

## RESCUE

I was put to work fixing roads. We all lived in barracks made out of old apartment houses on the east side of the city, the part where the breaking and burning hadn't done so much bad. One day, the man who'd been next to me up at the reservoir, Marlin he said his name was, told me the dead ones'd been just every kind. "People who wouldn't let go their ways," he said. "Hell, you point a gun at me and I'll let go anything don't have to be cut off me."

In bed there, I tossed and turned a lot. Thing was, I wanted to see Rena, and I didn't have an idea in a barefoot mile how to get away and find her. Her house had been on the east side of town only a half mile from where I was now, but once us road workers were done working and eating, they locked us in until morning. And I didn't even know if she might be there any more.

I spent a lot of nights tossing and turning.

One day, we got sent up onto the bay bridge up by Lake Ontario, to fill in some of the busted-out paving. All day this guard in gray stood watching us, cradling his gun, near the edge of the roadway where there wasn't any rail, like he could step back into empty space above the water.

About mid-afternoon the wind came up from behind him, from off the lake, and a gust must've shoved him forward. He tried to right himself, and he overcorrected. I saw it coming and I headed for him as he stuck one foot out to balance cause his body was over water now and he was looking over his shoulder with real big white eyes. I dived and grabbed his foot, and he flung his arms up and that gun of his went sailing out over the water and I pulled him onto the bridge again.

We laid there on the chopped-up pavement and I got my first close look at a man in gray. He was just a regular guy, with a narrow face and a dark jaw like a lot of guys have even after they shave, and he had big brown eyes and a full head of black hair, like real Italian. He said, "Thank you, brother."

"You'd do for me, wouldn't you?" I asked him, and he nodded, and he put his arms around me and we hugged. And that was that.

He put in a real good word for me. So after that I wore gray coveralls instead of green, and worked in a food warehouse about a mile and a half into the city from Rena's old place. They'd put me in a tiny apartment right across the street from

where I worked, and nobody I could see was watching me at night. So I started to take walks.

Sometimes, just to see if I was followed, I'd head downtown, to where the inner core of buildings was all fenced off with steel mesh crowned with razor wire, and I could look in past the guard post on East Main Street and see over the foothills of rubble to where the stump of Xerox Square still stood, but it'd sunk straight down a little. It still looked about fifteen stories high, some of its girders sticking up and out like splinters from a lightning-struck tree, and I'd turn and go back home thinking, *I got no idea what got lost here. It was way too big for me.*