

IGGY (Iguana Iguana) — A Novel (Chapter)

by Rick Rofihe

Chapter One — SURPRISE PARTY

Jocelyn didn't leave Virgil because he always was saying the thing was as old as he was, which was impossible, and perhaps even he knew that. She could have cared less. But the *timing*.

It was Virgil's birthday, a Wednesday, and he became thirty-six years old, though without expecting much recognition of it, even if, of course, his wife Jocelyn and some of the people at work knew. Herb, Phil, and Angie in his car-pool certainly knew.

The car-pool. If it had been *his* week to drive, Virgil would have arrived home by himself that Wednesday—at least then he would have had the car. The way it was turning out, he was going to be the very first to be dropped off by the others, so if nothing else, at that point he wouldn't be completely alone—but then Virgil never had been *completely* alone; that much was the truth.

Virgil, in the back seat, wasn't looking at the house, but Angie, in front of him, legs stretched up over the dash and toes pressed against the windshield as she likes to do, was. “No curtains,” she said right away, as Phil slowed down the car and pulled up to the curb. “Virge—did Jocelyn say anything about sending them out for cleaning today?”

“Your car's not here, either,” added Herb from the other side of the back seat. In the summer Virgil and Jocelyn always left their car out front or in the driveway.

“Something's *wrong*,” said Angie.

“*Nothing's* wrong,” said Phil. “Today's his birthday and it's got to be something like, you know, a surprise party.” He shut off the

engine. "We'll wait out here, Virge, and you come back out and tell us what's going on."

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It wasn't *in* Virgil to tell his car-pooling gang that Jocelyn hadn't spoken to him for almost a week. After he'd told her on Friday that No, he wasn't going to sign that contract for the cemetery plots she'd picked out—"I don't want to spend my whole life knowing exactly where I'll end up" is precisely what he'd said—the marriage, as far as she was concerned, was over, though she never said a thing beyond, "Most people *do* want to know. *Exactly* where."

After about five minutes had passed without Virgil returning, Angie became concerned and made her way to the same side door that Virgil had used, but got about only as far into the kitchen as he had. From where she was standing she could see a bit into the dining room, the living room, the hallway. *Everything* was gone, from *every* room.

Virgil was sitting in front of her on the floor, more or less where the kitchen table used to be. Angie started to ask him for some sort of explanation, but stopped herself, finding her voice seemed inappropriately unmodulated in this place where there now wasn't any soft bit of cloth or rug or cushion to absorb its sound. As she joined Virgil on the floor, Herb and Phil walked in, and before seating themselves at Virgil and Angie's level, looked inside the kitchen cupboard and closet and drawer—the refrigerator wasn't there anymore to look into—but again, everything, everywhere was gone.

"She was *never* the one for you, anyway," said Herb, who himself had married and divorced twice already. "Happy Birthday! I mean it."

"Happy *moving* day, you mean," said Phil, who both came from and had a large family. "This house is ready to sell. You'll get

rid of that mortgage you never wanted. You're lucky you didn't have kids yet."

"Virge—I don't think you should spend the night here alone," Angie said, and the instant she did, Virgil's head cocked back as if he were looking through the ceiling. Suddenly he was on his feet racing up the stairs in the living room while the whole house reverberated with one yelled name: "Iggy!"

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Iggy, in a way, was the world's oldest *iguana iguana*, a species of green reptile that grows to about a foot in height, six or so feet in length, and lives for about a dozen years. Iggy, however, if you looked at it from Virgil's—and his father before him's—point of view, was at least as old as Virgil himself.

As he reached the upstairs of his house, Virgil was beyond caring that every open door there revealed an absolutely empty room. *One* door, the last on the left, was closed, as it should have been, and still had the little blue-and-white license plate on it that just said, simply, IGGY. All that gave Virgil a breathless hope. He reached for the knob and the door opened into the only space that for some reason—mercy or understanding or respect or fear or repulsion—his wife had left untouched.

"Iggy—good kid!" Virgil said to his life-long friend as it turned and moved toward him. He looked over at Iggy's food-dish. "Hey, you ate all your yum-yums."

