

## **The Station**

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

Johnny looked around his darkened cell and could see several metal crosses made by jail bars intersecting at right angles directly facing the hard bench where he was seated. His thoughts drifted back to his fiancée and the dashed hopes of their upcoming marriage. He worried that she hadn't returned home a day ago and that he now found himself in an unknown police station following his arrest on the narrow streets of Kensington Market a few hours prior.

Suddenly, the sound of an officer entering the chamber outside his jail cell interrupted his preoccupied thoughts. Soon, a cup of cola was offered to him along with a small grilled cheese sandwich. Johnny reluctantly took the food through the opening in the jail bars but opted not to eat or drink anything, thinking back to something his old man had told him about tainted food and lessons about fasting. After the officer had left, Johnny sat there staring at the food next to him, still determined to ward off the temptation to taste it. Pretty soon, his thoughts drifted back toward Laura and last June when they were both at Portugal Fest. He thought back to the crowds on bustling Dundas West where several bars and restaurants had set up patios right onto the street where streetcars and motor vehicles would drive. He could picture her darkened curls and playful air amid the dusky haze of ambient colorful lights and smoking barbecues offering festival revelers corn on the cob, fried chicken and other Mediterranean staples.

"Laure dear... Check out that juggler! He's up to five clubs!"

"I can do four, but five is a bit of a stretch!" She said to him smiling as she reached over to hold his right hand.

"This tent reminds me of the souvlaki at Taste of the Danforth... Do you want some Portuguese chicken?"

"I'm not really that hungry, maybe we should share one of those coconut drinks. This weather is making me thirsty."

Continuing to walk westward hand-in-hand along Dundas, Johnny with his summer Hawaiian shirt and Laura with her floral dress were just a pair of bright specks adding faint pixelation to a crowd of colourful and diverse Toronto street festival attendees.

### ***June Before*** (Memories of Laura)

*Laura dearest I harken back to June  
T'was then amid the rhododendron dell  
I dreamt as butterflies graced blooms at noon  
Your eyes those spheres of chestnut fair I fell*

*The stars those suns of late as one we sought  
That tardy end when whip-poor-will didn't call  
Forlorn the feather'd male would stay I thought  
With cheer I sang as summer turned to fall*

*The rain fell soft beneath tree's crowning tent  
Apart those days my soul in twain did ache  
Branches laid full of fruit from time's lament  
Thought back to rock and dunes on Mystery Lake*

*Would search afoot were you far lost my dove  
Would always yearn below our tree my love*

Johnny's head shot up as he awoke from a quick bout of fatigue. As his eyes adjusted to the low light, he noticed he was in the same cell again. Soon after, two officers unlocked his cell, handcuffed his hands behind his back with cold steely metal digging into his wrist bones and lead him into a police van outside the unknown station with a small contingent of prisoners also picked up over the course of the last 24 hours. Riding in the police van, Johnny wondered where he was heading, and, most of all, where he had just been. When he was arrested and handcuffed, a lanky uniformed fellow who recited Johnny's civilian rights, placed a black cloak over his head as he was placed into the cramped rear seat of the vehicle. As the new and larger motor vehicle dashed into the unknown, Johnny looked downwards and feeling more comfortable avoiding the stares of the other men in front and next to him in the crowded and confined police van.

His thoughts drifted again toward Laura and wedding arrangements in Trinity-Bell Square, where the two had once wandered just after they had met and spent time together under the shade of Lindens with the homeless memorial close-by. Soon, Johnny felt the van halt for a prolonged period of time and he was lead into what seemed to be like a stark dungeon somewhere in Toronto's seamy underbelly. Still handcuffed, he hesitantly followed the convict queue through subterranean passages leading to a room filled with stationary prisoners and a broken toilet without conventional privacy barriers around it. After spending at least one hour in the putrid cell where a miserable few nearby had been forced to defecate in full view, Johnny was then led into a bail room of sorts, with frigid and stale air seeping in and instantly possessing its captives with a ghostly cold. In a t-shirt and jeans since his other attire had been taken away following time in station custody, Johnny stood shivering in the cold cell for what felt like hours. Finally, after feeling his blood congeal into a human popsicle, he was led out of the bail room by a different officer and through a latched doorway where his tired pupils and other senses adjusted to the brightness and din of an imposing courtroom. Feeling drained and still quite cold and shivery, Johnny's eyes settled on the judge to his left and could feel the sharp peering of many other eyes as he stood surrounded in a semi-circle in the scary pedestal supposedly reserved for dangerous felons and criminally-lowly persons. Johnny had not been ready to call for legal counsel and make

a plea, so the dark-haired judge with sharp creases on his face, who was seated in his high bench, curtly said to him: "Please state your name, sir."

"Jonathan Fontaine." He answered still shivering from the bail room.

Soon after, he was sent back into another holding cell and eventually was allowed to leave court and custodial confinement. When he left the building with the courtroom and its underlying dungeon, he noticed he was in Old City Hall by Toronto's Eaton Centre. Perturbed and sad that Laura still wasn't picking up her cell phone when he called from a phone booth, Johnny walked off into Nathan Phillips Square ascending a flight of steps to get to the raised walkways above the central fountains where ice skating went on during the winter months. From above, he noticed Speaker's Corner bordering Queen Street's North side with the imposing and stern figure of the much revered historical figure Winston Churchill. His eyes then shifted to the East when the clock tower began to sound almost at its peak with the striking of the eleventh hour. From the clock tower, he looked downwards at Old City Hall and was amazed by the sheer scale of the holding area directly underneath the courtrooms where countless GTA cases were funneled on a daily and nightly basis. Johnny's thoughts drifted back to the last half day or so still perplexed as to where the lanky officer had taken him when he was picked up off the street. Johnny carried the thoughts of Laura as he moved his tired limbs to nearby Trinity-Bell Square where he noticed that the clock had itself been arrested with the longer hand immobilized erroneously at half past the hour. He shuddered internally as the feeling of his wedding in that once magical space now felt even more like a distant and far-off dream. He then paused by the maze and felt as though he was now also stuck in an empty and shattered world without her there by his side. Thoughts of a recurrent nightmare that he had had as a freshman surfaced again, with his younger self, lost in a labyrinthine alley-way system, frantically riding a bicycle on training wheels and feeling pursued by a menacing and mysterious evil presence lurking directly behind him. While nodding off in custody, he had awoken terrified when the nightmare recurred and the soon familiar silhouette of the somber judge in the Old City Hall courtroom appeared directly behind him in the same alley-way when he turned his head toward the rear.

Johnny chose to walk and not commute on public transit to get back home. The city now seemed like a blur of violent lights and jarring sounds. Who had charged him of harming Laura? Thoughts of his recent incarceration lingered with him since he was abruptly introduced to Toronto's criminal nether-world. He felt like trying to figure out where he had just been, but only knew that the trip in the police van to Old City Hall was roughly half an hour and little more. As for his arrest, he had been picked up strolling to his usual coffee shop in Kensington Market where he routinely bought a small bag of ungrounded dark roast coffee beans. Before entering the roastery and café, Johnny noticed a police car stationed in front. Soon after, Johnny underwent the humiliation of being cuffed and put in the back seat of the vehicle in full view of market passer-bys and local residents. Soon after, with the cloak placed over his head, the car drove for at

least an hour before the covering was removed. All Johnny saw at this point was the same tall and sinewy cop leading him with force into a fortified lot and prisoner loading dock area. Once his pupils adjusted to the light, he was lead into a rather non-descript gray painted interrogation room with a small window and a large matching gray table at its center. In the room, several officers dressed like the musicians in the Beastie Boys video "Sabotage" confronted him and interrogated him with the pressured assumption that he was somehow the main culprit implicated in her vanishing.

"Mr. Fontaine, you said you were waiting for your fiancée Laura to return home last night. What were you doing prior to 6pm yesterday evening?" One officer with thick spectacles bordered by ugly brown frames asked him suspiciously.

"I've already told you officer... I got back home from work at about 5pm and was waiting in our home for her arrival at the usual time. The hours kept passing and she never did come home."

"We think you know where she is right now. Why don't you tell us when you really saw her last Mr. Fontaine." A second cop with a dark complexion stated with assertive interrogational prodding.

"I'm not trying to fool you officer. Emotionally I'm really drained right now. I'm just doing whatever I can to find my fiancée before time runs out."

Johnny continued to state that he was at home waiting for his partner to return and that she hadn't come home. He also stated how the hours went by with him sending her messages and how the phone eventually appeared to have been disconnected. He told the third officer who wore a two-piece suit with a small cravate that they should try to search for her mobile phone but the man just glared back at him suspiciously as though he had something to hide about a possible domestic dispute that broke out after he had proposed to marry her. Following the over-an-hour long interrogation, fingerprints and mug shots were taken, then Johnny was left in the cell where the possibly tainted food was offered to him and reluctantly refused.

Back in his flat on an off-shoot street to Spadina, Chinatown, Johnny watched the front door forlornly like a loyal pet waiting for its master's late arrival. He watched the sun vanish and thought of Laura staring up at a myriad of other solar spheres from a place far-off. At roughly midnight, he decided to take a trip to the nearest police station, to follow up on a missing person's notice despite the setbacks in court with the group of outlandish police officers. As he neared the closest police division, he had a vision that he was walking alone down the aisle of Little Trinity Church in a reverse direction. In the pews were the sleepy late-night restaurant goers along Dundas having a quick meal after a night of romping around on-the-town. Finally he reached St. Patrick and headed into the police station.

Inside, Johnny looked around noticing a place far different than the first stop of his night in police custody. The possibility that the lanky cop had driven around the

block for almost an hour to end up at this station quickly evaporated in his mind. Inside, he spoke to a female officer at the desk.

“I’d like to file a missing person’s report.”

“Please fill out his form, Sir.”

“Here is a picture of my fiancée Laura.”

After about an hour in the station, Johnny went back outdoors and decided to also reach out to local press. The following morning, when it was when the darkness crept away, Johnny went to get the Toronto Star newspaper in a variety store down the block and noticed a headline on the front page that read: *“Missing Woman Search Continues-Fiancée Seeking to Clear His Name”*. In a small corner next to the short paragraph of text was the photo that Johnny had given the police and press the day before. Feeling a little bit of relief, he headed home to make an internet search of all of the police stations in the 416 area. After tinkering with an online pedometer on his laptop, Johnny concluded that the mystery station was located quite a ways North and judging by the sheer size and scope, might have been even larger than the one in Chinatown closest to the flat he shared with Laura. After searching the layout of the suspected police encampment located to the North in the Eglinton and Don Mills area, Johnny made the assumption that the officers arresting him and putting him through custody were also involved in Laura’s disappearance and that her unknown location he hoped could be uncovered once the large police facility was inspected with security footage fully explored.

Completely preoccupied by the desire to uncover the police corruption involved in Laura’s disappearance, Johnny decided to hop on his bicycle and head North up the Don ravine system to scope out the ominous locale. Snaking his way out of Chinatown and northward up from Cherry St., Johnny quickly raced up river passing the underpasses at Corktown, heading under the bridge connecting both sides of Riverdale Park, and climbing uphill just before Pottery Rd. by half-mile bridge. After crossing the Queen St. viaduct, Johnny sped faster as he encounters some river-dwellers peddling around in the thickets possibly fishing the Don for any kind of sustenance. The men he thought, must always be on the move with everything being gentrified downtown and very little room remaining to hide away even in Toronto’s vast ravines. After crossing Pottery Rd., Johnny continued northward passing the eco-sculptures shaped like large rock molars and a series of rusty rail bridges from the same period as the old downtown one on Bathurst by the Garrison. When he reached the Ontario Science Centre, he decided to emerge from the ravines and re-enter the concrete streetscapes of upper Toronto. Finally, riding along Eglinton, a tattered street sign marked “5\_ Division” appeared en-route with a direction arrow and soon the outskirts of the large security facility emerged with the sun creeping beneath some thick clouds. Johnny immediately sensed that it was the same perimeter and lot where he had entered once the lanky cop, wearing shades on at this point, removed the cloak and lead him in his handcuffs

through a raised entranceway. Johnny peered over the tall concrete fence to the fortified lot and was sure he had found that mysterious first custody cell block.

Unable to confront a force of ruthless injustice so mighty, Johnny sat down on the curb with the station less than 50 meters away and felt overwhelmed and worried. How many people had been falsely charged through this police subdivision and how many had lost a loved one like he had? How could he confront these former captors in order to gather sufficient information to find Laura's present whereabouts? Looking up at the sky, the late afternoon sun made him blink as he wished despairingly that the Gods could search the rogue encampment through modern surveillance and report on enemy activity within its fortified walls. Heading back southward on his bike it began to grow dark as Johnny sped back toward the mouth of the Don. On his way back into the city, he felt as though he were a fish who could not travel any further upstream and was forced to follow the current into Lake Ontario. On his way out of the heavily forested ravines, Johnny caught sight of an old white bridge and wondered if it was now a hollowed-in command post hidden along the Don River to surveillance trail commuters resisting invasion along the water route. Once Johnny reached the waterfront trail it wasn't long before he re-entered his small world concrete and familiar lights.

Johnny went to sleep with teary eyes, feeling his bed was either too big, too empty, or both. The station lingered painfully with him like a dark fortress emanating a dull and sinful glow in the depths of night. Unable to re-enter the fortress following custody, he grew worried that acre by acre and district by district the city he once knew and loved was falling into the hands of the strange officers and their numerous spies whose gloom began to proliferate and become almost unbearable as it moved southward from the original and highly fortified stronghold miles North up the Don River.

[The End]