sunday, knowing that he'd stay the night. She also knew that she was motivated mostly by malice when she slept with him the first time. And because she assumed it would be the only time, she allowed her fury to explode. *I'll show you what it feels like to be dominated, to be used*. And when she sensed his submission, she rose in primal majesty above him, and in her mind, assumed his body as her own and wildly thrust it back at him. *I want you to be hurt, hurt, hurt*. Her hands turned into fists, as if to strike him, and only then did she realize that he had firmly grasped her by the wrists, was fighting back, and everything she ever was or ever would be fused without warning in that allconsuming instant *now*.

And *now* he shouted back, and suddenly they both were laughing as they collapsed, entangled in absurdity.

She expected, looking back on it, that JC Campbell would have been severely daunted by her raw display of passion, a bit intimidated by her self-indulgence, her aggression. She didn't really care. But in the end she realized he hadn't even noticed what she thought of as perversity, was unbothered by her obvious emotional detachment.

When she woke up on that Easter Monday morning, he was making breakfast.

Reality intruded briefly just before he left that day. At the door, he said, "I'll call you later." She tried to smile. How many farewells begin that way? *Give me a shout. Have a nice day.* She felt the dead weight in her chest. At least he hadn't mentioned "love," the second most abused word in the English language, after "sorry." How many times had she lived this doorway scene?

She forced a smile. "Sure."

"I have to pop into the office for a bit," he said. He stood silent for a moment. "I *will* call."

"You don't even have my number." She felt the urge to laugh. His face was almost boyish.

"I do," he said. "I made a note of it, from your kitchen phone, on Friday. When you weren't looking. I didn't think you'd mind."

"That was sneaky. You only had to ask."

"I was afraid of the answer," he said. He turned and trotted down the doorstep, then stopped and waved.

And shortly after five o'clock that day he called.

She hadn't really been prepared for the anger that poured out of her in what passed for "making love." In the aftermath, she was surprised by his extraordinary calm, as if her provocative behaviour and her outburst had been commonplace in his experience. The last thing she expected was to ever hear from him again. In her own mind, it had been Effie's last one-night stand. But he was almost eager when he called on Monday evening. He thought they should have lunch on Wednesday, talk some more. Talk more? What had they talked about?

It was a polite lunch at an Italian place on College, a place she was surprised he knew. One of *her* favourite places, but he suggested it. The conversation was mostly about how she came to specialize in Celtic studies. He listened carefully, avoiding speculation or analysis, though he ventured one conclusive comment. "It makes sense," he said. "It's an area that needs examination by someone with a modern outlook. Someone who can connect the dots between then and now, maybe tell us something about ourselves."

"Well," she said.

"Well, what?"

"I couldn't have put it better myself."

There was very little discussion about him. That would come later, by way of mostly disconnected observations about other things, figuring out where he was at certain moments in her life. By the end of lunch she wanted to know more: about Lebanon and Israel; about Russia and the Balkans and the Caucasus; about Spanish-sounding places that had been mentioned on the news. El Salvador.

Duncan had friends there, she said.

"Really?" He sounded surprised. "I'll have to ask him." Then, "I suppose you get back east quite a bit. Stay in touch."

She laughed. She told him she'd pretty well lost touch with Cape Breton after she and Sextus moved to the city in 1970. She'd only started going back in '94, started fixing up the old home. Before that, maybe once in God knows how many years. Not since about 1972.

He was surprised. "I would have thought Cape Breton was an ideal place for fieldwork, research."

"I kick myself all the time," she said, "especially now that I realize what was there and what I was missing. But no, I let it all slide. True tradition bearers are now few and far between. Unless you count the graveyards."

"Early seventies," he said. "I seem to recall something. Someone died. I remember Sextus talking about it."

"That would have been my father," she said, nodding. "He died around then."

"So that would have been your last trip for quite a while."

"Actually, I didn't even go home for that."

"Ahhh," he said. He was tracing circles on the tablecloth with the salt shaker. "We forget how travel was in those days. It was a big trip then."

"Yes," she said. "A very big trip."

He asked about the possibility of meeting up again on Friday evening. Drinks, maybe dinner. Talk some more?

"Give me a call," she said. "When you know your sched."

"The sched is pretty simple these days," he said. "I'm in editing."

"Something interesting?"

"Not really," he said. "A lot of hoohoraw about Y2K and the end of Western society as we know it. The millennium bug, wiping out computers everywhere at midnight, December 31, 1999. Mark the date."

"No great loss."

"I agree," he said. "A hundred percent."

They left in separate cabs. He held the door of hers for just a moment. "Our Easter dinner," he said. "I can't remember anything as ... memorable." He blushed.

She smiled. "Memorable?"

"I'll try to think of a better word. How about Friday? It'll be my homework. I'll hand it in at dinner, poetry perhaps. I expect your standards are high. Regarding poetry."

"Merciless," she said.

He kissed her quickly on the forehead before she ducked into the back seat. And he stood there as the taxi drove away.

Only once had Sextus's name come up during the time they spent together after JC's visit on Good Friday. JC wanted to know how long she and Sextus had known each other.

"Oh my God," she said. "Forever." And she'd looked away, vaguely irritated. "We were children."

She changed the subject then, but later, as she stood alone in her kitchen, listening to the whisper of her kettle, the first time she met Sextus came back to her. It was a very precise memory.

She and her father were standing in the barren yard at home. A car stopped near their gate. A man and a boy emerged. The boy was nine or ten years old, about Duncan's age. They walked toward the closed gate then stopped there. The man was heavy-set, with thinning hair. He stood, elbows resting on top of the gate, the boy beside him. Effie's father walked slowly toward them as she trailed behind, uncertain. He took the same position, forearms resting. Effie studied the boy, who was staring at her, his steady hazel eyes unblinking.

"Well, Angus," said the man. "So this is you. Back at square one, back home on the Long Stretch." He gestured widely with both arms, returned them to the top pole of the gate.

"Luckier than some," said Angus.

"There's that," the man replied. He extracted a package of cigarettes slowly from an inside pocket, poked it open, presented one to Angus.

Angus shook his head.

The stranger took one for himself, flicked a lighter, squinted at the flame and smoke.

"Sorry for your loss" he said, exhaling." I heard about the missus when it happened. Last year it was, I think. I was still in East Malartic. So I couldn't even get in touch."

Angus nodded. "The TB got her. The place was rotten with it. There was nothing anyone could do. And where are you now?"

"Stirling, near Loch Lomond." "What's there?" "Zinc. Base metals." "Right." "They're hiring. I was wondering ... you were an able man in the raise."

Angus laughed, placed a hand on Effie's head. The hand was heavy, seemed to grasp her skull for steadiness.

"I'm kind of tied down just now," he said. "Got all the raise work I can handle right here, raisin' kids."

"I suppose," the stranger said.

"I hear there'll soon be lots of work right here. The new causeway to the mainland."

"So they say. I'm planning to move home for that myself," the man said. "Should be good for a few years' work. We can do some catching up then."

"You saw Sandy?"

"I did. He's doing okay, considering. You know Sandy. Doesn't say much anymore."

Angus laughed. "And who's the gentleman beside you?" The man looked down.

"Another Sandy. The son and heir. Alexander Sextus." "Sextus?" Angus said. "Quite the handle."

Effie thought the boy looked bold. "What's your name?" he asked.

She looked away. "Effie MacAskill," she said at last.

"We'll be seeing you," the man said to her father. He dropped his half-smoked cigarette, stepped on it and turned away. The boy looked back and waved; no longer bold, he now seemed shy.

"Who was that?" asked Duncan, who by then was sitting on the doorstep.

"That's Jack Gillis," Angus said. Then, to Effie, "What'd he say that boy's name was?"

"I don't know, I couldn't hear," she said. "Something sex."

Her father looked at her sharply, then laughed and walked away toward the barn.

The Friday night dinner date was at a trendy fusion place, reputed to be terrifyingly expensive. It was cold for early April, but the air was fresh with hints of spring. She'd read about the restaurant, but it was her first time there. The menu had no prices. "If you have to ask how much, you shouldn't be here," JC said. He seemed to know the menu and the staff.

A waiter appeared with a tray of small plates, each with a careful arrangement of bite-size foods in sauces, garnished with sprigs of green and red. With exaggerated flourishes, the waiter placed them at the centre of the table. Poured water. She watched JC eat, noted how he picked at food, more curious than hungry.

A slim, young Asian man who, Effie gathered, was the owner, appeared near the end of dinner to inquire about JC's health. There were none of the usual formalities, whether they enjoyed the food, the service—satisfaction was a given. He and JC seemed to have a well-established friendship.

"Great guy," JC commented later. And, as he prepared to pay the bill, a server appeared with a half-bottle of dessert wine that they just had to try. Compliments of Mr. Lee.

Before they left, she excused herself, went to the bathroom to inspect her makeup. She looked and felt clearheaded. She had cleverly avoided cocktails, stuck to wine. Now she felt that she was ready for whatever. But at her door he declined when she offered him a nightcap. He had a heavy day on Saturday, he said apologetically. But he wanted to see her again soon, to talk more about the summer and her plans.

The prospect of a summer holiday together had arisen over dinner in the context of a general discussion about weather. In the city you could sense the end of winter, the inevitability of summer. But summer came reluctantly and invariably late to the east coast. As a rule she stayed in Toronto until July, then she would fly to Halifax and rent a car. That year she said she thought she'd enjoy driving out on her own, all the way. Hadn't done that for a zillion years.

And that was when he told her it felt at least that long since he'd been back to Nova Scotia, the last time a visit in the sixties that he'd rather not remember, even now. He laughed, remembering. "You probably knew about the scandal?"

"Can't say that I did."

"Pretty tame by the standards of today. But I got someone, as we used to delicately put it, in trouble. I was starting out in university. She was from Cape Breton. We arrived at a kind of settlement, but it pretty well wiped me out financially."

"I see," she said. Waited through a long pause, then gambled: "So ... you have a child."

"I suppose I do," he said.

"Boy or girl?"

"Girl," he said. "In her mid-thirties by now. I lost touch a long time ago."

"That's a shame," Effie said.

His frown tugged down the corners of his mouth. "Depends on how you look at it."

"So where did she end up?"

"Last I heard she was in your neck of the woods. Around the Strait somewhere. The mother was from Isle Madame. Petit-de-Grat. You ever been there?"

"She'd be French. *Acadienne*."

"*Oui*."

"I'm not sure what to say."

"It all worked out," he said. "It launched me into journalism."

She suppressed a laugh. "Really!"

"A long story, maybe for a long car drive."

"I suspect you have a lot of stories."

"A thousand and one," he said.

His handling of chopsticks, she'd noted, was masterful.

"And I could share the wheel. Those drives are killers."

"I wouldn't be averse to company," she said. "To share the driving. And, of course, the gas."

"And the accommodations."

"That too."

Everything about him was so easy, she told herself, settling at home that night with a small nightcap and a book she had no intention of even opening. He had no reluctance to disclose, but neither had there been the compulsive revelation she had heard so often, the self-mythologizing that can happen in the early going. His life was rich, as far as she could tell from his brief references to distant places and events. But such details always seemed subordinate to his avid curiosity about her. The overall impression he gave her was that nothing in his life, no prior time or place or individual, was as central to his consciousness as this one, here, with her.

She would, in later years, remember one event that would define JC Campbell and mercifully contradict so much that she would later struggle not to know. They were on the subway. It was shortly after that first Easter. The car was crowded. They were standing, swaying with the motion of the train. She smelled smoke. A man seated close to them had lit a cigarette. The people on the train were instantly uneasy, moving away, as if he'd lit a fuse. JC smiled, leaned down, said softly, "Put it out." The smoker just stared, cleared his throat as if to spit and turned away.

He was in the act of raising the cigarette to his lips again when JC caught his wrist, then squeezed the ember on the cigarette between his naked thumb and forefinger. Then he broke the cigarette in two. Sparks fell to the man's lap and he tried instantly to stand, but JC now had him firmly by the collar. Held him down. Leaned over, whispered something. The train was slowing for a station stop. JC released him. The man stood and moved toward the door, muttering dark threats. JC said to Effie, "Wait for me at Broadview." She said "No!" but JC and the stranger were already gone. As the train pulled away, she could see the man through the window, wild-faced, waving his arms while JC stood rockstill, hands jammed into the side pockets of his jacket.

"What happened?" she asked later.

"Nothing," he replied.

"You frightened me."

"Why? How?"

"What you did."

"Sometimes you have to do what you have to do."

It would be May before she'd have the confidence to talk about him, to share her feelings with another. May 31, to be exact, a Sunday. She called her brother, Duncan, and invited him to dinner.

"I might have news," she said.

"News. It's a perfect day for news. Good news, I presume?"

"I hope so," she said. "What's the day?"

"Pentecost," he said. "It's Pentecost Sunday."

"Sorry, Father, I've been missing Mass lately."

"You're forgiven," he said. "For your penance, a good act of contrition and three fingers of Balvenie for your confessor."

"You're on," she said.

"So is it anyone I know?" Duncan asked. He was sitting on her sofa now, studying his drink with a pastoral expression on his face.

"I think so," she replied from the kitchen. "I think you'll like him," she said, and was instantly disappointed by the lack of originality.

He raised an eyebrow. "They're all likeable at first, aren't they?"

"You know what I mean," she said.

"Tell me one good thing about him."

"How about three: he's intelligent; he's worldly; he's a grownup." Now she was standing in the archway between the kitchen and the larger space that served as dining room and den, hands concealed beneath the apron she was wearing. "And he's very good-looking. That's four."

He made a grimace of approval.

"He says he remembers you from university."

"That's going back a bit," he said. "So what's his name?"

"JC Campbell. He was part of the gang, back in the seventies."

"Hmmm. That rings a bell. JC. Yes, I remember. Serious, he was."

Now he was engaged, studying her face with new intensity. "How much has he told you about himself that's real?"

"Everything I need to know," she said.

"I see," he said, resuming his examination of the drink. "So what's he been doing with himself all this time?"

"He went off to the States. Worked in television all over the world. Now he's back."

"Baggage?"

"What do you mean?"

"Wives, kids, war wounds—you know what I mean."

"None of the above as far as I can tell. Well, almost none. A child he never knew, maybe."

Duncan sighed. "So how did this come about?"

And she explained. The accidental meeting in the subway station; the peculiar visit on Good Friday, pleading Sextus's case. Dinner on Easter Sunday (censored for her brother). She emphasized the cautious management of expectations.