

Chapter 11

Paul looked grim as we walked toward my car. Our breath was clouding the air and I was sure I felt a snowflake, but I said nothing.

“Do we have a clue who did this to her?”

I shook my head. “No, I’m afraid not.” We got into the car.

He looked at me. “No ideas at all?”

“No, none. At least not yet.” I didn’t think this was the time to talk about the leather gear and dirty girl lingerie. He might have known about her sexual tastes, but not cared at all; on the other hand he might not have known and could care a great deal. This was his dead little sister after all. “We’ve talked to some of her colleagues – .”

“You suspect one of them?”

“Not on what we have so far.” I started the car, then hesitated. “Do you want me to drive you to the motel?”

“I don’t know.” He looked at me. “I’m sorry. You have a life and I’m keeping you from it.”

I felt guilty for my not so recent resentment of his doing exactly that. “Not at all,” I told him, trying to be as ingratiating as I could be – without actually licking his cheek. Then Ingrid’s body floated before my eyes and nudged my hormones back where they belonged. I had a case to solve. “How well did you know Ingrid’s friends?”

He was quiet for a moment. “I barely knew Ingrid to tell the truth, never mind her friends.”

Whoa. I stared at him.

“But you’re her brother. Were, I mean, sorry.”

“I should explain our circumstances.” He had the grace to look embarrassed. “Ingrid was my stepmother’s daughter. She and my father married after my parents divorced – a break that took place largely because my father and Roberta were having an affair. Ingrid was five years younger than me.” So he was forty two. “I was fourteen, already away at school when she and her mother came to live with my father and things were tense when we were together – for not surprising reasons. Christmas, Thanksgiving, summers on Lake Michigan where the family had a place. That was it.” He didn’t sound comfortable with this topic.

So, he had been her stepbrother. “Did you have anything to do with her after that?”

Mr. Spoto looked far from comfy with that question. “Oh, we kept in touch, but it was business rather than affection. Joint legal responsibilities after our parents died. The odd lunch over the years, catch up. We did different things with our lives, were very different kinds of people.” He hesitated, then went on. “To be honest, I’m rather shocked that I’m the person called on to identify her, I should have thought she would have had people in her life who are far closer. Were,” he corrected himself.

He had a point. I too wondered about a woman who had so few close contacts that a family member she barely knew was the one called on to make an ID. The poignancy of that situation did not make me feel any less guilty about the decidedly personal feelings I was having about Paul.

“I thought you were her blood brother, sorry for the confusion.”

“No wonder you seemed shocked by our relationship being so tenuous.”

“The same last name as well, rather misleading.”

“My father adopted Ingrid.” He was silent for a long moment before telling me firmly: “Our name was about all we had in common. Our history together didn’t make for any sort of real closeness.”

I supposed not. We were only a few minutes away from the Holiday Inn. I had called ahead and booked a room. He asked me to tell the management no more than a week.

“I need to get back to the office, but I suppose there’s a lot for me to do here, isn’t there?” He didn’t look at all happy about that. “Getting the body released by the coroner, clearing out the house, finding her lawyer, ascertaining the conditions of her will – if indeed she had one – and deciding what should be done with the house,” he told me, sounding preoccupied.

The protocols that surround death are a downer – even more so when violent and premeditated death is involved. It’s tough to deal with and just as tough, in its way, to watch people go through what must be agony. I changed the subject.

“Was she ever married?”

He nodded. “Yes, but she was very young.”

So, conjectures on this topic had been fact. Things were looking up. Oh, please say the ex was nursing a grievance over who got the Rosenthal and the Baccarat. “Was he still in her life, at all?”

He shook his head. “No.” He shivered. “Could you turn up the heat?” I did so, although I would have preferred to solve his problem with body warmth. “She had married him at Oberlin. Married over the summer then a split before anyone could blink.”

“Did you meet him?”

Paul shook his head. “No. My stepmother told me quite a bit, after the fact, that it had gone badly.”

This could be helpful. “How so?”

“He abused her, badly. Mother said Ingrid changed radically after she left him. ‘Lost her innocence,’ as she put it.”

Yes, and turned into, well, what? Certainly a woman with secrets and an odd sex life. Had a marriage that turned so putrid rendered her either afraid, or incapable, of approaching a relationship not anchored by sex?

“What happened after she left him?”

“He turned into a stalker, which was hell, of course.”

How hideous for her – still, this could be a lead. Stalkers have been known to kill. “Could he have shown up here?”

Paul shook his head. “No, she mentioned about five years ago that he had been shot and killed in an incident in a bar – in Colorado somewhere, I think. Told me it was a release, considering the stalking. She was notified as his next of kin. They never did divorce.”

“Oh.” Shit – another lead that ended in vapor. God, but this case was frustrating.

He shrugged, still staring out of the window. Not a comfortable subject for him.

“I saw her photo at the house. She was beautiful.”

Paul shifted uncomfortably. “Yes, very.”

“Did she have a lot of men friends?”

“I have no idea, I told you, I didn’t see her on any regular basis.” He sounded impatient, paused and went on. “Ingrid *was* attractive, if that’s what you want to know.”

“When did you last see her?”

“Two years or so ago,” he answered, and that seemed to be that, because he said: “You’ve asked enough questions. My turn, now.”

I bowed my head in agreement. “Fair enough.”

“You’re English.” I crossed my fingers, hoping that he wouldn’t mention Princess Diana, cashmere, or tell me how much he loved Stilton.

I nodded. “Yes. I was brought up in north London. My mother and brother still live there.” *And want me back*, I could have added, but didn’t.

“Were you in the police there?”

I nodded as we stopped at a light. A car next to us was full of kids singing along to the throbbing music we could hear even through closed windows. I wondered if any of them were Ingrid Spoto’s students and if so, would they care all that much that she was dead? “I got my degree in criminology and joining the police was the logical next step. Promotion is

rapid when you have a degree. I thought of forensics, but the police work agreed with me.”

“What brought you here, then, or is that too personal?”

“No.” I didn’t look at him. “A husband.” I caught him glancing at my bare ring finger.

“Not any more, though?”

“No.” Which was true, if no one could read my mind and see the name ‘Gavin’ in neon. It was disquieting that Gavin’s name should be there even when I found Paul so exciting. What a muddle we get into when chemistry sizzles.

“How long have you been with the police force here?”

“Six years. My contract is up for renewal.”

“Will you stay?”

I was silent.

“Oh,” he said suddenly and turned around slightly. “*Sin City* is showing at that Cineplex we just passed. “I haven’t seen that.”

Be still my heart. “You like movies?”

He smiled. “Oh, yes. I don’t think there is a low moment in my life that isn’t fixed by watching a film. In fact, I’m hoping I can switch on to something at the motel, anything will do as long as it flickers. Does that sound callous, all things being equal?”

No, not even remotely. I had done nothing but watch films for weeks, after Gavin. I did an eenie meenie. “I don’t know how interested you would be . . . I know you must be terribly tired and a foreign film might not be your thing, but there’s a Kurosawa retrospective on campus.” I went on to tell him about *Hidden Fortress*.

He grinned happily. “God, wonderful stuff. *Throne of Blood*, now there’s the most brilliant cinematic adaptation of *Macbeth*, ever . . .”

I invited him along, of course. After all, I could continue quizzing Paul Spoto about his sister after the film and on the way to the Holiday Inn. No time would be wasted in finding the killer. The things women tell themselves when men are involved.

“As a matter of fact, I know a little something about the movies . . .” I reached into my pocket and turned off my cell phone.

I didn’t need Herb spoiling the mood.

“Oh?” said Paul. “In which film did Mary Astor win the Oscar for best supporting actress?”

“*The Great Lie*, 1941. I never figured out why Bette Davis let her have the better role.”

“Neither did she, I’m sure,” Paul said, “but let’s hope she fired her agent.”

“Here’s one for you. In what film did Meryl Streep have her first film role?”

Paul threw his hands up in mock despair. “Oh . . . wait . . . I know that . . . no, don’t tell me . . . “

“*Julia*,” I said triumphantly. “Now, your turn . . .”

We kept that up all the way to campus and up until the lights went down in the auditorium and the movie began.

Chapter 12

I woke up to find a light covering of snow on the ground. Not a surprise, but still a shock. It was a day to stay in and watch a movie with air-popped popcorn – not to hunt down a killer. Something long and set in a hot climate: *Flight of the Phoenix* perhaps or *Lawrence of Arabia*.

A rogue snowflake or two *had* drifted down as I dropped Paul off at his motel and the air did have a threatening stillness, the sky pale with the burden it was waiting to release. The film had been wonderful: “The perfect therapy,” he assured me.

We’d lingered for a long, long moment, mutually entertaining the same idea I suspected, one on which we had the good sense not to act. We talked about his needs for the next few days and I gave him my card, suggesting he contact me to find out when he could go through his sister’s house. He had tried me with a question about which film featured a line about cuckoo clocks.

“*The Third Man* and Orson Welles wrote that speech himself.”

We said goodbye and that was that.

Of course, the WKAF weather lady, Lucille Schrader, was as shocked by the brief blizzard this late in the year as if we all lived on Waikiki: “Wow, Brrr! What a downer!”

All I knew was that my storm windows were going to be taken down and my screens put up within the next week or two, whatever was thrown at us. I would no doubt be as sorry that I’d done this as I was that my winter clothes were already packed away, but so be it. I finished my muesli, took my vitamin and mineral supplements and a sturdy dose of calcium; looking after my bones was a priority. I’d been badly spooked by the recent focus on osteoporosis. Poking my head out of my front door to see if the Sunday *West Rapids Standard* had arrived I got two surprises. Most of the snow had already disappeared but my second surprise had me hugging my robe tighter around me.

“How’s it going?” Herb called out. He was standing with hands in the pockets of his shearling jacket, looking at my house.

“Yes.” I was taken aback. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“Your phone was switched off last night. I want to be brought up to speed, what do you think?” He looked around. “Your lawn needs clearing and the grass needs seeding. Those storm windows need to be taken down. Screens put up.”

“I’ve planned to do that already,” I lied, as he walked past me into the house.

“Good.”

I waved in the direction of the kitchen. “Why don’t you help yourself to some coffee while I get dressed,” I told him. “Decaf, hope that’s okay?”

“Okay, but not much I can do about it anyway, huh? Then we discuss what we’re going to do next on this case.”

Not a problem.

“I think we need to piece together a profile of Ingrid Spoto,” Herb told me an hour later – as if I hadn’t already started that process. “I want who did this. What’s with the brother? Have you ever read such a pile of crap?”

He was referring to a front-page piece in the Sunday edition of the *West Rapids Standard* about Ingrid Spoto’s death, inaccuracies and all. There was a shot of the “Death House” with Geraldine Drollette standing outside, looking inappropriately cheerful. She’d had nothing good to say about the police – “Talk about dropping the ball!”

There was no local TV news on Sunday mornings – only the sports scores and, as noted, the weather report. “I assume the investigative team - *moi* – will be served up on a spit on Monday morning,” I said, guessing I could look forward then to the unabridged version of Geraldine Drollette’s appraisal of my skills, or lack of them. Ah well, if you can’t stand the heat . . .

We were drinking decaf coffee and eating wholegrain bagels heated up in the microwave. Several of them – because there was quite a bit of Herb to fuel.

“What do we really know about her? I mean about who she hung with, that kind of thing? What about the Pazderka guy?”

I tossed an eenie meenie in my mind over how much to tell him and decided to go ahead. I described Eve Bishop’s heartbreak and her accusations about Barnett Pazderka and my evaluation of what she had to say. “She told me nothing that came even close to proving he’d done it. She also told me there hadn’t been any sign of him on campus on Friday. Charles Thomas – .”

“Who?”

“Eve’s neighbor. Prof at the U. who knew the deceased in passing. Told me there *had* been a relationship with Pazderka and it was the talk of the university. Two years ago. Of course he did cause that scene recently.”

Herb continued, “I checked out the police report. He had been

drinking and spouting the usual love chat: ‘Let’s get together again, you bitch,’ but he wasn’t hitting, spitting, or throwing anything. Arresting officer said he was more heartsick than violent. *She* refused to press charges and they took him home. The Drollette woman from next door called in the complaint, by the way. What do you make of Bishop?”

“Just a very unhappy woman who lost a friend and hated the competition without realizing that this was the problem. I want to track Pazderka down though,” I said. “If he isn’t at home or on campus tomorrow, we put out an all-points.”

“Where’s the brother staying?”

“Holiday Inn. She was married for a while, but according to him, she had a bad time of it. I wondered if that’s what soured her.”

“Marriage can do it,” Herb said with feeling and I wondered if his early morning visit had anything to do with his own connubial upheavals. “Any chance that the ex did her in? Did the Spoto guy know where this guy is?”

“No, afraid not . . .” I went on to explain why the husband was not the one whodunit. I did not tell him about my lusty subplot involving Paul, but that was about my pleasure, so not any of Herb’s business. But until we solved the case, Paul *was* a part of the big picture, one that had “Do not touch” written across it in big red letters.

Herb was not happy. “Shit. Ex’s are always good for this sort of stuff, but if he’s dead I guess we’re out of luck. I want this Pazderka guy to explain where he was on Friday night.”

“Yes, so let’s hope he surfaces. One thing I have figured out about Ingrid Spoto, though; she was quite a piece of work. Complicated and certainly more active sexually than her best friend knew, and I’m guessing the cast of characters who were on her regular visitors list weren’t just trying to sell her something at the door. We know for sure she was into something sticky. I don’t care what her pal Eve said about how dismissive she was of her great looks. She used her beauty for something – she must have done. Not to would be like having a bag full of cash and not spending any of it. I’ve seen her undies.”

There was a strangled response as Herb got most of a bagel down his throat and started on another, spread liberally with sugar-free raspberry jam. “This is weird jelly,” he said. “How come it isn’t sweet?”

“That’s because the ‘sweet’ you think of as natural is nothing more than additives that are as bad for your digestive system as they are addictive.”

“No kidding? Well, it’s lousy.”

I shrugged as he continued. “About Ingrid’s liking for leather – I’ve been thinking.” A bit of jam hit Herb’s sweatshirt. “Where did that leather and bondage stuff come from? There’s a sex shop in town that caters to the BDSM

locals. Leather Bob's."

For God's sake. I got some carbonated water from the fridge, put some of it on a jay cloth and handed it to him. "Here, dab it with this, it'll lift the stain. What's BD . . . whatever?"

He stopped sponging off the jam stain. "Bondage, dominance, sadism, masochism? You don't know that?"

Would I have asked if I had? "Let's go there," I said.

Herb looked at his sweatshirt. "What do you know? It worked. And if she got her stuff there, they'll remember her and maybe she was with someone else, huh? Tall, beautiful blonde who had some class? A standout in that sleaze market."

No doubt. "How do you know about Leather Bob's?"

"Hello? Who doesn't?"

I wanted to push another bagel into that big mouth, but settled for putting a check mark in the Con column against his name, and left it at that. It was not his first, nor would it be his last. "Is it open on Sundays?" I asked.

I got a big grin that showed large, very white front teeth. "Only after the staff has gotten back from church."

I smiled in spite of myself. "I want to look at the autopsy report."

"Think a man or a woman did it?"

"I don't know. Could swing either way. She was very slender, terrifically toned. No weight on her."

He looked thoughtful. "There's an angle right there. Say she worked out and maybe got carried away? Lots of people do, you know. Get themselves psyched into changing their body shape."

I thought about that. "Eve Bishop inferred she was a workaholic, which shows a tendency to obsessive behavior." I nibbled on my bagel. "Obsessed by work and just as focused on her sex life, so why not the same about exercise?"

Herb leaned back, hands clasped across his ample belly. "Yeah, I like it. She was into the dark side, as well – judging from that House of Leather stuff." He nodded. "Say she met someone at the gym? Some man who was on the same page sexually and it segued into something neither of them could handle?"

I liked that a lot. "She had a membership in the Silver Spa"

He nodded, looking hopeful for the first moment since he had arrived. "Good, go there after Leather Bob's. Take Jansen with you. She's a big girl, that intimidates people and you need all the help you can get, right?"

"Size only matters in some things, Herb." I hated references to my height, and he knew it.

He could not have cared less. "Why was your phone turned off?"

“I needed downtime,” I answered crisply. “Felt like watching a movie without being interrupted.” Which was sort of true, because I hadn’t fancied my phone ringing during *Hidden Fortress*. Mostly, though, I had not wanted an interrogation about Paul Spoto while I was sitting next to him, nor had I wanted to explain why I was doing just that. I had diverted Herb’s first round of questions about him, but I did not fancy my chances of doing that successfully for a second time. I needed a diversion.

“Herb,” I asked thoughtfully, playing with my bagel. “What do you think the killer did with Ingrid Spoto’s tongue?”

That worked a treat.

Chapter 13

I called Janet, asking her to meet me at my house – and she was there in a flash. I was no keener on her idea of plainclothes – jeans, trainers and an anorak – than I was on being told everything and anything was “Not a problem,” but I would deal with both in the fullness of time. I drove us across town in my car, because she rode a bicycle. “Great exercise,” I was told.

Before we did anything else I wanted to have a look at Ingrid’s house again.

By the time we’d reached the crime scene, the sun was out and the snow was already gone from the victim’s cordoned-off house. Who would own it now? An interesting point to ponder; people have taken to gun, knife or blunt instrument for property. A handsome house, in an even more handsome suburb, could encourage someone to lay premature claim to an inheritance.

“We need to see her will. That is if she had one, of course,” I told Janet.

“Most people have a copy in the house,” she suggested. “If not, we’ll flush out her attorney – that is if he or she hasn’t already contacted headquarters.”

It was a Sunday morning, so the murder scene had attracted stragglers rather than a crowd. Before we walked up to the house, Janet shooed them away and they wandered off as docile as lambs. The State Police CSI team had left yellow and black tape across the front door – a shabby affair especially when compared to its smartly lacquered neighbor at 122.

Janet tore off the tape and we were about to go into the house when a bulky type with the build and florid face of an ex-athlete lumbered toward us from the Drollettes. He was wearing a State U sweatshirt and khakis; from the scowl and the fists buried in his pockets, I deduced he was ready for trouble. I deduced also that he was a member of the Drollette clan, but that hardly made me Sherlock Holmes.

“Hey, no one’s allowed in here. There’s been a murder,” he told us, in a gravel voice with a strong Michigan accent.

Janet and I flashed our badges in unison. “I’m Detective Sergeant

Pimlott and this is Officer Jansen,” I said. The colleague in question smiled and they shook hands.

“I’m Chuck Drollette.”

I was about to ask how his daughter was doing, when he cut me off with, “You the Janet Jansen played ball for Huron U.?”

There was a lot more jolly hand pumping, then a boring exchange kicked off by statistics being thrown back and forth with reminiscences of triumphant moments on the basketball court that interested me not at all. I learned that Janet had been a star on the university team, one that had six years ago dislodged the giants of Indiana from the championship perch they had occupied for so long. Sports are big, big, big in the Midwest and no more so than in West Rapids. I was not surprised that Chuck Drollette was almost overcome. Men have less sense about sports than they do about sex.

As I deduced from the fact that he appeared to have no neck, Chuck Drollette had a history on the football field in the very stadium where Herb had done his thing. He knew of our boss’s feats, of course. “Those bastards on the Fighting Quakers always have the refs on their sides. They pray before the game. That’s religious types for ya.”

Well, it certainly works for them, I was tempted to argue, but had neither the time nor inclination to tackle Chuck Drollette’s religious biases. After a little more boring chatter, he and Janet ran out of steam and I got the show on the road.

“You must excuse us, Mr. Drollette – .”

“Call me Chuck, honey,” he insisted. “No reason to stand on ceremony.”

There was every reason. “It’s Detective Pimlott,” “Honey” reminded him.

“My little girl was mighty upset by what happened,” he told us solemnly, as if I had not spoken. I like a man with respect for such matters. “Doc said it’s going to be a long time before she gets over what she saw. I mean, the leather stuff.”

“Hmm,” I said, not committing myself.

“Beating her up, too.” He looked over his shoulder then turned back and said in a low voice: “She was some looker, Ingrid, it’s a damn shame he had to spoil her like that. Believe me, when that little lady lay out in her backyard in a bikini, that was something to see. Lot of guys agreed with me too, considering all the traffic.”

Which confirmed what his wife had said. I could have asked Chuck why he was spying on his neighbor, but mindful of the delicate balance that governed community relations, I kept my mouth shut. I proffered a hand that he crushed cruelly. “We have to go in and look around,” I told him. “Busy

time.”

He took the hint, but I could tell he didn't want to. “Right, right.” He shook his large head. “I hate stuff happening like this in our neighborhood.” He lowered his voice. “Was it a sex crime?” He sounded hopeful. “Wouldn't surprise me with all the stuff going on that night.”

Janet and I looked at one another. “Stuff going on?” I asked.

“Sure,” he nodded. “My wife had gone to bed but I couldn't sleep, so I was up watching the TV. A boring movie with that Merle whatever.”

“Meryl Streep,” I added, praying he would get on with it.

He shrugged. “Whatever. Anyway, I saw a guy wearing a baseball cap leaving.” He leered but I ignored him. “My better half says he's been there before.”

“What time?”

“Maybe just before midnight.”

Had Chuck Drollette seen our killer? What a fool, not telling the police. We had found out something vital to this case by accident. Oh, well, at least we had that fact to play with now. “Thank you for your vigilance, Mr Drollette.” I didn't think much of Pa Drollette after all. My heart went out to Mary Beth for reasons having nothing to do with her discovery on the lawn next door. I waved goodbye, grabbed Janet, slithered inside the house and shut the door.

It was cold inside the house. We looked around. The forensics bunch had done their job thoroughly. The place was a mess, but the lady of the house was in no position to take umbrage.

“Spooky, here, huh?” Janet said in a hushed voice.

I agreed. “Yes. So, we have a witness who can put our baseball cap in the same time frame as the killing.”

Janet nodded. “That jackass should have told someone before now that he'd seen someone, huh?”

Who could be bothered to agree? “Let's try for that will,” I told Janet, “I'll go upstairs, you look downstairs.”

“Not a problem.” She was already heading for the kitchen. I had barely hit the stairs, when she called out: “It was in the freezer.”

The freezer? “Why would she put it there?” I asked as she came out of the kitchen.

“Lot of people do that, think it's a good hiding place. Drugs, too. Don't think that's where anyone would look.”

Hmm. Must be tough to be paranoid, but not so paranoid that you would forget to find a hiding place that would keep you safe. I wondered why Ingrid had not kept her will in her study, but we would never know. Maybe it was keeping it in a secret place that *was* the kick. That seemed the right fit for

our victim.

“This was drawn up four months ago,” she said. Janet looked around the living room and ran a finger along the top of the green sofa. “God, this place? Who was her decorator? The guys from *Animal House*?”

I was surprised by the reference to a film that preceded her birth. Most of Janet’s generation had no time for any movie past DVD release. “You like movies?”

“Yeah and so do you. One of the guys down at the station house told me you’re crazy about them.”

“Oh,” I said, faintly. How much more did she know about me and why had she been asking? Asked and answered. Who was being paranoid now? Perhaps I should hide in the fridge. I turned my attention instead to the slim legal document in her hand.

I took it from her and unfolded the document. “It’s illegal for us to read this will until it’s tagged as evidence.”

“Yes, but who’ll know we have – if we don’t say so?”

I was shocked. “Did you skip the lecture on procedures?”

“I’m learning on the job,” she told me.

Ingrid had “big bucks” as Janet would put it. My eyes almost bugged out of my head when I saw the extent of her assets.

Janet gave a long, low whistle. “I was wondering why she had such a big house in this kind of neighborhood, just for one person, know what I mean? I bet this was a tax write-off.”

“Who gets the bulk of the estate?” she now asked.

I read through the terms of the will. The name Eve Bishop jumped out, but the bequest was the kind of money that bought a short trip to Europe, rather than any long-term relief from money worries. I went back to reading the will and got a shock that hit me right in the solar plexus.

My cell phone rang and, as coincidence would have it, the very person trying to contact me was Ingrid Spoto’s main beneficiary.

Chapter 14

It seemed that Paul Spoto had been closer to his sister than he let on and he had reaped the reward, accordingly. I gave him marks in the Con column for flim-flam.

“Good morning, Paul,” I said as I picked the phone up. Janet looked surprised at my use of his first name, as well she might. I turned away from her and walked over to the window. A couple and their dog, a disgruntled schnauzer, were gawking at the house. I glared out, flashed my badge and all three hurried off. I returned to my phone call. “How can I help? Any problems?”

“The snow was a downer, kind of, but soothing to watch.” I took that to mean he had had a sleepless night, since the largest part of the snowfall had fallen in the early hours. “Seems to have gone by and large, though.”

“No, never lasts this late in the year. Not all that unusual, though.”

There was silence. Paul spoke first.

“I’ve rented a car and I’d like to drive out to Ingrid’s at some point.”

“What a coincidence— that’s where I am. We’re taking a look around.”

I let that sink in. “I think you’ll have to wait a day or two until forensics gives the all-clear.”

“Oh, of course.” He sounded disappointed. I took a shot in the dark about the possible source of his frustration.

“We’ve found her will.” I waved away Janet’s mouthed objections.

“Oh, really?” Paul sounded interested, but he wasn’t panting with enthusiasm. “Who’s ‘we’?”

“I am working with Officer Jansen on this case.”

“Have you looked at the will?”

So, he was interested. “Can’t look at it until it’s tagged as evidence.”

Janet whispered “Liar, liar, pants on fire.”

“I just need to find out what to do with the house. No rush.”

Was he cunningly throwing us off the trail, rubbing his hands with glee over what he knew would be his, or, in his innocence, was he expressing an understandable concern? Was I being paranoid yet again and letting emotions

I had no right to feel undermine my judgement? No – I was in charge of the investigation and I needed to find out what I needed to find out and not take things at face value just because I liked the face. Feeling gooey at hearing his voice did little for my resolve, however. While I was pondering my reaction and its ramifications on my competence to conduct this case (like a professional and not a cheerleader with PMS) he was asking me something.

“Would it compromise your professional integrity if we had brunch?”

Had he been reading my mind? I could almost see the smile that was playing around his handsome mouth, almost see the skin crinkling around his dark chocolate, as in 70% cocoa, eyes. God, I wanted to slap myself to my senses.

“Brunch is fine.” Janet’s square jaw dropped some as she heard that. “It would only be difficult if you were a suspect.” She looked at me, struggling not to laugh, I suspected.

“Where shall we meet?”

“Oh, The Gypsy Market is good for Sunday brunch. You’ll need directions.” I instructed him on the best route to take. “Ten minutes tops.”

“That’s what I like about a small town, so easy to get around. Chicago is hell on a Sunday.”

“London, too.”

“Always wondered about living in a small town, to be truthful. Things seem to be so much more on an even keel.”

“Quite.” I had noticed that Americans yearned to live the small town life, as shown in Hollywood movies, in pretty much the same way the English fancied living like squires in the country and prancing round the village green of a May Day. Both were equally misguided ideals in my opinion. The air is no cleaner, the bread no fresher, the property values no more equitable, the people neither kinder, nor more concerned for their neighbors – who now can’t be avoided – and the grass isn’t any greener, there’s just more of it. The point was hardly worth arguing, though. “Yes, well, see you soon,” I told him, and we both hung up.

“Am I allowed to ask how you feel about this guy?” Janet asked.

“Well, I think we need to find out how things were between him and his sister. Other than that, I have no particular feelings toward him. Why do you ask?”

Janet shrugged. “Oh, because the entire time you were on the phone you were playing with your hair. You still are and there’s a piece sticking up in the back that you should fix before you head out for lunch. I notice stuff like that, because of the Psych course I took. I was a criminology major.” She sounded so solemn.

“Oh, well that’s a useful skill in our line of work, isn’t it?” I moved

my hand away from my hair as casually as I could, with a quick pat at the offending cowlick. I needed to find some work for this young woman to get stuck into – a great pile of work that would keep her busy and, at the same time, keep her snout out of my business. “Why don’t we check out members of the History Department and sooner rather than later? Find out what they thought of her. There are only thirty odd people, of course. Sorry to do this to you,” I said, cheering up. “You can get that done this afternoon though, I’m sure, people are usually at home on Sunday. Oh, and check that Lee Il Kwon. See if he’s in the system anywhere.”

“Not a problem,” she told me cheerfully. “Might learn something that could tie things up. If we bust someone for this, Lieutenant Fedewa will be happy, right?”

Out of the mouths of babes.

Chapter 15

We were settled into a booth in the Gypsy Market – Paul waiting for eggs Benedict, while I had ordered an eggwhite omelette and a side of wheat toast with unsalted butter. The laidback rustic atmosphere, wooden platters of chunky “peasant” bread, plain “fare” and glazed-eyed servers made the place a relic from the seventies – but one that was treasured by the locals. They often piped in the theme from *Easy Rider* and there was hardly a dry eye in the place by the time the last “Born to be Wild” had died away. Every time we had eaten there, Gavin had insisted that the fossilized ambiance made him feel a hundred years younger – even as he walked in.

“It’s as if I have more hair and my only worry in the world is if I can ace the Humanities exam,” he would say.

He had more and greater worries by the time I was going with him to the Gypsy Market and we had both known that.

Today, the place felt cosy and had a welcoming buzz. Paul and I were drinking mimosas, a request that caused some confusion for the staff but we got there in the end – once the bartender got over the idea of mixing good champagne with orange juice. I had protested at first; my conscience insisting that I was ethically, if not in reality, on duty. I had been over-ridden far too easily by Paul’s arguing that we were simply two friends having a meal together. Now, the mimosas looked well worth my time, as did Paul, in a dark brown cashmere turtleneck and grey cord pants.

Over the first sip or two we made small talk and I was glad I was wearing the moss green wool sweater that prompted him to remark that it was the same shade as my eyes. I knew that was a line, but I didn’t care.

I fingered the stem of my glass. Regretfully, it was time to get to work. I needed to talk about Ingrid and Ingrid’s cash. “You’ve said you weren’t close to Ingrid?”

He shook his head. “That’s right.” He smiled at me. His teeth were small and not completely straight. The effect was disarming, somehow. Had he been missing a few, I would no doubt have found that just as appealing. “I knew about her, but I didn’t know her, if that makes any sense. What makes

you ask that again?"

How much to tell him? Only that which I wanted him to know, that was what. "Say you featured prominently in the will? Of course, since you claim not to have been close –."

"I'm not 'claiming' as you put it. We weren't close. We weren't." His guard was back in place.

"Who do you think she left her money to?" I did an eenie meenie and it ended in my favor. "Say it was to you?"

"I would say again that she was a lonely woman who didn't have much of a life. Then again, the bulk of her estate was inherited from our father, so she might have viewed it as returning the money to source."

"So, it was family money?" I wasn't mad on what I was about to ask because it might end up with me eating my omelette alone, but I had my duty. Damn it. "Did you resent his leaving her the money?"

He leaned back against the back of the booth, fingering the stem of an almost empty glass. "That was clumsy," he bristled.

"So was her death," I shot back. "Clumsy and cruel. I need to find out who did this to your sister and I find that out by the process of elimination. I enjoy your company and I like sitting here on what passes for a spring day, sipping mimosas, but my first duty to Ingrid is to find her killer. If doing so means asking questions that make a second round of mimosas out of the question, then so be it."

Our eggs arrived. "Can I get a refill on the drinks for you folks . . .?" the server asked, her voice trailing away as she looked at me, then Paul, then back to me. You didn't have to be a psychic to sense the frosty atmosphere.

"No," I said firmly. "Coffee, please and decaf. Soy milk if you have it."

"Cappuccino for me, regular coffee, please."

"You're allergic?" he asked me.

"Borderline lactose deficiency, more a sensitivity," I answered, keeping my reply short.

There was a long, long moment of strained silence, while we eyeballed one another. He blinked first, which was as it should have been. I was in charge; only by a whisper, but I was. "You're right, of course. This is not a time for hurt feelings. The fact is, you hit a raw nerve. I do want to say I'm grateful on her behalf that you seem to care about what happened to her, to Ingrid. You don't talk about her or her death as if she was just another victim."

He had that one right. I was beginning to take her death personally, but that wasn't the whole story by a long shot and that mention of a raw nerve interested me. Following the facts finds killers, emotions don't. "Glad you

feel that way. Now, can I have an answer to my question? Did you resent your father leaving Ingrid a large part of his estate?"

"No, I didn't, and if anyone had a right to resent anyone, it would have been Ingrid, all things considered," he said – then pointed to his plate. "This looks good by the way." It did, mouth-wateringly so, but the cholesterol levels meant I had to pass. That my eggwhite omelette was all texture without taste was not the fault of The Gypsy Market. Jamie Oliver couldn't make anything tasty out of such ingredients and why should he even try?

Paul awarded himself a generous forkful of Hollandaise, ham and egg yolk, then continued. "Here's the problem. Ingrid was a good daughter and I was a not very good son. My father and I weren't close to begin with and, as I told you, I took his re-marriage badly. My attitude was shitty, to say the least, especially as I saw how fond Dad became of my new stepsister. When he was dying Ingrid was the one who went home and looked after him and believe me that was a chunk of time out of her life."

"Where was this?"

"Chicago, where we grew up and yes, I was living there but it was Ingrid who stayed with him at the house, did what needed to be done, took a leave of absence from the university. Nursed him, read to him. Took care of things. Her mother had died two years before Dad had his cancer."

"I'm sorry."

He shrugged. "Yes, well. My ex-wife never got along with him and I was stubborn and stupid enough to let her call the shots."

Ex-wife? Thank you God for that status. Then again, he got a check in the Con column for not being there for someone who was dying, no matter what the history. I had very special reasons to look down my nose at such a lapse. "Yet you didn't really keep in touch with Ingrid after your father's death?"

Our coffee arrived. The cappuccino smelled gorgeous and had chocolate sprinkled on the top, but the long-term effects of even short-term indulgence over-ruled my yearning. Paul continued with the troubled history of his relationship with his stepsister. "Well, Christmas cards, that sort of stuff. Phone calls. We had lunch when she was in Chicago, which wasn't often. Haven't we discussed this already?" He sounded impatient.

I thought about that. "You said it was at least two years since you saw her last?"

He shifted position. "About two years. As I just told you, if she was in the city we got together." There was something he was not telling me and it had nothing to do with the estate. I've been around a lot of interviews and I know when I am not getting the full story. God, but this man was really racking up the points in the Con column. Then again, he looked so good in

dark brown cashmere – that had to cancel out one or two of those points.

“How did she look?”

Paul shrugged. “Like she always did. Very beautiful, of course . . .” He shook his head. “This will sound awful, but it used to get to me how such a gorgeous woman could have chosen to bury herself in an atmosphere where it would be so little appreciated. It was as if she had made a concerted effort in her life to eschew anything that enhances human experience. You probably don’t understand what I’m talking about.”

I did because I had seen her house and her closet. On the other hand, on the telling evidence surrounding the manner of her death, I would have said she was not as averse to using her looks as her brother naively assumed. I fished further. “Was she always thin?”

He looked surprised. “No. In fact, she was rather on the curvaceous side. What are you getting at?”

“She was very slender indeed when we found her,” I explained, “and the kitchen was full of organic stuff, which indicates a concern with food issues.” And I would know.

He stared at me. “Ingrid? Really? Her tastes ran to burgers and stuff. Not keen in the kitchen if my memory serves.” He shifted his position, again. “Look, do we have to talk about this?”

Yes. “I think she’d been exercising as well, she had the kind of muscular development that comes from working out. Very lean.”

He shrugged. “A lot of people work out.”

Indeed, but as a girl, I knew why other girls suddenly did things they had never dreamed of doing – like eating sensibly and wearing the kind of bits and pieces that you only show off in private: *cherchez l’homme*. I believed Paul when he said he knew little of the goings on in his sister’s life. It would hardly be fruitful to quiz him over who the man or men might be in Ingrid Spoto’s life, or which one might have inspired her to head for the gym and the vegetable section. It was for a lover though – of that I was damn sure.

I was about to ask Paul if he’d had any hint of the change in her will during the last year, when he turned the tables – as he had done in the car on the previous evening.

“Can we talk about something other than Ingrid just for a minute.” He sounded serious. “I could beat around the bush but I won’t. I’m talking about us, or at least as much of an us as there is at this stage.” He leaned forward. “I know the timing is bad and your professional integrity is involved. I suppose I’m a suspect, technically, my sister is dead and all the rest hangs over us like a mushroom cloud – but there you have it. There’s something about violent death, about death, period. Things become clear and you want to act on what you feel.”

I leaned in to him. “Everything you say applies, I agree. Not that I know what to do about it or how appropriate it would be, one way or the other, has to be a moot point.”

He nodded, not looking surprised at my response. “Would you feel more comfortable if we leave it at that and play it by ear?”

“Best way,” I agreed, with a sigh.

He grinned and looked relaxed for the first time in several minutes. “Why don’t you have some of my eggs Benedict?”

“Oh, I don’t eat that sort of thing,” I told him.

“Sure you do.” He scooped up a mouthful on his fork and offered it to me. “Sure you do.”

I did.

Paul and I did not touch as we left the restaurant. We had to wait for our moment for any number of reasons, mostly mine. I went off to do some of those girlie Saturday chores I had not attended to the day before – because of Ingrid’s death. Paul said he was going back to his motel to make some calls involving business, then rent a video to watch in his room: “I’m in the mood for *Some Like It Hot*.”

I played it straight, saying I planned to do the same, but I primly prevented an invitation by saying I was hanging out with friends later. A lie, since I didn’t really have any friends to hang out with. I had held them at arm’s length for so long after Gavin that most had backed away forever.

I ached for Paul as I had not ached for anyone in a long time and I’m talking an ache south of the Mason Dixon line shall we say. I knew I should not do anything about that, so I invited him to dinner at my place for the next night. If he saw any contradiction in my earlier distancing and this about-face, he was wise enough to let it go. I crossed every finger I had that Herb would not catch wind of any of this. Not that I felt guilty, because what had I done after all? We’d gone to a movie, shared a meal and nothing had happened that could compromise my working on the case. Not even any real flirting.

But I knew better.

Chapter 16

I woke up to the local news on Channel 6, our local CBS outlet. My pal Kelli Kojecka was tossing a head of blonde curls so overloaded with product she risked going up like Joan of Arc under the heat of the studio lights. She was shrieking about the homicidal madman roaming our streets. This monster had already been dubbed “The Leather Killer,” Kelli told us breathlessly through glossed lips – revealing newly veneered teeth. When that call came from the network, she would be ready.

In line with the media’s sworn mission to create anxiety, there were the usual inaccuracies in her story. The police were blamed for not having brought anyone to justice instantly, which meant me. There I was on screen looking short, my face shiny, my thinking I looked good in my new brown pants suit disproved. I expected a call any minute from Herb and I was right. I turned down the sound on the TV.

“The Deputy Chief’s office is all over me. What happened?”

Geraldine Drollette now appeared on the screen, lips moving. I could imagine what was coming out. Now there was a tongue that could have done with some trimming. I kept my own in check, however, knowing what Herb would do with such a bad joke.

“The mother of the girl who found the body’s been busy,” I said.

“Jesus Christ, don’t you hate these women with nothing better to do. Still no leads?”

I told him about Janet’s assignment to track down the deceased’s departmental colleagues. “Still no sign of Pazderka,” I told him. “Thought we’d head over to campus and talk to him there if he isn’t at his house.”

“I’ll send a uniform to the house.” Herb told me. “What else?”

I told him about the contents of Ingrid Spoto’s will. “And we still need to find this Lee Il Kwon. The neighbor said she had seen an Asian man around for a while. Janet said she’d check the system, see if he shows up anywhere.”

“Smart gal. She’ll go places.”

“Early days, we’ll see, won’t we?”

“How’s the brother doing?”

I was startled. “What do you mean?”

“Where is he and what is he up to?”

My mouth went dry for reasons I understood all too well. “Well, he wants to look around the house as soon as possible – .”

“That reminds me,” Herb cut in. “The computer from the Spoto house is on your desk and those files you mentioned.”

“Going to go through it, try to figure out what she was up to.” I broke down and told him that some of the computer files did seem to have coded material. He gave a funny choking sound but that was it. “Could be useful, could mean nothing. Get Janet on it. Kid’s smart.”

So he’d said. “Glad you reminded me for the second time in as many seconds.”

“What’s he like?”

“Who?”

Herb sounded impatient. “The Spoto guy.”

“Well, he’s okay . . .” I sounded squeaky, so cleared my throat, “He’s upset of course. He’s her main beneficiary but he doesn’t know that yet.” I explained about finding the will and assured him it was tagged as evidence.

“I know, Janet told me this morning.”

Oh, had she, indeed? And what time had she arrived? Did she sleep there? “He could hardly have killed her, since he was in Chicago.”

“Maybe. Still, he might know something we need to know. Any agitating for the funeral?”

That stopped me in my tracks. Insisting on the body being handed over to the family for burial usually involved a tussle. Not with Paul, though. “No,” I said now. “Let me get on that.” Oh, dear.

“Sure the guy’s in the clear?”

“What?” That threw me.

“How do you know he didn’t do it?”

What? “Oh, come on. I met him at the airport, remember?”

Herb snuffled with contempt. “He could have driven here and back to Chicago in six, seven hours easy if he had a heavy foot on the pedal. Desk Sergeant said he would get Chicago PD on it.”

My throat almost closed up. “That’s crazy.” On the TV a reporter shoved a microphone at Mary Beth, who shied away in horror. I wondered again why the kid had not been kept out of harm’s way? Then again, the term “harm’s way” described her mother perfectly.

“Nothing’s crazy when a lot of money is involved and Janet tells me we are talking big bucks.”

Had she now. “I think you’re way off base and as for Janet, the woman’s been on the case for five minutes – .”

“Instead of your ten – .”

“Paul Spoto doesn’t need the money.”

“How do you know what Paul Spoto needs?” Herb asked quietly.

“Everyone needs money if enough of it is involved.”

I knew that.

Herb said quietly, but with the kind of emphasis I understood, “Don’t get carried away by this guy. I’m not saying it’s him and to tell you the truth I don’t think it is. Just keep a perspective on things, you hear me Sophie?”

I did.

“I’m going to talk to the Deputy Chief’s office,” he told me now. “Talk about damage control. Shit.” He hung up.

I put the phone down and sat thinking to myself about any number of things. Like Lee Il Kwon and any other leads that Janet had found. What was going on with the coded files? I also gave some thought to Paul Spoto, coming for dinner at my place, when there were more than enough reasons for him not to do so.

In his case, two million of them and that’s money enough to die for.

I didn’t expect a sex shop to be open at 10:00 in the morning, but it was. Janet had been at my door – again – scrubbed and bright-eyed, Palm Pilot in hand, within minutes of Herb’s call. I insisted on driving as a sort of power thing that backfired when I realized she had only a bicycle. She told me in the car on the way to Leather Bob’s how busy she had been since seeing me yesterday morning.

“Tracking down faculty was no piece of cake. If they aren’t on sabbatical, they’re on leave of absence, or at home with their families, or not there – when they should have been. A few of them suggested they form a committee to help us in our investigations.”

“What did they think of Ingrid?”

“Some yes, some no, a couple had to strain to remember who she was, if you believe it. Opinions varied on the lady. A few thought she was okay. Quite a few thought she was a pain in the ass. Too many couldn’t have cared less. One was worried about how they would replace her in the middle of the term. That was the compassionate one.”

I nodded. We stopped at a signal on Delacroix to let a group of students walk by. They were in anoraks and boots, although the day had turned out to be mild – considering the snowfall of just the day before. That’s the Midwest for you though – we wouldn’t be surprised if it hailed frogs, or an iceberg bore down us. I rested my hands on the steering wheel. “Pretty much what I got from the ones I talked to. Not enough passion on the nay side to spell killer so far, though.”

“So far.” Janet continued. “No Lee Il Kwon anywhere in the system

that I can find.”

The signal changed and we turned on Seifert, where Leather Bob’s was located. We parked outside the surprisingly attractive shop front and then entered. The place was much more cheerful than I would have expected, well-lit with perky music and lots of displays of undies and whips, chains and other bits and pieces but nothing icky about the place. The truth was this generally pleasant atmosphere legislated against anyone being truly offended.

There were quite a few customers – mostly young women and all laughing and chatting as if in they were in the supermarket. Certainly there was nothing covert about the operation, that was for certain. I was slightly disappointed, having expected a more threatening and/or sordid atmosphere. We waited for the lone sales person to finish with a client who looked a little like Tobey Maguire and even less threatening at that. The sales person managed to be ravishingly pretty even with a stud in her nose. She had an overwhelming amount of suspiciously dark red hair and wore a tight leather jacket and chewed-up jeans to great advantage. She looked like an extra in a film about porno directed by a very young film school graduate who had never set foot in a sex shop. The Maguire clone handed over his Visa card for a stack of stuff, some items of which brought the blood to my cheeks.

Stud girl slouched over, looking us up (Janet) and down (me). “Wow, the odd couple,” she said.

Ah, attitude. But there was a sure shortcut to breaking through this barrier. We flashed our badges and she folded, as I suspected she would. I know tough and I know a wanabee when I see one and just the threat of being in trouble with the local constabulary puts the latter into cooperative mode. I was guessing, but behind the stud and the tough girl act, we had a coed quaking before us. “What’s your name?”

“Abigail. I go to Huron, this is a part time thing.”

Bingo. “That’s fine Abigail. We just need your help.”

I put Ingrid’s picture on the counter, the one with the victim and Eve Bishop. “Have you ever seen her in here?”

She looked up at me, puzzled. “Which one?”

Ah, yes, of course. “The younger one,” Janet told her.

Abigail thought about it, really thought about it. “Well, maybe. That is, she looked different. Tidier. Great hair though, you know?”

I did. “Was she here often and when?”

Abigail shook her head, telling me: “No, only twice and I would say about two months ago, maybe six weeks. Long time. Way back.”

Yes, at Abigail’s age, you get nostalgic over what happened the week before, never mind six. “Who was she with?”

“No one.”

Janet and I looked at one another, disappointed. “What did she buy?”

Abigail shrugged. “Oh, same old same old.” She reeled off without a blush a list of leather purchases and sex toys that matched what I had seen at Ingrid’s. “That was when I told you, though, not the other time.”

I sorted through that syntax and liked what I heard. “When she was in again?”

“Right,” Abigail nodded. “But it wasn’t again, it was before she bought all that stuff. Then she bought a couple of vibrators, our special stock. Guy with her said she’d need a lubricant.”

That was a certainty. I’d seen them. “Which guy?” I took out my notebook.

“You should get one of these,” Janet told me, waving the Palm Pilot. If I’d had a pencil I would have wet the top with my tongue, I felt so old-fashioned. All I needed was a raincoat, a bowler hat and a moustache and I could have been Officer Plodalong of Scotland Yard.

“Which ‘guy’?” I repeated.

“The good looking Asian guy she hung with.” Abigail told us this as if we knew what she was talking about.

Janet and I looked at one another. “Lee Il Kwon?” she asked.

Abigail shrugged. “Maybe. He’s a personal trainer at The Silver Spa I think.”

“That must be where she met him,” I said to Janet.

A customer skulked in wearing, as God is my witness, an old stained raincoat. He stood out like a sore thumb.

“Is that it?” Abigail wanted to know anxiously. “I need to get back to work, otherwise Bob will be on my case.”

There really was a Leather Bob?

Janet and I thanked her and hit the road, as the customer sidled up to the counter hugging only God knows what to his chest.

Chapter 17

The Silver Spa was downtown, not far from Leather Bob's. It was a gym for classy types. A lot of business chatter was taking place at the juice bar as we walked by. The clientele was mostly townies since the university types hung out at the U Club on the campus: oil and water.

Visible through the floor-length windows of the interior were those mammoth machines I found so off-putting. Enthusiastic acolytes now pulled, pushed and stretched for victory over their own bodies. I went for gentler challenges: yoga suited me. The occasional class and the ritual session in the morning immediately after my hot water and lemon suited my system best.

Now, as we waited in the soothing reception area, one that was all soft lighting and healthy plant life, I thought about whether or not I should rethink a membership here – as I had been urged to do after Gavin was gone. To “meet people,” they had said, by which they meant men. I looked at the buff crowd in their spandex, towels over their shoulders, a glaze of sweat on their faces and came to my senses. I was not born to be one of them, full stop.

A receptionist with a body so toned it was a miracle that he didn't bounce off the carpet on which he stood, was as cooperative as Abigail – when he saw our badges. What an easy day we were having.

“Lee's with a client right now, but if you'd like to have a drink at the juice bar, I'll send him to you.” He checked a nifty Rolex on his wrist. “Ten minutes, tops. Smoothies are on us.”

We walked off, but he called after us “Say, didn't you play ball for Huron?”

Of course he was talking to Janet, who acknowledged that, indeed, she had thrown the basketball into one or two hoops for the local team. “Yes, still play every once in a while.”

“Thought of joining a gym? Special rate, of course.”

The celebrity rate, I assumed. “Not today,” I answered for Janet, who shrugged and followed me as I headed back toward the juice bar.

We were halfway through delicious mango smoothies when Lee II Kwon arrived.

Without so much of a “Howdy, how can I be of help, officer?” we got attitude again. “If this is about Ingrid Spoto, I have nothing to say, especially to the cops.”

I gave him a formidable number of points in the Con column. “Oh, I think you do and how did you know she was dead?”

“TV and those reporters made me sick. As to telling you anything, forget it.” The accompanying scowl did little for him, but it would have taken more than a few creases of the brow to spoil the effect of Lee Il Kwon. He was tall, long, lean and beautiful. He would have been superb in a martial arts film, flying through the air and winging off with Michelle Yeo. What a couple he and Ingrid must have made, although in his mid-twenties she had had a decade on him. The case was throwing up more attractive people – excluding Eve Bishop – than I was used to. “I’m telling you *bupkiss*,” he said now.

“Oh, wow. Yiddish,” Janet said, doing faux impressed. “What say I bounce you to the station house on your *tochus*?” I asked.

“Whatever,” Lee responded, but there was a little less wind in his sails. He shook the kind of hair usually seen floating back and forth in slowmotion shampoo ads. “I just don’t want you getting ideas about us, Ingrid and me.” His voice was still full of antagonism. “The wrong ideas, I mean.”

I had seen Ingrid’s bottom drawer so it was hard to conjure up the right ones, but everyone deserves a day in court. “How long had you known her and how heavy were things between you?”

He hoisted himself up on a stool next to me. “This okay? Not breaking any laws, am I?”

I smiled. “Maybe, maybe not. I make them up as I go along.”

He got the idea and calmed down. A spandex encased “*tochus*” and toned thighs made Lee a gift from the Gods. I was reminded that I had thought of Ingrid in the same way. Now Ingrid’s natural complement in the looks department ordered a bottle of Evian.

“Let’s cut to the chase,” he told us now.

“Which would be?” Janet asked, leaning in on the bar next to him, using her height to intimidate. It didn’t work.

“I was with friends at the Upper Level that night. That’s a club.”

Janet and I both nodded. It was a place on the south side, to drink, dance, make a lot of noise and find company for the night who did not necessarily want to pursue the relationship in the morning. There was the odd drug incident and or bust up, but it was not as decadent as the habitués would have liked to think. “I was there that night from eleven until two, then I went home with a couple of people. For coffee and whatever.” He almost cracked a smile.

Eleven huh? So give or take a half-hour and he *could* have been at 122

Sycamore Street, easy. Hotfooted it to the club and with the undoubtedly vague state of the clientele, who would know when he'd actually arrived?

"The names of these companions?"

He looked me right in the eye. "Diane and Lenny. Busy night. I have their cell phone number. Hoping to get together again, real soon."

Janet wrote the number down. I looked at Lee. Had Roger tested Ingrid for sexually transmitted diseases?

"What was your relationship with Ingrid Spoto?"

"Wasn't a relationship," he said, eyes averted as he tore the label off his bottle of water. This young man was angry. Whether this had to do with mourning, or whether it could be attributed to our meddling was hard to guess. We have a lot of problems with transference in our line of work. "Great sex, nothing heavy. She was too old."

As Ingrid's contemporary I considered that judgment and then left it to rot as it deserved, saying nothing. A spray of Con points went in his direction, however.

"Did she reciprocate your warm feelings?" Janet wanted to know.

If Lee picked up on the irony in her voice, he didn't show it. "Don't confuse me with someone who cared." I wondered if Lee's oh so perfect nose would grow, grow, grow like Pinocchio's – because he was lying, lying, lying. "It was a thing, just lasted for a while."

"And just how long is a while?" I asked.

He pretended to think about that, as if he didn't know to the day, the hour. "Six months, maybe. I got her into working out and eating right and the sex was great. Then she gets her head into other stuff. Kept talking about a 'secret.' Blew me off, which was okay." He tried looking nonchalant about that but the effort was a failure.

"What other stuff?" I finished my smoothie with a loud slurping sound. Lee smirked, as did Janet. They both got a look that straightened them out.

"Yeah and what secret?" Janet asked.

"If I knew that, it wouldn't have been a secret, right?"

His logic was indisputable, but that had little currency with me at that moment, although I did believe him when he said he didn't know what Ingrid was concealing. I was running out of patience with Lee II Smart Mouth. Not stupid though, I'd give him that.

"Don't make me have to repeat my questions down at the station house. I'm busy today so you might be there for a long, long time."

That worked, as it often does. Not always, but enough times that it was a trusty standby in my repertoire. Lee re-thought his attitude problem and left it where it belonged – out of my sight, out of my hearing.

He shrugged well-shaped, Armani model shoulders. "Yeah, well. She

wanted us to take a break. I said why stop seeing each other?"

"To which she replied?"

"The usual bullshit."

"Which would be?"

He sneered at me. "Shit, how long is it since you've been dating?"

I smiled. "For almost as long as you'll be out of circulation if you don't start giving straight answers. The guys downtown in the pen will like you."

I got a shrug, but he'd paled some. "Oh, that it wasn't me it was her. That kind of shit. I knew something was up, or knowing Ingrid, someone." His face twisted with unhappiness. "Wasn't even all that interested in f – ," he rethought his terminology. "Our stuff, know what I mean? I'd hardly seen her for the last three weeks."

Lee sounded more aggrieved than killing mad about being dumped. Still, a lot of rage over rejection could have been dissipated with his murdering Ingrid – in a way that was as rough as the sex life they had apparently enjoyed together. I imagined theirs had been a steamy union, so when Lee's steam had no place to go, it had to be worked off and not just on resistance machines. Who knew? I had another issue.

"Did you know she was rich?"

He looked at me as if I had a screw loose. He either hadn't known, or Hollywood might be advised to pick him up. God knows, he was pretty enough. "Ingrid didn't have any money, haven't you seen the way her house was?"

Hmm: yet another critic of Ingrid's taste. Why had she played her wealth so close to her chest? Because wealth had made her vulnerable and that was not on her agenda?

Now Lee put the empty bottle on the counter and said. "Thanks, man" to the bartender. He stood. "I gotta go, got a client. Anything else?"

"Did you like her?"

I got bravura-mode. "Yeah, she was great in bed."

"A quick learner I take it?"

He laughed, but it was not a merry sound. "If you mean me from me, then no. Taught me a lot, Ingrid. Took me to Leather Bob, taught me a lot."

That took me unawares. "Weren't you into the S and M stuff before you met her?"

He stared at me. "Huh? I've never been into that stuff." His eyes narrowed as though I had said more than I should. "Why? What are you getting at?"

So, who was into the rough stuff with her? I changed tracks. "What did you think of her as a person?"

Lee looked at me and I saw his Adam's apple slide up and down quickly. Was he trying to stifle tears? I pencilled a check in the Pro column. "She was cool. Beautiful. Not warm and fuzzy though, but who needs that? Ingrid liked sex and she was good at it. Don't rush to judgment."

He had me there. Janet had one more question.

"I take it you met her here?"

Lee smiled and ran both hands through that glossy hair, which fell perfectly into place. "Right, because where else would she meet someone like me? Well, guess what – she met me at the U. I was one of her grad students. Getting my PhD. She was the chair of my committee."

He walked away, while Janet and I were left to wipe the egg off our faces.

"I thought you checked the system?" I asked through clenched teeth.

"Not the university," she said, looking foolish. "The office is closed on Sunday so I couldn't access their stuff. Besides, who would have thought –."

"Never assume in our line of work," I said loftily, as if I hadn't done exactly the same thing. Janet said nothing and followed me out of the Silver Spa. looking miserable.

I felt as if I'd kicked a puppy.

Chapter 18

“You drive,” I said, tossing my car keys to Janet. I wanted to process some of the things I had just heard from Lee Il Kwon and, in the passenger seat, I was soon into a deep reverie.

I could just see Lee picture propping himself up on one elbow and watching Ingrid walking around the room as she lit a joint. The bulky towelling bathrobe that he hated was open and showing her nakedness. Her body was as beautiful now as her glowing face and he had made the face glow. God, if there was anything Lee Il Kwon loved, it was success. What an ass she had now and those long legs that, under his direction, were now as toned as the rest of her.

“Looking good, Prof.”

“The same could be said of you.” Jesus, Lee thought, but she had great teeth. He envied her that; the only part of him that had let him down were his teeth. Thank God for veneers. Now Ingrid took a long toke off the joint. then sat on the bed next to him. “You got off on the vibrator, didn’t you, big guy?” she said.

He had, for sure. “I didn’t think I’d be getting such personal attention.” Lee grinned and lay on his back, hand behind his head. God, but he was crazy about Ingrid, more gone that he could admit even to himself and he’d been around some. But this was not a woman who wanted a faithful dog panting at her heels. That would soon bore her. Best to play to the “Who gives a damn game?” with Ingrid.

They smoked until the joint was finished. Ingrid lay back, her hand fondling him. Lee was hard, immediately. “I have dry mouth,” she said. “Go downstairs, get some water. Don’t turn on any lights, I don’t want that busybody from next door to spot you.”

Lee padded down the stairs. God, this place was so fucking ugly. Not a mess really because nothing was out of place, just ugly and carelessly put together. Shit, didn’t Ingrid care how the place looked? He knew she didn’t.

The refrigerator was stacked with organic stuff, vegetables and fruit. All the stuff he had recommended, bullied her into buying; God, but she hated

paying that François guy for stuff you could get at Kroger's for half the price. Still, he'd got her on track and Ingrid admitted she looked and felt better – and she owed that to him.

Put that together with his first rate academic performance and his prowess in the sack and he might stay on the scene for quite a while. He doubted it though. Not Ingrid's style – her interest level in anything but herself and her work was finite to say the least. They were kind of alike that way, or at least he had been until meeting her. Ah, the irony of it. And now she was . . . things weren't the same between them . . . and he thought he knew why.

He got two bottles of still water and went back upstairs. Things would be okay. They had to be. Later they stood in the kitchen eating yoghurt. Ingrid's robe was tied firmly shut, Lee in his sweats. The light caught the pale gold of her hair, loose over her shoulders. Sometimes Lee wondered if what he felt for her was love, but what would be the point if it did? *I know my place*, he thought laconically.

"It's 10:00," he said. "I have to go. Essay to write, for you."

Ingrid nodded and smiled. "Yes, Lee, a day late already."

She only called him by his name, he noticed, when she'd finished with him in bed – it was back to business when he was again "Lee." He never pushed that back in her face though, because one wrong step and that would be that. Lee was fighting above his weight with Ingrid and he knew that.

"Not a problem, Prof, not a problem."

"Time for you to go," she said and started toward the front door. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him lightly on the cheek. They were the same height. Lee liked that about her. "Oh," she said. "One more thing."

"Yeah?"

"I think we should cool it for a while."

Everything stopped. He managed to stay cool, though. "How come?"

"It's not you, it's me."

"That's what they all say." He could have bitten his tongue.

"Oh, don't be difficult," she said and reached out to stroke his hair. He felt like a dog. "I thought you'd be cool with this," she said, "I mean we're hardly a couple. We just fuck."

He could have hit her. "You bitch," he thought.

Ingrid stood back. He felt the change in her as she was saying all this, felt her pull away from him in the way people do when they push you out of their emotional space.

"I have a lot of work, sweetie. It's a matter of priorities. Maybe when that's done – ."

"You're dropping me."

She sighed. "Don't be that way."

He felt himself getting angry as she slipped further away. “Oh, hey! More clichés.”

Ingrid put her hands behind her back, leaned against the counter. “We aren’t an item, Lee. We sleep together. You’re my personal trainer. I’m chair of your PhD committee.”

He hated being patronized; it made him feel like a kid. He knew she knew that and she was too smart not to. This was her way of having fun with him.

“Don’t I mean anything to you at all?” Shit, was he begging?

She shook her head. “Lee, I just told you. Don’t be a pain in the ass about this, okay?”

Christ, she was playing with him. Lee didn’t bother asking for how long he was supposed to be the forgotten man – it was until she said so. Weird, he was the one who usually called the shots, but here he was, the one on the receiving end. In a moment, his own mood changed. Christ, he hated the day he’d come on to her as a kind of joke – because everyone talked about how hot she was. He’d thought he play a few head games, not get into anything heavy, but in the end he’d been finessed by a better player.

“Don’t worry about it.” he said blithely. He sounded so young when he said that, like an aggrieved high school kid and he knew it. “I mean you aren’t getting any younger – .” Oh shit, he didn’t even mean that, he just wanted to hurt her.

She smiled, reaching over his shoulder to straighten out the hood of his sweatshirt. “I’ll just have to take my chances then, won’t I?”

Score that round to Ingrid. “See you at the gym, tomorrow,” he said angrily.

Fuck her. He wrenched open the front door and was out of there. He strode down the crumbling walk toward the street – his car parked a discreet block away. Did she think he was an idiot? There was someone else and he thought he knew who, as well. He’d strolled by her house one evening the week before just to, well, okay, check on her because he knew there was someone else in the picture. He’d felt it in his bones the way lovers do when the person that they . . . He had seen some dude getting a big welcome.

Was he being blown out for the dude in the baseball cap? Christ, call that a disguise? Asshole. Maybe he should make a phone call – that would stir stuff up. Shit he was pissed off. He had a thought then. He could have killed Ingrid Spoto for so casually removing him from her life. Killed her with pleasure.

Janet was a good driver and I had enjoyed my fantasy. Lee was still a suspect.

Chapter 19

As we had left the spa I noticed the air was faintly moist and the temperature, while low, held the promise of rising, not falling. Spring? The sky was a hope-giving blue and the sun was shining. The snow of the day before had vanished completely. Young leaves rustled in the light breeze from the south.

Janet and I stopped at Starbucks on the way back to the station house and I broke down and ordered a cappuccino, as did Janet. Mine was tall, skinny and decaf, but she took hers straight and vente. Ah, the carelessness of youth.

We picked up a copy of the *West Rapids Journal* from the stack by the counter. The lurid coverage of Ingrid Spoto's death echoed much of the nonsense seen on that morning's TV coverage. Ingrid was now a "glamorous academic" brutally murdered by the "Leather Killer" who was on a "rampage." God, had these people seen *The Front Page* once too often?

Our stationhouse was on a side street, Holt Road, running parallel to Delacroix, in the downtown area. A two-story crazy quilt of a building, we all hated it. We were nostalgic for our former graceful turn of the century quarters, still sitting empty – from which we had been evicted unwillingly six months before. We weren't a big force; sixty-five at full strength and that stretched the budget some – which had been one excuse for moving us. We had been told the city needed the space for some department or other, one with the kind of growth potential we did not have. My private take was that someone's relative was in the construction business.

There were some uniformed officers milling around but our plainclothes section was deserted. My absent colleagues in the detective division were either on the job, or enjoying lunch at Dodo's Diner, around the corner.

"Here's Spoto's financial stuff," Janet said, flipping open the file boxes on the floor by my desk.

"Yes," I said and firmly pushed her hand aside and snapped the box closed.

“Oh and her laptop. Shall I work on any coded files? See if we can make any sense of them?” She was already plugging the laptop in.

“Why not?”

The autopsy report was on my desk, as Roger had promised it would be, and a forensic report that had come up with zilch of any significance. A pale hair had been found snagged on a patch of blood where the body had been found. While it didn’t match the victim’s hair, there was no record of that particular DNA anywhere in the system. I hadn’t expected such a boon, but it was still a disappointment.

At first here was little I didn’t already know, or had not guessed. “Stomach contents show salmon and asparagus eaten five to six hours prior to death. Sex, fore and aft, an hour or two before death.” I remembered the stash of condoms. “No sign of it being forced, so we can assume it was consensual.” Ingrid had been tested for HIV with negative results, same for traces of anyone else’s DNA.

“Sex could have been with the killer and he then got pissed off big time over something later,” Janet suggested. She lounged in a seat next to my desk. I was not mad on her ubiquitous blue jeans, nor was I very happy with the terminology.

“Pissed-off big time is hardly the way to put it, considering the circumstances.” As soon as the words were out I realized I sounded exactly like my English teacher from Class Four, Miss Anglesey. I didn’t want to sound like *her* under any circumstances. “Still, I take your point.”

“Not a problem,” Janet told me affably.

I read from the autopsy report. “Death caused by blows to the front, back and side of the head with something heavy, smooth and of unknown provenance.” No wonder she was such a mess.

“Don’t let me see that leaked to the press.”

This was said by Herb, who had come up behind us and now perched on a corner of my desk. As usual he was dressed smartly in a dark blue suit and white shirt with a mismatched tie. My guess was Jerry Garcia. He loomed large and he was not happy. On the other hand, I’d seen him truly unhappy – and there was a definite difference. “How’s it going?”

Then I read something in the autopsy report that made me sit up and reach for the phone – I needed to speak to Roger. “You say,” when he at last answered, “that from the scarring she might once have had an abortion.”

Herb and Janet leaned forward, both interested.

Roger paused, then said, “There can be other causes for such scarring.”

“If it was an abortion,” I continued, “how long ago would this have been?”

“Absolutely no way to tell,” Roger concluded, hanging up abruptly.

“We just might have something here,” Herb said.

“That could get someone mighty upset – if he didn’t want her to do it. Brooded about it for a while, then wham,” Janet slammed one large fist into the other, “lost it.”

Herb shrugged. “Maybe.” He stood. “For now, I want you to check out Pazderka. Go to the U, talk to him and anyone else.”

“If he isn’t there?”

“Then we put out that all-points on him.” Herb sounded grim. “I don’t like him for this, to be honest, but the guy *must* know by now that she’s dead and he should have contacted us. As for the rest of the gang over there, someone knows something. Find out about this woman’s life and you’ll find out why someone wanted her dead. Then you find the murdering bastard.”

“Oh, I checked out most of the faculty yesterday, on the phone,” Janet told him confidently.

Herb smiled. “Then go to the campus and find the ones you didn’t check out yesterday.” He leaned over Janet’s shoulder. “No time like the present,” he said into her ear. then turned to me. “When are they releasing the body?”

I checked. “Any time.”

“Let the Spoto guy know,” Herb said to me. “I take it you’re in touch?”

That’s a small town for you. West Rapids labelled itself a city in its charter, but it was a village in terms of personal privacy. Seventy thousand busybodies, who knew too much about one another and were not shy about sharing what they knew. Without a doubt someone had blabbed to Herb about that brunch date at The Gypsy Market. Not a “date” I corrected myself. I had an interview with a family member, integral to the case.

“Yes, I’ll tell him,” I said and that was that.

We watched him return to his office, then Janet said, “You want to go for lunch before or after?”

I stood. “After.”

“Not a problem.”

We entered Edsel Ford Hall, a five-storied, unimaginative concrete block thrown up in the middle sixties when the university was ballooning with the mass enrollment of baby-boomers. The university police had given us their blessing to nose around on campus, so we weren’t stepping on any toes. Muscle flexing caused tensions that got in the way of the job. Still, there was a protocol and it to be scrupulously observed.

A directory by one of three elevators instructed us that the English department was on the first and second floor, the History department faculty

had their offices on the fourth floor, along with the department's main office. Classes were changing so the elevator was packed with young scholars slouching to wherever.

As we stepped out of the elevator I looked around. The department office was ahead of us. We walked up to the counter with a sign welcoming us to the History Department. The three women sitting behind the counter working at their computers gave lie to that sign by their very indifference to our presence.

"Excuse me?" I said in an effort to speed up the process.

The most senior got up quite slowly, her progress handicapped by the huge butt she was hauling around, one contained by black pants with an elasticated waist. A pink blouse with a pussy cat bow was a poor choice for what was left of the contours of her face. She had lovely skin, iron grey hair in an elaborately braided do and a surly expression.

"Are you authorized to be here?" Her ID badge identified her as Madge Marshall.

We showed her *our* badges and introduced ourselves, telling her the campus police had approved our presence. "We need to talk to some faculty members about Ingrid Spoto," I told her. "See if anyone has anything to tell us that might be of help."

"I'm the department secretary, everything goes through me," she told us with the confidence of a bully who accepted no serious challenges to her autonomy. I noticed that no expression of regret over Ingrid's violent demise was on offer.

I did a P.A.T.I.E.N.C.E. in my head then asked if our plan suited her? It did, but not a lot. I guessed how much she enjoyed terrorizing faculty and how sucking up by some – birthday cards, the odd gift when returning from travels, inquiries about her garden, her grandchildren – were taken as the kind of tribute that meant the supplicant deserved and received the advantages that were Madge's to give.

"Where would we find their offices?"

"Out the door, go to your left and through the double doors," we were told – and she turned back to her computer. We said goodbye and headed off to find Barnett Pazderka.

Not difficult – we just worked our way down a narrow windowless hall with all too many office doors closed, no doubt, against student intrusion, toward a cluster of cooing coeds – and there he was.

Chapter 20

Janet studied the gang of gigglers and blushers and grinned.

“Stud muffin is in the building,” she murmured.

A certain type of man, usually older and in a position of authority, in any institution and not just the hallowed halls of academe, attracts youthful females as if he were spread with honey. It has a lot to do with party A turning a position of authority to his advantage, while party B gets off by being wanted by someone in authority.

By and large young women are cheap dates, which is just as well, because such chaps are usually married and have a family with immediate financial needs that leave little cash for complex courting. A glass of wine, or a cup of designer coffee does it and a lot of talk starts the bonding process that sex completes. Then Party A dumps Party B, who has hopefully, learned something about life, love and the pursuit of happiness.

Which brought my thoughts back to Barnett Pazderka. He was rocking back and forth on a very fancy reclining black leather chair, legs stretched out and feet resting on a stool that was in tandem with the chair. It was not standard issue in any state working space I had ever seen. He also occupied a spacious corner office, where most of the furniture looked personal rather than standard institutional issue: a large sofa with an Indian throw, two easy chairs and a marble-topped coffee table loaded with stacks of essays and term papers gathering dust.

I’ve been around some, so I guessed that the large space and idiosyncratic furnishings were indications that Barnett’s place in the food chain was high. The sign on his door said that his field of specialization was the Middle East since 1945, which I assumed from all those coeds milling around was a sexy field of study these days. Ah, how the winds of war affect scholarship. I didn’t even want to think how squalid the work-space must be for any masochistic specialist in the history of the British Empire

Barnett Pazderka’s height and slim build were his only physical assets as far as I could see, but quite possibly the main attraction was concealed. He seemed to have a nasty skin condition of some sort – his face was red and

blotchy, with unappetizing eruptions here and there. His watery blue eyes were small and close-set over a bony, too long nose. He had big ears and from what I could see, short, sandy hair – a leather cowboy hat hid all but straggly, long sideburns. Blue jeans with holes in the knees, an equally faded and shabby jeans jacket and cowboy boots completed the ensemble.

Why a specialist in Middle East affairs had adopted a style better suited to Wyoming than the Negev was his business. It was never going to be mine. He was a caricature of a certain type of academic – the one with which townies massage their prejudices by labelling him as your typical academic. He stood, as we stuck our heads in the door, peering at us through a forest of females, who were all hormones and yearning.

Barnett was sexy in a way that seedy men often are. They're seen as bad boys by good girls panting to be just as naughty. I understood exactly why Eve Bishop had so strong a reaction against him. All that testosterone would send someone like her scurrying for cover – or revenge. He was the kind of man any adult woman instinctively categorized as trouble, fighting the feeling of attraction with every breath. Denying it would be a tough job and best done by looking at him only over your shoulder, using a mirror. A Jack Nicholson voice tied up the package in a double knot. I gave Barnett Pazderka several points in the Con column for simply being what he was. Yes, collaring Barnett was something I could live with.

“So, finally got around to me, huh?”

There were a few titters when Janet and I flashed our badges, but nothing major. They all had to know about Ingrid, so the police showing up was not a shock. Barnett shooed his chicks out and bid us sit on the sofa.

I remained standing. “Why haven't you contacted us, Professor Pazderka? We've been trying to get hold of you.”

“Yeah, but here you are, here I am, so what's the problem?”

I wanted to share with him what the problem was, I wanted to pull his pubic hair out with tweezers for being such a shit, or have Janet break him like a stick over one knee, but I didn't, of course. “We have some questions. I assume you've heard about Ingrid Spoto's death?”

“Yep. Bad business, she was a gorgeous gal. What a waste.” From his answer, I assumed his affections for the deceased had waned, or he was putting on one hell of a show. He sat now, swivelled the fancy chair around, putting his feet up on the coffee table between us, hands in his pockets. As he looked me up and down, I felt as if I was wearing my undies on the outside of my clothes. He wore no wedding ring, I noticed. “So you're a cop?”

I assumed that was directed at me. “Yes, Professor Pazderka – .”

“It's Barnett.” He smiled, showing good teeth, rather like Jack's. Considering the voice and the teeth, I was slightly flustered – but not for long.

“Pronounced my name right. Done your homework. Very good.”

“We try.” I looked him in his watery eyes and gave him the Forget It treatment. “I understand through the grapevine that you had a relationship with Ingrid Spoto.”

He laughed, a good sound – warm and attractive. His next words were neither. “Have you been talking to Old Lady Bishop? I bet you have.”

We said nothing.

Barnett shook his head in contempt. “What did that dried out old turd tell you?”

Was I supposed to find the reference to one of his colleagues, as something that floats in a toilet bowl, amusing? “Only what I told you, Professor Pazderka.” I had no intention of calling him Barnett. “How much of a relationship was it?”

“It was hot, it was heavy and it’s been over for a couple of years. Bet you want to know where I was Friday night?”

The gambling terminology was wearing thin for me and apparently for Janet as well. “Yes and I bet you were busy,” she said.

Barnett clicked his fingers. “Janet Jansen, right? I thought you’d go pro.”

“I didn’t,” Janet told him, which closed the subject. “Friday night?”

“I was getting my brains banged out in Ann Arbor. Drove down on Friday morning and stayed over Saturday and Sunday, got home this morning and came right here. Married lady.” He looked at me. “I suppose you want a name? I don’t like to kiss and tell, but if my ass is on the line?” He threw up his hands in mock supplication.

“Easily proved or not,” I said. I had a feeling that we were in for yet another frustrating disappointment. I got out my notebook, conscious of that electronic geegaw being pulled out yet again from Janet’s coat pocket. “Now, what about you and Ingrid? When did it start and when and why did it end?”

Barnett shrugged and focused on what looked like expensive boots, all pointy metal toes and hand-tooled coffee-colored leather. “It lasted three months and we’re talking two years ago the middle of September, when it started and the week after Christmas Break when it ended. Don’t really remember.”

Ah – another one like Lee Il Kwon who remembered the details of a purportedly casual fling with Ingrid, as if etched in acid on their frontal lobes. He continued his tale of star-crossed love.

“I’d been on sabbatical, then a year’s leave. I came back and wham, there she was. She’d arrived the year I was away. It was all fucking and no feeling and that got to me, if you must know.” He looked pleased with using a naughty word in front of the police. I judged Barnett Pazderka to be one of

those people who think they have been around, but they haven't. They scare easily. I know, and it can be a pleasure.

"You wanted more from the relationship, I take it?"

He shifted position. "I wasn't thinking commitment or anything but shit, I'm not into meat either."

I wished he would drop the sexy boy vocabulary. "If it was a hot and heavy there must have been some feeling on her part."

"Not her," he said, sounding bitter, bitter, bitter. Our Barnett had been smitten. "Not Ingrid. She wasn't after feelings, just sensations." I thought that was what he wanted. "All needs, that cunt," he said, looking at me, waiting, I assumed, for me to demand he wash his mouth out with soap. He looked disappointed when I didn't.

"Was she into anything irregular sexually?"

Barnett laughed out loud. "You mean all that leather shit we've been hearing about?" He shook his head. "No, that's new. I mean she wasn't shy or anything, but no weird stuff. No S&M."

He sounded regretful. Whether this was because he wished she had been while they were together, or implying that she had developed such tastes only after their ding-dong, and he was sorry about that, was something I judged irrelevant. I asked him the same question I had put to Lee Il Kwon. "What did you think of her?"

"I've told you." He pretended to sound bored. I promised myself that if he dared look at his watch, he would see the inside of the stationhouse. "She was a bitch who had no natural feelings, just ambitions."

"I'm having trouble reconciling your view of the deceased with the opinions of others," I told him quietly. "She doesn't seem to have been easy, but she was thought of by some of her colleagues as interesting, attractive, thoughtful, even generous –."

"Shit!" He almost fell backwards. "Who told you that?"

"Eve Bishop for one."

"Get serious, *she* worshipped Ingrid." Barnett laughed out loud. "Jesus, she was like a doormat. An ugly one that went with Ingrid's crap house."

What a shit. "Charles Thomas –."

"Who?"

"Your colleague in the English Department."

"Guy who looks as if he's been ironed? I didn't even know he knew her."

I continued obstinately. "Her brother also said some very kind things about her. Said she had looked after their dying father –."

"Then there was something in it for her," he cut in. "Bet we're talking

money.”

Janet and I looked at one another.

“Got it right in one, didn’t I?” Barnett laughed out loud. “Loved money, hated spending it. Seen the kind of second hand crap she lives with?”

“She doesn’t live with it anymore,” I reminded him.

His face crumpled rather as Lee’s had at this reminder, except the effect wasn’t as becoming. He recovered quickly and went on slandering someone no longer able to defend herself. A cheap shot by an even cheaper man.

“Wouldn’t spend anything on so much as a decent piece of furniture,” he seemed to be talking to himself. “Squeezed a buck. Always playing the angles. She was like that about everything, believe me. Ingrid might have been bright, beautiful and sexy but she had some bad, bad habits.”

“Such as?”

He chewed on a hangnail then answered. “She was into control and she got that by goading people. Liked throwing salt at open sores. Getting under your skin.”

Were we getting somewhere? “Did she do that to you?”

He looked down at the pointy-toed boots. “Of course she did, but that was the draw in a way. It was a game, but a sexy one.” He looked up. “She pissed someone off more than she bargained for. A game that went wrong.”

I’d thought the very same thing and it helped to have it confirmed by one of the main players. She certainly had been killed in a way that indicated someone might have been pushed that step too far – or was this the acid rant of a rejected lover? That made two on Ingrid’s scorecard, not that their acrimony had reaped any tangible rewards in our investigation so far. All we had was background. I had nothing on Barnett Pazderka. No forensic evidence and he claimed to have been out of town when Ingrid died. Until his alibi was checked I couldn’t touch him.

We stood.

“That’s it?” He sounded disappointed.

“For now,” I told him.

He stood and laughed. “Are you going to tell me not to leave town?”

“You’ve saved us the trouble,” Janet told him without smiling and Barnett looked a shade less pleased with himself.

I went through the ritual of giving him my card and reminding him that if he should by chance be hit by a thunderbolt that might help solve the case, he should contact us. I stood. “Oh. Do you know a grad student called Lee Il Kwon?”

“Yeah, one of Ingrid’s. He thinks he’s hot stuff, but he’s just another asshole as far as I can tell.”

I smiled and said nothing. He had not asked me why I wanted to know because Barnett already knew why I was asking. Intellectually talented people are easy to see through, because, more often than not, they do not have the guile of those not as blessed. They get a relatively easy ride through life and never have to be on their toes to a degree that can fool a copper who has heard it all.

I gave him yet another check in the Con column for being a clumsy liar.

As Janet and I walked down the hallowed halls of the History Department I had to do some concentrated thinking on the relationship I had just heard described by Barnett Pazderka. This is how I pictured it.

Barnett slammed the front door as he came into Ingrid's house. He found her sitting on that crap plastic sofa she'd bought in some second hand store. She was watching TV. Some anchor was beefing about something.

"You e-mail to tell me we're finished?" He realized he was yelling but somehow he always seemed to do that with Ingrid if they weren't fucking.

"What happened to knocking on the door?" Ingrid hit the remote control. The news maven was silenced. "As to breaking off with you, well I could have sent candy and flowers – ."

"Fuck you!" He pulled her to him by the shoulders. He noticed she looked tired, strained, she even flinched slightly at his touch. There were shadows under her eyes. "No one's ever treated me like this," he said.

"Then you were overdue, weren't you?" Ingrid pushed his hands away. There was a shit-eating little grin starting. The one he hated. "And spare me the tough guy posturing. God, but you must have seen some shitty movies in your time." She was wearing the white bathrobe he'd bought her, pulled tight around her body. "We were on, now we aren't."

Barnett wanted to throttle her. Didn't she know what she meant to him? Was she crazy? "What are you talking about? Things were fantastic between us. We were great together, in our heads, in bed – ."

"Barnett, we're history, if you don't mind the pun." Ingrid sank down again on the ugly sofa. "What do you care, anyway? You're all ego. I'm just the one who got away. That's what's killing you, sweetie. Poor Barnett." She actually laughed at him.

Barnett sat opposite her, stunned. "We were fine before I went off to see my kids before the holiday, then I come back and wham! Nice Christmas present, Ingrid."

Ingrid leaned back, her eyes closed. She swept her hair off her forehead, saying nothing.

Barnett leaned back, staring at her. He couldn't believe she was doing this to him. "Tell me why – ."

“It’s over because I say it’s over.” She smiled and Barnett’s heart almost stopped, she looked so beautiful. “You’re work, Barnett, don’t kid yourself. Let’s say it was too hot not to cool down.”

“Christ, you’re giving me Cole Porter lyrics – .”

“Lighten up, Barnett,” Ingrid shot back. She really didn’t look very well, and was holding her stomach. “You’re behaving as if we were engaged. We were fucking, now we’re not. Get over it.”

He stared at her. Was this how she treated other people’s feelings? Rubbing salt in the wound she’d made? What the hell. “Oh, I get it. Someone else, huh?” Barnett felt as if he was sixteen again, choking on jealousy as he had when his first girlfriend dumped him for a guy who was better looking. “You’re fucking someone else – .”

“As if you’ve ever been faithful - .”

“I have been to you – .”

“Well, well. All those coeds suffering from neglect? They can have you back.” Her mouth twisted into an odd shape then she said, with that same shit-eating grin that drove Barnett nuts, “Hasn’t a woman told you to get out of her life before? Considering the numbers, odds say it has to have happened.” She actually laughed, although he could tell it was an effort – more for effect, than anything else.

He was on his feet. “I want to know why? How can you trivialize what we had?”

An elegant eyebrow was raised. “Don’t make something out of this that it wasn’t. I’m just another notch on your bedpost. Now get out of my house.”

She wasn’t just another notch, not just the one who got away. “I care about you babe,” Barnett said and moved toward her. He fell on his knees, his head in her lap. “You know we’re special.”

He began to lift her bathrobe until it was over her thighs, but she pushed him away.

“Stop it,” Ingrid said. Her face was pale.

“Are you okay?” Barnett got to his feet. She looked like shit.

“Flu,” Ingrid managed. She stood, weaving slightly. “I’m going to be sick, help me.”

He got her to the downstairs bathroom just as Ingrid started throwing up. Ingrid’s head was over the toilet as she vomited over and over again. He stroked her back, raw with the pain of having lost her. Watching Ingrid puke her guts up, she had never looked as beautiful to him. Barnett had never wanted her as much as he did now that he had lost her.

She looked up. “Goodbye Barnett. Leave your key.”

He would get Ingrid for this. This wasn’t finished by a long shot – and

that is why he remained on my list of suspects.

Now Janet, seeing me sigh, asked, “How come you didn’t ask him about the abortion possibility? Could have been his.”

I shook my head. “If true, there might have been someone else in the frame and I didn’t want to betray what is, after all, still Ingrid Spoto’s business – even though she’s dead. If no one else comes into the frame, then I will ask him.”

“Got it.” Janet smiled. “Still crazy for her, isn’t he?”

I nodded. “Too right.”

“Maybe we’ll find a third Ingrid Spoto reject and bingo,” Janet said, as we knocked at yet another office door in our quest to interview all of Ingrid’s colleagues.

Then we met Mireille Prudhomme.

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