

J. J. STEINFELD

PAST ARTISTRY

I can't describe how much I feel like changing my name. Not that I don't like Derrick Rellesmurn, but after what I've found out recently my name feels unreal, fabricated, worse than a lie. A Rellesmurn painting is worth a tidy little sum, just on the reputation of my name. A name I've been building artistically for thirty years, so changing it could plunge me back to square one. But everything seems wrong now and my name feels false, untrue. *Untrue*. What a smash-in-the-face revelation: for so long I had valued the truth, wrapped it around myself, considered it the basis of my art. I had become a worshipper of the truth. But my artistic pursuit of the truth sure hasn't prevented me from making money, lots of money. I don't feel any contradiction in that, but I don't want to get into any long discussion about art and money, the purity of creativity as opposed to the crassness of clawing after the bucks. I sold my first painting when I was fourteen and I've been making a good living from art since I was in my mid-twenties. I always seemed to have a way of attracting attention to my work, a strong hook: the artist who was nearly killed when he was fourteen by a suburban sniper who was never caught. All the elements for delectable myth and irrepressible legend, not to mention for the occasional horror story. I've had a full and fortunate creative life, a solid artistic career.

Then I turn to the sad-looking old man sitting on the bar stool next to me in an upscale air-conditioned lounge and he stares at me and I try without any luck to pull my eyes away from his gaze. If not here in this lounge, he would have found me somewhere else. He had tracked me down, this frail yet relentless hunter, me the human trophy less than an arm's reach away. Softly, without being threatening, he told me that he had known of my approximate location for about thirty years, but he had waited. Waited as he grew older and frailer. Waited until this wretchedly hot day in the middle of summer.

I had lived in order to paint, literally so, and what could be clearer, almost as if it were a shouted order from the Heavens. Paint, you worthless

