



stories not readily offered to outsiders, who lack the appropriate context and who might insist upon awkward detail.

Those who grow old in this world know more answers than they will give. For instance, there is an old expression in South Philly that a man uses when he comes into money that he would rather not explain. He says, "It fell off the truck."

Not just South Philly

It means: Don't ask.

Day One

Coming down made Joey Coyle feel desperate and confused. When he was high the drug filled his chest and head with gusts of power so great he could barely breathe or think fast enough. This was how Joey spent his nights. When he slept it was during the day.

It had been almost a month since the union had called to give Joey work on the docks. He made good money as a longshoreman. It was where his father had worked and where his older brother worked. Joey had never finished high school, but he had an educated feel for machinery. On the docks they used him to repair the lifts, and he was good at it. He took pride in that. Engine grease colored gray the heavy calluses on his hands.

But for more than a year the economy had been bad in Philadelphia, and there were few chances to work. They had called him to fill in for a few weeks over the holidays. But that had been more than a month ago.

Shiftlessness weighed on Joey. He was twenty-eight, and he still lived in his mother's house. He was devoted to his mom. His father had died of a heart attack on a night after Joey had stormed out in anger after an argument. The old man didn't like the length of the boy's hair. His father had been gone six years, but in Joey the grief and guilt was still fresh. Staying with his mother had somehow helped. But now his mother was sick with

Whiskey in a long coat of who he is

liver disease, and he couldn't care for her anymore. She had moved just a few blocks away to his sister Ellen's apartment. Without reason, Joey blamed himself. He felt rejected and a failure, but would not have put those words on the feelings because he never looked inside himself long enough to figure them out. He couldn't. In the months since she left, his days blurred into nights in a speeding carousel of exhilarating highs and then crushing lows as he hustled to get money to buy more of the white powder called meth, which he called blow. It blew away all the demons of self-doubt and depression.

His home on Front Street was at the tattered edge of the tight weave of South Philly's streets, away from its strong, nurturing core. East of Front Street is a wasteland: weedy, trash-piled lots, junkyards, old brick warehouses defaced with graffiti, rusting hulks of old boxcars in forlorn rows alongside the newer cars that come and go, fenced-in lots around the trucking yards and dwindling industrial works along the Delaware River waterfront. Over this bleak expanse, the air is tinged gray and tastes of ash. Just behind the row of houses on Joey's block loomed the giant concrete underside of Interstate 95, which threw a perpetual shadow wider than a city block. When Joey was a little boy, he would leave the comfortable nest of his neighborhood and pass through the cool shadow of the great highway, the rush of its restless traffic roaring steadily overhead, and play on the grotesque junk heaps and boxcars beyond. It was a crude playground. He would search out clusters of rat holes, pour gasoline down all of them but one, and then touch a match to them. Joey would sit a few yards off from the one unburning hole and shoot at the fleeing rats with a bow and arrow. When he was older, he and his friends stealthily passed television sets from loaded boxcars to waiting arms, then ran to trade the loot for money to buy grass and beer.

For a boy, and then a young man, the wasteland beckoned as a lawless haven, training for streets seductive with vice. After Joey's father died, what little resistance he had to the lure of those streets was gone. Unlike his friends, Joey Coyle had not outgrown those years. He avoided the demons that troubled him in quiet moments and projected to the world a feckless, fun-loving style that was both frustrating and endearing to those who loved him. His complexion was pale pink, his hair so thin and blond you could hardly make out the mustache he had been growing for five years or the eyebrows over his small, deep-set blue eyes. Joey spoke in a gruff whisper that often turned into laughter and had no more of an interest in serious conversation than he had in hanging by his thumbs—which is something neighborhood bullies had actually once done to him. But trouble was immune to Joey's charm; it sought him out, and when it strayed, it seemed like Joey went looking for it. Like the time his car stalled and blocked a street. A man disputed Joey's placement of the vehicle and, in the ensuing brawl, drew a savage slice across the left side of Joey's face that had healed into a crooked gray scar from eye to earlobe. There was nothing funny about that scar, but Joey would tell the story in a way that would make people laugh, about how he finally got the man down just in time for the fuzz to arrive and spot him as the aggressor—which earned Joey another, official, beating. But bad luck just seemed to bounce off Joey. He would laugh and laugh even though the joke was on him. With bitter irony he would call it the luck of the Irish; he even had the word "Irish" tattooed on his upper right arm with a pipe and shamrock and shillelagh. His neck and chest and arms were broad and thick, and his hands seemed oversized—so swollen from all the times he had broken them working on engines that it was hard for him to close them into a fist. He could look tough, especially with that

scar, but Joey was a danger to no one but himself. Meth had muddled his mind so that he could not think straight for more than a few sentences. His front teeth had all been knocked out and replaced by a row of fakes. Joey had the calloused look of someone who had been knocked down a lot on hard streets, and a smile that wouldn't quit.

But nothing in Joey Coyle's resilient history could have prepared him for the joke fate would play on him this day.

He woke well after noon with the realization that he had used the last of his meth the night before. He was still high, but he could feel the sick feeling gaining on him.

He awakened in his mother's big bed in the wood-paneled bedroom one story above Front Street. Joey rose and walked downstairs in his underpants to start a pot of coffee. He went back upstairs while the coffee was brewing and returned wearing worn jeans and a flannel shirt. He poured a cup of black coffee and walked outside to sit on his front steps and drink it. His paycheck for the holiday work was supposed to arrive in the mail any day now—about \$700. Maybe his dealer would front him.

It was a cold afternoon. Joey scanned down the line of parked cars toward Spite's Bar at the corner. The block of two-story homes was empty. Above the telephone lines that draped lazily across the street, the sky was bright gray.

A few houses down, Johnny Behlau was out working on his father's car. It was a maroon boat of a Chevy, a 1972 Malibu. John had a coat of blue primer over the right front end that he had hammered back into shape. Behlau's friend, Jed Pennock, was just hanging out watching him work. Both John and Jed, like Joey, were unemployed. John was twenty-one. He was the taller of the two, a skinny blond-haired kid with a cocky, tough manner. Jed was short and stout. He had dark hair which enabled him, at twenty, to sport a heavier mustache than Joey. Jed wore

glasses with heavy, dark frames and was, in contrast to his friend, introverted, mild, and unsure of himself. Both Behlau and Pennock were out of school, waiting long, idle days for the economy to improve so they could get regular work on the waterfront and resume a normal life.

Joey knew them just as kids in the neighborhood. He was going to make their day. He walked down and greeted them with an offer.

"I can cop some blow if you give me a ride," he offered.

Boredom being easy prey to controlled substances, the boys and Joey set out at once in the Chevy.

But the dealer wasn't in. John and Jed sat in the car while Joey knocked, paced the sidewalk in front of the house, and then knocked some more. For the boys, it was a minor disappointment, but they could see that it was more serious with Joey. He was frantic. He slumped back into the car.

"We can try him again later," he said.

On the way home, Behlau stopped to buy gas at the Shell station on Oregon Avenue. Then he took a shortcut home up Swanson Street.

Swanson Street is a back road on the western edge of the wasteland, almost under I-95. For trucks, it is an axle-jarring shortcut from waterfront loading docks to Oregon and Delaware Avenues. High in the distance to the south is the long approach ramp of the Walt Whitman Bridge.

As Behlau turned up this rugged back alley, Joey was slumped in the front passenger seat, depressed as the landscape. To the left were familiar mounds of black earth piled with tires, garbage, bedsprings, soggy, stained mattresses, and broken glass. To the right was the double fencing around the Purolator Armored Car Company grounds. It was habit for Joey to scan the curbs along

Swanson. It was amazing the things you could find. Sometimes people dumped things he could sell or use.

And, sure enough, up ahead toward the right curb of Swanson was a yellow metal tub with its wheels pointing up. Behlau had to slow down to steer the car around it.

"Might make a good toolbox," said Joey. Behlau stopped.

Joey opened the car door and leaned out to right the tub and take a better look at it. It had two lid flaps that joined at the center with holes for padlocks, but there were no padlocks, and as he pushed the tub upright the top fell open, and out onto the street spilled two big canvas bags. They were white with lead seals and yellow tags at the top. Black letters on the sides of the bags spelled out "Federal Reserve Bank."

Joey laughed loudly. "Holy shit!" he said. "To hell with the box!"

Both bags were heavy. Joey stepped out for leverage and yanked them into the car.

"Let's get out of here!" Joey shouted. "Move it! Let's roll!"

"Where?" shouted Behlau, who already had the car moving.

"My house! Go!"

Behlau stepped on it. The car flew over the railroad tracks as he turned left on Wolf Street. Joey pulled a ballpoint pen from Behlau's dashboard, poked a hole through the thick canvas of one bag, and tore it open. Behlau stopped the car momentarily by the curb between two warehouses to have a look. Pennock leaned over the front seat. Inside the torn bag on Joey's lap were tightly-wrapped cellophane bundles of what looked like . . . Sweet Jesus! . . . Hundred-dollar bills!

"Oh, man!" said Joey. "What am I into now?"

John and Jed whooped deliriously.

Wheels squealed as the Malibu sped into the shadow of I-95. Joey felt a rush like a jolt of the drug. The boys were shouting for joy

and thumping him on the shoulders. He just stared at the money and shook with laughter. Joey laughed and laughed. He laughed so hard that the plate with his front teeth plopped in his lap.

Rumpled, steady Detective Pat Laurenzi was in his car at about 3 p.m. when he heard the report on his police radio. An armored car had dropped a bag of money somewhere near the vicinity of Front Street near the Purolator property. No information on the amount missing.

Laurenzi lived on street smarts, coffee, and hustle, a small man with a boyish face and muscular frame. He had wide brown eyes and straight brown hair that was cropped in a straight line high across the middle of his forehead, the haircut of a man with no time for barbers. There were places in the back where the hair stood upright. Reporting for his eight-hour shift, the detective looked more like an oversized Philly street kid than a man with a gold badge. His tight stretch sport shirt was tucked into the belt of light brown jeans, which he pulled high. Under his worn gray docksidiers were white socks.

He was not surprised by the Purolator report. This sort of thing had happened before. It usually involved a couple thousand dollars, and the money usually didn't stay missing long.

But back at his South Philly precinct, a bulky gray stone fortress on a tree-lined block of South Twenty-fourth Street, Laurenzi learned immediately that this Purolator drop was far more serious. Two bags were missing. The company estimated they held a total of \$1.2 million. And it was casino money, which meant that instead of being in numerical sequence, the way it comes from the Federal Reserve Bank, these were bundles of random hundred-dollar bills, untraceable, the cleanest money money could buy.

Of course, with \$1.2 million missing you had to start with the drivers. So Laurenzi drove over to the Purolator building. First, he inspected the armored car in the Purolator yard. There were two doors in back. The left door had to be shut and padlocked before the right door could be closed, so that door was usually kept shut. The right door fastened above and below with two steel rods that fitted into slots by rotating the door handle first to the right and then to the left. Once closed, a button at the center of the handle could be pushed to lock it in place. Just for the hell of it, Laurenzi had one of the Purolator men lock him inside the back. He leaned forward with one broad shoulder to the double doors, and the right one gave a loud snap and popped open. There had been two metal tubs in the back end that afternoon, one with two money bags, the other empty. Both were missing.

Laurenzi asked to see the drivers. Poor Bill Proctor and Ralph Saracino had already been suspended indefinitely. Every-body was eyeing them suspiciously.

Proctor, who was forty-six, was visibly shaken. He had told his story over and over in the past two hours. He swore he had locked the door tightly when they left the Federal Reserve Bank on Arch Street that afternoon. He had placed the two money bags in one of the two empty wheeled tubs they were supposed to take down to Ventnor the next day. Saracino, the twenty-one-year-old partner, said that he had watched Proctor fasten the door, by the book. They had driven down Delaware Avenue, turned right on Wolf Street, and then left on Swanson down to the back entrance of Purolator. It was a trip they could make blindfolded. It took only about six minutes. Sure, the roads were bad and it had been a bouncy ride, but with the doors locked it couldn't have dropped out!

Their attention had been called to the open back door by a dispatcher at the second, interior gate into the Purolator yard.

Proctor said he had bounded out to see. The vertical steel bars of the right door were still in the locked position, but the door had somehow swung open. When Proctor had leaned in the back end to look, both tubs were gone. He had run back to the front of the truck.

"Turn around," he shouted to Saracino. "We got to go back and retrace our route!"

Proctor took off on foot to ask the guard to reopen the first gate. Saracino backed the truck out, and Proctor jumped back in. Their panic eased briefly when they immediately saw the yellow tub up the street. Two men were standing over it. But as they approached the two men, one asked, "Was there anything in this?"

"There was," said Proctor, his hopes dashed.

Proctor got out to look. Inside, on the bottom of the tub, was the yellow receipt for two bags, one carrying \$800,000, the other \$400,000. There was nothing to say. They had driven past that same spot less than three minutes ago! Somehow, in the time it had taken them to drive down one hundred yards, pull through the first Purolator gate, discover the door was open, back out, and return, somebody had removed the bags from the tub. Proctor felt like someone had knocked the air out of him. He felt sick and nervous, and a little bit scared.

After talking to both Proctor and Saracino separately, Laurenzi was suspicious of their story. With that much money gone he had to be suspicious of everyone. Maybe the locked door had swung open when the heavy tub banged into it. But maybe not. Laurenzi didn't believe in the lie detector, but the company wanted the guards tested. He asked Proctor and Saracino if they would agree to it. The men were alarmed, but they agreed.

It is worth mentioning that while Detective Laurenzi was going through these essential first steps of his investigation, two FBI men in suits arrived. Often, it is reported in cases that might

involve federal jurisdiction that the FBI is "standing by," or "following the case closely," or that it is "ready to provide assistance" to local police. Laurenzi was thirty-one, and he had been a city cop for one-third of his life, a detective for almost five years, yet this was the first time he had the chance to observe firsthand the FBI fulfilling this generous role. The men in suits stood nearby, observing but not commenting or getting involved. It began to get on the detective's nerves. Now, there's no denying that the FBI is good at what it does, and the detective with his Cardinal Dougherty High School/Philadelphia Police Academy diplomas certainly didn't want to make it appear as though he didn't appreciate the professional presence of these feds with college/FBI Academy credentials, but Laurenzi called the men in suits aside and made it plain that if they weren't going to do anything but hover over his shoulder, maybe they could find something more useful to do uptown.

When the FBI men left, Laurenzi got back to work. He interviewed the other witnesses gathered in the Purolator Building, and by late afternoon he had come to the reluctant conclusion that the guards were telling the truth. Thomas Piacentino had been working at his father's junkyard just off Swanson Street where the one tub fell off the truck. He related the whole scene to Laurenzi: The yellow tub falls. In the minute or two that follow, one or two cars come down Swanson, ease around the obstacle, and drive on. Then this maroon Chevy Malibu with the right front fender painted blue stops suddenly, and a man looking to be in his late twenties or early thirties leans out, laughs loud enough for Piacentino to hear forty yards away, pulls two white things—they look like gunnysacks—out of the container, throws them into the car, jumps in, and it takes off fast around the corner. Curious now, Piacentino and his brother Charles walk out to have a look at the container. Just as they reach it, the armored

three stood gaping at the treasure. There was bundle after compressed cellophane bundle of cash, more than a hundred of them. Every one of the bundles was more money than they had ever seen. Each was wrapped with a paper band that read \$10,000. All the bills appeared to be hundreds.

Joey was delirious with joy. He shouted, he leapt, he laughed. He kept embracing and kissing John and Jed, who were equally thrilled. Joey kept saying it was like a scene in a movie, like a scene in a movie. He felt more excitement than he knew how to express. Every time he looked down at the pile of bundles on his bed it was almost like he expected it not to be there.

Of course, somebody was going to be looking for this money. After the initial excitement, reality began to intrude. Joey, John, and Jed stood around the big colonial-style bed and excitedly discussed their find. They figured the money belonged to the government, that it had fallen off one of the Purolator armored cars. The cops were going to hear of anyone flashing hundred-dollar bills. John and Jed wondered what kind of a reward there might be. But if Joey had even one fleeting thought of returning this bounty it was banished before it was fully formed. Finders keepers, man.

"It's mine," Joey told the boys. "I worked hard all my life. My hands are all busted up. I got nothin'."

He was no fancy talker, so he had no words to express it, but Joey felt at that moment like he had been touched by destiny, by the hand of God. His father had smiled down from heaven on his troubles. This was his chance. He had never felt more sure of a thing in his life. It was perfect! He had done nothing wrong. No crime had been committed. He hadn't hurt anyone. It was money from heaven. It was money meant for him. Finders keepers—if he just didn't blow it.

Now Joey had to try to think clearly. He swore John and Jed to silence. No, they could not even tell their parents.

truck comes barreling back up Swanson, and out jumps this guard, who looks real nervous.

It was dark when Laurenzi left the Purolator property that evening. His first working hunch was blown. He mulled over the problem as he twice retraced the route taken by the armored car from the Federal Reserve Bank to Swanson Street. The case was going to be hard. If somebody had just driven by and picked the money up, and that appeared to be what happened, how were you going to find them if they were intent on keeping it? Purolator was ready to put up a \$50,000 reward. But it takes a special breed of honesty to trade \$1.2 million for \$50,000. The detective knew that if whoever had those money bags just stuck them in a closet for long enough, there was virtually no way of recovering them. Philadelphia is a city of five million people. The only way to make a mistake would be to start passing out a lot of hundreds right away. Nobody was that dumb. But Laurenzi knew that was his only chance.

Then again, Swanson Street was no main thoroughfare. It was a neighborhood shortcut. The only people who used it were those who worked along that stretch of waterfront . . . and those who lived nearby.

*It takes effort to believe a stroke of luck so grand.* Joey and the boys felt an immediate need to hold the cellophane bundles in their hands, tear off the packaging, and feel and smell the bills. Johnny Behlau turned south on Front Street and stopped his father's car in front of Joey's. Joey took the bigger of the two canvas bags and sprinted up four front stairs. Pennock carried the other bag. He and Behlau followed Joey inside.

They ran upstairs to Joey's room, tore open the second money bag, and dumped the contents on his bed. There the

"I'll take care of everything," he said.

If it worked out, they would get a share of the money, too. If it didn't, it was on him.

"Leave it to me," he said.

But the problem seemed overwhelming. He would have to find a way of breaking the hundreds into smaller bills. But how? Where? Joey knew he needed help. And the man who came first to mind was his friend Carl Masi.

*Carl Masi had once been a prizefighter. After the war, he boxed as a lightweight for a few years before settling back in Philadelphia as a typesetter. At fifty-four, he was still a muscular man with square features and curly gray hair. But Masi's heart was failing. Surgeons had opened his chest twice from neck to belly to make repairs. The doctors were always cheerful and optimistic, but Masi didn't expect to live much longer. This had softened his manner, which was quiet anyway. It seemed there was no surprise or anger or fear that could overcome his will to savor what life he had left. His two daughters were grown; the older one was married. His wife, Dee, worked at Fidelity Bank. Since he couldn't hold a regular job anymore, Masi worked some nights as a bouncer for The Purgatory Club on Second Street, which was owned by a friend. In his condition, he could hardly be expected to mix it up with anyone, but the customers didn't know that.*

Masi had known Joey Coyle and his family from the neighborhood. Over the years, he had taken a special liking to Joey. The kid had no father, and Carl had no son. Joey was trouble sometimes. He took drugs and drank too much and gave his poor mother fits, but Masi saw that he was a good-hearted kid. He got mad when he saw how other men took advantage of Joey whenever the kid came home from the docks with a big paycheck.

Joey had poor judgment and was easily misled. Send the kid out with a roll of cash in his pockets, and he would come home high, happy, bruised, and broke. But Masi was indulgent. He was past the point of being riled by failed expectations, his own or anyone else's. He never gave up on Joey. He had gotten the kid a job as a doorman for the Purgatory Club. And it was there that Joey observed that Masi knew personally some of the shadowy, serious men who were part of the Philadelphia/Atlantic City mob.

Once Carl Masi's name popped into Joey's head he clung to it like a lifeline. Leaving Pennock with the money, he and Behlau got back in the Chevy and drove to a Sunoco station on Oregon Avenue. From a pay phone, he called Masi's house. Masi's daughter answered.

"This is Joey. It's important."

"He's not home," she said. "You can call Mom at work."

So Joey dialed Dee Masi at the bank.

"Where's your old man?" he asked.

"He should be picking me up soon," she said. "What's wrong?"

"You comin' home now?"

"Yes."

"Good. I'll see you there," said Joey, and then teased her a little. "Got somethin' to show you."

Behlau drove Joey first to another dealer's house, where he at last copped some meth. As he rode back to his house, Joey impatiently fingered the plastic bag full of white powder in his jacket pocket.

At home, Joey prepared to inject himself in the kitchen. The ritual was a familiar one. Pour some powder on a spoon, add a few drops of water, hold the spoon over a flame until the powder was mixed well with the water, draw the white liquid up into a hypodermic needle, pick a vein in his right forearm—they were

getting harder to find—and inject. Joey's need had grown so urgent that he performed this ritual every hour.

Fired up again, Joey returned to his bedroom and dragged two Bishop Newman schoolbags, small square suitcases of stiff black cardboard, from his closet. He stacked the bundles in the suitcases, then folded the canvas bags in on top of them. Then he and Behlau took the suitcases to Masi's rowhouse on South Twenty-ninth Street.

"He's connected," Joey told Behlau, which the younger man understood to mean Masi had ties to the mob. "Carl will know what to do with it."

Masi's daughter let them in. They took the suitcases to a front bedroom on the second floor. It was the biggest bedroom in the house, second floor front, with beige walls and standard, sixties-style department store furnishings. White curtains over the front windows allowed only a dim glow of light into the room. Joey set the black cases on the Masi's bed.

He removed the money in urgent fistfuls. Each of the \$10,000 bands was marked with a set of three initials, for each of the tellers who counted it. Joey marveled at the rituals of procedure revealed by the money's packaging. The initials were repeated on each bundle in the same order, on the top hundred-dollar bill in each bundle, and then again on the tag at the top of the canvas bag. Joey began to remove the wrappers and tags. After he had accumulated a mound of cellophane and paper wrappers, he stuffed that and the lead seals from the tops of the torn canvas bags into a double paper grocery bag. He got a can of lighter fluid from Masi's daughter and took it out to the patio, no bigger than a driveway, behind Masi's house. He stuffed the bag inside a trash can, soaked it with lighter fluid, and set it on fire. Joey stood by until it smoldered, and then squirted more fluid on it. He kept the inside of the can burning until all the paper

was gone and the seals were molten disks of lead. When the lead cooled, he took the dull, smooth disks from the bottom of the can and dropped them in his pocket. He didn't want to leave a trace.

While Joey was doing these things, Behlau left to get Pen-nock. Back up in the bedroom, Joey piled the wrapped and unwrapped hundreds into neat stacks of \$50,000 and set them in a bureau drawer. Then he went down to the kitchen to wait for Dee and Carl. John and Jed returned and flopped on the plastic-covered furniture in the Masis' living room.

Carl and Dee arrived at about 4 p.m. Joey met them at the door.

"Come on upstairs," he said. "I got somethin' for ya."

It looked to Masi like Joey was all cranked up again. The older man eyed suspiciously the two strange boys in his living room. Joey told John and Jed to wait for them downstairs. Then he and the Masis walked upstairs together. In the bedroom, Joey pulled open the drawer. Carl and Dee Masi stared at the money silently.

"Joey, did you kill anybody?" Masi asked.

"No!" Joey laughed.

"Did you hurt anybody?"

"No!"

Joey was impatient with his friend's subdued response. He drew the cash from the drawer and made a pile of it on the bed. Then he picked up Dee and dropped her on top of it. Dee laughed. Masi just looked on quietly. He didn't know where the money came from, but he knew it couldn't legitimately belong to Joey Coyle. Then he remembered. On the radio news in the car he had heard that more than a million dollars had fallen off the back of an armored truck.

*it feel off a truck - it really happened "*  
 "I heard about this," he said. "This is the money that fell off the truck this afternoon."

"Yeah," said Joey.

"Joey, you ought to get in touch with a lawyer and get in touch with Purolator and see what they'll give you for a reward."

"No way, Carl. It's mine. I found it."

"Joey, they're not going to let you keep it."

"How they gonna know?"

Masi knew Joey, and he knew there was no way he and these two kids downstairs were going to keep a secret like that. They were too excited, too young, too careless. He knew what Joey was like when he was all cranked up. It was going to be all over South Philly in a couple of days, no avoiding it.

"They already got a description of your car," Masi said. "I heard it on the radio coming over. Maroon Chevy with a blue front fender. There it is parked right outside. You're crazy."

Joey felt a touch of panic. It hadn't occurred to him that somebody might have seen them picking the money up.

"I come to you for help," Joey said. Joey explained that he had called Masi because he was connected. He wanted somebody from the mob to help him change the money into smaller bills. He would be willing to share it, he said.

"Could you get in touch with a few people? Get the money broke down from hundreds?"

Whatever they were going to do, first they would have to get rid of the car. It sat out in front like a red flag. It was past forty. The evening news would be on in a few minutes. Then everybody in Philadelphia would be looking for a maroon 1972 Chevy with blue primer on the front fender.

So Joey and Carl went downstairs and explained to Behlau that they had to ditch his father's car. Behlau was alarmed. It was his father's! What could he tell him?

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked.  
 "Look, we're just going to take the car over the bridge and sit it over in Jersey for the time being," said Joey.

Behlau reluctantly went out to the car, removed some of his own things and some scraps of ID from the glove compartment, and handed over the keys. Joey drove the Chevy, and Masi followed in his own car. Joey held his breath as they crossed the Walt Whitman Bridge. His gaze swept from one rearview mirror to the other. He expected to get pulled over at any minute. He drove to the 200 block of Mercer Street in Gloucester, near the shipyard where his older brother Billy was a supervisor, and parked it. Then he and Masi drove to a bar for a few drinks. Pennock, Behlau, and Dee Masi and her daughter were waiting for them when they returned two hours later.

Many men talk of their willingness to take great risks to accomplish great things, but few are really ready for the challenge when it stares them in the eye. If it had taken an hour early that afternoon for John Behlau and Jed Pennock to believe they had really found more than a million dollars off the street, it took only a few minutes of that night's television news for the seal of their adventure to sink in. The Purolator boondoggle was that night's lead story. Something akin to stage fright fluttered in the boys' bellies. Then came second thoughts.

"What did you do with my father's car?" Behlau asked when Joey returned.

"Don't worry," said Masi.

"We should get it crushed down," said Joey.

Behlau freaked. "That's my father's car!"

"Okay, okay. Jesus! We'll buy him a new car. We'll get it repainted. Tell him you're having it repainted. You'll get it back in a couple of days. No," said Joey. "I got too much to think about. Just leave it where it is for now."

Joey had asked Masi to call someone to help out with the money. The group of six sat in the Masis' small living room before the television and discussed what they had learned on the news. Pennock told Joey that the money definitely belonged to Purolator. They had been a little surprised at how much attention the story was getting. They told Joey that maybe they ought to consider giving the money back.

"Don't worry about it, don't worry about it," said Joey, his gruff voice rising with impatience. "There's been no crime committed. If there's anything that goes down, it's their fault, not ours! Like, they're negligent for losin' the money. Nobody has said there's a reward or anything. We just gotta lay low. We're rich. They know it's gone, but they don't know we got it."

*What happened next* that evening is a part of the story that retreats into shadow. One of the abiding oddities of life in South Philly is the mob, a long-standing, hierarchical, neighborhood (in that meaningful sense) criminal organization. There are those who will smile and swear that such a thing does not exist. But several times a year, an otherwise healthy man is found on the sidewalk or in the trunk of a car with a belly full of pasta and a bullet hole in his head. Decent, patriotic folks who go to church every Sunday and wash their children's mouths out with soap for swearing will shrug their shoulders and turn their heads and fail with alacrity to summon any outrage over this. The shadow world of violence coexists with virtue in South Philly, just as in the hearts of even the best of men there is sin. It is not spoken of. Even those who would speak of it are silenced by fear. There are things said or seen that become secrets vaulted so securely that the truth strays locked beyond the reach of any truth serum, courtroom, or oath.

A man from these depths came that night to Carl Masi's house. He was called Sonny. He was a man in his mid-fifties, short and thick, with glasses and a balding forehead. He spoke with a deep, gruff voice. Joey believed the man was Mario "Sonny" Riccobene, younger brother of the bearded, hunch-backed Harry Riccobene, and one of the most notorious organized crime leaders in Philadelphia. Joey felt a chill of fear and pleasure to be with him in the same room. He and Masi and Sonny went upstairs, where the money was still in a big pile on the bed. The others waited downstairs.

"What's the matter? You got a problem?" asked the man called Sonny.

Joey showed the cash. He explained that it was the Purolator money. The money that had fallen off the truck, \$1.2 million.

"You gonna give it back?"

"I figure there wasn't, like, no crime committed," said Joey. He had a tendency to stutter when he was too excited.

"Is there a reward?"

"Like, the money is being looked for—it was on radio and TV and all—but they ain't put up no reward. So, I figure, these people lose \$1.2 million, and they ain't puttin' up no reward for it! And I got these stacks of money, and it's very real, and they're offerin', over there, like nothing, a row of zeroes, you know what I mean? Hey, it ain't greed, but show me something to show good faith."

"What are you gonna do with it?"

Joey had given this some thought. He spelled out his plan. "Look, I think it would be smart to take this money and split it in three directions. Four for you, four for me, four for Carl. Put it in three different places, right? That way, if they catch me, I still got eight hundred thousand dollars when I get out. And you take the four for you, and you give me back three in small bills. The other

hundred thousand is for you. Whatever, you know what I'm saying? Like, just get me back the three hundred thousand in small bills as quick as you can, and you can keep a hundred thousand just for doin' it."

Sonny nodded slowly. Joey stood alone in the bedroom while the two older men conferred in the dark hallway. Then they returned.

"I think I could do that," said Sonny. "We could take it down to the casinos and play it. You win some and you lose some, but that way you pass as much of it as you can as fast as you can. We could do that. These aren't consecutive bills. It would take me a day or two."

Joey was delighted. It was more than merely getting the help he sought. It was a kind of recognition. They had bought his plan! Joey felt . . . well, honored. He sorted the money into three roughly equal piles. He put his cut back in one of the black cases. Masi and Sonny put theirs in brown paper bags. Then they came back downstairs. Before leaving the house, the man called Sonny turned to John and Jed. Silently, he put his forefinger to his lips and then, pointing toward them, held up his thumb like the hammer of a gun and let it fall. Both boys got the message.

Carl Masi would live much longer than he expected, but even in later years when he was asked to tell the story of Joey Coyle and the money that fell off the truck, long after the case was over and the police had lost interest in it, he would leave out the part about another man coming into his house that night.

"Wasn't there a man who visited that night?" he would be asked, because the story was well known.

"Here?"

"Yes. Others who were here have said that Sonny Riccobene came over that night."

"No way. Sonny Riccobene has never set foot in my house."

"No? Did anyone else come in?"

"Joey brought somebody in here, but it wasn't Sonny Riccobene. Those kids are crazy. I know Sonny Riccobene. Those kids are wrong. I bet you if you showed those boys Sonny Riccobene face to face they wouldn't even know him."

"Do you know who it was who came over that night?"

"Some guy. But it wasn't Sonny Riccobene. I wish those kids were here looking at me when they said that. Because they're wrong. They always said that it was Sonny Riccobene. They had the name 'Sonny.' And they said it was Sonny Riccobene. But they're full of shit. They are one hundred percent wrong. Do you think a guy like Sonny Riccobene would have let somebody like Joey Coyle keep two-thirds of that kind of money? They're crazy, spreading stories like that. Sonny Riccobene has never been in this house. That's the truth."

With his plan in motion, Joey Coyle felt like a man who had wrestled a giant opponent to the earth, and even though he knew the match was not over, he could take a deep breath again for the first time since finding the money that afternoon. Soon after the man called Sonny left, Masi drove Joey and John and Jed back to Front Street. They left the remaining \$800,000 in the bureau drawer in Masi's bedroom. Joey and the boys felt unburdened.

Masi arranged for a friend to loan Joey a big boat of a car, a car sufficient to match Joey's prosperous mood. It was an emerald Cadillac El Dorado with a white convertible top and a white interior. It was . . . well, perfect.

Waiting for Joey at home was his nineteen-year-old girlfriend, a small, thin blond woman named Linda Rutter. Linda was seeing Joey somewhat on the sly. She had another boyfriend,

a more respectable boyfriend, from whom she kept Joey secret. She and Joey had been seeing each other like this for about a year. At the house, in the mail, Linda had found Joey's \$700 check. She had taken it right away to a check-cashing place in the neighborhood where they knew her and Joey, and they had cashed it for her. She knew Joey was hungry for that money, and she was looking forward to blowing some of it that night. But when Joey came in, he looked strung out. Without hesitation, Joey explained to Linda his remarkable and exhausting day. Linda was excited and a little scared.

An hour after returning home, at about nine-thirty, Joey and Linda went out to buy groceries at the Pathmark at Fourth and Oregon. They bought groceries and came home, where John and Jed were waiting for Joey.

Joey was in no mood to get into it with the boys again. He felt like he had bought into something bigger after the meeting with Sonny. John and Jed were out of their depth. He had to get rid of them. Joey knew that Sonny had scared them badly enough that they weren't going to tell anyone about the money. So he told them that he didn't want to talk in front of his girlfriend and that he would meet them in half an hour on the corner. John and Jed left. They waited down the street, and then watched angrily as Joey and Linda left the house, got back in the Cadillac, and drove off.

Joey drove to his sister Ellen's house on Darien Street. Ellen was ironing. She is a big, blond, articulate, outgoing woman of thirty-one who tried to mother Joey the way she did her own children. She saw her baby brother as a vulnerable, artistic boy who lacked the maturity or self-confidence to manage life on his own. Like the time Joey had worked out a mechanical device to keep drivers down on the docks from accidentally blowing out transmissions on the lifts. Ellen had forced Joey to sit down and

sketch the thing and sent him to a lawyer to see about getting a patent so he could get some profit out of it. Joey had drawn it and had gone to see the lawyer, but he had never pursued it. That was the way he was. People loved Joey, but the same boyish qualities that made him lovable made him maddeningly difficult. Ellen, on the other hand, was a rock. She was as sober and steady as Joey was addled and dissolute. Ellen had been especially worried about Joey ever since their mother was bedridden and had to leave the old house to move in with her. She knew he was using drugs heavily and that he wasn't working. She worried about him. When she looked at his battered body, scarred face, and wild eyes, she saw a little blond-haired boy in a suit on the day of his first communion. She prayed for him. But there was only so much she could do.

Leaving Linda in the car outside, Joey went upstairs to see his mom, who was watching television with Ellen's eight-year-old daughter, Katie. His mother was sitting up in bed. She looked bad. Katie was on the floor by the television. Joey spent about fifteen minutes with them, talking quietly. He offered to let his niece in on a big secret. He made her swear not to tell, and the little girl opened her eyes wide and swore it. Then he told her that he had come into a lot of money and that they were all going to be rich.

"You're my baby, don't worry about nothin'," said Joey. "I'm going to be leaving for a little while, but I'll be sending for everybody. We're going to fly Mama out of the city, get her to some really good doctors."

When he came back downstairs, Ellen thought Joey looked upset. She wanted to talk to him, so she offered him a cup of coffee.

"No thanks," said Joey. "I got to go." He was moving around the room, looking out the windows down the street.

"What's wrong, Joey?" Ellen asked.  
 "Nothing, nothing. Everything is all right."  
 He said goodbye and walked out the door.

### Day Two

And who hasn't dreamed of finding a million dollars by the side of the road?

It might be argued that the Purolator Armored Car Company's misfortune was hardly as important to the lives and wellbeing of Philadelphia citizens as, say, President Reagan's visit to the British prime minister to discuss international trade, or the congressional debate over sending military aid to embattled Central American governments, but in white honor boxes on sunny street corners and folded on the front steps of hundreds of thousands of homes that Friday came the morning paper with this story stripped across the top: \$1.2 MILLION FALLS OFF TRUCK; 2 FLEE WITH IT.

And as the city rose to sunny, warmer skies and the promise of a springlike weekend in late winter, and as the odors of coffee, eggs, and toast mixed in a million busy kitchens, readers skimmed reports of the world's weightier matters but read to the last line the story of the \$1,200,000 that fell off the truck and then wondered aloud along Broad Street and on subways and trains and buses about what their next move would be. Very, very few of these fantasies began by giving the \$1,200,000 back.

There was another story that day of particular interest to South Philly. Police had found the body of one Frank Stillitano, thirty, in a parking garage at Philadelphia International Airport. Stillitano, who was wanted at the time for questioning in another mob murder, had been shot once in the leg and once behind the left ear, packed in the trunk of a car, and parked in an airport lot for the long, long term. It was the latest in a series of

mob killings—there would be a dozen in 1981—sparked by the 1980 assassination of longtime Philadelphia Mafia boss Angelo Bruno. News of the new mob killing had made its way around South Philly without benefit of modern media.

Joey Coyle and his girl, Linda, hadn't seen the newspaper. It was early morning over the blue Ben Franklin Bridge and over Alexander Calder's bright stainless-steel approximation of old Ben's kite and key, as Joey rolled his borrowed green and white El Dorado back from Jersey into Philadelphia and steered it south through rush-hour traffic. His secret \$1,200,000 find was all over the morning airwaves. Linda kept punching the radio buttons. Joey wasn't really listening. He was so pumped up he was shaking. He had scored some meth the night before and had been injecting himself at intervals. It was all he could do to sit still behind the wheel of the car. He and Linda had spent most of the night celebrating at a series of Jersey watering holes and at the Admiral Wilson Motel, where they registered as Mr. and Mrs. Joey Coyle. But Joey could not sit still. All through Thursday night, he and Linda moved from the motel room to bar to bar to bar, and then back to the motel room. The combination of his excitement over the money and the rush of the drug swept him along in a whirl of energy that found expression only in sex and constant motion. He had no desire to eat or sleep. They had left the motel that morning because Joey told Linda he wanted to show her the money. Truth is, through all his confusion Joey had begun to worry that his friend Masi and this Sonny might not be content to just babysit his million. A worm of doubt had begun to creep into his thoughts.

Joey's fears were fed when he and Linda arrived at Masi's soon after sunrise to find Masi and the man he knew as Sonny huddled together in the kitchen. Sonny got up when they entered and quickly left.

"We want to take another look," said Joey.

So Masi escorted the couple upstairs to the bedroom. He showed Joey the black case filled with his third of the money. Joey asked Linda to unwrap more of the bundles and stack the bills on the bureau while he talked with Masi in the hall.

In the hall, Joey asked Masi where the rest of the bills were. The older man explained he had hidden his third, and that Sonny was leaving for Las Vegas that morning with his third. Masi could see how spooked Joey was.

"Stop worrying," he told him. Masi reminded Joey that the plan to split up the money had been his own. It took time to move that much money. He and Sonny had run into a few snags, but it was all going to be okay.

Joey trusted his friend, but the worry was hard to shake. The feeling had just started coming over him early that morning, and it was getting stronger. The drug just seemed to amplify it. He told Masi that he was going to take his third with him. When the older man left to drive his wife to work at the bank, Joey and Linda stuffed the remaining cash and loose wrappers into the black case and pointed the El Dorado back east toward Front Street.

Upstairs in his bedroom, Joey finished unwrapping the cash. He arranged the hundred-dollar bills into forty stacks, \$10,000 in each stack, and fastened each bundle with a rubber band. He gave Linda a coffee can and told her to take the cellophane and paper wrappers to the bathroom, burn them, and flush the ashes down the toilet. She did.

Then Joey drove Linda over to her sister's house on Roseberry Street. He planned to spend the day alone at home, lying low. Joey told Linda he would get back in touch that night.

Back home on Front Street, Joey injected meth again into his right forearm. Over the years, the drug had ceased to give him

anything that could be called pleasure. Addiction was like riding a devilish engine that worked double, triple time. At first it was fun and made Joey feel all-powerful, vibrantly potent, and so much happier than he felt normally. But then, as the drug's grip on him hardened, even though Joey's mind and body grew tired, they stayed strapped to the same frantic engine which ran on and on at its double, triple speed through day and night, dulling both pleasure and pain, until he was pinioned to it like some pathetic, wildly gesticulating marionette. It was here where the drug played its deadly trick. Instead of giving Joey a rush of energy and potency, he found he now needed the regular injections to calm himself down. After only a few hours without a boost, the engine threatened to careen out of control, his senses reeling, his mind muddled and tormented by imagined terrors, his limbs shaking and in pain. The real devilish twist was that, in time, the only thing that hurt more than staying on the engine was getting off.

This time with the sudden surge of relief came another stronger surge of fear. Staring at all the green bundles, Joey felt suddenly overwhelmed by the challenge of hanging on to it. He expected the door to break down and the police to stomp in at any moment. Maybe he should have just left the cash with Masi. Joey got up and checked out the windows, just to make sure. Down the street in one direction he saw John Behlau and Jed Pennock out working on a pickup truck. In the other direction was a police car. It cruised slowly down the block, past Joey's house, and turned right on Wolf Street. The neighborhood was crawling with cop cars.

Joey paced and fidgeted. He had to find a safe place for the \$400,000. But where? He gathered the bundles into a brown paper bag and took it down to the kitchen. Underneath the kitchen floor, Joey had long ago built a safe spot to hide his drugs. Twice, the police had searched his house looking for drugs, and

feet. With his tools in one hand and the money bag in another, Joey walked up to the bathroom on the second floor. He had another idea. Getting down on all fours, he went to work on the toilet. He unbolted the toilet and, working with his plumbing tools, cut off the water connection. It felt good to be working with his tools; it calmed him. He tilted the bowl, and underneath, around the porcelain underbelly of the bowl, was a large enough empty space for him to stash the bag of money. The idea was appealing. Joey had known dealers who hid drugs there because the smell of the toilet bowl hid the stash from police dogs. He stuffed the bag up under the toilet bowl, reconnected the pipes, and bolted the toilet back to the floor.

Finally, Joey now felt relaxed enough to shower and change clothes. He made himself another cup of coffee and sat uneasily in the living room. Joey found lying low extremely difficult. Every few minutes he got up to check the windows, pulling back his mother's old curtains and peering out. He watched up and down the street. He paced. When the effects of the meth began to ease he would fix himself again. Taking a trip upstairs to urinate, Joey found himself no longer comfortable with the money inside the toilet bowl. It just didn't feel right to him. He couldn't explain it, even to himself, but Joey went straight for his tools again and began disassembling the toilet once more.

Before he had finished putting things back together, Joey thought of an even better hiding place. There was an empty space between the outside wall of the house and the plaster inside the walls. From inside the closet in his mother's bedroom he could climb up into the space between the ceiling and the roof beams, a tight squeeze, crawl the twenty feet across to the front of the house, and then lower the bag into the opening between the two front walls. It was a delicate task. His mother's bedroom had a dropped ceiling of tiles suspended on a fragile

both times they had missed the hiding place. Joey slid the bag of cash into the open space under the floor and covered it. At last, he could relax.

But only for a minute. Because right away the worry came back. Just because it had been a good hiding place for drugs, that didn't make it a good enough spot for \$400,000. The cops would be looking a lot harder for the money than the drugs. A hiding place under the floor? No. They probably had dogs or something that could sniff out cash. Joey could almost smell the dogs in the house. He checked all the windows again. Then he returned to the kitchen, uncovered the hiding place, and removed the bag of money.

There had to be a better place. Joey walked down to the basement, looking for the perfect spot. He was poking around down there for about ten minutes, stumped, when he hit upon the idea of hiding the money inside his hot-water heater. He set down the bag and ferched his tools. After disconnecting the piping, Joey removed the top of the heater and pulled out the fiberglass insulation inside it. Then he stuffed the bag inside, replaced the fiberglass, and reconnected all the fittings. He worked up a sweat doing it. The whole job took about half an hour. Unburdened at last, Joey went upstairs to the kitchen and made a cup of instant coffee.

But the wheels kept turning. The hot-water heater was gas. It had a pilot light inside of it. What if the paper got too hot and caught on fire? It would all burn up! Leaving the coffee cup full on the kitchen table, Joey bolted back out for his tools and returned with them to the basement. Working methodically now, he disassembled the piping on top of the heater, removed the fiberglass again, and drew back out the bag of money. Then he put the heater back together.

Two hours had elapsed, and the money bag was still at Joey's

aluminum matrix. Joey carefully edged out along the wooden ceiling beams. He lowered the bag of money into the space behind the front wall. Perfect! Feeling more confident, he tried to back out faster than he had climbed in. Then, with a sudden terrific jolt, Joey found himself on the floor of his mother's bedroom. He was too cranked up to feel any pain. It took a few instants to figure what had happened. He had momentarily blacked out. Around him on the floor were several bent pieces of aluminum stripping and two of the large tiles from the ceiling. Overhead was a gaping hole. Crawling backwards, his knee had missed the two-by-four beam. Joey had been thrown suddenly off-balance, and his whole 175-pound frame had crashed through the ceiling and plunged eight feet down to the floor, where he now lay looking up.

It took Joey another hour to repair the dropped ceiling. He bent the aluminum strips back into shape and refastened them, and then replaced the tiles. When he finished, Joey paused to inject himself with meth again and decided that the money wasn't safe between the two walls, so he climbed back up into the crawl space, edged back over to the front of the house, and fished it out again. . . .

*Detective Pat Laurenzi* had gone home to Roxborough late Thursday night. He had written reports of his interviews at Purolator and sent out the following message to area police departments:

Wanted: theft, RSP, Comsp. 2-26-81 appx. 2:30 PM on the hwy. Swanson and Wolf St. committed by 2 W/M's #1 20 to 30 yrs. light brown hair thin NFD #2 male were in a Maroon Chevy Malibu 1969 to 72. with a right front blue fender.

males took from the Hwy. 2 canvas bags from a yellow container that fell from a Purolator Truck bags contained the amount of appx. \$1.2 million dollars in cash in used \$100 bills Ser# unknown, money was picked up from the Federal Reserve Bank at 6th Arch St. 2-26-81. Bags may have a tag white in color with the name Atlantic National Bank of Ventnor, N.J. Bags were tied by a rope-type tie and crimped with lead. and further info contact F.B.I. or South Detective Special Invest Unit Det. Laurenzi.

When he came back in to work at about eight the next morning, there was a stack of telephone tips. Calls had started dribbling in after the evening news Thursday night, and as public interest grew, the tips accelerated. Every hundred-dollar bill in the region was suspect. People had seen the car in three states going in five different directions. One caller had seen the car in West Philadelphia by Drexel University. So Laurenzi got in his car and spent a few hours cruising through that part of town. Nothing. Then he drove back to precinct to take more calls.

He obtained a search warrant for the junkyard, in case the brother Piacentino had been less than forthcoming, but after driving over and surveying the fantastic expanse of debris, the detective realized that it would take weeks to conduct a proper search—there were simply too many places where the money could be hidden—and, besides, he tended to believe the brothers' story anyway.

Back at precinct again, Laurenzi knew he could do nothing but wait for something else to happen. At his gray metal desk, using a ruler as a straightedge, the detective drew a simple map of Swanson Street between Oregon and Wolf. He labeled in small squares the Purolator office and the junkyard, and drew a smaller square in the center right of the road and wrote next to it

"TUB." He put other details in the drawing. A few yards up from the place where the tub had fallen there was a telephone pole, so he drew a small circle and next to that wrote "pole."

Through that afternoon, Laurenzi cruised the neighborhood, familiarizing himself with the layout of streets at that furthermost eastern edge of his beat. They had thrown a large number of uninformed units into the neighborhood, on foot, in cars, even a helicopter. They were looking for a Chevy Malibu with signs of bodywork on the front end, but short of that, anything in the ballpark. He figured the brothers Piacentino might have been mistaken about the make or even the color. But so far the search had turned up nothing.

Waiting for something else to happen had stretched the day to frustrating lengths for Laurenzi. But the detective was not disheartened. Despite all the crazy telephone tips, he felt sure that whoever had picked up the money bags lived right here in this network of narrow streets. And if that was true, then the secret was bound to come out. This was South Philly. Nobody in these rowhouse blocks was going to find more than a million dollars without confiding the discovery to somebody. And once that someone knew, somebody else would get the news, then someone else, and so on. Laurenzi knew he only had to stick around and be ready.

He drove slowly, in widening circles, until he was about ten blocks away from Wolf and Swanson, then he reversed direction and worked his way gradually back to the center in smaller circles. Then he started over again.

## MARK BOWDEN ON "Finders Keepers: The Story of Joey Coyle"

My goal for this essay was to so thoroughly understand Joey Coyle's story that I could tell it with the intimacy and directness of fiction, and I'm happy with the way it turned out.

I was one of many reporters who worked on the story of the missing Purulator money during the frantic week Joey Coyle was on the run. The tale and its central character captivated Philadelphians. When I set out in the aftermath to piece the whole thing together, I saw the story as just a hilarious romp, with Coyle as a bumbling, lovably roguish Everyman.

I soon learned that Joey was a hopeless meth addict, and that the story, which had heretofore been strictly lighthearted, was colored from beginning to end by his addiction. At least one editor at the *Inquirer* wondered if I should just drop it at that point, since it wasn't the story we had all thought it was. But I came to see that the whole thing was about addiction. The money was just a slapstick symbol for Joey's true craving. I realized, as I sat down to write, that the story of Joey Coyle was a parable of addiction, of how hopeless and empty it is to assume success and happiness can be scooped up off the street or administered through a needle.

I started out with the ambition of writing creative nonfiction, inspired by writers like Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and many others. My whole journalism career, including my two books, has been devoted to becoming a better reporter and writer, and I've been tackling more and more ambitious projects as I've gone along. I have now begun supplementing my nonfiction work with fiction, partly because it's a way of writing more about my own experience, but also because it enables me to sit down and write without investing the tremendous amount of