

**Sean P. McCarthy**  
**from *A Gentleman of His Word***

Larry pulled over to the side of the road to pick some daisies. Jeff was dead. Larry still wasn't sure he really believed Jeff was dead—Jeff liked to play tricks—but there had been a mass and service just the day before, and people seemed to think it was true. And that was why Larry had stopped now to pick the daisies; the daisies were for Jacqui.

Jacqui had been Jeff's girlfriend, and she was beautiful. But because Larry was Larry, and Jeff was Jeff, and Jacqui was Jacqui, she was really Larry's girlfriend, too, and he realized that now; she, he, and Jeff had been one. The old CSNY son—"Helplessly Hoping"—played on the stereo inside Larry's head. The three of them used to play it in the car together, smoke a number. "*They are one person...they are two alone...they are three together...they are fooor...each other.*" For each other. And Larry needed to be there for her now

Larry examined the daisies. Daisies didn't normally grow in the fall, and here it was late October, so Larry knew these must be fall daisies. Long Island daisies. Larry had once worked for a florist, and he knew his flowers. Now he looked up at the window of the owner of the home where the daisies resided, but there was no one in sight. He pulled free a bunch and tossed them onto his passenger seat. Dank, he whispered.

The car was a 84 Chevy Nova. Once blue. It was a great car, and Larry had picked it up for 500 bucks. It needed new brakes, and you had to be careful or your feet went through the floor—Larry had put some boards over the floor in the back to remedy that—but other than that the car was solid. It just needed new upholstery, and new right front fender, and back bumper and rear left quarter panel, and probably a new transmission. Some little punks had spray painted

“I SUCK!” on the side in bright orange letters, but Larry was planning on getting the car repainted anyway.

It was Chris Pinkerton—Pinky—who had called Larry to tell him that Jeff was dead. It made no sense that Jeff was dead, and at first Larry laughed a little. But Pinky swore he was serious. Jeff. Dead. Larry pictured the car hitting the tree, the door flying open, and Jeff, not even waking, flying through the night, the stars bright above and around him. Arms spread wide like the wings of a bird.

After he had hung up the phone, Larry had taken off all his clothes and taken a walk down the street. But then his father had pulled up about three minutes later, and made Larry get in his squad car. People said Larry looked just like his father, but his father was bigger, and his hair was darker. He had been cop for like twenty years.

“What the f\*\*\* are you doing?” his father asked, scratching at his nuts as he did.

Larry smiled. “Walking.”

“Without any clothes on? Are you chewing acid again?”

“I’ve never chewed acid in my life,” Larry said. “I let it dissolve on my tongue.”

His father reached over and smacked the side of his head. “You know that if someone else had seen you first, another cop, you’d be locked up right now.”

“It’s casual.”

“It’s illegal, you moron.”

“It’s a sign of respect for the dead.”

“Who died?”

“I’m not sure I can divulge that information yet.”

His father had marched him into the house, wrestled him down and tied him to the bed with some rope from the back porch and it was later that night that Larry saw Jeff sitting in the corner of his bedroom, smiling. Half his head was missing, one eye. But he still had those big white teeth, those dimples.

“Ishkabibel?” he asked. It was their code word for “Can I have a beer?” Larry’s Uncle Ned used to tell him that he looked like someone named “Ishkabibel,” but Larry didn’t know who that was. Ned would laugh, rub his head, and say “What? Me worry?”

“I could use one right now,” Larry said.

Jeff had laughed again. “So get out of bed.”

“I seem to be having some difficulty with that at the moment,” Larry said, pulling a bit at the bonds on his wrists. “Besides. Aren’t you supposed to be dead?”