

[Page 44 - From Alison Robertson's New Book: In Love with Then](#)

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Close up Mike could see that it was a building of sorts • pieces of scrap lumber, car doors and bumpers, sheets of corrugated metal, plywood scraps, and tattered strips of yellowed plastic tacked over a patchwork of old doors and windows, the entire creation half-submerged in a banking of earth. His inventory of identifiable materials kept Mike from realizing for a moment why the crazy structure felt so familiar. He circled it as warily as if it were a great beast stilled in its death throes yet still capable of lashing out. As he smidied the shadowed side of the mound, where the glint of the plastic and metallic decoration was less distracting, Mike suddenly saw what Rags had done. It was not the random heap of junk it appeared but a re-creation from their shared past. Mike stood in awe of what seemed an offering from his own deepest memory. "Jesus," he hissed between clenched teeth. 233 Esplanade • 562-7646 An Historic Setting Overlooking the Harbour "Hill 109?" Sam asked, waiting for Mike to see what he had seen, and hardly believed, the first morning he'd come out here. "What..." Mike struggled to frame an adequate question, to demand from Sam an explanation of what he was playing at, but he saw his own perplexity reflected in Sam's bleak look and asked, "What the hell does this mean?" "You remember that winter?" Sam asked without requiring an answer. That winter was in 1943 when, half way up the Italian boot, they'd been ordered to dig in and wait for spring so they could climb the rest of Hill 109 • a bald, artillery-scarred mountain whose real name neither Mike or Sam could recall without looking it up • and kick a command company of Germans out of their cozy nest. Now, thousands of miles and thirty-five years away, they stood before an apparent duplicate • car parts and modern materials aside • of the shelter they'd pieced together on that barren slope where they'd spent the worst three months of their war. Whatever the tactical wisdom of their presence there, they'd felt stalled, trapped in a debilitating routine of hard survival and emotional self-examination that led to more breakdowns than any of the action they'd endured • or even the horror of the spring assault on Hill 109. A couple of dozen men lived in Rags City, as they called it in honour of its chief architect, and the only members of that accidental community who survived the war were Mike, Rags, Sam and Gerald Burke. Mike's skin crawled. He'd closed his eyes to review the rush of images from that time, opening them and blinking rapidly as he saw Jimmy Drake kneeling bare-arsed, pants down around his ankles, his head pressed down as if to smell the center of the crimson flower of his own blood spread on the thin mountain snow. Mike had found him. They assumed a German had come upon Jimmy relieving himself a bit too far from Rags City, and slit his throat before tiptoeing back up the mountain. But a month later, Martin MacNeil had gone missing, and Sam had found him in virtually identical circumstances. It was only a week before the assault was to get under way, and the powers that be decided nothing suspicious had happened, the same wandering German had claimed another victim. The men had their own opinions, but they kept quiet, because, once you admitted that the killer could be one of your own, it was bound to occur to you that anyone



you spoke to was a suspect. Gerald Burke had been a lieutenant, their commanding officer in Rags City, and he, as much as anyone, had tried to dismiss any enquiry that went beyond the anonymous German. But Mike recalled an evening, more than a year later in a Roman bar, when Rags blurted out his belief that Gerald Burke had murdered Jimmy and Martin after raping them. Mike had no use for Burke, but Rags's theory involved a leap he couldn't quite make. Was Burke queer? "I don't know about that," Rags had said, "but he is a coward and a sadist and I know at least one time when he murdered someone, killed him anyway, over a Get A Move On. Rent A Van From Avis. If you need a little help to move you, just call Avis. You'll find low rates on a wide range of roomy vehicles to take you anywhere you want to go. Insert rate details and information here. ;s GM vehicles. GMC safari. Call Today For Full Details And Reservations! Your address and phone number(s). Sydney-Glace Bay Hwy: (902) 564-8341 Sydney Airport: (902) 564-8265 AV/S We're trying harder than ever. • Mayflower's Over 75 Stores