



Patrick Sheridan is having technical difficulties . . .

SATELLITE

ROB THOMAS

**AUTHOR OF RATS SAW GOD
AND CREATOR OF VERONICA MARS**

DOWN

To my daughter, Greta, and my son, Hank. It's coming into sharp focus that you're not going to be jocks. Time to get reading. Oh, and I love you like crazy.



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In the Republic—

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nearly impossible to withdraw more than 200 pounds from a cash machine. This is how one pours a Guinness, etc.)

In Belfast—

Kathleen Burke and Jennifer Lancaster.

Finally, thanks to Sandy Bell and Sherri Brown, who kept me laughing during my tenure at Channel One.

Prologue

DOGGETT, TEXAS

THE GOOFY WAY MR. LINDER IS STUTTERING—I have to look down at the floor to keep from just busting out laughing. His lame “Well, I didn’t think it was necessary” and “Had I known I was violating policy”—I mean, who does he think he’s fooling? Definitely not the school board members, who all seem to be clenching their jaws. I could’ve actually felt sorry for him, if he hadn’t been such a slime when I interviewed him for my story.

The story didn’t start out as a means of getting the old goat fired. It was just some dumb feature idea I had about the high cost of extracurricular activities. You’ve seen them before—stories about the killer costs of cheerleading uniforms, band instruments, and so on. When I was investigating it, though, everyone in band talked about how, when they went out of town for games, they had to buy their own meals. Normally they’d stop at a Grandy’s or Luby’s or something like that, which would only run five or six dollars, but after you include the play-off games and a few basketball games, it could end up as much as an extra hundred bucks a year. Then it occurred to me. No one else has to pay for their meals. The football players don’t. The dance team doesn’t. So why the band? That’s what

I asked Mr. Linder. Which is when he made his fatal mistake. He made me mad.

"Why don't you just print the scores of the games and drop the *Hard Copy* act?" he said without looking up from the Jaguar brochure he had unfolded on his desk.

So this is what I printed.

BAND FUNDS UNACCOUNTED FOR

by Patrick Sheridan
Editor in chief

For the past two years the school board has budgeted five dollars meal money per student for out-of-town school functions. According to band members and their parents, none of that money has been used to provide meals for band students.

Band director Ned Linder initially denied such a fund existed. Later, when presented with a copy of the official school board policy, Linder claimed to have set up an emergency fund for instrument and uniform repair with the money.

"Our group has special needs," Linder said. "I've set aside the money in order to make sure we have functioning instruments and nice-looking uniforms. We don't get new uniforms every other year like the football team."

But Mrs. Terry Billingham, mother of

drum major Stanton Billingham, doubts such a fund exists.

"Stanton's had to get his trumpet fixed twice with his own money. Where is this money Mr. Linder claims he has set aside?" Billingham said.

Principal Charles Gruter promised to look into the matter.

"I'm confident everything's aboveboard," he said.

But apparently it wasn't, which is why I'm at the school board meeting watching Linder fry. My best friend Zeb leans across my other best friend Anderson and whispers, "Do we still tar and feather people here?"

"Just Yankees," says Anderson.

"He'll get off easy. They'll let him resign or something like that," I say. "It's almost impossible to fire teachers."

I'm only repeating what I heard my lawyer father saying earlier this afternoon, but he should know what he's talking about. He's on the school board. It's pretty obvious the direction he's leaning in when he asks the final question.

"Mr. Linder," says Papa, using the same tone of voice he used with me in seventh grade when he caught me copying Anderson's math homework, "have you enjoyed your stay here in Doggett?"

That question pretty much marks the end of the inquisition, and I'm able to stop taking notes. I glance at my watch. The school board is going into closed session—that means they leave

"Commerce creates culture," I say.

Kate rolls over on her stomach and looks up at me. "You're not going to scare me until you can say those words like you believe them."

"How's Zeb doing at Stanford?" I ask, changing the subject. The two have stayed together since the prom.

Kate flops onto her back and stares up at the sky. "Great. He's playing number two singles . . . likes his classes."

She passes this info along hesitantly. She still thinks it bothers me to talk about Zeb. But it doesn't. Not much does.

"When will you get to see him again?"

"Not until Thanksgiving. He's flying home then."

I tell her that sounds great, but afterward there's a long silence. Kate and I have a lot of these lately.

"Hey, aren't you"—*If I had a dollar* . . . The figure that's moved in front of me is blocking the sun. I just see the black outline of a female—"Patrick Sheridan? From *Classroom Direct*?"

"I'll call you later," Kate says. She shakes her head as she picks up her backpack.

"Okay," I say.

The form sits down next to me and materializes into the kind of long-legged, Roper-wearing coed we're known for here at Tech. The three triangles on her visor identify her as a Tri Delt. I think I'm learning more Greek here than anything else.

"It is you. I thought it was. Somebody said you were going to school here."

"Hi," I say.

"What?"

"I'm not really into parties, but I've got an afternoon to kill. Come up. Afterward, I'll tell you all about Ireland. It'll give you a story for tonight's mixer."

Cheryl's face darkens. "Who the hell do you think you are?"

I shrug.

"Screw you," she says. Then she stomps off.

For a split second I have the urge to stop her. Apologize. But for what? I wasn't really serious about using her. I doubt she could honestly say the reverse was true.

The architecture building is the tallest structure on the Tech campus, maybe all of Texas west of San Antonio. I walk by it daily on my way back to my dorm room. It towers out over the flat West Texas landscape. From the top floor, I've heard you can see Doggett, Odessa, Muleshoe. Maybe you can even see real cowboys riding horses into the sunset. But I wouldn't know for sure, because I manage to walk by every day without climbing its stairs.



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ROB THOMAS is the creator and executive producer of the television series *Veronica Mars*. He is also the co-creator and executive producer of *Party Down*; he wrote, directed, and produced the 2014 *Veronica Mars* feature film; and he is the co-creator and executive producer of *iZOMBIE*. Thomas is the author of *Rats Saw God*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; *Doing Time*; *Satellite Down*; and *Slave Day*. A Texas native, Thomas taught high school journalism for five years prior to the publication of his first novel. He currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

DETERMINED TO PURSUE HIS DREAMS

of becoming a reporter, Patrick Sheridan leaves his deeply religious family behind in his small Texas town for a job on a teen news show in LA. Before he knows it, he's mingling with the rich and famous, lying to his parents, and cheating on his girlfriend, who's waiting for him back home.

While on assignment across the pond in Ireland, he learns that it was his pretty face—not his talent—that landed him the job in the first place. Devastated and at a loss for what to do, Patrick runs. He knows it's up to him to pick up the shattered pieces of his life, but what do you do when everything you thought you knew turns out to be wrong?

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