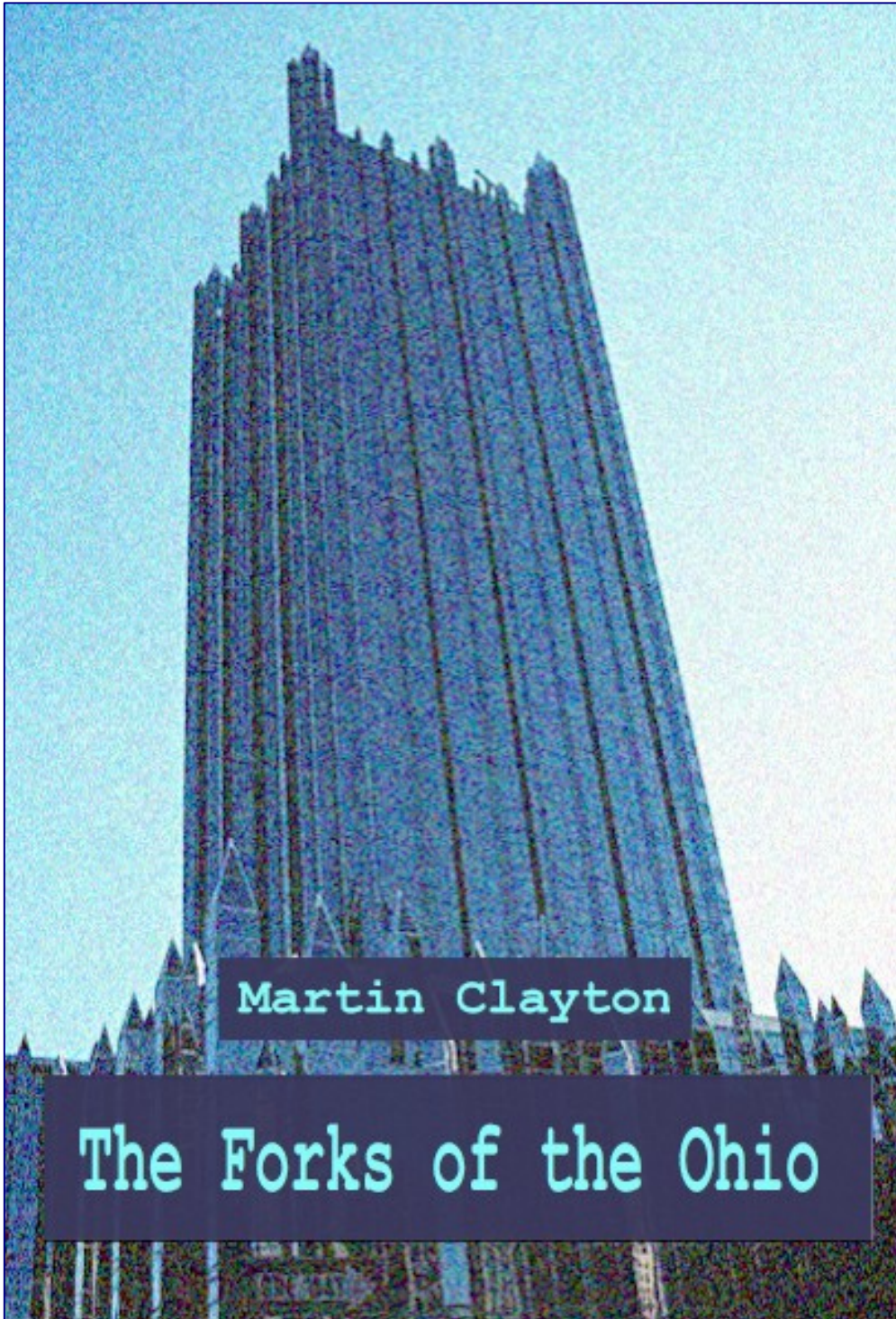


Free excerpt from "The Forks of the Ohio" by Martin
Clayton



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Clayton

After temporarily removing my belt, and shoes, and going through security, I was allowed into departures, and headed for the food hall, where I had loosely arranged to meet Miss Novitski. I wondered if it was Miss? Maybe it was Mrs ... the conversation had never wandered into the marital section, and I had not even thought of looking for a ring. Oh well, what did it matter anyhow? I was going to Pittsburgh.

There was a bar in the food hall that I'd been in a couple of times, and we'd mentioned on the flight, so I was hoping to meet up with her there.

The 'Britishness' in me refused to let me simply turn up though, I just had to confirm the arrangement, so I stopped at a rocking chair, and sat down.

Philadelphia airport has a thing for white rocking chairs, as you'll know if you've been there. They are very comfortable on the whole, but I suspect they are

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there to make the place look more homely, less 'awayly' - obviously not a real word. They do brighten the place up, and it's always good for the soul to have a rock. It takes you back to being a child I guess.

I had found my mobile phone, and switched it on. Whilst I waited for the airwaves to catch up, and send me six hundred welcome messages, I hunted for the envelope, which Carrie-Ann had written her number on. I found several items that I couldn't remember packing in my hand luggage, including a cd by Izzy Stradlin, which would come in useful if I ever sobered up enough to drive a car. The envelope was bigger than I remembered, when I finally found it, A5 size I think it's called. It was addressed to Carrie-Ann Novitski, 26 Highbury Grove, Islington, London, England (the world?), and another address was written on the back: somebody else's name, a Mr. Lewis Pine, who lived in Akron. I wasn't sure that Carrie-Ann knew she'd thrown all of this out. I'd make sure, and give it back to her when I met up with her.

My mobile phone was obviously upset after its eight hours of down time, and was beeping away like crazy.

Two messages from Rachel, that's my girlfriend / ex-girlfriend / whatever, both saying that I was an asshole, and don't bother coming back, and three others from an assortment of friends, all hoping that I'd had a safe

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flight, and imploring me to get in touch. Oh, and a message from some network provider welcoming me to the area, and offering me lots of premium services which I couldn't afford to miss.

I skipped to the main menu, intending to go back to them later, and dialled Carrie-Ann's number.

The phone rang twice, and then picked up.

"Hello?" an oddly quiet sounding woman's voice answered.

"Carrie-Ann?" I asked, uncertainly.

"Who's calling?"

This was a bit strange, and I was starting to think she'd given me a bogus number to get rid of me. It was like somebody was intentionally trying to sound like an older woman. I thought I'd try one last thing before I hung up.

"Hi, my name is Mike. I've been given this number, and I'm trying..."

"Mike, hi, it's me," came the sudden change of voice.

Odd maybe? Keep reading...

"Mike? Are you still there?" This was definitely Carrie-Ann now.

"Yes. You just had me fooled there for a minute. Are you screening calls?" I asked.

"Well you never know who's gonna be at the end of the line," she replied. "It could have been a crank call."

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"I've been accused of worse in my time," I admitted.

"Oh dear", she said sounding all sympathetic, and very Marilyn Monroe all of a sudden, "well I'd better buy you a beer to make up for upsetting you then."

Happy... birthday... Mr... Pres - i - dent... Sing along now!

"That sounds like a plan", I said. "Where are you?"

"I'm just finishing up eating, out in the food court, and can be in the bar we were talking about in two minutes".

"Sounds good, I'll see you in there".

"Great", she said, and hung up.

Maybe she fancied a trip to Pittsburgh after the funeral to loosen up?

I gathered up my belongings, and headed towards the bar, which was about fifty yards in front of me, on the right. As I approached, I saw Carrie-Ann appear from the food court on the left, and was just about to wave, when somebody stepped out about ten yards in front of me, blocking my view. He was a big guy, certainly over six feet tall, with long black hair tied up in a pony-tail. He was wearing blue jeans, boots, and a red and black checked jacket / shirt type of thing. He was facing away from me, and headed directly for Carrie-Ann with obvious intent. Instinctively I ducked to the right behind a pillar, and as I did so I caught sight of Carrie-Ann's face. She was wearing a look of absolute shock. It was

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clear that she knew this guy, and didn't exactly look pleased to see him.

I was behind the pillar now though, not able to see anything, and wondering what my next move was. Did my new persona include saving damsels in distress? Or was this a good time to turn, and head for the city on three rivers?

One thing I did realise though, was that I was standing, with my back to the pillar, looking a bit like James Bond, and that I'd better revert to a natural look quickly, before airport security pulled people off of watching the snakes at immigration, and sent them out looking for John McClean.

Ippyky-Ay!