

LOOKING FOR DON

DEEP HOLLOW



D. KRAUSS

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To the three Bs. Long may you run.

Thanks again, Jayne!

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LOOKING FOR DON

D. KRAUSS



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Chapter 1

Déjà vu all over again.

Sitting in Mom's car on Washington Avenue checking out Don's house to see if the coast was clear before coasting down the road and up Don's driveway in prelude to days and nights of hijinks and peril... how many times had Butch done this? A hundred? A thousand? It's like he never left.

But he had.

Butch shifted irritably in the seat, drumming fingers on the wheel. Thought you got away, huh? Yet, here you are, right back at it. Only things different are the details: Mom's car is a Pontiac, not a Duster. Thank God for that. And Butch is no longer in high school; he's in the Air Force. Let's not thank God for that. Still, Mom's car, and he was using it to look for Don.

Which was a bust: Don wasn't home. Don's mom's Buick was out front, but the Batmobile wasn't, so what's the point? Came all this way for nothing. Could say "hi" to Mom, at least.

Don's mom, that is. Not his own mom whom he'd already said "hi" to this morning when, fresh off the plane and out of a taxi, he'd knocked on the door at Ridge's house over there in Rest Haven and hi Mom I'm back from basic training and no, I don't want any breakfast can I borrow your car, please? as Ridge glowered at him from the living room. And she'd hemmed and hawed and cast fearful glances back at Ridge, who said nothing because, really, what could he? It's not like Butch was his kid or anything, and she'd relented — finally — while looking all put out and hurt that he didn't want to stay and have breakfast and tell her all about basic and why did you join the Air Force just like that out of the blue without telling me and seriously, Mom? Seriously? And took the offered keys.

Guilt is a wonderful motivator.

Some wretched Abba tune screeched from the dashboard speakers and Butch sighed and wished he still had Buggy, his 1961 baby-blue VW Beetle with porthole windows in the back, no working instruments and only one functioning windshield wiper (the driver's side, fortunately), air-conditioned in summer through a combination of open window-wings and speeds of 60 mph, and heated in winter by a valve underneath the driver's seat he unscrewed to let in the engine fumes.

But you know what it did have? FM radio. Which meant he wouldn't have to listen to this top 40 WIP-AM radio crap. Gawd, Mom, you have FM in the house, why don't you have it in the car?

Easy; because Ridge is a cheap-ass, at least when it came to Butch's Mom and her kids. Ridge's kids probably had FM in their cars, probably cassettes, too,

which they didn't pay for, like they didn't pay for their brand-new-special-ordered Mustangs and Camaros and GTOs. Ridge paid. With Mom's money.

Butch paid for Buggy with his own money; half of Buggy, that is. Cindy and he split the \$100 price. "Now you both will have to share," Mom said as she did the paperwork while he and Cindy danced around Buggy, already planning cross-country drives or, at the minimum, a visit to Seaside. Sharing didn't bother either of them. They shared a lot.

A lot.

He shivered.

The sharing came to naught because, shortly after, Cindy got herself an idiot Piney boyfriend who drove a Nova SS and they were out all the time doing stupid Piney things, effectively leaving Butch as Buggy's sole proprietor. Butch had acquired an FM converter in a dubious transaction with Pee Sea (which, upon reflection, should have been his *last* dubious transaction with Pee Sea) and spent a subsequent afternoon under the dashboard trying to figure out which wire hooked to what. It was about the only time he wished idiot Piney boyfriend was around because the guy did know cars; but Butch managed, leaving the converter on the floor in front of the passenger seat because dismantling the AM radio and setting the converter in its place was a bridge too far. That made changing stations while driving a hazardous proposition but he'd never needed to change stations after he tuned in WYSP...

"What's this shit?" Don picked the tuner off the floor, examining the hard-to-read dial like a doctor checking for gangrene.

"YSP." Butch downshifted while peering hard through the half-assed wiper, which was losing its battle with the snow. "A new station. It's better than MMR."

Don snorted. "Nothin's better than MMR," and he spun the dial wheel looking for it but no way could MMR or YSP or any other Philly radio station be acquired or re-acquired in the middle of a snowstorm somewhere on the other side of Mt. Misery. It took Butch a couple of days to get YSP back and he'd threatened Don with dismemberment if he ever, EVER, touched the converter again. Which he did, anyway...

Butch chuckled.

Feel free to change Mom's crappy AM radio the moment you get in, Donny boy. Like you're going to find anything good on it.

First, though, had to find him. So let's knock on the door, ask Mom where he is, go to that location, and acquire his hijinks-and-peril sidekick.

Looking like this?

Butch ran his head over his skull. Not hair; skull. Some bristles up there could technically be called hair but they were nothing compared with what he'd sported before that mule skinner laughingly called a barber at Lacklaaaaand Air Force Base! (always said in *Firesign Theater* accents) had his way with him. Butch's beautiful white-'fro fell in waves down his front and back and all over the floor and it had not grown back. Not a whit. Eight weeks later, he still looked like a shorn Basic Trainee. Butch still mourned. He would never get his hair back. Don

wouldn't recognize him. No one would recognize him.

Maybe that was a good thing.

Boarding that plane at Philly airport eight weeks ago with sixty other loser idiots too stupid or too broke to do something worthwhile, such as attend college or grow dope, meant he'd escaped unpaid debts, old scores, unresolved complaints, and even a murder attempt or two. It also meant he was now a full-fledged member of Loserville (the military. Oh God) but a full-fledged *breathing* member of Loserville, at least.

And yet, he came back.

The dog returns to its vomit.

Butch accelerated the drumming fingers to Keith Moon levels and frowned and considered alternative courses of action.

Take the car back. Right now. Have Mom drive me to Philly airport. Grab the first thing smoking for Chicago. Get on the Chanute Air Force Base bus and report early for Weather Observer school.

They'd probably make him paint toilets or haul garbage the two weeks before the school started, but it was better than hiding at the apartment sans car or hiding at Ridge's house sans sanity.

Forget it.

Instead, keep Mom's car, risking vehicle theft charges (courtesy of Ridge), and tool around the Barrens heading towards the inevitable run-in with old enemies and girlfriends who would stop and stare and bust out laughing when they saw Butch the Skinhead. "You loser! You sellout!" and there'd be fights, half of which he would lose.

What the heck is a Weather Observer, anyway?

Butch didn't know. He'd put it down as his third career choice, after X-Ray and Lab Technician, the counselor at Lackland saying, "Ah, you'll get your first choice anyway. Just finish out the form with this" – tap of the finger on the line displaying the Weather AFSC (Air Force Specialty Code. He was larnin' the lingo) halfway down the list of available Air Force technical schools – "and then I can submit it and there you'll be, on your way to a Medical Career!" The guy actually smiled when he said that. Butch did, too.

You idiot.

Little too late now, my friend.

I'm locked into four years of observing the weather.

What's that entail? Run outside a couple of times an hour, stick a hand out, see if it's raining? Butch shook his head. Only the Air Force would have a job like that.

So, after four years, I'll be a highly trained and skilled rain spotter. Big call for that in the outside world.

'Outside world.' Listen to you. You're already making distinctions.

"Are you going in or what?"

Butch did not immediately leap straight through the top of the car because he knew that voice. Instead, with a calmness he really shouldn't feel, he glanced at

the rearview mirror. Yep, Frank Vaughn, sitting behind him.

“I thought you were in Oklahoma.”

“I am.” Frank pushed his cheek back into place, closing the hole in the side of his head. Butch shuddered. “Just paying a visit.”

“I haven’t seen you in a while. You look... older.”

“So do you.”

“But you can’t get older. You’re dead.”

Frank dismissed that with a shrug and fiddled with the jaw some more. “Question remains, you going in?”

Butch stared at the house. “What’s it to you?” he asked and turned for the answer but Frank wasn’t there. But he did have a point. Didn’t get dressed up and come all this way for nothin’.

Butch shifted into first and drifted down the road and pulled into Don’s driveway and shut off the engine, listening as the after-knock ran for about thirty or forty seconds.

Think you need a tune-up, Mom. Like Ridge is going to spring for it. Like I am?

He scowled. No, he wasn’t. Mom owed *him*; he didn’t owe *her*. Hence, possession of the car for the day. Or a couple of days. Or maybe for the rest of his life if he simply avoided Ridge’s place and tooled around the Barrens getting into fights before heading to Illinois.

Could I? Butch mused.

Well, yes, he could, with impunity; his sense of being owed eliminated any guilt twinges and Mom’s sense of guilt obviated any stolen car reports except ... he’d left his duffel bag, filled with his entire issue of Aaaaair Farce uniforms, at Ridge’s.

Idiot.

He stepped out, pulling the cunt cap off the right side of his belt as he yanked and tugged at his 1505s until they were straight and proper, gig line in place. ‘Gig line’. Only the ate-up military would create an actual term to describe the lining up of the pants’ fly with the edge of the *buckle, belt, chrome, one each*. And here he was ensuring said gig line was, indeed, giggered. And here he was, walking around in full-blown ate-up uniform.

Butch’d thought of changing into his civvies when he got off the airplane, but then he’d be walking through the airport in overalls and T-shirt and Earth shoes, his shiny-and-bright skinned head proclaiming to the world he’d either recently escaped from a concentration camp or undergoing chemo... or some military guy pretending he wasn’t in the military. So which was worse, the pretense, or the reality? He’d opted for the reality and got a few nods and friendly waves from some old farts, and lots of sneers and flipped birds from the young. Get used to it. Besides, 1505s were comfortable. Too bad the Air Force was doing away with them.

He walked up the porch and knocked on the door and glanced up and down the street to see if anyone had spotted him yet; specifically, anybody he used to

hang out with; more specifically, any of the guys (or gals) still pissed at him. Didn't want to get any blood on his spiffy and properly-gigged 1505s.

The door opened and Don's mom stood there blinking at him.

"Hi, Mom," Butch said, cheerfully.

Startled, she glared hard at him through her blue-plastic *Our Miss Brooks* glasses, trying to associate this skinny bald fascist on her porch with someone who could call her that. Glared UP at him, more accurately, because she was about four feet nothing, less than a hundred pounds nothing, slight and wispy and myopic and the best mom in the world. Just was.

"Butch!" she trilled in the perfect mom voice as a perfect-mom smile threw her heart-shaped face, framed by brown curls (natural curls at that), into the perfect-mom expression, "So glad to see you, son, please come in and have some cookies," and Butch warmed, because how many times had he knocked on Don's door at all hours and days and Don's mom greeted him in exactly the same manner, no questions asked, "C'min c'min." Now, if Don's *dad* opened the door, as was sometimes the case, he'd get an instant growl of, "Grab a rake. We got work to do," and propelled off the porch and to the backyard where they spent hours doing yard stuff. And that was okay, too.

"Oh, my!" she thrilled, gazing at his egg-smooth skull and reached up and rubbed his head, knocking off the cap, which Butch caught in a deft display of reflexes, and she giggled and it was "C'min! C'min!" and he followed her into the perfect-mom living room: couches and chairs all covered in knitted afghans and throws. All her handiwork, so many that the original upholsteries revealed themselves only through various knitting gaps. Family photos of Don and his brother at various stages of growth between oil portraits of mom and dad at various stages of aging and random watercolor seascapes – which Don's mom painted – covered every available wall space, the original wallpaper peeking shyly here and there between frame gaps. The smell of roasted coffee and potpourri and string beans boiling on a distant stove blended with the perfume of welcome and stability and home. A home.

"Oh, my!" Don's mom beamed at Butch, who stood in the middle of everything and absorbed it all and felt weights and stresses and concerns simply melt away. "They certainly did a job on you, didn't they?"

Butch made an exaggerated swipe at his hairline, or, rather, where his hairline used to be. "They certainly did."

"And look how skinny you are now!" Her hands clutched her collar in mock horror.

"Yep!" Butch made an exaggerated sweep down his body. "Lost twenty pounds."

"You didn't have it to lose to begin with!" She took a ferocious step and pushed him into an armchair padded with afghans across from an afghan-padded couch, unfinished knitting on the table between them. "Now you sit right there while I make you a sandwich. Two sandwiches!"

"You really don't—"

She raised a “nonsense!” hand as she flipped around the corner and there were sounds of plates flung about and drawers opened and Butch grinned and sat back and all was right with the world. He browsed the pictures while Don’s mom committed assault on lunch and look at this one right here, Don and Dooby and Butch, the Three Musketeers, in front of the house, Don sitting on the hood of the Batmobile, his ’59 salmon-colored Impala with the gigantic fins, hence the name, Butch and Dooby flanking him, all long hair and beards (in Dooby’s case) and hippie overalls and plaid shirts and looking so young and teenaged and carefree.

Carefree.

“Now, let’s get some of that weight back on you!” Don’s mom turned the corner with a serving tray that she dropped onto Butch’s lap: two gigantic Wonderbread sandwiches piled high with turkey and ham and lettuce and tomato and Charles Chips and Oreos. She placed a cup of steaming coffee on a flank of the unfinished knitting and a glass of milk on the other, all in one motion.

“Gee, Mom, you really didn’t—”

“Nonsense!” Spoken this time, not gestured. “Your mother must have passed out when she saw you.”

“I don’t think she even noticed.”

“Oh.” She dismissed that with an irritated wave. “Of course she did. And your hair looks fine.” Said in the voice moms used when things didn’t look fine. “Dad” – Don’s dad – “had his hair that short about the whole time he was in the Army, so I think it looks nice.”

“Thanks.” Said without enthusiasm but Butch actually felt better. Of course. Mom’s superpower was making her sons feel better.

She chose to read his pseudo-skepticism. “No, I mean it. You look very handsome in your uniform.”

“Handsome?” Butch straight-out laughed. “That would be a first.”

She flourished a handful of knitting. “Oh, stop fishing for compliments. I always knew there was a handsome boy under all that hair. So how was it?”

“Rough,” was all he said, slightly stung because yeah, he had been fishing, hadn’t he? Couldn’t help it: there weren’t a lot of people with good things to say about him. Not even his own mom.

And whose fault is that?

She gave him a sideways glance. “Rough?”

He blushed a bit. “Well, not as rough as the Army or the Marines I know, but rough enough.” And blushed a little more because, geez, her husband was a Major and fought in Korea and here Butch was complaining about creampuff Air Force basic training.

She threw him a lifeline. “It’s rough if you’re not used to it.”

“I wasn’t,” he said, grasping at it, “I thought I was, you know, with all the karate training but, wow.” He shook his head. “The running damn near killed me.”

She bent over the needles. *Click clack click clack*. A scarf, Butch guessed. “Imagine doing all that with a fifty-pound backpack and a rifle,” she pointed out.

“Yes.” He nodded vigorously. “I am quite grateful I went into the right recruiter’s door.”

She laughed. “The Air Force *is* a lot better. They treat their people very well. I wish Donny had gone with you.” That last spoken with a bit of ruefulness.

“Speaking of which... where is he? At work?”

An exasperated expression crossed her face. “I wish I knew. He hasn't been home in a while.”

“Oh.” A pause. “That’s nothing new.”

“I know, which is why I’m not worried,” she said, worried. “At least not yet.”

“Give him two weeks before you call the cops,” Butch said. “Is he still working at the printing plant?”

“Well, yes.” She gave him the fisheye. “You know, you’ve only been gone a few weeks.”

True, Mom, but a week in New Jersey is like a year anywhere else.

Parents don’t know that, so he said nothing.

She gestured at his shorn head. “So what *did* your mother say?”

“Eh.” Butch wagged his hand. “Nothing really. Ridge said something about me no longer being a hippie and Mom laughed, but I think she was just shoring up her position.”

Don’s mom gave a dismissive *tsk*. “You really need to get over your mom marrying him. It’s not like you can do anything about it.”

“I know, I know. I just wish she wasn’t such a doormat.”

“It’s a survival instinct,” Donny mommy said. “Once learned, it’s hard to change.”

“I know.”

Boy, did he know.

A smattering of images: cringing in the bedroom as Dad roared down on him; cringing in the yard as Dad roared down on him... lots of cringing in those memories.

Cringing in the rain, shovel in hand, Cindy beside him, shovel in her own hands, crying.

He blinked the memories away. “I just wish...” he trailed, not sure what he wanted to say. She needle-gestured for him to go on. “That we were as close as we used to be.”

She pursed her lips.

“It’s inevitable. A mom’s heartbreak. Her boys grow up and leave.”

And she sighed, obviously meaning Don.

“That’s not it.” He frowned, trying to find the right words. “She’s thrown in with Ridge’s family. I guess she thinks they’re better than us.”

“Ha!” Spoken derisively. “No mother is going to abandon her children for someone else’s.”

“Well, I’m not really her child, am I?”

She let out a long, slow breath. “Butch, that’s just unfair to your mom. She loved you as much as her own children. You just said how close you were.”

“Yeah.”

He conceded the point; at least, that he had used those words. But their closeness back there in Alabama, back during Butch’s previous and now completely alien life, felt one-sided. Butch sat with Mom after school and watched the boring soaps (except for *General Hospital*; that was good), went with her to the Piggly Wiggly and helped carry bags, and did his homework in the kitchens of strangers’ houses while Mom ran Tupperware parties in their living rooms because selling Tupperware was the only job Dad would let her have. Mom feared the long drives over dark country roads to Dothan, which was the closest town containing households prosperous enough to host Tupperware parties, and Butch volunteered to help her navigate. They often didn’t return home until close to midnight. Dad liked that. It left him to his own devices. For hours. So he never gave her a hard time about the parties and she scheduled as many as she could in a given week and Butch passed 7th and 8th grades with flying colors because of all the time he spent completing homework assignments on strange kitchen tables. The strangers gushed admiration for his scholarly diligence and his filial dedication to mom’s welfare as they passed in and out of the kitchen collecting brownies and pigs-in-blankets for the party attendees, letting Butch have one or two in passing. Butch took their regard in his stride, convinced he was a good son. In all those instances, from soap-watching to road-traversing, there’d been companionability. Butch felt protective of Mom, supportive.

But a coldness prevailed whenever Butch needed reciprocation. Say Dad stroked him six or seven times with the bullwhip because Dad had scratched the truck’s bumper running into the lawnmower that Butch had not pushed far enough back in the garage and this was obviously Butch’s fault (or Dad’s for inattentive driving but let’s not mention that), so he’d go crying to Mom seeking solace and got, “Serves you right!”, instead. Or when the kids at school jeered, “Bookworm! Bookworm!” because he sought the companionability of Heinlein and Alexander Key instead of lewd, cruel games, she’d conclude, “Well, you ARE a bookworm!”

Or when forced to dig a grave... “Don’t tell Mom. Ever.” Cindy’s tearful, panicked plea. And he never had.

A distance, despite his best efforts, and Butch suspected resentments not his fault as their origin. Evidence: that summer in Alabama when she loaded them all in a car because things were out of hand and they needed to hide for a while and Mom told Art that yes, of course, Butch was adopted but Dad was his real dad so he’s really your brother, adding with completely unnecessary emphasis, “Yes, that makes him a bastard.”

Really, Mom? Really?

Butch was shocked into utter silence by that. Art wasn’t. Art used that gem for years after. Thing was, Butch already knew his patrimony, his bastardy, had known since the summer of ’65 when they were all supposed to be divorced and Dad had gone gallivanting around the south visiting his girlfriends (and other bastard children, as it turned out) with Butch as reluctant companion and witness while Cindy and Mom and Art (and Dale, don’t forget her) remained at the Deats’

homestead in Oklahoma preparing for a life post-Dad and post-Butch. Butch and Dad weren't supposed to come back from that gallivant; it was the dissolution of the family, doncha know, but, surprise, surprise, they did go back by the end of that same summer, plans for divorce temporarily shelved and Dad packed them all up and stowed them, kit and kaboodle in the desolation of abomination called Alabama. Where everything else happened.

Cindy briefed Butch regarding his aforementioned patrimony the very day of his return. He hadn't known before. Mom had told her the same day he and Dad had gallivanted, so the sister of the bastard knew he was a bastard three months before the bastard himself knew. Butch guessed Mom thought it was easier to justify the death of this family to Cindy if she exposed the reason for it, Butch being that reason. Didn't expose it to Art; he was too young. But the family didn't die, went on, in fact, like a stubborn cancer patient, in the middle of Alabama swampland suffering occasional relapses like that later summer in which Mom felt it necessary to finally enlighten Art, before the final, terrifying expiration some months later.

So why did Mom think it necessary to tell Art at all? Especially in Butch's presence?

Payback?

"Yeah," he said again, because he still couldn't find the right words.

"Anyway," she said brightly, "I'm very glad you decided to get out of New Jersey. I don't think there's much of a future here."

Butch's brows rose. "Then, why are you guys here?"

"Because we're retired. We don't have a future." She laughed.

Butch's brows segued into full furrow. "But... isn't Dad still working?"

Dismissive tut. "Oh, that's just a bill-paying job. Mad money. Dad's real career was the Army."

In a way, Butch understood that. Only a few weeks in the Air Force and he already felt its uniqueness. If he stayed in, then it would be his life, too, would define him, regardless of anything else he ever did before or after. Which was why he had no intention of staying. Do his four years, get his VA, go to school to study Japanese, move to Japan and study the sword. That's the plan.

"So what do you mean there's no future here?"

She sighed, long and hard.

"Look around. The Arab embargo, that idiot Carter and the bigger idiot Corzine wasting all our tax money, everybody going on welfare, more crime all the time and the drugs, oh my, the drugs. And people are getting meaner."

"Meaner?"

"Well, yes. Just in the short time you were gone, someone shot a sheriff's deputy right over there in Tabernacle. And they found a headless body on Deep Hollow."

Butch started. "What? Deep Hollow?" The mystical mostly-dirt road connecting the back of the Lakes to the rest of the world through the Lebanon Forest.

It was his Street of Joy.

Many of Butch's craziest nights and weekends originated somewhere on that road, a midnight creep under a wizard's moon as the pines whipped by and the three of them, Don and Dooby and Butch in either Buggy, Battleship, or the Batmobile, imbued with the ether of youth and freedom and illegal substances, launched into the woods searching for the spirits and the gypsies and fought wars of magic and song in the forest's netherworlds. Sometimes they got there separately, in separate cars, after a night of running into each other first here and then there, someone having to go do something somewhere with someone else and fine, man, see you back at the Lakes and when the errands and to-dos ended, the various universes placated and sated, then their various gravities spun them back together, rituals and spells ensuring Buggy and Battleship and Batmobile converged at the side entrance of Magnolia at the exact same time, one behind the other in order of arrival, and they raced down the dirt road through the woods with their lights off, bumper-to-bumper, their only cues the sand berm with its shadow pines and the drip of moonlight through the boughs and felt the motion of the earth, of speeding cars, of their lives, the blood pounding in their ears as the girlfriends-of-the-moment screamed, "Are you crazy?" and yes, yes, dear, we are, but the magic saved them and they piled onto the beach laughing and dancing and brothers always, always brothers.

And now, Deep Hollow was tainted. "Do they know who it was?"

"Yes. Some boy from Perkins named Jape."

Butch's heart stilled. "Garfield Jape?"

"Yes, that's him. You knew him?"

"Yes."

Oh yes, he knew Garfield Sinclair Jape, small-time hood and big-time dreamer and even bigger talker. He was one of the reasons Butch joined the Air Force so hastily. One of the reasons.

"Do they know what happened?"

"Drug deal gone bad."

Well, yes. And Butch had a real good idea which specific drug deal went bad. "They catch the guy?"

"No. They have no idea who did it." Her eyes narrowed. "Do you?"

Well, yes...

"No." Poker face. "I just knew Jape around Perkins." Poker face shifted to one of innocence. "So... when did this happen?"

"Last week."

"Wow," Butch said softly. Definitely should not have come back home.

"Well, are you going to eat those sandwiches or am I going to serve them to Dad for dinner?"

Butch ate, even though his appetite had evaporated, and Mom fetched several books from various tables to show him what she was reading now and he was grateful for the distraction.

"Have you heard of this one?" She held up a monster-sized book, *Centennial*

by James Michener.

“Think so,” he said, although he hadn’t. “Isn’t he the guy who wrote *The Source*?”

“The very one.” She beamed and he beamed back.

Don wasn’t a reader, so Butch substituted as the literary son. Not that he minded. It was good to have a parent who shared his reading passion. Lord knows Mom and Dad never did. You bookworm.

“I’ll let you have it when I’m done with it.”

“Don’t know if I’ll have a lot of time for reading over the next few weeks.”

“Pish,” she countered. “You can always find time to read. Stop watching television.”

“Haven’t much time for that, either.”

She laughed. “No, I imagine not. Not that you’re missing anything.”

“Eh.” Butch waggled his hand. “I kinda like *Barney Miller*. And *Baretta*.”

“Stick with reading,” she said.

They talked about books, past ones and future ones, and Butch finished his sandwiches and Oreos and did not refuse when she offered Fig Newtons and more coffee and an hour went by, maybe, and Don did not show up and it was time to find him, the jerk.

“Don’t be a stranger!” she said at the door.

And he said he wouldn’t and got into Mom’s car and backed up and wondered where to go next. Don’s workplace, probably.

In the middle of the street, he fiddled with the radio in the forlorn hope that one of the AM stations had come to its senses and played album rock when a car pulled up next to him. Absently, Butch waved it on, but the car did not move and he looked up. And froze.

A 1969 purple El Camino. And, behind the wheel, Pee Sea. Staring at him, malevolence flowing off his cement-block-shaped head like an overheated radiator, his pig eyes inflamed and ferocious.

“Welcome back, motherfucker,” he snarled, made a gun with his forefinger and thumb, pointed it at Butch, pretended to fire, and then peeled out, without breaking eye contact.

Butch watched in the rearview mirror as the El Camino whipped around the corner, convinced Pee Sea would be back in moments wielding a shotgun. He remembered to breathe and realized he needed to get someplace safe.

Now.

Thong’s. Now.

OTHER BOOKS BY D. KRAUSS

The Frank Vaughn Trilogy

Frank Vaughn, Killed by His Mom
Southern Gothic
Looking for Don

The Partholon Trilogy

Partholon
Tu'An
Col'm

The Ship Trilogy

The Ship to Look for God
The Ship Looking for God
The Ship Finding God

Story Collections

The Moonlight in Genevieve's Eyes
and other Strange Stories
The Last Man in the World Explains All
and other strange tales

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

D. Krauss currently resides in the Shenandoah Valley. He's been a cottonpicker, a sod buster, a surgical orderly, the guy who paints the little white line down the middle of the road, a weatherman, a gun-totin' door-kickin' lawman, a layabout, and a bus driver, in that order.

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