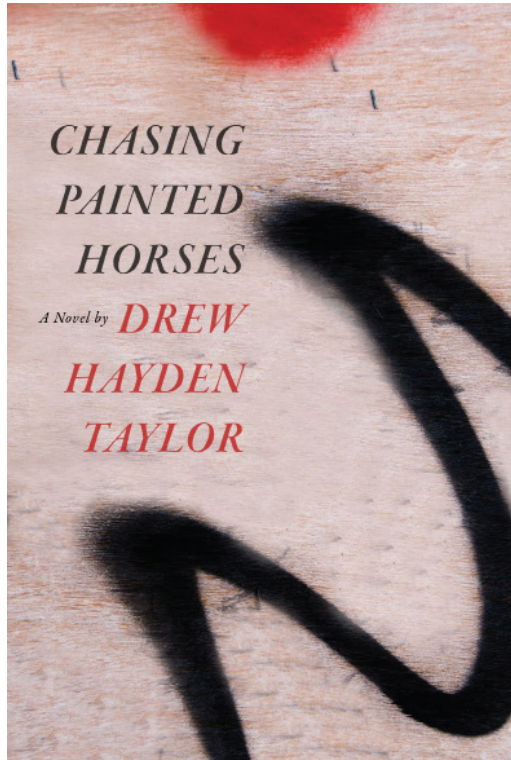


**Excerpt from *Chasing Painted Horses*
by Drew Hayden Taylor**



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CHAPTER ONE

HOWEVER IMPOLITELY, “IT’S COLDER than a Christian’s heart” is how Ralph Thomas’s childhood friend William would have described this morning’s weather. Ignoring the theological and politically incorrect implications, William would have been essentially correct. And though Ralph was several hundred miles and two decades away from where and when his friend had said that, it was indeed a very cold morning, religious affiliations notwithstanding.

The temperature at present was hovering somewhere around a brisk minus ten or so on the Celsius scale, creating an urban landscape of huddled masses struggling to stay warm in the bright sunlight. Across the city, its denizens walked the streets bundled up in scarves, coats, heavy sweaters, and all sorts of unflattering woollen and fake fur hats, trying in vain to ward off the climate. Evidently, being Canadian had its downside.

Somewhere in that Canadian city known as Toronto, not that far from where Ralph Thomas was planning to start his working day as protector of the public, sat a man. Social workers, politicians, statisticians, and people with spare change would call him a typical — whatever that may mean — homeless man. A panhandler. A street person. A representative of those who have slipped through the safety nets in a supposedly sympathetic society. Though covered in layers of mismatched, dirty clothing, this man smiled out at the world as he sat on his kingdom, commonly known as a sidewalk grating, a cloud of steam making him appear oddly unfocused and mysteriously hazy to the occasional passerby. He was known to the world — the world that cared, mind you — simply as Harry, due to his bushy beard, eyebrows, and unkempt hair that peeked out from underneath a worn cap saluting a local hockey team that did not deserve such saluting, which obviously did little

to protect his ears from the climate. But no matter. He was survivor. What's a pair of cold ears to a man who every day walked the tightrope of life? As an Aboriginal man, he was a contradiction in stereotypes — on one hand, he met the cliché of being down-and-out and looking for other people to supplement his condition. On the other hand, the rumour that Native people did not have body or facial hair did not apply to him.

A long time ago, when Harry could remember and was remembered, he'd come from a Cree reserve far out in the direction where the sun set every evening. He'd wandered in the direction of the rising sun to seek his fortune and had landed here on the shores of an inland sea, his fortune unfound. His financial empire now consisted mostly of donated spare change, a hodgepodge of mismatched, discarded attire that he had come across in past years, and disjointed memories. It has been said by a man far smarter than Harry that some are born to greatness, others achieve it, and there are those who have it thrust upon them. The same could be said for destitution. Harry had his thrust upon him with violent determination, courtesy of a negligent and schizophrenic society confused in its understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and everybody else. But no matter. He was where he was, and, all things considered, he was happy. Cold, but happy. The vast majority of the world's population could say they were cold, but only a few could say they were legitimately happy. Harry smiled.

Like most people, the forgotten man had talents. Some were recognizable: coming from an oral culture and having spent years with multitudes of multicultural down-and-outers who had been pushed aside by what prided itself as a just society, a cultural mosaic, he could imitate any number of accents. It often helped in panhandling. Amused patrons were more generous when he

spoke with a Jamaican patois or an impressive Scottish burr. Other talents in his possession were not so obvious. He could see people. Not dead people, or aliens, or demons, or anything Hollywood, or what a psychiatrist or social worker would find worthy of their billable hours. Instead, Harry saw people as they really were — what emanated from their souls, not what they appeared to be to everyone else.

Once he'd been about to receive a few quarters from this lovely woman in a checkered sweater, until a man he'd assumed to be her husband angrily pulled her away, irritably mumbling something about "not encouraging those types." What the woman in the checkered top didn't seem to see was something that was only too evident to Harry. The man had no eyes, just dark apertures out of which dripped ominous obsidian drops of pure malice. It was like his spirit was slowly escaping from his body and leaking out through the two orifices where most people's eyes usually were. Harry had watched the couple disappear into the crowd of spring shoppers, leaving a trail on the pavement of the smouldering blackness still slowly oozing from the front of the man's head. Harry was blissfully unaware that sometime later the man had killed the woman in a rage, afterwards setting fire to a cottage they shared in Muskoka.

But such sight wasn't all bad. Another time he'd spotted a little white girl, no more than nine years old, just across the street, petting a smallish dog tied to a tree. The poor creature was panting and very uncomfortable in the August heat, so the little girl gave the dog her vanilla ice cream cone. Dietary concerns aside, the dog gratefully accepted the cold, somewhat moist offering, quickly devouring it, tail wagging constantly. The girl looked across the street at Harry and smiled. Harry smiled back. To his eyes, she was glowing, her tiny body surrounded by a multi-hued aura of some

sort. Somewhere in that little girl, surprisingly close to the surface, sat the spirit of someone who would do good works in her future, changing people (and, it seemed, dogs), places, and times for the better. It was the rare kind of spirit Buddhists would venerate. If there were a bell curve of good and bad, this little creature would somehow transcend it.

Harry didn't know if his unique talent was a product of his Aboriginal heritage, several decades of altering the chemical balance of his brain, or merely being the ultimate observer of society due to his privileges as a bystander. It merely existed, and existed in him. There was little he could do about it, so he did his best to live with it. Besides, he had other problems to deal with.

Winter days like this made being a Canadian homeless person exceedingly difficult. The vent that he called home was a double-edged sword. It provided a certain amount of warmth, but the steam made him and his clothing damp. Dampness and cold weather do not go together. He had many friends who had lost fingers and limbs to such a combination once the bitter winter night fell. Sometimes they'd lost more. And worst of all, people of society often had their heads down and were in such a hurry that they seldom saw him, both as an actual physical presence and as a person of need. Still, like everything else in his life, there was little he could do about it; he merely accepted it. Privately, he loathed the season. Though his people had been born to the frozen wastelands of the Prairies, Harry had enough white blood flowing through his veins to make this time of year difficult. Luckily, not everyone shared his sentiments. At the other end of the spectrum, there were some who found the yearly tilt of the planet away from the sun a rather enjoyable experience.

Such a person was the aforementioned Ralph Thomas, currently navigating piles of dusky-coloured snow alongside the kilometres

of urban sidewalks. The man liked really cold days, particularly the way they made his senses more aware and awake, the way they made his skin tingle and his nose hairs stick together after a deep breath. It was a feeling of life or survival, not like those stupefying, humid days of summer that zapped his strength, draining his will to do anything. He knew most people usually cursed cold Canadian winter days, but not Ralph. Ralph Thomas had grown up on a small, isolated reserve several hours north of Toronto, a place called Otter Lake. So on some genetic, cultural, and personal level, he knew he could take the best this city and the tilted nature of the planet could throw at him. His people had faced, fought, and triumphed over the Canadian winter since their fabled beginning known as Time Immemorial.

Taking a deep breath, he uttered to no one in particular, "Oh, that feels good." This was Ralph's element, his environment. Ever since he was a child, winter had been his favourite season. Half jokingly, he'd asked his father, when he was still alive, if there wasn't some Inuit blood floating through their family.

As proof of his resilience, Ralph's jacket wasn't zipped up, and all that separated his legs and torso from the frigid air was a thin layer of wool combined with polyester, the blend of his Toronto Police Service-issued uniform. And a bulletproof vest. To Ralph, long johns were for long treks in the woods or hours on a snowmobile, not for short jaunts from a house to a mall, a bus, a Tim Hortons, or his division. Long johns in the city were for wimps, he often joked and really believed. Today was no different. Enjoying the briskness of the morning, Ralph noticed passerby after passerby, heads down low, elbows close to their bodies, ignoring the world around them as their feet made short, hesitant steps on the snow-caked sidewalks, hoping not to slide embarrassingly into a salt and pepper snowdrift. As usual, he seemed to be the only one

enjoying the morning.

And why not? All things considered, life was going pretty well for the Aboriginal man. Yes, he was of average build and a bit lean for his own personal tastes, but he knew that at the age of thirty-one the whole future lay ahead of him, for the most part. In two years, it would be his tenth anniversary as a member of that thin blue line that kept the forces of chaos and anarchy at bay. Eight years earlier he had started his career, after several years of education, as a constable policing the windswept streets of Dead Rat River First Nation. But after three years, the novelty had worn off. Too many people calling him an “apple,” too many domestic disputes, and living in the actual community he policed, there was no real way of developing any serious Ralph time or space, let alone friends or girlfriends. So, after some paperwork and retraining, Ralph found himself walking the streets of Canada’s biggest city, packing heat, authority, and a certain amount of attitude. He was a First Nations man authorized to toss white people in jail. Yes, indeed, it was good to be alive.

During his younger years, after high school, Ralph had surfed the world he existed in by mostly doing contract work here and there, frequently employed in odd jobs that tested his sense of monotony more than his intelligence. When asked, he considered his multitudes of mini-careers ... “seasoning.” But even at that young age, it was becoming apparent to Ralph that he was dangerously close to simply going through life, not actually living it. Additionally, his sister, Shelley, had told him repeatedly that it is possible to become over-seasoned, which frequently can make things inedible. She would know. She was a pretty good cook.

So, after much thought, the young man had decided to make something of himself and find an actual destination in life, rather than just journeying through it. So here he was, living in Toronto,

a cop. Ralph Thomas. Officer Thomas. Police Constable Thomas. A protector of the innocent and punisher of the evil. And let's not forget stalwart guardian of construction sites.

"It's better to be a cop than to need one" was the saying one of his instructors had frequently, laughingly drilled into his students. Everyone seemed to agree. At this point, so did Ralph.

Up ahead, he saw the Queen streetcar clang past the corner where he would frequently grab a coffee. As resilient to the cold as the man was, one does not spit into the face of the Canadian winter without proper armour. Armour bearing the insignia of the great ice warrior Tim Horton. Since it wasn't that cold a day, regardless of what everybody else seemed to think, Ralph decided to walk to the subway sans coffee. His shift maintaining the safety of a seventeen-storey condo under construction was over, and there was no point in challenging the caffeine gods to a test of wills. Many of his coworkers preferred to drive home, or Uber it, especially when in uniform. And, on occasion, so did Ralph. But today was too good a day to waste sitting inside something. He'd put in a couple of kilometres on his Fitbit, helping to keep the belly demons at bay, before jumping on the subway. His family had a tendency, after the age of thirty, to put on roughly a pound with each passing year. In that tradition, Shelley was definitely an overachiever, as was her husband, William. But unlike many fellow cops, Ralph could still kneel to tie his shoes without everything going hazy.

With that in mind, he started following Niagara Street to Richmond and headed east. Ralph had been making some extra cash, as many of his brethren in blue frequently did, as a concrete and steel nursemaid. Four hours of standing street-side of a huge pit lined with girders, watching early-morning traffic and people pouring past. His real shift as a police officer began in four hours. Time enough for a nap, shower, food, and maybe some Netflix.

Again, life was good. This wasn't the life he had expected when he'd joined the force, but then again, reality tends to be a harsh teacher.

Ralph's eyes scanned the houses and buildings with interest, because this part of the city was new to him. Geographically he knew perfectly well where he was, but he'd never actually walked these side streets before. The cop in him took in the world around him and stored it. He never knew when he might find himself here without the opportunity for such a leisurely assessment of his surroundings.

Following Richmond Street, he began zigzagging through the smaller streets, intending to make as direct a line to the subway as he could walking on north-south and east-west streets. The snow made its distinctive crunching beneath his shoes, letting him know the immediate temperature of the city. No doubt back home it was a good five or six degrees colder, and maybe you could hear the trees crack in the cold. The way sound travelled over a snow-covered forest was like nothing else. He missed that. Here in the city, often the sounds he heard only reminded him of the alien world he lived in.

Often Ralph was of two minds about living in the city known as Toronto. There weren't a lot of Korean or Vietnamese restaurants back home in Otter Lake. Jokingly, he would say there was more sweetgrass than lemongrass. Not even what could be called a real Chinese restaurant: the nearest, in nearby Baymeadow, was one of those ubiquitous Chinese-Canadian restaurants that dot the expanse of Canada. He chose not to eat in those establishments. His relatively few years in Toronto had taught him what real Chinese food was, and he had little tolerance for soggy stir-fried broccoli or sweet-and-sour chicken balls with their radioactive red sauce. When he had first arrived in the city, he'd been shocked to discover that the Chinese from China had never heard of sweet-and-

sour chicken balls or chop suey. As with many urban Aboriginals, Ralph Thomas had, over time, become a food snob.

In addition, here amidst the concrete mountains there were movies he could see at noon, all kinds of stores to shop in, and a lot more women he was not related to than there were back home. When it came to encouraging Native students to attend the finer institutions of higher education, Ralph was always surprised that universities and colleges never showcased these elements when canvassing for Indigenous students. He was sure that, with proper publicity, enrolment would shoot up and dropout rates would plummet.

Still, Otter Lake had its incentives. For all his whining about the quality of ethnic food back home, it was almost impossible to find good Native Canadian cuisine in Toronto. Retail deer or moose meat was practically non-existent, unless you had a source, a connection. Trying to locate and purchase wild meat in Toronto felt to Ralph like looking for opiates, and he needed a pusher of non-prescription meats. His sister, Shelley, could make a shepherd's pie like nobody else. Her meatloaf wasn't just a mainstay of settler middle-class life, in Otter Lake it was a work of art. When people came over for dinner, they often requested it.

For sure, what Shelley could do for everyday cooking could bring any chef to tears, Ralph believed. All three of her kids were well on their way to plumpness. In fact, thinking about her cooking was making him hungry. He increased his pace to the subway.

Back home, there was quietness. The stillness of the country. There was fresh air, the lake itself, and lots and lots of family. It was a long trip home, but he hadn't been home in months, not since the summer. Ralph had sworn he wouldn't become one of those types who only came home to the reserve once, maybe twice a year, gradually drifting further and further away from the people

they had grown up with. Weddings and funerals frequently acted as a lighthouse, showing people the way home. Members of his family had long ago given up remembering the names of people they or their parents had grown up with; they now complained about what the government was doing to First Nations people in other parts of the country. But right now, Ralph wanted to get to his home here in the city. He was hungry, and, in his hunger, he was positive he had some of Shelley's chili in the back of the fridge, cautiously stored since last summer for just such emergencies. The battle against crime required a lot of calories. That's why Batman, Superman, and all the other superheroes were always so skinny.

Hands deep in the pockets of his regulation jacket, Ralph made his way up a back alley. It was still early, and the city was just beginning to wake up on this lazy Saturday morning. Running alongside him, on the walls and garage doors that lined this back street, he noticed the graffiti. Lots of it. It seemed there weren't two square feet of empty brick or aluminum siding left unadorned, representing the innate need for humanity to continuously illustrate and comment on life. He had read somewhere there had been graffiti in ancient Egypt and Rome.

Intrigued, Ralph slowed down, taking in the complex symbols spread along the walls. The bright and dazzling images that surrounded him were startling, even breathtaking. A dozen or more different artists had created entire universes. Red and blue seemed to be the dominant colours, but there were others. Lots of others. Rainbows of shades and multitudes of images, one after another. Directly in front of him was a painting of the CN Tower as a rocket blasting off into outer space. Beside that was what appeared to be a family of three, all with the bodies of dogs. Behind him, concrete trees. Ahead, two people kissing, their heads morphing into a loving heart.

Ralph had seen graffiti before, even in Otter Lake, and in one of his justice classes he'd learned it was a misdemeanour. But here, all around him in this space, it wasn't a public disgrace; at least, it didn't seem to be. Yes, there was quantity, but, more importantly, there was also a stunning array of quality. The hearts and the minds of an entire subclass of Torontonians had come to this spot to express themselves. And Ralph had to admit, as gaudy and haphazard as it might appear, there was something awesome about each of the images staring back at him. Beautiful, even.

One by one, he took in the startling representations. Somebody with exaggerated facial features waving to him from a convertible car. The guy driving looked kind of goofy. Unlike the picture of what appeared to be a witch-like character, yelling down at four shrinking children — Ralph assumed they were children — cowering below her. Scattered amidst the more obvious and easily recognizable reproductions, he saw others that were more abstract. Paint on the wall that evoked a feeling rather than recognition. Swirls and random letters within letters. Maybe, he pondered, a more street-smart form of a Rorschach test. And what was even more interesting to the police officer was the notable sense of respect that each artist expressed for the others. No image dared to encroach on the paint of its neighbour. There was no overlap, and occasionally one vision would complement the one beside it.

Pictographs, Ralph thought. Or petroglyphs. He smiled at the realization. It was true: the more things changed, the more they stayed the same. What his ancestors had done so long ago on rock walls, this generation of this society was struggling to do on brick. To make their mark on this world, show their point of view. Only these declarations would be lucky to last the winter.

One after the other, the policeman explored all of them with his eyes. They were amazing. Ralph was puzzled that he'd never heard

of this alleyway. He could feel the joy and the agony coming off those few millimetres of paint layers that adorned the walls. Directly in front of him, he was looking at an image of a Christ-like figure with arms outspread to the heavens. Except Jesus seemed to be black and in a wheelchair. And the angels were Asian. And his disciples were ... Native, possibly. And heaven looked like the skyline of Vancouver that he'd once seen — skyscrapers and mountains vying enviously as they reached for the sky. Ralph was positive there was an interesting story behind this one. A multitude of people using their artistic visions to comment on what their actual eyes saw. For a moment, he felt a twinge ... a small quiver in the back of his mind, as if looking out on a large pond and seeing the ripples on the surface made by something he hadn't seen but knew was there.

Almost immediately, his attention was once again captured by a dozen different forms of calligraphy that peppered both walls. What wasn't covered in pictures was coated with letters both recognizable and unknown. Some illegible. The varying scripts took different styles, shapes, and characters, depending on which samples he was looking at. Some resembled Cyrillic, others Sanskrit, and the rest reminded him of an alien language he'd seen ages ago on an episode of *Star Trek*. What any of these "words" actually said was a mystery to the man, thus rendering the original purpose of written language moot, it seemed.

As he moved further down the alley towards the street, the frequency and the freshness of the graffiti began to peter out. Posters and flyers began to litter the walls, hiding more and more of the older artistic impressions; as he neared Bathurst, the walls were almost completely covered with advertising for some band Ralph had never heard of that had played at a Toronto club called Grossman's two months ago.

Feeling little tendrils of cold working their way into his muscles, Ralph decided it was time to speed up his sidewalk sojourn and find the subway that would take him to his apartment. Though not technically chilled, Ralph knew the simple act of shivering (which in itself to him was a sign of defeat) was perhaps only minutes away. This had been an odd but interesting detour, and, for some reason he couldn't quite fathom just yet, a little unsettling too. It was almost like reading the diary of someone he didn't know and not having a full grasp of what was being written, other than it was personal in a public way and needed to be said.

The corner of Queen and Bathurst lay ahead of him; a few blocks further down was the subway. It would be nice to take off his police belt, weighted down with heavy police paraphernalia. Add to that his hefty Kevlar vest and jacket. Metaphorically, he and other cops frequently felt they were carrying the weight of society on their shoulders ... or their waists, maybe. Looking to his right, he saw and then felt in the pavement beneath him a streetcar roaring down the street, eager to take people home for the cost of a token. And that's when a flash of colour from the wall reached out, tearing the former Otter Lake resident from this world, forcing him into a long-forgotten place.

At first, out of the corner of his eye, Ralph noticed something peeking out at him from beneath the torn and weary posters. About five feet up and six feet from the building's corner, peering at him from around tape, was what appeared to Ralph to be a large, wild eye. An eye painted of dark blue and purple with a little white. About five inches across. Staring at him. Glaring. The eye looked out of place. But there it was, a dozen or so feet away.

Once again, something in the back of Ralph's mind quivered uncomfortably. He had no idea why an errant eye from a wall of brick hidden behind old posters would do that to him, but there

was definitely something in that simple, if disturbing, image that caused a shiver of memory. But, like the eye, maybe it was just a hint of what was hidden. The memory reluctant to come, almost like it was afraid to. Either way, that did not bode well.

And the eye, was it hiding? That was a bizarre thought to have, Ralph suddenly realized. Had somebody tried to conceal it?

Moving a few feet closer, Ralph peered deep into the eye. It was layered with circular swirls of blue and purple, softening where they overlapped and became a shade of grey or white, like a photo of a hurricane. It had the eerie effect of watching him, standing there in the urban winter morning, staring back.

This is silly, Ralph thought. But he knew the eye, somehow; or, more accurately, he knew he should know the eye, or what it represented. The knowledge was swirling in places his mind stored things that might cause discomfort, trying to get free. This was more than a few layers of paint. He approached the wall like a police officer and, hesitating for two seconds, grabbed two handfuls of weathered paper, tearing them violently off their anchors. They came away from the brick quite easily, the adhesive long ago having lost its effectiveness. Handful after handful of frail paper drifted to the ground, collecting at his feet. Officer Thomas was sure a case for littering could have been made against him, but he didn't care. The more he tore away from the wall, the more he revealed the owner of the eye.

In less than a minute, the wall was bare and the cold northern wind channelling down that alleyway was blowing the shredded paper all across the street and onto the streetcar tracks. Not from the wind, Ralph shivered. He spoke his second set of words of the morning, very quietly and soberly and not nearly with the same enthusiasm as his first.

“Christ, it's you.”

The strange memory in the back of Ralph Thomas's brain was no longer twitching to be noticed. It was out. It was at the front of his mind, screaming. Now he was no longer a member of the Toronto Police Service; he was very much the boy who had grown up in Otter Lake. He gazed at an old but never forgotten friend ... though what he was looking at didn't look particularly friendly. Not at all. It had grown in both size and attitude since he'd last seen it so long ago, and though the paint was chipped and peeling in places and poster paste had left scars all over its body, it was still a very powerful image. Winter had nothing to do with the coldness he felt.

Near where the heart would be on such an animal, he spotted something that confirmed his suspicions. A painted image of a hand, a small, delicate hand, complete with faint fingerprints and a slightly crooked little finger, a finger that had been broken once or twice a long time ago. He knew that hand, and this Horse. His childhood, like the wind blowing down the alleyway, came rushing to him.

Once more, his voice was lost in the cold winter wind. "Danielle. What happened to you?" Though he had asked this question out loud, Ralph wasn't sure he wanted to know the answer.

DOWN THE STREET, HARRY was counting his change. Saturday mornings weren't usually that profitable. Cold and irritable people, unlucky enough to work on weekends, who staggered down the street still half asleep, weren't usually in generous moods. He usually had to wait until the shopping and brunch crowd started emerging from their comfortable environments. Still, he had enough for some coffee and donuts. The hot brew and carbohydrates would help keep him warm for the rest of the morning. Sometimes that's all a person needed in life. Hobbling painfully to

his feet, he noticed a flow of paper shreds blowing past him along the street. Then he observed Ralph across and down the street a few dozen metres, staring at the wall. Not moving.

“Oh, oh. That police guy found the Horse,” Harry muttered to himself. Still carrying the tattered remnants of a Catholic upbringing, he crossed himself. In a brief second, the old man saw what could only be the glow of self-confidence inside the man replaced by something akin to regret, flavoured with guilt, peppered with a growing sense of fear. A veritable potpourri of dark emotions. He’d seen it all happen before. A lot of people who looked at that Horse knew badness was somehow attached to it. Yeah, it was made of a few layers of spray paint, but that didn’t mean anything. It’s never what it is that’s dangerous, it’s where it came from and what it means that can be the problem. Viruses can’t be seen. They’re smaller than those few layers of spray paint but can cause a lot of damage.

That was understandable. Harry remembered the night he’d come upon the girl — she was a woman, but in so many ways she appeared to be just a young girl, barely taller than his waist — painting the Horse, a number of spray paint cans at her feet. Instinctively he didn’t like the Horse, and the Horse didn’t like him. And it had taken him a moment to realize that in actuality, there was no woman-girl standing there, glaring at him from in front of the wall, there was only the Horse, disguised as a little girl. And something about that wasn’t right to Harry. Giving the girl and the Horse a wide birth, Harry had turned and left, very anxious to relocate to a safe distance. There were other grates in this city with less provocative neighbours. Toronto was a city of grates. Eventually, though, the grate he still operated from was like his own patch of home. No other hole in the sidewalk felt right, and slowly he gravitated back to his corner. An unspoken detente had developed

between him and the creature on the wall, so he resumed occupying his small patch of home, continuing to sit here, observing but never crossing the street. This was the agreement.

He wondered only briefly if he should warn the man, because it seemed to Harry the man was taking far too much interest in the Horse, more than a casual glance or appreciation might warrant. Harry feared for the policeman because of the Horse. Yes, Harry could see the man had a gun, a bulletproof vest, a baton, all the usual accoutrements for aggression and self-defence. But what could they do against the Horse?

Crossing himself once more for reasons he could barely remember, he declined to warn the man, as that would require him to venture near the Horse, which was against the agreement. We all choose our own paths, Harry thought. We can't choose them for other people. Instead, Harry shuffled off to the nearest Tim Hortons, where life and problems were much simpler. He planned to take two crullers and call it a morning.

The less Horse in his life, the better, he thought. A double-double in addition to the crullers, on a cold day like today, would solve most of his problems for the moment.

As he walked to the Tim Hortons, the always-smiling Harry realized that he wasn't smiling anymore.