

Control

by Jerry Ratch

Paul and Mary Jo lived in an apartment at the top of a long, dark flight of stairs that were so high, I remember as if it were yesterday thinking, the night she pushed him down the stairs, he would surely be dead by the time he hit the landing at the bottom.

To our horror he tumbled head over heels all the way down. But he didn't die. He got up at the bottom. He was a tall, lanky guy with glasses that always hung off his nose, and he always, always wore a trench coat, since they used to live in San Francisco where it rained a lot.

Paul straightened himself up, looked at us while brushing himself off, shrugged his narrow shoulders, giving off this goofy grin as if to acknowledge he'd been wrong to argue about going out for a beer with the gang of us waiting at the foot of the stairs, and he trudged all the way up that long flight, saying: "Good night. I don't think I'm going out."

Which was exactly what she wanted, for him to stay home. "Think about the baby, Paul" she said. We could see him nodding at the top stair, though I was always of the opinion that his head had been injured from the fall.

Nevertheless, it worked, and Mary Jo got her way with him as she always did, though none of us were convinced that she'd even been pregnant. She wasn't by the next month, anyway, when she got her period as usual.

