

Chapter 1: Daniel by Gary Geick

To say that Daniel Harrison was upset when he walked into Prologue Café would have been a colossal understatement. It wouldn't be easy for anyone to get from Kitchener, Ontario to Toronto on a Friday evening during rush hour in the middle of winter, but it had been particularly difficult for Daniel, who was only 18 years old, and had no car.

The trip from Laurentian Hills, where he lived with his parents, to Ted Reeves Community Arena, should have only taken three and a half hours by bus. With the weather, though, it had taken nearly five. The Greater Toronto Area, which included the districts of Halton, Peel, York, and Durham, had received five inches of snow. That alone would have made travel difficult, but because the temperature had risen to three degrees Celsius, it had turned the highway into a hell of slush and ice.

Of course, seeing as he came from a rich family, Daniel could think of better ways for him to travel, but his father believed that certain things created character in a person. And once his father had his say, there was no working around it. "Just be grateful to have someone picking you up," his father had added when he'd complained, which Daniel interpreted as, "If you keep complaining, you will not have a ride home," which was Daniel's cue to shut his mouth.

As the bus crawled along the 401 at a snail's pace, it had seemed to Daniel that there were almost as many cars in the ditch as there were in the highway. Most had caught ice and slid safely into the ditch on either side of the road, where they would be forced to wait for who knows how long for a tow truck to bail them out. But there were plenty of accidents as well, and Daniel had seen one as it happened. Five cars ahead of the bus, a Volkswagen Rabbit had hit a strip of ice, and as the driver pumped his brakes, his car spun and did a full four-hundred-and-fifty-degree turn. There had been a three car's distance between this car and the one behind it.

Even though the second car tried to stop, it could not. It caught the same icy patch that the first had, slid, and T-boned the first car. The third car rear ended the second car, the fourth car rear ended the third, and the fifth slid safely to a stop behind the fourth.

It was a mess but, luckily for Daniel, and for all the other passengers on the bus, Highway 401 had 18 lanes. The bus driver slowed the bus to a stop behind the fifth car, and once the action was over, he changed into the lane two over from the one he'd been in and carried on as if nothing had happened. As they passed the Volkswagen Rabbit, all the passengers grouped together at the window, but the Rabbit's windows were shattered, so there wasn't much to be seen. The way that the passenger side door had been crushed in, though, it could be assumed that if anyone had been sitting on that side, then they were with the angels.

The driver of the car behind it was sprawled across his windshield. He was alone, and he didn't appear to be moving.

All along the 401, it was like this, and the emergency services were out in full force. Everywhere Daniel looked, he saw ambulances, fire trucks, policemen, helicopters, and tow trucks. Occasionally, he saw people being torn out of their vehicles with the Jaws of Life or being carried away on stretchers and in body bags. At first it was shocking and horrifying, but it quickly became mundane and uninteresting.

Daniel had to change buses more times than he cared to think about, and along the way, he listened to music and read a book. Under the Dome by Stephen King had come out earlier that year, and he'd brought it with him. He'd known that the trip would be long, and he'd come prepared. He'd given himself the extra time he'd presumed he would need to account for the weather, and when he'd left the house at two o'clock in the afternoon, he'd assumed that it would all be worth it. Thus, he was not bothered by the weather, the road conditions, or even the ride itself, which was bumpy as hell. He had his music, his book, and his destination.

Daniel Harrison was a Roller Derby enthusiast and his favorite team, the Orangeville Roller Derby Girls, were playing at the Ted Reeves Community League. The Orangeville girls hadn't been doing too well this year, but Daniel was loyal, and he held out hope for them. He really did think that they had a chance against the Hogtown Horror All Star Team, even if the match was on the Torontonians home turf. No matter who won or lost, though, Daniel knew that he would have a good time. If all that mattered was the result, he could have looked the score up on the internet the next day. But it was about so much more. It was about the fast-paced nature of the game, and the energy it brought into the building. Daniel had been to Hockey games in the past. Hockey is a national pastime in Canada, but Daniel swore that it lacked the intensity and vitality that the ladies brought to their sport.

There were other draws, too. Unlike major league sports, when you went to a Roller Derby event, you had the opportunity to meet your heroes in person, shake their hands, hug them if you dared, and ask them to autograph your merchandise. This was important to Daniel because, not only was Daniel a huge fan of the Orangeville Roller Derby Girls, but he also had a fan-boy crush on their Jammer, Romeo's Killer.

Daniel put away his book as he thought about Romeo's Killer. She was just under six feet tall but, somehow, she looked shorter than she actually was. She was strong, but not overly muscular. She was only three years older than he was, and her small perky breasts complemented the rest of her body perfectly. Her face was pretty, but not outstandingly sexy. That didn't matter though, because it wasn't her physical attributes that drew Daniel to her. It was the spunk and attitude that she brought to the character of Romeo's Killer that drove the crowd to stand and cheer; that, and her performance in the arena. Romeo's Killer was probably the best player in the league. She was so good that other cities had tried to entice her into joining their teams, which was almost unheard of in this sport. She had stuck with the Orangeville girls, though, because Orangeville was her home, and her teammates were her family.

Daniel was a block and a half away from his stop, so he rang the bell. When the bus stopped, he thanked the driver, got off, and he frowned as he looked around. He had forgotten how ugly some parts of Toronto were. It was no matter, though. This was the last leg of his journey. He hopped on the Light Rail Train, taking it from Main Street Station to St. Gerrard Street East Station, and when he got off, the arena would be just across the street.

As Daniel approached the arena, the first thing he noticed was that there were only three cars in the parking lot. This was very strange because the doors had opened half an hour earlier, and usually the parking lot would be full by now. Daniel's heart sank in his chest, and his first thought was that he'd gotten the wrong date. When he arrived at the event board, though, everything seemed to be as he'd expected. Orangeville Derby Girls Vs the Hogtown Horror All Star Team. Friday, December 7, 2009. Game Starts at 8. Doors open at 7.

Daniel pulled the poster off the board and brought it with him as he entered the arena. Looking around, he saw that the building was completely deserted. He looked down the first corridor he came to, cupped his hands to his mouth, and called out, "Hello, is there anyone here?!?!?"

After a minute, a middle-aged woman hurried out of one of the offices. She looked tired and frazzled, but Daniel had no sympathy for her. He was beginning to feel very angry. He held up the poster in his hand, shook it, and shouted, "I travelled five hours on the bus from Kitchener to get here to see a Roller Derby! What the hell is going on here?"

The woman threw up her hands and said, "I'm sorry. The Orangeville girls hit ice on highway 10. They're fine, but their van is in a ditch. Some people went out to collect them, but they won't even be able to get a tow truck out there until tomorrow. We are offering refunds, but we are also going to reschedule the match. If you'd like to keep your ticket, it will also be valid for that event."

When the words hit Daniel's ears, it felt like he had been hit by a Mac Truck. He wanted to rage, but there was nobody to rage at. None of this was anybody's fault. It was winter and their accident wasn't unlike any of the other's he'd seen on the way into Toronto. Tears began to stream out of his eyes and his head went hazy, and if not for the chair and table against the wall, he might have fallen to the floor.

Daniel sat down on the chair closest to him and the woman approached him. It was clear that she felt bad, but it was also clear that he was making her uncomfortable. "I am truly sorry," she said again. "I wish I could do something..."

When Daniel didn't stop crying, the woman reached into her pocket and pulled out a gift card. She handed it to Daniel and said, "Why don't you take this and go to the coffee shop across the street. It's worth ten dollars, and maybe you'll feel better after you've had a cup of peppermint cocoa."