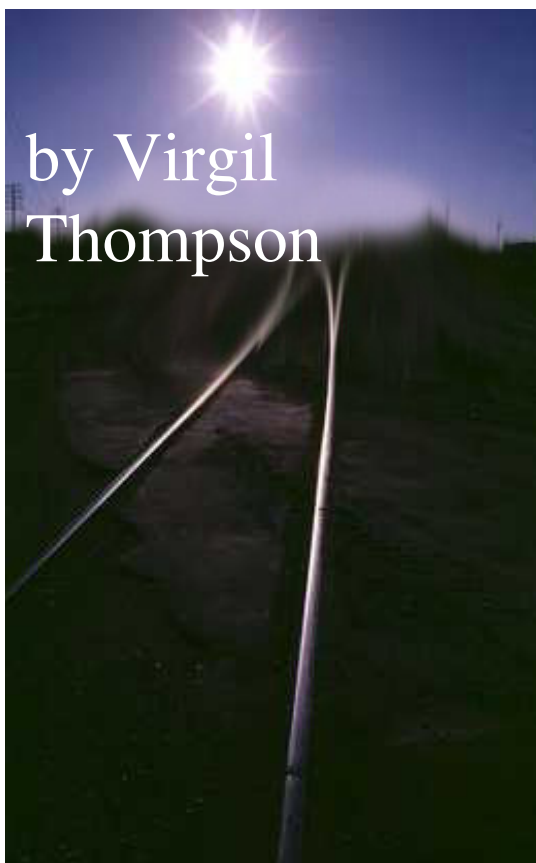


THE BEAST



When he got up Thursday, my attorney Victor Natri had no idea that fourteen hours later he would cower in a suffocating and stitchless blackness without air conditioning and refrigeration. The sensation of being lost—lost at night—was most unsettling. Victor lived alone. After losing power at the midtown office, he bumped through the messy human tide into the canyons of Manhattan and reached his brownstone stinking of sweat. His nerves slathered with gin, he curled beside a radio purchased after 9/11 and for which he had remembered to stock D-cell batteries. There were similar power troubles in Connecticut, WLIB said. Stirred by the memory of urgent business, Victor hurried to issue an overdue warning through his cell phone. But by ten o'clock the phone lines were overloaded, and I was beyond his help.

When I got dressed Thursday morning, I didn't know August 14 was the day I was supposed to die. And that the hour and method of my death had been scripted by three men who were not killers, not as you would expect, but who were in every material way prepared to commit murder.

By 4:30 Thursday afternoon, my estate in Greenley, Connecticut was on generator power. The ominous East Coast blackout hit like a freak storm, devastating several towns while sparing others at random.

My kidnapers were not strangers. It would have been Ruben Szivos, the retired detective, who handled the reconnaissance, mapped my nights and days, ultimately choosing *the* day. Szivos's accomplices, Bernard and Lawrence Cormier, were highly motivated amateurs.

I have called the Cormiers come-alongs, and I'm sticking to it, although Bernard Cormier most likely campaigned for and funded my murder. I picture Szivos in the later hours of preparation, eyeing the senior Cormier, dark-haired and gray-eyed Bernard, warning Cormier that the summary execution of a human being was not what he, Cormier, thought. And there was the possibility of arrest, prosecution. Szivos probably talked a lot about the last part, pumping up Cormier to handle police interviews. By then, Cormier had developed a squint, the habit of a man in constant pain.