

By Wayne Halm

## Introduction

At opening Jefferson General Hospital was an elegant building. It both dominated and supported the feel of the neighborhood, it's six stories definitely dwarfed the single story houses around it, yet it seemed related, sort of a big brother. Those who saw it smiled, they didn't go out of their way to see it, but they smiled when they did. Visually it fit.

Years passed and things changed, things grew, and things died. A massive elevated expressway was put in, six lanes wide and half as tall, it split the neighborhood from end to end. The hospital grew, four ten story buildings were added, four plain functional ugly impersonal cubes. Doctors converted some of the surrounding houses into offices, bulldozers converted the rest into an assisted living facility and parking lots.

The hospital grew "to meet the needs of the community". Now it's easy to get to, has the latest equipment, is a model of efficiency, and advertises heavily. People still smile occasionally, usually the ones who find a parking spot in the shade.

## Chapter 1

Tom Harrison had heard the roar before. He looked up to watch the hunter green Mustang convertible accelerate to near 80 miles per hour in the four blocks between the stop sign and the parking lot entrance. The tires never squealed but the exhaust rumbled as the car was downshifted and put into a 90 degree right-hand turn into the parking lot then a 180 degree left into the first parking space. The car stopped the engine died and the door opened all in the same instant.

Driving the golf cart through the hospital parking lot wasn't really part of Tom's job as Chief of Security. But on nice mornings it was enjoyable, a chance to get away from the paperwork, a chance to do some security. He frequently gave the guard an extra coffee break and patrolled the lots, other hospitals were having cars broken into, he was determined not to have that on his watch.

And watch he did. He stopped the cart and watched the Mustang. Two bar feet were pushed out the door by a pair of long slim and equally

bare legs. A head of brilliant red hair leaned out and slender pale arms buckled beige spiked heels on the feet, flashing pale blue panties from beneath the black mini-skirt in the process. The driver stood, reaching 5'8" in the heels, and buttoned the top two buttons on her beige silk blouse, the silk clearly showing that she wore no bra. She bent at the waist and reached back into the car. The mini skirt slid up again revealing the pale blue panties that did not quite cover the tattoo of a red rose on her right cheek. She came out with a white lab coat and slipped it on. With that the driver was transformed into Dr. Claire Barker. Tom drove over to offer her a ride.

"Good morning Claire," Tom said.

"Morning Tom. Did you get an eye full?" Claire responded.

"Oh, I've seen it before, but it will keep me smiling all morning," Tom chuckled.

"Screw you," Claire said.

"Great idea! Now is sort of a bad time, but I'll take a rain-check. Hop in," Tom said.

Tom looked at the rear end of the Mustang. The bulging metal had a muscular look, it presented a sensation of barely tamed power. A ticking sound came from the cooling exhaust suggesting that it was impatiently waiting to roar down the hi-way again.

"Why did you buy that thing? Why not a Lexus or a beamer?" Tom asked as Claire slid in beside him.

"I looked at those. Fantasies of power for old men who can't get it up anymore. Not for me, I prefer real things. Let's go," Claire responded and patted Tom's leg.

Tom took the long way to the door and drove slow.

"Claire the way you drive ... well one of these days they are going to put you under the jail, or bring you here in an ambulance," Tom chided.

"They're not going to put me in jail, I play the game," Claire replied, "I'm Sheriff Harvey's doctor. I treat his diabetes, he's not going to put his doctor in jail. And leaving these top buttons open usually satisfies the new deputies that haven't gotten the word yet."

Tom glances over at her breasts now partly covered by the lab coat and completely covered by the silk blouse, yet still clearly jiggling with the bumps. "Very satisfying indeed," he said.

"Screw you," Claire replied.

"Still a bad time, but I'll take another rain-check," Tom said.

"And if I ever come in here in an ambulance, you can bet your ass it's because I was doing exactly what I wanted to do," Claire stated.

"Yeah, well now that I think about it. What you want to do is more likely to put me in the ambulance," Tom replied.

"Screw you Tom, you love it," Claire said with a smile.

"Exactly. You know I may need some of that Viagra," Tom replied and they both chuckled.

The cart stopped at the door. Claire smiled and blew Tom a kiss, then marched through the door to begin her days work. Tom watched, then released the brake to continue his.

## Chapter 2

Billy Brown pulled the dirty white Camero up to the hospital door. He stopped right next to the No Parking sign. Two women waiting in the passenger zone frowned at the blue smoke coming from the tailpipe. Billy rested his head on the steering wheel for a minute before turning off the ignition. He got out and slammed the door but then had to lean on the door with both hands, his head hanging, staring at "Bad Billy" stenciled on the door.

Billy smiled at the name, took a deep breath and started for the hospital door. He sneered at the two women and they backed away slightly, Billy pulled himself more erect as he went through the automatic door.

"I want to see a doctor," Billy told the receptionist. "Right now," he added.

The receptionist replied, "You'll have to go to the emergency room, just go down this hallway and ..."

"I don't have time for all that crap," Billy cut her short, "Just get me a doctor."

"Sir, the emergency room," the receptionist started.

"I don't need this shit," Billy roared at her.

Claire heard the shouting and walked up. "Is anything wrong Rebecca?" she asked the receptionist.

"This man wants to see a doctor but refuses to go to the emergency room," Rebecca answered.

Claire turned to Billy and said, "Sir, there are doctors in the emergency room, the procedure is."

"I don't give a shit about your procedures, I want to see a doctor right now," Billy roared cutting her off.

Claire stepped directly in front of Billy, unbuttoned the lab coat, put her hands on her hips, and said, "Okay, you're seeing one."

Billy looked her from head to foot and back again before speaking, "Doc, I got this bug and need some pills to."

"Then go to the emergency room," Claire cut him off.

Billy stared coldly at her, then rolled his eyes and slid gently to the floor.

"Rebecca, get someone down here with a wheelchair, and have them get an exam room ready," Claire said calmly.

It only took a couple of minutes for them to get Billy into a wheelchair. From the chair he glanced at Rebecca and smirked.

"Rebecca, please call ahead and have a proctoscope sent to the exam room, we'll have to do a complete rectal exam," Claire said and winked at Rebecca.

Billy's smirk faded.

## Chapter 3

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! What is that?" Julie exclaimed

"That, my favorite little student, is the freshman tests we have to grade this morning," Dr. Barbara Johnson answered and pointed to a pile of paper.

"No, most esteemed professor. What is that on your finger?" Julie pressed.

"Oh, that," Barbara said smiling, "Mark gave it to me last night when I accepted his marriage proposal." She held out her left hand so Julie could see the engagement ring.

Julie grabbed her hand, pulled her into better light, and closely examined the ring. "It's

beautiful," she gasped then she recovered and added, "Whoa, slow down, this is way too fast. Are you sure? I mean Mark's a great guy, but this is just so fast. You're not pregnant are you?"

Barbara chuckled, "No, Mother, I'm not pregnant."

"This is wonderful. I'm so happy. And a bit envious. Mark really doesn't mess around does he? First he makes us famous by reporting the West Nile discovery, now he's making you his wife. He really makes things happen," Julie rambled.

"I understand that your guy Paul started the ball rolling, but there's more," Barbara said.

### Chapter 4

Billy was sitting on the table in the exam room when Claire and a clerk entered. He had been there 15 minutes, his head drooped forward and he looked truly miserable.

"Okay, let's see what we've got here," Claire said to start things off.

Billy lifted his head glared at her, then said, "Let's get one thing straight, ain't nobody sticking nothing in me, you understand?"

"Well maybe we won't need the rectal exam," Claire chuckled.

"You're god damned right we won't," Billy stated and pulled his shoulders back.

"What's your name sir?" the clerk asked.

"Billy Brown," Billy replied.

"Do you have insurance Mr. Brown?", the clerk continued.

"Don't worry your greedy ass about that, I got money," Billy growled and pulled out a sizable roll of bills, "Now Doc give me some pills so I can get the hell out of here."

"First let's find out what you've got, then I can figure out a treatment," Claire said, Then asked, "What's the problem?"

"I feel like crap, my head hurts, I got the shits, and I'm tired all the time," Billy replied, "Give me some pain pills and antibiotics and I'll go sleep it off."

"I see," Claire said and wrapped a blood pressure band around his arm. She pumped it and said "I see," again. She listened to Billy's chest with a stethoscope and said "I see," a third

time. Billy's head drooped again during the process.

"Ask Troy to come in and take some blood," Claire said to the clerk. Billy took no notice.

Troy entered with a tray, set it on the counter and picked up a needle, Billy took notice of this.

"I said ain't nobody sticking nothing in me. You come over here with that shit and I'll knock the crap out of you," Billy growled.

Troy held his 240 pounds dead still, not in fear but in disbelief. He stared at the 160 pound growling man in puzzlement, then looked at Claire. Claire shook her head. Troy nodded, put the needle back in the tray and left.

"He'd better listen, I will, I'll knock the crap out of him," Billy stated with satisfaction.

"Billy, we can't cure you unless you let us treat you," Claire said firmly.

"Just give me some god damned pills," Billy said coldly.

Before Claire could respond Dr. Dennis Douglas stuck his head in and said, "Claire we're going to have the prayer circle out front in five minutes, can you join us?"

"I'll try Dennis," Claire said and Dennis left.

"Prayer circle? What the hell is that?" Billy asked.

"We're all going to get together and pray for the victims of the World Trade Center," Claire answered.

"You're gonna pray for dead people? You guys are really stupid, they're already there. That's just plain pissing into the wind," Billy stated.

"Yeah Billy, we do a lot of that around here," Claire said, "Look, I've had enough of your stupid redneck shit."

Billy jerked tense, his fists balled up, his head spun around, his eyes filled with hatred, his face twisted with rage, his mouth opened to yell. But the cold confident stare on Claire's face stopped him.

"You try to knock the crap out of me and you really will need this place," she warned then continued, "I'm going to write you a couple of prescriptions, they won't do any good, but waste your money on them anyway. Then come back here in two days."

"Yeah, sure," Billy replied.

**Lunch Novel:**

## Into the Wind

"Now you listen to me boy, this could be very serious, you really should let us take some blood for tests," Claire tried one last time.

"I said ain't nobody sticking nothing in me," Billy yelled.

"Fine, be hard headed. Take the pills, no alcohol, eat, and stay in bed," Claire said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Billy said.

"And see the clerk on your way out," Claire added.

Billy pulled a hundred dollar bill off of his roll and slapped it on the table, "That should cover this", he said, "See you around, doc."

"I doubt that Billy, I hardly ever work the morgue," Claire replied.

Billy walked out.

### Chapter 5

Dr. Barbara Johnson picked up the phone on the third ring. "Barb, this is Claire," the speaker said before she could say hello.

"Claire, it's great to hear your voice. I was beginning to worry that you'd moved away and opened a bordello," Barbara said.

"No, not yet. But Barb, I've been hearing rumors about you. What have you been doing with that big reporter?" Claire teased.

"Since when have you slowed down long enough to listen to rumors? Subject is your usual place in the rumor mill," Barbara teased back.

"Well girlie, I hate to admit it, but, when the rumor concerns my old college roommate, yeah, I stop and listen. So talk to me Barb. What have you two been doing? Give me some nasty juicy details," Claire said.

Well, Mark is a wonderful guy," Barbara started.

Claire cut her off, "Barbie, this is Claire you're talking to. I don't want to hear about wonderful guys, I want to hear about bedroom abilities. Come on, what have you two been doing?"

"I doubt that we've done anything that you and your Security Chief haven't been doing. Well not yet anyway," Barbara said.

"Not yet? What do you mean not yet? You don't mean? I'll be damned," Claire stammered.

"Your invitation is in the mail honey. You had better be there," Barbara chuckled.

"Oh, yeah, I'll be there. Little Barbie getting married. This I have to see," Claire said then added, "But Barb, I think I saw a West Nile case this morning."

"What? Are you sure? What does the lab work look like?" Barbara questioned.

"Can't be certain, but I'm pretty sure. Looked a lot like the flu, but it's the wrong time of year. We didn't get any blood work, the patient resisted treatment. He's dumb as they come and just wouldn't play the game. I gave him some percadan and penicillin tablets and told him to come back. Maybe he will and maybe he won't," Claire answered.

"Let me know if he shows up again," Barbara said, "This is driving me up the wall. I proved that the virus is here but nobody will do anything. It's so frustrating, it's like they need a corpse before they can act, there was that bar owner down in Lafitte, but he didn't die and they called it the flu. What am I saying? It sounds like I wanted him to die. Of course I didn't, I'm glad that he recovered. Help me Claire, I'm losing it here. I've talked myself blue in the face, nobody doubts me, they just won't do anything. I'm tired of beating my head against the wall. How plain do the signs have to be? What more can I do? I ... okay, I've vented, thanks for listening, call me."

"You got it Barbie. Later babe," Claire said and hung up.

### Chapter 6

Tom watched Claire's arrival ritual. Pink panties this time. Then he drove the golf cart up to give her a ride.

"Oh, I haven't had a ride to the door in a week. Is this my reward for last night?" Claire asked.

"No, this is more like my reward for finishing that damned budget," Tom answered.

"Paperwork and meetings, I hate that crap too. And today I've got to go downtown to a damned AMA luncheon," Claire said.

"Lunch doesn't sound so bad. What's the problem?" Tom asked.

"Do you know what a 'goodie two shoes' is? It's a person who won't admit doing all the nasty little things they like to do. Yet they talk about other people doing them. I have to sit in a room with two hundred of these hypocrites, it turns my stomach," Claire explained.

"Then why go?" Tom asked.

"Because it's part of the game. They need to have someone to talk about. Maybe last night can keep a smile on my face," Claire replied.

### **Chapter 7**

The boy drove the uncolored pickup at the speed limit.

"Take it easy now. We don't need any tickets or fender benders, specially now," Rufus Green told his boy.

"Your leg's broke Daddy, we gotta get you to the hospital," the boy replied.

"Rushing around is what broke it. If I hadn't been in such a hurry I wouldn't of slipped off that roof. The hospital's been in the same place for forty years, it ain't going anywhere, and my leg will still be broke in a few minutes, so take it easy. Give the old truck a break, you're gonna need it. You know you've got to run the business until I get well," Rufus explained.

The boy slowed down a little but still finished the trip in under five minutes.

### **Chapter 8**

The smile had not lasted through the luncheon. Claire was just putting on her shoes when the dirty white Camero swerved recklessly into the hospital parking lot. It hit the curb separating her parking space from the driveway then veered of toward the emergency entrance. She watched as it rolled through the flower bed, scraped the flag pole, and crashed into the corner of the building. She stopped her arrival ritual and ran toward it.

Troy was helping the boy get Rufus and his white plaster leg into the pickup when the car hit the wall.

"Damn," he said and ran to the crumpled car.

"Go help," Rufus told the boy.

The engine had died but smoke or steam was coming from under the hood. Gasoline flowed onto the pavement. The driver was draped over the steering wheel, blood dripping from his nose. Troy noticed "Bad Billy" stenciled on the door and recognized Billy.

"Don't look like you'll be knocking the crap out of anybody today, Bad Billy," Troy said as he yanked the door open.

"Help me get him away from the car," Troy told the boy and they carried the barely conscious Billy across the drive way. Claire met them and sent Troy to get a gurney.

Claire kneeled beside Billy, felt his pulse - weak, listened to his chest - congested, and checked his eye response - fixated.

"You should have come back sooner Billy, you should have given in, you should have played the game," she said.

"Told you I'd see you again doc," Billy whispered, "Nice tits."

"What? Oh," Claire said. She sat back and buttoned her blouse. When she looked back down Billy's eyes were still on her chest, but they were dead.

Claire hung here head and closed her eyes for a second, then looked at the sky and prayed, "Lord I ask you to take care of Billy's soul. He was a very sick man," she stopped and looked back down at Billy. Then raising her eyes again she continued, "He was also right about pissing into the wind. Please if you are listening, help that little girl in 402, the one with the liver infection."

### **Chapter 9**

"Damned, that was him," the boy said as he got back in the pickup.

"Don't cuss boy. Who is it?" Rufus asked.

"The man we saw on the road a couple of months ago, the day we found the dog," the boy replied.

"Oh yeah. I remember. How is he?" Rufus asked.

"He's dead," the boy replied.

"Dead? From that little wreck?" Rufus asked.

"He's dead. I don't know from what," the boy said.

"The Lord works in mysterious ways," Rufus said. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Now we gotta get you home so I can go hire a helper to finish that job we started," the boy said.

"Mysterious ways," Rufus mused as the truck pulled away.

### **Chapter 10**

**Lunch Novel:**

## Into the Wind

Claire wore a knee length skirt and had her blouse buttoned as she and Tom entered the Sacred Heart Church on Canal Street. The church wasn't full, but it wasn't embarrassingly empty either. Many heads turned at her entrance, Claire knew most of them, but got few smiles of recognition.

"I see a lot of unfriendly faces. Are you sure we're in the right place?" Tom whispered.

"We're in the right place," Claire assured Tom. "I know these people, most of the men have made passes at me, and I know who most of their wives are screwing. It's all part of the game. That odd look you see on their faces is fear," she explained.

A young man stood and asked, "Dr. Barker?"

Claire looked but didn't know the young man, then she saw Julie, Barbara's favorite student, sitting next to him. "Would you like to sit with us?", Julie asked.

"Hello Julie, and you must be Paul, this is Tom," Claire said. "Yes, we'd love to. You can tell me about this hunk that Barbie is marrying," Claire said and the all sat down.

Paul chuckled almost to himself until he noticed Julie and Claire looking at him. "What?" Julie said.

"I've heard people call Dr. Johnson, Barbara, and Cleopatria, but never Barbie before," Paul said.

"It's an old nickname from our school days," Claire said. "She doesn't like it very much," she warned.

"I'll bet you have some stories to tell about those days," Paul offered.

"I do, but first you have to tell me about Mark. Do you know him well?" Claire replied.

"Mark is a great guy. We introduced them," Julie started and told the story. Perhaps Tom and Paul would have talked sports, but Julie and Claire were between them, so they just looked around.

"A war correspondent, that's a no-win situation now-a-days," Claire mused when the story ended.

"That's pretty much the way Mark feels," Paul interjected.

"But he's got a new angle now," Julie explained, "He's training to be an aid. That way he can go to Afghanistan with Barbara."

"Hold on. Stop right there," Claire interrupted, "Barbara's going to Afghanistan?"

"Yes, they are leaving next month, part of the U.N. mission. She thinks she can make more of a difference there. Paul and I have applied and there is a good chance we can work there next summer," Julie explained.

Claire stared off at the ceiling. "Amazing, little play it safe Barbie is going to Afghanistan," she said to no one in particular.

"Claire, I can see what you are thinking. Forget it, Afghanistan is a dangerous place," Tom objected.

"You can be my security," Claire said not the least distracted by the objection.

"Afghanistan is on the other side of the world, working there would cost a fortune. Without U.N. or some other sponsorship, you don't have the money. The paperwork could take years," Tom continued his discouragement.

Claire looked around the church and smiled. "I'll bet I can get sponsors right here, if I play it right," she said as the music began.

### Chapter 11

"Tom, I'll be out in just a minute," Claire said as the crowd followed Mr. and Mrs. Mark Anthony Case out of the church.

When the church emptied she walked to the alter, kneeled, and prayed, "God, I was wrong the other day about pissing into the wind. Billy was a fool, but you know that. Please help him now."

She stopped when she became aware that the Priest was waiting for her to finish. "I'm sorry, I know this wasn't the time, but," she said.

"But you felt the need? It's okay," the Priest answered.

"Yes, but I'm afraid I needed better words," Claire said.

"God listens to the heart" the Priest said, "I don't think he gives a ... well, your heart's in the right place, and I think your words were just fine."

"You're kind, but Billy was a mess, he's going to need a lot of help," she said.

"And he's getting it now," the Priest said, "Let's also help those who are still alive."

"Thank you. That's exactly what I have in mind," Claire said. As she marched out of the church

Lunch Novel:

## Into the Wind

---

the spike heels made a ticking sound on the  
stone floor.

###