

[Page 45 - From Alison Robertson's New Book: In Love with Then](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 64](#)

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card game." Mike had listened, perhaps even convinced by Rags's reasoning, but there was no proof, and finally their belief in Burke's crime was just one more thing to live with, and to push down into that already vast swamp of wartime knowledge. Burke had survived Hill 109 by hiding, it was said, and he wisely pulled strings trailing back to his father to obtain a transfer. Neither Rags nor Mike ever spoke again about Rags's suspicion, and Mike didn't even recall thinking of it until he heard how Rags died. Sam offered Mike a cigarette, which he lit and fiercely inhaled before becoming conscious of what he'd done and spitting it out. "Well, that's better than ripping them apart, I suppose," Sam said, staring blankly at the discarded smoke as he'd been staring the moment before across the sparkling river mouth to the Westmount shore. Turning again toward the dark mass of the bunker framed by the calm harbour, Mike saw, with a rush of hallucinatory fear, a large white shape bearing down on them. "It's a cruise ship," he said aloud, wondering at the state of his nerves. "Rags died with his pants on anyway," Sam said. "Did Rags ever tell you he thought Gerald Burke was the killer?" "Yeah, he mentioned it. I told him that was crazy. That's an important family. Gerald is a member of parliament. His goddamn father is one of the most important men in the country, never mind around here." "He tell you he believed Burke murdered an American soldier who won a lot of money from him in a card game? Cut his throat? He tell you that happened a year before Hill 109?" "No, but it doesn't matter. Rags was crazy. Look around. Think about it. I didn't like Burke, no one did, but the man is respected now in this community, whatever personality quirks he had. He's not even a bad politician. His old man has been the only thing keeping this island afloat for a good many years, and we can only hope Gerald will carry on as long and as well." "You should write their speeches. I saw them on TV. They're in town. Was Gerald in town when Rags was killed?" "Okay, there it is. That's why I wanted you here with me. You're nosing around this business...never mind you think it's a joke, you're nosing around because you've got your life so screwed up you need a little distraction. Don't interrupt. I know you as well as you think you know me. I knew you'd make these connections, but so have I, and I'm the cop and I will deal with them. Got that? If anything is even whispered about any of this, I'll see you regret it." Sam had gone purple as he spoke, jabbing the air in Mike's direction. "We're speaking friend to friend?" Mike asked sarcastically, surprised he felt no anger in return toward Sam. There was something wrong here, but Sam's outburst had a calming effect on Mike. "Damn it, Mike, I've been at this job too long. Maybe I should retire. But I want to make Chief first. It's not a big ambition but it's mine," Sam said slowly, almost pleadingly, then fell silent a moment. "Go look around. That's why you came here, isn't it?" "There's no wooden chest, is there? You already looked after I told you about it. Did you find it?" Sam laughed. "No, Mister Detective, but go look anyway, you'll see how dependable Rags was. You got your camera? Take some pictures for souvenirs and then forget about it." "Did Rags die inside there?" Sam looked like he might fly off the handle again, but instead



growled, "No, he was over there." He pointed out a place marked off by cord where the brook met the shore. "That's why he was noticed so soon after it happened. He might have rotted before anyone looked inside this dump. Listen, I have to go to the station, you want to meet me at Ben's in an hour?" "All right, I have to do something with the dogs anyway." Mike . watched Sam until he drove off He wanted to ask him a lot of questions, but now he wondered if he'd get any satisfactory answers. It might be nonsense, all imaginary, but Mike had at least seen the man in the blue suit with Sam and the man in the blue suit had been with the Burkes. It didn't mean anything yet, but Mike certainly wasn't going to forget it. The smell inside the new Rags City hit Mike like a punch in the chest. There was no telling of what it was compounded • unwashed flesh, spoiled food, dirty rags, animal droppings. PEMBROKE CONSTRUCTION 23 McKeen St., GLACE BAY, Nova Scotia "" General Contractors Specializing in New Home Construction and Commercial Construction • Renovations • Roofing • Siding • Cabinets • Additions Participating in the 5-Year New Home Warranty Program REG'D BUILDER #01-0392 ??JJJJ-tJUHJJ SYDNEY No. 539-2530 NOVASCOCOMMUNITY COLLEGE technical tecnnoioi' Scotians and tomorrow s. Haiifax, Nova Scotia B3J3B7 N-=sc' Department of 'ii' Education u'nniirable John Mac Honourable John MacEachern Minisier