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The  
**Butler**  
Did It!  
Garrison Flint

As a fierce winter storm swirls about an eerie old mansion perched atop a tiny island, Masters is unexpectedly faced with five bodies.

# **THE BUTLER DID IT!**

**A Raymond Masters Mystery**

***BOOK ELEVEN***

by

**Garrison Flint**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: DAY ONE TUESDAY AFTERNOON**

There was nothing remotely youthful about Windstone Manor – not the huge, ancient, three story, rock and beam edifice itself; not the small, always damp and windblown, craggy island atop which it sat there in the ever cold, churning waters some forty miles off the coast of northern Maine; not Elliott Stone, the reclusive, wheelchair-ridden, 74 year old, eccentric, lord of the manor; not the aging staff or curious assortment of five former butlers who had been assembled there to try and enhance their share of the old man's estate; not even Raymond Masters, the long retired, substantially built, revered old detective who was there to oversee the contest Elliott had devised for his less than altruistic, would be heirs.

It was not the kind of assignment Masters accepted. Elliott knew that from the outset. He also knew how to get what he wanted. If the old detective would spend just three days at Windstone, confirming that a simple game was carried out honestly and with dispatch, Elliott would donate a substantial sum to The Orphan's Relief Fund, Masters' favorite charity. Declining the invitation had not been an option, you see.

Elliott, paralyzed from polio and confined to a wheelchair since age five, was a generally humorless man – a genius, it was said - who had spent his life taking advantage of others in the realms of business and investments. Aside from the apparent generosity of his last will and testament, one would be hard put to find any socially redeeming qualities in

the old man. He trusted no one and no one trusted him. He liked no one and no one liked him.

Because of - and perhaps directed by - those several traits, Elliott had established a unique routine to support his life. Clearly dependent upon others to meet all of his physical and safety needs he hired only strong, young, greedy men as butlers. They were employed at age 30 for a tenure of exactly eight years at which time each one selected his own successor. The entire arrangement was brilliant. Elliott paid them twice the going rate while they were with him and upon completion of the eight-year stint each received a bonus equal to half of their total earnings during that time. It gets better.

They were all included in his will, the provisions of which were made clear to them from the outset. Depending on how long Elliott lived, each former butler would receive a predetermined percentage of Mr. Stone's estate as follows:

Elliot lives to be:	Each Butler receives:
50	1% of estate
55	2%
60	3%
65	4%
70	5%
75 or older	10%

He had no resignations and experienced no incompetent replacements.

The will also provided, that ten percent go to an Estate Trust for the perpetual upkeep of Windstone Manor, with another ten percent to his nephew, Jeremy, ten percent split equally among his long-time nurse, maid and grounds keeper, and an additional ten percent plus ownership of Windstone Manor to the winner of a special scavenger hunt, which Elliott had devised.

At the time of his death - whenever that occurred - the non-allotted portion of his estate was to be divided equally among his nephew (Jeremy), and his estranged brother and sister (Jeremy's mother).

Clearly it behooved each butler not only to take excellent care of Elliott but to also be meticulous in his selection of his successor. The longer the man lived, the larger each one's inheritance. On the other side of the coin,

his relatives would far better if Elliott packed it in early on. If there was any joy in Elliott's life it came from playing those two possibilities against each other, and the Scavenger Hunt, which was about to begin, pitted them all against each other in one final, greed-powered, brouhaha. It was to be the ultimate joy in the malevolent old man's life.

Masters had arrived by boat early in the afternoon of Tuesday, January 21st. Elliott's seventy-fifth birthday was the following day, on Wednesday the 22nd at twelve fifty-two in the afternoon – Elliot had been careful to specify the exact moment.

The five former butlers had arrived earlier in the day and were each established in a room of their own on the second floor. Hyde, the current butler of not quite two years, met Masters at the dock and escorted him - by way of the small cable car – up and over, the steep, rocky, incline to the Manor. To negotiate one's way to the top on foot or by vehicle was not feasible – well, for Buck perhaps, but that is another story.

With the butler's assistance, Masters was soon settling into his own, spacious, second floor room. It had large windows which overlooked the desolate, irregular, rock face of the northern slope. Hyde opened the heavy, brown drapes, presenting a breathtaking view of the dark, angry, sea, as it rushed in and crashed its swirling waves high and hard against the island's jagged, inhospitable, shoreline. The island stood as a fully unnecessary, stubborn bastion against the unrelenting, ferocious, forces of nature.

And high atop the little island stood Windstone Manor. Everything about Windstone was massive – from the generous size of the rooms with twelve foot ceilings, to the bulky, oversized, rustic furniture. Masters chuckled to himself and spoke aloud for his own as well as Butler Hyde's benefit.

“Finally, a setting in which I feel down right petite.”

Hyde nodded his recognition of the humorous line without varying his expression.

Two gasoline powered generators provided electricity for the island – often momentarily hesitant in their delivery but generally dependable.

“Meals at seven, twelve and six,” Hyde announced as

he paused at the door ready to leave. "The kitchen is always open if – or when - you feel the need for additional sustenance. Will there be anything else?"

"When will I meet Mr. Stone to receive the particulars of my responsibilities?"

"Mr. Stone will contact you in his own time. Everything at Windstone is done on Mr. Stone's own time."

There came the first hint of a smile from the handsome young man's square featured, face.

"The name of the cook?"

"Angie. She is the maid as well and competent at both. You will undoubtedly find her to be more relaxed about life than I am. Mr. Stone's nurse and secretary is Miss Mayford – I haven't a clue as to what her first name might be. She is efficient and aloof but not intentionally unfriendly. The grounds keeper is Buck – seventy plus himself I'd guess. Chatty. Full of stories. He grew up here on the island. His father and grandfather held the position before him. I think he believes it's really his island and he is just allowing the rest of us to stop over for a while. If he has left this rock during my year and a half here, I can't remember when."

"You are a fountain of information. Thank you. I look forward to getting better acquainted. The boat's captain said the former butlers have arrived. Is there anyone else here?"

"Jeremy, Mr. Stone's nephew – a few years younger than I am I'd guess. He's a permanent resident and perhaps my only friend here; unfortunately, it is only a friendship of circumstances. He has lived with Mr. Stone since he was five; his mother, as I understand it, just decided she no longer wanted him and deposited him on the doorstep – or in the cable car as it truly was. He is a happy go lucky type, irresponsible, and an admitted moral degenerate when it comes to women. I've known him to take six showers in a day. Fanatically, clean, I suppose you'd say. He and I are quite the opposites, really. Perhaps that's why we get on so well. I admire a small portion of his frivolous nature and he my reliability. The lines are clearly drawn regarding what we can and cannot expect from one another.

"Mr. Stone's brother will arrive later in the day – Gil, short for Gilbert, I believe. The two hate each other and

haven't spoken for thirty years. I don't know the man. It should present a fascinating element of entertainment, though, don't you think?"

"You are an imp in disguise, I believe, Butler Hyde."

"You've seen through me in fifteen minutes, Sir. I could never survive this grim place being otherwise."

"How about the sister - Jeremy's mother?"

"Again, I've never met her. Jeremy hasn't seen her for fifteen years. She will arrive early in the morning. Jane Dormer, widowed since Jerem was three – well that's the official version. Jerem tells it differently. She works for a meat processing plant somewhere in Arkansas. A chain smoker I understand. Tobacco's not allowed here in Windstone. With the big winter storm to arrive momentarily, that should also make for an interesting scenario. I can hardly wait!"

"You're clearly an educated man," Masters observed.

"MS from Princeton – art history. Just don't spread it around."

"MS from Harvard – sociology," Masters said, extending a hand. "I suppose even so, we can still find some way to be friends."

The two chuckled and nodded, acknowledging the absurdity of the two schools' age-old rivalry. The stay at Windstone had suddenly taken a tolerable turn. Masters arranged his things and then went in search of the kitchen.

On his way down to the first floor, Masters encountered a young man coming up the open staircase from the living room.

"I'm guessing you're Jeremy," Masters said extending his hand. "I'm Ray Masters."

"You didn't take me for one of the butlers!" Jeremy said smiling, feigning surprise and holding out his arms in an obvious put-on of his own generally disheveled appearance.

"Hyde spoke of you earlier."

The response didn't confirm or deny Jeremy's self-deprecating implication but seemed to get the old gentleman off the hook.

"Hyde's okay. Pretty stiff, but about my only friend around here aside from a beautiful wench or two I import on the weekends. At least mornings I know Hyde by his name."

His laugh confirmed his opinion that women were objects to be used, not known. His words brashly established himself as the patently dissolute person Hyde had suggested.

"You're here to run this circus, I understand," Jeremy said, suggesting some genuine interest in the old detective.

"Something like that," Masters answered. "Right now, I'm seeking the location of the kitchen."

Jeremy turned and pointed.

"Through the dining area over there. The only door on the right. Angie's the cook. She's a sweetheart. Always has a stash of goodies."

"Thanks. Nice meeting you. I'm sure we'll see more of each other."

The two proceeded in different directions.

The living room – more appropriately described as a great room – was fifty by fifty with blazing, sandstone, fireplaces on each of the four walls. The bare, wide plank and peg floor set the rustic atmosphere for the room, which spanned the width of the building. Numerous conversation areas had been arranged with oversized sofas and chairs surrounding interesting rugs and low tables. The center of the room was open to the roof some forty feet above. The second and third floors were actually mezzanines along the north side with the rooms opening out onto a wide walk-way, open to the huge room below, secured by a wooden rail, and lit by a series of wood and metal chandeliers, which were smaller versions of those hanging from chains above the great room. The massive, rough-hewn, pine beams and columns afforded a degree of confidence that Windstone Manor would surely stand for a second hundred years.

Angie was short and plump and wore both well. Her silver hair was tucked inside her stiffly starched, white, cap – a match to the color of her apron and hose. A simple, navy-blue dress completed her ensemble. It had the makings of a neat, attractive uniform but something about the cocked cap, the untied apron and the stocking feet, gave it Angie's personalized, more informal touch. Masters had to smile.

"You're Raymond Masters the detective fellow. I've been expecting you. I'm Angie and probably the only one on the island who enjoys eating raspberry twisters as much as

you do,” she said as if greeting an old friend. “Always a stash here in this canister on the counter. Enjoy.”

“You seem to have me at a disadvantage.”

“It’s them Mr. Flint’s books, you know.”

She blushed and scrunched her shoulders.

“I’ve had a crush on you ever since I read my first one way back when – The Murder No One Committed. I’ve whipped up something you liked from every one of them books. May need to stay an extra week just to sample them all.”

“I’m honored. You’re very kind and generous. What would you suggest first for a man who only managed to pick at his airline dinner some four hours ago?”

“Raspberry tarts with lemon sauce?” she asked more than answered.

“You didn’t! I love you already, Ms. Angie. Go find a minister and we’ll tie the knot.”

Angie blushed again and bustled to the cupboard.

“Take a seat at the table. Coffee with that? Can have a fresh pot brewed in three minutes.”

“That would be wonderful.”

Masters looked around the surprisingly modern kitchen.

“I assume you have been here a while.”

“Forty plus years. I’m much older than I look, you see.”

It was a strange twist to the usual age veiling comment and had clearly been intended as humorous. They each acknowledged that with a smile.

“What do I need to know about this place and all its residents?” Masters asked, opening the topic and giving Angie her head.

“Mr. Stone is gruff and self-centered. He can be generous, but only in the service of his own selfish needs. Young master Jeremy is a bright, self-absorbed, skirt chaser. I love him but would never trust him. Mr. S gave up on him years ago. When he turned eighteen, Mr. S tried to set him up to butler this place – arranged to pay him a big salary - but that all fell apart after about six months as I recall. He did look handsome all dressed up, I’ll tell you that. Just never seemed to get the hang of butlering. Never really found his niche doing anything.

“Hyde, now he’s a gentleman’s gentleman – brings more class to this place than any of those that came before him. Then there’s old Buck. If he was in his rightful setting, he’d be a mountain man. Has a million stories about this place – his own and those his pappy and grandpappy told him. His wife passed on shortly after they married. Frail and couldn’t endure these awful conditions. Miss Mayford is Mr. S’s nurse and secretary. She’s stiff and standoffish but does her jobs as good as anybody ever could. We play pinnacle when we can collar Hyde. Peanut butter cookies will usually do the trick. Me and her have coffee mornings – I like mine black. She likes milk and honey in hers. She mostly sips and listens while I prattle on. I’m sure that’s a big surprise to you.”

They chuckled again as Angie placed a small container of lemon sauce in the microwave.

“What do you know about Gil and Jane?”

“Not a lot. Jerem – we’ve called him that forever – hates his mom’s guts if you know what I mean. She’s had bad luck with money, I guess. Even worse luck with husbands – five that Jerem knows about – or maybe that’s six now, I can’t keep up. I’ve heard some were druggies. Maybe his problem with the opposite sex is inherited. I understand that Jane hates both her brothers – Mr. Stone and Gilbert – and never got on well with her father. Gil owns several men’s clothing stores down in the Boston area. Done pretty well for himself, considering he started out as a butler, himself. Nothing to compare to Mr. S’s millions, but pretty well off. The two of them had a major problem many years ago and haven’t spoke since.”

“Do you know the nature of that problem?”

Angie brought a platter of tarts and the boat of sauce, and took a seat across from Masters. Her tone became confidential as she reached across and served the old detective.

“It was my first year here. Mr. S was just thirty-five. Gil was thirty and Jane twenty-five – I assume their parents had done some family planning if you know what I mean.”

She winked an oversized wink.

“Well, their father had just died – the mother had passed on years before. He left Windstone to Elliott - our Mr.

Stone - and each of the three kids 5,000 shares of stock in a company called Pennington Crate. It built wooden shipping crates and owned thousands of acres of timber around the country – some of it in Arkansas and that will be important in a minute.

“It happened right at the time when wooden shipping crates were on their way out and corrugated boxes were on the way in. Mr. S could see that timber could make pasteboard cartons as well as crates, but that went right over the heads of the other two. In addition to that, Mr. S learned that bauxite had been discovered on some of the company’s land in Arkansas. It’s the source of aluminum, you know.”

Masters nodded.

“Well, Mr. S, playing like the good hearted big brother, offered to buy his brother’s and sister’s shares at whatever the going price was – it had dropped quite a bit in the years just before. The two jumped at the offer and each ended up with about ten thousand dollars – which back then was a whole lot of money, but then I guess you know that, too.

“Six years later, Pennington Crate was a big player in cardboard of all kinds and fell into millions from the aluminum rights deals. At that point Mr. S sold all fifteen thousand shares at a hundred dollars apiece. When Gil and Jane got wind of it they were furious and soon after that the family just split apart – everybody went their separate ways.”

The family history had been more complete than Masters had expected. He was moved to question Angie about it.

“And may I ask how you came by all this information?”

“Well,” (she tittered) I guess some mornings Miss Mayford may talk just a little bit!”

They exchanged smiles.

“These tarts are every bit as good as the originals, Angie. How can I thank you?”

“Just enjoy them. That’s the only thanks a cook really wants.”

Masters nodded and enjoyed!

“So, that’s the family, out here, is it?”

“Well, except for Mr. Black - Carl Black, Mr. Stone’s lawyer and accountant. He comes and goes. He’s coming

out in the morning. Probably arrive on the boat with Jane if the weather holds off another day. Supposed to have a big winter blow any time now. They can last weeks. Nothing comes or goes out here when a storm sets in. I've seen it get twenty below with a wind chill twenty degrees below that. Back in the days when I hung out the laundry, the clothes would get froze together in the basket before I could get 'em on the line. I'd heat bricks in the oven and put 'em in the bottom."

"It sounds quite unpleasant around here during the winter."

"Only if you have to be out in it. Windstone, here, is always warm and cozy, if such a rangy place can be called cozy. Mr. Stone requires it extra warm. You've noticed that already, I imagine."

"Yes, now that you mention it."

Masters undid several buttons on his dark brown cardigan. A booming sound from outside distracted them both.

"What on Earth was that?" Masters asked.

"Probably thunder. I've seen it lightening right through these snow storms. Really rocks the place sometimes."

"Never heard of such a thing," Masters said, clearly interested. "Unnerving, I'd think!"

Angie accepted the comment but didn't react. She continued on about the mansion.

"The fireplaces are mostly for show even though they burn constantly. There are huge oil furnaces in the basement that do the real heating – vents into every room," she explained slipping another tart onto his plate and ladling out a generous portion of lemon sauce.

"You get away from here sometimes?" he asked nodding his appreciation.

"I get two weeks in July every year and then every other Saturday. That Saturday thing is really a joke because I still have to do all the work and have the meals prepared ahead of time, but I've learned to live with it."

"And the butlers?"

"Time off, you mean? Nope. They work twenty-four, seven as it's said these days. Well, twenty-four, seven, fifty-

two, I guess would be more accurate. No time off, ever. It's like an eight-year hitch in the foreign legion for them. With all the money they earn and nowhere to spend it, they come out pretty well off in the end. Never heard one of 'em complain about it."

"Back to Mr. Black?"

"Oh, yeah. He's a lawyer and he handles all the legal stuff and the money matters. He's like Mr. Stone's legs on the mainland. He does the banking, signs the checks, makes the investments, attends meetings, and things like that - the way I hear it, anyway."

"Do you know him well?"

"I suppose so. He's married with a passel of kids - Irish Catholic, you know, but he doesn't drink. He's a real gentleman as far as I can tell, but since he does Mr. S's bidding, he must have a darker side to him I've never seen."

Masters remained silent hoping for more.

"I shouldn't have said that. It's just that, well, Mr. Stone is known to be - what should I say - ruthless when it comes to business. I think he's been in pain so long that he somehow enjoys inflicting hurt on others - poor man - like it evens things out for him, you might say. My, I shouldn't have said that either. You have a way of drawing out secrets, Mr. M."

That was met by a smile and continued silence from the old detective. Masters was a firm believer in the old adage, 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. Angie prattled on.

"He allowed the butlers to be terribly rough on Jerem when he was a little boy. When he arrived here he was really out of control - temper tantrums, destructive, foul language like you wouldn't believe. More than once I seen him physically attack other people. He'd rage and pound and kick and bite on any part of them he could find. Mr. S just washed his hands of the problem and let the butlers handle the disciplining - mostly severe spankings when he was little but as he got older it got worse. I remember once, when he had just turned thirteen, Phillip - who had a sadistic streak in him anyway - stripped the boy naked and tied him to a tree outside. He left him there all night through a terrible, September rain storm. I'm surprised he didn't drown from the driving rain or die of pneumonia. September nights are cold

out here. I didn't know about it until weeks later. It still hurts me to think about it."

She dabbed at her eyes with her apron and went to get the coffee pot.

"I can tell you care about Jeremy. You're still close?"

"Close ain't the term. I don't think nobody's close with him. Well, maybe Miss Mayford. She tutored him when he was a kid and did what she could to protect him. When he'd get hurt or sick it was Miss Mayford he wanted. I never saw him out of line around her. He still hugs her when they meet. Never got his hug, myself, but to answer your question, I'd say that Jeremy and I get on real good."

A bell rang and Masters looked around in search of its source.

"That's Buck."

"Buck rings?"

Angie chuckled through a broad grin.

"No, Sir. He comes into the mud room for coffee and meals. He seems to prefer not to be in the rest of the house unless something needs fixing – well, the basement to keep the fires up and generators going, of course. I take his meals to him. The bell rings when the back door is opened. I already got his afternoon pot brewing back there on a hot plate. He likes to doctor it up from his hip pocket if you get my drift."

"Perhaps this would be a good time for me to meet the man," Masters said, finishing the final sliver of tart, dabbing at his lips with a napkin, and running his comb through his everward mustache to rid it of any stray crumbs.

"Sure. He's a real friendly sort. He's a loner everywhere else on the island but he seems to like people when he's up here."

Masters stood, reset his chair under the table and patted his generous stomach.

"Thank you for the delicious snack, Angie. I promise that I will do my best to sample absolutely everything you have so generously prepared for me."

Again, she blushed and turned her head. She hadn't been misspeaking when she said she had a crush on the old detective.

“Though that door.” She pointed.

Masters pocketed three raspberry twisters, winked, and disappeared into the next room.

Buck was, as he had been described, both a mountain man and a mountain of a man. His two hundred fifty pounds were powerfully distributed over a six foot six frame, still erect and proud at seventy-four. His full beard and long hair, both plainly untrimmed for years, still bore substantial proof of their earlier red color.

Buck’s ability to read and compute – whatever they were - seemed at least adequate for his responsibilities but had been acquired outside any formal classroom. He lived alone in an ancient, three room log cabin. It had been installed with care into a well-sheltered recess some forty stone steps above the substantial timber dock twenty-five feet below. The steps - their surfaces cupped from a century of wear - had been carved out of the solid rock, southern face of the island.

The mud room was just behind the kitchen. Twenty feet square, it was complete with shower, sofa, several chairs and a long table. Closets ran the length of the east wall and open shelves covered the west. Small windows on each side of the door on the north side provided the only natural light. When Masters entered, Buck was seated at the table sipping his “back-pocket” Irish coffee.

He raised his huge hand in greeting and smiled his easy, natural, mostly toothless grin.

“Welcome to Buck’s dining room,” he said pleasantly, offering some humor with the remark.

The distinctive, trailing aroma, which accompanied Buck’s presence, suggested to Masters that although it was conceivable the man may have bathed at some time during his life, it had likely been prior the Carter Administration. Still, something about the scruffy old man was immediately attractive.

“Buck, then, I assume,” Masters said. “I’m Ray.”

He took a seat across the table.

“Here for the big game, I ‘magine,” Buck said looking the new guy up one side and down the other. “Look likes we gots lots in common.”

Initially the comment struck Masters as humorous but upon immediate reflection he understood the reference had probably been to age and size.

“It certainly appears that way.”

“You talk city.”

“I must plead guilty,” Masters said. “Lived in cities most of my life. Retired now to a little town in western New York - Rossville. Peaceful, friendly, with folks who are respectful of each other’s privacy.”

“You’ll like it here, then. Never asked a man his business in all my 74 years.”

It was an interesting comment since the second thing out of his mouth had been an inquiry as to why Masters was there.

Masters nodded - more just a friendly gesture than to indicate agreement with anything.

“Quite a rock you have here,” Masters said, again opening a topic in his well-practiced ‘ink blot’ fashion.

“Solid like Gibraltar. This house sat here through three generations - birth to grave - well, almost, me bein’ the third, ya see, with no intention of goin’ to ma grave jist yet. That ol’ sea just keeps commin’ at her out’a the north, but she don’t give a inch. Like a battle a wills.”

“I know this house, as you call it, is referred to as Windstone Manor. Is Windstone the island’s name as well?”

“It’s a no name island, Ray. Not on many maps or charts. The folk’s in town calls it Buck’s Island - both my pappy and his pappy were Bucks like me.”

“I assume Mr. Stone somehow bought it?”

“It was his pappy’s, and his pappy’s before him. Us two families just always shared it. Mr. S reckons it’s his. I reckon it’s mine. Don’t matter none. No man can claim any part a God’s Earth fer long - money or no money, this ol’ rock is her own keeper.”

“You’re a philosopher at heart, Buck.”

“Don’t let it out.”

His smile suggested there was more to the man than his trappings and backwoods English implied.

“You and Mr. Stone get on well, then, do you?”

“Hain’t seen the man in thirty years. Played t’gether as

li'l boys. I does the work, and he leaves me cash money here on the table every Monday morning. He don't boss and I don't complain. Good arrangement. Ang makes despots for me in town when she goes. Don't trust the banks with much of it though."

"How about the others around here. They easy to get along with?"

"The butlers come and go. One's 'bout like the next. The new guy's classy - not like the others. I like him. He talks to me. Likes my stories about this place."

Buck leaned across the table.

"Some a them is even true."

He laughed from his toes, raring back and slapping the table.

"Those are powerful hands you have there," Masters commented.

Buck held them up, palms toward his face.

"Served me well all these years. A bit a the 'itis' once in a while."

He opened and closed his fingers several times.

"Me too," Masters said mirroring the action. "I'd think these damp conditions would really aggravate it."

Buck shrugged as if to say, 'Why even consider that? It's a given out here.'

"And Miss Mayford?"

"Again, hain't seen her in years except from a distance. She's a lady - sure a that. She walks the ridge in the morning on good days. I see her there sometimes but not to speak. No woman should be an old maid. Hain't natural. That's what I tell Ang. 'Find a man,' I tell her every time she takes the boat to town. She never does. Just not natural though."

"You and Ang get on well, I take it."

"Ang is a gem. Kind 'n considerate. Give ya the shirt off her back - well, you know what I mean. She even gets on with the boy."

"Jeremy?"

Buck grunted what Masters took to be a yes.

"You and Jeremy?"

"I try to avoid him. Always been trouble. Used to feel sorry for him the way he was treated around here. As a little

tyke, he'd follow me around and think he was helpin'. Tickled me. Always afraid a the bees when we opened the hives to collect the honey but he'd always come along, I'll give him that. He'd steal anything that weren't tacked down – you know. Never did a kind deed lessin there was somethin' in it fer him. Now that he's growed he's still that same little boy. You'd think thirty years a livin' would teach a man somethin' 'bout human nature, wouldn't ya?"

It was rhetorical and Masters let it drop.

"I better make myself available for Mr. Stone," Masters said at last. "If I'm supposed to be running this game, I better know what it's all about."

He stood to leave.

"It's been nice chatting with you, Buck. I'm sure our paths will cross again while I'm here."

It deserved and received only a nod from the man who returned to his coffee and solitude.

Masters turned and left.

In the kitchen, Angie had been joined by Miss Mayford.

"Here's the big guy, now," Angie said as he entered.

"Mr. Masters this is Miss Mayford. She was just looking for you. She preferred to wait here rather than to expose herself to Buck's ... bouquet, shall we say."

He held out his hand and they shook, a more substantial grip than he had anticipated from such a slight woman.'

"Seems strong hands go with Windstone. I was just looking at Buck's."

"Well, strong hands tend to develop in a nurse who gives three, half-hour, massages a day. That much I can tell you, for sure. Mr. Stone is ready for you when you can come."

"I have nothing else on my agenda. Lead the way."

"I should forewarn you that he is brusque and gets right to the point - some, well most, might call it rude."

"I understand."

"Probably not, but he is waiting by the west fireplace. He likes to sit and look out over the water toward the open sea."

"I see you don't mince words, yourself, Miss. Mayford. I assume that's what you prefer to be called?"

It had been a question and was accepted as such.

She looked at him and offered her first smile.

“You know in the thirty-five plus years I’ve been here, you’re the first person who has ever asked me what I preferred to be called. Beatrice or Bea, if you like. And thank you for inquiring.”

“I’m Raymond, Ray if you like, and you’re completely welcome.”

They exchanged a smile. She escorted him toward Mr. Stone who sat in his wheelchair, a gaudy, well-worn, afghan draped about his spindly legs.

“Masters. Sit. Sit! Let’s get to it. Give the man the check. Every cent I promised. I’m a man of my word if nothing else.”

“Thank you. The funds will put it to good use, I assure you.”

“Could care less. It bought you. That’s its sole purpose as far as I’m concerned.”

Bea looked at Masters over the top of her glasses, carefully out of Stone’s sight.

“Call me Elliott. I’ll call you Ray. Give Ray the rules.”

Bea took a large brown envelope from a briefcase that sat near the wheelchair and handed it to Masters. Stone continued.

“It is a scavenger hunt. The winner gets this God-awful place and an extra ten percent of my estate. There will be my five former butlers, my cook, my nephew, my brother and sister and the grounds keeper competing. I have looked forward to this for forty years so don’t screw it up! It will begin after dinner this evening and end whenever it ends. We will all gather here at seven thirty to get started. Each of the participants has already received a copy of the rules.

“In a nutshell, I have listed ten items that each participant must find or construct here on the island and deliver to this room. The weather should be absolutely terrible which makes it all the better. As each one is satisfied that he has an item completed he will bring it to you for verification. You will mark it completed up on the black board over there by the south fireplace. Miss Mayford has already prepared it. I have described the requirements for each item in detail on the

instruction sheet.”

“It would seem most anyone could do my job,” Masters observed. “Why me?”

“It’s a devilish group of people, Ray. I expect backbiting and a full range of other despicable acts among them. If - no - as things get hairy, I want you here to sort them out. I trust your honesty and integrity and just may need your professional assistance if things get as out of hand as I expect they will.”

He smiled and rubbed his hands as if portraying the wealthy villain about to foreclose in a melodrama of old.

Suddenly Masters suspected it was more likely to be a modern tragedy.

“You feel safe through all of this?” Masters asked.

“Of course, not! That’s the fun, the rush, the danger. Jane, Gil and Jeremy will want me laid out stone cold dead before the minute of my birthday so they can inherit the whole 50% that’s up for grabs here. The butlers will guard me at all costs to see that I live past that moment. The surest way for them to assure themselves the promised generous cut to the winner would be to do in my three relatives. Wonderful fun, you see, is about to get under way out here. With any luck, the winter storm will set in after everyone arrives and we’ll be captives here together as it all plays out.”

There was another boom of thunder and another smile from the old man’s face as he looked skyward in anticipation of the storm.

Sometimes madness only affects one small aspect of a personality. It seemed to Masters that was probably the case with Elliott. He looked at Bea. She shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows nodding toward the window. The dark swirling clouds suggested that the storm would soon take hold of the island. The boat from town was approaching. Elliott spied it as well.

“That’s probably my loving family arriving now. Came early to make sure they got here ahead of the storm. Greed can fire courage - I’ll tell you that - even in the habitually gutless.”

He laughed and clapped like a small boy watching a fire engine.

It was one of the few times in Masters' career when he had been at a loss about how to proceed. He had clearly been brought there under the false pretense that the game was, in fact, a game, and not some play 'til you kill or are killed Coliseum event.

From his view of the rapidly deteriorating conditions outside, Masters determined that if he didn't leave on the boat then docking, he would be stuck there for the duration along with the rest. Given the time-line, such an effort seemed futile. He would stay and try to direct the activity along rational lines – for the sake of the orphans.

Stone manipulated several levers on the handle of his chair and without a further word was off across the room heading toward his private quarters just beyond the northern fireplace. Masters looked at Bea.

“What . . . ?”

He could bring to mind no words to hone his thought. None were needed.

“Mr. Stone is as rational as you and I except for this, Mr. Masters.”

“Ray, please.”

She nodded and smiled, and then continued.

“Do you think you can keep it all under control?”

“It is not I who has to do the controlling, Bea. I can try to appeal to their humanity but it appears they are as deranged about all this as he is. Any suggestions will be appreciated.”

“If any surface, I'll be sure to share them. Well, you have the set up there in the envelope. The blackboard is self-explanatory. I'd suggest you spend some time with the conditions Mr. Stone has set down and let me know if there are questions. You can usually reach me from any of the house phones by dialing 0-0-0-0. I have always hoped that extension number didn't reflect Mr. Stone's evaluation of my worth.”

She smiled.

Stiff old Miss Mayford was really not stiff old Miss Mayford at all. Masters wondered how that could that have been kept under wraps all those years.

“And a phone to the mainland?” Masters asked.

“There is only one. It works through a buried cable laid down seventy-five years ago. It is accessed by dialing 9-9-9-9 but Mr. Stone has a lock-switch that he can use to cut it off for everyone but himself. I imagine that switch has already been thrown. He will have Hyde confiscate all the cell phones shortly. Actually, in weather conditions like this, they are useless out here anyway.”

“Are there firearms on the island?”

“There aren’t supposed to be. Mr. Stone detests them. I imagine Buck has some though I have never heard shots fired. I may be wrong about that. Buck is pretty much an island unto himself, you might say.”

“May I ask about the location of your quarters, in case the phones go dead?”

The door to the left of the North fireplace leads to Mr. Stone’s quarters. The door to the right leads to mine. There are connecting doors between the suites to make my work easier. The first room is my office. Just barge right in.”

“He is legitimately confined to the chair?”

“Oh, yes. Nothing works below his diaphragm and his arms couldn’t possibly handle his weight. He is quite helpless physically.”

“He must trust you completely.”

“Trust? I don’t think so. Believes that I will blindly do his bidding because he pays me so well? Yes! He doesn’t understand loyalty out of compassion or love. He believes only in the power of the dollar sign and has set up his life in ways that prove that to him over and over again. Last week he informed me there would be a hundred and fifty-thousand-dollar bonus for me if he were still alive come Thursday morning. Trust in human morality? No. Trust in human greed? Definitely!”

“I’d like to ask you what has kept you here all these years, but that is really none of my business,” Masters said attempting to be honest on both counts.

“I’m terrified of the real world out there. It’s that simple. If I’d have been Catholic, I’d have become a nun – not for any righteous reasons – just out of fear – a place to retreat. For me, this place is comfortable. Perhaps that makes me as loony as the Stone Family. If Mr. Stone only understood that

I'd do anything to keep him alive just so I will continue to have my sanctuary here, he'd stop paying me – perhaps start charging me rent. I suppose that's my own version of greed, isn't it?"

It was certainly not what Masters had expected but then had he known what to expect he wouldn't have posed the question.

"I need a belt of Angie's coffee," she said. "Let me know when I can be of assistance."

She patted his big hand, turned, and left.

Bea had made it unanimous. Everyone had placed the responsibility for the civil outcome of the "hunt" squarely on Masters' shoulders. Through the years, he had developed a completely dependable way to handle the anxiety produced by such overwhelming circumstances – he would take a nap.

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**CHAPTER TWO:  
LATE TUESDAY  
THROUGH WEDNESDAY MORNING  
(Plus a little more!)**

Masters could not be sure if it had been the faint rapping at his door or the rattling of the windows that had awakened him.

“Yes. Come in.”

He struggled his large frame into a sitting position on the side of his bed. It was Hyde.

“Dinner in ten minutes. It will be less drafty and much quieter in here with the drapes closed. Shall I?”

“Yes. Please. Thank you.”

The rattling was indeed muted.

“It’s vicious outside. Will be beastly cold around here tonight. The vent from the second furnace will need to be opened. That will keep you quite comfortable.”

He hesitated as if for permission to take care of it.

“Yes. Thank you. I must have slipped into a deep sleep. My naps are usually just twilight affairs. What is the dress for dinner?”

“What you’re wearing is fine. Actually, anything goes. We’re just always happy when Jerem shows up wearing shirt and pants.”

Again, Hyde flashed his wonderful smile. That time it was Masters who acknowledged the attempt at humor with a nod.

“The others arrive safely?” Masters asked, getting to his feet and reaching for his sweater.

“Yes. Gilbert Stone, Jane Dormer, and Carl Black all came in late this afternoon. With the prediction for a wind driven blast of arctic air over the next several days, the captain who runs the ferry service out here won’t take chances. It was come now or wait it out in town.”

“And they are staying where?”

“Mr. Black keeps a room down at the east end here on the second floor. He spends a great deal of time at Windstone - one or two nights a week. The other two are up on the third floor. Mr. Stone had me set them up in the smallest rooms in the Manor - speaking of someone with the imp in him. Jane expected her old room back on the first floor. It’s been part of Miss Mayford’s suite for the past thirty-five years. She raged on for a while – as if there were anything that could have been done about it. I’m surprised that didn’t awaken you. She’s in a room that is almost directly above yours. Gil had no comment, but I could tell he was seething under the collar. The third floor has traditionally been the servants’ quarters – low ceilings and cramped. Years ago, Jerum combined four of the rooms up there and put a pretty nice suite together for himself. He doesn’t need or appreciate fancy and likes to be isolated from the rest of us. My room is the largest one on the east end - has a dormer that makes it appear roomier than it is. Other than that, the third floor is vacant.”

“Again, thanks for your help and information,” Masters said as the two left the room together.

Hyde adjusted Masters’ collar. Masters nodded his appreciation.

“You’d make a good wife!”

“I’ve been told that,” Hyde came back, smiling. “Now I have the privilege of informing the incensed Jane and still stewing Gil about dinner time. Does it seem to you that I am enjoying all this way too much?”

It required no answer but a set of raised eyebrows and quick tilt of the head confirmed Masters’ agreement with the premise.

The former butlers had already gathered near the fireplace on the north wall of the living room, near the entry arch which led into the dining room. From the distance of the stairway it appeared to Masters they were more friendly than

would have been expected from a group that had met only hours before. Perhaps it was a butler thing. He stood there for several minutes and watched, unnoticed by those below.

The oldest looked to be in his late sixties or early seventies – Ellsworth, Elliott’s first butler. He appeared stooped and frail. Jackson, now in his late fifties had been the butler when Jeremy first arrived at Windstone Manor. He walked with a cane. Whether that was out of necessity or for effect could not be ascertained from a distance. Phillip, the butler who had reportedly been periodically sadistic in his handling of Jeremy as a young teenager still sported a full head of jet black hair at fifty or so. His suit was clearly tailor-made and very expensive. Jules in his mid-forties had lost his hair and may well have looked more distinguished without it than he had before. Finally, there was Randolph, the most recent departure from the Manor, still looking fit for the triathlon. He had selected Hyde, of course - apparently, a fine choice in the waning years of the line of succession.

“Getting acquainted with the field?” Hyde said, stopping on the step beside Masters on his return from the third floor.

“You could say that. May I ask if you keep in contact with Randolph, the one who selected you for this job?”

“No. Never. At the outset, he tried to extort fifty percent of my salary in order to recommend me for employment. I’m not sure if that’s standard procedure among the lot or not. I told him to shove the whole thing and walked away. Two days later he came begging at my door. I do think he’d have paid me something to hire on. I’m not into that sort of thing, of course.”

“Interesting intrigue,” Masters said. “One other thing that has puzzled me. You aren’t included in the contest. Doesn’t that bother you – being shut out, so to speak?”

Hyde smiled.

“When I was hired, I knew the arrangement. Mr. Stone realized that if his current butler were a part of it all, there would be no one to care for him during the hunt. So, I don’t have to go through the agony and, provided he lives through one more day, I receive an immediate bonus of two hundred fifty thousand dollars.”

“I see. The old boy has had the details worked out for

years, hasn't he?"

"It would certainly seem so."

They moved on down the stairs and Hyde made the official introductions. The buzz of conversation stopped as the two approached. Masters shook hands with each and exchanged some bit of meaningless small talk as is done in such situations. He made a mental note that Phillip, dressed in an expensive suit, had dirty fingernails. Not at all what he would have expected.

Soon Jane and Gil appeared on the staircase arm in arm – he in a tux and she an evening gown - apparently, a throwback to the days of their youth there at Windstone Manor.

Masters looked at Hyde, frowning a silent question. Hyde leaned close and whispered.

"They didn't ask about attire and I must have failed to say anything."

He chuckled himself back into his flawless, erect posture and began ushering the group into the dining area. Place cards marked the seating arrangement. Hyde, who seated Masters first, joyously accepted daggers across the room from Jane's icy stare. Perhaps it had been 'age before beauty'. Perhaps it had been something else.

Interesting to Masters, the help ate at the table with the rest of them. Gil sat to Masters' right and Jane to his left – a convenience undoubtedly arranged by Elliott, himself, who had been on station at the head of the table since before the rest entered the room. He made no effort to direct the conversation but got right to the task of eating. Clearly the meal was functional and not social in his mind.

Masters introduced himself to those beside him and then turned specifically to Jane.

"How are things in the grand state of Arkansas?" was his opening line. "It's one of my favorite places in the World."

She ignored it as being the merely polite small talk, which it was, and got right to her agenda.

"None of this is fair, you understand. This crew of buzzardly butlers, doesn't have rightful claim to any of Elliott's money."

Masters did not comment.

“Gil and I are going to sue to get this thing reversed, you understand. The old man is insane.”

Again, it asked for no response and received none.

Jeremy was seated on the other side of his mother and spoke.

“Mother dear. Crackers for your soup or are you crackers enough without them, Mother dear?”

It was a poorly constructed attempt at sarcasm but clearly indicated his perception of their relationship.

“I see that not even twenty-five years in hell has straightened you out,” came her response as if to moderate his implication about her lack of parenting through the years.

Extricating himself from the childlike nattering to his left, Masters turned to Gil.

“I understand you’re into men’s clothing - so to speak. You have a line to fit us overstuffed guys?”

“Whatever you need and for any occasion. We call it our Tall and Stout line. That’s one of the blessings of men’s clothing – you can call it like it is. Now in women’s, can you imagine getting by calling any of them stout. You’d have pickets and protest boycotts! For them the lines have to be Full Figured or Lots to Love. Glad I chose men. Women would simply drive me batty.”

Masters couldn’t resist:

“Married?” he asked with an impish smile of his own.

“No. My sister handles all the marriages in our family.”

He bent forward to look across Masters and catch Jane’s reaction. She pretended not to have heard. Jeremy laughed out loud and slapped the table.

“Your brother appears to be in good health, such as it can be,” Masters said, probing.

“Unfortunately. Who’d have thought he’d make it this long? Has the fortitude of Hulk Hogan? Well, maybe I can salvage something from this game he’s devised. How hard should it be to beat a bunch from the servant class?”

It had been a question but Masters chose not to answer it.

“Well, it sounds interesting, at least,” Masters said, trying to hide his trepidation.”

“Just hope we get through it without bodies dangling

from the chandeliers,” Gil said, offering only a modest effort to make it seem humorous.

As the meal progressed, Jeremy continued to take jabs at his mother who retaliated with comments about her devil son and that even as a small child he demonstrated the inability to be anything but demanding and self-centered. In the only serious attempt at communication between the two of them Jeremy pointed out that children under the age of five were normally demanding and self-centered, and that mothers were supposed to be wise enough and altruistic enough to take that into account. At that, Jane shifted in her chair, putting as much of her back in his direction as was possible given the close quarters of the seating arrangement.

Mercifully, dessert was finally finished (bread pudding topped with raspberry sherbet) and the group moved in the direction of the living room to await final instructions for the hunt.

Masters approached Angie to thank her for the fine meal. Apparently, Hyde had just done the same and was on his way elsewhere.

“Ready for the bloodbath?” he smiled – eyebrows raised – as he moved past Masters, not waiting for an answer.

“He’s probably right you know,” Angie said, playing nervously with her apron. “I’m glad I’m having no part in it.”

“I thought you and all the staff were eligible to participate.”

“We are but what would Angie Smythe do with another million dollars and the responsibility for this old dinosaur of a place? No, Sir, I’ll stay in my quarters and just hope nobody burns it down around me.”

She moved on to tend to her business. It was an unnerving possibility that Masters had not considered – the burning of Windstone. In a fleeting thought he wondered about fire escapes from the second floor as he held his big pocket watch at arm’s length. The time had come. He strode to a place beside the blackboard and cleared his throat.

Hyde made the announcement.

“Your attention is directed to the Honorable Raymond Masters at the blackboard near the South wall. He will officiate this . . . activity.”

He had wanted to use the word mayhem but thought better of it.

Chairs were turned and people moved into positions closer to the old detective. Presently a hush overtook the room. Elliott entered from his quarters and stationed himself at Masters' left. Masters acknowledged his presence with a nod and then turned back to the larger group.

"You have previously received the instructions. Miss Mayford will hand you the list of articles you are to acquire during the Scavenger Hunt. Unlike some you may have participated in as youngsters, in this instance you are to return here and deposit each item with me as you acquire it. If it meets the requirement I will tag it, mark it off beside your name on the board and enter the time it was accepted. The items are numbered one through ten. That corresponds with the spaces here on the blackboard. You may acquire them in any order. There will be no questioning of my decisions. To do so will result in a player's immediate disqualification. When I do not accept an item the player may continue searching for a version of that item that will be suitable. Are there any questions?"

Jeremy raised his hand in the overly energetic fashion of a fourth grader urgently in need of a trip to the restroom – his attempt, no doubt, to diminish the importance of the undertaking.

"Jeremy," Masters said ignoring his antics.

"What about fouls? Is touching and bumping or holding onto face masks allowed? Can we snatch the ball from another's arms in a well-planned dash-by?"

"Theft and physical abuse will not be tolerated here, just as they have not been tolerated in kindergarten classes down through history."

The others looked toward Jeremy and snickered but understood Master's serious intent.

"If there are no other general questions let's go through the ten items which Mr. Stone has specified."

Bea handed a list to each participant. Carl Black, standing arms folded at the rear of the gathering, refused a card with a look, which clearly signified he was not to be a party to the madness. The field was thereby narrowed to eight

– the five butlers, Jane, Gil and Jeremy – us against them, as it were!

Masters erased from the board, the names of those who had withdrawn. Buck's name remained in place even though he had not appeared for the meeting.

“Number one,” Masters began in his imposing, baritone voice. “A four-foot length of metal pipe – measuring within one inch of the specified length. Number two; seventy-four pennies – one for each of Mr. Elliot Stone's years. Number three; six, unbroken, cedar shingles from the roof of Windstone Manor. Number four; six clay, flower pots. Number five; a U. S. Flag or a carefully drawn and colored replica. Number six; the driver's license of one of the other participants and it cannot be a simple exchange between two people. Number seven; twenty-one cigarettes or ten cigars. Number eight; a black gumball from the old fashioned, one cent, glass-domed, dispenser down in the dock house - it contains fifteen black and two-hundred of other colors. Number nine; a book of poems by a now deceased author, and Number ten; a test tube filled with human blood, preferably your own – alcohol, cotton, test tubes, corks, razor blades and band aids will be found in the upper left compartment of the cupboard in the mud room.”

Elliott smiled and again clapped quietly. The room echoed with the participants' murmur. Masters shook his head and glanced from Bea to Hyde in both cases met with shrugs. He spoke one last time.

“Although I have more than a few reservations about this activity I will see that it is officiated fairly. I now declare the Scavenger Hunt to be underway. It will end when the first one of you has successfully delivered all ten of the items to me here.”

With that, whatever small sense of group cohesiveness that may have existed, gave way to an immediate, paranoid-like disconnect. Each, privately, studied the items. Most made notes on the sheet. Some glanced around the gathering apparently considering the necessity for fleeting, mutually beneficial, alliances and began making overtures toward those they deemed useful, though weaker than themselves.

Masters witnessed a brief but sustained glance

between Jeremy and his mother. Had it reflected hate? Had it reflected challenge? Had it reflected coalition? Masters could not be sure. Regardless, it struck him as curiously out of place.

Jeremy was the first to leave the room. He disappeared through the doorway to the kitchen. Gradually the others departed – each assuming a face that implied clear-cut purpose. Jane climbed the stairs and soon reappeared in jeans and sweatshirt. She carried a quilted coat. Masters noted that she was equally as attractive dressed in that manner as she had been before. Gil shed his tie and cummerbund but opted not to use his time for a complete costume change.

Within five minutes the room was cleared of participants and Elliott had returned to his quarters. It was Jeremy who reappeared first, flaunting the vile of blood for those remaining to see.

“One tube of genuine, all-American, Jeremy Newman blood,” he announced handing over the still warm container to Masters. It was accepted, tagged, and placed in a box without comment.

Jeremy turned and bounded up the stairs, returning shortly, clad in coat, hat and boots. He handed Masters a copy of Emily Dickenson’s poems and thereby had two items completed. Gil and several of the butlers had already opted to take care of the outdoor tasks first. Masters looked for a comfortable place to ensconce himself. It would be a long night. It was well that his nap had been so prolonged and deep.

The lesser items began trickling in. By ten p.m. three had brought in the pennies which Masters diligently counted. Six more had come bearing black gumballs. Jackson had arrived with cigarettes and Gil with cigars. Early on it was busy enough to keep the old detective steadily occupied. As the hours slipped by, the time between contributions lengthened. Angie kept Masters’ coffee mug filled and the plate beside him stocked with a variety of goodies to munch on.

‘So far, so good,’ he thought to himself. Even so, it continued to be a thoroughly distasteful activity. The smell of

smoke from the fireplaces – usually enjoyable and relaxing – became a pointed reminder of Angie’s earlier comment.

By midnight, Jeremy, Jane, and Jules were tied with three items apiece. Jackson and Phillip had not reappeared and Masters grew concerned. He motioned across the room to Hyde who came immediately – a wonderfully youthful spring in his step.

“Would you please check on Mr. Stone, and, have you seen Jackson and Phillip since they left this room?”

“No. I haven’t, come to think of it. Let me look in on Mr. Stone and then I’ll take a walk through the Manor.”

He reappeared from Elliott’s room with a thumbs-up and disappeared around the corner to begin his check on the others. About that time the outside door on the east side of the room opened. Buck entered carrying Jackson in his arms. He deposited him on a couch with more tenderness than Masters would have expected. Masters went to investigate.

“Found him at the dock out stone cold,” Buck reported, pushing back the hood from his knee length, red and black plaid coat. “Look like he’s taken a blow to the head.”

“Could it have been an accident?” Masters asked. “Could he have stumbled into something in the storm?”

“Could a. Prob’ly didn’t. His hair and the shoulders a his shirt’s wet. No hat. Don’t add up no how! Wet hair in 20 below? Jist don’t add up.”

Whether Buck had come by that analysis through some special woodsman’s knowledge about such things or it was merely his opinion wasn’t clear and he offered nothing more.

Angie entered with a pot of coffee. Masters called to her.

“We need Miss Mayford. Have her bring her medical bag, if she has one.”

Angie hurried across the room and rapped on the door to Bea’s suite. Moments later she was there examining the still unconscious man.

“His vitals are marginal. I’m really not equipped for such things. I have a two-bed infirmary such as it is, behind my quarters. We need to get him in there. Perhaps an IV. It’s been so long since I’ve dealt with such a thing.”

Masters nodded at Buck and he hoisted the man back

into his arms and followed Bea to her suite. Masters addressed Angie. Go along if you will, please. I need to know what Bea finds in the wound – gravel, splinters, dirt – whatever.”

Angie did a brow-furrowed, second take, and Masters understood.

“Bea!” Masters explained. “Is that Miss Mayford’s first name. How in the . . . oh, well, another time.”

Buck returned as Hyde descended the stairs throwing up his hands and shaking his head indicating that he had not located either of the men. He joined the others and Masters explained what had just transpired. Hyde’s expression sobered.

“It’s really begun, then, has it? Somehow not as much fun as I had anticipated it would be. Let me go see if I can help Miss Mayford.”

Masters addressed Buck, who had returned and was repositioning his hood making ready to leave.

“Thank you for your help, Buck. Any ideas?”

“Somebody whopped him a good’n up side his head with a two by four if’n that what ya’s askin’.”

He pulled a long, bloody splinter from his pocket.

“Pulled it out a his head. Figured t’weren’t doin’ the man no good in there. Grey like that, it’s from a old weathered two by – probably from a stack in the boat house.”

His earlier evaluation had clearly not been opinion. In fact, it had been pretty good police work. Masters took the splinter with his hanky and laid it on the table beside him. He patted the big man on the back.

“Thanks again.”

“Can’t see it’s your place to do the thankin’,” Buck said, plainly puzzled, though in no way being unkind. He left the way he’d come.

Hyde returned.

“Lots of little splinters, she says. It was severe enough that he lost lots of blood. She’s typing it now. Says he has to have a transfusion. I guess one of us will become the lucky donor. I’m type O if that helps. I’m sure I have plenty to spare. Is there something special I can be doing?”

“I’m not sure what. I guess it’s a wait and see game,

now.”

Masters was plainly concerned. He went to the board and put an X through Jackson’s name. Now there were seven. The lights flickered. Masters looked around.

“It happens a lot,” Hyde explained. “Nothing to be concerned about. It’s just the old generator’s way of reminding us how completely dependent we really are on it.”

Angie entered the room, her face in her handkerchief.

“Oh Mr. M. The poor man just died. One second he was alive and the next second he was dead. I never seen nobody die before. He’s just dead!”

Hyde moved to her side and, with Masters’ nod of approval, escorted her toward her quarters.

“One down and how many to go?” Masters said out loud to no one but himself.

Bea came into the room and Masters walked to meet her.

“He probably didn’t have a chance. Lots of blood loss by the time he got here. I can only guess but it looks like he was struck on the temple with a piece of old wood. Probably massive bleeding inside his brain. One other very strange thing. The man’s buttocks was also beaten black and blue – blood vessels broken. Quite a mess. There were abrasions around his wrists and ankles as if they had been tied and he struggled against it. None of it makes any sense. What shall we do with the body?”

“First, I suppose we should alert the authorities. Who has jurisdiction out here?”

“It’s never come up before. This far out my guess would be the Coast Guard but I’m not sure.”

“Will you inform Elliott and see to the notification?” Masters asked.

“I’ll notify Mr. Stone but I wouldn’t count on any kind of notification leaving this place tonight.”

“The dreadful storm?” Masters asked.

“The dreadful Stone,” she replied in clear reference to Elliott.

“I see. Well in that case then we need to move the body to a cool spot. I wouldn’t expect that should be difficult to find.”

“The root cellar. It’s underground and access is gained from a pull up door in the mud room floor. Temperature stays just above freezing during the winter.”

“You tell Elliott and I’ll find help to move the body,” Masters said.

Twenty minutes later Jackson was at rest in his new home alongside pecks of potatoes, crates of cabbage, and bags of beets.

The news had spread quickly among the remaining participants. Understanding that Elliott would not call off the game merely because someone had been killed, Masters continued to collect and verify the items as they arrived.

Bea soon reported he had, in fact, refused to notify the authorities. She said he was back asleep and she was going to her quarters and try to get some rest herself.

Three a.m. arrived. It was again Buck who brought the news, that time from the door on the West.

“Better come’n see this’n fer yourself, Ray. It’s a first in my days, I tells ya that!”

Masters donned a communal parka which was hanging beside the door and snugged the hood tight around his head. He followed Buck outside. The wind was driving the icy snow with such intensity that it stung the skin. Twenty yards from the house stood a huge old, oak tree, easily four feet in diameter. Masters’ first reaction was to stop and contemplate how a tree could grow to such size sucking its life out of some debris-filled crack in a rock. His second reaction was revulsion. Upon moving around to the north side of the tree he saw Phillip, tied to the trunk, naked, frozen stiff.

“Untie him, Buck. Save the ropes. Another contribution for the root cellar.”

Masters estimated the temperature to be ten degrees below zero with a wind-chill far below that. The man hadn’t lasted an hour. Mercifully, he had surely lapsed into unconsciousness within a few minutes.

A cursory examination there at the site revealed several puzzling things. The body was muddy, especially the feet, knees and hands. The bottom of the feet were bruised and cut in dozens of places – as if he had walked over broken bottles.

The clear, front-runner, in Phillip's demise would have to be Jeremy. It had been Phillip who had stripped and tied Jeremy to that very tree during a cold rain storm some twenty years before. The same could be assumed for Jackson – tied and spanked unmercifully before being killed with a single, adrenaline powered blow to his head.

Sometimes the obvious is, in fact, the truth. Other times it provides no clue whatsoever. Masters' rule was to maintain a healthy skepticism.

Buck removed the body and after the briefest additional examination by Masters was placed alongside that of Randolph. The door in the floor was closed. Masters spoke.

"Buck, I feel the need to put some kind of lock on this door. Can you arrange that?"

"No problem. G'me ten minutes. A hasp 'n padlock bein' okay?"

"That will be perfect. Is there an entrance outside?"

"Nope. This'n are all there is."

"Good, then. I will trust you to provide me with all the keys when you are finished."

Buck grinned his wonderful, wide, toothless grin.

"You hain't really got no choice 'bout that, does ya?"

"Luckily, I feel sure you are a man of your word, Buck."

"Thank ya fer that, Ray. I am that. Thank ya."

Ten minutes later Buck had Masters inspecting his handy work.

"I put a hasp and lock on both sides a the door, ya see. Those hinges over there could just be unscrewed and anybody could git in. Now they cain't. And here is the four keys. I scratched on the ones fer this here lock. It's scratched, too, case'n ya ferget."

He pointed. Masters nodded his appreciation.

"You mind sticking around up here at least 'til daybreak, Buck. I'd just feel better knowing you were here."

"Be pleased to. I'll just be right here. If'n Angie has any leavin's from supper, I'd be obliged."

"I'll rustle something up. By the way, I've been wondering why you aren't playing. I'd think you'd be the odds on favorite to win."

"This place is already mine, Ray. Why would I play

some game to win it?"

The explanation was flawless from Buck's perspective, and Masters left fully satisfied. Fifteen minutes later Buck was dining on pot roast with all the trimmings. Masters was back in the living room. Bea had returned from her nap and had been standing in for him but there had been no business to attend to.

"I'll check on Elliott," she said. "He can only sleep when medicated – a mild sedative. He can be roused if necessary. I'll inform him about Phillip if you like."

"No need. Phillip will still be just as dead in the morning."

She nodded and left.

Several of the players had come inside to warm up. By then, Angie was functioning again and had coffee and hot chocolate for them. Not unpredictably, none of the players seemed particularly concerned over either death. They remained focused on their own selfish objectives.

Over the next four hours they came and went. The number of items needing to be entered on the board had dwindled to a trickle. With Phillip now also out of the running there were six players left. Gil led the pack with seven items, Jeremy was second with six. Jules and Jane were tied for third with four each.

Masters had decided it would be folly to begin questioning the guests before the completion of the game. They would, after all, be going nowhere – well, unless to an ill-timed visit to the root cellar.

The three front runners had all visited their rooms to add layers of clothing. The storm was worsening. The lights continued to flicker. The windows rattled. Suddenly the shadows seemed longer; the flickering had endowed them with a life of their own.

Ellsworth, the eldest, was yet to score a single item and had not been seen for many hours. Masters was concerned but there was no possible way of keeping track of everyone amid the disordered, incessant, insanity. At 8:30 he approached Hyde who was sipping hot chocolate and munching cookies.

"May I bother you to go check Ellsworth's room? He

hasn't been seen for some time. I am wondering if he decided to just give up and went to bed, perhaps."

"Surely. Give me five minutes. Try the little peanut butter wedges. Simply out of this world."

A few minutes later Hyde motioned to Masters from the top of the stairs. He commandeered Angie to look after things at the board and went to meet Hyde.

"Number three, I'm afraid. Dead if I've ever seen dead. More cold than warm I'd say. The window in his room was wide open. I closed it. Perhaps I shouldn't have. It must be freezing in there."

Masters followed him down the hall and into the room. Hyde's impression had been correct. From the condition of the body, and allowing some for the chilled air, Masters placed the time of death nearly six hours before – approximately 2:30 a.m. although that was admittedly imprecise. With the frigid air in the room it could have been hours earlier. There were no marks on the visible portions of the body.

"Strip him. We need to make sure there are no telltale signs anywhere else," Masters said to his young companion.

Before the shirt was off, Masters stopped Hyde and picked up Ellsworth's limp hand.

"The thumbnail," he said. "See the discoloration under the nail. He has been injected with something. My guess would be boiled down honey. I've seen that stain before. Search his things. See if he was diabetic."

The search was over almost before it began. A small toiletry bag contained all the testing accoutrements of a diabetic. The old man's upper arm had been badly bruised indicating to Masters that it may have been roughly handled during the injection. In all likelihood, it would not have taken long for the old man to have slipped into a coma and later died.

Masters produced an evidence bag into which he inserted the other hand, securing it in place with a rubber band around the wrist.

"There may be tell-tale evidence under the fingernails – skin, hair, blood - from his assailant. You have a key to this room, I suppose," Masters said.

"Yes. There is not a pass key that opens all of the

rooms here like in a hotel. Instead there are a dozen different locks spread around the place all quite willy-nilly. Let's see, if I recollect, I used . . . this one when I was preparing the room. I'll give it a try."

He did and it worked.

"Keep the room locked," Masters instructed. "The investigators will need to go over this place with a fine-toothed comb."

The room was locked. Butler number three was escorted down stairs for the last time and placed beside his comrades in the root cellar.

Back in the living room, Masters put an X through his name on the board. Now there were five.

Buck appeared, well bundled in his coat and hat and waved to Masters signaling that with daybreak, he was moving on. Masters nodded and mouthed a 'thank you' across the room.

Gil arrived with a pipe which met the requirements and was off in search of the final item on his list – the driver's license. It seemed that inappropriate planning had been a strategic error on his part. No one was going to give up the license they possessed and let him claim victory. He was furious! It seemed an odd miscalculation for someone as bright as Gil.

Jules had climbed into second place with only two more items to find – the flag which he knew he could draw at the last minute and the gumball. He re-bundled himself and set off toward the cable car for his trip down to the dock. It appeared as though he easily had victory in sight.

Jane still needed shingles, the pennies and the flag. She completed a satisfactory flag on a sheet of paper and then also, bundled up and left the building, presumably in search of the shingles.

Randolph lacked only the pipe, and blood.

And so it stood at 9:30 in the morning. Angie had set out a continental breakfast earlier. Only Masters and Hyde had eaten. Gil sat stewing in a corner. Carl, who had turned in about nine the night before, was just descending the steps. He walked over to the board to catch up on the game's progress. Angie brought him coffee. He yawned and

stretched as if the bed had not been fully friendly toward him.

Jules returned a beaten man – the glass globe on the gumball machine had burst - presumably due to the cold weather - and given up its contents to the sea through the cracks in the decking. Jane presented the shingles but was scrounging unsuccessfully for fifty-four more pennies. She offered Angie, Bea and Hyde each one thousand dollars for whatever pennies they had. The ante was later raised to five. No pennies seemed to be available. She again put on her coat and boots and set off for the dock with a crowbar from the toolbox in the mudroom. The gumball machine might have lost its candy but there should still be lots and lots of pennies inside.

When nine forty-five rolled around, Masters became concerned that Elliott had not yet made his appearance for the day. He asked Hyde to check.

Hyde returned saying the old gentleman was feeling ill and that Miss Mayford was attending to him. He went on to explain that from time to time – especially when he got unduly excited – he experienced problems breathing and had to have a portable respirator strapped around his chest. During those times he was unable to easily fit into his chair and preferred to remain in bed.

Before Masters could question Hyde further, Randolph arrived with a section of pipe. It was too long by three inches. He requested a re-measurement before agreeing to Masters' finding. He left in a snit to find some way of cutting it. When Masters turned back to continue his conversation with Hyde the young man was gone. He hadn't seen Bea for hours but took Hyde at his word that she was with Elliott – that was her primary obligation.

Everything about Hyde's explanation made sense given Elliott's age, affliction and frame of mind. Masters would soon check on the old gentleman himself.

Eleven-thirty came and Angie announced a buffet for those so inclined. Masters and his 'incline' were first to partake. He returned with his food to sit near the board. Carl joined him while Gil had loud words with Jane and stormed out of the room.

"We really haven't had a chance to get acquainted,"

Carl said. "What do you make of all this?"

"Three murders was never part of any scavenger hunt that I participated in. How about you?"

"Probably should have predicted something like it, though I would have bet on Elliott being the first victim. His three relatives aren't the kind to work this hard if there is an easier out."

"Killing him before his birthday arrives so the Hunt becomes meaningless?" Masters asked, seeking clarification.

"Right."

"You believe they are really capable of killing the old man?"

"Capable?" Yes. Enjoy doing it? Most certainly."

"And yet you came."

"Elliott played the money card. My presence was required, shall we say. You know, Detective Masters, you and I are probably the only ones here whose lives are completely safe. Everybody else's death could benefit somebody on this island."

"A sobering thought"

Masters looked at the board.

"After all is said and done it appears the winner of this thing may win by default."

"How so?" Carl asked, clearly intrigued.

Masters pointed up at the board.

"Gil is out of the running because he can't acquire a driver's license. Jules lost when the gumball machine burst. Jane's only chance is to crack open the cast iron money box on that same machine. Doubtful!

"I haven't heard from Jeremy or Randolph for a while but it appears it's down to the two of them and neither may even know it. I'm concerned about Elliott. Hyde says he's experiencing respiration problems."

"That, too, could have been predicted, I suppose. He's been known to stop breathing just thinking ahead to this day. Now that it's here, well, like I said, I'm not surprised. It passes. Doc says when he gets excited his diaphragm, which is very weak to begin with, tenses and fails to operate properly. After a few hours with his medication and respirator, he's back to his old, despicable self."

“You apparently don’t hold him in very high esteem.”

Carl smiled.

“Calling him despicable, you mean. That’s probably the most flattering thing he’s been called by anyone since Harry Truman was in office.”

He chuckled and nibbled on his egg salad sandwich. Masters raised his eyes toward the ceiling and silently vowed never to become involved in another case (of course he had done that regularly since his ‘retirement’ seven years earlier). They continued to make small talk as they ate.

For a third time, it was Buck who was the bearer of terrible news. He stood at the corner of the dining room and beckoned to Masters. Carl accompanied him. They followed the man into the mud room.

There lay Randolph on the floor in a pool of blood, his perfectly freshly-cut section of pipe beside him.

A close examination of the wound – made directly into the vein in the left wrist – appeared to have been severe enough to have allowed him to bleed to death. Evidence of foul play was not immediately clear. What was clear was that the Root Cellar Club now had its fourth member.

It was time to visit with Elliott, so Masters and Carl headed back to the living room. Jeremy was there with his final requirement – the flower pots. Masters relayed the news of Randolph’s death to those assembled there.

It brought a massive smile to Jeremy’s face and moved him to speak.

“Let’s see, now. If I turn in these pots I win the ten percent and this valuable house, providing the old man doesn’t die of a heart attack between now and twelve fifty-two this afternoon – about six minutes from now. Uncle Gil and Mother won’t get the house, but will share in Elliott’s estate once he eventually kicks the bucket. Of course, I will share in that as well whether I turn the pots in or not. If I don’t turn in the pots, nobody wins the hunt and the estate and Windstone will be split up among the three of us – which could well lead to more blood-letting.”

In light of the manner in which Randolph had just died, Masters thought Jeremy’s choice of words seemed peculiar.

“My, what power I command,” Jeremy said, holding the

pots high above his head.”

“You’re as much of an SOB as the old man,” Jules said.”

“Thank you for noticing. Thanks to my devoted mother, the ‘old man’ has been my one consistent role model all these years.”

Jeremy looked around.

“Where is my dear mother, anyway?”

Gil approached him from across the room.

“She’s down at the dock. I’m sure I can speak for her, though. The two of us will pay you half a million not to end the game by turning in the flower pots.”

“You really think I’d trade half a mil for the ten percent and title to this place? You are moronic as well as insane.”

“My God, Jeremy,” Hyde said. “Get on with it. Turn in the pots!”

For the first time, Hyde’s behavior seemed odd to Masters. It was as if he were in a hurry for the game to be over. Why, when he had apparently been enjoying it all so much? Perhaps he was just fed up with Jeremy’s antics. Perhaps there was some more substantial reason.

With a look of disdain directed at Gil, Jeremy handed the pots to Masters who checked them off the board, and declared Jeremy the winner at 1:02 pm.

Masters turned to Hyde.

“I need to inform Mr. Stone of the results,” he said. “Will you accompany me?”

Hyde hesitated.

“Perhaps I should go and make sure he’s presentable. He is a stickler about such things. I’ll be back for you in just a minute.”

It seemed both a reasonable and yet an awkward suggestion on the young butler’s part but Masters nodded and let it pass. He turned toward Carl and wiped his brow, signaling how glad he was the event had concluded.

Hyde reappeared.

“Masters, come quickly. Something terrible.”

With Carl at his heels, Masters followed Hyde into Elliott’s quarters. Bea was crying as she hovered over her employer of so many years. Hyde explained.

“Just as I arrived to see to things, Miss Mayford was working on him. He breathed his last breath as I reached his bedside.”

Bea, who had been administering oxygen and allowing the respirator to continue, as the three entered, turned to them and sighed, shaking her head, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“He’s gone.”

It was a simple pronouncement, hardly worthy of the power the man had commanded during his lifetime.

“It is imperative that you call a time of death, Bea,” Masters stated emphatically, postponing his condolences.

She looked up at the clock on the wall and then down at her wristwatch.

“Two minutes ago, would have made it exactly 1:00 p.m, January twenty-second.”

“You swear to its accuracy here in the presence of Hyde, Carl and me.”

She nodded.

“Yes. I swear.”

She removed the oxygen mask, tuned off the respirator and pulled the comforter up over Elliott’s head.

“May he rest in peace,” she said quietly. “He certainly had none these past seventy years.”

Masters turned to Hyde.

“I assume you can turn on the phone to the mainland.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Call the local sheriff and see who actually has jurisdiction out here.”

Carl interrupted.

“That will be the state police. Maine has claimed the island since statehood even though its position this far out could call that into question. I would call the State Police Office at Calais for starters. Though inland, it’s the closest. Ask for Captain Lovell and mention my name. He’s a good friend.”

Masters nodded his agreement.

“Get him on the line and I’ll speak with him. Carl, if you don’t mind will you remain here with the body. Nobody touches it! No objects leave the room. Hyde, once you show

me how to work the phone, take Bea to stay with Angie.”

“Bea?”

“You people! I don’t . . . Miss Mayford.”

The phone was made operational and Masters chatted with the Captain. The weather system was rapidly moving out to sea and they would send someone by Coast Guard Cutter immediately even though the storm had left them shorthanded on the highways. Masters also requested a Medical Examiner from the coroner’s office and means for transporting the bodies. He handed the phone to Carl who completed the conversation with his friend.

“Now we wait,” Masters said and then continued.

“Carl, put your legal hat on and see if this fits with your recollection. I clocked Jeremy’s final item onto the blackboard at 1:02. Bea puts the time of death at 1:00. My watch is accurate with the one here on the wall. Look to verify that, if you will.”

Carl agreed to the correspondence between the clock and watch. Masters continued.

“It would appear that Elliott lived to see his birthday at 12:52 so the results of the Scavenger Hunt stand. It also appears that Jules, the one remaining butler, will receive his ten percent of the estate and those current staff members, who were to receive bonuses if he reached 75, are eligible to collect them. In all instances, I used the word ‘appear’ because the circumstances certainly warrant further investigation.”

“I agree, Ray,” Carl said, “And Tuffy - Captain Lovell - requested that you lead that investigation with the full powers of his office.”

“I’ll do some initial poking around until we see where it all leads. That’s as far as I’ll commit my involvement right now. I have a goddaughter’s christening to attend back in Wyoming this coming Sunday. [The new daughter of B. L. and Abby from The Case of the Gypsy Curse.]

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### **CHAPTER THREE: WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON AND EVENING**

It was shortly after three o'clock when the phone rang. Hyde took the call and reported to Masters.

"The Coast Guard Cutter will be arriving at the dock in a few minutes. Apparently, there are several people from the coroner's office and one State Policeman. I'll go down and meet them if you like."

"Yes. If you wouldn't mind? Thank you. Bundle up. The storm doesn't seem to know it's supposed to be blowing itself out to sea."

Hyde managed a faint smile, "Perhaps this is out to sea, Sir!"

Masters raised his eyebrows and nodded then added, "I assume the cutter will wait here for the coroner and bodies. The policeman will probably stay overnight. Make sure you have that straight with everybody down there before you return."

"Will do. By the way, do you have any idea who has done all this?"

Masters returned his smile.

"The butler, of course."

Hyde's face became puzzled and then relaxed.

"Yes, with six of us here, that would seem the most likely guess I assume. It is a guess, right?"

"More or less."

Masters smiled a smile that clearly said, 'That's all I'll have to say on the matter'.

It certainly had not cleared things up for Hyde but he

didn't press. He put on what had become the communal parka, which hung by the west door, pulled the draw string in the hood tight, and left. The lights continued to flicker. It only seemed unnerving to the visitors. At least the thundering booms from above had stopped.

In the quiet of the in-between time, Masters realized he was tired. He sat in a recliner and closed his eyes hoping to catch forty winks. He did and it helped.

It was twenty minutes later when the gentle pressure of Hyde's cold hand on his shoulder awakened him. The bustle-factor in the room had increased remarkably. He stood and Hyde began the introductions.

"Dr. Lucy Mitchell, assistant coroner and three of her assistants whose names I guess I have not heard."

Dr. Mitchell extended her hand.

"Lucy. It's a pleasure to meet a legend, Sir."

Masters replied.

"It's Ray, if you will, and I've always believed one really needed to have passed on before he could qualify as a legend."

Lucy nodded and continued, pointing at her three assistants individually as she spoke.

"Tom, Dick and Harry – really - affectionately known to me as Larry, Moe and Curly."

Masters shook hands and in a whispered aside, leaned close and addressed them.

"Hang in there, guys. Someday she may elevate you to the status of Harpo, Zeppo and Groucho."

They smiled and nodded.

As her own aside to her crew, Lucy added, "I told you he would be a hoot!"

Masters let it pass assuming it had everything to do with Flint's books little to do with him.

Lucy got right to the business at hand.

"What we got here? My information says a pile of fresh bodies."

"Four former butlers from here at Windstone and the Lord of the Manor, Elliott Stone," Masters explained. The butler's demises appear to be murders. Mr. Stone's appears to be from natural causes. He was old, ill, and frail."

“So, not all at once, then?”

“Right. The first occurred somewhere between ten and midnight yesterday. Mr. Stone at about one o'clock this afternoon. The others were spread out in between.”

“Beastly weather out here. I assume they all died inside,” she said.

“Mr. Stone and the last two butlers inside: the first two were outside.”

“No chance of natural causes? These conditions could do in a polar bear.”

Masters shook his head.

“No natural causes here. I suggest you begin with Mr. Stone. He is still in his bed - dead about three hours now – at least according to those who witnessed it.”

“That’s a strange way to call it, Sir, er, Ray.”

“Let’s see what you find. The others are in the root cellar - the closest thing to secure cold storage we could manage here.”

“How inventive! I’ll take a look at this Mr. Stone and if someone will show the guys to the root cellar we can get this thing underway,” Lucy suggested.

“Fine,” Masters said. “Hyde, if you will show the good doctor to Mr. Stone’s quarters I will accompany the others to the mud room.”

Hyde extended his arm toward the door and Lucy followed. As Masters turned to leave, the tallest, thinnest, gangliest, state trooper Masters could remember seeing made his awkwardly circuitous way across the big room toward him.

“Trooper Kopp, at your service,” the young man said extending his right hand which still held his wide brimmed hat.

He was six feet eight or more yet couldn’t have weighed 175 pounds dripping in tar. Perhaps there was a more appropriate descriptor than disheveled, but none came to Masters’ mind. He extended his hand to greet the officer who by then had laid his hat aside.

“I’m Ray Masters - more or less in charge until you arrived.”

“Oh, no, Sir. You’re still in charge. The Captain made that perfectly clear. It’s a relief to me. In-charge, just isn’t one of my best things.”

He looked around the room uneasily.

“You got dead guys here, I hear.”

“Five to be exact,” Masters said to clarify.

Kopp shivered.

“Never liked dead guys, myself. Give me the willies. Glad the coroners came along. They do dead guys better than me.”

‘I would hope so,’ Masters thought to himself.

In other circumstances, Masters would have thought he was being set-up and put-on by some long-forgotten college chum. He sighed deeply, resigned to the fact that Kopp the cop was indeed for real.

“I was about to show these gentlemen from the coroner’s office to where the bodies have been kept. Feel free to come along.”

“I’ll just wait here, thanks. You can tell me what to do when you get back.”

That seemed to quite clearly establish the line of command.

Masters lead the others to the mud room and fished the keys out of his pants pocket. One by one the butlers were laid out on the table, tagged by name, photographed, and given cursory examinations before being placed in body bags for transportation back to the mainland. Masters supplied approximate times of death for each. That task quickly done, Masters made his way back to the living room where he found Trooper Kopp pacing back and forth, humming some unidentifiable tune.

“Officer, if you will excuse me just a few more minutes, I need to check in with Dr. Mitchell in the room back there. I shouldn’t be long and you are welcome to come along.”

“No hurry. I’ll wait here. I don’t have any other assignments waiting for me.”

Masters felt he probably understood why. He just had to get one thing straight immediately, however.

“Your father was judge or party leader, right?”

“Judge Willard Kopp, first district court of appeals. You know the family then?”

“In a very general way, I guess you could say.”

Kopp pulled himself up to his full height, clearly proud

of his father. Masters moved on, satisfied that once again his 'help' had come by his position in some way other than through adequate preparation, hard work, or devotion to the profession.

"Tell me what your take is on this," Lucy asked, before Masters reached the bed.

He did a cursory visual examination. He felt the ears and cheeks. He felt the fingers and the toes.

"It appears that from the neck up the man has been dead about 12 hours. From the neck, down, I'd say he's been dead for three. What gives?"

She pointed to a cover draped across a chair.

"Ah!" Masters said, moving to examine it. "An electric blanket. It was on?"

"Still on high when I arrived. Significantly speeded up the morbidity rate but on the surface, makes it appear he's been dead for less than the actual amount of time- skin still far warmer than it would have been if things had played out naturally. It will take some doing to establish the exact time of death. Fortunate you had eye witnesses."

"Yes, indeed," Masters said brushing repeatedly at his ever-wayward moustache.

Stone was placed in a bag and by four-thirty the bodies, the Coroner, and her team had left the island. Reports were promised by fax as soon as they became available.

Masters turned his attention back to Kopp who was perched forward on a chair, looking out the window toward the sea his fingers directing some imperceptible piece of music.

"Well, Trooper, are you ready to go to work?"

"Been working since eight his morning, Sir. What now?"

Masters could see that he would need to remain steadfastly literal with the man.

"The first matter of business is to establish a minute by minute time line depicting the exact location of each of these people during the past twenty some hours since the game began."

"I wouldn't call five deaths a game, Sir."

Masters explained, and eventually was satisfied that Kopp understood. He looked around for Hyde who was

setting the dinner table. Masters, with Kopp on his heels, walked across the room toward him.

“You have met Trooper Kopp, I believe. We need lots and lots of paper, yellow pads or some such thing if you have them.”

“By the tons. Most are so old that even their yellow pages have yellowed, but they should work. Mr. Stone couldn’t pass up a bargain and I suspect he burned somebody big time for them back in the sixties.”

“I’m sure they will work just fine. And we will need a private place to interview everyone.”

Hyde looked around.

“A corner of the living room could be arranged to be cozy and separate or if you prefer something even more private there is a small room just off the dining area here.”

He pointed to the door.

“I’d opt for the corner of the big room. What do you say, Trooper?”

“I didn’t say anything, Sir.”

Kopp Smiled.

Masters raised his eyebrows in Hyde’s direction.

“The living room will be fine.”

“I’ll be finished here in five minutes,” Hyde said. “Then I’ll get you set up.”

Dinner was a somber affair – though delicious. Angie and Bea sat together, quietly, their eyes still red. Gil continued to be angry and fumed alone. It should have been directed at himself, of course, but seemed aimed at everyone else. Jane and Jules had struck up some kind of relationship and chatted together across one corner of the table. Jeremy sat with Hyde at the other end and they spoke in quiet tones - whether out of respect for the others or because it was private business, was not clear.

Masters and Trooper Kopp sat together somewhat separated from the others or was it that the others had separated from them?

Mercifully, dinner soon came to an end. Before the others went their separate ways, Masters stood and explained that he and Trooper Kopp needed to complete an initial interview with each of them that evening. He circulated a pad,

which listed time slots into which they were to schedule themselves. He called their attention to the southwest corner of the living room where they would meet. He then had one final comment - not entirely whimsical.

“If anyone would like to save us the time and effort of an investigation and just admit to the foul play at this time, it will be greatly appreciated.”

He smiled.

Hurried, uneasy, glances shot from person to person, like a poorly executed stadium wave at a ball game, but no one stepped forward to claim responsibility. Even Jeremy was unwilling to launch some smart mouthed, sophomoric, comeback.

Without further comment, Masters excused himself and headed for the interview area. Kopp followed, carrying a box of yellow pads and pencils. Initially Masters would set up one pad for each person. He sensed there would be a convoluted set of comings and goings that would have to be carefully woven together to provide the whole picture. For those who had participated in the Hunt, scattered benchmarks were available on the blackboard in the form of the times they had arrived in the living room with each item. That would become the framework around which the other information would be added.

For those who had not participated, the task would be more demanding. The preliminary interview would be mainly gathering 'where and when' data before it slipped the guests' minds. Jeremy had taken the first spot on the signup sheet and arrived exactly at seven as scheduled. He took a seat on a sofa facing Masters, his arms sprawled to both sides along its bulging, upholstered, back. Kopp sat off to one side, pad and pencil at the ready. The old detective hoped the man knew how to write.

Masters began on what might have been interpreted as a light note.

“So, Jeremy, which of the five did you do in?”

“Which do you suspect, Sir?” he snapped back with a smile.

“Jackson and Phillip would be my first entries with the possibility of at least some complicity in Elsworth's death.

Let's begin by establishing where you were at those times. Jackson died sometime between 10:00 p.m. last night and 12:30 a.m. this morning."

"That's a two-and-a-half-hour span. I imagine I was in and out of this room several times."

"The blackboard indicates that you didn't deposit any items during those hours."

"Hmm. Perhaps I was scaling the roof for the shingles. Yes, I believe that's what I was doing."

"The board says you turned in gumballs at 9:00, pennies at 9:15 and shingles at 9:57."

"Probably wasn't the shingles then, was it? I had a good deal of difficulty finding the pipe. I imagine that was what I was doing. Spent lots of time rummaging around in the basement. I figured no one else would know about that place. I'm pretty sure Ang saw me go down there – back steps just off the kitchen. Eventually I found it down behind Buck's place."

"The next check-in time for you was 12:20 with the cigarettes. That seems to make it important for you to establish an alibi for the ten to a little after midnight span," Masters pointed out. "The next benchmark I see for you was 5:40 so you also need one for the interval during which Phillip was killed."

"How did old Phil die anyway?" Jeremy asked.

"Stripped and tied to a tree. Sound familiar?"

"Oh my. Yes. The bastard did that to me when I was about twelve. Ironic, wouldn't you say, that he should meet his doom in that same way?"

"If not ironic, all quite vengefully intentional," Masters said.

"You think I would choose a way to do him in that clearly pointed to me? I may lack an education but I've never been accused of being dumb."

"Dumb you are not. We can agree on that, Jeremy, but you see my problem. Before Jackson was killed, he was spanked unmercifully - again, in a manner I'm told he used to spank you. And then Phillip at the tree."

Jeremy remained silent. Masters continued.

"I have noted the fact that if someone wanted to set you

up, those would have been ideal ways to do it. But, if not you, then who and for what end?

Jeremy seemed prepared for the question.

“The more butlers who bit the dust, the less of the total inheritance would go to them, so the more would be left for Mother and Gil.”

“And you.”

“Yes, and me.”

“So, you can’t see why any of the other butlers would have killed either of them?”

“No. Can you?”

Masters ignored the question since his intention was for the interrogation to flow in the opposite direction.

“What do you know about the outgoing butler extorting the incoming one out of some portion of his salary?”

“They all did it and they all complained about it. It was part of the game. They still hate – well they did hate each other for it.”

“But that would not be motive, here?” Masters asked. “Jackson doing Ellsworth. Phillip doing Jackson. Jules doing Phillip.”

“That would leave Hyde doing Randolph,” Jeremy added, “And Hyde’s not a murderer. I’d bet on me before Hyde.”

It almost sounded protective. He stopped to think and then went on.

“You do make an interesting point. Those murders wouldn’t have had anything to do with the inheritance, really, just flat out revenge. I love it. Yes, I think I’ll go with that. May I leave now?”

“In just a moment. Did you happen to see your mother or Gil between two and three a.m. this morning or between ten p.m. and one a.m. – over the midnight hour.”

“At a little after nine last night, I traded driver’s licenses with Jules. Then Mother – who was with Jules in the hall upstairs - immediately re-traded on the spot with me.”

“So, you ended up with Jane’s, Jane ended up with Jules’ and Jules ended up with yours.”

“Right, like the rules said, no simple one to one trades.”

“But you turned in Ellsworth’s license and not until six

a.m. this morning.”

“I ran into him upstairs sometime between one and two this morning, I’d say. He asked for the trade so I made it. Didn’t look like he was really into the game anyway. He was the only one of the butlers I didn’t know so I didn’t have reason to hate him. Anyway, he was the most pathetic of the crowd – old, feeble, sick.”

“You hated all the others?”

“With a passion, Sir.”

“And Hyde?”

“Oh, no. He’s more like a fellow inmate here – hard to hate – probably even likeable if I allowed myself that luxury.”

“You seem to get on well with Bea?”

“Who?”

“I declare, you people! Miss Mayford.”

“That’s different. She raised me. She gave great baths - put lavender in the water. Unfortunately, she refused to continue them once I reached puberty. She tried to protect me from the bad guys. She was a pretty cool teacher. Yeah. I like her. And while we’re at it, I guess I like old Angie, too. Who’d have thought? Interesting! Me liking two, maybe even three people.”

“And your feelings about Elliott Stone, your uncle.”

“Somewhere between hate and abhorrence I’d say. We never had a clue about how to get along with each other. He just gave up and handed me over to the butlers. I kept trying to get his attention for a while but it only got me into more and more trouble and worse and worse punishments. I doubt if he felt as badly toward me. He was supposed to be the adult family member in my life – you know - and he wouldn’t relate to me – probably couldn’t. I can see that now. I guess I’m sorry he died. Maybe not. I don’t know.”

“Thanks for your information. We will talk again,” Masters said, signaling that he could leave.

Jane approached as Jeremy turned to go. He spoke to her as they passed.

“Much to my surprise they didn’t use either thumbscrews or bamboo shoots. I can only hope you won’t fare as well.”

Jane bravely pretended the words had not hurt her.

She took a seat, snuggling close to the end of the couch.

“You and Jeremy seem to have the same problem,” Masters began. “No alibi at the times Jackson and Phillip died.”

“Well, I can’t speak for Jeremy, but I had nothing to do with them.”

“The board reads this way. At 7:50 p.m. you deposited the book, 8:10 the cigarettes, and at 9:22 the driver’s license. Then there is a gap - while Jackson was being beaten and killed - until the flowerpots at 11:58 p.m. Another gap until the pipe at 3:45 – the time during which Phillip was killed.”

“Well, I had nothing to do with either of them.”

“Think back and tell us who can vouch for your whereabouts during those periods and we’ll check it out.”

“I’ll have to think about it. No one comes to mind. The whole scavenger hunt was so confusing – so much coming and going - hubbub. I can’t remember who I saw where.”

“I suppose I can understand that. Do you have any high-quality suspects for any of the murders?”

“It seems like the only ones who would benefit from the butler’s deaths would be Jeremy, Gil and me. Jeremy the most because it would not only give him a better chance to win the game but it would also reduce the take from the eventual inheritance he and Gil and I would share.”

“That assumed that neither you nor Gil would win the game,” Masters pointed out.

“Well, yes. I meant after Gil and I were well out of the race. What about the filthy old grounds keeper, Buck? Isn’t he a suspect?”

“And how would the butler’s deaths benefit him?”

“I don’t know, I guess. Maybe he developed grudges against them over the years. He always talked like this island was his. Maybe there’s some connection to that. I don’t know. Maybe the killing isn’t over and he is going to kill off all of us so no one will have claim to this place. Then he will be alone here. It really will be his.”

“That’s an interesting alternative that I certainly hadn’t yet thought of. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Masters was almost finished with the interview.

“Do you have any skills such as martial arts that I will eventually learn about that might have provided the power needed to subdue Jackson or Phillip?”

“No. Well, I am a five-star pistol marksman. Won the State’s Women’s Title three years in a row a while back. None of them were shot, though, right?”

“No. That’s right. Did you bring a gun with you?”

“Certainly not!” . . . “You’re going to do a search, aren’t you?”

“Oh, yes. Attic to basement and rock by rock if that is necessary.”

“Okay, then. I brought a little .22 along. Just for my own protection out here on this God forsaken rock.”

“Anything else you want to share with me before I discover it through some other channel?”

“Can’t think of anything. How long are we going to be cooped up out here?”

“Until I’m satisfied I have all four or five murders solved.”

“Four or five? The fifth would have to be Elliott? I thought he died of natural causes.”

“Initially, at least, that seems to be the case. I am just a very thorough investigator, Jane.”

“If he was murdered, does that change the inheritance?”

“Your compassion for the man is overwhelming, my dear. No. I don’t think the cause of death in any way affects that. You may leave. We will be speaking with you again. Try and fill in the gaps in your timeline with legitimate alibis.”

Jane left, clearly unhappy with her performance. Masters turned to Kopp.

“Well, what do you think?”

Kopp seemed puzzled at the question. It seemed conceivable that had been the first time in his law enforcement career when his opinion had been requested.

“Well, I think that each timeline filled one page. The material from Jeremy’s interview covers fourteen pages and from Jane, nine.”

He handed two pads to Masters who perused them both.

“This is remarkable work, Trooper! You took down virtually every word that was said.”

“It’s the one thing I do pretty well, I guess. I can print as fast as lots of folks can type. In school I always had great notes. I just couldn’t bring myself to study them. I’ll make a composite timeline once we have finished all the interviews. Having all the data on one chart should make your job easier, I’d think.”

“Our job, Trooper Kopp. Our job.”

“I’ve always just been called Kopp. I’d feel more comfortable without the Trooper every time.”

“Then Kopp it is. Ready for number three? Looks like it’s Gil.”

“New pad. New pencil. I’m ready!”

Gil just wanted to get things over with. He was still in a disagreeable mood – about losing the hunt, not about losing his brother.

“Have a seat,” Masters offered as Gil approached the corner. “Just a few questions this evening and we will let you be on your way.”

“What a nightmare this has all turned into,” Gil began.

“Yes, indeed. We need to account for everyone’s whereabouts at the times of the deaths. Not knowing when Ellsworth died yet, we will concentrate on the other three. Jackson died somewhere between ten p.m. last night and 12:30 this morning. Let’s look at your column on the blackboard.”

“Cigars at 9:40 p.m. the first night – two and a half hours after the hunt began. Gumballs at 10:58. Then another three hours pass before you arrive with the pennies at 2:10 a.m. Looks like you’ll need to find an alibi for that time period as that’s when Jackson was killed.

“Then you brought in the book at 2:15 and the flower pots half an hour later at 2:48. That would seem to cover you during the demise of Phillip – marginally at least. Blood at 4:12 and the drawing of the flag at 4:18. You didn’t sign in anything else until you deposited the shingles at 7:52 over three hours later. The pipe came in at 8:45 and at about 9:15 several of us witnessed you blowing your stack because no one would trade driver’s licenses with you. At 12 noon you

stormed out of the living room and went outside – I just happen to recall the time since the clock struck the hour as you slammed the door behind you. You had returned by a little before one when Jeremy was doing his dance.

“We need to find an alibi for you between twelve noon and 12:30 when Randolph was found dead in the mud room.”

“Well you won’t. I went walking on the ridge east of the building trying to regain control of myself. My outburst was embarrassing and not at all the way I usually am. I had things under control again by the time I returned.”

When was that?

“Just before you found Elliott dead, I believe – a few minutes before 1:00 this afternoon. Why would I be out to kill Randolph? I didn’t know the man. I don’t believe I’ve even ever spoken to him.”

“One motive could have been the reduction of butlers by one more so your basic inheritance would not be decreased by another ten percent,” Masters suggested.

Gil grumbled under his breath.

“I’m afraid I missed that,” Masters said.

Gil looked directly into Masters’ face.

“I could never have bled a man to death. I’ve been known to faint dead away at the sight of my own blood let alone anyone else’s. Jane and the other women here will verify that - It’s not as uncommon as one might think. It was all I could do to get that vile for the competition. I’m ashamed to say that even though I was sitting down during the process, I’m sure I passed out for a moment or so. It was an agonizing procedure and you can bet that Elliott had me targeted as part of his plan.”

“Do you, then, have any candidates of your own for all this killing?”

“Not really. Jane seemed to be the most gung ho about having to win the hunt. From what I know about the butlers my money would have been on Phillip as the bad guy – a real sadistic bastard from what I’ve heard. Maybe he had a fetish about butts. He beat Jeremy’s for years and maybe ended Jackson’s life in some similarly sick way.”

“And you heard he was sadistic from whom?”

“Angie, Miss Mayford, Jeremy. It was years ago, so I

suppose he could have changed. The punishments he supposedly administered to Jeremy were unspeakable. Can't say I'm sorry to see he got his. I mean, I have never been able to stand Jeremy – he's everything a human being shouldn't be. If we were all amoral and self-centered like him the human species would have killed itself off centuries ago. But, still. No little kid should have been treated in those ways."

Masters moved on, noting the unexpected passion in Gil's statement.

"In terms of the financial side of things, it seems to have worked out pretty much in your favor – only 20% taken from the estate rather than the possible 50% - Jules' original 10% since Elliott reached 75 and Jeremy's for winning the hunt. Of course, you lost Windstone to Jeremy."

"Couldn't care less about the Windstone Dungeon. That's what we called it as kids. Isolated. Unpleasant. No friends. We three kids hated each other, but we were all we had. Jane and I were required to spend most of our time taking care of Elliott. I hated him for that. I never got to go anywhere. I hadn't even kissed a girl 'til after I left this awful place for college when I was eighteen. Doubt if poor old Elliott ever did. Jane made up for all of us, I guess. So, yes, I suppose it all worked out pretty well as far as the estate is concerned."

"I have a question that's been troubling me," Masters said. "If you three – Elliott, Jane, and you – disliked each other so much, why is he leaving his money to you?"

"You got me. Don't think I haven't asked myself that question hundreds of times. He laid it all out years ago. I guess I always expected him to pull a last-minute switch of some kind and write us all out – after dangling it in front of us all those years. It was how he got pleasure in life – teasing and hurting - destroying. Maybe death just snuck up on him before he could make those changes. I don't know how to answer your question."

"It couldn't have been, then, that he was really fond of you, or at least was appreciative of your efforts on his behalf when you were children?"

Gil looked puzzled.

“That possibility never entered my head.”

He said no more but as he walked away the confused look turned to troubled.

It was Jules’ turn and he arrived at a brisk pace, straightening the throw pillows on the couch before taking a seat at a far end, as distant from Masters as the arrangement permitted.

“I’ll tell you what I’ve told the others,” Masters began. “We are here to get some basic information this evening. We will talk in more detail later.”

Jules nodded that he understood.

“Let’s begin with the timeline we have for you on the big board. You seem to have worked during two very productive, short, spurts, Jules. Eight to midnight last night and 7:15 a.m. to about nine this morning.

“Specifically, I see the blood was deposited at 8:00, the pipe at 10:40, and the pennies at 11:58 – all last night. Then we saw nothing of you from then until 7:15 a.m. when you brought in the pots. At 7:35 you arrived with the shingles. 7:45 the book and at 8:00 the cigarettes. The driver’s license is logged in at 8:50 which left only the flag and the gumballs, neither of which you turned in.

“Jackson was killed between 10:00 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. The board doesn’t account for your whereabouts between 10:40 and midnight. You will need to find alibis during that period.

“Phillip died between two and three a.m. and the board cannot account for you between midnight and 7:15 this morning. Alibis again, Jules. Randolph died between 12:00 noon and 12:30 today. Your witnessing Jeremy’s final contribution here in the living room seems to cover you for that one.

Masters then became more specific.

“Who can account for you at the time of Jackson’s death – across the midnight hour last night?”

“From ten to eleven thirty, Jane and I were in her room together. We have known – you might say – each other for some fifteen years. It’s been an on again, off again thing. She shows up on my doorstep between husbands.”

“And you took time off to make whoopee in the middle

of such an important activity – one that could have been worth millions to the two of you?”

“Spend just one night with her and you’ll understand.”

“I’ll pass, thank you,” Masters said.

Kopp fidgeted noticeably, pulling at his collar, but kept to his task.

“And between midnight and seven-fifteen?”

“I was helping Jane collect her items. There was nothing in the rules against that. I read them and reread them.”

“So, the two of you are each other’s alibis during those time periods. Traded alibis - like traded licenses - don’t cut it. You’ll both need third party corroboration.”

“Like we invited someone into her bedroom to be with us.”

“As an English friend of mine says, ‘Trysts are a lot like sticky wickets. Neither appears troublesome at the time you take the shot.’”

Jules just looked puzzled.

“I guess you have to know Charles,” Masters explained.

“I would imagine that anyone seeing the two of you together would not easily forget. See what you can find.”

“Will there be anything else?”

“Any ideas about who the bad guy or guys might be?”

“You suspect more than one person?”

Jules seemed genuine in his surprise.

Masters responded.

“I have to cover all the possibilities. I understand for example that Phillip got you the job here.”

“Yes, he did.”

“And that he extorted a good proportion of your salary for himself.”

“You know about that?”

“It seems to be the common rumor around here. Hadn’t had it confirmed until just now, I suppose. Would that give you a motive to kill him?”

“Motive? Yes. I hated him. Did I do it? No.”

“What about this, then,” Masters said, spinning another possibility. “Get Randolph out of the way so Jane would inherit a bigger slice of the pie. She was out of the game before he

was killed so perhaps it became even more important at that point for her to eliminate butlers.”

“Nice try. I see no proof. You even said I was covered on that one. Let me know when you have the evidence.”

“Oh, if such proof comes along, you’ll be the first I’ll let know,” Masters said through his big, warm smile. “Have a good evening. We will talk with you again tomorrow.”

Carl arrived and took a seat.

“I’m your best suspect in terms of time line, although I just can’t figure what my motive might have been.”

“This is strictly for the record, Carl,” Masters said returning his smile. “You left for your room early last night – a little before nine and returned this morning about 9:30 as I recall.”

“That’s the way I recall it also.”

“Twelve hours. You slept all that time? You appeared tired when you arrived down here this morning.”

“There was very little sleep, actually, and it’s primarily your fault.”

“Mine?” Masters asked confused by the remark.

“Angie slipped me a copy of, *The Murders at Terrapin Island*, and I couldn’t put it down. Flint has a great way with a tale. If I said I slept six hours, it would probably be stretching it.”

“You were awake to hear the comings and goings out in the hall on the second floor, then.”

“Yes. Better than that, I suppose. I always leave my door open on cold nights. Something about the air circulation helps keep the room warmer. It’s there in the northwest corner. I’m afraid, however, that I don’t have much to report. At about 8:45 this morning I heard you and Hyde talking in the hall. It’s what woke me up in fact. I caught another forty winks, then rolled out, showered and came down stairs.

“One thing, maybe. The back stairs from the third floor enters the second floor about ten feet from my door. Sometime after I got to my room I heard a man and woman snickering as they came down the stairs. I couldn’t help but look. It was Jules and Jane. Later - and I can’t say when - I heard someone opening a door down the hall and a few minutes later leave. In fact, that happened twice come to think

of it – hours apart. I’m just not sure of the times. I never wear a watch. Something about my system that magnetizes the works. I didn’t look at a clock on either occasion. The second time I figured it was one of the butlers going in and out of his room.”

“And the first time?”

“I didn’t think much about it, I guess. Oh, yes. The person sneezed in the hall. It was muffled, like into a hand, but it was a woman’s sneeze – soprano - I’m quite sure about that. One other thing – for what it’s worth – it was three short, crisp sneezes in rapid succession. You know how some people just sneeze once and others always twice? Well, that was three.”

“Sure wish you’d kept notes on the times,” Masters said fully realizing the idea was absurd, considering that at the time Carl had no way of knowing there was trouble afoot in the Manor.

“About the will,” Masters went on. “Does the cause of death enter into the disbursement in any way?”

“No. Strangely, I suppose, that was never a consideration.”

“How about a second will? One that Elliott may have intended to pull out at the last minute, disowning his siblings and/or Jeremy.”

“If there is such a document, I have never been privy to it, and I believe that I’ve been privy to everything.”

“Would such a move be consistent with the Elliott you knew?”

“That’s a tough one, Ray. He was a decisive man. I can’t see him changing his mind that way once his decision had been made public. But, then, if it had been his plan all along to cut them out, that could make it a very different story. I just can’t venture a good guess.”

“Were you aware that Jules and Jane have had an ongoing affair for some years?”

“No. I had never heard so much as a hint about that. It’s certainly not inconceivable. Jules does wear pants.”

“Jane has a reputation that way, does she?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Do you know anyone you believe could have killed

Elliott?”

Carl straightened up in his seat.

“I thought the finding was that he died of natural causes.”

“He probably did. I’m just getting a leg up in case the coroner finds otherwise.”

“Sure. I understand. Jeremy, Gil, Jane – for starters. Then dozens of business associates and rivals he buried through the years. I wouldn’t know where to start, there.”

“How about Angie or Bea?”

“Bea?”

“I do give up,” Masters said throwing his hands in the air. Bea is the first name of the lady known to one and all at Windstone Manor as Miss Mayford – Bea Mayford.”

“I see. I may have known that at one time. Your question. Neither seems the killer type to me. I can’t see they had anything to gain. Their tenure goes with Windstone – guaranteed employment and/or retirement here for life. Miss Mayford – Bea, if you like and you do seem to like – was a special person in Elliott’s life. He may have loved her though I doubt if he knew that one way or the other. In her own way she probably loved him. She received a million dollars twenty some years ago, with the understanding that she would stay by him as long as she was needed. It may have been the only time Elliott let himself trust someone – give her the money up front and trust she would fulfill her part of the bargain. I suppose killing him would have set her free from this place but it’s the only place she’s known since she arrived here as a twenty-four-year-old. BS in nursing and MA in business administration. A very bright person, you see, to have attained all that by such a young age.”

“And Angie? She referred to herself as a millionaire once when we were talking. I let it pass, thinking it was a figure of speech. Now, I need to know.”

“I’m not sure. She’s earned a very good wage here the past forty-some years. Everything she needs is provided. What would she spend it on? With prudent investments, sure, she could be a millionaire. Being a millionaire isn’t nearly like it was when you and I were kids, though, you know.”

“I’m aware of that. Elliott never did her wrong, as far as

you know then.”

Carl shook his head.

“That leaves Hyde,” Masters said.

Carl’s face brightened.

“He’s the best thing that’s happened to this place since – well, he’s just the best thing that’s happened to this place.”

“In what ways?”

“His charm. His wit. His work ethic. The way he gets along with everyone, even Jeremy for God sake. His presence just brightens things. You spend two minutes with him and your dreary day suddenly seems wonderful. He has something special.”

“Very kind words.”

“He deserves them. Even Elliott liked to be around him although I’m sure it was never said.”

“So, Hyde would not be on your suspect list.”

“A suspect. Hyde? No. Never.”

“During the brief negotiation between Jeremy and Gil, earlier, Hyde urged Jeremy to complete the Scavenger Hunt. In some way, it just seemed out of character for him.”

“I caught the same thing. I can’t explain it.”

“What is Hyde’s status now that Elliott is dead?”

“He receives a \$250,000 bonus for one thing. His terms of employment guarantee him a full eight years pay even if something happened to Elliott – but that has always been standard in the butler contract.”

“How much total worth are we speaking about, roughly?”

“No roughly to it. Hyde earns \$60,000 a year, that’s \$480,000 over the eight-year contract period, plus the fifty percent bonus upon termination brings it to \$720,000. Add the two fifty bonus to it and we’re looking at \$970,000 in his pocket - probably within the week.”

“So, no incentive for him to eliminate the butlers. To speed up Elliott’s demise would hasten his road to riches, however. What would that come to, about \$500,000 a year for the two years he’s been here?”

“Well, yes, I guess, but we’re speaking about Hyde.”

“It brings us to you, I guess, Carl. How could you benefit in any of this?”

“I’ll get to start spending one or two more nights a week at home with my wife for starters. I’ll get my usual transaction fee for working through the will – that will be five percent of whatever it comes to. I’ll cease drawing my non-refundable, yearly, retainer of \$100,000. I won’t have to face Elliott to tell him I am resigning at the end of this calendar year.”

That’s been your intention?”

“Yes. My wife and I agreed we need our life back.”

“You are wealthy in your own right, I assume,” Masters said after some quick mental calculations.

“I’d never have to work another day if I lived to be 200 - if that’s what you mean.”

“You got on well with the former butlers, did you?”

“I got on well enough because I avoided them. They were greedy, vicious, vermin one and all. Just what Elliott felt he required to meet his long and short term personal and safety needs. He seemed to be right about that. He beat his actuarial charts by some forty years.

“If you’re really asking if I had reason to kill any of them, probably not. It pained me to see how some of them handled Jeremy when he was small, but then Jeremy could be the devil himself – no doubt about that. Love conquers all they say, but in Jeremy’s case we’ll never know. He probably doesn’t feel like he’s experienced a full day’s worth of love in his entire life. Maybe from Miss Mayfield. I probably feel guilty about looking the other way, but it wouldn’t drive me to kill anyone as a result.”

“I certainly appreciate your candor and insights,” Masters said, rising and extending a hand. “I think I’m going to call this to a halt for the night and get a fresh start in the morning.”

Carl nodded and started toward the kitchen, saying, “Got to find Angie and sponge another book for tonight.”

Masters got Hyde’s attention and asked him to see that Kopp was set up in a room for the next day or so. He nodded and led the policeman up the stairs.

The big clock struck ten. Masters was exhausted. It was seldom he ended the first full day on a new case without a sense of direction. That night the only sure direction was up the stairs and into bed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THURSDAY MORNING

The intensity of the storm had lessened during the night though it had by no means moved on out to sea. Masters opened his drapes just enough to view the ocean. The high waves still seemed angry in their relentless attack below. The mottled gray sky allowed only faint shadows to be cast, which worked to soften the starkness of the landscape. It produced a chill so he drew them closed, donned his sweater-of-the-day – a blue and brown cable stitch – and descended the stairs.

He was met by a breakfast buffet with omelets available from Angie upon request. Masters began with coffee, a biscuit, and raspberry jam – begin with dessert and work your way back, was the big man’s motto.

Angie and Hyde were the only ones in evidence. He approached Hyde.

“No messages from the coroner yet, I assume.”

“Correct. Delectable biscuits, though.”

He raised his own as if in a toast.

Masters responded in kind and smiled.

“I assume you have some way of knowing when that phone rings in the office.”

“Yes, Sir. Miss Mayford answers it and comes to find me. Still all quite pre-tech around here, I’m happy to say.”

“Sounds comfortable to me,” Masters said, nodding as if needed to further confirm his response.

Hyde continued.

“May I ask if you made any progress last evening? I mean if it’s none of my business just excuse the question.”

“Well, for one thing, your sainthood was definitely established, while the other butlers were painted as the devil’s henchmen. Jeremy, I am led to believe, is a raving lunatic, which is generally blamed on the fully inappropriate way he was raised, while Angie and Bea are very wealthy angles. Gil and Jane are merely selfish, opportunist relatives, and Carl’s true identity is yet to be established. He flies above it all as if in blue cape and red tights. Old Buck may well be the sanest of the bunch – present company excepted, of course.”

It was Hyde's turn to offer a quick, broad, smile.

“I guess except for the Saint in your monologue, I tend to see things pretty much like the others, then. I have to wonder about Buck. It’s not that I dislike him, mind you; it’s just that I’ve never felt I really knew where he was coming from. I have to wonder if he’s not just some gigantic put-on. He is certainly powerful enough to have done in every one of the victims and never broke a sweat.”

Evading the point, Masters looked around.

“Seen Kopp yet this morning?”

“Yes, Sir. He went jogging some forty minutes ago. I have to admit that seeing him in a sweat suit was a sight to behold. More coffee?”

“Yes, thanks.”

Bea approached. The coroner had called and was transmitting reports by fax at that moment.

“A fax. I’m impressed.”

“An essential in today’s business technology,” she said. “It continues to amaze me – sending words and pictures thousands of miles in seconds. Don’t even get me started on Hyde’s internet.”

Hyde filled her coffee mug as she searched the pastry tray for just the right morsel. Apparently, it was an apricot swirl. Masters was moved to follow suit. It had been a good choice.

Bea seemed to have made a substantial recovery since the night before. She wore a smile – genuine, not assumed – and chatted easily through ten minutes of small talk. Angie joined them and the two women moved off to a corner by themselves. Kopp crossed the living room and waved as he continued to jog on up the stairs toward his room.

“Speaking of interesting characters,” Hyde said, hoping to turn the conversation in the trooper’s direction.

“He has proved invaluable, so far,” Masters said with no intention of elaborating.

Bea approached them, mug in hand.

“I assume the fax is finished. Shall I bring it to you here?” she asked.

“Let me accompany you, unless there is some rule against pastry on the run.”

They smiled and he assumed there wasn’t. There were four reports with a note saying Ellsworth’s had been delayed for further analysis. Bea provided four manila file folders and Masters set off to find a cozy spot by a fireplace.

“First things first,” he said to himself, though out loud, and searched for Jackson’s folder. The report included little that had not been obvious from Masters’ own cursory examination. He had been severely beaten with a wide, flat, board on his bare buttocks, perhaps to the point that he would have passed out. He had been tied, apparently before the beating at both wrists and ankles – undoubtedly so he couldn’t move. Cotton fibers in the mouth suggested it had been stuffed with cloth to muffle his screams. He also had a strange, deep, abrasion running the width of the base of his abdomen. Finally, he received one powerful blow to the temple which had been determined to be the cause of death. Splinters in the heels of his shoes suggested he had been dragged some distance across a bare, unfinished, wooden surface such as the plank flooring at the dock house or pier where he had been found by Buck. The weapon would be a lengthy 2 X 4 - most likely - Masters thought. A four to six-foot length would have been necessary to have provided enough leverage to deliver such a severe blow. It could have been toward the shorter end of those figures if the perpetrator had been a strong man; toward the longer extreme if it had been a weaker man or woman. The entire process probably took fifteen to twenty minutes – thirty at the outside.

The unresolved portion of the event was why Jackson had allowed himself to be tied up. The usual answer would be that a weapon was present – most likely a gun – probably a pistol that could be easily manipulated as the appendages had

been tied in place. The murder weapon itself - the 2 X 4 - could have easily been tossed into the raging sea and was probably miles away. A rough cut board would not have given up finger prints anyway.

Masters had to wonder why the body was not also dumped into the ocean. Perhaps the murderer had been interrupted before that could happen or had expended all of his or her strength at the point where the body was found on the dock. It could be that the murderer had some purpose in wanting the body to be found.

Masters realized he would probably need to establish motive to solve it. So far, Jeremy seemed to be leading the pack on that score.

He moved on to the second folder – that of Phillip. Again, there was little beyond what Masters' own observations had suggested. The man had been forced to undress, probably at the threat of a weapon, and was then positioned with arms back around the tree. The rope looped his neck, ran to his wrists where they were secured and finally the rope was tied behind the tree. His ankles were looped with rope and then bound against the base of the trunk, the rope again being tied on the opposite side of the tree. Why he was covered in mud and how the soles of his feet had become cut were still unknowns.

Where were his clothes, Masters wondered? The shoes and belt might deliver some prints. With no other markings on the body, it was clear that the murderer was content not to slap or hit or beat, but just to let nature's deep freeze do the job; it had been a crime of calculated revenge, not passionate anger.

Folder three contained the report on Randolph. It, too, was straight forward. He had bled to death right there in the mudroom. There were bruises on his forehead, chin and right shoulder. They could have occurred when he fell forward at the point where he lost consciousness from lack of blood to the brain. That would mean he had been forced to stand as the process took place. He had not fought back – there were no scratches or bruises on his hands or arms typical of self-defense. From all appearances, he had not been gagged - there were no tell-tale abrasions on either side of the mouth or

streaks of redness across the cheeks. No fibers in his mouth or throat. Nothing about it seemed right to Masters.

Why would he just stand there, knowing he was bleeding to death? Why would he not call out for help? Even if he had been held at gunpoint throughout the process, it seems likely that he would have attacked his assailant and risked being shot. Once the vein had been cut what would there have been to lose? Plus, the noise of the gun might have summoned help. The case of Randolph presented many challenging questions.

The fourth death, Elliott, should have been the most straightforward – heart failure, respiratory failure or some such thing. Not so, Masters learned. The insides of Elliott’s lips were cut and had bled significantly before he died. His lips themselves were impregnated with metal foil – just tiny bits and pieces but easily detectable. His lungs and trachea harbored traces of feathers.

“The man was smothered!” Masters said, again aloud but to himself. He considered it further in a barely audible voice.

“Feathers from a pillow held so tightly against his face that his teeth had cut into the lining of his mouth. But the foil? Pillows don’t contain foil.”

He read on. The cause of death had indeed been established as suffocation.

So, it was five murders, Masters thought to himself, assuming murder would also be the finding in Ellsworth’s case. A new list of suspects and motives would need to be formulated. The essential, initial, question was, ‘Does the evidence suggest only one, or more than one, murderer?’

To find just one who clearly wanted the butlers as well as Elliott dead would probably be more easily accomplished than to find five or even just several killers with varying individual motives. His work was cut out for him.

First, he would examine Ellsworth’s room and belongings and find out what he could about the man. He began by returning to Bea’s office.

“What can you tell me about Ellsworth?”

He took a seat across the desk from her.

“Well, he was the first butler. He had been a – how do

they say it – a two-bit prize fighter, I believe, uncouth in every sense of the word. He did his work here, well, however. He . . . never mind. That was strictly personal.”

Masters let it go.

“Do you know anything about his health?”

“He was diabetic, if that’s what you mean.”

“Was that widely known by the folks here?”

“I doubt it. I knew because I procured his insulin and supplies. It was on his health record. He didn’t speak of it – a big, burly, ex-fighter wasn’t about to admit to such an affliction, I suppose. No, I’d say Mr. Elliott and I were the only ones who knew that. With his shots, he could maintain a regular diet.”

“And where are the health records kept?”

“In a folder, here in my desk drawer.”

“Always have been right there?”

“Well, let me think. Yes, I believe so.”

“Does the drawer lock?”

“Yes. I mean it can be locked or could be. I never have and I’m not sure if I ever even had a key.”

“Thank you, my dear. You have been a great help. I’m expecting one final report from the coroner. I will appreciate receiving it just as soon as it arrives. I’ll be up in the room that Ellsworth was occupying.”

Bea nodded and Masters stood and left in search of Kopp who had opted for cereal, juice and fruit. What a wonderfully healthful meal, Masters thought to himself and then shuddered.

“Kopp, my man. The first thing on our agenda today is to snoop around in the room used by Ellsworth. I’ve had a funny feeling about that one since we found the body. Apparently so does the coroner from the amount of time she is taking. When you’re ready. Take your time. I’ll have another cup of coffee. I need to speak with Angie anyway.”

Kopp nodded, not thinking words were necessary. Masters pushed his way through the swinging door into the kitchen. Windowless swinging doors always bothered the big man. It was as if radar were necessary to truly, fearlessly, approach one. Angie was humming - also plainly feeling better than she had the night before.

“Angie, my dear. A wonderful spread you fixed for us

this morning. Have the others come and gone?"

"Most haven't showed up yet. I expected as much. That's why I decided to make the eggs on demand. Nothing worse than hour old eggs."

They shivered together in agreement.

"Did any of the guests require special dietary consideration?" he asked holding out his cup to meet the coffee pot she had lifted from the stove.

"Well, there's you of course," she said snickering into her hand. "Just kidding there. Well, not really. Randolph struggled with a history of high cholesterol so I planned low fat things for him. Ellsworth needed a variety of things to choose from - he was diabetic - but he could make a meal without any fuss. He seemed embarrassed about it all."

"You knew he was diabetic, then."

"Sure. Forever. Which reminds me, I'm not sure what to do with his insulin and things he put in the walk-in."

"The walk-in refrigerator?"

"Right."

"May I see what he left there?"

"Sure."

She was back only moments later with a small plastic, Tupperware container she had provided for his use. Masters took it over to the kitchen table and sat down. Angie slipped a plate of pastries alongside him as he began examining the contents.

"Two vials of insulin - one half used - and three disposable syringes. Do you recall how often he injected himself?"

"Just mornings. It's funny you ask that. Yesterday he did one just after dinner - about seven, I'd say. I didn't ask him about it - you never questioned Ellsworth about anything, but it seemed strange. I guess he felt he needed to explain. He said he just felt like he required more - something about getting off schedule on the trip. He took the container into the bathroom and was back in a few minutes. He put it away and left. He seemed pretty frail. Not at all like the Ellsworth of his youth, you might say."

Masters shook the open vial and frowned. He inserted the needle of a syringe into the vial and sucked a small

amount into the cylinder. He laid the vile back in the container and slowly dispensed a small amount of the clear, liquid into his left palm. He dipped his right index finger into the substance and put it to his nose, sniffing. He then put it to his tongue.

He kept his finding quiet, thinking to himself, 'It's water! It's not insulin but water. Someone has made a switch.'

Rather than helping, the new finding muddied the water (so to speak). He had been certain that the discoloration under the fingernail had come from a honey injection. That in itself might have killed the man. So, why tinker with his insulin - which also, could have killed him during the night?

It appeared that somebody wanted to make certain there was no slip up. Masters needed more information.

"Was anyone else aware that Ellsworth's things were here in the walk in?"

"I wouldn't know how."

"Are you the only one who comes and goes in the walk in?"

"Mostly. Yeah."

"Mostly?"

It was a request for clarification.

"Hyde is everywhere in this place. When he or Jeremy get the munchies, they may go scrounging in there. Miss Mayford keeps her honey in there. She insists it takes cold honey to make really good honey-sweetened coffee. She tickles me. I can't tell the difference, personally."

"And yesterday. Were any of them in their yesterday?"

"Well, yes, all of them. Several times, in fact. It wasn't the usual schedule around here. They suspects, or something?"

"Just covering all the bases. Do you have a plastic bag large enough to slip this container into? I'd like to seal it up as possible evidence and then return it to the refrigerator."

"Sure. I got all sizes."

That was soon taken care of and Masters took his coffee (and a roll) into the dining room to see if Kopp had finished. He had and they made their way up the stairs.

"I don't have the key," Masters said, half way up."

As he turned to search for Hyde, the young man

appeared from the door of Bea's office.

"Hyde! Masters called. "I need the door opened to the room Ellsworth was using."

Hyde bounded up the stairs and the door was soon open.

"Looking for something special?" Hyde asked.

"In a search like this I seldom know what I'm after until I find it."

The answer had clearly provided no information but had not put him off. After opening the door Hyde handed the key to Masters.

"I have another. Keep it. Cross my heart I won't go in without your permission but I need a copy to get in and out of several others."

"Not a problem," Masters said. "If the word of a Saint isn't good, I don't know whose would be!"

Kopp looked puzzled. Hyde looked embarrassed. Masters took note of both and entered the room with a smile. He explained what he knew to Kopp.

"Hyde reported that when he found Ellsworth's body the window, there, was wide open and that the room was frigid. He closed the window before coming to get me. A few minutes later when I arrived the air was still cold but as I touched the bed and the dresser I found they were not cold - quite warm in fact."

Kopp again looked puzzled. Masters explained his theory.

"I have to assume the window had been open for a very brief time - hardly long enough to have affected the state of morbidity in the body. My estimate was that he had been dead about six hours and I feel confident that's well within the ballpark. That puts the time of death at about 2:30 a.m."

"Why would the killer come back six hours later and open the window?" Kopp asked.

"Yes. That's one of the crucial questions, Kopp. Very good."

Kopp stood a bit taller. Masters continued.

"Upon examination, I noticed a dark area under his left thumb nail. I had seen it once before many years ago during a case in Louisiana. Something about honey and blood

mixing leave a distinctive light brown discoloration. I am assuming he had been injected there with a considerable amount of honey - probably boiled down to increase the sugar value per cc."

"And the man just laid there and let somebody do that to him?" Kopp asked.

"Again, you imply the good question. There were some bruise-like marks on his arms that could have been the result of a struggle. Ellsworth was frail and now that I know his insulin had been tampered with, he could well have been in shock or a coma."

"Wouldn't it have taken a long time to inject thick honey into a thumb? Why not right into a vein on his wrist?"

"Marks. The killer didn't want us to find the injection marks so he or she went in under the nail of the fleshiest finger - the thumb."

"Like junkies do to avoid detection."

"Exactly the same way."

"The killer must not have been worried about being caught in the act then," Kopp observed, appearing more and more astute every time he opened his mouth.

"We need to get a forensic team out here, Kopp. Can you see to that?"

"Sure. When I'm on the phone with a request from Raymond Masters I'm just about the most powerful cop in the state."

It was Master's turn to look embarrassed.

"I'll make a list of things I want checked out and leave it here on the bed. They should feel free to follow their noses, however."

"There was an odor left behind?"

The old Kopp had returned and Masters chuckled.

"Just an expression. Probably not used outside of New York," Masters explained hoping the man wouldn't feel put down.

Kopp left to make the call. Masters began his list. There was a spot on the sheet, which he assumed would be found to be honey. The windows would need to be printed as would the bed posts, doors and knobs.

"If I could find the syringe used I might luck out on

prints,” he said out loud as he looked around. “Perhaps it was thrown out the window. More likely taken along and disposed of in some more careful manner. This killer was clever. If I were a clever killer who knew about injecting under the fingernails, where might I hide the syringe? Some place from which I could easily come and retrieve it later. Bingo!”

Bingos were usually reserved for actual finds, but Masters was so sure in that case that the idea deserved one ahead of time. He went into the bathroom and using a towel removed the lid to the water tank on the stool. There it was – one disposable syringe - floating on the water. He reached in with a wash cloth and carefully removed it.

‘Why was it floating,’ he asked himself? The cylinder was empty of liquid and filled with air behind the plunger. The end of the needle was clogged - with honey, Masters assumed - which kept the water out and the air in. Masters preferred having a witness when he found evidence, but that would not be on that occasion. He laid it on a dry hand towel and placed it on the bed with his notes, suggesting it be printed along with the stool lid in the bathroom – the lid, inside and out.

Masters then began going through the clothes Ellsworth had been wearing at the time he was found. He had been fully clothed as if he had just laid down for a nap or to rest a brief time, having the intention of returning to the scavenger hunt. He was a fighter. He would not have easily given up. The search revealed nothing out of the ordinary – change, a hanky, a billfold and comb. The billfold contained over four hundred dollars, a few business cards, four credit cards and a metal medical alert card. It was what wasn’t there that interested Masters the most. There was no driver’s license. His, of course, had been turned in by Jeremy. Where was Jane’s?

The most perplexing question remained. ‘Why would the murderer use two such different methods for killing the man, and why so many hours apart?’ Perhaps, it all occurred backwards. The killer would have needed to know that Ellsworth did his injection in the morning. So, he or she injected the honey during the night, knowing that the water, substituted for the morning insulin, would not control it. The man would then have died much later - sometime after

breakfast. It would in that way make the time-line irrelevant since no one would have needed to have been in contact with him close to his time of death. Unknown to the killer, he had missed earlier injections due to the confusion of the trip and had already taken some of the water substitute. He therefore had no insulin in his system. If the water switch had been made prior to the Tuesday morning shot, he would have had no insulin in his system for thirty or more hours at the time the honey had been injected. He probably died almost instantly upon receiving the honey – perhaps, even while the murderer was still there.

Masters was eager to receive the coroner's report to see how much of that they would verify. He locked the door, pocketed the key and went back down stairs.

The coroner's report had just arrived and Hyde, with the folder in hand, met Masters at the bottom of the steps.

"Ellsworth, I believe," Hyde said, handing the folder over. "I was just on my way up with it."

"Thank you. Suppose there's any chance of getting one more Apricot Swirl? If there is I'll be in my usual spot by the window."

Kopp caught up with him as he crossed the room.

"Forensics is on the way. Probably an hour and a half. The storm's still too bad to chance a chopper trip. They'll come by Coast Guard cutter. I heard the report on Ellsworth came in."

"Yes, I have it here. Let's give it the once over."

"Once over what?"

"Let's look at the report."

"Good idea."

They found seats and Masters opened the folder and passed on the highlights to Kopp.

"Diabetic coma - too much sugar. Pretty much as I figured. Lucy found the injection mark under the nail. Still enough honey in the flesh to be found there so he died soon after the injection - otherwise it would have been absorbed. Blood insulin level was nil suggesting he had received none for nearly a day and a half. We need to find Jules and see if he remembers anything about Ellsworth taking an injection in the morning before they caught the ferry out here. I

understand they arrived here mid-morning after spending the night in a motel in town. Maybe Angie can help there also. Would you go find either or both of them?"

Kopp seemed pleased to have an assignment. A few minutes later Angie arrived bearing a plate of apricot swirls.

"The tall one said you had a question for me."

"The tall one. Yes. Back to Ellsworth. Are you sure about the first time he took an insulin shot after arriving?"

"Yeah. He arrived about nine as I recall and he asked me for a place to keep his stuff refrigerated and I got him the Tupperware thing. I showed him a place it could stay in there and he even thanked me. I remember he said he got off schedule the day before - with the airplane flight and all - he lived in California - and that he'd be back around noon to start gradually getting things back to normal. I don't know much about such things. Miss Mayford was having coffee with me when he arrived. She might remember something more. Then he came back about one thirty and used his stuff for the first time."

Masters thanked her for her help.

Jules and Kopp arrived as Angie left.

"You and Ellsworth stayed at the same motel in town the night before you came out here, I understand," Masters asked Jules

"Yes, Sir. Different rooms. Didn't know he was there at the time. The others were all there as well. Small town - one motel."

"Did you know he was diabetic?"

"No, Sir. He didn't mention it. I really didn't know the man. Probably didn't speak with him for more than ten minutes all told."

"How did his health appear while you were with him?"

"Health? Sickly, I suppose. Moved slowly. He said he had tripped and fallen getting onto the plane he took up here from Boston - those little commuters you know - about the size of flying hot water heaters."

On a wild hunch, Masters asked, "Tell me your version of your drug use."

Jules looked surprised but began an immediate answer.

“It was before I came to work here. Steroids back before we knew how dangerous they were. Never anything else.”

“Are there any other things I should know? I really don’t like surprises late in the game.”

“Well, don’t know if it’s important, but I saw Buck walk by the kitchen window heading East at about 2:30 the first night of the hunt. He was carrying some kind of shotgun under his arm.”

“And what was your reason for being in the kitchen at that hour?”

That answer did not flow as easily as the others. After a short pause, he said, “Pots. As I recall I was searching the house for three more flower pots. That’s why I was close to the windows. Thought there might be some on the sills; Angie always loved flowers. The rules didn’t say the pots had to be empty.”

Masters nodded and continued.

“While I’m thinking about it, Jules - down at the dock house when you went in search of the black gumball - can you describe the way the broken machine looked?”

“Well, just like I said before. The big glass globe that sat on top that held the balls was scattered everywhere in little pieces. I assumed the cold temperature burst it somehow.”

“And all the gumballs were gone?”

“No, actually. Down in the base where the neck of the globe sat, there were a dozen or so white balls mixed in with the glass slivers.”

He reached into his pocket and pulled out several balls.

“I searched through them for a black one but there wasn’t one there. I figured what the hell; at least I can salvage something; I picked up a half dozen or so and put them in my pocket.”

“May I have them?”

“Sure. What’s left? I had one. Really terrible but then what would you expect for a penny these days?”

It took several trips into his pocket but eventually seven white gumballs were transferred into Masters’ possession. Jules left. Jane was just coming down the stairs. He went to meet her as if their friendship was nothing to hide.

"I have a question," Kopp said, looking up from his pad and scratching his head.

So far his questions had been good ones. Masters was interested.

"What's that, Kopp?"

"Why do they call it a hot water heater when really it's a cold-water heater? I mean if the water was already hot, you wouldn't need to heat it. A hot water maker - like a coffee maker - would be a better name for it don't you think?"

"I can honestly say I have never thought about that, but what you say does make perfect sense."

Kopp smiled and nodded, apparently satisfied having received Masters' concurrence. If he had been required to guess about the nature of a water heater question from Kopp it would have had to do with how they made them fly. Oh, well. Even great detectives sometimes make inaccurate assumptions.

Masters had placed the gumballs on the end table beside him. He donned his reading glasses and began examining them one by one. Number three seemed to have a small hole in it. He took out his pocket knife and cut it in two.

"Interesting!" he said and handed one half of the ball to Kopp.

"What do you make of that?"

Kopp was careful and thorough in his examination before answering.

"A piece of shot from a shotgun. Never can tell what you'll find in food these days."

"You're familiar with shot guns I assume."

"No more than I have to be. I hate guns. I shot a bit as a teenager when I was out on my grandpa's farm. Shot mark mostly. Never could bring myself to pull that trigger against an animal."

Masters really, really, wanted to ask how Mark felt about being shot, but he resisted, knowing it would only lead to ... well, it was Kopp.

Masters' working assumption would be that the globe had not given way to the cold but had been blown apart by a shotgun. Who? Why? When? The latter question would be the easiest to answer. It was broken by 8:30 on Wednesday

morning, when Jules arrived to get his gumball. The person who had deposited hers just prior to that was Jane at 4:40 a.m. It might make some sense to think she had destroyed it so no one else could get one. If that had been her plan, why wait so long? Why not get her gumball early on and destroy it so none of the others could get one?

Finding the gun might provide answers to Who. In all likelihood, it would be Buck's gun. Would it have been Buck? Could anyone else have gained access to it? He needed to chat with Buck.

They found him making ready to leave the mud room. He seemed genuinely happy to see Masters again. No extended hand, but a quiet smile and nod in the old detective's direction.

"I need a minute of your time, Buck."

"Sure. Who's the tall fella?"

"This is Trooper Kopp from the State Police. He is here investigating the murders."

"Okay then. Sure, what kin I do fer ya?"

"Is there a shotgun on the island? I've been told Mr. Stone didn't allow firearms here."

"Which guy was shot?"

"No one was shot. It's something else."

"I gots a old four-ten down ta my cabin. Hain't been shot 'n years, though."

"Would you have been carrying it about two or so last night outside the kitchen window?"

"No. I was there 'bout that time. I been down in the basement checkin' the gen'rator. It was stressin' more than usual so I thought I should ataken a look. Needed a drink a thirty weight 'twas all. The door is right there outside the kitchen. I had my walkin' pole in my hand but not no gun."

"Okay. That probably answers that. Also, we think somebody may have borrowed it from you earlier."

"The four-ten? T'was there this mornin'?"

"How about sometime yesterday."

"I was cuttin' firewood off and on over on the west shore where the logs is delivered to us. S'pose somebody coulda used it. Never lock the place. Never needed to."

"With your permission, I'd like the trooper here to go

with you and get it so I can take a look at it. You also should probably examine your shell box to see if it's been moved or tampered with in any way."

"I was head'n down there now, anyways. Sure, trooper. I'll show ya the shortcut."

Buck winked at Masters who suddenly sensed Kopp was in for a new and not altogether pleasant experience.

"While you're down there, Buck, you said there was a pile of two bys in the dock house. I'd like Trooper Kopp to look through them on the off chance the murder weapon got replaced there rather than thrown away. It would be four to six feet long and in all likelihood, would have faint traces of blood on it - may look black by now. There is also the matter of the rope with which Jackson was tied and some place to which he could have been tied during the beating."

The two nodded that they understood. Kopp got his coat and hat and they were soon on their way. Masters went back to visit with Bea. He found her having coffee with Angie.

"My two favorite ladies at the same table," he began, his warm smile washing across the area.

They knew it was polite flattery, but still, both blushed.

"Pull up'a. I'll get you'a," Angie said tittering at her own verbal shorthand.

Masters took a seat next to Bea who began to speak almost immediately.

"I've been thinking about our conversation regarding the health records. This may be nothing but I think I should tell you anyway. About four, maybe five weeks ago, I noticed that some of the books in my little library in my office were out of order. I put them back the way I wanted them and didn't think much more about it."

"I'm interested in how you knew they were out of order."

"You're a college graduate, Sir. You know how books at that level are always referred to by author rather than title."

Masters nodded.

"Mine are arranged alphabetically by author. Anyone not understanding about that would probably think they were just shelved in a random fashion. Four were out of place."

"And they were . . .?"

"Bates, Church, Dirkson, and Grey. Dirkson is the title

that came to mind when I put that incident together with our discussion. Its title is, The Care and Management of the Older Diabetic Patient.”

“I see. Yes. Good thinking, Bea. Just for the record what were the others?”

“All would seem to be related, I suppose, to the non-medical person. One was an intermediate nursing textbook, one on pharmacology, and one on human anatomy.”

“I will want to have them dusted for fingerprints. Officer Kopp will come by to pick them up when he returns. I appreciate your good thinking. If it is related to Ellsworth’s death, it would tend to rule out those who were not here during that week - the butlers, Jane and Gil.”

“And rule in the five of us?”

“Five?” Masters began counting on his fingers.

“Me, of course - though I’m not sure why I would be bringing it up if it had been me - Angie, here; Jeremy; Elliott; and Buck.”

“Does Buck read?”

His question was met with an all-out smile. It gave her rather plain face a wonderfully appealing glow. She answered.

“Let’s see what would be the proper word - voraciously, perhaps.”

“Really? He reads a lot? So that’s what’s behind the sparkle in his big, brown, eyes! And his poor English?”

“Like his family’s. His first language, you could say. He’s read everything in my library and I assume everything in Mr. Stone’s. Owns hundreds and hundreds of books, himself. He could hold his own with professors if he chose to.”

“You know the workings of this place better than anyone else. Suppose Ellsworth’s death had nothing to do with either the estate or winning the hunt. Is there anybody here who had reason to want him dead for some other reason?”

She sighed a long sigh.

“If you don’t already know, I’m sure you will find out. During the first year I was here - I was twenty five at the time but for all intents and purposes still a barefoot kid right off the farm in Iowa - Ellsworth - he’d been here maybe a month -

attacked me, sexually. I screamed and it awakened Angie - back then her room was just across the wall from my bedroom, where the infirmary is now. She came to see what was wrong and Ellsworth left. He threatened us both with more of the same if we said anything to Mr. Stone. We didn't and the man never made so much as another pass at me. I'm not sure why, but I was certainly relieved when his eighth year came to an end. I suppose I would be the one around here who would have a score to settle with him."

Angie returned.

"I heard you talking. Sorry if I shouldn't of. I've never told you this, but I was so afraid for both of us after that, that I told Buck about it and asked him if there was anything he could do. I have to assume he did something - something major - because Ellsworth wasn't the kind to be put off by a couple of wet behind the ears young ladies."

Bea reached across the table and patted her old friend's hand. Her tears were matched by Angie's. Masters thanked them and quickly made his exit, leaving them alone in their important moment.

He went back and dissected the remaining gum balls. He found no more shot. At ten, the forensics team arrived. Kopp was with them, shotgun, gunny sack, and a 2 X 4 in tow. Masters directed the group to Ellsworth's room and discussed the possibility of matching the single piece of shot to the weapon. They all agreed that would most likely be impossible, but they bagged it for lab analysis. The shot size in the ball was the same size as that from Buck's box of old shells. He had no idea if any were missing. Beyond that they could probably offer little more assistance.

Hyde took the team upstairs. Kopp had further information for Masters.

"That dock house has a narrow front room with a solid floor and walls. It looks like it was probably built to be a weather tight, heated, office of some kind. In it is a massive wooden table, three feet wide and six or seven feet long. The top is smooth finished but the legs are just roughhewn. Look what I found!"

He took out an evidence bag which contained four smaller evidence bags each plainly marked for each of the

four legs. Masters looked through the clear plastic.

“Looks like strands from an old hemp rope.”

“That’s just what Buck said. I’d say ropes were tied around each leg of the table. The two legs on the east had the strands down low but on the west, they were up high. Doesn’t make sense but that’s where they were.”

“Perhaps it does make sense. If Jackson’s killer forced him to stand facing - and up against - the east end of the table, he or she could have tied his ankles to the table legs – down near the bottom. His pants could have then been dropped and Jackson forced to bend over the table, his torso in effect lying on it. With his arms stretched out ahead of him, his hands were then bound tightly and tied to the legs – right hand to one, left to the other. That would account for the strands on the west end being up high on the table legs. He was then beaten – probably into unconsciousness, untied, bludgeoned on the temple with the 2 X 4, redressed and dragged out onto the dock where he was found. Makes perfect sense and also accounts for the raw area across the base of his abdomen - rubbed raw against the edge of the table top during the beating. Good police work?”

Kopp puffed up as if the deductions had been his own. He followed Masters up the stairs to see how the forensics team was doing.

Few prints had been found on the window or sill. There were a few more on the bed. The stool in the bathroom yielded virtually none. Hyde indicated that it had been cleaned the day before the guests arrived but that he would have imagined some of his should have been found. With that statement, he was either merely being helpful or establishing a reason for their presence there. Masters addressed him.

“We will need to fingerprint everyone who is here. We’ll also need to draw blood samples for typing. Arrange a time and place with these folks and then gather the guests.”

“Can’t you use the blood vials from the hunt?”

“There is no way to be sure each one actually contains the blood of the person whose name is on the label.”

Hyde nodded. Things were arranged and one of the technicians went with Hyde to get started. Rather than bother Buck, Masters suggested that his prints be lifted off his coffee

mug. That was easily done. If his blood became necessary, it could be drawn later.

By eleven, the team had finished with the room, and prints and blood had been obtained from the guests and residents. The shotgun had been printed - apparently only one partial taken from the trigger. That told Masters it had been wiped clean since the last time Buck had used it - unless of course, Buck had done the wiping after using it himself. Ellsworth's wallet had been printed - three sets, one of which would be Masters'. Wallets seldom held more than the owner's prints (sometimes their wives!!!) so Masters was more than a little interested in finding out to whom the third set belonged. The 2 X 4 had blood right where it would have been predicted to be. It, too, was packed for the trip back to town.

The team returned to the mainland to carry out the analysis. Masters and Kopp went in search of Jeremy who was in his suite on the third floor.

"Been expecting you," he said, answering the door in far less than the law allowed.

"What can I do for you?"

"Perhaps you could begin by donning a robe," Masters suggested.

"Oh, gee! Yes. I'm sorry. Nobody ever comes up here except Hyde and my ladies' and none of them seem to care if I'm in my natural state. I've always hated to wear clothes - tight, binding, hot, yuck."

He shuddered as he slipped into his robe.

"Can't even stand long sleeved shirts, if you can imagine."

Masters took a seat. Kopp chose to stand, looking out a window. Masters spoke.

"I need you to clear up one thing for me. You said you traded licenses with Ellsworth, so he should have ended up with Jane's, is that correct?"

"Yes."

"We have not been able to find any license in his room, in his clothes or in his wallet. Could you help me with that?"

"Not a clue. Sorry. Like I said, we traded in the hall. I felt sorry for the old codger and he was obviously not going to be any real competition. Maybe he dropped it on the way

back to his room. When do we get our own back, by the way?"

"I'll have them for you at lunch. No reason for us to keep them. I'm at a loss as to where Jane's might be. It could prove very inconvenient for her."

"Not if she goes directly from here to jail for murder. See, a fine reason to just accuse dear old Mom and get it all out of the way."

"You really suspect her?"

"She's a people user. Whatever it takes to further her own agenda. She threw away her own kid, for God sakes, because he was an inconvenience. Surely she couldn't have scruples about killing somebody she doesn't even know – somebody that might keep her from getting what she thinks is her rightful inheritance."

"And in the process, you believe, she would be willing to implicate you - frame you, if you will?"

"She's always hated me. She made that clear the day she buckled me into the seat on the cable car and pressed the start button. Sure, she would. I'd probably do the same to her. Cut from the same cloth, I think they call it."

"She did buckle you in."

"Not for my safety you can bet. Probably just to make sure I'd survive the trip up the hill and live to become a thorn in her older brother's ass."

Masters chose to change the subject.

"I don't recall ever hearing anything about your father." Masters said.

"That makes two of us, I guess."

"Masters frowned."

"He blew mom and me off before I was born – at least that's the version of the story I choose to believe. Never saw the man. Considerably older than her, I understand. Handsome. I suppose I owe my good looks to him. Mom always said he died in the war - which one was never specified. I never looked into it - could care less. He was undoubtedly an undesirable, incurable, sociopath."

"What leads you to that conclusion?"

"Well, first, he chose and married Mom and, second, I like to assume that my condition is genetic. Takes that old

responsible for my own behavior pressure off me, you see.”

He smiled his relaxed, charismatic smile, something, Masters had noted, he had unquestionably not inherited from his brow-furrowed, always uncomfortable appearing, mother.

“So, you’re telling me you believe your mother killed the butlers to improve her position in the inheritance.”

“That’s as good a theory as I can find.”

“What about this one,” Masters offered. “Jane kills Jackson and Phillip to take revenge on them for the reprehensible way in which they treated her son, who she has always loved but knew she was fully incapable of taking care of. Or this one. Jeremy kills the three butlers to not only improve his position in the will but also so he could win the Hunt thereby assuring himself of this wonderful old mansion to live in for the rest of his life - all upkeep paid, no less. Or how about this one. Jeremy kills the butlers to serve his triple purpose: to take revenge on those he hated and to distract the investigation from his main purpose - to also kill his Uncle Elliott and speed up the big payoff to himself. Knowing that neither Jane nor Gil would want to have anything to do with this big old place so filled with unhappy memories, it would be his.”

“I believe that last one would make it quadruple not triple. They are all interesting except that Unc took better care of me - outside of his will - than you seem to know. Regardless of who gets this place during my lifetime, I have the right to live here and receive the interest from a trust fund - about fifty thousand a year - that’s about forty more than I spend on myself now.”

“You could, of course, have felt that would have shielded yourself from suspicion, and used it to take your revenge on Jackson, Phillip and Elliott; or to allow you to implicate someone else, like your mother, for an added portion of retribution.”

“You’re spinning cloth out of air - I remember that phrase from a children’s book Miss Mayford used to read me. None of it can be proved, even if any part or all of your accusations are true.”

“Oh, those were not accusations, Jeremy. Just possibilities. I never accuse until I have a definite lock on a

case.”

Masters smiled and continued.

“By the way, since we have established such a congenial atmosphere here, one more question if I may. Were you aware that one of the Butlers was diabetic?”

“Diabetic. Who? No.”

“That would certainly make it difficult to explain those prints, then, wouldn’t it? Well, I suppose that’s my problem and not yours. Thanks for talking with us. Don’t catch cold.”

Masters smiled again and the two left. In the hall, Kopp asked the question.

“You found Jeremy’s prints on Ellsworth’s medical supplies?”

“No. I just find that sprinkling a few such hypothetical possibilities around often sets interesting events in motion.”

Kopp nodded. Whether he understood was not clear.

“It must be lunch time, don’t you suppose? Let’s go down and see what Angie has prepared.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THURSDAY AFTERNOON**

Being so physically isolated from police services was slowing down the investigation. The piece of shot, the books, the 2 X 4, the shotgun and other bits and pieces had been dispatched to the lab by Coast Guard cutter shortly after noon. The boat had also delivered some supplies that Masters had requested, most of which were not for the prying eyes of the staff and guests.

In the kitchen, he took a small box into the walk-in while Kopp remained outside to assure his privacy. The container, which Ellsworth had used, and its contents, had been sent to the lab. There had been three unused syringes, each sealed in a plastic wrapper, and several vials of insulin - the open one having contained only water. Masters added three new syringes to the new, substitute, Tupperware container, first wiping them free of all prints but his own - and he made certain his were left on each item. He repeated that procedure with new insulin vials - one of which he had emptied and partially refilled with water - and finally the container itself, which he then replaced onto the shelf. He had carefully avoided letting anyone know that the original box and its contents had been removed. He left the cool little cubical with a shiver and the two men returned to the corner of the living room, which had become their base of operations.

Jules and Jane strolled over to them. The purpose of their visit was not clear. Masters took the initiative and used the opportunity to procure information.

“Jane,” he began, “One of the men told me you were

with him at the times two of the murders were being committed. It would certainly help if you would identify who that man was and define the time periods – to verify his statement, you understand.”

He smiled up at her, waiting. Jane looked at Jules who nodded almost imperceptibly.

“I was with Jules from about ten to eleven thirty in my room on the third floor. Then he spent some time helping me search for some of the absurd items on the Scavenger list. That would have been from about midnight to seven or so this morning, I guess. Is that what you needed to hear?”

“As I told Jules earlier, since you both have to be considered suspects, it is important that you find third parties to verify all of that.”

“We didn’t invite an audience into my room, I’m afraid.”

“Then that will remain a problem for both of you, I suppose. What about the rest of the time. Surely you crossed paths with somebody. This is a tiny island and the required activities were pretty much confined to things in and about the house, the dock, and the cable car.”

“We’ll have to think back about it. If we come up with anything we’ll let you know,” she said as if she should be considered above it all.

“Oh, no! You will let me know either way. This is a serious investigation. Four or perhaps five men were murdered out here and you two are prime suspects. It’s not some walk in the park. Give me your report within the hour.”

She shrugged her shoulders and they left.

“Okay, Kopp,” Masters said. “Get comfortable. We need to think through motives for each of the possible murderers. Make lists.”

Kopp seemed pleased to have his services requested and he began writing as Masters began talking.

“Jackson. He was the second butler here at the manor, coming after Ellsworth’s retirement, probably having been extorted out of some portion of his salary by Ellsworth and presumably doing the same to Phillip who followed him. So, in terms of extortion, Phillip would have the only revenge-based motive against Jackson. Phillip had appeared briefly for dinner and stayed for the explanation of the Hunt but was

never heard from again. That gave him opportunity along with motive. What it didn't apparently give him was a reason to beat the man's buttocks bloody and inflict that wound across his lower abdomen. That, of course, could have been done to point the blame at Jeremy – someone he clearly had never liked. It would have been unlikely that Phillip would not have known about the way Jackson disciplined the boy. The extra 10% of the estate and the ownership of Windstone that Phillip could have won in the Scavenger Hunt could be considered further motive to kill off any competitor although he really never got into the swing of things. The means to commit the murder were all available in the dock house. He might have lured Jackson there on some pretext of cooperation or who knows what. Motive, opportunity and means make him a suspect. The only missing element is how he could have forced Jackson to allow himself to be tied up. A knife or a hand gun would be the best source of such power, I suspect. Make a note to search Phillip's room and belongings for a weapon."

Kopp nodded and diligently started a list on a separate pad. Masters continued.

"His possessing a weapon poses another problem however. If Phillip were armed, how could someone later force him to undress and be tied to the tree? Perhaps he had discarded the weapon once Jackson had been killed. That would assume that Phillip had no plans to murder others – or at least that he would not need a weapon to do so.

"The best motive for Jackson's torture-type killing would be Jeremy's. He is too bright to have kept any weapon he may have used to initially subdue the man. Bea and Angie would have motives I suppose since they cared for Jeremy as a boy and abhorred the way he had been disciplined. It seems doubtful they would have involved the flashback aspect since that would automatically point to Jeremy, the one for whom they would have been taking revenge in the first place."

"Then there is Phillip's own murder. Much of what holds for the circumstances surrounding Jackson's killing, also holds there. Extortion would have been directed at Jules who, so far, has no alibi - other than Jane - for the time of Phillip's death. A weapon of some kind would have been needed –

Jane's .22 perhaps. Knowledge of the tree incident with Jeremy would have been necessary to set up the frame. Similar motives about the inheritance and reduction of competition would apply as before. Only Jackson, who was dead, would seem to be definitely ruled out as a potential killer in the case of Phillip. There is some question about Ellsworth's state of consciousness at the time in question. My hunch is he was in no condition to carry out such an activity. I am also ruling out Elliott for both of the outdoor murders. Gil had several short intervals of time available during the period. It's conceivable he could have managed it – unlikely but conceivable. Again, the torture aspect of the crime moves Jeremy to the top of the list. The fact that both of the first two murders involved recreations of Jeremy's excessive discipline as a child tends to suggest that if it were not Jeremy, then the same person or team probably committed both murders."

"Ellsworth died around two or two thirty. Bea has given herself ample motive. That same incident could give Angie motive – Bea has been her friend most of her life. A two-some, perhaps. Interesting! They both knew about Ellsworth's diabetes and Angie had access to his supplies. Bea, a nurse, had the knowledge to use the condition against him – to kill him either by taking away his insulin or by overdosing him with sugar. Perhaps Bea and Angie both participated but neither knew about the other. Acting independently, Angie could have replaced the insulin in her refrigerator and Bea could have injected him with the honey. Being a nurse, she could have even gone to check on him in his room, gaining entry to ostensibly help him. That could account for the lack of struggle. He knew her as a nurse and trusted her. In his delirium, he may have even thought she was giving him a needed insulin shot. A simply fascinating possibility. So, substitute sexual assault for extortion and the ugly old revenge factor remains alive for Ellsworth. He was clearly the easiest target for murder – old, frail, sick. I have to wonder why he even bothered to come. Jeremy's weakest motive to kill him would have been to reduce the Hunt competition but as he stated earlier, Ellsworth really wasn't competition. One less to share in the inheritance might provide a better motive but if Jeremy can be believed, Elliott had taken good care of him

even without the general inheritance. There are many interesting possibilities.”

“Randolph. It was another case in which a weapon would, presumably, need to have been used to subdue or control the victim. This murder makes the least sense. Who in his right mind would let someone - even if holding a gun on them - cut open a vein in his wrist and then just stand there and watch himself bleed to death? There were no signs that he had been tied. Here’s an interesting idea. Let’s say Randolph had already made the cut into his vein - a foolish place to have sought such a small amount of blood. At that point the person with the gun entered the room. The cut was so deep that before Randolph could have determined how to launch any counter measure he lapsed into unconsciousness. The murderer then left him there to bleed to death. Would that person even be a murderer in the strictest sense of the word? Interesting!”

“Another possibility would be that someone far stronger than Randolph accosted him in the mud room, held him on the floor or against the wall while cutting his wrist and then muffled his cries for help with a big hand over the mouth until he passed out. There would be only one person with that kind of power on the island - Buck. Motive is hard to establish for Buck unless as Jane indicated earlier he wants this place all to himself.

“It could have been a two-person operation. One with the gun who also muffled the man’s mouth, while the other did the cutting. Forcing him to close his eyes or forcing his head at an upward angle so he could not be fully aware of the life-threatening danger he was in could also help account for the minimal struggle.”

“I see three possible alliances. Jane and Jules, Bea and Angie, and Jeremy and Hyde - that last one being unlikely, given each man’s personality. In the case of Randolph, there seems to be no apparent motive for Bea and Angie. If the murders had been orchestrated by Elliott, however, the field is open. He could have paid any one of them to kill any other. Here’s an interesting scenario. Elliott pays Phillip to kill Jackson. He pays Randolph to kill Phillip. He pays Jules to kill Randolph and Jane to kill Jules, who she

didn't of course because of their romantic involvement. Elliott could have also engaged Jane to kill Ellsworth. Getting paid to reduce the competition would have seemed like a bonanza - a bonus - to her.

'Motive? Why would Elliott have wanted them killed? Perhaps, in terms of Jackson and Phillip, to take revenge for the way they treated young Jeremy. Maybe killing them would ease his own guilt over allowing it to have taken place. That's a possibility. Another could be to see that his relatives would receive his entire fortune. Unlikely. Perhaps in order to frame Jane, Gil and Jeremy and take them down so none of the lot would receive his inheritance? With no payment until after the fact, there would be no way to connect Elliott to the hired killers. That would have left Bea, Angie, Hyde and Carl - undoubtedly the most loyal and trusted of his people. We need to find out from Carl what the line of succession is in the will - who would benefit if the butlers and relatives died before Elliott. Oh, my! A possible quartet!"

"Carl is in Miss Mayford's office," Kopp said. "I noticed him entering a few minutes ago. Shall I get him?"

"Yes, if you wouldn't mind. While you're gone, I'll look through the notes you've made."

Carl arrived and took a seat. The answer was simple and quite straightforward.

"In the event no relative survives Elliott, the estate is to be split equally among those staff members who are in his employ at the time of his death."

Masters had a final question.

"And what about relatives who were in jail? Were they to still share in the estate?"

"It was an intriguing clause, broader than your question," Carl said, crossing his legs as if settling in. "Elliott knew he had surrounded himself with selfish, greedy, amoral butlers - it was the type of person he thought he could count on to see that he lived in comfort and complete safety. But, he also knew those kinds were likely to run amok of the law. The same was true for his relatives. So, he had a clause added that specifically excluded inheritance to any individual who, subsequent to his association with Elliott, was convicted of a crime which involved a jail or prison sentence of more than

ninety days. One would think that would have provided a huge incentive for them all to keep their noses clean and it may have been part of Elliott's purpose. He did have a heart though seldom chose to show it."

"And to your knowledge the butlers had all managed that?"

"Heavens no! It was the main motive that brought them here for this show. Elliott allowed them to enter into this final competition even though most of them had already lost their share of his inheritance. It wouldn't have been as much fun for Elliott if they all hadn't taken part."

"Most of them implies that only a few had maintained a clean legal record. Who would they be?"

"They would have been only Jules, among the butlers, that is. The three relatives have all managed to elude jail time."

Masters kept the following thought to himself. 'So, the other butlers suddenly become prime suspects in Elliott's death – revenge for the disinheritance – if it turns out not to have been from natural causes.'

"And Hyde?" Masters asked.

"Clean as a whistle."

"So, this was a last-ditch effort for the four other butlers."

"Right. To get something rather than nothing."

"Any other surprises tucked away in the will?"

"One, perhaps. Upon Ellsworth's death, ownership of the island goes to Buck with several provisos - and here it becomes complicated. Title to the property built on the island and access to it remains as it is disbursed in Elliott's will. If Buck has no blood heirs, then, upon Buck's death, the island reverts to Elliott's heir-in-line. That just means that he stipulates an order in which the heirs will be considered eligible, provided they are alive, of sound mind, and meet the non-incarceration clause. Miss Mayford is at the top of that list and Jane at the bottom."

"And in between - in order?"

Carl held up his hand and counted off on his fingers as he listed them.

"Angie, Jeremy, Gil, Hyde, and myself or my heirs

according to age.”

“Which effectively leaves Jane out completely. I assume that you have children.”

“Four sons, two daughters, and twelve grandchildren.”

Masters nodded. His full cheeks smiled, though his brow wrinkled. It acknowledged Carl’s fine family. It documented the single regret in Masters’ own life. He moved on.

“When was the current will made?”

“The basic terms were solidified about thirty-five years ago. A few changes have been made along the way. Jeremy was added when he arrived here as was Hyde’s special status last year.”

“With Buck having no heir, Miss Mayfield seems to be the big winner in all of this.”

“Provided she outlives Buck. His father died at 92 and his grandfather at 101.”

“I appreciate your input. It throws a new light on some of the subtleties of the case.”

Carl stood preparing to leave.

“By the way, a fax was coming in from the coroner while I was in Miss Mayford’s office just now.”

“I’ll go get that, Sir,” Kopp said getting to his feet.

“Thanks. I appreciate that.”

Masters munched a raspberry twister as he awaited Kopp’s return.

The fax contained the final reports on Elliott and Ellsworth. Masters continued to speak out loud as he scanned the sheets.

“Elliott had died many hours before it was reported by Bea and Hyde - sometime between two and five a.m. that day. The cause of death remained the same - suffocation. Elliott had been alone off and on from soon after the hunt began at seven p.m. on the 21st up until about three a.m. on Wednesday the 22nd. It would have been at some time before three that Bea put him on the respirator and oxygen. She stayed with him from about three or so up until she pronounced him dead at one p.m. Either he was already dead when she arrived at three, or she – or someone she saw – killed him during the next two hours. Hyde had been in and out

often during the period Elliott was in his room. That was Hyde's job, of course. There was access to Elliott's room through Bea's quarters. Make a note to find out about back doors to both those apartments. Who was unaccounted for between two and five? Jeremy from 12:20 to 5:40. Jane and Jules from midnight to three. Gil had been regularly delivering items during those hours although there were several half-hour gaps. Being in and out of the living room so much during those hours provided a good general alibi but the gaps presented opportunities he might hope would be overlooked. By two, only Jackson had been taken out of the picture. Possibilities! There are way too many possibilities."

Masters sighed and turned to the second report.

"Ellsworth died from the overdose of sugar as a result of having insufficient insulin in his system to handle it. That was a two-pronged diagnosis. Interesting. It appears that either one alone would probably not have resulted in death. Even without insulin for hours, he would probably have lived if he had received his usual shot a few hours later at breakfast. Had his insulin level been normal from his usual regime of earlier shots, the sugar injection would not have killed him. So, either someone with very specialized knowledge precisely coordinated both those events or two people acting independently with inaccurate information just happened onto the lethal combination. Precise planning or dumb luck? Not much help there. I'm not ready to bet either way. The one with the specialized knowledge, of course, was Bea, but since that was so obvious it would be unlikely that she would implicate herself in such a manner - unless her hatred for him had outgrown her desire to remain free. Who else could have easily known about Ellsworth's condition? Angie and Hyde. Who else might have known about harming a diabetic by reducing the insulin or increasing the sugar? Most anyone who had ever heard about the condition - particularly the person that borrowed the book from Bea on older diabetics. Of course, if Bea were the bad guy she could have staged or fabricated the library incident after the fact."

Masters was off to the kitchen. Kopp studied the reports.

"Angie, my dear. Think with me, if you will. Who knows

that Miss Mayford sweetens her coffee with honey.”

“Well, there is me, of course - I order in her honey from a health food store in town. She’s very particular about the brand. I really don’t like my coffee that way. Then Hyde, and Mr. Stone and Jeremy. Jane tried it the first day she was here. Miss Mayford suggested it might help her sore throat and sniffles. She drowned it with cream so it would have tasted pretty different, I suppose, of course nothing tastes right when you’re nursing a cold.”

“Assume somebody wanted to boil something for a long time and have nobody know about it, where could they do that around here?”

“All the old servants’ quarters up on the third floor have a kitchenette across one wall. There’s also an old apartment in the basement that was used by the handyman - that was before my time. I’ve been in it though and it has a kitchen with a gas stove. I guess here in my kitchen - overnight - say between one and five or so. Nobody’s ever in it during those hours. That’s about all, well except for Buck’s place I suppose and the hot plate in the mud room that I keep Buck’s coffee on. And, oh, yes, Bea has a hot plate in her bedroom.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your help.”

Again, too many possibilities. He made his way to Bea’s office.

“If you will, please call the forensics office and tell them I need as much information as they can possibly provide about the honey that remained in the syringe.”

Bea looked puzzled but nodded and made a note. She was reaching for the phone as Masters left, headed for his ‘office’ in the living room where Kopp sat, waiting patiently.

Kopp intrigued Masters. Though certainly not ugly, there was really nothing physically attractive about the man. His rumpled appearance did nothing to offset that. He was certainly not dumb yet only infrequently seemed to have his mental functions usefully focused. He seemed embarrassed about being referred to as ‘Trooper’ yet was clearly pleased to be on the force. Beyond that, and the fact that he came from an influential family, Masters knew little about the man.

He took a seat and smiled at Kopp.

“So, we’ve been so busy that we really haven’t had a

chance to get to know each other. Maine your home state?"

"No, but I was born and raised here."

"I see. Come from a big family?"

"Yes, sir. Even my younger sister tops six feet. Mother's the runt of the litter. That's what my father says. He jokes like that sometimes."

"You're how old?"

"Twenty-nine. I'll be thirty my next birthday."

He nodded as if to emphasize the fact.

"It often happens that way," Masters said as if serious though truly just for his own amusement.

"Single?"

"Sir?"

"Are you married?"

"Oh, yes Sir to the tune of five children - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Amos."

"Biblical names," Masters said still adjusting to the fact the man was married - so very married.

"No, sir. Named after my five uncles. Don't know what we'd have done if one of them had been born a girl."

It had not been a joke. It was the very serious voicing of a brow furrowing, boy-we're-lucky, sigh producing, wipe the sweat from the brow, concern."

"Ages?"

"Yes, they just keep getting older. It happens, you know."

"And how old are they?" Masters asked, rephrasing his question.

"Ten, eight, six, four, and three. Can't figure what happened there. Little Amos just seemed to be a hurry to join the family."

Again, he nodded. He was proud of his family.

"And your wife."

"Yes, sir. She had the kids. A wonderful lady. My Grandfather told me not to get married until I found a real lady who I could be friends with forever. That's Mary Ann. My best friend and a real lady."

"It sounds like you have a wonderful life together."

"And about the greatest family you could ever want. I'm really a lucky guy."

It was reassuring to hear about a happy family amid the sorely dysfunctional, hate driven, association presented by the Stone clan.

“Well, I think the next things on our agenda are to search Phillip’s room for a weapon and whatever else turns up, and then Jane’s and Jules’ rooms for her pistol.”

“Shall I bring a pad?”

“Why not?”

“Well, it requires the full use of one of my hands to . . .”

Masters broke in.

“Please, bring one along anyway, okay?”

“Yes, Sir.”

One continuous, non-stop, ascent to the third floor seemed significantly more effort-filled to his Rotundness than had his usual trip to the second.

After pausing for several deep breaths, Masters took a card from his pocket. It contained a diagram Hyde had provided earlier showing the locations of each guest’s room. Jeremy’s quarters occupied the four rooms on the east end. That left five to the west. At the opposite end of the hall was Hyde’s room, the largest single room on the floor. Next to it was Jane’s’ room. An empty room separated Jane from Gil. They approached Jane’s room and knocked. There was no answer. Master realized he had no pass key. They would try again later.

Jules room was back down on the second floor. They made their way back down the stairs, which creaked even under Kopp’s weight. They approached Jules’ room which was next to Carl’s.

Masters knocked. Jules answered opening the door wide and smiling as if expecting someone. Upon seeing the two men his expression soured.

“Sorry if we’re not who you were expecting. We need to look around.”

“And that would be with or without my permission?”

“You have the picture,” Masters said, smiling.”

“If you don’t need me, I’ll just leave you to your job, then.”

“No, I would prefer that you remain here. Just have a seat if you like.”

Jules understood it had not merely been a suggestion. He sat and mounted a pout.

“We are looking for Jane’s hand gun - a .22 I believe she said - and any other weapon or weapons you may have. If you know about anything like that you can speed up the process by telling us.”

Masters began to search the dresser while waiting for an answer. Kopp took a cue from his partner and began a methodical search of the cabinets along the opposite wall in the kitchenette.

“I don’t know about any gun Jane might have and I didn’t bring any weapon into this room.”

A half hour later Jules’ pronouncement seemed to have been accurate. No weapon was found, aside from a paring knife in the drawer beside the sink.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Jules,” Masters said as they prepared to leave.”

“Sure. Anytime.”

It had been purposefully sarcastic. That out of his system, his tone mellowed.

“Here’s the list you wanted - the people we think saw us at various places during the early morning hours. You’ll have to ask them of course to make sure.”

“Yes, we will and thank you. Now we have a place to begin proving your alibis for you.”

Masters made it appear that he was working for Jules and Jane, and, in a sense, of course, he was. Proving innocence was always highest among the old detective’s priorities.

In the hall they met Jane approaching Jules’ room. Masters spoke.

“Jane. We need to search your room and I want you to be present. If you would lead the way, we’ll get it over with as quickly and painlessly as possible.”

With an extended sigh, she let it be known that it was a great inconvenience, but agreed without actual comment. By the time they reached her door, she had become more affable.

“Come in, I suppose,” she said.

“My pistol’s in the top right dresser drawer under my unmentionables.”

Kopp blushed. He had five kids and he blushed at unmentionables! Masters was amused enough that his chuckle rippled his considerable bulk.

“Will you get it for us, please,” he asked at last.

Jane went right to the drawer. The gun was not there. Either she was an accomplished actress or she was genuinely surprised. Masters reserved judgment.

“We will need to search the room, you understand,” Masters said, indicating with his hand, that she take a seat.

Another half hour passed without finding so much as a whiff of gun oil.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Jane,” Masters said and he headed toward the door. “By the way, Jules provided us with a list of possible alibis. I assume that was a joint effort and that you don’t also have one.”

“That’s right. We did it together.”

“Just one more thing, Jane.”

“What’s that?”

“I believe Jules is expecting you. He seemed dreadfully disappointed when Kopp and I showed up.”

The door was closed behind them with more effort than was probably necessary. Kopp jumped, startled. Masters smiled believing he had hit a nerve - although not sure which one or precisely why.

Using a pass key, they entered Phillip’s room. A still unopened, unpacked suitcase was on the bed. The drapes were open and the air was chilled.

“I’ll take the suitcase, Kopp, while you look around the room.”

Wondering just how his instruction was going to be misinterpreted, Masters paused, waiting. Kopp got right to work. Masters followed suit.

Other than the suitcase, the room appeared to contain nothing that Phillip might have brought into it. The bag held just what one would expect considering the planned three day stay away from home. It also contained one surprise - an open six-pack of syringes containing only five. They appeared identical with the one found in Ellsworth’s bathroom.

“Bag these, Kopp. Careful with the prints. I need to have this suitcase printed. Having the lab so inaccessible is

becoming a real pain.”

“I can do the printing, Sir. It’s one of my best cop things. I have a kit in my room.”

“Kopp, I could kiss you - and that IS just an old expression in case you are wondering. Yes. Go get it and let’s see what there is to find.”

What they found were no prints at all on the latches and surrounding surfaces. A single thumb print appearing to be Hyde’s was eventually lifted from the top of the handle - reasonable, perhaps, since he probably carried the luggage upstairs. Unreasonable, was the lack of either Phillip’s or Hyde’s prints generously covering the handle. The prints scattered elsewhere were probably those of luggage handlers. The butler-like grey, dress gloves on the dresser might explain the lack of Phillip’s prints. Then again ... .

“One thing seems clear,” Masters said, looking into the closet, “Phillip had not taken time to unpack anything other than the suit, shirt and shoes he wore to dinner. They’re all right here. Why would he close and relock the suitcase? I always open mine immediately even if I don’t have time to hang things, just to ease the wrinkle factor.

“He arrived out here about nine in the morning and died some eighteen hours later. I have to wonder what he did in the intervening time.”

Kopp made an interesting - perhaps naive - comment.

“No pajamas.”

“What?”

“He didn’t have any pajamas in his suitcase. The first thing that I’d do would be to take out the PJ’s and put them under the pillow.”

He lifted the pillow. No PJ’s but there was something else. A sheet of typing paper. Being careful not to touch it, he pointed it out to Masters who leaned across the bed craning his neck to read what was on it.

“These old eyes don’t seem to focus at that distance. Let’s use yours.”

Kopp stood, smiling. Masters tried again.

“Would you read what’s on the sheet - that is, on the sheet of paper. I can’t make it out.”

“Yes Sir. It says, You will die before the next sunrise.

All caps. Looks like it was done on an old fashioned typewriter. Not like from any printer I've seen."

"Print it and bag it if you will, please. Then meet me downstairs."

Masters made his way back down to the living room and crossed to Bea's office.

"Bea. Is there still such a thing as an actual typewriter in this place?"

"Yes. Several, in fact. I have one in that desk. It pops up into view when the middle section of the top is pulled up and pushed back. When I first got that, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven – such convenience! Technology has been on a rampage since then, of course. Then Jeremy has, or had, my old one - an ancient Remington. There used to be one in the butler's quarters but with the coming of Hyde's computer in there I imagine it's long gone. I use this computer for everything now."

"Does the typewriter in the desk still work?"

"I imagine so. Haven't tried it in years."

"Would you see, and if it does just type some random paragraph on it for me as a sample – in all caps?"

"Sure. It'll be like unexpectedly encountering an old friend. The ribbon may be dry and brittle. It's been a decade, I'm sure."

A few minutes later the sample was in Masters' hands. He nodded. He hmm'ed. He smiled.

"Now, if I may bother you one more time, could you remove the printing ribbon for me?"

As expertly as if she were still doing it twice each week, Bea pushed a few levers and lifted it out.

"Can you believe that?" she said. "I can remember how to do that but can't recall if I brushed my teeth this morning." Masters smiled and nodded, knowingly. Bea continued.

"An envelope?" These old ribbons are terribly messy."

"Yes, thank you. Very thoughtful."

Another smile and nod later, he was headed back toward his 'office'. Kopp was just sitting down on the couch, the plastic evidence bag on his lap - a huge lap, made so by the interminable length of his upper legs. Masters could easily envision all five of his children happily perched there at once

(in their PJ's, perhaps!).

"Let's compare the note with this sample," Masters said taking a seat beside him.

Again, there was nodding. Again, there was humming.

"Looks to be a match to me," he said. "What do you think?"

"The 'S' and the 'T' are both damaged across the top. I'd say it is a good match," Kopp said, in a surprisingly astute observation.

"Blast it!" Masters said, pounding his knee and then wincing at the pain.

"Blast it, Sir?" The request clearly seemed odd to Kopp who reached to where his sidearm would have been had he carried one.

"Before I had Bea type the sample I should have had you dust the keys for prints."

"Would you be looking for a man's or woman's print?"

"I'm guessing a man's but I can't be entirely sure."

"Let me try then. A man's print might be enough wider than Bea's that we could pick up some hints if not possibles around the edges."

"Kopp. Sometimes you amaze me! Go to it, if you will, and while you're at it, do the desk top, especially under the front lip where fingers would be placed to open it. Also, see if the paper is a match to what Bea uses. If so, print the drawer handle or whatever leads to where she keeps it."

Kopp strode across the room with an air of authority (well, no, not really!). Jane had just gone into the kitchen and Masters followed.

She and Angie were about to have coffee.

"May I join you ladies?" Masters said, not really asking permission.

Angie started to stand to get him a cup.

"Sit. Sit, my dear. I'm still quite capable of finding a cup and pouring coffee."

That completed he took a seat.

"Jane. I wish I didn't have to bring this up, but I find it necessary. What were the actual circumstances surrounding your giving up Jeremy into Elliott's care?"

It was a full-out, straight from the soul, glower that met

his question - a glower that was immediately mellowed by moistening eyes and an expression of obvious pain. Jane spoke slowly.

"I was never cut out to be a mother. Jeremy had that much right at dinner the other night. I hated being pregnant with him. He irritated the hell out of me from the first moment the nurse placed him in my arms after he was born. He cried. He wet. He needed this. He needed that.

"He was odd right from the start - had to have a complete blood transfusion immediately. Delayed my hospital stay a full day. Those awful gowns!"

"As he got older he constantly wanted my attention. Do this. I want that. Gimme! Gimme!! Gimme!!! I'm not a giving person. I was a terrible mother. So, before I ruined him completely, I decided I had to find another place for him. I figured he needed a man, so I went to Gil. He was single. He and Jeremy seemed to get on well the few times they'd been together. Gil laughed in my face. I mean, he actually laughed out loud in my face. I had Jeremy with me. I had told him that he would be staying with his uncle Gil for a while. Jeremy heard Gil's rejection. I know it hurt him. I shouldn't have got his hopes up, but like I said, as a mother I'm just dumb. I never had a clue as to how to be one.

"Well, my only alternative, then, was Elliott. I figured he really owed me. I had been forced to care for him when we were kids and then later he swindled me out of a huge amount of stock. I hoped he'd understand how much he owed me. As a boy he used to talk about how he wanted to have a big family with lots of kids. I was sure he'd take Jeremy in - especially if I didn't give him an out. Not even Elliott would turn away a waif.

"So, I brought him here and sent him up the rock to his uncle. Elliott and I never spoke of it. I guess that's the scoop. Believe it or not, but that's how it was."

"And you've missed him."

"Of course, I've missed him. Not a day goes by still, that I don't shed tears over it."

"Have you spoken with Jeremy about your feelings?"

"No, never. I always figured if he had me to hate, then he wouldn't hate Elliott so much. I hoped maybe that would

somehow help them bond. I don't know."

"How do you think he was treated while he was in your brother's care?"

"Until recently, I had figured he'd been treated well. There were the two women here. I figured they would probably spoil him rotten."

"Until recently?"

"Jules knew things he hadn't told me. It came out. I'm not sure how or why. I was furious. Furious at Elliott. Furious at the staff here. Furious with myself, mostly. Even furious with Jeremy. If he just hadn't been such a bother - so demanding."

"You've just given yourself more than enough motive to kill at least two of the butlers and Elliott, you understand."

"I suppose so. I didn't but what's to lose at this point in my life. I'd gladly just admit to it all and be locked up except I think the victims deserve to have their actual murderers brought to justice."

"I just have to ask. You've done little theater, haven't you?"

Jane smiled - perhaps for the first time in years.

"You know that for a fact or are you guessing?"

"A Hunch, I guess."

"Yes. Two plays a year whether I need to or not. It's been my one pleasure in life. I've been told I'm very good. But that presents a problem for you."

"And what would that be?"

"Am I acting now because I'm such a good actress or am I such a good actress because the miserable life I've just described has prepared me to act?"

"If you are the bad guy in all of this, Jane, you are a worthy adversary. If not, I truly hope you find a way to secure peace in your life."

Jane nodded. It seemed sincere.

Angie had been sitting quietly, absorbing the words but still not certain what had just taken place.

"More coffee?"

"No thanks, Angie," Masters said. "I need to handle a few more loose ends."

"It looks like the storm is finally moving on," Angie said,

trying to make conversation and wanting to move away from the topic just past.

“Good.” Masters said. “I’ve missed my morning walks, though I must say climbing these stairs a few times every day has probably been an adequate substitute.”

He returned to the living room. Kopp was there.

“Got some under-prints that spill over around the lady’s prints but the lab will have to handle them. Don’t know if they’ll really be of much help. I noticed her fax machine does a whole lot more than she seems to understand. I could blow up these prints and fax them into the lab if that will help.”

“Yes. You can do that on her machine? Sure. Do it, then. Great!”

“Did you print every key?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Kopp pulled a sheet of paper from the large envelope he was carrying.

“I have each print marked by the key it was on.”

“May I?” Masters said reaching for the sheet.

“Problem,” Masters said, presenting a frown. “You found complete prints that are not Bea’s on several keys that were not used in the death threat note.”

“I saw that, too. Let me blow them up and maybe we’ll get lucky and be able to tell if they seem to be the same as the under-prints.”

“Okay. Let me jot down which keys they were. ‘W’, ‘P’, and ‘B’.”

“By the way,” Kopp added, “Bea’s stationery is not a match to the paper the note was typed on. Hers is cotton watermarked. The note is on some cheap grade of low brightness stuff.”

“Okay. Well, I guess that means we keep searching.”

Kopp returned to Bea’s office. Masters took the ribbon from the envelope. He unrolled it across the length of the long, narrow, coffee table in front of the sofa and put on his reading glasses. Each key stroke left an imprint of the letter on the mostly unused ribbon. He searched back to find the beginning of the note.

“Okay. There it is.”

He read forward on the tape.

“Ah, ha! Not a skilled typist. Whoever it was made several mistakes typing ‘W’ for ‘E’ in two cases, ‘P’ for ‘O’ in one case, and ‘B’ for ‘V’ in one case. He or she made immediate corrections suggesting a hunt and peck typist who examined each letter as it appeared in print.”

He sat back, looking up and out the window as he thought.

“So, the mistakes had to have been corrected with white-out or some such thing. Since that is not evident on the note itself, it means the note found under the pillow is a photo copy.”

He held the note close and felt the letters.

“I should have realized that. It’s amazing how you see what you think should be there rather than what actually is there.”

He re-rolled the tape, placed it into its envelope, and then returned to Bea’s office.

“Your copy paper, Bea; May I see a piece?”

She removed a sheet and handed it to him.

Masters took it aside and held it up to Kopp, side by side with the note.

“Looks like a match to the note, wouldn’t you say?”

Kopp studied them.

“Both eighteen-pound weight and low brightness. Seems like it to me. Shall I slip a piece into the bag with the note and get them off to the Lab?”

“Yes, first chance we have.”

“The prints have already been enlarged and faxed to the lab,” Kopp reported.

“Yes,” Bea said. “In five minutes, this young man just taught me more about my fax machine than I learned from six hours with the blasted manual. It’s like a magic box. Makes things bigger. Makes things smaller. Puts two or four sheets side by side on one sheet. Did you know this thing will even copy two sided documents on both sides?”

“Sounds like a magic box, indeed.” Masters said. “And my old head’s still swirling about the now ancient teletype machine.”

They exchanged an understanding smile that only those who had lived before the technological rampage, as Bea

had so cleverly put it, could appreciate.

It came out of the blue - Kopp's remark - as the two made their way back to their corner of the living room.

"That Jeremy must be some lady's man!"

Masters was amused - both at the unexpected topic and Kopp's apparent genuine interest.

"How so?"

"That row of hickeys he had on the side of his neck. Must have some real tigers in his collection!"

"Hickeys? I didn't notice, I'm afraid. Where on his neck?"

"Along the left side, right at his shoulder. "

He pointed to his own neck to clarify as he continued.

"You were on the other side of him up in his room. I guess I was trying to avoid looking elsewhere when he answered the door bare necked, and I focused right down on that long row of red spots. After that, the big collar on his robe probably covered them up."

"I think it would be worth further investigation. I'll have to bow to your hickey expertise, Kopp. Would you say they were fresh or old?"

"Oh. They were fresh and mean looking, even."

"Mean looking?"

"Almost like skin had been removed. Like I said. She must have been a real tiger."

"I think we better go hickey hunting."

"His are the only ones I've seen around here. I imagine that's pretty private for most folks."

"What I should have said was I need to look at Jeremy's."

"He's in the kitchen, if that helps. Saw him enter just as we got back here."

Masters excused himself and went to the kitchen. Jeremy was downing a can of V-8 and chatting with Angie. Approaching him from the rear, Masters could just see the top of the abrasion to which Kopp had made reference. Masters seated himself beside Jeremy at the table.

"Some scrape there on your neck, Jeremy. Looks painful."

Jeremy drew his collar up over it as if wishing to cover

it.

“This? Dragged the bar from my weight set across it. Dumb! I got in a hurry. Distracted by someone in the hall, as I recall.”

The mark was at the base of the neck, about a half inch wide and curving around his neck from side to back a distance of perhaps eight inches. It was clearly not a set of hickeys. It was also clearly not the mark made by a smooth metal rod. Masters constructed a reason for having dropped by.

“You never attended a regular school, is that right?”

“Right. Miss Mayford taught me everything I know - well, Miss Mayford and several dozen young . . . loose women, I believe that’s what your generation prefers to call them.”

“You took the usual subjects, I suppose.”

“Right down the line. Readin’, writin’, ‘rithmetic.”

“And in high school?”

“University of Nebraska. High school through their correspondence program. Not too bad, really. The teachers wrote me personal notes about every assignment I turned in. It was like they really cared about me. I looked forward to getting them back. I did pretty well. Finished with better than a B average.”

“Typing?”

“Did I take typing? No. Played around with the old typewriter Miss Mayford gave me. Except for her, we’re all hunt and peck typists out here. Maybe not Hyde. He knows everything.”

“Ever consider college?”

“Briefly. Got a brochure my senior year from some school in Florida. The gorgeous girls in the picture and the prospect of co-ed dorms were enticing for a day or so.”

“Okay, then. Thanks for your information. Better have Miss Mayford look at your neck. You don’t want that to become infected.”

“It has already been swabbed out - peroxide - Angie’s magic cure for all ills.”

Jeremy stood, tossed his can into a trash receptacle across the room - silently congratulating himself for the wonderful shot with arms pumping above his head - and left.

It was more what would have been expected of a ten year old. Masters couldn't decide whether to be happy for the man because he was obviously not fettered by unreasonable social expectations or to feel sorry for him because he remained so immature in his behavior. It posed a more general quandary, which he would consider at some later date.

Angie, who had moved to work on the far side of the kitchen to give the men some privacy, returned to the table.

"Need a late-afternoon snack?"

"Always," he said offering a broad smile.

She put an assortment of cookies on a plate and brought a mug of coffee.

"Jeremy tells me you are the Peroxide Queen, or some such thing."

"That boy! He always had skinned knees and elbows as he was growing up. Miss Mayford used alcohol to dab them clean, and that hurt. I used peroxide and that didn't. You can guess who big brave Jeremy came to with his boo boos."

"Yes, I think I can. Any recent boo boo's?"

"His neck you mean. Wednesday morning early. I came in here to start breakfast and he was already making a mess of the place with cotton balls and peroxide all over the counter. I sat him down took care of it. Quite an angry abrasion. I cleaned it out. Not sure how he got it. He didn't offer and I didn't ask. Once he reached puberty I learned not to ask about much of anything for fear he'd tell me – he has never understood about modesty of either body or thoughts."

She giggled.

"The cotton you used to swab his neck. Would that still be around?"

"I'm ashamed to admit it, but yes. I usually take the trash out every evening but with this terrible storm, I haven't felt like going out to the dumpster. It's all in the waste basket under the counter here."

"If I can trouble you for a baggie and for your silence about my taking that cotton?"

She zipped her lips and didn't ask the logical question.

"Dinner in about an hour. Don't ruin your appetite, now!"

Her admonition was accompanied by a wagging finger

as she slid the plate of goodies closer.

Presenting the most serious face he could muster, Masters nodded and crossed his heart while pocketing a handful of cookies.

With the swabs in the bag, he zipped it shut, put it in his pocket and returned to the living room, a cookie and coffee in hand. He offered the cookie to Kopp.

“No thanks. Us guys gotta watch our figures, you know.”

He gave no indication that he thought his words would not be taken seriously in regard to himself or that they could have been construed as a put down to the portly Raymond Masters. The old detective enjoyed the humor and naivete contained in both possibilities.

“I have one more thing to add to our collection for the lab.”

He placed the bag on top of the one containing the note. Kopp showed no particular interest in its contents.

“A cutter will be here in half an hour to pick up what we have. They’ve sure been a big help through all of this.”

“The Coast Guard? Yes. I’ve found I can always count on them to go beyond the call of duty. Good guys. Always there taking care of us and yet most of us never give them a second thought.”

The cookies were soon gone. The cutter arrived and left. Hyde announced dinner. Masters had seconds. Angie seemed pleased.

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## CHAPTER SIX: THURSDAY EVENING

After dinner Masters asked Bea and Hyde to join him in Elliott's bedroom. They sat in a small, comfortable sitting area near a large window, which looked down onto the sea. Hyde closed the heavy, red, drapes against the chill. Other than the colorful drapes and matching throw rugs, the room was stark and bland.

Masters began.

"We have a problem, you know."

The other two looked at each other and then at Masters, the hint of a nod from Bea.

"The coroner places Elliott's actual time of death somewhere between two and five a.m. on Tuesday the 22nd – probably closer to two than five. I have established that you, Bea, were gone from his room from about 12:30 until a few minutes after three - in your quarters resting I believe. Then you watched the board for me for a few minutes while I was away. Hyde, you were in and out of here every half hour or so which I assume is your usual routine, is that right?"

"Only when Miss Mayford isn't with him. Usually neither one of us would be with him during the night unless he was having some physical problem. If he needs assistance he rings for us. From her quarters, Miss Mayford can be here in thirty seconds and I can get down here in about a minute. It was all the excitement that made us feel we needed to keep a closer watch than usual."

"When did you put the respirator on him?"

Bea answered.

“At midnight. He told me to go get some rest but I wasn’t comfortable leaving him, knowing how tension affected him. I agreed to rest if he would let me put the respirator on him as a precaution. He agreed without any discussion. He was stubborn but not stupid. I told Hyde and he said he’d keep a close watch on things. We often shared the responsibility like that. Hyde’s been a God-send to this place. I’m just too old to keep doing all this by myself.”

She reached over and patted Hyde’s hand. He smiled, embarrassed, and lifted a barely perceptible shrug of his broad shoulders.

“When you arrived back in this room at 3:15 or so, what was his condition?”

She broke into sobs. Tears flowed. Hyde moved to sit on the wide arm of her chair and put his arm around her, pulling her head into him. Masters waited, patiently and compassionately. After a few moments she straightened away from Hyde’s side and began to speak.

“He had already died. No more than a few minutes I’d say – thirty at the most. I truly wouldn’t have noticed if I hadn’t brushed his hair back from his forehead. I loved him, you know. I could never like him, but I did love him so.”

Again, she sobbed. Again, Hyde comforted and Masters waited.

“You said you wouldn’t have noticed. Explain if you will.”

“The respirator. It made it appear that everything was fine. Without it, I would have realized he was not breathing but with it . . . .”

“I see. And the electric blanket?”

Hyde answered.

“He always slept with an electric blanket - even in the summer.”

“Honestly, I didn’t even think about turning it off,” Bea added.

“And why did you not let anyone know what had happened.”

She looked up at Hyde.

“I didn’t even tell Hyde.”

She sighed.

“Several reasons, I suppose. Elliott so wanted to reach his 75th birthday. I guess I thought if I made it seem he’d lived to see it, that would somehow make it so for him. I also knew that Hyde’s big bonus hung on Elliott’s living until his birthday. Then there was the hellish game going on out there. I knew if Jeremy got Windstone I’d be welcome to live out my years here. Oh, I know the will says I can anyway but with Jane or Gil in charge I can’t imagine how those years could ever be pleasant. So, I wanted to give Jeremy time to win. It’s mostly just silly old lady things, Mr. Masters. I can’t say I’m sorry. I suppose I should have known how it would turn out.”

“You are stating that Hyde had no part in the deception. Have I heard you correctly?”

“Yes. That’s right. He didn’t know until just now.”

Hyde sat quietly not agreeing or denying. He was suddenly somber. A look of sadness crept across his face. He gently smoothed Bea’s hair with the long, slender fingers of his big hand.

“Do with me what you need to do, Mr. Masters. I know I’ve broken both my oath and the law.”

“The authorities will deal with that aspect of the case later. In the meantime, just go on with your life and duties, if you will. I ask that our entire conversation remain just among the three of us.”

They both nodded.

“Other entrances?” he asked. “Are there back doors, so to speak, to this suit and to yours, Bea?”

“Yes” she answered. “Off a back hall that runs the width of the first floor along the north wall. The back stairs come in on the west end. There are doors from the hall into Elliott’s’ living room, my living room, the dining room, the kitchen and the mud room.”

“Hyde, will you give me the tour?”

“Sure. You be alright Miss Mayford?”

“I’ll be fine and if you could bring yourself to call me, Bea, I would certainly be grateful!”

Hyde nodded and led Masters through a door at the rear of the bedroom into Elliott’s living room.

“The door over on the east wall to the right goes into Miss . . . well, I might as well practice . . . into Bea’s living

room. The door back there opens out into the hall. It was never kept locked in case Mr. Stone had an emergency and we needed to get to him from wherever we happened to be.”

They walked to the back door and Hyde opened it. Masters walked through, stopping to survey the narrow back stairs to the west and the long narrow hall running east. It was windowless except for one mirroring the window in the kitchen. It was lit by small bare bulbs spaced ten feet apart down the length of the ceiling. It was unheated and frigid - clearly built as a buffer against the cold of the northern blasts - ingenious, really, at the time it had been built.

Hands on hips, Masters thought out loud to Hyde.

“So, anyone has access to any first floor room on this northern face of the house.”

“Yes. That’s right. We all respect each other’s right to privacy – even Jerem, I’ll give him that much. It’s never presented a problem.”

“I see no door here to the outside,” Masters said.

“The door at the far end opens into the mudroom and there is an exit from there as you know.

“Yes. I see. So, to have come in from the outside and gained access to this back hall, the mudroom doorbell would have had to ring.”

“Right.”

Hyde offered a further explanation.

“If there is noise in the living room we don’t always hear it. It’s in the kitchen. There’s a switch in there that Angie can turn when she’s going to be out of the area. It rings an auxiliary bell in the living room but she seldom remembers to do that.”

Masters nodded, turned around, and asked:

“The stairs here at this end go to the second floor and then on up to the third?”

“That’s right - well, these just lead to the second as an alternative, back stairway. From the second to the third there is just one set here on the west end by Mr. Black’s room.”

“Does the staff actually use this hall very often?”

“Mostly Buck, I suppose. All the rooms have fireplaces and he keeps each room stocked with wood. I imagine he uses the hall every day. There is seldom any reason for the

rest of us to be back here. It is my rapid route to Mr. Stone's room in case he calls – called – during the night. I'm in the West room on the third floor straight above where we're standing."

"So, you're above Carl's room."

"Yes. For what it's worth he usually leaves his door open - day and night. Something about air circulation he says. I think it's because he's lonely. He's used to having a big family around. I imagine he sees everybody who uses the stairs to the third floor."

"Let's go look at that bell ringing mechanism on the mudroom door," Masters said and the two moved off in that direction.

It turned out to be a simple trip mechanism. As the door opened a metal plate on its top edge brushed a pair of springs hanging down from the top of the frame making an electrical connection and ringing the bell.

Masters squinted up at the gadget. He looked around the room for a step stool. Finding none, he made a request of Hyde.

"Would you and your young legs climb up on a chair and examine that little metal plate on the door. I would expect it to be shiny from being rubbed over and over but it appears dull. Would you take a look? Don't touch it just tell me what you see."

Hyde was soon in place, apparently happy to be helping.

"Good eyes, Sir. The metal plate is covered with a white sticky looking substance. Well not entirely covered."

"Smell it if you will," Masters asked

Hyde broke into an immediate grin at the strange request, but did as he had been asked.

"I see," Hyde said. "Only one thing smells like that. Adhesive tape. The sticky stuff must be the adhesive from tape."

"Okay. Thanks. You may get down."

"I saw what you saw and I smelled the smell you clearly thought would be there but I haven't the foggiest idea what it means."

"At some time in the recent past, a piece of tape was

placed over the plate to keep the bell from ringing. Who? When? Why?"

"My guess on who, Sir, would be anybody but Jane and Gil. The butlers and staff would all know about the bell but it wasn't there back when Jane and Gill lived here."

"That's helpful to know, though it certainly doesn't pin point anybody, does it?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe?"

"Well, as I understand it, it had fallen into disrepair but Randolph had it fixed. He had some kind of row with Buck and became a bit paranoid about him. He wanted to be sure he knew when Buck was in the house. He did it under the pretense of making Angie's job easier for her."

"And you came by this information, how?"

"It was one of many little pieces of background information Randolph gave me before I began working here."

"Do you know the reason for the row, as you put it?"

"No. I was never told. He just warned me to always look over my back when Buck was around. Since getting to know him, I've never felt the need to do that."

Masters nodded and looked around the room.

"I need coffee. How about you?" he said, putting a hand on Hyde's shoulder.

"Sure. There's bound to be a pot awaiting us in the kitchen."

He swung the adjoining door open and motioned Masters through ahead of him. He followed and soon they were seated - pot on the table and mugs in hand. Masters had more questions.

"Help me think back on the time during the Hunt. You were constantly on the go - in and out of the living room dozens of time. I'm particularly interested in what Jeremy was wearing throughout the early morning hours. As I recall he brought me the cigarettes at somewhere around 12:30."

"12:20," Hyde corrected.

Masters raised his eyebrows and Hyde explained.

"I have this darn old photographic memory that I just can't shake. I was just re-visualizing the blackboard."

They exchanged smiles.

“A definite plus for an art history major I would guess.”

“Handy for lots of things, actually.”

“Okay. Jeremy arrived with the cigarettes at 12:20. Do you remember what he was wearing?”

Hyde looked off into space as he began speaking.

“He was not wearing a coat - just a muscle shirt, jeans and sandals. His hair was wet as if he had just showered. I remember thinking that strange at the time - but, then, it was Jerem!”

“That’s just how I remember it,” Masters said. “What I’m not sure about is what he wore when he handed me the pipe at . . .”

Hyde filled in the time as Masters paused, assuming that he would.

“5:40 a.m. He had changed into a white sweater, black wool slacks, and dress boots. He entered the room from the east outside door and left his coat on the rack there.”

“And the sweater’s collar?”

“Turtle neck, Sir.”

“Does that strike you as strange attire for having just come from an outside search for the pipe?”

“So dressed up, you mean? I doubt if he had been searching outside, Sir.”

“What makes you say that?”

“From time to time he asks me to straighten his room - not often and usually on Fridays just prior to his weekend orgy - pardon that - his visit here with young ladies from town. He was away over last weekend so I skipped his room. Monday, he asked if I could give his place a once over. I did. I found a handwritten copy of the ten items on the Scavenger Hunt list. I had no idea what it was at the time but it hit me in a hurry once I saw the list Miss Mayford - Bea - handed out on Tuesday evening.”

“So, you’re saying he must have found the list ahead of time, copied down the items and assembled them before the game began.”

“I don’t know that for a fact, Sir, but it seems a likely possibility. Jeremy would certainly not be given to following the rules if there were some way to break them and get by with it. Again, I shouldn’t have said that, even though I believe

it's true."

"You put an interesting twist on things. One further question. Have you noticed anything unusual about Jeremy's choice of clothing since the Hunt?"

"Unusual? Well, yes, now that you ask, although I hadn't thought about it. He's continued to wear high collars."

Masters changed the subject.

"What's your take on Carl?"

Hyde smiled.

"He's my island of sanity out here. I look forward to his days here."

"Island of sanity?"

"He floats adjacent to it all. He does his work but never gets bogged down in the why or wherefore of Mr. Stone's motivation. He just goes to work and does what needs to be done. He comes. He works. He escapes back to the real world."

"Much the way you seem to operate around here," Masters said.

"But Carl's the master. Like the night of the Hunt; he just went up to his room. He could have cared less what was going on. He knew it would soon be over and then he could get back to doing what he needed to be doing."

"Would you say you two are close?"

"Yes. Pretty close. He has a son my age and he brings him along on occasion - strictly for my benefit, I think, so I'll have some contact with a real person from time to time. I do miss people who can talk about something other than who did what with whom."

"Would he kill?"

Hyde looked shocked and paused, thoughtfully.

"Carl kill? To protect his family, perhaps. I can't envisage any other circumstances."

"How about you, Hyde. Would you kill?"

"Me? I'm a charter member of Wimpy Pacifists, Incorporated. Maybe, to protect myself or a loved one. Fortunately, I've never been in a situation where I had to come to grips with that question."

"If not you or Carl, then who?"

"These murders, you mean. I didn't know the other

butlers or Mr. Stone's siblings so I can't say, though I'd have to bet on them, knowing the good people on staff here now."

"Jeremy? Buck?"

"Hard calls. Jeremy would certainly have no compunction against killing somebody but he would never want to be inconvenienced by jail time, so it would have to be something really important. Buck is a hard call. He's huge and strong and very independent minded, but he's also gentle and caring. He's really a hard call."

"You are a very astute observer of people, Hyde."

"Minor in psych."

Masters nodded and finished his coffee.

"I thank you for your assistance this evening. I'm sure you have better things to do than hang with an old man."

"Sadly, I don't - well, that didn't come out exactly right but I'll defer to your understanding and not try to extract my foot."

Masters smiled, stood, and patted him on the back.

"Now that you have brought it up, Sir, there might be one thing of interest. It's just a rumor I heard in town the day I was waiting there before starting out here. The town's people call this place Buck Island."

Masters nodded that he knew so Hyde could skip the explanation. He went right to the story.

"The three Bucks have an aura of mystique built up around them. I'm sure it has grown away from the facts, as stories that are told and retold by bored old men often do, but the one that came to mind just now was about Buck number three – the present Buck. The story had something to do with his wife and how Buck caught her in a romantic situation with Elliott shortly after she arrived here on the island. It's hard to conceive of how Elliott could have performed any romantic feats with anyone, although letting one's squalid imagination take flight I suppose it is possible. The story goes on to say that a short time later she was found dead and Buck believed it had been Elliott who had ordered her killed. The chilling twist is that Buck swore to take his revenge on Elliott, making it known that it might happen that very week or perhaps not for fifty years. In other words, Elliott would have to live with the threat and the constant uncertainty. That is supposedly when

he hired Ellsworth and began the line of bodyguard-type butlers.”

“An intriguing story indeed. It leads me to a question I have wanted to ask you.”

Hyde looked interested. He stood and waited.

“How do you fit into that line of ruffians? Art history, psychology, sophistication?”

“I imagine it has something to do with my three black belts.”

“Three black belts?”

“Karate, Jujitsu and Tai Kwan Do.”

Masters took a playful step backward and raised his hands as if to shield himself. Hyde smiled and explained.

“As a kid, I was always the one on the beach getting the sand kicked in his face by the muscle boys. I was slight and my interests, being non-sports oriented, led to whispers about my manliness, I guess you could say. I pursued the martial arts. Eventually they became as much a mental exercise and philosophy as a defensive measure, I suppose. It was very good for me - providing self-assurance, confidence, and reduced my fears about most everything. Undoubtedly it also helped get me this position.”

“Why do I wish I hadn’t asked that question?” Masters said.

“I know. I was going to tell you. There just never seemed to be that right moment. Yes, I could have done in anyone of them. I didn’t. I’m short on motive as I see it.”

“Just tell me your father wasn’t swindled by Elliott somewhere along the way.”

“Okay. My father wasn’t swindled by Elliott somewhere along the way; it was my uncle.”

Masters did a double take.

“A joke, Sir. I just couldn’t resist. I get very few opportunities to use my sense of humor around here.”

“That I can believe. Thank you for your candor. I’ve taken more of your time than I intended. Trooper Kopp has been watching the fax for information from the lab. I need to check on the progress.”

Masters turned to leave but at the door, took a page from Colombo. He scratched his head and turned back toward

Hyde.

“Just one more thing. Do you recall how Phillip’s luggage got to his room?”

“Yes, Sir. I carried it for him - a single, brown, soft-side suitcase. He didn’t want any help arranging his things when we got to his room. He tried to tip me and sent me on my way. He seemed intent on something quite unrelated to settling in.”

“Do you know where he went?”

“As I began walking down the stairs into the living room he left his room and walked west. I figured he was going to see one of the other butlers. I guess he could have been on his way to the third-floor stairs.”

“Or to the back stairs into that hall on the first floor.”

“Yes, that’s another possibility – with adhesive tape, perhaps?”

“Thanks again,” Masters said, that time moving through the door. He headed for Bea’s office where he expected to find Kopp. He did.”

“Anything yet?”

“Nope and nothing’s come in on the fax either.”

As much as Masters wanted to know how the simple question, ‘anything yet’, could have been misinterpreted, he resisted the urge and moved on.

“Well, if you don’t mind, please stay here and let me know as things come in.”

“Happy to do that. Miss Mayford has some interesting books here I’ve been looking through. Some really sickening pictures here and there. Got a weak stomach myself. I learned to change diapers but it was always a struggle against my stomach’s natural tendency, I’ll tell you that.”

Masters smiled, and remained quiet, having no diaper changing experience from which to offer a related story.

“It’s a funny thing, isn’t it?” Kopp said letting the phrase just lay there.

Masters had to bite.

“What’s a funny thing? Changing diapers?”

“No, sir. Nothing funny about that. I was just reading in here about how doctors use an elevated white cell count to help diagnose appendicitis. And the funny thing is that I’ll

always remember that I was sitting here in this office on this case when I learned that. Sometimes I'll be doing something like putting a bike together or something while the TV's on around Christmas time and I'll always remember the program when I think back about putting it together."

"Yes. I've experienced the same thing, often."

"You put bikes together, too, then?"

"No. Not really. It was the idea . . . . I'll go into it all later."

He turned to leave the room but stopped.

"Bingo my friend! Bingo!" he said then hurried on before Kopp went in search of cards, buttons, and a caller so they could indulge in a game. He cornered Angie in the kitchen and soon had her copy of the book that she had loaned to Carl that first night.

Carl was reading the paper near the western fireplace. Masters approached him, taking a seat nearby.

"I have a hunch that you can reconstruct the time-line of the comings and goings on the second floor the night of the murders," Masters began.

Carl put the paper down, looking interested, ready to listen. Masters continued.

"You began reading Angie's book at about what time?"

"Murders at Terrapin Island? Almost immediately upon getting to my room. I undressed, slipped into my robe, arranged the pillows on my bed and stretched out to read. I'd say I began at five after nine. That's probably a very accurate estimate."

"And you finished at what time?"

"Three o'clock on the dot. I'm sure of that because I looked at the clock and calculated I could still get six hours of sleep if I set it for nine."

"Okay. So that's six hours. The book has how many pages?"

"Right at 180 I believe. Maybe 185. It's one of the things I like about Flint's books; they aren't so long that you can't finish them in one evening or on one of those wonderful, curl up in a big chair, rainy, Sunday mornings.

Masters paged to the end.

"One hundred eighty-three, in this edition. That's only

about thirty pages an hour, if my calculations are right.”

“I read for pleasure at a pretty slow rate. I started out in school as one of the BAD boys – blond, allergic, and dyslexic as we were later diagnosed - so 175 words or so a minute is still about my comfort limit.”

“And you read straight through?”

“Can’t put a Flint book down, you know?”

“Okay, now all you have to do is recall what you were reading about at the time each of the things took place out in the hall that night. Then we can calculate the time almost to the minute, I imagine.”

“Ingenious!”

“We will have to thank Kopp for the idea. Can we get started?”

“Sure. Let’s see. Well, as I said I had just really got started when I heard the voices of Jane, and Jeremy and then Jules out in the hall. This is fascinating. I do recall that in the story you were at the boathouse with the first corpse. You had to take over the camera work because the deputy got sick looking at the body.”

Masters scanned the pages (he cruised through such books at 600 words a minute, himself!). Here we are. Page seventeen. Subtract the seven introductory pages – table of contents and such – and that gives us ten pages or twenty minutes. Let’s call it 9:25 when they were in the hall. That corresponds fairly well to when Jeremy says they traded driver’s licenses.

“Go on. At some point, you heard Jane and Jules going up the stairs to the third floor.”

“Right. You were meeting the cook and learning about all the trouble she went through to make you those raspberry tarts.”

“Okay. Raspberry tarts. Raspberry tarts.”

Masters paused and looked up.

“You know? Angie’s are every bit as good as Sam’s were.”

He lowered his head and continued to thumb through the book.

“Here we are on page 27 – less seven equals 20. At two minutes per page that’s about 40 minutes after 9:05 or

close to 9:45.”

“Then, you heard them returning down the steps to the second floor.”

“Okay. Yes. Let me think. The deputy had just driven you to the fuel storage building and he showed you how to take out screws with a quarter.”

Masters scanned through the pages.

“Here we are. Page 93. Subtract seven pages and get 86. Multiply that by two and get 172 minutes, or two hours and fifty-two minutes, added to 9:05 puts it at 11:57.

“Good. Now, on to the female sneezing down the hall before entering a door.”

“Yes. I remember. Masters - that would be you,” he smiled, pointing at the old detective - “Learns the print on the radio belongs to Spence. I must say, I felt as bad about that as you did. I really liked that kid.”

“Page 164. Subtract seven pages and get 157. Multiply that by two and get 314 minutes or five hours and fourteen minutes added to 9:05 puts it at 2:19 a.m.

“Nice work, Carl. We’re on a roll, here,” Masters said rubbing his big hands together.

“Then just a bit later that person left the room.”

“Okay. Let’s see. I was just ready to begin the last chapter.”

“A blank page there so let’s make it 169 - five pages or ten minutes later making it about 2:30. That certainly approximates the time of Ellsworth’s death - the time of the honey injection.”

“I wish I hadn’t turned my back on the door about then,” Carl said.

“How’s that?”

“I turned from side to side - you know - the way you do when reading in bed over a long period. I had just turned away from my door as I heard her shut the one down the hall. Then she walked right past my door to the back steps. I really don’t recall if I thought she was going up or down.”

“Perhaps knowing she went in that direction will, by itself, be of some help.”

Masters closed the book.

“Good work, Carl. This is an invaluable contribution.”

“There is one more thing, Ray, now that I’ve been thinking about it. Jeremy ran up the stairs from the first floor to the third at some point and then returned - well I assume it was him, although he wasn’t running at that point - about a half hour later I’d say. Let me think now. He went up well after Jules and Jane went upstairs and then down just about the time they returned.”

“How are you sure it was Jeremy?”

“The way he runs the stairs. He and Hyde both run up stairs - one way they keep in shape, I suppose. Hyde’s pace is always as regular as clock work. Jeremy’s is always quite irregular - like most things about him, I guess.”

“Can we pinpoint those times?” Masters asked.

Carl thought. “Upstairs at the point Mary was telling you about her husband’s dying words - instructions, really, I guess you’d say.”

Masters paged backward through the book.

“Pages 80 and 81. Subtract seven and get, let’s say 74, times two equals 148 minutes or two hours and twenty-eight minutes would put it at about eleven thirty, with his return trip at about midnight, would you say?”

“Yes. It couldn’t have been more than five minutes or so after Jules and Jane came back downstairs.”

“And which stairs did Jeremy use on the way down to the first floor?”

“The rear stairs, otherwise I would have seen him pass my door.”

“Jeremy in the back hall at midnight,” Masters said thinking out loud. “Well, this has not only been helpful but it’s been an intriguing exercise.”

Carl nodded. Masters returned to his ‘office’. Carl picked up his paper. Kopp emerged from Bea’s office, papers in hand. He took a seat across the coffee table from Masters.

“Some stuff from the lab. Just bits and pieces.”

He handed the sheets across the table to Masters.

“Well, let’s see what we have here.”

The old detective put on his gold, wire framed, reading glasses.

“The prints on the books taken from Bea’s library belong to Bea, Hyde, Jeremy and would you believe, Buck?”

"It says Hyde's were only found on the spine," Kopp said. "What do you make of that?"

"Maybe touched while dusting. Maybe he was running his finger along the book spines on the shelf looking for something specific. Numerous possibilities."

Masters read on.

"Here's an interesting finding. Two different blood types found on the 2 X 4 that killed Jackson. His, of course – type A - but then down toward the opposite end were traces of AB blood in among the splinters. They must have punctured the killers flesh. This could be a great break. AB is the rarest of blood types. Look through the blood type list. Who fits that bill?"

"The lab doesn't charge them, Sir."

"That's very kind of them."

Masters sighed and flashed a brief smile.

"Who on our list has type AB blood?"

"Too many to be helpful. Elliott, Phillip, Jane, Jeremy, Gil, and Buck."

"Seems to run in the Stone family," Masters noted. This is just a guess but is Jane AB negative?"

Kopp fingered down the list.

"Yes, Sir. She certainly is."

"And is Jeremy AB positive?"

"Why, yes Sir. He is. How did you know?"

"It probably explains why Jeremy had the blood transfusion at the time of his birth. Get the lab to do a DNA on that AB from the two-by. It should be a lock. They'll need to do the same for Elliott, Jeremy, Jane, Phillip, Gil, and Buck, of course. You know, that is really amazing. AB is the rarest of blood types and yet half of these people are AB."

Kopp noted Masters' observation but seemed less impressed. He was off to Bea's office. Masters turned to the next page in the report - continuing to speak aloud.

"The razor blade found beside Randolph's body had only one print on each side - one from his right thumb and one from his right index finger. Not much help. He could have just picked it up but never used it. He could have used it to make the cut into his vein and dropped it. Someone else could have used it to make the cut, wiped it clean and added Randolph's

prints later. Not much help at all.”

“Here’s the report on the honey, which remained in the syringe found in Ellsworth’s bathroom. Let’s see. It was not the honey Bea uses but the less refined, darker honey collected by Buck here on the island. Still, little help. Most likely if Bea were to have used honey, she would not have used her own. Someone trying to implicate her - someone who didn’t know there were different kinds of honey - might have used the island variety in error. There are jars of both in the walk-in. It’s enough to make an old man’s head spin.”

Kopp returned.

“The lab’s mostly already done with the DNA-ing of all the suspect’s blood samples. Doc Lucy suggested it to them right from the start.”

“You have a good team there, Kopp.”

“Yes, Sir. Won the softball league four years in a row. I play first. You should see Doc Lucy pitch.”

It wasn’t so much that it was really more than Masters wanted to hear. It was, in fact, interesting. It was just light years away from the topic he had intended to initiate. He smiled and moved on.

“In the walk-in refrigerator, in the kitchen, here in this house,” he began, trying to be completely specific and clear, “You will find glass jars which contain honey - bee honey. One kind Angie buys in town. The other Buck produces here on the island. I assume Bucks has no commercial label on it. At any rate, it will be much darker than the other. This is what I need you to do. Dust all the honey jars in that walk-in and save the prints. I expect Angie’s to be on all of them. Probably Buck’s on the dark variety and Bea’s on the light. If there is any variation in that pattern I want to know about it.”

“Consider it done,” Kopp said, picking up his brief case and standing. “You ever play ball, Sir?”

Why did that question not fill Masters with confidence about the honey printing assignment!

“Yes. In fact, I did. Baseball. High school and college. Shortstop mostly. Some center field. Hit 328 my senior year in high school.”

Kopp nodded and smiled, and then left for the kitchen. ‘At least he’s headed in the right direction,’ Masters thought to

himself and them mused about the fact that he could remember his batting percentage from fifty years before but had already forgotten what he'd had for breakfast that morning. It produced private chuckles made public by the telltale ripples traveling up and down his expansive midsection. He returned to the reports.

There had been no prints found on the plastic bag, which had contained the syringes found in Phillip's bag. It was a disappointment yet it suggested some interesting questions. 'Why not?' and 'How could it have escaped acquiring prints on its exploits from the manufacturer to Phillip's bag?' The answer clearly was that the prints had been carefully removed. Why? By whom? When? Masters held out his hands and pantomimed the opening of a factory sealed plastic bag. He pretended to pull it apart at the top seal and then to place his thumbs inside the opening, which that had created, in order to hold it open.

"Inside! It doesn't say they looked on the inside."

He jotted a note for Kopp to get back to the lab about that and then went to the kitchen to see how his unusual, young, assistant was making out - another two word phrase never to be spoken to Kopp!

He had four jars on the counter and was just finishing capturing prints to cellophane tape.

"The ones you expected were right where you thought they'd be. Only two sets of mavericks."

"Mavericks?"

"It's what my printing teacher used to call prints you didn't expect to find or couldn't identify right away."

"An interesting and undoubtedly useful term. Any of them look familiar?"

"I haven't had time to do any checking. Let's take a look."

Kopp pulled the print cards from his brief case - those taken earlier from the guests and staff. He studied them while Masters looked on over his shoulder.

"Hyde's on the light honey, probably not the most recent since some of them have been partially over printed by others. Then, look here! Another on this dark jar. I'd say a probable match to the Ellsworth guy, wouldn't you?"

Masters donned his glasses. Kopp held the print close to the print card.

“Sure could be. Smudged a bit. Could be, though. So, the Mavericks are Hyde and Ellsworth. Where’s the third set?”

“Here on the light variety. Might be someone who handled it at the store,” Kopp pointed out.

“A good possibility. I suppose we aren’t really concerned with any prints that don’t belong to someone who was here on the Island these past few days. I do have to wonder why Jane’s aren’t on it.”

The honey was returned to the walk-in. Kopp returned to Bea’s office to use the fax. Masters lingered in the kitchen hoping to accost some sweet morsel before bedtime.

Angie entered the room (not the sweet morsel he had in mind!). Still, she soon had him ooing and ahhhing over her apricot cobbler - served refrigerator cold just the way he liked it.

“Angie,” he said, “Talk to me about tape.”

“Tape measure. Tape worm. Tape deck.”

She giggled thinking she had made a little joke. It received Masters’ nod and broad, warm, smile.

“More like the variety one would use on a wound.”

“If you mean who has what kind here in the Manor we have three first aid kits - well, Miss Mayford’s isn’t really just a first aid kit, you understand. I have one here in the kitchen and there is one in the mud room.”

“May I take a look at yours?”

He was soon pawing through the contents of the little, white, metal box.

“I see you use the newer variety of tape - paper backed.”

“Started using it when it first come out. Sticks good and don’t hurt much when you pull it off. I keep the same kind in the mud room. Miss Mayford still prefers the old fashioned adhesive tape - the cloth backed stuff that takes your flesh with it when you try to remove it.”

Masters closed the kit, slid it across the table toward Angie, and nodded.

“Wonderful cobbler, my dear. And real cream. Seldom get real cream anymore.”

“Yeah. It’s like Miss Mayford’s tape, I guess. We stick to what we’re comfortable with.” (It had not been intended as a pun but garnered a silent smile from Masters as Angie continued.) “Just that revolting noise you hear getting the non-dairy stuff out of the squirt can is enough to turn my stomach.”

Again, she giggled.

“I see the walk-in has a lock,” Masters said.

“Never used it. Mr. Stone had the old ice cooled pantry replaced with the walk-in about thirty years ago now, I guess. Couldn’t lock the old one. Never locked the new one.”

“Do you remember anything unusual about your conversations with Ellsworth?”

“You mean this week?”

“Yes. I should have been more specific.”

“Unusual. Well, let’s see. I got the idea his memory was beginning to fail him a little.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. He was all bothered because he thought he’d packed two bags of syringes and could only find one. I told him he’d only need one while he was here and that made him feel better I think. He lives - lived - in a partial care facility in California. I imagine things like that were all taken care of for him by a nurse or somebody. He wasn’t used to having to keep track of it for himself. He seemed so weak and sick. I can’t understand why he came. He must of knowed he couldn’t win the competition.”

It was an interesting point - two interesting points, actually. Perhaps he had brought two packages of syringes but one had been stolen to be used in killing him. And, why would he have come? Perhaps to kill Elliott. Could he have suffocated the man? Would he have been strong enough?

Dosed with a sedative and encumbered by the respirator, Elliott would have been easy prey, even for someone as feeble as Ellsworth. He knew the building well and could have made his way to Elliott’s bedroom without being seen. Motive? The incarceration clause in the will and how he perceived it as being unfair? Perhaps there was some other personal vendetta? Maybe just to make sure that since he couldn’t win the competition, he would see that Elliott died

before the hunt was completed so no one would win. That seemed to hold some seeds of merit.

Cobbler finished and Angie thanked, Masters headed upstairs to his room. So many things unanswered and perhaps unanswerable about the case - such as where had Phillip been all that time and how did the syringes get into his luggage? How did Buck fit into all of it? Were Gill, Hyde and Carl really as uninvolved as they appeared? And, most puzzling of all, perhaps, what fascinating mental mechanism explained Kopp?

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN: EARLY FRIDAY MORNING**

Breakfast over, Masters was taking a few turns around the living room, convincing himself it was excellent exercise and that the pounds were literally melting away. After completing the fourth circuit, he heard the mudroom bell ring. Moments later Buck appeared at the dining room door. He motioned for Masters who cut across the room to meet him.

“Gots somthin’ in the mudroom you needs ta see,” he said.

He turned and Masters followed hoping it was not another body. It was, instead, a suitcase, caked in mud and clearly heavy as Buck lifted it up onto the table. He pointed as if suggesting Masters should open it.

It unzipped from end to end. Close inspection led Masters to believe it was a match to the one on Phillip’s bed. With some effort, he opened it out flat exposing the contents - hammers and chisels of several sizes; nine small sticks of dynamite; fine mesh screen attached to bulky, 9 X 12 inch, wooden picture frames; large aluminum cake pans; a small, sharp shovel and other paraphernalia that looked to be the equipment of an 1850’s prospector.

Masters’ brow furrowed. Buck removed a sizable canvas pouch from each of his side coat pockets. He untied the drawstrings and dumped their contents onto the table. It was gold – up to marble sized nuggets of gold.

“Found it at the mouth of the cave down at the point.”

“The point?”

“A jut a rock on the southeast corner a the island. Us

Bucks knowed the cave had gold way back to my grandpappy. Didn't know any outsider knowed, though. Somebody took out twenty, maybe twenty-five pounds here. That'll keep him livin' in style through this lifetime and the next."

Buck laughed a wonderful, full, deep laugh.

"If the gold is yours, why bring it to me?" Masters asked.

"Thought it might be 'portant to yer case - all the murders."

"Yes. It may explain several things, like where Phillip had been all day and how he had managed to live so high on the hog all these years."

"High on the hog. I likes that," Buck said through another toothless smile.

"When did you find this suitcase?"

" 'Bout an hour ago. Keep a row boat up inside the cave during bad weather. Went down to check on her now that the storm's mostly blown by. Been a few days since I had fresh fish. A man shouldn't go long without fresh fish, ya know. Couldn't understand why somebody'd just leave it all there. Suitcase was open, 'bout like it is now."

He walked to the door and picked up a gunny sack lying on the floor there. He brought it to Masters with a question.

"Here's the most perplexing thing. I can't comprehend why someone would leave a complete set of clothing behind. See. Coat, pants, sweater, shirt, shoes, sox, underwear. That is just inexplicable."

Masters smiled into the man's face, his eyebrows raised as if waiting for something more.

"I believe I may have just blown my cover, as they say in those Raymond Masters Mystery Books," Buck said willing to grin at his own slip up.

"I'll never tell, and I'll never ask why, though you can bet all the gold on this island I'm dying to know."

"Self-taught. I'm a reader. Closets full of books. Every imaginable topic. Miss Mayford got me started. I did a little favor for her when she first came here and she asked what she could do in return. I said I wanted to learn how to read. She spent hundreds of hours over several years teaching me.

She ordered books for me. I must have a thousand - probably even more."

"But yet you stay out here?"

"This is my home. It's where I'm comfortable. It's like my language, I'm more comfortable with what I grew up with - woops - with what I grew up."

"It appears Bea was a very good teacher."

"Bea?"

Masters sighed the sigh of resignation.

"I meant Miss Mayford."

"I'm just joshing with you. I've known her name since the day she arrived."

"Knowing about the gold, now, I have to consider new possibilities," Masters said.

"Like did I find someone working my vein in the cave and kill him?"

"Yes, like that."

"Could have. Didn't. Wouldn't."

"Did anyone up here, know about the gold?"

"Can't say for sure. I never told anybody. When he was a boy Jeremy followed me around like a shadow. He might have found out, although I never took him there or mentioned it to him."

"Have you ever noticed it having been worked - by someone other than you, I mean?"

"Now that you mention it, yes. A very long time ago."

"Who was the butler here at the time?"

Buck paused to think.

"Phillip. Interesting. Probably during the last few months before Randolph arrived."

"May we talk about your wife?"

"I'd rather not but if it's connected to all this, I suppose so."

"Thank you. I'll ask it straight out. The rumor is that shortly after her death you threatened Elliott's life for having some kind of illicit association with her."

"Is that the rumor?"

Yes."

"Well, it's true."

With those three words, he appeared to have assumed

the conversation was over.

“No explanation? No ‘heat of passion’ defense?” Masters asked.

“She was young and impressionable. Had lived her life on a farm in South Carolina. He was rich and educated - probably seemed sophisticated to her. I believe it was a onetime thing. It took place early on his birthday, of all things - like he was giving himself a present or something. She told me about it later the same morning. She was so ashamed. I went to him and threatened his life. I did that. Louise was dead two months later - pneumonia. With her gone my anger at Elliott seemed pointless. That is my story. That is the truth. They both should have known better - especially him. Louise was beautiful - long golden curls, just like in a fairy tale. I can see why he was attracted to her. Not an excuse. Just the fact.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry I had to ask.”

“It’s okay. It’s the first time I’ve ever spoke of it. I probably needed to. Perhaps I should be thanking you.”

“Well, you’ve answered some important questions for me and raised many others. I thank you for both. I’m not sure where to keep all of this material you brought up here.”

“Hows ‘bout this’n cupboard right o’er here?”

He smiled broadly as he opened one of the closet doors and produced a padlock from his pants pocket.

“You had this all planned from the beginning, I suppose.”

“S’pose? I’ll put the stuff away ‘n leave the key on the table fer ya.”

Masters nodded his approval and then shook his head indicating the whole scenario had been surrealistic.

“Yes. Thanks. That will be fine. I’ll take the bag of clothing for the lab to look over.”

Buck handed him the sack. Masters made his way back through the kitchen on his way to the dining room.

It had become Angie’s practice to provide a buffet at breakfast and lunch. Kopp was seated enjoying his usual healthful fare while Jules was picking at this and that at the steam table. Masters put his sack in a corner of the room and fixed a plate for himself - eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns,

biscuit and gravy with a sliced banana – sugared and creamed - as his token, heart-healthy food. The men were soon seated together at one end of the big table.

“Old Angie can sure put on a spread,” Masters said, attempting to open the conversation.

Kopp had no idea what he meant so kept quiet. Jules understood but chose not to reply. Masters tried again, addressing Jules directly.

“I am interested in your take on something, Jules.”

Jules looked up, his expression suggested mild interest.

“Why do you think you were the only former butler who was not killed?”

“Not killed YET, at least,” came his reply.

“Yes. Yet. But still, why not, I wonder.”

“Three possibilities come to mind,” Jules offered. “I am the killer so I am left alive, of course. The killer loves me so that makes the killer Jane. The killer hates me so let me live to make it look like I’m the killer. In that case the killer is probably Jeremy - Jane being the mother he hates and therefore wants to hurt her in the worst way.”

“My. Had you rehearsed that? It flowed so smoothly and quickly.”

“I’ve certainly been wondering about it at lot. Those are just the possibilities that have come to mind - plus the first one I mentioned.”

“The first one?”

“That I am still in danger.”

“Who among those left, would think has a motive to kill you?”

“Jeremy, like I said. The motive wouldn’t be so much anything against me personally but against his mother - a way to hurt her through me.”

“What’s your take, Kopp?” Masters said, finally getting serious about the food on his plate and trying to draw the man into conversation.

“I took the dark honey. You just never know what they’ve put in the more refined stuff you get off the grocery shelf.”

Jules looked puzzled. Masters decided to confound his

puzzlement.

“My take exactly, Kopp. Additives! They ought to be outlawed.”

Jules shook his head, deciding to just ignore the apparent absurdity. It was worth a single, tummy quaking, chuckle.

Jane arrived and Jules moved his plate and mug to sit with her at the far end of the table. Masters spoke with Kopp.

“A new development, this morning, Kopp. We’re going to need that cutter to deliver one more set of evidence to the lab.”

“I’ll call right after breakfast - or before if you want me to.”

“After will be fine.”

He went on to explain his earlier encounter with Buck, the suitcase and the clothes. Hyde arrived, plate in hand.

“May I join you gentlemen?”

“Certainly,” Masters answered.

“I had a thought about the open window I found in Ellsworth’s room. I don’t know if the prints you found there were of any help or not - I imagine they were mostly mine since the room is seldom used and I am the one who cleans it when it gets cleaned. Did you print the brass lock on top of the window – the one you turn to fasten it? There is no security reason to keep second floor windows locked around here but I always do just because it tends to pull the upper and lower sections tightly together - less drafty that way. Whoever opened it would have had to unlock it first.”

Masters looked at Kopp.

“Do you know if that lock was printed?”

“I’ll have to look at the report. I don’t recall any mention of it. I’d surely have thought they’d have got it. Let me go get the reports and call the cutter. I’m finished here anyway.”

He left. Masters turned back to Hyde.

“Jules raised an interesting point a few minutes ago. He’s concerned that he still may be a target of the murderer.”

“That’s an unnerving possibility,” Hyde said, clearly uncomfortable either at the insight or the prospect.

“A butler knows everything about the household in which he works,” Masters said. “I’ve known that for years. Is

there anything you can think of that would lead you to believe anyone here would want to see Jules dead?’

“At this point? After the hunt has been declared invalid? I assume since Elliott did not reach his 75th birthday the hunt is invalid, right?”

“I assume so. I need to check the point specifically with Carl, I suppose. But, yes, let’s assume that it is.”

Hyde thought.

“There really is no particularly bad scuttlebutt about Jules’ during the time he was out here. He did his work well. He didn’t seem to be a complainer. Neither Bea nor Angie has ever voiced any complaints about him. He was a ladies’ man as I understand it from Jeremy. For Jeremy’s eighteenth birthday, Jules imported three women of the evening for him to enjoy over the weekend. That relationship seemed to continue between them. It probably takes Jeremy out of the running as one who would want to see him dead. Unless he crossed Buck in some way, I don’t see anybody else here with a motive – certainly neither of the women.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your input. If anything else comes to mind, please let me know and good thinking about the window lock.”

A new possibility flashed across the old detective’s mind. ‘Perhaps Jane just learned of Jules negative influence on her son - leading him to adopt the promiscuous life style - the one that had caused her so much pain and anguish. Would she be prepared to take retribution against Jules for that?’

Masters left for his ‘office’. Just outside the entrance to the dining room he met Jeremy - clad only in white tennis shorts, apparently back to his more customary, personally comfortable preferences in attire. Masters stopped to talk, extending his hand to shake. Jeremy took his hand but winced. Masters smiled and spoke.

“A question if I may.”

Jeremy nodded, seemingly interested.

“Jules. What was your relationship like with him when he was the butler here?”

“Jules was born a dirty old man. He encouraged me down the same path. I gladly followed. We’d bring girls out

on the weekends. Now I have to do that all by myself. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

Masters ignored the question.

"He ever cross you or displease you?"

"Do I have some secret reason to want to kill him, you mean?"

"It's your question."

"No. He was the first butler out here I was able to be buddies with. He treated me right. We were a lot alike. It was comfortable having him around - maybe not uplifting but comfortable."

"How do you feel about his current relationship with your mother?"

He shrugged.

"He's just found himself another whore. It's no more or less than I'd expect. I suppose you think that's a terrible way to talk about my mother, huh? Well, five or six husbands - I can't keep track - and who knows how many dozen casuals. What should I think of her? Like mother like son, I guess. One difference. I'll never marry one."

"One?"

"Female, girl, woman, slut, nag-bag, whatever."

"Well, I can't say it's been a pleasant conversation, but thank you for your time and apparent candor."

"Apparent? Interesting word. I'm a suspect, then?"

"Apparent-ly," Masters said with a smile, patting the young man on his back.

Jeremy moved on into the dining room. Masters met Kopp in their corner of the living room.

"Cutter will be here mid-morning. I alerted the lab to expect the clothes. Looked through the report on Ellsworth's room and find no mention of the window lock. Shall I go see what I can find?"

"Yes, if you would. It'll be a tricky surface to print, I imagine. Even trickier to lift. On the way, find Hyde and ask if he remembers whether or not he locked it when he closed it that last time before he came to get me. Oh, and one more thing. Dust the adhesive tape container in Bea's nurses' kit. If there are any prints on it other than hers see if she has any explanation for them."

Kopp nodded and left.

Bea approached with a sheet of paper in hand.

“A fax from the Lab. I looked. Maybe I shouldn’t have. It says Elliott was suffocated with some special form of aluminum foil. Does that make any sense?”

“Have a seat and I’ll give you my take on it, Bea. It appears that a sheet of heavy duty foil was placed on a pillow and then pressed against his face. I have my suspicion about why but have been awaiting this report. It’s nothing to be suggested out loud yet.”

“I’ve heard of doing that to form an impression in the foil to make a death mask from,” Bea said, “But that seems bizarre, don’t you think?”

Killing five people on this little island seems bizarre by itself, doesn’t it?”

“Well, yes, I suppose so. Do you have any idea when you’ll have all of this solved?”

“Oh, I have it all solved. I just have to prove it. Proving it is always the pesky, time-consuming part of a case.”

Bea looked surprised.

“Well I suppose that should be a relief but for some reason it isn’t,” she said. “It just suddenly makes it so plain that there is a killer walking around among us. I think I’ll go to my quarters for a while. I’ll be there if you need me. Make yourself at home in my office if you need anything.”

“Certainly. Thank you.”

She stood to leave. Masters was not quite finished.

“For what it may be worth, I don’t believe anyone is after you.”

She nodded and her eyes became moist.

“I spoke earlier with one of your prize pupils.”

“Jeremy?”

“Buck.”

She smiled.

“He is something else, isn’t he?”

“He certainly feels beholden to you.”

“We seldom talk anymore. I suppose I should make more of an effort. He always seemed uneasy around me. Not sure why. I think of him as a real gentleman. My own definition, perhaps.”

“Certainly, an interesting man. You go rest. We know where you’ll be if we need you.”

She turned and walked to her door.

Kopp returned with Hyde.

“What’s up, gentlemen? Masters asked.

Kopp spoke first while glancing toward the ceiling.

“Only Hyde’s prints on the window lock. Strange though. Should have been a mess of Hyde’s prints there and there was only one set.”

“Which is what we would expect if the one who opened it last wiped it clean of his or her fingerprints,” Masters said, explaining.

“Kopp said you wanted to know if I had locked it. I guess the prints show I had. I really didn’t remember but suspected that I would have - out of habit.”

“And the adhesive tape?” Masters asked.

“No prints at all,” Kopp reported. “I guess whoever used that, wiped it, also.”

“Or, Hyde, added,” his eyes sparkling, “ After Mr. Masters and I did our detective work in the mudroom, I could have gone back and wiped my prints off, in the event I am the one who taped the bell’s strike plate.”

“And who but an imp or the guilty party would make such an open suggestion about himself?” Masters said smiling.

Kopp was confused but endured the state without question.

“Anything else, Sir?” Hyde asked.

“Nothing at the moment. Thanks for the help.”

Kopp took a seat and Hyde ran up the stairs. Masters watched, amazed, trying to remember the day when he could have performed such a feat.

Angie came through the dining room door and reported that the cutter would be docking in fifteen minutes.

“I’ll gather up the evidence and get it down to the dock,” Kopp said.

Masters produced the key to the closet and handed up the sack of clothes from beside his chair. He produced a folded sheet of paper from his shirt pocket.

“Here’s what I want them to look for. Blood other than

Phillip's and weathered oak splinters. I will just assume the laundry tags sewed into them carrying Phillip's name are genuine. We could have the sloughed off skin inside them examined for a DNA match to Phillip. Give the lab that option."

Kopp nodded and left.

Carl descended the stairs on his way to the dining room. Masters walked to greet him. He got coffee and took a seat at the table as Carl filled his plate and then joined him.

"Sleep well?" Masters began.

"Like a new born baby. And you."

"I never let anything interfere with a good night's sleep - well, except the occasional scavenger hunt, I guess."

Carl smiled. Masters continued.

"Mind if we talk business over breakfast?"

"Anything to get me off this island more quickly."

"About the Scavenger Hunt. I am assuming that according to the various legal stipulations about it, its results are null and void; is that correct?"

"It's a sticky point. Usually, in law, a person's birthday is considered to begin at 12:00:01 a.m. on the day he was born. Using that as the standard, the results of the hunt would stand because he was alive at that time. However, Elliott made such a point of stipulating the exact time of his birth - and I will need to verify that from hospital records - a judge may well use that time as the basis of a decision instead."

"So, it will be resolved in a judge's chambers?"

"That's right. Until then, it's all up in the air."

"Your best guess?"

"I have none. It may be new territory."

"Can the judge's decision be challenged by one of the parties?"

"I doubt it - not successfully. Elliott's sanity could be challenged, but since the specifics of the hunt were established when he was still a relatively young man, there is virtually no chance that would be allowed, either."

"New subject. Do you know anything about the threat to Elliott's life that Buck made sometime prior to Ellsworth's employment?"

"Before my time here. Anything I'd say would be

hearsay - pure rumor.”

“What is Buck paid for his services?”

“Two thousand dollars a month in four installments - five hundred in cash every Monday morning. It is the same now as it was when I began with Elliott years ago.”

“Doesn’t that seem a bit odd?”

“Not if you know Buck. He has no need for money. Angie provides all his food. The few clothes he needs he orders from catalogs. His stash of money, wherever it is, must be huge. Speaking of Buck, I had a chat with him yesterday after lunch. He had lots of questions about you. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard him really express an interest in anybody who has showed up out here.”

“Like what kinds of questions?”

“Mostly how you came to be here this week. He seemed taken by your motivation – getting the check for the orphan’s relief fund. He loves children. He seemed to know about the fund. He does read voraciously, you know.”

“I’ve been made aware of that, yes.”

“He feels he knows you through Angie’s never-ending supply of Flint books.”

“So, Flint’s typically exaggerated accounts of an old man’s exploits have preceded me have they?”

Carl smiled, choosing not to agree or disagree with Masters’ appraisal of the stories.

“Any idea when you’ll have this thing wrapped up?”

“I’m still waiting on several lab reports, which I hope will be forthcoming today. Just a couple more pieces of the puzzle from out here and I’ll be ready to present my findings.”

“Really!”

Carl seemed surprised.

“I had no idea things had fallen into place so quickly. That’s great!”

“Like I said earlier, I have a goddaughter’s christening to attend on Sunday. Have to have a lock on this before then.”

He smiled at Carl. It was returned with a nod and a pat on the back.

Masters refilled his coffee mug and went to Bea’s office to check the fax. There was one sheet in the tray - a medical

report he had requested from Randolph's physician. He scanned it hurriedly, nodded, and returned to the dining room. Jeremy was there getting coffee. Angie was pouring. Bea entered with her empty mug. Carl was making ready to leave. Masters addressed them as a group.

"One quick question, folks, if you please. Did Randolph approach any of you for a vial of your blood during the scavenger hunt?"

All four raised their hands – each looking at the others with surprise.

"And did anyone provide it?"

All four shook their heads, no.

"Thank you."

Masters left in search of the others. Each in turn answered the two questions in a similar manner - yes Randolph had asked them and no they had not accommodated him.

Masters knew, for certain, who was responsible for Randolph's death. The lab reports he was awaiting would, he was sure, confirm his suspicions and identify the killer (or killers) of Jackson and Phillip. He needed the reports on two more sets of prints and he would have everything he needed to prove who killed Ellsworth.

That left just Elliott. He was counting on a calculated long shot to pin down that murder. The necessary information had not yet arrived.

At that point in a case Masters tended to become antsy. He would eat until all the pieces were solidly in place. He went in search of Angie and her supply of goodies.

Kopp met him in the kitchen.

"The evidence is on its way to the lab," he announced sitting down at the table.

Melodramatically, Angie placed the back of her hand to her forehead.

"I see a bowl of mixed fruit for Mr. Kopp and cheese Danish for Mr. Masters," she announced as if performing a mind-reading act.

"You've come to know us both pretty well in this short time, Angie," Masters said.

Kopp nodded and smiled, apparently pleased that he

knew what was going on.

“Oh, I’ve know’d you for a long time, Sir. That just made one of you I had to learn about.”

The snacks were soon prepared and delivered to the table. Looking at the work counter, she put her hands on her hips and shook her head.

“What a mess. It’ll take me the rest of the morning to just clean up the place. Don’t expect lunch to be on time.”

With a sigh, she got to work. She lifted the flour canister to put it on the shelf above her work area. She paused and hefted it as if something were strange.

“A problem?” Masters asked.

She took it to him and opened it.

“Look inside. Only a quarter full and it weighs half full. I’m good at weights. Never measure ingredients. Always know what’s right from the weight.”

Masters lifted the container and looked inside, nodding his agreement. He searched his shirt pocket for a pen or pencil. Finding none he settled for a fork and began probing the flour.

“I’ll bet my Danish that this is .22 caliber flour, Kopp.”

The trooper had no clue but smiled politely. Masters dug further and soon produced a hand gun, which he assumed was the one missing from Jane’s room.

“How about that?” Kopp said. “A pre-fingerprinted piece of evidence.”

It had been humorous in content and delivery - just not in intent. Kopp handed him a pencil, which Masters inserted into the barrel. He then carefully tapped the gun on the counter and blew on it to remove the excess flour, which was clinging to its oily, metal, surface. Kopp’s prediction had been right. There were several prints clearly visible on the barrel.

“May I once again trouble you for a Zip bag to keep this in?” Masters asked Angie.

The weapon was soon secured inside and in Kopp’s possession.

Fruit finished, he left with the sack to see if he could identify the prints, well smudged from having been thrust through eight inches of flour. Masters enjoyed a second Danish.

“Do you suppose that I can count these as dairy portions in my diet, considering they contain cheese?” he joked.

Angie patted his hand.

“You can count them as anything you want to, honey, if you’ll just hurry up and get this mess all cleaned up.”

“The murders or your work space?” he asked with a guarded chuckle.

He got the look that all women deliver at such moments. Realizing that retreat was undoubtedly the better part of valor, he hurried off toward Bea’s office.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT: LATE FRIDAY MORNING

Bea had returned to her office and was sorting through a stack of papers as Masters entered.

“Bea. May I interrupt you for just a moment?”

“Certainly.”

“You know Buck better than anyone here - probably better than anyone anywhere. Did you ever consider the possibility of foul play in the death of his wife?”

“Interesting that you should ask. At the time, I did, but not for long. I had two questions about it, I’ll admit.”

“And they were?”

“First, I had to ask myself if Elliott would have had her killed for some reason - if he couldn’t have her than nobody should have her; he thought like that. She’s the one who told Buck about the tryst - for lack of a better term. He may have been vengeful for having been given up like that.”

“And the second question?”

“Was Buck, himself, so angered at her, that he killed her? Now, I’m ashamed for having thought either of those things.”

“Now, meaning . . .”

“Now that I have had the opportunity to get to know Buck and to reflect on how Elliott would have probably reacted to it all.”

“And how would that have been?”

“Like that sing-songy thing kids say - na, na, nana, na.”

Masters smiled.

“And you are led to believe that neither scenario was likely?”

“That’s right. She died of pneumonia.”

“And you know that for a fact?”

“I guess I don’t, actually. I know she was very ill and I examined her at Buck’s request, down in his cabin. It appeared to be pneumonia to me and I suggested she be hospitalized. Buck took her to the mainland for treatment. I was told she died in the hospital. I believe she is buried in town.”

“Would you mind making some calls - to the County Clerk’s office, perhaps - to verify her cause of death?”

“Sure. I’ll get right on it. Finally, something I actually know how to do.”

Masters went to the kitchen and removed the Tupperware container from the walk-in. He then returned to the living room where Kopp was just beginning to work on the prints from the gun.

“I also need you to look at the prints on this box and its contents.”

“As I recall you left only your prints on them, Sir.”

“That’s correct. I’m sure you will now either find others - probably the same ones you find on the gun - or none at all and I’m betting on the latter. I’ll leave it with you. Have you seen Jane?”

“Yes. She went upstairs just a few minutes ago.”

Masters thanked him and made his own way up the thirty-two steps.

He walked to the west end of the mezzanine, catching his breath as he went, and took those stairs to the third floor. He was soon at Jane’s door. It was open and she was sitting by the window in the rear. He knocked on the door frame and she motioned him inside.

“I’ll just take a minute, Jane. Your driver’s license is still missing. According to Jeremy he traded yours for Ellsworth’s. I have a suspicion that Ellsworth’s killer may have returned it here to your room to implicate you. Have you run across it?”

“No, but then I haven’t had reason to look. Go ahead if you like.”

Masters surveyed the cramped, squat room. He lifted the mattress. He looked behind pictures. He rifled through drawers. It was not to be found. He looked around the room

again, in the process glancing at the ceiling and the light. It was an inexpensive screw on, flat, glass fixture, which barely disguised the two sixty watt bulbs. There was a small, oblong shadow cast from the other side of the glass. He reached up and unscrewed the decorative, brass, nut that held the glass in place. Soon the glass and the small object were in his hand. It was Jane's license. Jane seemed genuinely impressed.

"Why, again?" she asked.

"It should have been in Ellsworth's possession. It was not. I've had to consider why not. Either Jeremy did not make the trade and merely stole Ellsworth's license or he had traded and Ellsworth's killer, in order to throw suspicion elsewhere, returned it here and hid it in a place he or she was sure we would find."

"But if not Jeremy, who?" she asked.

"Who else knew about the trade?"

"Jules and me, I guess. Wait, maybe that Carl guy. His door was open and his light was on. I assume he was in there and could hear us."

"So, if not Jeremy, you or Jules, then you'd think Carl?"

"Well it wasn't me and I'm sure it wasn't Jules. I can't see why Jeremy would have done him in – he didn't even know the man the way I hear it. Rumor is that Carl comes out of all this a very rich man. Not sure how but that's what I hear."

Masters thanked her for her time and cooperation, replaced the light fixture and left. As he walked past Carl's room he noticed the door was open. He knocked and was immediately invited in. Carl was sitting in a comfortable looking overstuffed chair, another book in hand.

"Don't tell me another Flint creation?" Masters said smiling.

"Afraid so – Case of the Cryptogram Murders. Just got into it. It was the butler, wasn't it?"

"Do you really think I would spoil your fun by answering that?"

"No, or I wouldn't have asked. What can I do for you?"

"I was on my way downstairs to see what delicious spread Angie has prepared for our lunch. Wondered if you

wanted to accompany me.”

“Sure. I had a late breakfast but there’s something about reading a Raymond Masters Mystery that always makes me hungry. Wonder why?”

They exchanged smiles and made their way to the dining room.

“Still a few loose-ends?” Carl asked as they surveyed the cold cuts and salads.

“A few. Nothing major.”

“So, we may be sitting at the same table with a killer this noon?”

“Not may be, Carl. Will be, provided killers still need to eat.”

Gradually the others arrived, filled their plates, and taking seats around the big table, which seemed all the larger due to the recent dwindling of guests.

Gil, a generally quiet, reclusive man, addressed Masters from across the table.

“I understand you have all of this solved. When do we get to leave this wretched place?”

“Those who are guiltless will be able to leave in the morning. We will meet in the living room at seven this evening and I will share my findings with you. If you need to make arrangements for transportation, I’m sure Bea will make the phone available for you.”

“You can book plane reservations over the internet through my computer if you want,” Hyde offered, the last to take a seat.

Lunch proceeded amidst a buzz of quiet, individual conversations - Bea with Angie, Jeremy with Hyde, Jane with Jules and Gil. Masters and Carl had little to say as both seemed more interested in what was being said elsewhere. Kopp sat beside Masters but seldom initiated conversation.

At one point Angie turned to Masters.

“Will this case get into a book?”

“It depends on how long I’m able to evade the issue with my old friend Garrison Flint?”

He laughed. Angie had a follow-up question.

“If it does, what will it be called?”

“That’s strictly up to him. My best guess would be

something like, The Blank Did It.”

“The *Blank* Did It?” she asked, puzzlement showing on her face.

“Yes. If the killer turns out to be the cook it will be, The Cook Did It. If the nurse, The Nurse Did It. If the Butler, The Butler Did It.”

“And if I’m the bad boy?” Jeremy asked like a cocky sophomore, “Then, I suppose it’ll be called, The Degenerate Did It.”

“Your words again, not mine, Jeremy,” Masters said smiling.

Angie looked confused: “Why would he tell you in the title who did it? That would take the fun out of it”

“Twists, Angie. Always count on unexpected twists.”

She nodded, knowingly.

Masters turned to Kopp and lowered his voice.

“I will need you to have a cutter or police boat standing by this evening with perhaps four troopers available out here. Also, your superior and someone from the appropriate State’s Attorney’s office will need to be present.”

“I’ll see to it right after lunch. I called the lab and the rest of the reports will be arriving by mid-afternoon.”

“Good. Good,” Masters said, suddenly feeling he had the fox securely up the tree.

As each one finished, he or she left the room.

Jane stopped to talk with Hyde, asking if he knew a website from which she could rent a car. He jotted an address on a napkin and handed it to her saying his door was always open and she should go on in.

Gil was the only other one remaining when Masters stood to leave. He approached the old detective.

“I have something you need to know, if you don’t already,” he began.

Masters paused to listen.

“When I arrived, Hyde told me that Elliott wanted to see me immediately. I met with him privately in his living room. Hyde took me there through the back hall. Elliott asked a favor of me and said that I would be well rewarded for my effort. He was a scoundrel but he had never outright lied to me – not even as kids. I believed him.”

“And that favor?”

“S t r a n g e, but then it was Elliott. When it came to this scavenger hunt he really seemed quite mad, you know - mad as in insane. His request was delivered as if it were the most important mission anyone had ever undertaken. He required me to repeat his instruction three times.

“He asked that at eight o’clock in the morning of his birthday, I call Buck and tell him Angie needed him up at the Manor. Then, I was to go to his cabin, get his shotgun, and at exactly 8:21, I was to destroy the globe on the gumball machine with one blast, aiming down at an angle from the top, and return his gun to his cabin.”

“And you did that?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Fingerprints?”

“I wore gloves. I had worn gloves all night, of course. It was beastly cold outside.”

“That was between the times you turned in the Shingles and the Pipe, if I recollect properly.”

“That’s right. I had the pipe stashed just outside so I could pick it up on my way back here from the dock.”

“He gave you no explanation?”

“None. Like I said, he seemed certifiably mad to me. He swore me to secrecy and I’ve never gone back on my word to him, but I assume this is a special situation.”

“Yes, I assume so,” Masters agreed. “Thank you. And your payment or whatever?”

“Ten thousand dollars in an envelope under my pillow.”

“For some reason that must have been very important to Elliott,” Masters said.

“Apparently. Insane, but important.”

“Thanks. I’m not sure how it relates, other than perhaps to try and implicate Buck in the destruction of the gumball dispenser. Makes no immediate sense, but thanks.”

Masters went to his chair in the living room. It had been one of the pesky loose ends. It still may have been, depending on whether or not he could trust Gil’s story. He beckoned a passing Hyde.

“Two questions, Hyde.”

Hyde sat down on the couch, leaning forward, signaling

it was to be a temporary arrangement.

“First, did you take anyone to see Mr. Stone as soon as they arrived on the Island?”

“Yes, Sir. Gil. Mr. Stone had made the request first thing that morning. He had me bring him to his living quarters by way of the back hall. Is that important? It had really just slipped my mind, considering everything else.”

“I’m not sure. The second thing. Did you deliver an envelope from Mr. Stone to beneath the pillow of any of those who participated in the scavenger hunt?”

“Yes. Again, it was Gil. My instructions were to place it there at exactly 8:21 a.m. on Wednesday.”

The answer evoked a prolonged and thoughtful, “Hmm,” from Masters.

“Will there be anything else?”

“Yes, actually. That gumball machine. Why a gumball machine down there at the edge of nowhere?”

“My understanding is that five or so years ago, Buck bought it and installed it so the ferry Captain’s little boy could get treats when he came along. Buck loves kids. It was really like a bribe, I suppose, to get the lad to come out. Buck always has a fist full of pennies for him. The Captain will let him stay all day sometimes. It’s the highlight of Buck’s life. I think Buck’s greatest sadness is that he never had children.”

Masters sniffed and blinked.

“I see. Thank you. I appreciate your help.”

They were clearly more alike than just in age and stature.

“One more thing,” Hyde added. “Mr. Stone had me fill it with the black and white gumballs before the hunt - very specific in his instructions. He made me repeat them to him three times.”

Masters nodded and Hyde turned to leave.

Again, 8:21 had been specified and had been suggested - confirmed, really - from two independent sources. That moment had held some significance for Elliott. Masters was quite sure he knew what it was, but he needed Buck’s verification.

Masters called after Hyde. He had one last request.

“Can you get Buck to meet me in the mud room,

ASAP?”

“If I can reach him. He doesn’t wear a beeper or carry a cell phone. My only chance is to get him on his cabin phone or run into him.”

“Please, just do what you can.”

Hyde nodded and left.

Elliott could not have known for sure the hunt would still be going on at 8:21 that morning. So, the fact that the broken gumball dispenser would disrupt the hunt was clearly a secondary motive – secondary to that exact time.

Kopp arrived with the final reports from the lab.

“Interesting stuff here, Sir. Very interesting.”

He handed the several sheets to Masters and took a seat. Masters set them aside as Jeremy entered the area and took a seat.

“Jules says you are looking for alibis for Mother and him during the early morning hours the second day of the hunt.”

“Yes. You have something?”

“Maybe, and believe me, alibiing her is not high among my priorities, you understand. But, fair’s fair, I suppose. I was up and down the stairs several times during those hours. The temperature had dropped some 20 degrees by then so I went up to my room to add layers. On my way up, I saw mother and Jules carrying a pipe – must have been eight feet or so long. I thought they were probably going to cut it up so they’d both have a pipe to enter. Anyway, they were coming up the back stairs from the back hall. Then, when I came down, they were carrying just one piece down the stairs – looked regulation length that time so I guess they’d cut it someway.”

“And what times would these have been?” Masters asked, picking up a pad for notes.”

Jeremy thought and looked at his watch.

“I’d say the first time it was exactly 2:15 because the clock in the living room had just struck fifteen after the hour. The second time would have been about a half hour later – 2:45 I’d say.”

“And how did you come by that estimate?”

“Up in my room I turned on the radio. I realized I smelled like a linebacker so I took a quick shower. I hate to

stink. I dressed and when I left the room I turned off the radio and it was on commercials – had to be close to a quarter before the hour. That station has ads every fifteen minutes all night long.”

“Did you speak to them, when you saw them?”

“No. I was either way ahead of them or way behind them. They probably barely got a glimpse of me – like me of them.”

“Was that it, then?” Masters asked.

“Yes. That’s it, I guess.”

“Thanks for your help. I’ll put it into the pot with all the other information. Oh, one more thing. Do you know if your mother ever travels by air?”

“Always. All over the country, as I understand it. She’s a quality control person for a meat packer or something and she flies into every little Podunk in the southeastern United States. Something to do with new product development - I’m really not sure what she does.”

“Thank you.”

Jeremy left.

“You believe him?” Kopp asked.

“He was on Jules’ list of people who might have seen him and Jane during that blank period.”

“I don’t trust Jeremy, Kopp said.”

It was the first real opinion Kopp had offered over the three days he had been there. For some reason, it amused Masters and moved him to follow up.

“Anybody else you don’t trust?”

“Yes, Sir, there is.”

It was stated with emotion and conviction.

“My neighbor to the north. He steals sand from my kid’s sandbox to mix in his potting soil.”

Masters nodded. He had known from the outset that a question was a bad idea.

Hyde returned.

“Buck’s in the mudroom.”

“Thank you. Kopp, study the reports if you will. Mark anything that doesn’t make immediate sense to you.”

Kopp nodded, clearly accepting the assignment as if it were of special importance.

In the mudroom, Masters found Buck at the coffee pot. He had just poured two mugs and brought them to the table. He obviously saw it as a social occasion. Masters took a seat and thanked him. Buck drew a flask from his back pocket.

“Want a little octane added to that?” he asked.

“No thanks.”

Buck proceeded to doctor his own.

“So, what’s on the great detective’s mind this afternoon?”

Two things. You seem to get all over this island without using the cable car.”

“Never trusted that contraption.”

“So, there are ways of climbing, say from the cave you spoke of, all the way up here?”

“Not ways. Just one way.”

“Who would know about that way?”

“Most everybody out here, I suppose. Hyde, Jeremy for sure, Phillip – if he’s the one who was digging for gold earlier. I imagine all the former butlers, really. Gil and Jane played everywhere on this old rock as kids. The trails are no secret.”

“Okay. Question two. Does the time 8:21 mean anything to you?”

Buck clearly became uncomfortable.

“Yes, Sir. It was the time I threatened Mr. Stone after he and Louise . . .”

“I see,” Masters said, interrupting so Buck would not have to finish the pain-filled sentence. “And how can you possibly remember that so precisely?”

“I smashed his alarm clock against the table so it would stop, and held it up to his face. I told him to take a good look at the time - 8:21 a.m. - because from that moment on, his life could be extinguished at any second - well back then I didn’t use such fancy words but they meant the same thing.”

“I know I said just two questions but a third occurs to me. Where is your wife buried?”

“At sea. Nothing legal about what I did. I know that. I brought her back out on my boat after . . . the hospital. Buried her out about 200 yards off shore to the south. That way I’m still close to her every time I feel the water. There’s a headstone in the cemetery in town but no grave was ever

dug.”

“Thank you. By the way, did you receive a call during the hunt at about eight in the morning asking you to come up here?”

“Yes, I did. I came. Angie didn’t know anything about it.”

“Do you know who called?”

“Sure. It was Gil.”

“Have you confronted him about it?”

“Why? It’s over.”

Masters raised his eyebrows and nodded.

“Thanks again, Buck. You’ve been a big help.”

“And that did end up being six questions - not two.” The old Mountain Man’s eyes danced. “Bea could probably help you with your counting if you need a refresher course.”

He grinned his wonderfully warm, toothless grin. Masters reached across the table to shake his hand. The man was clearly unpracticed, but made an attempt. It accomplished its purpose.

Back in the living room, Kopp had several questions.

“You said to mark things that didn’t make sense. Look for yourself.”

Masters took a seat, put on his reading glasses and scanned the reports to find Kopp’s marks. He read the indicated paragraphs out loud.

“The two ropes used to tie Phillip were 3/8-inch hemp, at least thirty years old and well weathered. Each was twelve feet long. The first rope had two areas of blood near the center spread approximately three feet apart. The second rope had blood near one end and then again five feet on up the rope from that same end. It also had a bloody section near the center. Interestingly, several of the bloody areas on both ropes contained a mixture of types “A” and “B” – there were two exceptions. The bloody section near one end of the second rope contained only type “B”. There was also a small section - about five feet from one end - that contained AB.”

“Hot digity!” (It was Master’s indication that a real ‘biggie’ – one he was expecting – had just fallen into place.)

“Kopp, my man, we can now prove who killed Jackson and Phillip.”

He read on, mumbling through the words to speed it up. Finally, he put the papers down.

“Apparently, Buck’s wife did die from pneumonia. Sad as it is, at least there was no foul play involved in that death.”

Masters sighed and looked at Kopp while picking up a pad.

“If I’m correct - and I’m sure I am - you will find the final piece of evidence we need here.”

He jotted some instructions, tore out the sheet and handed it across the coffee table.

“Get that checked out right away and make sure no one sees you doing it.”

“Like a real, undercover, detective, huh?”

“Just like that,” Masters said, standing to pat the man on his back as he left.

“Tell Jane I need to speak with her down here.”

Moments later, Jane descended the stairs and walked over to where Masters was sitting.

“The tall one said you wanted to see me.”

Angie’s name for Kopp had apparently stuck. Masters smiled.

“Yes. Thanks for coming. Just a couple of questions. Little things I need to clear up.”

Jane took a seat on the couch. Masters continued.

“I understand you usually fly when you travel around the South for your employer, is that right?”

“Yes. Pretty easy now that we have the beautiful new Northwest Arkansas Regional airport just down the road from my place.”

“But on this trip, you chose to rent a car and drive?”

“Yes. So?”

“I was just wondering why. It must have taken several days. Even with winter rental rates, you add motels and gas and it must have been nearly as expensive as flying. And driving through January snows from Missouri all the way to the East Coast . . . I’m just intrigued by your decision, I suppose.”

“I like to drive. I had ten days off - half my yearly vacation time. I decided to make it a cross country tour. There’s still some adventure in these old bones. It’s that simple.”

“Plus, of course, you couldn’t have managed to bring the pistol along - airport security and all - if you had flown.”

“If I’d have flown, I just would have left it at home. It was mostly for protection during the road trip.”

“Well, that would explain that. You won’t have it on your return trip, you understand. It has become evidence here.”

“I assumed as much.”

“But you are still planning to return by car.”

“Yes. Well, as far as Boston at least. I may fly from there, depending on when you turn us loose from here.”

“By car to Boston? That I certainly don’t understand.”

“I don’t like flying in those tin cans they use on runs into little places like this. I feel safer driving.”

“I see. Well, thank you. I appreciate your time.”

Jane looked puzzled, stood and left.

Kopp and Hyde were coming down the stairs as Jane passed them on her way back up to her room. Hyde went to the kitchen and Kopp approached Masters.

“All done. It was just as you expected. Got the photo in case the evidence disappears. Took Hyde along to verify the find. Used his digital camera. All just like you asked in the note.”

“Good work, my man.”

Masters nodded the nod of complete satisfaction. ‘There can be no doubt about it,’ he thought to himself; ‘It is definitely time for a snack.’

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## **CHAPTER NINE: FRIDAY EVENING**

These gatherings were usually somber, quiet, events. Not so at Windstone Manor. Well before the announced seven o'clock meeting time, the chatty group had gathered in the southwest corner of the living room. Kopp, Clark and Captain Lovell from the State Police sat together toward the rear of the group. Carl and Lovell seemed to be catching up on old times. Angie, Hyde and Bea shared a couch near the front going on as if they hadn't seen each other for months. Doctor Lucy sat with a woman representing the State's Attorney's office. They talked quietly. Oddly, Gil and Jeremy sat together at one side passing the time of day, and Jane and Jules giggled together nearby. Buck stood just inside the east door - the only silent figure in the room. He had removed his cap and coat, signaling that he recognized the formal nature of the occasion. (His hair just may have been combed.) Four State Troopers stood at ease at the rear of the group.

At promptly seven o'clock - as tolled by the big grandfather's clock near the dining room arch - Masters, wearing his trademark three-piece dark suit - made his way down the stairs and crossed to face the group, his back toward the southern fireplace. Voices quieted and attention was directed at the imposing figure standing before them.

"Good evening and thank you for being here."

He directed nods of special recognition toward Captain Lovell, the State's Attorney and, interestingly, Buck.

"Trooper Willard Kopp, Jr. and I have concluded our investigation into the recent deaths here at Windstone Manor

and this evening I will describe for you how each of them unfolded. I ask Captain Lovell not to take anyone into custody until all five deaths have been covered.”

Captain Lovell nodded his understanding. Kopp was still beaming and sitting tall from Masters’ opening remark which had so clearly and kindly included him.

“There were, in a way, six murders - five of human beings and one of a relationship symbolized by the gumball machine. The devastation of the latter was actually the most difficult to explain. Initially I had to suspect that it had been done to prevent one or several of the participants in the hunt from winning. In light of the timing, that reasoning made little logical sense. Later, I came to understand that it was born out of a very different kind of motive.

“Because the motivation for that act was formed inside the mind of a crazed old man, we cannot know for sure how it came about. This is my best guess. For years, Elliott had lived in fear of Buck who had threatened him forty years ago at 8:21 a.m. on his birthday. While Buck had given it up when his wife died, Elliott was not privy to that decision and so continued to live in fear. Elliott spent his life searching for just the right retribution of his own.

Buck has no family and his needs are few. Elliott could find no Achilles heel so to speak - no way to really hurt the man. Then, he learned of Buck’s fondness for children - one in particular who would come on the ferry with his father and be a part of Buck’s life for a few wonderful hours several times a month. For Elliott, the gumball dispenser - which Buck had purchased for the pleasure of youngsters - became a symbol of all the joy in Buck’s life. He came to believe that destroying it, would in effect, destroy the most important thing in Buck’s life therefore hurting him in the worst way possible. Elliott hired Gil to shoot the dispenser with Buck’s own shotgun at that extremely important moment in Elliott’s life - 8:21 a.m. In some way, that made the punishment satisfying to Elliott. The gumballs will be replaced. The relationship will continue. Not so for the other five.

“In terms of the human deaths, I will begin with that of Butler Randolph. In many ways, it was the most baffling. There were no physical clues left behind at the scene. It

appeared that all of the others on this island could reliably be placed elsewhere at the time of his death. There were, however, several clues, which when taken as a whole, provide convincing evidence. Randolph had made the rounds early in the evening trying to buy a vial of blood from the others. That led me to ask myself if, perhaps, he was a hemophiliac - a bleeder. I requested a background check which disclosed he had worked most of his life since leaving here as a carpenter - not the occupation of someone prone to excessive bleeding at the slightest abrasion.

“Randolph was in dire financial straits and because of his several stints in prison, had removed himself from Elliott’s will. He was, according to friends, extremely angry about that and blamed Mr. Stone for most of his problems in life. He came here to participate in the hunt, hoping to be able to get his finances under control and to take some measure of revenge on Elliott by garnering at least a piece of the old man’s wealth, and perhaps hurting him physically should the opportunity arise.

“With victory in sight as noon approached, Randolph performed one of the bravest acts of his life - he cut himself to let the blood flow. I say brave because in the report from his physician it states the man always fainted when blood had to be drawn and with his ongoing cholesterol problem that needed to be done regularly. Apparently, it is not an uncommon reaction.

“So it was on Wednesday morning. I can imagine the scenario. He positioned the razor blade over his wrist, looked away as he cut himself, hoping to remain conscious, and then when forced to bring the vial close to the blood, fainted. With the rush of adrenalin building in his system from the accompanying anxiety, he had cut himself too deeply and in no time at all had bled to death there on the mudroom floor.

“So, death number one: Butler Randolph; accidental death due to a self-inflicted wound with no apparent suicidal intent.

“Death number two, Butler Ellsworth. Whereas in the case of Randolph there seemed to be too little evidence, in this case there was too much. The man was murdered - not once but twice. Upon arrival here, his diabetic equipment and

insulin were placed in the walk-in refrigerator. Almost immediately his open insulin vial was tampered with, the insulin having been drawn out and replaced with tap water. That idea had come to life earlier as the would-be killer studied a book borrowed from Miss Mayford's library. Ellsworth's next several 'insulin' shots were, therefore, fully ineffective. He grew weak and was unable to participate in the hunt. He, like Randolph, was virtually penniless so needed to try and win the hunt. Also like Randolph, his prison record had disqualified him from the percentage inheritance based on the length of Elliott's life.

"But I said he was murdered twice - not entirely accurate but sufficient for this presentation. Someone who knew about the devastating effects of elevated blood sugar levels in diabetics and who also had some expertise in the use of honey, boiled a quantity of honey down to half its original bulk, filled a syringe and at about two-twenty in the morning, went to Ellsworth's room and injected him. Most folks - those not familiar with the secrets of junkies - would have plunged the needle into an arm or vein, made a quick injection, and left. This injection was made under the fingernail to hide the entry mark - and not just any fingernail. It was into the thumb, the fleshiest finger, able to more quickly absorb the honey into the bloodstream. He was in - or nearly in - a coma at the time, which made the task relatively simple. The bruises on his body very likely came from a recent fall at an airport rather than a struggle at the time he was injected.

"Let me add some educated speculation at this point. The one who injected Ellsworth may have planned all along to kill as many of the butler's as possible in order to reduce the competition. When it turned out that a detective of reputation had been brought in to run the show - so to speak - that person backed off, feeling greater care would be necessary than originally thought. Ellsworth's condition allowed him to be killed in such a way that it would, in all probability, appear to be the normal death of an aging diabetic so that murder went forward.

"There are two among us who have admitted a very different motive dating back to Ellsworth's early years here. They had means, motive and access, so have to be

considered viable suspects.

"I will name the killer later when I speak more about motive.

"Death number three, Butler Jackson. He was lured to the secluded front room of the dock house, an all quite separate area from where the gumball machine sits. There he was met by his soon to be killer who was armed with a hand gun. He was gagged to muffle his screams, which would probably not have been heard anyway, considering the howling storm. His ankles were tied to the legs of the heavy wooden table, his pants were dropped to the floor, he was forced to bend over the table, hands out in front and his wrists tied to the top of the legs at the other end. He was then beaten unmercifully on the buttocks with a roughhewn board - for perhaps as long as twenty minutes during which he undoubtedly passed out. When found, his hair was dripping wet, suggesting the murderer revived him - perhaps several times but most likely just before the fatal blow was administered to his temple. Eventually he was untied, redressed and dragged out onto the dock where he was soon found. I say soon, because his wet hair had not yet frozen when Buck found him.

"The motive was clearly revenge for the way he had treated Jeremy as a boy. Who would have harbored that motive all these years? Jeremy - for one - I assume. Jane, a motive fueled by her own guilt about abandoning the boy to such treatment. Gil, guilty that he had not taken the boy in when asked to do so may have nursed a remorse-based motive similar to Jane's. Elliott may have had second thoughts for having allowed that treatment to take place. He, of course, would have had to employ a killer - most likely not a problem considering the amoral nature of many of the guests. And then, there would be the two people in the world who clearly love Jeremy the most - Bea, er, Miss Mayford - and Angie. Knowing of the mistreatment and having been helpless to stop it, they - together or either alone - might have harbored sufficient malice to have done the deed.

"Jackson had extorted a large portion of Phillips salary in return for getting him the job. Phillip could have still held feelings of revenge about that, and reconstructed the spanking

scenario in order to implicate his old nemesis, Jeremy. I will return to Jackson's death in a moment.

"In the fourth death, that of Butler Phillip, all of the motives just listed, which relate to Jeremy's treatment, also apply here. During the time Phillip worked here, he had discovered a vein of precious metal - one the Bucks have mined for years out here. He came to the competition with one goal in mind and it did not relate to winning the hunt but to replenishing his supply from the vein of ore. During the peak of the storm on Tuesday we all misinterpreted his low-level dynamite blasts at the mining site for thunder.

"He was absent from the Manor almost immediately from the time he arrived. He then showed up for dinner. Oddly, I thought, this immaculately dressed, former butler, arrived to eat with filthy fingernails. In his hurry to wash up and dress, he had missed them. After dinner and our seven o'clock meeting he returned to his mining operation, the location of which I will not reveal to protect Buck's interests. His killer or killers followed him back there, forced him to disrobe and then to make his way back up the treacherous, rocky path - barefoot - which accounts for his badly cut feet. He was tied to the tree just outside the west door and left to freeze to death. He had been secured with the same ropes previously used to tie Jackson down in the boat house. Those ropes could have been re-used by Jackson's killer or could have been found there and used by a second killer.

"Blood types A and B overlap at the points where the two sets of ankles were tied near the center of one rope. In the center of the other, Phillip's blood remains where the rope had encircled his neck, holding his head and upper body in place.

"In the case of Phillip's death, motive must be coupled with considerations about the great physical endurance required to carry it out. Traversing the trail from the sea to the top of this rock is an arduous task requiring great physical strength and stamina. Several suspects must be eliminated on that basis alone. I'll come back to this murder shortly.

"That leaves us with the death of Elliott Stone, smothered in his bed with a feather pillow used - bizarrely - to press a layer of industrial strength aluminum foil against his

mouth and nostrils. Miss Mayford has already admitted falsifying the time of death so that certain other items in this fully bizarre agenda would be met - most prominently, Hyde's bonus. She insists that Hyde had no knowledge of what she had done even though he had been in and out of the room numerous times after Elliott was dead. Understandably, the regular rhythm of the respirator made it appear to Hyde that he was alive and breathing.

"It was an easy task to smother an old man who was as sick and frail as Elliott. His weak arms could not have mounted a successful struggle against the weakest of the several possible suspects. For that reason, had the killer been content to just use a pillow, it seems unlikely I would have been able to make the identification. Several possible suspects were unaccounted for at the time of his death. Only one, however, had ready access to the particular type of foil used in the murder.

"When I first read that traces of aluminum foil had been found on Elliott's face and lips I was immediately reminded of the fact that Elliott had taken advantage of his brother and sister in a stock deal in which bauxite - the raw ore from which aluminum comes - played a part. Its use in this case was clearly symbolic rather than functional since it only made the task more difficult. The killer probably flaunted it before the old man with an accompanying, virulent, explanation just before he was killed.

"The aluminum foil, thin sheets, actually, is the kind used to cover and seal frozen dinners. This specific foil is produced especially for the chicken processing company that Jane works for in Arkansas. Jane had two reasons for not flying. One was that she brought a pistol along, planning to kill several butlers and reduce the competition. Airport security X-Rays would have uncovered it. Secondly, she brought the aluminum foil, which would have also been discovered in the same way. Jane felt the need to hide the foil sheets and she did so rather ingeniously. She loosened the cloth, inner lining of her suitcase, slipped several flat sheets of foil in behind, and reattached it. Trooper Kopp discovered it there earlier in the day. He found three unused sheets and the one that had been used to kill Elliott - wrinkled, bloody, and oily from being

pressed into the flesh of his face. Although the oil and skin bits have not yet been analyzed for DNA, I am sure it will reveal they belong to Elliott. Trooper Kopp also found partial finger prints on the underside - the oily side - which appear to match Jane's - the lab will need to verify that.

"Why did she replace the foil into the suitcase after the deed? I was assuming the killer would have found some way of hiding or disposing of it - into the sea, buried, flushed. It was not until I learned that Jane was traveling home by car that it struck me. Clearly, she would be carrying something with her that she could not have detected by security - not the gun, since we are holding that as evidence - so what? What was left? The foil!"

"I was further convinced of that when she told me she was driving to Boston and then would fly home from there. Why drive to Boston? To provide an opportunity to get rid of the foil evidence some distance from the island. Why not dispose of it here? I'm not sure. Most likely that was due to a lingering fear that it just might be found. Jane, like all the Stone's, is a very bright person. She may have over-thought that one, however. So, Captain Lovell, States Attorney, Jane is the killer of her brother Elliott Stone."

Jane sat tall in her seat, her chin high and lips tightly closed. She stared out the window, looking the part of some noble martyr of old. She made no attempt to deny or justify the deed.

Masters continued.

"Ellsworth, as I indicated, was essentially killed twice. When I discovered that two all quite opposite methods had been used, I had to wonder if it had been one person who was just very thorough or if two people had been involved. The latter turned out to be the case. One person, working all quite independently of the other, doctored the insulin, and another, likewise unaware of the first person, administered the honey. Their motives were different. One merely wanted to reduce the competition. That person's fingerprints were found on the syringe used to administer the fatal dose of honey. Don't get me wrong, it had been meticulously wiped clean but after the injection. The prints that were not removed at that point were those on the inside - on the shaft of the plunger, touched while

drawing the honey into the syringe but missed when the outside of the instrument was thoroughly wiped after the act. Two, big, beautiful thumb prints were also left on the inside of the plastic bag which had contained Ellsworth's second set of syringes - the ones he reportedly thought he had forgotten and left at home. The prints had been left when a syringe was taken for the honey injection. The partially empty bag was then planted in Phillip's suitcase - to implicate him - after having been wiped clean of prints on the outside. The logically sound idea of wiping prints did not seem to serve this killer well.

"There was also the lack of prints on the jar of honey in the walk-in. The killer had used it openly, earlier, so should have left prints on it. Wiping them clean in anticipation of later using the honey for the injection was a significant slip up. Ellsworth's prints were also on that honey jar and briefly caused me to wonder if suicide or at least its contemplation had played a part. My judgment is that Ellsworth had merely moved the jar on the shelf to make room for his equipment container.

"If none of that evidence had been available, however, Ellsworth's killer would still have been easily identified. The place where this person worked was experimenting with a new method for making its product more appealing to the typical pallet - by injecting thickened honey into the breasts of its turkeys and chickens. Again, all the credible evidence - including her head cold and accompanying, characteristic, triple sneeze - points to Jane. The company reports she was an important part of the product improvement research team. Although never a user of drugs herself, several of her husbands were afflicted with the habit so she knew their secrets. Why resort to the use of honey over the more easily concocted sugar water? Probably to point the finger away from herself and at Miss. Mayford if the presence of honey was indeed found.

"The second person's motive involved a long-held grudge over a sexual attack that Ellsworth had committed early in his career here at Windstone Manor. My first hint came when, early on, this person referred to Ellsworth as a sick old man indicating to me that his medical condition was

known.

“The killer was not the woman against whom the attack had been committed. It was not her best friend, who had also been threatened by the man. Instead, it was a person to whom that violated woman had been especially kind, had cared for, and loved. She had been his unselfish substitute mother since he had arrived here on the island. Jeremy.

“I mentioned to him - all quite privately - that there had been prints found, relative to Ellsworth’s death. Not saying where or whose. I had, in the meantime, removed all prints but mine from the container in the walk-in - the one which held duplicate syringes and insulin vials.

“Later in the day, the container was printed and found to be free of all prints - as was its contents. Only one person had the information which he thought necessitated such an act. There is additional evidence. Jeremy entered Ellsworth’s room at approximately 5:15 a.m. I imagine the visit had a twofold purpose. First to check and make sure he had died. Then, to confound the time-line, he opened the window to let in the cold air and slow down the rate of morbidity. Why he waited that long is not clear, but the time is certain. Although the air was cold when I arrived and found him dead, the objects in the room were still warm - the window had not been open long - perhaps ten minutes before Hyde had closed and locked it. The room had been thoroughly cleaned and dusted the day before - including the window and its lock. The lock held two prints - Hyde’s on top - which I can account for by his having closed the window - and Jeremy’s underneath and to one side.

“Jeremy’s prints were also found on Ellsworth’s wallet. To throw suspicion elsewhere, Jeremy planted Jane’s driver’s license in her room - the license that Ellsworth should have had after the well-witnessed trading in the hall hours before.

“Jeremy clearly loves Miss Mayford as much as he is able to love anyone. When he learned about Ellsworth’s attack on her, it infuriated him. This gathering afforded him the opportunity to finally avenge the terrible deed.

“So, Butler Ellsworth was killed by the mother and son team of Jane and Jeremy - working all quite independently of one another, much like they have lived their lives.”

Gill's expression was pained as he looked from Jeremy to Jane. His lower lip quivered and a single tear made its way down his cheek.

Jeremy sat stoically, arms folded, the hint of a smile growing on his face as he turned toward Bea, fully expecting some clear indication of thanks from her. Instead, she broke into uncontrollable sobbing. Angie, herself crying, put her arm around her dear friend in an attempt to comfort her. Jeremy looked genuinely puzzled. The one act of love he had attempted in his life had been rejected.

"Now to the death of Butler Jackson. Again, it was motivated by revenge - revenge for the way Jeremy had been treated by the man. The 2 X 4 used in the beating and subsequent murder was found and established as the weapon. Jackson's blood was found liberally distributed over its surface. Splinters from the board were found embedded in Jackson's buttocks and temple. Tiny traces of the killer's blood were found at the other end of the board - where it would have been held during the attacks. Blood was also found on splinters which had been removed from where they had entered the killer's hands during that time. I had not expected to find that splinter evidence but when I shook the killer's hand, sometime later, I witnessed a face wincing in pain. I had to wonder why, and asked myself if it could have been related to manipulating the roughhewn 2 X 4 over the long period of the beating. It sent me on a second search of the trash can below the first aid kit in the kitchen where numerous small splinters were found - all bearing the murderers blood. Traces of that same blood remained on the tweezers as did the killer's prints. The combination of those blood finds and that person's clear thumb print on the inside of Jackson's belt - reversible black to brown and therefore having a hard, shiny finish that preserves prints over long periods - plus ample motivation, all implicate Jeremy as the Killer of Butler Jackson. His willingness to alibi his mother and Jules may have actually been a half-hearted attempt to establish an alibi for himself in the death of Jackson.

"Now, to the fifth death, Butler Phillip. The motivation was the same revenge-based motive involved in Jackson's death. The menu of possible killers also remained the same.

The ropes used to tie Jackson and Phillip were the same ropes. The blood of the two men - "A" for one and "B" for the other - from ankles and wrists rubbed raw against their struggling generally overlap on both ropes. The evidence which identifies the killer is also blood. It was found five feet from the end of one piece of those rope strands. By the time Phillip was being tied to the tree, he was undoubtedly struggling - such as he could, having been exposed to the freezing weather for so long. At some point, the killer - standing behind the tree, tried to secure the rope over his own shoulder and against his own neck to force the struggling Phillip's arms back around the tree to be tied in place. During that process the killer received a rope burn - severe and deep. The swabs used to clean the wound contained fibers from the rope. The pistol used to control Philip bore the killer's prints, unwiped and clean, as if intentionally left for me to find.

"Butler Phillips was killed by Jeremy who had kept his entering and exiting the Manor quiet by having rigged the mudroom doorbell with tape - his print having been captured on the tape, unwisely disposed of in the mudroom trashcan.

"I'll leave you with a piece of conjecture. In his disturbed way, Jeremy felt he was offering his thanks and proving his love for his teacher and protector by meeting out justice as he saw it. In order for that deed to be fully meaningful, however, he needed for Miss Mayford to know that it had been he who had undertaken it. For that to happen, he had to be caught. The trail of evidence he left - including leaving his prints on the typewriter after writing the death threat to Phillip - was not that of an inept, careless criminal but that of a brilliant, focused, though terribly troubled young man."

"So, even though Jeremy's, early, six month run as the butler here at Windstone Manor was not particularly successful or enduring, this case does seem to qualify as one in which The Butler Did It - well, the butler and his mother."

## EPILOGUE

Buck's Island survived the scavenger hunt and Masters was proudly present at his Goddaughter's christening - Raylee Abigail. He then returned safely to his comfortable, quiet, home in Rossville intending to settle back and enjoy his retirement – again!

Gil came up the big winner in terms of Elliott's estate. The results of the Hunt were declared invalid - not that it really mattered with Jeremy spending his next three lifetimes in prison. Gil saw to it that Hyde received the substantial bonus Elliott had promised him during the hunt and signed over Windstone Manor in a three-way split to Bea (Miss Mayford!), Angie, and Hyde. The States Attorney looked the other way and Bea was not prosecuted for originally falsifying Elliott's time of death. Hyde went back to graduate school but still spends one weekend a month on the island with the two ladies he came to love and appreciate while working there. Reportedly, there is a pretty, young, professor in his life away from the Manor.

Bea and Angie hired a maid and cook but seldom let them do much, preferring to take care of things themselves. It has been reported that the winnings at their pinnacle games have, on occasion, climbed as high as seventy-eight cents!

Kopp remained a cop but more importantly a loving and caring father, husband and friend, ever eager to tell about the time Raymond Masters assisted him in solving a quintuple murder case.

Jules, suddenly older and wiser, returned to being a butler, taking a position that Gil arranged for him in Boston.

Buck remains Buck although seems taken with the mother of the new maid who lives with her daughter at Windstone Manor. It's rumored that he even bathes before calling on her. One can only imagine that his pappy and grandpappy are turning over in their graves!

Masters found himself with two contributions to present to The Orphan's Relief Fund - one, the original, generous check he had received from Elliott. The second, a shoebox full of one hundred dollar bills, which was delivered soon after the old detective arrived home. Upon opening it he had to smile as his nose was met with a familiar and unmistakable - how did Angie put it - bouquet. Inside was a note, crudely scrawled in pencil: "Expect a box every January."

It had been a strange case with strange players. It caused Masters to once again reflect on how the quality and nature of life's experiences unquestionably form (or mis-form) the raw human essence with which we all enter this world, and to be impressed by the ultimate importance of an enlightened and loving, upbringing.

THE END