

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, **Love**reading will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Pleasantville

Written by Attica Locke

Published by Serpent's Tail

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to **Love**reading.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

A complete catalogue record for this book can
be obtained from the British Library on request

The right of Attica Locke to be identified as the author of this work has
been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents
Act 1988

Copyright © 2015 Attica Locke

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real
persons, dead or alive, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publisher.

First published in the USA in 2015 by HarperCollins Publishers, New York

First published in 2015 by Serpent's Tail,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
3A Exmouth House
Pine Street
London EC1R 0JH
www.serpentstail.com

ISBN 978 1 84668 948 2
eISBN 978 1 78125 409 7

Printed by xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx [plus paper logo]

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

TEXAS, 1996

They partied in Pleasantville that night, from Laurentide to Demaree Lane. They unscrewed bottle tops, set the needle on a few records, left dinner dishes soaking in the sink. They sat on leather sofas in front of color TVs; hovered over kitchen radios; kept the phone lines hot, passing gossip on percentages and precinct returns, on the verge, they knew, of realizing the dream of their lifetime, the ripe fruit of decades of labor and struggle. They were retired army men, some, grown men who wept openly in front of their TV sets as the numbers started to roll in. They were doctors and lawyers, nurses, schoolteachers and engineers, men and women who had settled here in the years after the Second World War, in Pleasantville, a neighborhood that, when it was built in 1949, had been advertised over

the city's airwaves and in the pages of the *Defender* and the *Sun* as the first of its kind in the nation—"a planned community of new homes, spacious and modern in design, and built specifically for Negro families of means and class," a description that belied the rebellious spirit of its first inhabitants, the tenacity of that postwar generation. For, yes, they endured the worst of Jim Crow, backs of buses and separate toilets; and, yes, they paid their poll taxes, driving or walking for miles each Election Day, waiting in lines two and three hours long. Yes, they waited. But they also *marched*. In wing tips and patent leather pumps, crisp fedoras and pin-striped suits, belted dresses and silk stockings, they marched on city hall, the school board, even the Department of Public Works, holding out the collective votes of a brand-new bloc as a bargaining chip to politicians previously reluctant to consider the needs of the new Negro middle class, and sealing, in the process, the neighborhood's unexpected political power, which would become legend over the next four decades. And it was hard not to believe it had all been leading to this.

Channels 13 and 11 were already calling the local race, putting Sandy Wolcott and Axel Hathorne, a Pleasantville native, in next month's runoff for the mayor's seat, and Houston, Texas, that much closer to getting its first black mayor in its 160-year history. Channel 2 was running a concession speech by Councilman Lewis Acton, who looked to finish a distant third—and word was now spreading down the wide oak- and elm-lined streets of Pleasantville that the man himself, their onetime neighbor, Axel Hathorne; his father, Sam "Sunny" Hathorne, patriarch of one of Pleasantville's founding families; and key members of the Hathorne campaign staff were all coming home to celebrate. From Gellhorn Drive to Silverdale, folks freshened up coffeepots, pulled the good gin from under the sink. They set out ice, punch, and cookies and waited for

the doorbell to ring, as they'd been told Axel wanted to knock on doors personally, shake a few hands, just as Fred Hofheinz did the night Pleasantville helped put him in the mayor's office, and Oscar Holcombe before him—celebrations that wouldn't come close to tonight's.

The girl, she wasn't invited.

But she didn't expect to be.

She had played her small part, put in hours on the ground, knocked on some doors, and now what she wanted, more than anything, was to go home. At the appointed place, the corner of Guinevere and Ledwicke, she waited for her ride, her blue cotton T-shirt a thin shell against the damp night air. It was well above seventy degrees when she'd left home this afternoon, and she'd never meant to be gone this long, but she was due a bonus, a little extra cash in her pocket, if she unloaded all the leaflets she'd been given to distribute. She was too smart, or proud, to toss the lot of them into a trash can at the neighborhood community center as others before her had tried, only to be fired the second the ploy was discovered by the campaign staff. This job meant more to her than to the others, she knew that. She was six months out of high school with no brighter prospect on her horizon than moving up to the cash register at the Wendy's on OST where she worked part-time, so she'd pushed herself a little harder, made a show of her unmatched fortitude and productivity, pointedly staying past nightfall, a plan she hadn't thought all the way through, as evidenced by her lack of a decent coat or even a cotton sweater, and the fact that she was flat broke after spending what little money she had at a pay phone at the truck stop on Market Street. Once more, she checked to make sure the last leaflet, the one she'd saved and carefully folded into a neat square, was still inside the front pocket of her leather purse. Rooting around inside, she checked the time on her pager, the one Kenny had bought

her when he left for college, promising they'd make it work somehow. Had he called? She scrolled through the phone numbers stored in the tiny machine. How long would she have to wait out here? It was already coming on nine o'clock, and she knew her mother would worry. She could picture her right now, smoking a Newport out the kitchen window, still in her pink nurse's scrubs, and listening to KTSU, *All the Blues You Can Use*, glancing every few minutes at the yellow sunflower clock above the stove, wondering why her daughter wasn't home yet. The girl crossed her skinny arms across her chest, a defense against the night air, which seemed cooler here at the southernmost edge of the neighborhood, where the base of Ledwicke ended abruptly, running smack into the lip of a wide, untamed plot of scrub oak and weeds and tall, clawlike trees. This far to the south the streetlamps in Pleasantville gave out, and she was all too aware that she was standing alone on a dim street corner miles from home, with nothing but the low, insistent hum of an idling engine as unwelcome company.

He'd been watching her for a few minutes now, the nose of his vehicle pointed east on Guinevere, the body tucked under the low-hanging branches of a willow tree, so that she could make out no more than a man's rough silhouette behind the windshield, sharp angles outlined by a faint yellow light coming from a window on the side of a house across Ledwicke from where she was standing. His headlights were dark, which is why she hadn't seen him at first. But he was facing in her direction, his engine running, his features wearing an expression she couldn't read in the dark. She couldn't tell the make or model of the vehicle, but it was the height and width of a van, or a truck of some sort.

Run. Just run.

It was a whisper inside her own skull, her mother's voice actually, calling her home. But she should wait for her ride,

shouldn't she? She felt a stab of uncertainty, a panic so sharp it made her eyes water. Everything hinged on this one choice. *I should wait for my way out*, she thought, still wanting to believe a way out was possible, but already knowing, with a creeping certainty, that this night had turned on her, that her disappearing had already begun. She knew she'd made a mistake, knew even before she heard the van's door open. *Just run.*

Jay Porter stood on his own lonely street corner clear across town.

It was late that same night, a little after eleven, when he got the call that someone had broken into his office on Brazos Street, just south of downtown, about half a mile from the Hyatt Regency. He could see the twinkling white lights of the high-rise luxury hotel from the corner of Brazos and Anita, where he was waiting on the squad car that ADT had assured him was on its way. The hotel sat on the other side of the 45 Freeway, the dividing line between the city's corporate heart and Jay's neighborhood, a clunky mix of old Victorians turned over for business, glass-and-brick storefronts, record shops, barbecue stands, liquidation centers, and the shell of an old Montgomery Ward. He'd hung out a shingle here last year, finally moving out of the cramped office in the strip mall on W. Gray, paying cash for this place, which was falling apart when he found it, a foreclosure that had been sitting empty for years. The house was a modest Victorian with good bones and an open floor plan and a room upstairs for his law library, a place where he could write his briefs away from the phones and the noise on the street. It was the kind of house Bernie would have liked to call her own, even more than the rambling suburban three-bedroom ranch they'd settled in a few years after their youngest, Ben, was born—a fine house, sure, but one he

could hardly distinguish from half a dozen others on their block. Rows and rows of beige brick and lacquered wood, their subdivision was the real estate equivalent of a box of drugstore chocolates, pretty, but dull.

Jay had refurbished the eighty-seven-year-old Victorian himself, as if his wife might *yet* have the chance to spend slow afternoons on its wraparound porch, as if they might still have a shot at starting over. He half-expected to walk through the front yard's wrought-iron gate one day and find her sitting there, on the white two-seater swing he'd built himself. The house, with its bottomless demands and clamors for his attention—missing doorknobs and broken light fixtures, the floors he'd stripped by hand—had saved his life during the worst of this past year. He thanked it daily for putting tools in his hands, all those long, idle afternoons when he let his practice go to shit.

There'd been three break-ins in the area since June.

Even the Hathorne for Mayor headquarters on Travis got hit, and much political hay was made in the *Chronicle* over the former police chief's seeming inability to secure his own campaign office. Jay's place had been raided in July, when thieves had taken the back door completely off its hinges. They'd made off with a drill set from Sears and a color TV, a little pocket Sony on which Eddie Mae had watched gavel-to-gavel coverage of the O.J. trial, plus some petty cash and a gold bracelet of hers. A week later he'd had the alarm system installed.

They must have come in through a window this time.

When he'd pulled up to the house, the headlights of his Land Cruiser had swept the front porch, lighting up pieces of broken glass. There were shards of it still scattered across the porch's wide slats, a rough pile in a semicircle just under the first-floor window, the glass lying where it had fallen, the scene strangely preserved, as still as a snapshot. Whoever had broken in tonight had exited the house a different way, or was, at this very

moment, still inside. Jay, who didn't keep guns in his home anymore, not since the kids, had a single registered firearm, and it was right now sitting useless inside a locked box in the bottom drawer of his office desk. Hence his patient vigil across the street, waiting for the cops. There was nothing in that office that he couldn't live without, not a thing in the world he would put before the need to get back home to his family in one piece. He wasn't trying to be a hero.

The Crown Victoria came riding low, with its light bar off, its tires crunching loose gravel in the street. The officers pulled to a stop at an angle that brought the front end of their cruiser to rest nearly at Jay's feet at the curb, its headlights hitting him square in the chest. He instinctively raised his hands.

"Porter," he said, loud and clear. "This is my place."

The woman was youngish and short. Her hair was slicked back into a tiny nub of a bun, and her lips were full and pink, a dime-store rose that most women abandon in their twenties. She came out of the car first, one hand on the handle of her service weapon, already en route to the front door. She nodded at the sound of his name, but otherwise said nothing as Jay unlocked the front gate.

"You been inside?"

Jay shook his head, stepping aside to let her pass.

He handed her the key to the front door.

The woman's partner was taking his time. He was slow getting out of the car, slow coming up the front steps, not the least bit of tension in his stride. For all Jay knew, this might have been the fiftieth break-in they'd handled tonight. He was older than the woman, but not by much. Jay didn't believe he'd set foot into his fourth decade. He wore a mustache and a hard part on the left side of his head, and he smelled heavily of cologne as Jay let him pass. Crossing the threshold, he too put a hand on the handle of his pistol. Jay followed them into the house, the

soft creak of the pine floors beneath their feet the only sound in the dark. He felt along the wall for the light switch, the one between the front door and Eddie Mae's desk. It cut a shaft of light through the center of the waiting room, shadows scattering like startled mice. The younger cop was in motion, down the main hall toward the back of the house, the storage closet, and the kitchen. Her partner was walking up the stairs. There was the law library up there, plus the conference room. Downstairs, Jay inspected Eddie Mae's desk, opening and closing drawers. Then he walked down the hall to his own office in the rear-left corner of the house, the room closest to the back door, which was standing wide open. "Must have been the way they got out," he heard behind him. It was the cop with the mustache. "I didn't see anything upstairs." His partner likewise had nothing to report from the kitchen. She had already holstered her weapon and was reaching for an ink pen. Within ten minutes they filled out a full incident report. Jay could see nothing that was missing: not his checkbook, or the sterling letter opener he hardly ever used, not his collection of LPs and 45s, obscure R & B pressings from Arhoolie and Peacock Records, including a mint-condition copy of A. G. Hats's *Belle Blue*. It was the Texas blues of his childhood, music that can't be replaced on CD. He had a turntable in here too, an old Magnavox he kept behind the door, also untouched. He checked both the petty cash and the metal lockbox with his .38 revolver, which was right where he'd last left it, stowed away since the very morning he'd moved into this office. It took the officers more time to inspect his gun license than it did to fill out their paperwork. Whoever it was, they guessed, maybe the alarm had scared him off. It looked as if someone had simply opened the back door and walked out. The cops did a cursory search of the backyard. It was a tiny, blank square of grass, and a single glance was more than sufficient to wrap up their entire investigation. "Okay," Jay said,

shoving his hands into the pockets of his slacks. He walked the cops to the front steps, zipping his windbreaker. Another dispatch call was coming in, something about a 22-11 over on Crawford Street, just off Wheeler. The one with the mustache lifted his radio first, and then the two of them were off. Jay locked the gate behind them, watching through the wrought-iron bars as the squad car peeled down Brazos Street, this time flashing its red and blue lights. Back inside, Jay walked to the hall closet to get a broom. He would need plywood too, or at least a thick piece of cardboard, something he could put over the broken window for the night, or however long it would take to get a guy out to fix it. He'd painted the house oyster gray, but had otherwise left the exterior, including the original windows, intact. Replacing this one would cost him at least two hundred dollars.

The broken window sat just to the side of Eddie Mae's desk, and if tomorrow's temperature was within even ten degrees of what it was now, Jay's entire day would consist of listening to a long recitation of the ingredients she would need to buy for a home remedy to fight the bug that was inevitably setting up shop in her throat and lungs. He could picture her shivering, clearing her throat every fifteen minutes, and eventually asking for a long lunch so she could hunt down some chicken soup. The thought, at this hour, as he stood broom in hand, actually made him smile. It had been nearly twenty years now, the two of them working together. He'd put her through school, set up a trust fund for her grandkids, from the portion of the civil settlements that was Eddie Mae's cut. Back when the money was still rolling in, of course, when Jay still had more than one client. She was now a certified paralegal, shopped exclusively at Casual Corner, and had narrowed her choices of coiffure down to two wigs, both of a color that occurs in nature. But Eddie Mae was still Eddie Mae, and there wasn't

a day she didn't think could be better passed over a few beers and an early dominoes game. She was nearing seventy now, stuck in a house full of kids, and, aside from one grandson at TSU who worked part-time at a Radio Shack, the only one with steady employment. She weekly cursed Jay for setting up that "dang trust," giving her progeny an excuse to perfect the art of waiting—and forcing her to work out of the house thirty hours a week just to get some peace and quiet. She was one of the few constants in Jay's life, and he'd come to love her for it, the parts of their daily life that he could set his watch by.

Jay held the metal dustpan in his left hand. He felt his forty-six-year-old knees creak as he squatted beside Eddie Mae's desk, aiming the bristles of the wooden broom at the spot where dozens of pieces of broken glass *should* have been.

And that's, of course, when he saw the thief's mistake.

There wasn't a single shard of glass inside the house.

The floor beside Eddie Mae's desk was bare, covered only by the corner of a hand-woven Indian rug he'd bought at Foley's. *The glass is on the wrong side*, he thought. It was so obvious to him now that he couldn't believe he hadn't realized it before. He couldn't believe the two officers hadn't noticed it either. But, hell, they'd given the incident no more than ten minutes of their time, and Jay knew if he weren't paying a monthly service fee to the alarm company, HPD wouldn't have sent anyone at all, not with the pressures on the department being what they were. Houston's crime problem was as much a part of its cultural identity as its love of football and line dancing, barbecue and big hair, a permanent fixture no matter the state of the local economy or the face in the mayor's office. Two law-and-order candidates—Axel Hathorne, former chief of police, and Sandy Wolcott, the current district attorney of Harris County—were running to change that. There was probably no greater evidence of the electorate's singular focus—the widespread fear that

Houston would never pull out of the shadow of the oil bust that had devastated its economy in the '80s, wounding its diamond-crusted pride, until it got its crime situation under control.

Jay pulled himself upright. He rested one hand on the tip of the broom's handle, taking in the staged scene. If someone had broken in through this window, as Jay had originally thought, the intruder would have kicked the window *in*, raining glass exactly where Jay was standing now, still holding the empty dustpan. But someone had actually kicked this window from inside the house, pushing the glass *out*, and onto the front porch, where Jay had first seen it. Someone wanted Jay to think he had come through the front window, when all the while the back door had been opened with as much ease as if Jay had unlocked it himself. Someone either picked the lock, he thought, or had a key. The window and broken glass were just for show. It was a pointed, if unsophisticated, sleight of hand, and more effort than he imagined the average two-bit crook, looking for tools or jewelry or cash for drugs, would bother with. It suggested that Jay had walked in on something he didn't as yet understand.

The phone on Eddie Mae's desk rang.

The sound so startled Jay that the dustpan dropped from his hand.

It fell straight to the floor, the metal edge cutting into the soft pine, leaving a small dent in the wooden board beneath Jay's tennis shoes. As he reached across her desk for the telephone, he knocked over a picture frame and Eddie Mae's dish of butterscotch candy. On the other end of the line, he heard a light cough, and then a familiar voice. "Everything all right down there, Counselor?"

It was Rolly Snow.

He was calling from the alley behind the Hyatt Regency, where Town Cars two, four, and six of his fleet of Lincolns were

parked, waiting to pick up any stragglers from Sandy Wolcott's victory party, which was still raging, her supporters reveling in the night's surprising turn of events. Axel Hathorne had been favored to win by a wide margin, with more than 50 percent of the vote, to become the Bayou City's first black mayor. But the race had quickly tightened when Wolcott entered, late and hot on the fuel of her newfound fame. She'd beaten Charlie Luckman, arguably the best defense attorney in the state, in a high-profile murder trial last year, one that brought her national attention and a spot on Court TV offering hours of analysis during the O.J. trial. She got a six-figure book deal. She went on *Oprah*. And it didn't take long for somebody to see in her rising star a shot at city hall. Wolcott quickly got her name on the ballot, stealing Axel Hathorne's law-and-order platform right out from under him, and now the two of them were heading into a runoff in thirty days. The party at the Hyatt showed no signs of slowing. If Rolly was lucky, some drunk potentate or campaign official would forget which car he'd arrived in and slide into the back of one of Rolly's Rolling Elegance Town Cars instead. In a black suit and his Stacy Adams, a black braid tucked beneath the starched collar of his shirt, he had been catching a smoke with two of his drivers, sharing a plate of shrimp they'd paid a busboy twenty bucks to hand-deliver, when ADT called. Rolly's was the second name on the alarm company's contact sheet. He called Jay's house first. It was Ellie who'd told him her dad wasn't home.

"She's still up?"

"Was when I called."

Jay sighed. He'd told that girl to get off the phone.

It was the last thing he'd said before he walked out the door. She had a trigonometry test in the morning, and he'd told her in no uncertain terms to hang up the phone and go to bed. This was almost becoming a nightly thing with them, this tug-

of-war over the telephone. It wasn't boys yet, that he knew of. Just a couple of girlfriends, Lori King being the closest, who had a near cannibalistic attraction to each other, gobbling up every word, every breath swirling between them, as they talked and talked for hours on end—the same girls who looked at Jay blankly if he asked them so much as what they had for lunch that day, the classes they were taking this fall, or even the names of their siblings. They were a species of which he had no field knowledge, sly and chameleonlike. In the presence of an adult, and especially one who was asking too many questions, they went as stiff and dull as tree bark. Tonight was the first time he'd let Ellie stay alone with Ben. There was no way to get a sitter this late, and Rolly, he knew, was working, and uninterested, frankly, in meeting two cops at Jay's office. He'd had no choice but to leave, to lock the front door and promise he'd be back in an hour.

“I can swing by the office if you need me, after this wraps up.”

“Yeah, why don't you, man,” Jay said.

For whatever reason, he didn't mention the odd details of the break-in, the degree to which the staged scene made him uncomfortable. Instead, he asked Rolly to drive by the place a few times through the night, to make sure nothing funny was going on. “I can give you a couple hundred bucks for it,” he said, offering something close to Rolly's old hourly rate, back when he still did pickup work for Jay as a private investigator. They'd worked together off and on for years, Rolly running a one-man operation out of his bar, Lula's, and when that closed down, meeting clients at the garage where he kept his fleet of Town Cars. “Looking into stuff,” as Rolly liked to call it, had never been more than a sideline gig, a source of income, sure, but also his own personal gift to the world, like perfect pitch or a throwing arm like Joe Montana's, a talent that would shame God to waste. He made bank on the car service company and

had plans to buy his first limousine next year. These days, he only ever “looked into stuff” for old friends.

“On the house, Counselor,” he said.

Jay hung up the line and bent down to pick up the dustpan.

He started for the hall closet, but then stopped himself a moment later, pausing long enough to right the picture frame on Eddie Mae’s desk. It was a snapshot of her first great-grandchild, a pigtailed girl named Angel. The butterscotch candies had scattered across the desktop. Jay was picking up the pieces one by one when he heard a faint thump overhead, the sound of a heavy footfall, like the heel of a boot landing on a wood floor. He looked up at the tin ceiling tiles, rows of beveled bronze, and swore he heard it again. The gas lamp in the ceiling was swaying slightly from the weight of whatever was going on upstairs, the light pushing shadows this way and that. Jay felt his breath stop.

Someone, he thought, is still in this house.

He started for the phone first, but his mind went blank. He couldn’t for the life of him remember even two of the numbers for Rolly’s mobile phone, his pager either. An emergency call to 911 would waste time he didn’t have. It had taken the beat cops nearly fifteen minutes to get here, and it would take a hell of a lot less time than that for Jay to end up on the losing side of a confrontation with whoever was locked inside this dark house with him.

He went for the .38 next.

It was in the lockbox still sitting on top of his desk.

He couldn’t remember the last time he’d held a pistol like this, but this one seemed to remember him, the metal warming to his touch. He gripped the gun at his side as he stepped from his office into the center hallway, glancing at the ceiling, wondering what it was that awaited him on the other side. The back of his neck was wet with sweat, the windbreaker sticking

to his skin. He unzipped the jacket, peeling it off, arm by arm, as he moved toward the stairs, pressing himself against the side of the wall as he climbed the steps. Upstairs, the overhead lights were all off. He felt his way through the dark, keeping his cover, confident he knew the lay of this property better than anyone else. There was the law library up here, plus the conference room, which he used for makeshift storage, filled with stacks of boxes he hadn't bothered to unpack after the move last year, files going all the way back to the Ainsley case, his first big civil verdict, against Cole Oil Industries. He heard a crash, glass breaking, coming from that direction. He ran to the conference room, which sat right above Eddie Mae's desk downstairs, stepping inside just in time to see a silhouette standing by a newly broken window. He smelled hair grease and alcohol, plus something else coming off human skin, the sour punch of marijuana, curling the hairs in his nostrils. He reached for the light switch and raised the .38 at the same time.

The kid froze.

And so did Jay. He had a clean shot, but he couldn't move, pierced through the heart by the kid's eyes, red rimmed and black. He was nineteen or twenty, baby faced but tall and lanky like a ballplayer. He wore a flattop fade that had seen better days, and his pants came up short of his ankles, details Jay was storing without even realizing he was doing it. The kid didn't raise his hands, but neither did he run, and Jay wondered if he had a knife or, worse, a gun. They were in a standoff of sorts, he and Jay, which, as the seconds ticked away, began to feel almost like a dare. Jay had his shot, which the state of Texas said he was well within his rights to take. *Shoot. Just shoot.* It was a whisper inside his skull, a reckless impulse he didn't know was still there. Slowly, the kid raised his hands. "Come on, Mr. Cosby," he said, eyeing the middle-aged black man standing in front of him. "Let's keep it light, old man."

Jay felt his grip on the gun slip. He glanced toward the telephone on the conference room table, judging its distance versus his speed. He took his eyes off the scene for only a second, but it was long enough for the kid to make his move. He kicked at the remaining glass along the bottom of the window frame and pushed his lean frame through, moving as fast as a rat through a tunnel. Jay had a line on him, had the .38 still in his hand. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't shoot this kid in the back. The kid looked over his shoulder once and, inexplicably, flashed Jay a smile. And then he jumped. Jay ran to the open window, careful not to cut himself on the glass. Down below, the kid landed in the grass with a grunt, scrambling to his feet in one ceaseless motion. He scaled the low-lying gate and took off on foot to the south, running toward Wheeler Avenue, the border between Jay's neighborhood and Third Ward.

Jay stood in front of the window, his chest heaving.

He knew he'd made a mistake, knew it before the kid even hit the ground.

It was that smile, for one, the openmouthed taunt. But also the peculiar circumstances of the break-in, the staged scene downstairs and the feeling he'd had that someone was playing games with him. And now that someone was gone, had slipped off into a night already dampening at this hour into a wide, white fog that would cover the city by dawn. There was a dagger of glass still hanging from the top of the window frame, and in the harsh white light of the conference room, Jay caught a glimpse of his own reflection. He hadn't shaved in days, and the curls on his chin were coming in a steel gray. His eyes had gone flat and dull with age, like two coals forgotten in a fire. Jay hardly flinched at the sight. He was four years shy of fifty, he had two kids who deserved a hell of a lot better than they'd been handed in this life, and his wife had been dead a year.

He was going home.