

THE HUNCH

**a novel by
Seymour Shubin**

CHAPTER ONE

I think of all the times I saw Cindy and Jon without being aware of the horror in their lives. And yet even when I began to sense that something was wrong, terribly wrong, I still had a hellish time making myself believe it.

Jon Hendricks was my closest buddy going way back to elementary school, the second grade actually. He was the shortest kid in class, even until the first or second year of high school when he sprang up to over six feet. He was also one of the best-looking guys in class, with black hair and clear blue eyes and the greatest smile. Add to that he was also a terrific athlete, was the star of our high school basketball team even though he also managed to hold down jobs. He'd always worked, even as a kid when the rest of us were out playing: his father was a house painter with a booze problem that kept getting him fired. Jon got an athletic scholarship to college, where he also won academic honors and a scholarship that helped get him into dental school.

And Cindy was always there, in support. He met her in middle-school -- she was a couple of grades behind us -- and they were married a few days after he was admitted to dental school. She was beautiful -- that's the only word I can think of to describe her --

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blonde and slender, with soft, fine features which stayed with her as she turned into her forties. And from everything I knew and saw, she was a great mother to their one child, their daughter.

Nor did Cindy lose a certain flare she had from the time I first met her. Some of our “crowd” thought of it as “artsy,” which was based largely on her being in almost every school play and later, after college, being involved in local productions.

As Jon was to tell me about the night the horror began, he didn’t start getting frantic about her until about eleven.

He also told me there’s no way to really -- *really* -- describe what followed, the depths of it and what he did and why.

“What I tell you,” he said, “multiply by a thousand, a million.”

* * *

He couldn’t think of any reason why Cindy should still be out at eleven that night. He had called the bridal shop she said she was going to about some changes in Diane’s wedding dress but it was closed. And that had been a little before nine.

He had thought about calling some of her friends but he couldn’t see her not telling him where she would be; and by the time he really wanted to, it was this late and he didn’t want to alarm them or embarrass Cindy.

He thought of course about hospitals and the police. He would give her just ten more minutes, just ten, no more. Meanwhile he walked upstairs to see if Diane was awake, though he didn’t know what he would do if she was: he hated to scare her. Her door was closed, as usual. He stood by it as if somehow he could tell if she

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was sleeping. And it was just then that he heard the car pulling into the driveway.

He took a deep breath. Thank God.

But then as he walked downstairs he felt a surge of anger. Why the hell couldn't she have called?

And then he thought: Maybe she was in an accident.

He was downstairs when he heard the key turning in the lock. And then she walked in, but without a look at him. She walked upstairs, still in her coat, the brown Spring one she always kept with the others in the hall closet. He followed her up enough to hear the bathroom door close.

Worried, he went to the door. He could hear water running in the sink. He tapped lightly.

"I'll be out, I'll be out." Frantic but quiet, as if still aware she mustn't wake Diane.

He waited just a few moments. "Cindy." Softly, though he wanted to yell.

The water stopped but then started again. He opened the door. She was bending over the sink, part of her coat under the running water. She looked at him. Then she broke into tears.

"Oh help me. Oh God, Jon, help me."

"Help you with what?"

He grabbed her arm when she didn't answer. "Tell me."

"You're hurting me." She tried to shake her arm free.

"Help you with what?"

"Let's," she pleaded, "go downstairs."

She walked ahead of him, carrying the coat. There, in the living room, she raised her hands to her forehead, letting the coat drop to the hardwood floor.

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“Oh Jon.”

“Just tell me, what is it?”

She stared at the floor. “A man -- Someone -- A man.”

“Who?” as she began gasping. “Tell me.”

“A man -- A couple of months ago -- we were fighting.”

“Who was fighting?”

“You, me. Quarreling. I mean quarreling. And I was feeling low in general. No excuse, none, none, none, but I - I went with him. Just once,” she pleaded.

“Went with him?” Wanting to shout but managing to hold back. “Who? Who is he?”

“That director. I can’t think right now...his name. He called this morning. Threatened...to tell unless... I went to beg him, to plead. But he was crazy. In his car, sitting in his car, we were sitting in his car. And he tried to... Jon, he did, he grabbed... And there was this knife. On the floor. And I stabbed... I think I killed...”

He stared at her dazedly. He wanted to push her farther away from him, wanted to slap her, to punch her, thoughts that were so foreign to him. And now he heard her saying, “And I lost the knife. I dropped it getting out. Oh, Jon, I don’t deserve it but help me.”

He turned and walked out the back door into the night, his legs almost trembling. He had to get air, to breathe. It was a chilly night but he barely felt it. He sank onto a bench at the wooden table near the apple tree, where the three of them would often have lunch or dinner. And when Diane was young this is where they had several of her birthday parties, with Diane breaking the piñata and the girls screaming and running wild.

Oh God, it had slipped out of his mind -- how could he forget? -- that Diane’s wedding was only three days away. Poor

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innocent Diane! And it was not only the wedding he was thinking of, it was how Diane and Cindy were oh so close, they were like twins. They even looked alike. How could Cindy do this to her? Forget *him*, how to *her*? How could Diane ever live with this? And the scene that would follow from day one to forever -- all the cops here and reporters and cameramen and TV vans, and all the neighbors looking on and some even speaking into mikes. *Oh, we never suspected, they were nice neighbors, so quiet, we never knew.* And Diane looking on as her mother, her dear beloved mother, her idol, leaving here with her hands manacled in back. Then after that, reporters shouting as Diane and he went in and out of court, microphones raised to them, TV cameras following,

Oh Christ, Diane, Diane!

He sat there, breathing hard and just staring into the darkness. And filled with a hate he'd never thought he was capable of.

About an hour later he made himself stand up, slowly. What he was thinking was absolute madness. Insanity. How could he even *begin* to think it? If she killed someone, she should pay for it. At the same time a part of him was beginning to think that maybe it's different from what she said, maybe she hadn't actually killed him, maybe he'd even managed to drive away; she could be wrong.

He could see Cindy through an opening in the drape, her forehead down against her hands at the kitchen table. She didn't look up when he walked in. And then only when he said, "Tell me where the damn car is."

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You're crazy, he still kept telling himself as he drove. You're mad, you're totally insane. And so scared that his skin felt like it was trying to lift off him.

His hands were tight on the steering wheel of his Lexus, as if it were the only way they wouldn't fly free. And he was almost bent over toward the windshield, turning this way and that to try to make out street signs in the blackness. The dashboard clock read a few minutes to two.

But he couldn't find the street, the damn street. In fact he wasn't sure he even remembered the right one. Why hadn't he written it down? He began turning into one street after another, thinking *I'm going to be stopped by the police*. And thinking too that maybe this was what was meant to be, that he wasn't meant to find it. In almost total panic, he made another turn, then into another street.

Was that the car?

Oh yes!

It was parked, as she'd said, on this empty section of street just inside Philadelphia off City Line. And yes he could make out that it was a BMW. He was good at identifying cars but she was even better.

His heart echoing in his ears, he drove by the car slowly, looking over at it. It was in semi-darkness between streetlights. He couldn't see anyone in it. Maybe -- just maybe -- whoever it was had managed to call 911 and they'd taken him away. He wanted to u-turn for another look but was afraid, even in all this emptiness, with only a couple of darkened houses farther down the block, that someone would see what might seem like something unusual. So even though he knew he was thinking crazily, he circled the block and turned into

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the street like any car would, then parked next to the other car's passenger side, his lights out.

He got out slowly, afraid his legs were going to sag. From where he was standing he still couldn't see in there. He walked just a little closer. And saw a body slumped across the seat.

He whirled and ran back to his car, thinking only that he had to race away from there. He started to pull away but then stopped, remembering. The knife! But where?

She'd said it -- didn't she say it? -- she dropped it getting out of the car. He slid out again, hardly believing he was doing this too. He couldn't see anything on the street. He started to look under the BMW but that was all blackness. He broke for his car in a fresh burst of panic. He'd had a flashlight in the glove compartment but had used it and he couldn't remember if he had put it back. No, his hand couldn't find it. He turned on the headlights quickly, was alarmed by the brightness and started to turn them off. But in that instant he saw a knife on the street.

He pulled out a fistful of tissues from a box he kept in the car, jumped out, but for a few moments, at the sight of the blood on the blade, couldn't make himself reach down to it. Then he lifted it up in the tissues, ran back and stuck the blade inside the tissue box. And it was only when he started to drive away that he remembered that he'd accidentally touched the handle while covering it with tissues. So his fingerprints were on it now.

--- END OF SAMPLE ---

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