Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Salem Falls

Written by Jodi Picoult

Published by Hodder & Stoughton

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

March 2000
North Haverhill, New Hampshire

Several miles into his journey, Jack St. Bride decided to give up his former life.

He made this choice as he walked aimlessly along Route 10, huddling against the cold. He had dressed this morning in a pair of khaki pants, a white shirt with a nick in the collar, stiff dress shoes, a smooth-skinned belt – clothing he'd last worn 5,760 hours ago, clothing that had fit him last August. This morning, his blue blazer was oversized and the waistband of his trousers hung loose. It had taken Jack a moment to realize it wasn't weight he'd lost during these eight months but pride.

He wished he had a winter coat, but you wore out of jail the same outfit you'd worn in. What he did have was the forty-three dollars that had been in his wallet on the hot afternoon he was incarcerated, a ring of keys that opened doors to places where Jack no longer was welcome, and a piece of gum.

Other inmates who were released from jail had family to pick them up. Or they arranged for transportation. But Jack had no one waiting for him, and he hadn't thought about getting a ride. When the door closed behind him, a jaw being snapped shut, he had simply started walking.

The snow seeped into his dress shoes, and passing trucks splattered his trousers with slush and mud. A taxi pulled onto the side of the road and the driver unrolled the window, but Jack kept struggling forward, certain that the cab had stopped for someone else.

'Car trouble?' the driver called out.

Jack looked, but there was no one behind him. 'Just walking.'

'Pretty miserable weather for that,' the man replied, and Jack stared. He could count on one hand the number of casual conversations he'd had in the past year. It had been better, easier, to keep to himself. 'Where you headed?'

The truth was, he had no idea. There were countless problems he hadn't considered, most of them practical: What would he do for work? For transportation? Where would he live? He didn't want to return to Loyal, New Hampshire, not even to pick up his belongings. What good was the evidence of a career he no longer had, of a person he would never be?

The cabdriver frowned. 'Look, buddy,' he said, 'why don't you just get in?'

Jack nodded and stood there, waiting. But there was no bright buzz, no click of the latch. And then he remembered that in the outside world, no one had to unlock a door before he entered.

I

Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

Then up Jack got and home did trot as fast as he could caper,
To old Dame Dob, who patched his nob,
With vinegar and brown paper.

Is there no good penitence but it be public?
– The Crucible

March 2000
Salem Falls, New Hampshire

On the second worst day of Addie Peabody's life, her refrigerator and dishwasher both died, like long-term lovers who could not conceive of existing without each other. This would have been a trial for anyone, but as she was the owner of the Do-Or-Diner, it blossomed into a catas-trophe of enormous proportions. Addie stood with her hands pressed to the stainless steel door of the Sub-Zero walk-in, as if she might jump-start its heart by faith healing.

It was hard to decide what was more devastating: the health violations or the loss of potential income. Twenty pounds of dry ice, the most the medical supply store had to offer, wasn't doing the job. Within hours, Addie would have to throw away the gallon buckets of gravy, stew, and chicken soup made that morning. 'I think,' she said after a moment, 'I'm going to build a snowman.'

'Now?' asked Delilah, the cook, her crossed arms as thick as a blacksmith's. She frowned. 'You know, Addie, I never believed it when folks around here called you crazy, but –'

'I'll stick it in the fridge. Maybe it'll save the food until the repairman gets here.'

'Snowmen melt,' Delilah said, but Addie could tell that she was turning the idea over in her mind.

'Then we'll mop up and make more.'

'And I suppose you're just gonna let the customers fend for themselves?'

'No,' Addie said. 'I'm going to get them to help. Will you get Chloe's boots?'

The diner was not crowded for 10 A.M. Of the six booths,

two were occupied: one by a mother and her toddler, the other by a businessman brushing muffin crumbs off his laptop. A couple of elderly regulars, Stuart and Wallace, slouched at the counter drinking coffee while they argued over the local paper's headlines.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' Addie proclaimed. 'I'm pleased to announce the start of the Do-or-Diner's winter carnival. The first event is going to be a snow-sculpture contest, and if you'd all just come out back for a moment, we can get started –'

'It's freezing out there!' cried Wallace.

'Well, of course it is. Otherwise we'd be having a summer carnival. Winner of the contest gets . . . a month of breakfast on the house.'

Stuart and Wallace shrugged, a good sign. The toddler bounced on the banquette like popcorn in a skillet. Only the businessman seemed unconvinced. As the others shuffled through the door, Addie approached his table. 'Look,' the businessman said. 'I don't want to build a snowman, all right? All I came here for was some breakfast.'

'Well, we're not serving now. We're sculpting.' She gave him her brightest smile.

The man seemed nonplussed. He tossed a handful of change on the table, gathered his coat and computer, and stood up to leave. 'You're nuts.'

Addie watched him leave. 'Yes,' she murmured. 'That's what they say.'

Outside, Stuart and Wallace were huffing through their scarves, crafting a respectable armadillo. Delilah had fashioned a snow chicken, a leg of lamb, pole beans. The toddler, stuffed into a snowsuit the color of a storm, lay on her back making angels.

Once Chloe had asked: *Is Heaven above or below the place where snow comes from?*

'You got the Devil's own luck,' Delilah told Addie. 'What if there was no snow?'

'Since when has there been no snow here in March? And

besides, this isn't luck. Luck is finding out the repairman could come a day early.'

As if Addie had conjured it, a man's voice called out. 'Anybody home?'

'We're back here.' Addie was faintly disappointed to see a young cop, instead of an appliance repairman, rounding the corner. 'Hi, Orren. You here for a cup of coffee?'

'Uh, no, Addie. I'm here on official business.'

Her head swam. Could the accountant have reported them to the board of health so quickly? Did a law enforcement officer have the power to make her close her doors? But before she could voice her doubts, the policeman spoke again.

'It's your father,' Orren explained, blushing. 'He's been arrested.'

Addie stormed into the police department with such force that the double doors slammed back on their hinges, letting in a gust of cold wind. 'Jeez Louise,' said the dispatch sergeant. 'Hope Courtemanche found himself a good hiding place.'

'Where is he?' Addie demanded.

'My best guess? Maybe in the men's room, in a stall. Or squeezed into one of the empty lockers in the squad room.' The officer scratched his jaw. 'Come to think of it, I once hid in the trunk of a cruiser when my wife was on the warpath.'

'I'm not talking about Officer Courtemanche,' Addie said through clenched teeth. 'I meant my *father*.'

'Oh, Roy's in the lockup.' He winced, remembering something. 'But if you're here to spring him, you're gonna have to talk to Wes anyway, since it was his arrest.' He picked up the phone. 'You can take a seat, Addie. I'll let you know when Wes is free.'

Addie scowled. 'I'm sure I'll know. You always smell a skunk before you see it.'

'Why, Addie, is that any way to speak to the man who saved your father's life?'

In his blue uniform, his badge glinting like a third eye, Wes Courtemanche was handsome enough to make women in Salem

Falls dream about committing crimes. Addie, however, took one look at him and thought – not for the first time – that some men ought to come with an expiration date.

'Arresting a sixty-five-year-old man isn't my idea of saving his life,' she huffed.

Wes took her elbow and led her gently down the hall, away from the dispatch sergeant's eyes and ears. 'Your father was driving under the influence again, Addie.'

Heat rose to her cheeks. Roy Peabody's drinking wasn't any secret in Salem Falls, but he'd gone one step too far last month, wrapping his car around the town's statue of Giles Corey, the only man who'd been a casualty of the Puritan witch hunts. Roy's license had been revoked. For his own safety, Addie had junked the car. And her own Mazda was safely parked at the diner. What vehicle could he have used?

As if he could read her mind, Wes said, 'He was in the breakdown lane of Route 10, on his ride-on mower.'

'His ride-on mower,' Addie repeated. 'Wes, that thing can't go more than five miles an hour.'

'Fifteen, but that's neither here nor there. The point is, he doesn't have a license. And you need one if you're gonna operate any self-propelled vehicle on the street.'

'Maybe it was an emergency . . .'

'Guess it was, Addie. We confiscated a brand-new fifth of vodka from him, too.' Wes paused. 'He was on his way home from the liquor store in North Haverhill.' He watched Addie knead her temples. 'Is there anything I can do for you?'

'I think you've done enough, Wes. I mean, gosh, you arrested a man joyriding on a lawn mower. Surely they'll give you a Purple Heart or something for going to such extremes to ensure public safety.'

'Now, just a second. I *was* ensuring safety . . . *Roy's*. What if a truck cut the curve too tight and ran him down? What if he fell asleep at the wheel?'

'Can I just take him home now?'

Wes regarded her thoughtfully. It made Addie feel like he

was sorting through her mind, opening up certain ideas and shuffling aside others. She closed her eyes.

'Sure,' Wes said. 'Follow me.'

He led her down a hallway to a room at the back of the police department. There was a wide desk manned by another officer, a high counter with ink pads for fingerprinting, and in the shadowy distance, a trio of tiny cells. Wes touched her forearm. 'I'm not going to write him up, Addie.'

'You're a real prince.'

He laughed and walked off. She heard the barred door slide open like a sword being pulled from its scabbard. 'Guess who's waiting for you out there, Roy?'

Her father's voice now, pouring slow as honey: 'My Margaret?'

' 'Fraid not. Margaret's been gone about five years now.'

They turned the corner, Wes bearing the brunt of her father's weight. Roy Peabody was a charmer of a man, with hair as white and thick as the inner wing of a dove and blue eyes that always swam with a secret. 'Addie!' he crowed, seeing her. 'Happy birthday!'

He lunged for her, and Addie staggered. 'Come on, Dad. We'll get you home.'

Wes hooked his thumb on his belt. 'You want a hand getting him out to your car?'

'No, thanks. We can manage.' At that moment, her father felt slighter and more insubstantial than Chloe. They walked awkwardly, like contestants in a three-legged race.

Wes held open the door. 'Well, shoot, Addie. I'm sorry I had to call you down for this on your birthday.'

She did not break stride. 'It's not my birthday,' she said, and guided her father out.

At 6:30 that morning, Gillian Duncan had lit a match and waved a thermometer through it, spiking a temperature that made her father believe she truly was too sick to go to school. She spent the morning in her bedroom instead, listening to Alanis Morissette,

braiding her long red hair, and painting her fingernails and toenails electric blue. In spite of the fact that she was seventeen years old and could fend for herself, her father had taken the day off from work to be with her. It raised her hackles and secretly pleased her all at once. As the owner of Duncan Pharmaceuticals, the biggest employer in Salem Falls, Amos Duncan was generally re-garded as one of its richest and busiest citizens. But then, he had always had time to take care of her; he'd been doing it since Gilly was eight and her mother had died.

She was going crazy in her room and was about to do something really drastic, like pick up a textbook, when the doorbell rang. Listening closely, Gilly heard the voices of her friends downstairs. 'Hi, Mr. D,' said Meg. 'How's Gillian?'

Before he could respond, Whitney interrupted. 'We brought her jellybeans. My mom says they soak up a fever, and if they don't, they taste so good you don't care.'

'We brought her homework, too,' Chelsea added. Painfully tall, self-conscious, and shy, she was one of Gilly's newest friends.

'Well, thank God you're all here,' her father said. 'I have a hard time recognizing Gilly unless she's glued to the three of you. Just let me see if she's awake.'

Gilly dove beneath the covers, trying desperately to look sick. Her father cracked open the door and peered inside. 'You up for company, Gilly?'

Rubbing her eyes, Gillian sat up. 'Maybe for a little while.'

He nodded, then called out to the girls. Meg led the charge up to Gillian's room, a hail of Skechers pounding up the stairs. 'I think my whole home could fit in this room,' Chelsea breathed, stepping inside.

'Oh, that's right . . .' Whitney said. 'This is the first time you've been to the manor.'

Gillian slanted a look at her father. It was a common joke in town that the reason the Duncan home sat to the east whereas all the other roads and developments sat to the west was because Amos had wanted a palace separate and apart for his kingdom.

'Yes,' Amos said, with a straight face. 'We're putting in a drawbridge this spring.'

Chelsea's eyes widened. 'For real?'

Whitney laughed. She liked Gillian's dad; they all did. He knew how to make a teenager feel perfectly welcome.

'If you guys tire her out,' Amos said, 'I'll make you dig the moat.' He winked at Chelsea, then pulled the door closed behind him.

The girls wilted onto the carpet, lilies floating on a pond. 'So?' Meg asked. 'Did you watch *Passions*?'

Meg Saxton had been Gilly's first best friend. Even as she'd grown up, she hadn't lost her baby fat, and her brown hair flew away from her face in a riot of curls.

'I didn't watch any soaps. I took a nap.'

'A nap? I thought you were faking.'

Gillian shrugged. 'I'm not faking; I'm method-acting.'

'Well, FYI, the trig test sucked,' Whitney said. The only child of one of the town selectmen, Whitney O'Neill was nothing short of a knockout. She'd opened the bag of jellybeans to help herself. 'Why can't we write a spell to get A's?'

Chelsea looked nervously at the large, lovely bedroom, then at Gillian. 'Are you sure we can do magick here, with your father right downstairs?'

Of course they could – and would – do magick. They had been students of the Craft for nearly a year now; it was why they had gathered this afternoon. 'I wouldn't have invited you if I didn't think it was okay,' Gillian said, withdrawing a black-and-white composition notebook from between the mattress and box spring. Written in bubble letters, with smiley-face O's, was its title: *Book of Shadows.* She got out of bed and padded into the large adjoining bathroom. The others could hear her turning on the faucet, and then she returned with an eight-ounce glass of water. 'Here,' she said, handing it to Whitney. 'Drink.'

Whitney took a sip, then spat on the floor. 'This is disgusting! It's salt water!'

'So?' Gillian said. As she spoke, she walked around her

friends, sprinkling more salt onto the carpet. 'Would you rather waste time taking a bath? Or maybe you've got a better way to purify yourself?'

Grimacing, Whitney drank again, and then passed it to the others. 'Let's do something quick today,' Meg suggested. 'My mom will kill me if I'm not home by four-thirty.' She scooted into position, across from Gillian on the floor, as Whitney and Chelsea made up the other corners of their square. Gillian reached for Whitney's hand, and a cold draft snaked in through a crack in the window. As Whitney's palm skimmed over Meg's, the lamp on the nightstand dimmed. The pages of the notebook fluttered as Meg reached for Chelsea. And when Chelsea clasped Gillian's hand, the air grew too thick to breathe.

'What color is your circle?' Gillian asked Chelsea.

'It's blue.'

'And yours?'

Meg's eyes drifted shut. 'Pink.'

'Mine's silver,' Whitney murmured.

'Pure gold,' Gillian said. All of their eyes were closed now, but they had learned over the course of the past year that you did not need them open to see. The girls sat, their minds winnowed to this point of power; as one snake of color after another surrounded them, plaited into a thick ring, and sealed them inside.

'Not again,' Delilah said with a sigh, as Addie hauled Roy Peabody into the kitchen.

'I don't need this from you now.' Addie gritted her teeth as her father stumbled heavily on the arch of her foot.

'Is that Delilah?' Roy crowed, craning his neck. 'Prettiest cook in New Hampshire.'

Addie managed to push her father into a narrow stairwell that led upstairs to his apartment. 'Did Chloe give you any trouble?' she called back over her shoulder.

'No, honey,' Delilah sighed. 'No trouble whatsoever.'

Through sheer will, Addie and Roy made it upstairs. 'Why don't

you sit down, Daddy?' she said softly, guiding him to the frayed armchair that had stood in that spot all of Addie's life.

She could smell the stew that Delilah had prepared for the lunch rush rising through the floor and the weave of the carpet – carrots, beef base, thyme. As a child, she had believed that breathing in the diner had rooted it in her system, making it as much as part of her as her blood or her bones. Her father had been like that, too, once. But it had been seven years since he'd voluntarily set foot behind the stove. She wondered if it caused him the same phantom pain that came from losing a vital limb – if he drank to dull the ache of it.

Addie crouched down beside his chair. 'Daddy,' she whispered.

Roy blinked. 'My girl.'

Tears sprang to her eyes. 'I need you to do me a favor. The diner, it's too busy for me to take care of. I need you –'

'Oh, Addie. Don't.'

'Just the register. You won't ever have to go into the kitchen.'

'You don't need me to work the register. You just want to keep tabs on me.'

Addie flushed. 'That's not true.'

'It's all right.' He covered her hand with his own and squeezed. 'Every now and then it's nice to know that someone cares where I am.'

Addie opened her mouth to say the things she should have said years ago to her father, all those months after her mother's death when she was too busy keeping the diner afloat to notice that Roy was drowning, but the telephone interrupted her. Delilah was on the other end. 'Get down here,' the cook said. 'Your bad day? It just got worse.'

'Did you say something?' The cab driver's eyes met Jack's in the rearview mirror.

'No.'

'This look familiar yet?'

Jack had lied to the driver – what was one more lie in a long

string of others? – confessing that he couldn't remember the name of the town he was headed toward but that Route 10 ran right through its middle. He would recognize it, he said, as soon as Main Street came into view.

Now, forty minutes later, he glanced out the window. They were driving through a village, small but well-heeled, with a New England steepled white church and women in riding boots darting into stores to run their errands. It reminded him too much of the prep-school town of Loyal, and he shook his head. 'Not this one,' he said.

What he needed was a place where he could disappear for a while – a place where he could figure out how to start all over again. Teaching – well, that was out of the question now. But it was also all he'd ever done. He'd worked at Westonbrook for four years . . . an awfully big hole to omit in a job interview for any related field. And even a McDonald's manager could ask him if he'd ever been convicted of a crime.

Lulled by the motion of the taxi, he dozed off. He dreamed of an inmate he'd worked with on farm duty. Aldo's girlfriend would commute to Haverhill and leave treasures in the cornfield for him: whiskey, pot, instant coffee. Once, she set herself up naked on a blanket, waiting for Aldo to come over on the tractor. 'Drive slow,' Aldo would say, when they went out to harvest. 'You never know what you're going to find.'

'Salem Falls coming up,' the cab driver announced, waking him.

A hand-lettered blue placard announced the name of the town and proclaimed it home of Duncan Pharmaceuticals. The town was built outward from a central green, crowned by a memorial statue that listed badly to the left, as if it had been rammed from the side. A bank, a general store, and a town office building were dotted along the green – all neatly painted, walks shoveled clear of snow. Standing incongruously at the corner was a junked railroad car. Jack did a double take, and as the cab turned to follow the one-way road around the green, he realized it was a diner.

In the window was a small sign.

'Stop,' Jack said. 'This is the place.'

Harlan Pettigrew sat at the counter, nursing a bowl of stew. A napkin was tucked over his bow tie, to prevent staining. His eyes darted around the diner, lighting on the clock.

Addie pushed through the swinging doors. 'Mr. Pettigrew,' she began.

The man blotted his mouth with his napkin and got to his feet. 'It's about time.'

'There's something I need to tell you first. You see, we've been having a little trouble with some of our appliances.'

Pettigrew's brows drew together. 'I see.'

Suddenly the door opened. A man in a rumpled sports jacket walked in, looking cold and lost. His shoes were completely inappropriate for the season and left small puddles of melting snow on the linoleum floor. When he spotted her pink apron, he started toward her. 'Excuse me – is the owner in?'

His voice made Addie think of coffee, deep and dark and rich, with a texture that slid between her senses. 'That would be me.'

'Oh.' He seemed surprised by this. 'Okay. Well. I, um, I'm here because –'

A wide smile spread over Addie's face. 'Because I called you!' She shook his hand, trying not to notice how the man froze in shock. 'I was just telling Mr. Pettigrew, here, from the *board of health,* that the repairman was on his way to fix our refrigerator and dishwasher. They're right through here.'

She began to tug the stranger into the kitchen, with Pettigrew in their wake. 'Just a moment,' the inspector said, frowning. 'You don't look like an appliance repairman.'

Addie tensed. The man probably thought she was insane. Well, hell. So did the rest of Salem Falls.

The woman was insane. And God, she'd *touched* him. She'd reached right out and grabbed his hand, as if that were normal

for him, as if it had been eight minutes rather than eight months since a woman's skin had come in contact with his own.

If she was covering something up from the board of health, then the diner was probably violating a code. He started to back away, but then the woman bowed her head.

It was that, the giving in, that ruined him.

The part in her dark hair was crooked and pink as a newborn's skin. Jack almost reached out one finger and touched it but stuffed his hands in his pockets instead. He knew better than anyone that you could not trust a woman who said she was telling the truth.

But what if you knew, from the start, that she was lying?

Jack cleared his throat. 'I came as quickly as I could, ma'am,' he said, then glanced at Pettigrew. 'I was paged from my aunt's birthday party and didn't stop home to get my uniform. Where are the broken appliances?'

The kitchen looked remarkably similar to the one at the jail. Jack nodded to a sequoia of a woman standing behind the grill and tried desperately to remember any technical trivia he could about dishwashers. He opened the two rolled doors, slid out the tray, and peered inside. 'Could be the pump . . . or the water inlet valve.'

For the first time, he looked directly at the owner of the diner. She was small and delicate in build, no taller than his collarbone, but had muscles in her arms built, he imagined, by many a hard day's labor. Her brown hair was yanked into a knot at the back of her head and held in place by a pencil, and her eyes were the unlikely color of peridot – a stone, Jack recalled, the ancient Hawaiians believed to be the tears shed by the volcano goddess. Those eyes, now, seemed absolutely stunned. 'I didn't bring my toolbox, but I can have this fixed by . . .' He pretended to do the math, trying to catch the woman's eye. *Tomorrow,* she mouthed.

'Tomorrow,' Jack announced. 'Now what's the problem with the fridge?'

Pettigrew looked from the owner of the diner to Jack, and then

back again. 'There's no point in checking out the rest of the kitchen when I have to return anyway,' he said. 'I'll come by next week to do my inspection.' With a curt nod, he let himself out.

The owner of the diner launched herself across the line, embracing the cook and whooping with delight. Radiant, she turned to Jack and extended her hand . . . but this time, he moved out of the way before she could touch him. 'I'm Addie Peabody, and this is Delilah Piggett. We're so grateful to you. You certainly sounded authentic.' Suddenly, she paused, an idea dawning. 'You don't actually know how to fix appliances, do you?'

'No. That was just some stuff I heard in the last place I worked.' He saw his opening and leaped. 'I was on my way in to ask about the HELP WANTED sign.'

The cook beamed. 'You're hired.'

'Delilah, who died and left you king?' She smiled at Jack. 'You're hired.'

'Do you mind if I ask what the job is?'

'Yes. I mean, no, I don't mind. We're in the market for a dishwasher.'

A reluctant grin tugged at Jack's mouth. 'I heard.'

'Well, even if we fix the machine, we'll still need someone to run it.'

'Is it full time?'

'Part time . . . afternoons. Minimum wage.'

Jack's face fell. He had a Ph.D. in history, and was applying for a job that paid $5.15 per hour. Misinterpreting his reaction, Delilah said, 'I've been asking Addie to hire a prep cook a while now. That would be a part-time morning job, wouldn't it?'

Addie hesitated. 'Have you ever worked in a kitchen before, Mr. . . .'

'St. Bride. Jack. And yeah, I have.' He didn't say where the kitchen was, or that he'd been a guest of the state at the time.

'That beats the last guy you hired,' Delilah said. 'Remember when we found him shooting up over the scrambled eggs?'

'It's not like he mentioned his habit at the interview.' Addie turned to Jack. 'How old are you?'

Ah, this was the moment – the one where she'd ask him why a man his age would settle for menial work like this. 'Thirty-one.'

She nodded. 'If you want the job, it's yours.'

No application, no references, no questions about his past employment. And anonymity – no one would ever expect to find him washing dishes in a diner. For a man who had determined to put his past firmly behind him, this situation seemed too good to be true. 'I'd like it very much,' Jack managed.

'Then grab an apron,' said his new boss.

Suddenly, he remembered that there was something he needed to do, if Salem Falls was going to become his new residence. 'I need about an hour to run an errand,' he said.

'No problem. It's the least I can do for the person who saved me.'

Funny, Jack thought. *I was thinking the same thing.*

Detective-Lieutenant Charlie Saxton fiddled with the radio in his squad car for a few moments, then switched it off. He listened to the squelch of slush under the Bronco's tires and wondered, again, if he should have stayed with the Miami Police Department.

It was a hard thing to be a law enforcement officer in the town where you'd once grown up. You'd walk down the street, and instead of noticing the IGA, you'd remember the storeroom where a local teen had knifed his girlfriend. You'd pass the school playground and think of the drugs confiscated from the children of the town selectmen. Where everyone else saw the picture-perfect New England town of their youth, you saw the underbelly of its existence.

His radio crackled as he turned onto Main Street. 'Saxton.'

'Lieutenant, there's some guy here insisting he'll talk only to you.'

Even with the bad reception, Wes sounded pissed. 'He got a name?'

'If he does, he isn't giving it up.'

Charlie sighed. For all he knew, this man had committed murder within town lines and wanted to confess. 'Well, I'm driving into the parking lot. Have him take a seat.'

He swung the Bronco into a spot, then walked in to find his guest cooling his heels.

Literally. Charlie's first thought, pure detective, was that the guy couldn't be from around here – no one who lived in New Hampshire was stupid enough to wear a sports jacket and dress shoes in the freezing slush of early March. Still, he didn't seem particularly distraught, like the recent victim of a crime, or nervous, like a perp. No, he just looked like a guy who'd had a lousy day. Charlie extended his hand. 'Hi there. Detective-Lieutenant Saxton.'

The man didn't identify himself. 'Could I have a few minutes of your time?'

Charlie nodded, his curiosity piqued. He led the way to his office, and gestured to a chair. 'What can I do for you, Mr. . . .'

'Jack St. Bride. I'm moving to Salem Falls.'

'Welcome.' Ah, it all was falling into place. This was probably some family man who wanted to make sure the locale was safe enough for his wife and kids and puppy. 'Great place, great town. Is there something in particular I can help you with?'

For a long moment, St. Bride was silent. His hands flexed on his knees. 'I'm here because of 651-B,' he said finally.

It took Charlie a moment to realize this well-dressed, soft-spoken man was talking about a legal statute that required certain criminals to report in to a local law enforcement agency for ten years or for life, depending on the charge for which they had been convicted. Charlie schooled his features until they were as blank as St. Bride's, until it was clear that his former words of welcome had been rescinded. Then he pulled from his desk drawer the state police's form to register a sexual offender.