

CHAPTER SIX

Truth and Deception

KWANG! KWANG! KWANG!

Martin awoke with a start. The bag of chips that had been resting on his chest fell to the floor along with the excess crumbs that were scattered across his vest. He tried to focus on the clock that sat on the fireplace mantle. It said 8:45. The clock had stopped years ago.

KWANG! The doorknocker went again.

Martin rubbed his eyes and blinked. From the light streaming in through the front bay windows he realized it was morning. He'd slept all night in his chair in the living room. He got up and stumbled his way towards the front door. Martin undid the deadbolt, turned the large key in the lock and swung open the heavy front door.

Fourteen Song Bird Lane faced directly east. The house had been designed and situated so that the early morning sun light would stream through the custom-made stained-glass window in the front door. Martin shielded his eyes from the bright morning light. Part of the light was blocked by the tall, slender figure in the door way. Martin squinted as his eyes adjusted to the intrusion of light. He rubbed his eyes again. The kind of rubbing you do when you expect what's in front of you to disappear. Martin finally focused and stared up into smiling face of his sister, Milly Boughtom.

"I, uh," was all Martin could manage.

"Martin," said Milly, gently, "why don't you ask me in?"

"Uh, yes," managed Martin as he stepped back from the door. Milly glided into

the front hallway.

To say that Milly and Martin were opposites would be an understatement. Milly was model-tall, but not model-thin. She had shimmering, shoulder-length ash-blonde hair and her cheeks had that faint blush of pink that you see sometimes in white peonies. When she moved, it was with a ballerina-like gracefulness and her voice was melodious. Martin was considerably shorter with red hair, freckles and a wee pudgy middle. He was far from graceful. Martin stared at his sister. He was awestruck. He had not seen his sister in ten years. She had changed. Martin always thought his older sister was attractive, even though she managed to hide it, but she was now luminous. The last time he'd seen Milly her hair was pulled back in a harsh bun, she was wearing large dark-framed glasses, a ratty sweater, woolly stockings and a tweed skirt. She'd looked like the bottom-of-the-barrel choice from a third-rate placement agency.

“Mil, I,” Martin was still fumbling around for words.

Milly reached out and took Martin's hand. “I know, I know. It's been too long and I have so much to explain to you.” She looked down lovingly at her brother. “I should never have abandoned you Martin, but there were so many things I had to come to grips with, demons that I had to deal with. It's taken me this long to even work up the courage to tell you about our parents and it's also taken me this long to realize how important family is. Martin, no matter what, you are my brother. You are my family.” Milly hugged her younger brother. Martin started to blink furiously. This time it was to blink back tears.

“Come on, Martin,” Milly said as she maneuvered him down the hall towards the kitchen, “I'll make tea. I think I remember where everything is, unless you've changed

things around.”

Martin snuffled and wiped his eyes on his sleeve as he shook his head back and forth. “Everything’s the same, Mil.”

“Good. I’ll make lots. I’ve got a long story to tell you.”

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“Hell’s Bells, Yeah, Hell’s Bells...”

Solomon woke with a start, lurched out of bed and hit the ‘off’ button on his radio-alarm clock. He stared in disbelief at the time, 7:15 a.m. Solomon quickly flopped back onto the bed, face down.

“Solomon are you up?” Lillian shuffled into his room. “I don’t know why you don’t play more cheerful music in the morning.”

“It is cheerful, it’s AC/DC,” was Solomon’s muffled reply. His head was buried in his pillow.

“C’mon Solomon, we’ve got to find Darwin, get dressed. I’ll go and wake-up Gladly.”

“Mmmff,” was all Solomon could manage.

Lillian rolled her eyes and let out a big sigh. She turned and went back down the hall to Darwin’s room. There was a hollow in the bean-bag chair where Gladly had been sleeping, but no Gladly. Lillian felt a flutter of panic. She backed out of the room and headed downstairs. She checked the front door. It was still locked. The living room was empty, so was the dining room. Lillian heard the chomping before she entered the kitchen. Gladly was perched on a stool by the kitchen island. He’d found a huge mixing bowl and had it full of cereal. Lillian guessed that he’d put a little bit of each type of

cereal into the bowl, judging by the seven boxes of different brands he had lined up in front of him. Gladly was merrily shoveling a spoon full of cereal into mouth.

“Mornmpffh,” was all he managed. A few chewed pieces of cereal fell out of the corners of his mouth.

Lillian surveyed the rest of the mess that Gladly had created. The orange juice was on the counter. The pantry door was open. There was a jar of jam with a knife stuck in it on the counter beside the toaster. A loaf of frozen bread was next to the toaster and the frozen pieces of bread were splayed out on the counter like large white dominoes.

“Well Gladly, I’m so delighted that you’ve made yourself at home.” Lillian started to gather up the cereal boxes to put away. She jumped when the toast popped behind her.

“Oh! And I see you need some toast to follow your large bowl of breakfast cereal.” She gritted her teeth. Just then Solomon sauntered into the kitchen.

“Whoa! Hey way to go Gladly! Even a bigger mess than I make!”

Lillian slammed the boxes onto the counter. “That’s it. You two idiots better be ready in five minutes to get out the door.” She turned to Solomon and glared at him.

“And you. You better hope that your younger brother, the brother that adores you and looks up to you, is all right. Because if he isn’t you will be haunted for the rest of your life.”

Lillian grabbed a couple of granola bars from the cupboard and then stormed up to her room to get dressed.

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Coach Dribble was already semi-conscious when his alarm went off at 7:20 a.m.

Tony made sure of that. The dog leapt onto his bed at the first twittering of birds out the bedroom window and covered the Coach with bulldog-style slobbery kisses. So the Coach didn't really need The Kingsman's "Louie, Louie" to wake him on his clock-radio.

"Big day today, Tony," said the Coach to his loyal dog, as he pulled on one of his more conservative jogging suits. It was bright powder-blue, with dark-burgundy stripes. "Not sure when I'll be home buddy, could be late, so I'll leave you a bit of extra food." Coach Dribble patted Tony's head, stretched and then headed to his tiny kitchen to make himself breakfast and put Tony out in the backyard for his morning piddle. Ten minutes later, after Tony had gobbled some food and was plopped comfortably in his doggie-bed, Coach Dribble was out the door.

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Milly was astounded. Everything was in exactly the same place in the kitchen. Nothing had changed in ten years. She quickly made tea for herself and Martin, found a half-package of cookies in the cupboard and sat down across from her younger brother at the kitchen's centre island. Mrs. Smitherwinky had made sure the kitchen was spotless.

The kitchen of 14 Song Bird Boulevard was a cook's dream, or had been. It was still a magnificent kitchen with two gas ranges, double ovens and an enormous two-door fridge. The frosted-glass cupboards were stacked with heavy mixing bowls and dishes galore. An array of every possible size of copper pot and pan hung over the two ranges. None of it had been used in years. Martin had installed a small bar-fridge in the corner and the only well-used appliance was a crumb-filled toaster oven that sat on the far granite counter.

Milly poured their tea, nibbled the edge of a cookie and took a deep breath and let

it out, slowly.

“Martin, I’m not even sure where to begin.” She looked across at her rumped-looking brother. Martin was still trying to blink back tears.

“I guess the best place to start is before you were born. At least that way, you’ll understand everything in context.”

So Milly began her story. Martin had an uneasy feeling that his world was going to change, drastically.

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Selwyn Miles Boughtom was a brilliant master carpenter and entrepreneur. He became known in Derry Dell as Smiles Boughtom, mostly because he always had a smile on his face and he had the ability to make other people smile. He built the Boughtom house at 14 Song Bird Boulevard long before there even was a boulevard because he loved the view. Smiles also built many of the homes in Derry Dell. He purchased land outside of town that yielded a rich vein of cobalt; that made Smiles rich too. Smiles married later in life. His bride was the stunningly beautiful Augustina Serafin. She became known as Aggie. She was funny and charming as much as she was beautiful. About a year after Aggie and Smiles were married, they had a son. Stanley Marvin Boughtom was the apple of his father’s eye. Smiles would cart the little boy all over town to various job sites and point out the finer points of good construction and workmanship. The townspeople jokingly called the little boy Smarvin. Both Aggie and Smiles loved plants and flowers. So many quiet afternoons were spent crawling around on their hands and knees with Smarvin in their back garden getting up close and personal with plants, flowers and insects. Life for the Boughtom family was idyllic, until the summer Smarvin

turned fifteen.

Like many teenagers before him, Smarvin figured he knew everything. He wasn't really cocky, he'd just reply "Yeah, I know that," if someone, especially his father, tried to explain something to him. Smiles had started taking Smarvin on jobs with him. He paid him to be his helper and hand him tools when he needed them. Smiles 'piece de resistance' that summer was the Pruitt house, a beautiful two-storey home that sat across the valley from the Boughtom house, just above the cobalt mine. Smiles was hand-carving the beams on the second floor vaulted ceiling above the living room. It meant he had to precariously perch himself on scaffolding far above the flag-stone floor, two stories down. Smarvin had been sulking most of the morning because his father wouldn't allow him to crawl out on the scaffolding with him. He was crouched on the second-floor landing, tiny ear-phones stuffed in his ears. He was listening to Din's basement band, long before they became The Budgie Hammers. Smiles finally got his son's attention. Smarvin removed the ear-phones. "Yeah, what?"

"Son, look I know you're disappointed, but I think it's too risky for you to be out here. I'll be finished in a few minutes and then you can help me with the finishing around the fireplace. Okay? Now can you hand me that small chisel?"

What happened next would haunt Stanley Marvin Boughtom until the day he died. Instead of handing his father the small chisel, he flung it onto one of the planks on the scaffold. Smiles turned back to try and reach it, but it was a finger-length away. Young Stanley Marvin instead of using a small piece of lumber to push the tool towards his father climbed up and flattened himself on the planks to push the chisel with his fingertips. In doing so, Smarvin caught the edge of his designer shirt on one of the

scaffold planks. When he stepped back, he tugged at the shirt-tail, using his foot to push against the metal braces to free it. Two-stories below, one of the workmen had noticed the footing had slipped slightly out of place. Just as Stanley Marvin Boughtom was pushing against the scaffold braces two-stories up, to free his expensive and funky designer shirt, Ralph Nodbunge was using a hammer, two-stories down, to straighten the footing. It only took three inches of plank to come off the braces and send Selwyn Miles Boughtom crashing to the flag-stone floor below. The shocked and bewildered expression on Smile's face as he glanced over at his son and then slipped off the scaffolding was etched into Smarvin's brain forever. Ralph Nodbunge was so shocked when Smiles crashed to the floor beside him that he forgot to relay Smiles last words to Smarvin which were, "tell my son I love him."

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Tears were streaming down Martin's face.

"Oh Martin, I know this is going to be difficult, but you have to hear it," Milly wiped the tears from the edge of her eyes. "So much of who we are hinges on the things that happened to uhm, our parents. Should I keep going?"

Martin grabbed a tissue from a box on the counter, nodding his head as he blew his nose, loudly.

Milly took a big gulp of tea, swallowed and continued.

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Aggie withdrew from all of Derry Dell's social activities. She would spend hours in the garden. Aggie planted roses, peonies, irises, poppies, and daisies – anything that

was colourful or beautiful. The house eventually looked like it was sitting in the most extravagant bouquet possible. The Garden Club made a number of requests for their annual gardening tour, but Aggie always turned them down. Smarvin became known as S. Marvin and when he wasn't at school would retreat to the backyard. He'd lie for hours on his stomach and watch the insect activity amongst the hundreds of flowers and plants. Butterflies became his favourites. S. Marvin was a good student. He excelled at biology. It was his lab partner that finally made him break out of his cocoon of despair and guilt. His lab partner was Leonora Buckhorn.

Leonora Buckhorn reminded S. Marvin of his mother, not so much in looks, but in her warm and funny personality. She had a lithe, athletic build with long straight ash-blond hair. With Aggie's blessing the two were married as soon as they finished their final year of high school. Leonora had been orphaned at an early age and the maternal aunt who had been her guardian for years was quite happy to be rid of the responsibility. The aunt quickly and quietly left Derry Dell after the marriage and they never heard from her again.

In the meantime, Aggie had been receiving unsettling reports about the mine. She was concerned about the miners and how the cobalt was affecting their health. So she decided to sell the mine. Aggie was very surprised when Kenwick Orville Bolt came forward with an offer of purchase. She always thought of Kenwick as a bit of a ne'er-do-well, so she waited for six weeks to see if there were going to be any other offers. There were none. So reluctantly, she sold the mine to Kenwick Orville Bolt. It soon became apparent that the only reason that Kenwick had purchased the mine was to try and get closer to the Boughton family and thereby get closer to Leonora. He had been infatuated

with her since high school. Unlike many of the other kids at school, she was always pleasant and kind to him, but she'd never encouraged his friendship. The Boughtom's were always polite when Kenwick would show up unexpectedly with either flowers or chocolate, supposedly for Aggie, but he never got much past the front door of the house.

S. Marvin wanted to go back to school. He wanted to study biology. Aggie agreed and so did Leonora. They had not seen him so enthusiastic about anything in years. The money from the sale of the mine had made them very comfortable and university affordable. So S. Marvin enrolled and was accepted. Leonora got a job at the library and Aggie continued to beautify her garden. She became a little less reclusive and would occasionally venture into town. S. Marvin finished his degree in biology and got a job in the biology department. He worked on the amazing butterfly display at the university. Six months later, I was born. Life had seemed to return to normal for the Boughtom's.

One week after I was born, Kenwick married Felicity Dendislip. Felicity was quite lovely, in a vacant sort of way. Her mother was a very exotic Pixie named Shimmer Sparkling. All of Derry Dell speculated that she had somehow enchanted the excruciatingly boring George Dendislip, so she could marry and escape the usual Pixie mayhem of her family. It was uncommon for Pixie's and people to marry. The gossip's of Derry Dell called girl children of these 'mixed marriages' womixies and boys were pixmen. Felicity as you can imagine, had few friends at DISS. She was certainly shunned by the 'in' crowd. To everyone's shock and surprise, Shimmer did manage to keep a lovely little house while Felicity was growing up, but as soon as Felicity married Kenwick, Shimmer flitted back to her Pixie hang-outs. George was devastated. Kenwick was a boor. Felicity soon realized that he was still smitten by Leonora. Nonetheless, nine

months later he became the father of Kimmeridgian Orlando Bolt.

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“Mil, I hate to interrupt, but I don’t really care about the Bolt family. Anyone in Derry Dell will tell how weird they were.” Martin blew his nose again. He had a small pile of tissues on the floor beneath him. “And so what about Pixies back then.” Martin had not yet made the connection between the past and the present.

Milly took a deep breath. “But Martin the Pixies and Fairies are important,” Milly paused, “and I have to tell you what happened, to all of us.”

Martin had a puzzled look on his face. “How come I’ve never known about Pixies and Fairies before or how they affected our family?”

Milly bowed her head down. When she raised it, there were tears in her eyes. She looked directly at her brother. “After everything happened, Mother asked the Fairies to stay away from 14 Song Bird Boulevard and the Pixies kind of went underground in most of Derry Dell.”

Martin all of a sudden sensed how difficult this was for his sister. He had no idea why. “Okay,” he said quietly. “What happened next?”

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By the time I turned three, it was apparent that S. Marvin was obsessed with butterflies. It was all he could talk about. He’d come home from the butterfly display and spend hours in the backyard taking notes and observing the butterflies in Aggie’s garden. S. Marvin did take me into the garden occasionally, but since all I wanted to do was to chase the butterflies, I was eventually banned from the garden. Aggie and Leonora tried to get S. Marvin interested in anything other than butterflies, but to no avail.

It was Leonora who got the phone call. I was still only three and a half but I remember that day. Derry Dell was in the midst of a heat wave, so to keep me cooled off; mother had bought me a small plastic pool. She'd put it in the backyard up on the stone patio, away from the rest of the garden and the butterflies. I was sitting in about two inches of water, floating rubber duckies in my pool. I was watching father. He was lying on his stomach observing a butterfly. Mother, Leonora came racing past me with the portable phone in her hand. She was trying to call his name, but nothing was coming out. As she raced into the garden the butterflies scattered. I still remember the annoyed look on father's face as he stood up. She still couldn't say anything, so she handed him the phone. S. Marvin took the phone and listened for a few seconds. Father dropped the phone and I don't think I'd ever seen him move that quickly. He raced across the garden, past me and the next thing I heard was the car starting up and the sound of the engine being gunned down the driveway.

Mother took me out of my pool, dried me off and got me dressed. I remember it was all very mechanical, like she was doing it on automatic pilot, or something. The next thing I knew the house was full of people, a lot of them crying. I knew something wasn't right. Later on, when father, S. Marvin came home, he and mother took me into the living room and quietly explained that Grammie Aggie wouldn't be coming home, ever. Keep in mind I was three years old. I just thought she'd gone away. Mrs. Smitherwinky told me years later what had happened. Apparently Aggie was crossing one of the bridges in Derry Dell, on foot, when Norville Mownack came careening across the bridge going the other direction. Norville was known as a notoriously bad driver and since the bridges are quite narrow, Aggie stepped back towards the railing. She stepped back too far, slipped

and toppled over the railing into the river. Unfortunately, it was just after they'd increased the flow of the river from the dam up-stream. The current was really strong. People raced along the side of the river to try and catch her, but in seconds she was gone. They never found her body. The basket of flowers Aggie was taking to Delia Quopnoddy had fallen from her grasp and all the flowers had scattered on the bridge. They named all the bridges in Derry Dell after flowers in her memory.

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“Oh Mil,” Martin sniffled, “that’s so, so sad. I’ve looked at her pictures around the house. She was very beautiful.”

“Yes, she was, but what happened next was truly a tragedy, for everyone involved.”

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S. Marvin lost it completely. He and Leonora waited about three weeks, just to see if Aggie’s body would turn up down river before they held a memorial service for her. Then about two weeks after that, S. Marvin was gone. Years later I finally saw the letter he’d left mother. S. Marvin had gone off to the rainforests of Papua New Guinea to track down the Queen Alexandra’s Birdwing, the rarest butterfly in the world. Ironically, the rarest butterfly today is the Palos Verdes Blue. It’s only found in California, not exotic enough for S. Marvin’s tastes.

Leonora barely held it together. She tried to get messages to S. Marvin through some of his colleagues at the butterfly display. They often traveled to mysterious and out-of-the-way places, hunting for rare butterflies. No-one was venturing to Papua New Guinea though - they thought it too dangerous and people disappeared there. So once

again, the Boughton house was shrouded in despair. We kept to ourselves. I know mother loved me, but she was always so sad. Then one day everything changed.

I guess I'd just turned eight. It was a Thursday afternoon. I remember that because Mrs. Smitherwinky would help out Leonora on Thursdays and she always baked me cookies. It was after school in the afternoon and I was eating cookies in the kitchen. I could hear laughter, Leonora's laughter, in the living room. There was another voice too, but it was one I wasn't familiar with. So I took another cookie and wandered into the living room. Leonora was sitting on the couch and beside her was my father, S. Marvin. Or it was someone who looked like S. Marvin. I was stunned. Mother was enthralled, she kept saying "he's come home, he's come home!" I wasn't so sure. I know I hadn't seen my father in almost five years, but something about this person made me very uneasy. I just couldn't put my finger on it.

Leonora blossomed. The house went from gloomy to glowing. She even started to tend the gardens again and with the Garden Fairies help, they were soon back to a glorious state. I avoided S. Marvin as much as I could. I found it odd that he would never go into town with her. I would often run errands and hear the local shop keepers muttering under their breath "poor child, mother delusional and carrying on like that." One day I happened to pass the dining room and could have sworn that I saw Kenwick Orville Bolt sitting in one of the chairs, but when I retraced my steps, it was just S. Marvin, or the person that called himself S. Marvin. Anyway, about nine months later you were born. You were an adorable baby. You were chubby and had soft wisps of red-blond hair. Mother, Leonora, doted on you and you even made me laugh with your gurgles and chortling.

One morning we were all sitting in the main dining room having breakfast. It must have been a Saturday, or maybe a Sunday, I remember I wasn't at school. Leonora asked me to run up to your crib and grab your fuzzy blue blankie. You'd fallen asleep in your bassinette and she wanted to make sure you were warm enough. As I passed the front door, I saw someone coming up the walk-way. I almost went to answer the door, but Mother shooed me up the stairs and went to the door herself. I ran to your room and got the blanket. Then I detoured to my room, which was at the front of the house. I wanted to grab a book to read; that's when all the shouting started.

It was hard to hear at first. Leonora was wailing and weeping and then you started to cry too. I did manage to pick up snippets like, "how could you do this behind my back" and "I come back half-way around the world." The rest was a lot of yelling about cheating and deceitfulness. The next thing I heard was the front door slamming. So I ran to my window and watched as S. Marvin stormed down the front walk way. Leonora was grabbing at his arm, but he kept shaking her off. He got back into the cab that I guess he'd kept waiting at the curb and drove off. Leonora crumpled into a heap by the road. I said to myself "good riddance, who ever you are," and then ran from my room and started down the stairs. You were still crying, loudly, but it didn't mask the high-pitched crazed laughter I heard. It made my hair stand on end.

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"Whew," Martin let out a long, low whistle. "So our father completely wiggled out again? I mean it sounds like you were all having a nice breakfast, so who came to the door and set him off? And why was there a cab waiting? Had he phoned for one ahead of time? And who was laughing?"

Milly just stared at her brother. This was going to be harder than she thought.

“So what happened next? Leonora must have been shattered, again. It kind of explains why I remember her as always being sad. Did she try to find him?”

“Oh Martin,” there were tears in Milly’s eyes.

Martin moved around the counter and hugged his sister. “I know this is difficult for you. I was way too young to know our father, but I remember our mother. I’m still sad about her leaving. I used to get really angry about how she just upped and left. I realized we were well taken care of and there were no money worries, but sometimes I really needed a mom. No offense, Mil. But it made me angry too that she’d foisted all that responsibility on your shoulders. I mean, you were what, eighteen and I was eight? Ten? I remember that she left everything in place, the guardianship, the bank accounts, and the support from all the women in Derry Dell, so it was kind of planned in advance. I guess I was hoping to hear from her, sometime. I mean she is still our mother. Just a card or something...” Martin’s voice trailed away. “Then when you left when I was eighteen, well, I felt like I had no-one. No family, no-one to love me. I guess that’s why I became an accountant. I figured numbers didn’t have emotions or feelings, so I couldn’t get hurt.”

Martin let out a deep sigh and his shoulders slumped. He took a couple of steps back from his sister. “Whatever happened to her Mil? I used to ask Mrs. Smitherwinky but all she ever said was ‘I don’t know dear’ and pat me on the head.”

Tears welled up in Milly’s eyes. “I guess I’m responsible for you not being told. I thought if you knew where she was you might try to find her. I realize now that that might not have been a bad thing. I was trying to protect you both; you from finding out and Leonora from being found.” A large tear spilled onto Milly’s cheek and then raced

down her face. “She died five years ago this past spring. She’d been living at the convent in Heather Haven Downs. She worked there as the gardener and many of the Garden Fairies from this house followed her there. Mrs. Smitherwinky would keep me informed. Apparently the gardens were spectacular and Leonora seemed content.” Milly paused, she blinked and more tears raced down her flawless face. “She did love you Martin.”

“Heather Haven Downs. But Mil, that’s only a forty minute drive from here,” Martin looked up at his sister; you could see the hurt in his eyes. “I could have visited her and talked to her...”

“She’d taken a vow of silence Martin.”

“But I,” Martin paused, he tilted his head and a questioning look came over his face, “protect me from what and from finding out what?” He stared at his sister.

Milly dried her eyes with a tissue. “Martin, I have to tell you who your father was, is.”

Martin had retreated back to his side of the counter. “But Mil, I know.” Martin looked puzzled with the apparent change of topic.

“You do?” Milly looked bewildered.

“Yes, I know. I know he was a bit of a raving nut-bar who went half-way around the world chasing butterflies. I just hope I don’t or haven’t inherited that kind of quirkiness. I don’t think I have. I mean, I hope I’m more like mother or grandmother.”

Milly bit her lip. “Oh Martin, the man you think is your father is not your father.”

Martin looked across at his sister, now he was really puzzled. “What do you mean?” My father is the guy in all the pictures around the house, right?”

Milly, pale as she was normally, was now even paler. “No Martin. Those are

pictures of my father, your father is...”

“KWANG”

The sound of the front door-knocker reverberated through the house.

“KWANG, KWANG” it went again.

Martin jumped at the sound. “Oh my gosh! What time is it?” He quickly looked at his watch. “8:55, oh rats. I was supposed to meet Coach and everybody at 8 a.m. at my office. I bet that’s them wondering where I am. I’ll be right back Mil.” Martin scurried out of the kitchen to let in whoever was at the front door.