

# LORETTA and THE DRONES



a  
novel  
by

# JOHN GINSBURG



## LORETTA AND THE DRONES

What do you get when you combine sexual obsession and rock and roll, in equal parts, and mix well?

Jimmy Green is the rhythm guitar player in a rock and roll band called *The Drones*. With his long hair, flared sideburns and cool sunglasses, he's a throwback to the sixties. Jimmy enjoys a comfortable, middle-class life with his wife Karen and their two adorable young daughters. But in recent times, that simple, predictable world has taken on a dangerous layer of complexity. For the past year, Jimmy has been secretly involved with another woman, Loretta Selby. Alluring and passionate, Loretta is married to Duane Selby, the talented and dominating lead guitar player in Jimmy's band. The steamy affair has worked perfectly for both Jimmy and Loretta. Both have seamlessly maintained their home lives and carefully preserved their secret. Until things change.

The novel begins on November 7, 2017, in Winnipeg. As Jimmy and Karen watch the evening news, they are shocked to learn of the disappearance of Loretta Selby. It has now been three weeks since Karen learned of Jimmy's year-long affair. What happened to Loretta?

Suspicion immediately falls on Loretta's volatile and fearsome husband Duane. Soon enough, police find sufficient evidence to charge Duane in connection with Loretta's disappearance.

With rock and roll music as the insistent backdrop, the novel traces the changing course of Jimmy's sexual obsession with Loretta, and the dramatic story of Loretta's disappearance.



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This is a work of fiction. With obvious exceptions, the people and events depicted are purely fictional. A number of the places and locations referred to, including The Gold Rush and Garland Road, do not exist.

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# 1 The Disappearance of Loretta Selby

Winnipeg, November 7, 2017

To all appearances, it was an ordinary Tuesday evening at the Green home. Dishes had been done, lunches were made for school, the girls were happily occupied in their rooms down the hall. The girls - Kerry, 10 and Lisa, 8 - were mostly oblivious to any serious issues in their parents' adult world. That sturdy, dependable world had in fact been severely shaken by infidelity, and the past three weeks had been unspeakably difficult for their parents.

Jimmy and Karen Green had strongly concurred on the optimal short-term strategy, showing a familiar brave face and revealing nothing to the children. To the two girls, everything in their comfortable little world was exactly the same as it always had been. But their parents' reality was far different. Jimmy and Karen were reeling, living in a toxic fog, and struggling to communicate. Their predictable, harmonious relationship had been upended. It was a fearful time, not knowing where things were going or even how to talk about it. Conversations between the two were painfully awkward and limited to short, muffled extrusions, usually ending abruptly with a hurtful remark. When would they find the time to genuinely try and resolve things, to obtain some clarity? Or were they just avoiding it?

As Jimmy and Karen sat down to watch the 8 pm local news, their tense and difficult situation was about to receive a further sharp jolt. Jimmy sat in the old oak rocking chair, directly in front of the TV, remote in hand and a cup of tea beside him. Karen sat to Jimmy's right, on the leather love-seat, reaching reflexively for her knitting as the news anchor introduced the lead story.

'Winnipeg police have issued an urgent appeal to the public for any information they might have about a missing Winnipeg woman, Loretta Selby, from the West Kildonan area of Winnipeg. Police spokesperson Ravinder Singh has asked anyone having any information regarding the woman's whereabouts to contact police immediately.'

It took a fraction of a second for Jimmy and Karen to fully register the woman's name. In that fraction of a second, as the video frame switched to the police press conference, Jimmy was on the point of making a derisive comment about the size of the policeman's blue turban, and how jobs like his never went to ordinary men any more. Karen was unhappily well-used to such remarks from her husband and she bristled in anticipation, hoping the two girls wouldn't hear their father. No matter how many times she called Jimmy on it, it didn't seem to make any difference. He could be such a jerk. But the missing woman's name hit them both at exactly the same time and Jimmy's words never came. Instead, he froze and the blood rushed from his face. He looked over at Karen, who was just as stunned.

'Loretta Selby?' said Jimmy, incredulous. 'It can't be.'

'Shush' said Karen. 'Let's listen.'

Standing at a small lectern, the police constable read out his statement:

"Anyone knowing anything about the current whereabouts of Loretta Selby, of 1888 Smithfield Avenue, is asked to please contact their local police detachment. Ms. Selby has not been seen or heard from in more than three weeks. She is fifty-one years of age, five feet six inches in height, with long

brown hair, and is thought to have been driving a white, 2011 Hyundai SUV. Her picture and other information are posted online..."

As the statement was read, a recent picture of Loretta Selby appeared on the monitor. There was absolutely no doubt about it. It was her. Loretta. With her straight brown hair tied back in a ponytail, as she often wore it, and wearing a denim jacket. There was a hint of a smile on her face. It was a very recent picture. It might have been taken at the band's last gig, Jimmy thought. Elliot was taking pictures of everybody with his iPhone.

A journalist present at the small news conference asked the obvious question. "Is this being treated as a criminal case? Are there any individuals under investigation at present?"

"That's all we have to say for now" said Constable Singh, who then stood up and walked off camera.

Jimmy switched the channel, then turned the television off.

On top of the tremendous shock, it was a supremely uncomfortable moment. It was exactly three weeks and one day since Jimmy had disclosed his long-running affair with Loretta. Karen had been totally in the dark.

Committed to the appearance of normalcy and calm, Jimmy and Karen sat in frozen silence for a moment, their thoughts and reactions inaccessible to one another. Karen was the first to speak, looking over at her husband and keeping her voice down. 'Do you know anything about this, Jimmy? I'm sure you know a lot more than you've been telling me. Have you been in contact with her? Do you know where she went?' Though she hadn't spoken very loudly, Karen was immediately aware of having lost her composure. She looked anxiously in the direction of the girls' rooms, relieved that they were still out of hearing range.

Jimmy, still stunned by the news of Loretta's disappearance, was feeling a sense of panic. He knew he had to remain calm and he had to answer Karen carefully and quietly. 'No. I don't' he said. 'I've had no contact with her at all. I meant what I said. It's over. I have no idea where she is.'

Ten days later, Duane Selby - Loretta's husband and the lead guitarist in Jimmy's band - was arrested in connection with her disappearance.

## 2 Loretta

October 4, 2017

At 8 pm, Loretta Selby was intently making her way up the stairs from the basement, with two freshly-ironed shirts and a pair of black pants slung over her arm. She had her long dark hair tied back in a ponytail and was wearing an old, faded, gray hoodie, with *Tom Petty Free Fallin 1990* in pale purple lettering on the front. The hoodie was a prized souvenir, from a concert in Calgary she'd attended with her sister. On hearing the sad news of Petty's death two days earlier, she had immediately retrieved the hoodie from a downstairs storage closet, and worn it ever since.

As Loretta turned the corner at the top of the stairs, walking up into the kitchen, she crossed paths with Duane. He had his navy blue jacket on, clearly about to leave the house. The two made eye contact very briefly. 'I'm going out. See you later' said Duane. 'I can see that, Duane' answered Loretta, coldly. At the hostile tone, Duane stopped and turned to look at Loretta. 'Why?' he said, his tone, by contrast, rather complacent. 'What's the problem?' Loretta had continued walking into the kitchen. She stopped and looked back at her husband of 31 years. 'The matter? Nothing's the fucking matter, Duane. If I hadn't run into you on the stairs, I wouldn't have even known you'd left the house. I live here too, you know. I mean, no one's expecting you to justify every minute of your life.' With that, she turned again and walked away, through the kitchen and into the living room.

Duane either had nothing more to add or didn't especially feel like talking to thin air. Loretta heard the back door close and then the roaring sound of Duane's black F-150 truck starting up. She didn't know where he was going. Maybe drinking with a few of his buddies. Or maybe he was going to buy something somewhere. Maybe he was fucking some other woman, having an affair like she was. She didn't know and she didn't really care a whole lot. But she certainly deserved to know if was going to be out. And at least to have some vague idea for how long. They still lived in the same house.

It wasn't all that different from the way it had been five years ago, she thought. Even ten years ago. What did it amount to? She cooked and cleaned the house. She did her sewing work. Sometimes they ate meals together, usually while they were watching TV. They went over to Duane's brother's place once in a while. And that was about it. They hardly ever talked anymore, about anything. If they did, it sounded fake. They hadn't had sex in years. He'd been sleeping in the second bedroom. She couldn't imagine ever kissing him or fucking him again. With or without Jimmy in her life.

The marriage was way past its best-before date. It was worse than watching paint dry. It was like watching the paint after it had dried, watching it fade into nothing. If it was supposed to be some kind of endurance test, she should get the gold medal, that was for sure.

At least he brought home a paycheque, she had to give him that, digging holes and filling them up again, day after day, same as he'd done for thirty years.

Maybe he was as numb to it as she was. Maybe it didn't matter to him anymore, like it didn't to her. Maybe he was just as worn down by the years. Or maybe he was actually content. As content as a guy like him could ever be. When he wasn't working at his job, he was working on

his vehicles in the big workshop-garage in the back yard. It was like a used car lot out there. In addition to Loretta's 2011 Hyundai SUV and the Ford truck Duane drove, there were always one or two other vehicles in the driveway or inside the garage; some giant truck he'd bought from somebody on Kijiji, or some washed-up old Mercedes. He'd fix a vehicle up and drive it a little for a few months, and then he'd sell it over the internet to somebody else. Losing money as often as he made money. And then another one would show up a few days later. Or he'd decide to build something, or fix something around the house, like the bathroom in the basement, and the cedar shed in the back. And it would take years and still never get done. He always had to do everything himself and he always had to get the lowest price on materials.

And he had his band, The Drones. Well, that was a good thing for both of them; that's how she'd met Jimmy.

Jimmy. She was in love with him. And he was crazy about her. It had been well over a year now. They were like a couple of rabid dogs; they couldn't be together for more than two minutes and he'd have her jeans down and his face between her legs, and then he'd fuck her like a madman. She knew Jimmy loved her, even if he didn't say it. He said he still loved his wife. And he probably did. But it was really fear. He was scared of losing his safe, secure little world. He didn't even want to think about it, he'd say. You have to face it Jimmy, she'd tell him. You can't possibly be cheating on her like you have been, and keep slipping back home and pretending everything's the way it should be.

And his daughters... She knew how much they meant to him. All he ever said was he couldn't ever destroy their life or make them unhappy. He just couldn't. He wouldn't be able to live with himself if he ever did.

It wouldn't be like that, she'd tell Jimmy. Marriages break up all the time. How many people did he know who had married someone and was still with that person? People deal with it and move on, she'd say to Jimmy. You'd still be their dad; you'd still have them as much as you could, be with them. I'd help you. It would just take some time for people to get used to things, settle in to a new life. It would be better for everyone. It would be real; honest. You wouldn't have to lie anymore. You wouldn't have to feel guilty anymore. We'd have a real relationship. We'd be so good together, Jimmy, she'd say. Jimmy would just get that distant look in his eyes when they talked about it; scared, put-off, pushed away.

Jimmy just needed a good push, that was all.

Loretta set down the shirts and pants on the kitchen table and walked into the living room. She sat down on the modular black leather sofa, one of Duane's proud IKEA purchases, and mindlessly flicked on the television. The news was on. Catalonia was the headlining story. There was Trudeau, firmly pledging his support for Spain. Funny how it was okay for Quebec to vote for independence, Loretta thought. So what was the deal, then? If you weren't French, you were out of luck? After muting the sound and surfing through a few channels, she turned the television off.

One of Duane's acoustic guitars was lying on the end of the sofa. His Martin. He'd been playing while she was working downstairs. How long ago had he bought that guitar? Twenty years ago, maybe? He wouldn't let anyone else touch that guitar at the time. He'd kept it hidden away when anyone came over. "You like that guitar more than you like me, Duane" she used to say to him. That was their big joke at the time. "You're a pretty close second, Loretta" he'd answer. "You just have to tune up every once in a while."

Those were the days when they still had jokes like that together. Long ago....

### 3 The Drones

October 5, 2017

It has often been said that choosing the name for a rock and roll band is one of the lowest of art forms. The vast majority of band-names are mocked soundly and then quickly disappear into the ether. But *The Drones* was a name that had enjoyed a measure of longevity in the city. Perhaps it was because people found the name easy to ignore. At any rate, as Nathan Rose, the progenitor, proudly told anyone who cared to listen, his brilliant idea for the name occurred in the early nineties, well before its entrenching in the western lexicon as an aeronautical and military term. Rose was the original drummer for the band, happily pounding his way through two inconspicuous years of basement practices and occasional gigs. To the bewilderment of his mates, Rose abruptly abandoned his career in rock and roll in 1997, becoming a rabbi in a small reform synagogue in the city's north end. And though the move was entirely of his own volition, Rose loved to claim he had suffered the same fate as Pete Best, gleefully adding that his first choice for the band's name had been The Beat Pests.

Following the band's inception in 1995, The Drones' lineup and status changed regularly. In present times, only the band's founder, Duane Selby, remained from those earliest days. Selby, now 50 years of age, was a talented lead guitar player, a difficult, aggressive man who relished his dominant role in the band. Virtually all the important decisions over the years had been Selby's, as he sustained the band through long periods of inactivity and change after change in personnel. As presently constituted, The Drones featured a keyboard as well as lead guitar, rhythm guitar, bass guitar and drums.

One thing had never changed about Duane's band: the kind of music that was played. It was an old-time rock and roll band, playing songs almost entirely from the nineteen sixties and seventies. A few of the songs were from the late fifties. They sounded, in 2017, just like the bands of those earlier times.

It was a chilly, fall evening. As was invariably the case, Duane was the first to arrive at the former strip-mall where the band currently practised. At 7pm, it was already starting to get dark. The drab-looking site was situated on Corydon Avenue near the CN tracks. It had once hosted a large grocery market and four other smaller shops. After sitting vacant for more than a year, the disregarded side-by-side units were still struggling to make a comeback. Recently, the largest unit had been leased to a government-funded day care centre. All of the remaining units were still available for sale or lease.

The band practised in what had most recently been a yoga studio. Entrance from the outside led into a long, narrow reception area, with a bathroom at one end and a door at the other end, which opened into a forty foot by twenty foot windowless room. A large storage closet had been left behind, situated at one corner of the room, and which the band made good use of. Folding metal chairs and a small office desk had been moved into the room from the reception area. Aside from a couple of wooden stools and the band's equipment, the only other furnishings in the room were a number of throw-away chairs brought by various members of the band. These were scattered randomly in the middle of the room: four old, discoloured PVC patio chairs and a pair of unsightly rattan chairs, still usable but coming apart in places.

White Tama drums were set up along a wall adjacent to the closet. The keyboard, speakers and amplifiers formed a semi-circle around the drums, extending out onto the worn hardwood floor. Microphone stands, cords and metal chairs occupied the same positions they had at the end of the previous practice. Two cases of bottled water sat on the floor beside the amplifiers.

As a practice space, it was a very economical find by Duane: for a hundred and forty dollars a month, the band had twice-a-week access, with all the power they needed. Duane had neatly avoided any cost to himself with a simple dodge, informing the others that the rental was a hundred and seventy-five a month, to be split equally five ways. Why not, he thought? He'd found the place, made the contact and set it all up, hadn't he?

Wearing a faded black leather jacket, black jeans and worn, white trainers, Duane was carrying a guitar case in each hand. One was an old grey case with a faded pattern on it, scratched and scuffed by years of packing and moving equipment. Inside it was an old seventies Stratocaster, for which he claimed to have been offered fifteen thousand dollars. The other case was newer, plain black, and contained his ten-year-old Gibson Les Paul. Two additional guitars had to be transported from his car into the building, a much newer Stratocaster, as well as a Telecaster he'd recently purchased.