

# *Looking for Will*



*Jane  
Collins-Philippe*

## *Missing*

The day sixteen month old William Benjamin Dewhurst went missing was an especially fine one. Although his parents, David and Jan Dewhurst would maintain that the heat was merciless. That the sun made eyes water and set nerves on end. It was mid May, 1969. For the northern region of Ontario, Canada, it was exceptional weather. Sometimes reaching over 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The Dewhursts were returning home after a holiday in Calgary. Over the previous few days they'd traveled through Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Arriving at last in Ontario was a welcome relief. Home loomed on the horizon. Only one more night in an hotel. David was sure they'd reach Toronto the following evening.

An ongoing dispute had occupied the young couple all day. The heat and humidity served to inflame their tempers even more. By the time they pulled into the parking lot of The Sunrise Motel late that afternoon both were fit to be tied. David went immediately to book a room. While he was doing so his wife was leaning into the back seat, about to lift the light cotton blanket under which she believed their son to be sleeping. Her tanned arms reached out. "Come on little guy, you've been sleeping long enough. Up you get now." The woman's foul mood sweetened in anticipation as she pulled back the checkered blanket. But her calm didn't last. Instead of her child, Jan Dewhurst found nothing but a bundle of crumpled pillows and the mohair shawl that so resembled his golden hair. Suddenly, she was gasping like a fish out of water. In a panic, she began tossing aside folds of scattered blankets and discarded clothing. Walking casually back toward the car her husband heard her screaming, "Will! Where are you? *William!*"

"What in God's name have you done with him?" was the first response to come out of David Dewhurst's mouth.

The police were called upon immediately. In the motel office, David paced the floor. He ranted. "I'm an attorney at law," he kept reminding the motel owner who assured him that the police would not move faster because of it. By the time Sergeant Patricia Hayes arrived the child's mother was in a dreadful state. And for all his bluster, the father was useless. He scowled at the female trauma expert, muttering something

about their not rating a proper policeman. Sergeant Hayes ignored his comment. For the sake of comfort and privacy they moved quickly to their rental unit. There, between sobs of anger, grief and disbelief, the basic facts of their story were eked out.

“We’d been visiting my grandmother in Calgary and were on our way back home,” Jan Dewhurst began in a voice that couldn’t stay still. “The past few days we’ve driven long distances so this morning we didn’t leave our motel until about 11:00. Will . . . our son’s name is William but we call him Will.” She circled the room, holding her throat with trembling fingers. Blinking back tears. “Will was sleeping in the back seat.” Her hands flittered like leaves in the air. “There were piles of clothes, you know, because of the changing weather, and some blankets and quilts that my grandmother gave us. Will was snuggled in amongst them. At times we could hardly see him.” Her burst of laughter bordered on hysteria.

“Nobody cares about your grandmother Jan, or the mess in the car,” hissed David. “All we need are the facts.” Without missing a beat he took charge. “We kept driving along the Trans Canada Highway until around one o’clock or so when we pulled over at a roadside inn for something to eat. The Nordale I believe it was called.”

Jan nodded. “That’s where Will got the balloon.”

“Balloon?”

“Never mind the *bloody balloon*,” huffed David, his eyes rolling upwards.

Jan touched her husband’s arm. Tears dripped onto her knuckles. “But it’s gone too, David. The balloon is gone.”

“Let’s hear about the balloon.” The sergeant pressed closer. David sighed in frustration as his wife went on.

“There was a family at the restaurant. One of the boys, I think it was his birthday, had a bunch of balloons. He gave Will a big red one on a yellow streamer.”

“For Christ’s sake,” cried David. “Who cares about a balloon? We’ve got to find Will!”

“Of course, Mr. Dewhurst,” Sergeant Hayes said through gritted teeth, “but if this balloon is still with your son it could help us.” David threw his head back with a groan.

“Please go on, Mrs. Dewhurst.”

Jan wiped her face and straightened her shoulders. Trying her best to resist the grief that wanted to paste her to the floor. “Well, as I said, the boy gave Will a red balloon.” Her mouth curled into what was almost a smile. “He was so happy; he’d never had one before.” She looked toward her husband. “Remember,” she said with a sob, “how he made everyone laugh when he called it a *bawoon*?”

Lifting a hand in front of his face, David coughed and turned away. Jan replied shakily to the next question. “The balloon wasn’t attached to Will’s wrist, but he had hold of the streamer as we got into the car to leave.” When asked if the thing may have floated out an open window while they were driving, she replied, “No, I saw it clinging to the rear window when we stopped because of the flat tire.”

“A flat? Tell me about that.”

David intervened; shooting words like bullets. “A while after leaving the restaurant we had a puncture.”

“How long after?”

“Maybe forty-five minutes. And it took around twenty minutes to change the tire.”

“Mr. Dewhurst, do you think it possible that someone could have . . . ?”

“The place was a no man’s land. There wasn’t a soul on the road. We were completely alone.”

Jan nodded her agreement. Sergeant Hayes encouraged the couple to be more precise in locating the stretch of highway where they stopped. All that could ascertained was that it was remote and less than an hour from the place where they had lunch. Hayes asked the couple to describe what happened.

David opened his mouth but Jan had already begun. “Luckily we were under a tree so the car was in the shade; it’s been so hot lately.” She hesitated with a wary glimpse at her husband. “I went to help. Will stayed in the car. We’d made up a sort of bed for him on the seat.” Almost pleadingly, her eyes rested on the woman in uniform. “Outside the restaurant there was a playground. Will and the older kids played together there for a while. He was exhausted afterward. When the puncture happened he was fast asleep.” Jan remembered reaching over her seat to pull Will’s blanket away from his mouth. The recollection flooded her mind with images she’d been trying to avoid. Images of her

child's beautiful face. A face she might never see again. Suddenly, she was gagging. Like a person rising to the surface of a sea, searching desperately for air before submerging again.