

Prelude

I am lying in the dark listening to my husband's raspy almost-snore, unable to sleep. To keep myself occupied, I try to remember when I first knew I wanted to be an archaeologist.

After seeing the first Indiana Jones movie as a teenager, perhaps? No, Indy merely served to bolster my interest in the field. The real turning point came while watching a documentary called "In Search of Noah's Ark" when I was no more than twelve, back in the time before the super cinemas. It was in those creaky seats, between mouthfuls of salty, buttery popcorn and watered down cola I knew. Wood decomposed to nothing but dark shadows in the soil, aerial photographs of well-fed vegetation, and measurements which approximated those in The Bible; I still literally shudder in awe at the thought of it.

The first site I ever worked on was in the middle of a conservation area, almost an hour's drive north of the city. That was my first real taste of archaeology: dark soil dampening trouser knees and buttocks, dirt rammed under fingernails, blowing out a peppering of dust mixed with snot on the Kleenex—Man! I was hooked.

It was only a few short years later I was running my own sites. I was near graduation and in need of letters of recommendation from a series of Profs to get into grad school. Dr. Richardson, the head of the department, was very complimentary and offered to be my faculty advisor on the spot. I accepted without hesitation. He assigned me a site, the remains of a carriage house behind a restored

clapboard house, built nearly two centuries ago. The planning, supervision, excavation and analysis of the site over two years' time would earn me my Master's degree. It was then, in that very instant, I knew: I loved him.

I picked up my assistants at the designated area and we arrived at the clapboard house almost two hours later; traffic was horrendous. Dr. Richardson was sitting on the stoop reading *Scientific American*. The issue that month featured an article on a cache of Peruvian mummies and Dr. Richardson is a forensic anthropologist which means he gets off on dead people and figuring out how they died. He works extensively with the police, trying to give them clues as to what decomposed bodies and skeletons may have looked like while they were still living and breathing.

We approached the stoop and he stood to greet us. I had to crane my neck and shield my eyes from the sun in order to meet his gaze. He is at least an entire foot taller than me with shoulders twice as wide. He must've been a football player in another life. He smiled at me, said hello and squeezed my shoulder. My stomach lurched. Dr. Richardson is what we used to call "a hunk". The first time my mother met him she called him "a dreamboat" and said she wouldn't throw him out of her bed for eating crackers. The way things turned out, that comment was just on *so* many different levels of wrong.

The house had been converted to a living museum sometime in the late eighties. The side entrance, added on around the same time, served as a welcome area; it smelled of new carpet and fresh paint. Pictures of the house in various stages of disrepair and renovation hung on the walls like windows

into the past. A fairly modern cash register sat on a large glass case filled with souvenirs near the entrance, and there was a coat-check behind the door. The foundation of the building was raised higher than the original structure and we had to step down to enter; Dr. Richardson had to bend so as not to hit his head on the doorjamb. He took us on the grand tour: the men's parlor, the women's sitting room, the dining room. Upstairs, the ceiling was lower. We gawked at the restored ballroom, once split into two bedrooms to accommodate a growing family in a time before birth control. The home owners had six children of their own and had taken in two others—a niece and a nephew—when their parents had passed. In back were two small rooms, no larger than typical walk-in closets by today's

standards, which were the nurseries, one for the boys, the other for the girls. A narrow staircase took us up to the third floor servants' quarters. This floor was only two rooms large. Neither was as spacious as the nurseries below. The ceiling on the third floor was so low even I could touch it when standing on tip-toe.

Back downstairs, Dr. Richardson took us into the kitchen. The walls were of unfinished wood made dark by soot. At the centre of one wall was the original hearth, complete with bake ovens. A single wooden table stood in the middle of the room, deeply scarred through use and over time. And in the far corner, the kitchen pantry, a small storage-cum-utility closet after the restorations. Near the ceiling Dr. Richardson pointed to a series of wallpaper layers. He recited each occupation and era by rote and I was in awe of him.

He finished his lecture and ushered us out of our cramped quarters. I was the first one in and the last to leave. I chanced a glance up at him and he smiled at me. A perfect three-toed crow's foot appeared to frame the outer edge of each of his eyes. The solitary, unshaded light bulb which dimly lit the room shone in his dark eyes; a girl could get lost in those eyes. I blushed, embarrassed at the lust I felt for him at that moment, chastising myself for allowing me to fall for my faculty advisor. But then I reminded myself Dr. Richardson was a good sixteen years' my senior, and everyone knew he was seeing Dr. Pascoe, the Egyptologist. Dr. Richardson was safe, like a movie star. Like a movie star, he was unattainable, and consequently, not entirely real. I remember telling myself the crush would pass, and it did, later that year when I met Gabriel Sykes.

Palmer's snoring again. I nudge him and tell him to roll over. I roll over myself and wedge one hand between his rib cage and the mattress and one foot arch-deep between his thighs; he doesn't protest.

Sleep has eluded me this evening. Pretty soon my bedside alarm will begin to shriek at me, signifying the start of yet another day. I need a drink. Tea would go down good right about now. Hot tea with honey and lemon.

In the kitchen I fill the kettle and plug it in, fish a lemon from the crisper in the fridge and slice a large wedge. While I wait for the water to boil, I stroll into the living room and take a peek out the front

window. Two black sedans are parked on the road, each facing opposite directions, waiting for me in case I decide to take it on the lam. Inside each car sits a pair of officers, which officers are out there tonight is anybody's guess. The possibilities read like a who's who for law enforcement: CIA, CSIS, OPP...I throw in FBI and MI6 for good measure. It's funny how quickly things spiral out of your control: yesterday I was an archaeology professor considering earning my doctoral degree. Today I am the prime suspect in a murder investigation.

I toy with the idea of treating the officers to a thermos of coffee, but then I remember I can't remember the last time I made a cup of coffee anyone appreciated. Besides, I don't think it a good idea to appear flip about the situation. Just thinking about it exhausts me.

The kettle begins to boil. I unplug it. Sometime between eying the sedans and thinking about the death I may have expedited, I've lost my appetite for tea.

I return to bed, drawing my body close to Palmer's, more for security than warmth. I find solace in the fact I was right about one thing when I was struggling with that crush on my faculty advisor all those years ago: Palmer Richardson *is* safe.