

MICHAEL  
KIMBALL

'ONE OF THE FINEST EXPONENTS OF THE THRILLER' SUNDAY EXPRESS

GREEN  
GIRLS

# Green Girls

Michael Kimball

headline

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For my daughter Sarah

## Thank You

Paul Callahan

Richard Callahan

Brian Chernack

Kevin Farley

Chris Fahy

Jodi Frechette

Nancy Graham

Rick Hautala

Phil Jones

Chuck Landry

Paul Mann

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Note: Although some character names were borrowed from friends, personalities, relationships and events are totally fictional.

One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them . . .

Robert Frost, *Birches*

## *PROLOGUE*

---

A great time to figure things out. The young man plummets from the top of the bridge, his mind scattered in the ocean wind, reaching for the sky, silent, weightless, balanced against the crescent moon.

Time slows down as the trussed steel of the bridge whispers past. The young man can not only smell the river that rises to meet him, he has time to consider how a particular mustiness tinges the odor.

It's metabolism, the reason time slows down. Hummingbirds, for example, have such a high metabolic rate, they perceive human movement in slow motion. To a fruit fly, we are statues; their day on earth lasts a lifetime.

In humans, fear increases metabolism . . . which is why the victim of a car wreck will describe the accident as though it happened in slow motion. Extreme fear causes extreme time stall. What is the limit? It's long been acknowledged that some people who fall to their deaths actually die of heart failure before they land. Perhaps they die of old age.

In the 4.03 seconds it takes to fall 250 feet, from the top of the Piscataqua River Bridge to the water, a man can do a lot of thinking. Not that Jacob William Winter is watching his life pass before him.

He is simply seeing how things came to be.



# *PART ONE*



## CHAPTER ONE

---

'My wife didn't bail me?'

'Apparently, someone beat her to it,' said the lawyer, unlatching his briefcase. 'Your wife did bring your car, though, and packed some things for you.'

'Packed what?'

The lawyer pulled out a manila folder and set it on the table in front of him. 'You were bailed by a woman named Alix Callahan.'

Jacob didn't recognize the name at first.

'A friend?'

Jacob shrugged, mystified. 'What did Laura pack for me?'

'Clothes, toilet articles, sleeping bag, your computer. You don't know anyone named Alix Callahan?'

'There was an Alix Callahan in college with me, fifteen years ago,' Jacob said, but he was thinking more about the sleeping bag. 'We weren't friends. Anything but. Why is she bailing me?'

'Maybe she's a fan,' the lawyer told him in a sympathetic way. 'I'm sorry, but I'm on a tight schedule today. Can you tell me what happened?' He snapped on his tape recorder.

Jacob said, 'Whatever's in the police report.'

'The report says you attacked the victim, then proceeded to demolish your house.'

'I don't remember much,' Jacob said. He could see his old Mazda outside the courthouse window – a cardboard box pressed up against the rear window. After two nights in the York County Jail, all he wanted was to leave, go home and talk to Laura. 'She brought my sleeping bag?'

The young attorney fidgeted with the pleat of his wrinkled trousers, waiting for Jacob to get it through his head. His wife didn't want him coming home.

He'd barely slept since he was locked up, pacing and pacing, needing to know. Now another part of his brain churned with this new information, about the woman who'd paid his bail.

'Mr. Winter, I'm sorry, I don't mean to rush you, but I have a two-thirty appointment,' said the lawyer in a careful way. Men, in particular, tended to be careful around Jacob. Six-two and solidly proportioned, when he frowned – even when he smiled – it seemed a muscular function.

Frowning now, lifting his eyes to the plaster ceiling as though it were a movie screen. Over the past 36 hours, Jacob had replayed the episode relentlessly: coming home from the Red Sox game with his son Max, seeing Price Ashworth's green Z3 in the driveway.

He told the lawyer everything as it replayed: entering the house, he can smell the dinner before he sees it; in fact there's nothing on the kitchen table; the evidence is on the stove and counter: the empty lobster pot, the soup pot, the salad bowl, oily with remnants.

Even if Jacob wanted to abandon the film, he could not. The same scenes kept looping over and over in his mind.

'Looks like someone had a nice dinner,' Max says, taking an ice cream bar out of the freezer.

Jacob thinks he can hear the Red Sox game playing. But the radio in the kitchen is turned off. And they have no television.

It's impossible to forget this much: it's the way he steps into the hallway . . . and stops there when he realizes the radio is playing in their bedroom. Then Laura comes out of the dining room. She stops when she sees him. It's the look of concentration on her face, the strange way she meets his eyes, or maybe the way she says to Max, 'Hon, go down to the field and play, okay?'

'Play what?' Max's mouth is full of ice cream.

'Daddy and I have to talk about something.'

'Okay, champ?' Jacob says, with a tightness he hopes Max won't detect.

Max complies, but only after giving his dad a quizzical scowl.

Jacob stands there listening to the boy's footsteps tumble down the porch steps, then he walks to the dining room without speaking, while his head churns with noise. Laura follows him, saying, 'Jake, wait.'

She's his wife of twelve years, Price Ashworth his former psychiatrist. Twice in the past two weeks he has come home from baseball practice to find Laura sitting on the couch talking to Price on the phone. She's explained that Price was thinking of moving his office and was seeking her counsel. Now Jacob stands in the dining-room doorway, his head humming, his stomach clenched, while Price sits in his chair.

The table is set for dinner, actually its aftermath: two red lobster shells on the good Italian stoneware, oyster-minestrone soup, the half-eaten loaf of Italian bread on a cutting board, the half-drunk bottle of wine. Of this much, Jacob remembers every detail: the twin candles flickering.

The stone coffee pot and mugs. Cream in the matching pitcher.

Price Ashworth speaks first, in his assured way. 'The timing could have been better, to say the least.' As if this were one of those episodes that might turn into a good story over time.

The movie flickers out of this war-torn corner of Jacob's mind, and he cannot stop it. Yes, he can even remember the label on the wine bottle. He stands there with his heart pounding behind his eyes. He can't think of a word to say.

'Jake,' Laura says with a shiver in her voice, 'we have to talk.' She seats herself in her place, beside Price. She's so beautiful, Jacob thinks, even in memory, the way her dark hair sweeps over the faithless flush of her cheek.

Price shows Jacob his hand. It might be the start of an apology, but Price Ashworth is not accustomed to apologizing beneath his station. Pompous when sober, wine exalts him. No, not apologizing, he's gesturing Jacob to sit down – at his own table, the table he built for their home. Table, chairs, hutch – Jacob built them all himself, with hand tools – as he's built all the furniture in the house, cupboards and cabinets, the bookcases, end tables, coffee table, bedside tables, kitchen table, kitchen chairs.

Jacob does sit, across the table from Laura. Three years younger than Price, and lumbering by comparison, his chest is quaking, and his lungs are filled. The ballgame continues playing from the bedroom clock-radio, a small, state-of-the-art piece of hardware he had bought for Laura with the advance on his third book.

Now Price looks at Laura and says, 'Stay focused. Natural breathing.' He's coaching her.

A crowd's cheer erupts from the bedroom radio. Laura takes a deep breath. Her owl-brown eyes are dilated black.

When she exhales, her breath trembles. 'Jake, our marriage,' she begins again, but she needs another breath. She looks at Price, helplessly. He offers his hand. She takes it.

Jacob stands up. His chair falls. He floats out of the room, into the hallway, down to the bedroom. The ballgame plays on. He walks to the bed, an exquisite, hand-tooled piece of mahogany furniture that took him half a year to build – his engagement ring to Laura. Inset in the headboard is a backlit, stained-glass panel that Price himself had created for the couple, as a wedding gift, an artless depiction of two pines overlooking a moonlit ocean. The crescent moon is, in plain fact, a yellow isosceles triangle.

'Jake, please. Can we go back in the dining room and sit down?' Laura has followed him in. Price stands beside her.

Jacob walks over to the radio. It's the radio that's getting to him. 'I thought you knew it was a *make-up* double header,' he says to Laura in a tightly controlled voice. Then he explains to Price, 'In a make-up double header, people with rain-check tickets only get to see the first game, the one that got rained out last month.'

'Jake, please?' Laura says. Is she crying? Apologizing?

Jacob stares at the square of stained glass on the headboard. A powerful wave comes over him, and he snaps the radio's plug out of the electrical outlet. The room becomes suddenly, contemplatively quiet. His heart is dying.

Price says, 'Jacob, is baseball really what you are wanting to discuss at this point in time?'

The movie flickers. The radio leaps.

'*Jake!*'

Laura shouts. Glass shatters. A window shade sputters up and sunlight bursts into the room.

Then something shudders up from Jacob's chest, a

sickening, dull horror at the sight of Laura bent over Price on the bed, holding his head in her hands . . .

‘Keep going.’

Jacob stared dizzily at the table. ‘I hit him.’

‘And?’

‘I must have. With the radio. I don’t know.’

The lawyer studied his notepad as if he were afraid to challenge Jacob’s reticence. ‘Dr. Ashworth went to the hospital with a severe concussion,’ he said. ‘He could have died. Your entire house looks like a tornado went through.’ He had photos in his hand. ‘Looks like some very nice furniture – which I understand you made yourself?’

Jacob wouldn’t take the photos. His mind was engaged: had he been too self-absorbed? Too caught up in his work?

‘Personally speaking’ – the lawyer turned off the tape recorder – ‘if I discovered my wife and friend—’

‘Not a friend. Her employer.’

‘Another man,’ the lawyer corrected himself. ‘If I found them in my dining room having a candle-lit dinner, I would’ve shown the guy the door and maybe given him a concussion doing so. You’d have a hard time finding a judge and jury who’d say I wasn’t somewhat justified.’

Jacob shook his head. Kittery was a small town. Did Max know what had happened? Did he know what his mother had done?

‘Here’s the problem,’ the attorney said, and he waited to continue until Jacob met his eyes.

‘Dr. Ashworth never said anything about a dinner. He claims they were sitting at the table, having a cup of coffee, waiting for you to come home – when you marched in and attacked him in a psychotic rage.’