

4:45pm, Philadelphia

by Nonnie Augustine

He stays a couple of yards behind me as we slog uphill. I try to diffuse the tension with a coy toss of head, slip on wet leaves. My ankle rolls and I splat noisily down. From my new angle his beard looks less stylish—bristles straggle all up his neck. He maintains a steely-eyed glare but handsomely offers his hand and I'm glad he's wearing leather gloves because my own hand is filthy with bits of gravel and gutter stuff. He grunts as he pulls me up. (I'm heavier than I look.) I curse in Swedish and he looks startled. My crappy orthostatic hypotension kicks in and, whooshing, I swoon into his arms. I catch his smirk and try to throw it back but I'm too dizzy. He pushes me down onto a nearby row house stoop, and forces my head between my knees. I rest, take stock. I feel better, almost crafty, and stand up, carefully. With a grim wave of his iron gray gun he points toward the bridge in the dim mist up the hill. I slink on, again ahead of him, plotting. I try again to diffuse the tension with a coy toss of head, slip on wet leaves, my ankle rolls, and I splat but less noisily. From my new angle the Russian's beard looks silly. He rolls his eyes but offers his hand. As he pulls me up I knee him, kick the gun out of his hand as he goes down on the wet, slimy, leafy, sidewalk. The gun goes off, hits nothing that I'm aware of. The bastard curses in English, (he's been deep cover) glowers up at me. I pick up the gun and gloat in Swedish.

