



**THE  
MANY  
REVENGES  
OF  
KIP  
FLYNN**

*a novel by*

*Sean Dixon*







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REVENGES  
OF  
KIP  
FLYNN

*Sean Dixon*

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*For my father, Bob Dixon, who reads all the Toronto books.  
And for Kat, always.*



‘In the Ford factory, everything is collaboration, unity of views, unity of purpose, a perfect convergence of the totality of gestures and ideas. With us, in building, there is nothing but contradictions, hostilities, dispersion, divergence of views, affirmation of opposed purposes, pawing the ground ... Let the hitherto contradictory currents line up in a single procession ... Let the ghosts stop blocking the road!’

– Le Corbusier

‘The outcome is in the balance, although the fight takes place in the air.’

– Pliny the Elder





## ONE TOUR GUIDE'S CITY PRIMER

*It has a subway, with two lines – one that runs like a U down through the centre, and another that bisects the first about a third of the way up, like this: ∩. There are also streetcars. The downtown area is not porous with catacombs or old mines – it's a relatively new city – so there can be tall buildings. It has a couple of rivers, one of which could be said to be as mighty as the Thames, but these are not culturally significant in the same way because they're at the sides instead of the centre and there is a huge lake that runs all the way across the bottom. A little way out, still part of the city, there's an island. Several islands, really. Alongside the islands, a spit, created by earth and stones displaced by the building of the subway.*

*There are rich and poor people here, who, as in other places, generally stay out of one another's way.*

*If you've got a bit of money, you can occupy spaces that float above the city, where you might stand at your high window and say, 'What a view! Get rid of that blight right there and it would be perfect!' and point your finger way down to a small red brick garage with a rusty roof, still standing among all the titans, itself surrounded by demonstrators holding placards, trying to preserve it.*

*But if you're on the side of the small red brick garage, and if you're young and poor and don't mind a precarious existence, there's no better place to live than Kensington Market, where food is cheap and rent is low due to a certain relaxation of municipal regulations. That's where I live. Long live*





*One*  
**NOT A CITY  
BUT  
A ROSE**



# 1

Spring. A young couple, clad in black, crouched in front of the door of an old bay-and-gable house a mile or so northwest of the Market, as the crow flies. Pendrith Street. In the area of Shaw Street just south of Dupont, not far from Christie Pits. The houses in this particular area of the city follow an up-and-down wave pattern along some of the streets, like this



since they were built over a creek called the Garrison, buried not entirely successfully in the late nineteenth century. But the house that was the focus of current interest was in better shape, having been constructed on landfill of greater density and depth. It sat square on the top of a hill, with the subterranean creek running just behind, a sidewalk in front, and stairs climbing up to a front porch that offered a view of the whole neighbourhood – an overexposed destination for the two thieves who were breaking in.

The boyfriend was down on one knee, trying to pick the lock. The girlfriend, presumptive heroine of our tale, was more opaque and dreamy, easily distracted and, at the moment, a source of great annoyance to him. Still, she seemed to have hidden talents and abilities that could surprise even herself. Case in point: she tried the door. It was open. The boyfriend glared at her. His name was Mani. Hers was

KIP

and she existed mostly below the surface of herself.

Then they were inside a dark front room, Kip closing the door gently and watching Mani. They just stood there for a moment, overwhelmed by lack of experience, wondering whether they should turn around, grab their bikes locked together at the corner of the street and go home.

‘Tell me what you told me before, Mani.’ (Whispering.)

‘What’s that.’

‘That this isn’t wrong.’

‘This isn’t wrong, Kip. He had it coming.’

‘He had it coming,’ said Kip, trying to convince herself.

‘You can’t just do what he did and get away with it.’

‘Right,’ said Kip. And then she looked around. ‘I don’t see anything to steal, though.’

Just to their right, a load-bearing wall had been taken down, exposing some remnants of brick and newly supported up above by a brand-new eight-by-eight beam. Across the jagged divide, there were piles of dirt, as if someone didn’t know it was the inside of a house. There was no furniture. Nobody seemed to live here, a fact that made Kip almost giddy with relief. The only valuable thing in sight was the front door, which was teak and featured a bas relief carving of the whole earth.

‘Maybe we should just take the door,’ whispered Kip. ‘I could start a whole new enterprise with it.’

‘What enterprise?’ asked Mani, without enthusiasm.

Kip played the part in low tones: ‘Heeha, ladies and gentlemen, our blind Market swami will feel out your future on this door of the world ...’

‘Where do we get the blind Market swami?’

Kip pointed at him and shrugged. He told her to shut up and let him do the deft work of a prowler.

Mani may not seem to be a particularly likeable character, but he is not going to be in this story for very long. Which is itself a tragedy because Kip loved him. And he generally deserved her love. It just so happens that at this particular moment, he was feeling foul. Case in point: the words *shut up*. Their careless employment pushed a button in Kip, who was in a bit of a bad mood herself, though she didn’t like to admit things like bad moods. But she had cause today.

She was pregnant, you see.

And she wanted to tell Mani but couldn’t quite come out with it.

Maybe the timing was bad. They were robbing a house after all. Then again, it was an empty house, undergoing renovation, with an unlocked door. Maybe even now she was being characteristically unassertive. She asked herself, *What is there to steal?* She asked herself, *Why are two inexperienced thieves robbing a house in which there's nothing to steal?* She told herself, *Look on the bright side: at least nobody's here.*

Except she was wrong about that.

The house is owned by a developer named J. Cyrus York, who is not particularly likeable either, but who is also not going to be in this story very long. Still, he has some interesting hobbies. He's been digging in the basement here. Though urban preservationists are a collective thorn in his side, he's paid attention to one of their more epic interests: the buried creek.

At the moment, he's down there toasting his successful (historic!) containment of the Garrison's seepage – the house having been picked and purchased for this very reason – in the company of a distracted and moody son. The father is so spirited you would never consider him to be a dangerous man. But he's also armed.

On the business side of things, Cyrus York has recently embarked on an ambitious project to redevelop the city's Kensington Market, a ramshackle collection of vegetable stands and drug dens sitting on top of the most eligible real estate in the city. His associates have been applying gentle pressure on the Market's landlords, compelling them to part with their properties. The threat, barely whispered, is that he is prepared to make formal complaints to the fire marshall about all the regulations currently being flaunted. Thus will come crippling renovation expenses to destroy them all.

Ninety percent of these landlords have been rolling over. But there's one – a small-time Vietnamese gangster type named Joseph Luong – who has informed Cyrus that he will not respond well to threats. Research has pointed to this man having fingers in a lot of Market pies – some are fruity, some are savoury, most are treacherous.

And so the old man has taken the precaution of arming himself with a small Glock which he likes very much and which he's going to register very soon. There was a time in his life when he would have employed bodyguards. But these days, he's feeling more than a bit set in his ways, not keen on the company of strangers.

For Kip, presumptive heroine of our tale, the Market is just a sweet place where she can live and shop her wares. She has no idea she occupies ground zero in a war of dark against dark, a war for the city's soul. She has a bit of a blind spot for the dark, in fact, having lived in so many ramshackle places that she has developed an instinct to look towards the light.

If you want to see Kip (or, rather, her type), travel down to the Market at seven o'clock on a warm summer evening. Get to what seems to be the bottom of Augusta Avenue, a short block above Dundas Street. There's a smallish park there called Bellevue. You'll see a statue of Al Waxman there, and Kip and Mani too, in the flesh, sitting on the grass with all their worldly possessions – stuffed army knapsacks, beat-up guitars, short-haired dogs or just themselves. They won't be alone either. You might have heard some expert on urban demographics tell you they've all come from Peterborough or the suburbs and are merely in the throes of youthful rebellious ecstasy, but there are more than a few – like Kip, and even more like Mani – who just sprang up there like mushrooms after the first spring rain.

Kip wasn't born in Bellevue Park or even the Market, but she wasn't from Peterborough either. She was the daughter of one of the city's many living urban ghosts, the type that can drift over the streets of a city for almost a century without leaving a mark of any kind; the type who would not be able to bail you out of a spot of trouble, no matter how much he might want to; the type with a daughter left to her own devices.

Kip was a hard worker. She didn't look like your standard work-ethicist, not even in silhouette, but it's what she was, right down to the bone. Since her primary property and living space had always been her own body, she kept it adorned in the way you might



decorate your home – with glittery baubles, pretty lampshades, old keepsakes, shrines, hidden closets, drawers, tool racks, nooks, windows, stashes of feathers and stones, pressed roses, pure colours, and private letters creased and re-creased. If you can imagine transferring everything you treasure from within four private walls to the secure surface of your person, then you'll start to recognize Kip. You'll see her completely only when you understand these bits as architecture and not deficiency, mental illness, rebellion or lack of cohesion. To get to know her is to take the tour. Otherwise you'll confuse her with your own opinions about bits and baubles, torn cloth, piercings and dreads.

Kip lived hand to mouth, pretty much exclusively. And so, given this reality, every meaningful relationship she forged in her life had to be encountered and sealed somewhere between the hand and the mouth. Mani, for instance: she'd met him in the course of her working life and he stuck because he got involved in her schemes. Here's an example: for a while, she ran a guerrilla bar out of the back of a station wagon – totally illegal, you understand, but you might be surprised at how many respectable people will accept an outdoor drink in exchange for cash when it is presented with brio and a hint of class. No paper-bag business here. The idea had come in a flash when Kip had, by chance, come across six tumblers of Bohemian crystal (a \$360 value) sitting in a box by a dumpster. This was a decidedly finite number for any conventional drinking establishment, but Mani proved such a wizard with the washcloth, despite the limitations of the station wagon, that you could swear there were up to ten people being served at a time. He also mixed the drinks and kept a keen eye out for prospective thieves. Bodyguard, bartender, dishwasher, pocket-warmer. What was not to love?

For the last several months, Kip and Mani had been engaged in the surprisingly lucrative business of producing BLACK ROSES FOR SALE – hanging fresh red ones up to dry and then dipping them in hot

tar, allowing them to harden, painting the leaves green again and then selling them in the streets and goth bars of the city.

This one had been Mani's idea. He had recognized the beauty of tar-fixed plant life one night the previous spring while pissing in a laneway where someone had been repairing the leaky roof of a garage. The weeds poking up from beneath the foot of the wall had been thoroughly tarred, yet retained their shape and even the delicacy of their veins. Despite his drunkenness, Mani had declared it the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen, plucking several of the leaves and waltzing out onto Spadina Avenue to show them off to strangers.

Since Mani was a bit of a natural-born alchemist (having once turned a few bits of base metal into enough gold to fleck Kip's eyelashes), it was no time at all before he'd whipped up a burbling laboratory on the back roof of Kip's building, behind the gable that blocked it from a view of the street – beside the fifteen pretty potted marijuana plants he kept there.

'Genius,' as Kip was wont to say in those days.

The cauldron stank badly and sometimes Kip and Mani stank too. But at least, Kip thought, they stank together. Otherwise, Mani smelled like cinnamon and tea tree oil and sometimes sulphur, which was not a bad smell to her because it reminded her of her father and his perennial skin problems.

You might think there would not have been a market for black roses outside the goth community, but the two of them hit pay dirt when a popular musical, *Beauty and the Beast*, came to town. Black roses appealed, for some reason, to the audience of this show, a cuted-up version of an old legend about spousal abduction. Kip happened to be walking by at intermission one night with an armful of wares. Then, before they knew it, she and Mani had a kiosk in the outer lobby of the Princess of Wales Theatre, and were spending all their off-hours hovering like hecates over the bubbling cauldron. The demand had been so great, they'd been unable to prevent inferior mimics – two of them – sprouting rickety structures, on each side of theirs. Unscrupulous men who used fake roses and spray paint.

Still, our innocent heroine and her loyal sidekick stayed above the fray, even if it was clear that 90 percent of the patrons could not distinguish a difference in quality.

Then, just a couple of weeks before this night of prowling in an empty house on a hill with a creek in its basement, came the fateful moment when Kip handed a particularly fragile specimen to a small, silver-suited young gentleman whose only physical blight was a delicate silver scar running down the centre of his nose.

Perhaps this one flower had been too delicate to withstand its plunge into the boiling tar. And perhaps someone opened a door to the lobby just in that instant, it being intermission, at the same moment when an actor was stepping back into the wings from stealing a smoke on the fire escape. Perhaps this created a unique draft through the building, slipping under doors and around corners, lifting a strand or two of Kip's hair, and beginning a storm of escalating vengeance that would only come to an end eight months later in the much bigger firestorm of a burning, three-storey pit.

Whatever the cause, it was a very simple effect: the flower tumbled off the stem, snapping off a couple of petals as it bounced off the young gentleman's sleeve, rolled past his elbow and fell to the carpet.

That was all there was to it.

Kip snorted goofily and the man flashed her a look she could not interpret. Then his eyes rolled up into his head for a moment, like he was having a seizure. It was over in a moment but it clearly embarrassed him and then sharpened his anger. He snorted something about elite arty hucksters and would not accept a replacement. It soon became apparent that nothing would convince him that one rose's lack of integrity was a fluke. He was more than indignant, he was enraged, explaining that he was advocating on behalf of those whose roses would collapse closer to their cars. Which of course didn't make any sense since it was intermission and there was a whole other act to come. But this dude was on a rhetorical roll.

He made it his mission, accomplished within ten minutes, to get Kip and Mani escorted from the property forever – checking the

other kiosks and pronouncing their synthetic knock-offs entirely more durable.

And so a grudge was born. In Mani, if not in Kip.

Not wishing to return to the indignity of trolling goth bars, no longer consumed by the gargantuan alchemy project and possessing two weeks' worth of savings before the wolf came to the door, Mani devoted all waking hours to ascertaining the identity of the man in the silver suit. He would not have gotten anywhere – detective work not being his calling – and his rancour might have faded away in a few days, had it not been for a brief encounter with Kip's flatmate,

NANCY,

who knew how to take advantage of a grudge.

Nancy was an urban explorer, builderer and anti-development activist who took pleasure in infiltrating new condo towers for the purpose of liberating collections of cockroaches and mice, also staining the whitewashed walls with tea to create the illusion of water damage from faulty pipes. She had a team of shadowy allies, many of whom worked in the city's downtown as innocuous tour guides, who gazed out every day upon a city razed and replaced, spinning bitter tales about its former beauty, like a tag-team Scheherazade.

You'll see Nancy in that park at the bottom of Augusta too, but she fits more with the demographic. She had not always been a Market-dwelling activist. It just so happens that Kip met her on the day – the very moment, in fact – of her metamorphosis.

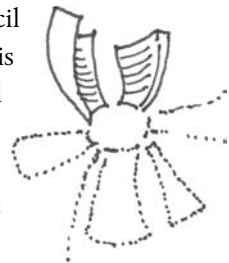
Nancy grew up in Etobicoke with nice, responsible parents, went to a good school, said *please* and *thank you*, understood the importance of keeping proper accounts and going to church on Sundays, smiled sweetly, took a General Arts BA at a nearby university and then moved downtown to Cabbagetown and took a job as a tour guide in the tall concrete structure of City Hall. She excelled in the

position, cycling to work along the bike lanes in the summer and switching to the streetcar in the fall, embracing the rhythm of city life with a studied contentment, observing the thousands of strangers who travelled with her every day as if they were all part of a single whirling ornament.

In her job too, she displayed a near empathic understanding of all the various interests of people who came through. One of her tricks for eliding the interests of conservatives, progressives, development buffs and conservationists was to praise the bold innovation of the City Hall design and then point out that concrete structures like it, far from being urban blights, should now be seen as historic monuments of their era that need to be protected against the latest architectural fashions. They were vulnerable, she said, an oversized endangered species like the blue whale or the African elephant. When asked how such sturdy concrete could possibly need protection, she would simply reply, mysteriously, 'I don't know. Ask the Romans.'

In lighter moments, she told the tourists that its pair of curved concrete towers were as fragile, in their way, as the petals of a flower.

But in the month before she first met Kip, Nancy had experienced a seismic shift. In her work, she was as dimply and patient as ever with her charges, but she seemed frayed around the edges, something was crumbling or leaking somewhere. If asked, she would have claimed not to know the source of her dilapidation, but if it had a homing signal, it would have led you, intrepid investigator, up the City Hall stairs and into the 4,000-tonne council chamber (whose weight is here noted because this same chamber has the interesting architectural feature of being supported by a single circular column in the floor below, a place, Nancy told her followers at the start of each tour, known as the Hall of Memory.)



In short, Nancy's problem was the new mayor.

She would never have confessed it at the time, since she'd actually voted for this longstanding councillor from her parents' ward. She

thought she'd liked his common touch, had not liked the way some of her friends made jokes about his girth. She'd found him handsome and charismatic and was quietly impressed by his forthrightness. Admittedly (this being her pre-activist life), she hadn't paid much attention to his proposals. But there had been a moment in a public forum in Nathan Phillips Square where she had witnessed him be at a loss for words in front of a microphone while still clearly in the grip of feelings, convictions, the desire to express something he could not express. 'He's just like me,' she'd thought, in that moment, conjuring the whirling ornament. And so she cast her vote.

But the mayor turned out to be a different sort of beast than the one she'd conjured. When the time came for him to express himself more clearly, with policy, Nancy felt compelled to stop her ears for fear of getting upset and displaying some less than civil emotions. Specifically, he declared that her beautiful, gliding streetcars were impeding the progress of the city's movers and shakers: car commuters were tired – so tired – of spending forty-five minutes stuck behind such a vehicle after an hour or more racing through the arteries that brought them into the city. Nancy sympathized with the commuters, they made her think of her parents, haggard after a lifetime of driving. But ... but ... the mayor sought to replace her iconic trams with farting, greasy buses. He sought to supplant them by digging down and running subways through subterranean tunnels, the oiled darkness below the city. Such digging would require funding deals with building developers who would eradicate height restrictions throughout the city and see a new heyday in highrise development.

Still, she lived close by in Cabbagetown. She could shut her eyes to the new shadows rising, the pits being dug and the diesel uglies farting by. At least she still had her bicycle.

Then, one day, a few years before the events being here depicted, Nancy decided to break with protocol by giving her small City Hall tour group a gander inside the council chamber itself, even though it was in session. She tiptoed the four of them up the stairs of the central building and opened one of the doors just as the mayor, standing

at his podium, was declaring to the assembled councillors that the city's roads were built for cars, trucks and buses. Nothing else. And she closed it again just as he said, 'My heart bleeds when a cyclist gets killed, but it's their own fault at the end of the day.'

Then she continued her tour out into Nathan Phillips Square, where it just so happened that her small group of four tourists was joined by a fifth, a certain pierced, tattooed and dreadlocked marginal type you happen to know by the name Kip Flynn.

Kip was working that day too, conducting research on the possibility of becoming a tour guide herself. She'd been reading up on the city's architecture – cultivating an interest that hearkened back to the fallout of a scheme from one snowy winter when she was nineteen: She and a beau had tried to set up small igloo-movie-viewing rooms for lovers with laptop computers in Trinity Bellwoods Park. But the igloos all collapsed so they were forced to give the admission money back and, in one case, run for their lives. The experience gave her a new appreciation for the rules and forms of architecture. Recently, her reading on the subject (in a particularly well-designed library on College Street just east of Spadina, fronted by a lion and a griffin) had led her to think it was possible she might be able to talk about it to people in a formal capacity. She'd come down to City Hall to seek out an example and joined a small cache of tourists standing with a cherubic guide, dressed in a particularly alienating colour of blue. She followed the pack into the building and was just arriving at the conclusion that the work would require an unfathomable transformation of personal style, when the guide, just coming abreast of the huge white column in the centre of the floor, suddenly rounded on the group with a sharp change of tone: 'You know, I used to love the Romans,' she said. 'I used to love concrete. I used to think the time of concrete and the Romans was in the past and should be preserved despite its brutality. But ... I mean, I'm not sure what's come over me, but I ... It's occurred to me lately that, right here, on this spot



where I've been preaching every day, there used to be a neighbourhood called St. John's Ward. It was a vibrant place, densely populated by people who didn't live like the big besuited dudes who ruled the city, the arrogant men who, claiming to speak for the weakest and poorest among us, took their diggers and their rollers and their Jurassic construction equipment and knocked down the ward, which they had declared smelly and dangerous, and whose blameless occupants – the city's weakest and poorest, if I may belabour the point – were thus driven out, making way, eventually, for this behemoth we're currently standing in the belly of, being slowly digested ourselves. Anyone who survived took up their bits of schmatte and their cans of herring and their pushcarts and lamps and they trudged over to the location of what is now known as Kensington Market, where they set up their livelihoods again. And these ... these ... fat cats, they're never going to stop, are they? They're never going to stop ...'

Then, in what Kip would later understand as an unprecedented moment that would never be repeated, Nancy burst into tears. 'I'm sorry,' she said, still speaking perfectly despite the emotional display. 'I don't know what's come over me. I'm just a little upset. I feel a little betrayed. I feel like I've been stick-handled through City Hall like a puck made of frozen gravy. I think this is my last day on the job.'

And that was all. She didn't say any more. Just continued to stand there, staring, wide-eyed, teary and open-mouthed at the collection of tourists, who eventually turned and fled just as Kip stepped forward to offer her a hankie.

'What's that for?' asked Nancy.

'You're crying,' said Kip.

'Am I?'

Nancy took it and wiped her eyes. 'Oh yeah,' she said. And then: 'Thank you. I really don't know what's come over me. I'm not even political, necessarily. I just –'



And then she noticed the monogrammed stitching on the handkerchief Kip had given her. ‘Does that say *snot*?’ she asked, appalled.

Kip nodded. ‘I also have ones that say *sputum*, *phlegm*, *smegma*, *jism* and *tears*.’

‘That’s so gross!’ Nancy shouted, and then started to laugh.

Kip told her she used to sell them for five dollars a pop but they took too long to make.

‘Then you should totally charge more,’ said Nancy, sniffing. And then: ‘Wait a second. Don’t you want to sell this one? You look like you could use the money.’

Kip said, ‘This one is for my own personal use. But,’ she added, ‘it’s clean.’

And then, after a bit more encouragement from Kip, Nancy finally blew her nose.

‘That was an interesting speech,’ said Kip.

‘You call that a speech?’ asked Nancy. ‘I was thinking it was more like a meltdown. I feel weird,’ she went on, looking around, Kip gazing at her with some fascination – she looked like a typical customer for one of her doodads, only different somehow. ‘It’s ugly in here,’ Nancy went on. ‘Wow. Look how ugly it is here. Where are all the windows? Can we get out of here?’

‘Sure,’ said Kip. ‘But I wanted to tell you I had no idea about St. John’s Ward even though I live in Kensington Market.’

‘Really?’ asked Nancy, embracing serendipity. ‘Can I see your place?’ She was still teary, wiping her nose, flushed, but sticking hard to the path that would lead to her new life.

‘Sure,’ said Kip, shrugging. ‘I was sharing it with a guy, but I don’t think that’s going to work out.’

‘I feel,’ said Nancy, starting to move, ‘like I’ve spent the last six months walking around inside a clock that just broke.’

So Nancy went home to the Market with Kip. And soon after that, she moved into her place.

And they became friends of course, that goes without saying. Close friends, like twins almost. Mirror images of one another. Kip

wished she could be neat and organized like Nancy. Nancy wished she could be a goddess like Kip. That's how she saw her. Not that she'd ever come out and say something like that. But she felt – could not really help it – that Kip was – oh, what's the word? – *authentic*; that her movements hummed in the same key as the deep heart of the city.

Kip felt Nancy's admiration too, although it was never expressed, and although it mingled more and more with the spottier evaluation that began to emerge.

Nancy assumed, because Kip was poor and lived in the Market and looked the way she did, that she must be a rabble-rousing political activist. But Kip was no such thing. This was, at first, a cause of surprise for Nancy, and then – once she began to see her own value as a potential leader in her new community – disappointment. She was quiet about it at first, but, growing into her role, she became more teasy, goady, interventionist. Kip tolerated her friend's behaviour because she could always see, very clearly, the old Nancy embedded in the new. Her friend liked to keep clean, dress nicely, and became concerned when people didn't keep their finances in order or were not properly considerate of others face to face. Kip was charmed by the contradictions. She'd never known anyone like Nancy before and she loved her. So she didn't mind when her new friend tried, valiantly, to indoctrinate her to the cause.

The most memorable effort had taken place already during that first winter together, when Nancy dragged Kip out to a place called Guildwood Park, in far eastern Scarborough. Nancy called it 'the boneyard' because someone had partially reconstructed the buildings that had been torn down from the vicinity of King and Bay in the sixties, neoclassical structures of stone festooned with stern watchers, cross-armed and stripped to the waist, or lion heads flanking the cracked face of a child. A recent snowfall, melted, had left the stone steeped in hues of purple and green.

'You should know better than anyone how we're at war,' Nancy said, that day in the park, pointing to the archway behind her. 'And this is the cemetery for the honoured dead.'

‘Not really a cemetery, though,’ said Kip. ‘It’s a park!’

‘Look at the address above the archway,’ Nancy commanded.

Kip looked: 39 King Street West.

‘Most of these structures,’ said Nancy, ‘were swept away by the erection of the Mies Tower and her sooty black sisters.’

Kip said, ‘But I’m sure if someone threatened to pull down those towers, you’d be trying to stop that too.’

‘No way,’ said Nancy. ‘I learned my lesson there. It houses one of the enemies in this war.’

‘I don’t believe in war,’ Kip replied. ‘I’m a merchant.’

‘What does *that* have to do with anything?’

‘Jane Jacobs says that merchants follow a different code than guardians like you.’

‘Where does she say that?’

‘*Systems of Survival*, it –’

‘– was a completely unimportant book from an otherwise –’

‘It was important to me!’

‘If you’re just about selling, then everything’s for sale!’

After that, the two of them had made the long journey back downtown and Nancy didn’t speak to Kip for a week. Kip only managed to break the ice, finally, by offering entertainment for some of Nancy’s newly formed workshop rallies – a combination of stilt-walking, high-wire balancing and fire-breathing, all skills Kip had learned under the tutelage of a pre-Mani beau. Nancy called these entertainments ‘bourgeois distractions,’ but seemed pleased about them nonetheless.

And so everything settled down in their little Manichean universe for a while – Kip letting Nancy burst out with the occasional speech, Nancy allowing Kip to be her authentic self – until the day Kip was escorted (with Mani) off the grounds of the Princess of Wales Theatre before intermission was even over.

One morning, just a few days later, the vengeful Mani happened to be sitting in the Kip/Nancy kitchen, reading the newspaper that had been left there by a third flatmate, when he just happened to spot a photograph on page A7.

The shot was of a distinguished elderly man shaking hands with a prominent architect on the front steps of a Toronto house. The architect, Frank Gehry, was turning down a condo proposal just as the photo was being snapped and the old man was attempting not to betray his feelings on the matter. But Mani was more interested in a young face behind him, almost in the shadows at his shoulder.

‘This is the guy. Hey Kip, is this the guy? This is the guy.’



Kip didn't look at the top picture. Her eye had been drawn to the one beneath it, of one of the architect's famous projects: a building from a faraway city that looked like a man and woman dancing, though in an architectural kind of way. It reminded her of herself and Mani, in an idealized scenario, with Mani being manly and square and Kip leaning into him all curvy and spiky. Except she was more spiky than curvy and it was a building. Still she liked it. Its permanence attracted her. Especially since she was feeling vulnerable, mortal, fertile, pregnant. And Mani was clued out.

And she was disappointed that the female half of the building looked mostly like it was offering a tray of drinks.

She said, ‘What do you think the baby building would look like?’

Mani said, ‘Kip! Is this the guy?’

Kip said, ‘I ... don't know.’

And then Nancy happened through. Happened to look over Mani's shoulder.

‘What do you want to know about that guy?’ she asked. ‘I've got a whole dossier on him.’

‘What's a dossier?’ asked Mani.

‘Newspaper articles, projects, medical histories – anything you can name.’

‘Don’t pay attention to her,’ said Kip. ‘She has an enemies list. She wants to change the world.’

‘Not the world,’ said Nancy. ‘Just the city.’

‘I have an enemies list too,’ said Mani, pointing to the paper. ‘This guy’s the only one on it.’

‘Great,’ said Kip, rolling her eyes.

‘He wants to tear down the Market,’ said Nancy. ‘He surely does.’

‘Really?’ said Mani, sitting up. He was really interested now.

‘Really,’ said Nancy. ‘And he hatches his plots downtown at the top of the sooty black Mies Tower.’

Kip to Nancy: ‘Just to be clear, you’re talking about the old guy in the photo, he’s talking about the young guy.’

‘Like father like son,’ said Nancy.

Kip gave her flatmate a dubious look and said, ‘You’re just trying to radicalize my boyfriend.’

Now that they had finally embarked on their revenge project and were inside the house, Kip suddenly found she wanted to ask Mani whether he might ever be willing to give up the self-destructive practice of seeking vengeance for what, in the grand scheme of things, was the merest of slights. Where daddy-material evaluation was concerned, it was just, she told herself, a theoretical question, since she was definitely not going through with the pregnancy. She would drop in at the Planned Parenthood (read, abortion) centre the next day.

Oh wait, no. She was waiting till the day after – right after the strangely early ultrasound appointment that had been scheduled for her by a cagey (presumably Catholic) doctor last week at the walk-in clinic, when Kip had gone in a teary panic and confessed her condition.

All this contemplation was keeping Kip quiet as Mani prowled around the gritty ground floor. She followed him around the front

stairs where there was again nothing and she finally said, 'I really don't think there's anything here you can take.'

'Yeah, funny that,' he whispered. 'Considering you were so passionate about choosing this place.'

'I wasn't passionate about any of it. Nancy –'

'Nancy suggested the mansion on the Bridle Path –'

'Which features a snare and a net inside every window. Not to mention locks. You should thank me.'

'For talking me into robbing a house with nothing in it? I'm supposed to be wreaking havoc.'

'I'm not stopping you,' said Kip. 'Wreak away.'

'I'm wreaking,' said Mani.

'You stink too,' said Kip, 'speaking of reeking.'

'What do you mean?'

'Like, you haven't put on clean clothes in –'

'More important things to think about here,' protested Mani, his voice rising a bit.

'Why are you so bugged?'

'I'm not bugged.'

'Yes you are. You're bugged. I'm bugging you.'

'Just shut up. I'm trying to concentrate.'

'Your concentration has the look of a man who's bugged.'

Mani emitted a grumble that sounded suspiciously again like *shut up*. Believe it or not, it was only the third time he'd ever used such words with Kip, the first being just outside the door. Kip was beginning to wonder whether she wasn't telegraphing her indecision.

Or was he just being an asshole?

She opted to change the subject. Bring up the pregnancy.

'Mani –'

A bit of unearthly scuffling. There was a man there. Standing in front of them, in the middle of the far room. He hadn't been there before. Dust had been raised. Now a second man beside him, half his size in the half light. Had they come from the floor? Yes, from below. The second, older, pointing. There was something in his hand.

And then Kip saw that Mani had something in his hand too. Pointing it in the direction of the ...

At the other end of the room, the dust came to a point. A flash of light.

Mani said something. And then, impossibly late, there was the sound of a shot and Mani was already falling. He had pointed his gun (*what was he doing with a gun?*) and then he had fallen. And then the sound. And then he had said what he had said. He'd said, 'He-ey.' Admonishing. As if some kid had just narrowly missed him on his bike.

Kip's eyes had gone blind with the shock of it. Her hands went to the floor. Filthy. Any second, that gun was going to go off again. She was choking from the dust. Coughing. There were voices. One low, staccato and soothing, controlling. The second choked and weeping. Two men. At least that much was clear.

The first thing she heard (or remembered hearing, since the shock placed her ahead of the action somehow, a few moments into the future, or maybe an hour, perhaps a century) was, 'What the fuck?' in the tones of an old man who sounded unaccustomed to cursing. Then there was a frantic exchange about 'How did they get in?' and 'I think I might have left the -' and 'Jesus!' and 'Just have a look see if anyone's put on a light somewhere.' And then, after a long pause, a pair of sentences, directed towards her:

'Who sent you? Why are you here?'

'Wh -' said Kip.

Followed by an argument, swift and hushed, between the older and younger man. She could not follow it. Then a pause. Looming faces. Soft, wrinkled wrist sliding from a sleeve. A firm grip on her forearm. The old man's tone was changing, though. It was taking on an august regret.

'It's all right, young lady. Nobody is going to hurt you.'

And then, the whole brief dust-raising cacophony having lasted no more than a few seconds, 'Let's move this conversation downstairs.'

Later, Kip was outside, standing in the darkness of an empty laneway. Feeling a bit like nobody. She looked down. There was a worm crawling over her shoe. She started to walk. Her lungs were pumping, her face flushed and hot, clothes wet. Now suddenly she felt woozy.

Still, she knew what they had done.

She knew what she had done too.

*If you're all about selling, then everything's for sale.*

Later still she was wandering through the city. Her feet didn't even get tired. Pendrith to Christie. Christie to Bloor. Sliding down Grace like a hillside, to College, where she should have turned left but didn't. Floated instead further down that street to Dundas and then over to Trinity Bellwoods Park. Felt the pull like her body was a divining rod carved from a tree that had sent roots down to the buried creek, and Mani was seeping away down it to lodge in landfill north of the lake. She ended up walking the minimalist grounds of Fort York, with its guns and grass and spartan stones. It was both-ering her that Mani was wearing stinky clothes. And there was an old conversation running endlessly through her head. Mani once telling her she was an excellent salesman. Except in her memory now Mani was talking to her and holding the gun, casual-like, with Kip thinking, *I didn't sell him that.*

Eventually she came to her home, realizing, as she ascended the stairs, that she had forgotten her bike. Up there, near the death house, it was locked to a post, together with Mani's. They were locked together. This was going to bug her too, along with the fact that he was wearing dirty clothes. As if she didn't have enough to think about. All the little things that helped her keep her fingers in the dam.