

Chapter 41

I got out of the tub, steam still rising, and wrapped myself in a red terrycloth robe. I had discarded the white one since it reminded me of Ingrid, lying in her bier of leaves. I turned up the heat, checked that the doors were locked back and front, stirred the fire in the living room. I'd picked up a tofu salad platter from Bon Appétit and settled myself on the sofa, legs up on the coffee table. I now ate my dinner and sipped from my bottle of mineral water and watched a video.

Sometimes when I needed to think about things and God only knows I had more on my plate that night than tofu salad, I ran *Now, Voyager*, a weepy with Bette Davis and Paul Henreid. I made a point of echoing Charlotte's final speech, as she tells Gerry of the sacrifice they must make for the sake of little Tina, his youngest daughter and the emotionally-damaged victim of what would now be known as a dysfunctional family:

"Oh Gerry, let's not ask for the moon, we have the stars."

Since I had neither, I wasn't uplifted by Bette and Paul's sacrifice. I returned to brooding over the case. I had a canvas with very few strokes – other than those made by a very clever killer. I had three dead women and suspects with alibis that seemed as dense as the doors on the vault at the Federal Reserve. I had liked Lawrence Saxton for the murders, but even if that arrogant bastard didn't think Mireille was waiting up for his return from his sex session with Ingrid, I intuited she *would* confirm the time he arrived home, down to the nanosecond. His wife might not have known what he was up to for sure, but she would have known with certainty that it had nothing to do with ministering to patients after dinner parties. Women have keen noses for that particular deceit.

On the other hand, Doc Saxton, having killed Ingrid, might know Mireille was waiting up and gambled she would lie to protect the status quo. What, when it came down to it, what would he have to lose by her knowing about his affair? Bed privileges? Hardly. Could be she'd toss him out of her life but he seemed confident she wouldn't, and my guess was that he was spot on there. Impossible to guess the dynamic of anyone else's marriage.

Chewing each mouthful of tofu carefully I turned to thoughts of Paul Spoto and that Gordian knot of conflicted feelings.

I had not had the heart to check out his alibi for the night of Ingrid's death. I would feel wretched – whether he was telling the truth or lying – so I had passed the deed on to Janet. The alibi checked out and I'd been all too right about how I would feel. What niggled almost as much was that he was richer by two million dollars; there was no getting around that damning fact. I didn't want him to be the killer, for reasons I didn't wish to discuss with myself – any more than I wanted to thrash out the issue with Herb.

Then, thinking of Paul, I remembered the photos he'd given me earlier. I'd forgotten to look at them. I got the manila envelope from the outer pocket of my bag, spilling the contents out on the kitchen table. There were about twenty or so prints. I put them in neat rows on the dining table, pushing aside with a twinge of something or other, the unsigned contract that was gathering dust like Miss Havisham's wedding cake in David Lean's *Great Expectations*. I paused, wondering why Ingrid had had only one photo on display, when she had such a cache. Ah, yet another Ingrid Spoto question that would never be answered.

Most of the pictures were dated on the back. One, taken in 1992, showed Ingrid in a white sheath with a matching jacket, holding a bouquet of white roses and looking glowingly beautiful. She was on the arm of a tall man with blond hair and smiling into the camera. He wore a navy suit that didn't fit him: rented, or borrowed? It was a wedding picture of course.

I wondered if perhaps the girl who glowed so in the photo would have stayed that way if the marriage hadn't gone so sour? She might have had a life and not embarked on a series of relationships that, as far as I could tell, were a way to use her singular beauty to abuse people cruelly. She might not have needed to embark on power trips by tormenting others with things they would rather forget or hated others knowing. Never letting them know whether she would let the boom drop was as sadistic as it was manipulative. Maybe she'd had a moral center once, but it had eroded without the feeling of ever being loved – and not merely lusted after. Then again, maybe she always knew she was not cut out for liaisons that needed parity and integrity to flourish – and her marriage had been the last hurrah of the hope that she would be able to sustain such a relationship.

There were several photos of graduation ceremonies and family holidays, snaps taken with friends, and with a group of fellow graduates at Oberlin. There were several of Ingrid, with her mother and a man who looked very much like Paul – I assumed this must be his father. There was even a photo of her with Paul, in front of an imposing residence that I assumed was the Spoto family house. I looked at it more closely. It had been taken recently,

that I was willing to swear, since Paul looked as he did now. I checked the back and sure enough, the date written down was just two years ago, almost to the day. Who had taken it?

I put the photos back in the envelope. There's nothing sadder than looking at the photographs collected by victims. Most police officers have done it and it never gets any easier. It's a way of getting to know the victim and more importantly, who might have facilitated that status, still.... The flipside was getting to know someone now dead. Someone you could never get to know any better than you already did. Not much fun in that.

I lay in bed, pretending to read the latest copy of *Vanity Fair*, sipping warm milk. I would have taken one of the sleeping pills prescribed by my homeopath, but I never trusted such medications. My fear was going to sleep and not waking up, because of taking something I shouldn't. Finally I got drowsy and drifted into sleep.

My last thought though was of the photos. One of them had stirred my memory in an odd way. It was as if I knew one of the people in one of the photos, other than Paul or Ingrid that is. How could I, though?

But I did. I knew I did.

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Mireille Prudhomme was on edge and no wonder.

“Why have you brought me here?” she asked, even as she walked into the interrogation room, Janet trailing behind her, Herb hovering outside. “I’m missing a graduate seminar, this is ridiculous. What’s so urgent that you couldn’t have come to my office? We’re all terribly upset about Ingrid and the others and now the police show up and no doubt, everyone is even more upset – .”

I cut her off, with: “Three women are dead, Professor Prudhomme. A situation that prompts urgent action, wouldn’t you agree?”

“I still find this treatment to be totally out of line, Detective.” She was doing a nice turn as the indignant but not unduly alarmed citizen. However, as she had no idea how much we already knew, she had to be churning inside. Not that anyone would have guessed so from her polished exterior. Every hair lay exactly as it was supposed to, despite a heavy rain outside that had done few favors for mine. The black silk shirt under the charcoal grey pantsuit had a crease in the leg that could have cut through butter and she wore black pumps with neat grosgrain bows. The woman was immaculate, not even a line of sweat on the upper lip – even though the room was warm and stuffy and we’d left her cooling her heels for fifteen minutes. Yet it was all window dressing. I knew the sign.

It was in the eyes that swivelled back and forth. In the problem of what to do with the hands she so wanted to wring. It was in how to control the vibrating right leg that wanted to carry her as far away from where she was now as it was possible to be. Now though, she remembered to make the right noises and turned on the charm – a gift to beguile that was wearing thin.

“I’m so sorry Detective Pimlott. I’m very upset and for reasons that must be obvious. I must, however, reiterate my shock at being brought here. That seems very dramatic and since you already know everything you need to know – .”

“About what?”

Professor Prudhomme did not look pleased by being cut off. I guessed

that didn't go down well in the lecture hall or the seminar room. "You can't suspect me of having anything to do with such brutal deaths?"

"Well, just in case, why don't you give me something in the way of an alibi?"

She was on surer ground. "When poor Eve died I was looking after Lawrence. He thought he had a cold and you know how men are when they don't feel well –."

"Not an emergency at the hospital?"

She ran her tongue over her lips, but said nothing.

"Your husband seems to have a lot of emergencies that take him away from home at night." Not as many in the future, though, I was willing to bet, but that could change, if I knew leopards.

"I'm not sure what you mean?" Those stabs of color came into her cheeks and she looked uncertain. "Of course, he has emergencies, he's a doctor." She looked at me, head to the side. "Neither Eve nor Nancy's death has anything to do with us. Neither of us would have had any reason to cause them any harm."

I believed her for now. On the other hand, what was there to have stopped her leaving the house and killing Eve, for instance, then coming home and claiming she had been preparing hubby some nostrum for his sniffles? The alibi jelled with her husband's version, though. Of course, you can leave a sick husband when he's full of medication but so can he – without your knowing he's faked taking that same medication.

I got a sympathetic smile, meant to soften me up. Oh well, it was worth a try. "I can't believe you think I had anything to do with the death of my friends –."

"Were they your friends?"

"Well, yes . . ." she looked disconcerted. "Of course."

"We were told –."

"Told what?" Two spots of red appeared in her cheeks again.

"I was told that you were not that keen on Eve Bishop – or on Ingrid Spoto."

"What? By whom?"

I did not supply names – more strategic to hold back on telling who had been telling tales, until my reticence had the right degree of impact to loosen her tongue. "By persons connected with the case, who thought it was relevant that they share such information with us."

Mireille looked at me. I wondered whether or not she ever spelled out P.A.T.I.E.N.C.E. in *her* head to compose herself, as I did. Whatever she was doing now, it worked. "Detective Pimlott, I was quite candid with you about my lack of enthusiasm for Eve Bishop, so why hash that over now. Is it your

experience that a mild distaste for someone is motive for killing? I think not. As to Ingrid, I found her interesting, bright and admittedly, decorative, which is why she was a guest in my home. I respected Nancy as my department head.”

That was good. I liked it. Not enough to let her get away with it, but there you are. “Oh, I heard you had stronger feelings than that toward Ingrid.”

That bothered Professor Prudhomme. “Rubbish and why are you harping on that? That she wasn’t my best friend? So what? Anyway, you know where I was when she died – .”

“Do I?”

I could almost hear Mireille Prudhomme’s intuition click in. We were approaching dangerous ground. “I don’t understand what you’re getting at. I was at home with my husband, we had cleared up after the party – .”

“You cleared up. He didn’t. He was visiting a patient at St Joseph’s, wasn’t he?” I put a sceptical emphasis on the word “patient” that only a troglodyte could miss – and Mireille was far from that. I could sense all the hairs on the back of her neck were standing on end, like an animal warned of some peril.

“How did you know that?”

So Doctor Saxton hadn’t come clean? “That doesn’t concern you for now.”

“Have you spoken to Lawrence?”

I smiled, but said nothing.

Now Janet spoke for the first time. “So, your husband was out of the house?”

“Yes and I’m sorry I forgot.” She was holding on by a hangnail, but she wasn’t going to break yet. “He wasn’t gone for very long. Forty-five minutes perhaps, maybe an hour.” She smiled prettily. “I forgot, because it’s so routine for Lawrence to check out his patients. He’s very conscientious.”

Quite. “What time did he come home?”

She thought about that. “I was watching a movie in bed and the midnight news bulletin had just finished. He walked past – .” She stopped, but too late.

“Past where?” Janet asked innocently.

Mireille linked her fingers, looking down at them. The French manicure was perfect. “He walked past my room. I heard him go into his bathroom and taking a shower.” She turned to me. “We have separate rooms,” Mireille told me calmly. “We aren’t romantic young things.”

That was certainly true. “If you sleep separately, Dr. Saxton wouldn’t even know if *you* were at home, would he?”

She gave an odd little tilt of her head then licked her lips. “I don’t

know what you mean? Where else would I be?"

Herb, from his listening post, paged, "Tell her about her husband," but I said: "Well, you might have been at Ingrid Spoto's – ."

"Why would I be there?" She looked ready to upset the table between us, then cut and run.

Herb paged, "Slow and easy," so I all but purred: "Because your husband was having an affair with her."

"What are you talking about?" Mireille Prudhomme was playing for time she knew had run out.

"Dr. Saxton told us everything," I told her quietly. "I think you knew about their relationship. Did you go to see her that night?"

She was as cool as it gets. "You can't prove anything at all."

I had to hand it to her, but not for long. "We found a pale hair at the murder scene. DNA." I pointed to the smooth cap of silver hair. "Just might match yours."

"Oh!" Her cheeks were livid.

"We can work on it," I told her. Then took a lucky stab in the dark. "Did you know we use luminal spray to test for blood splatter that you can't even see?"

That did it. Mireille Prudhomme looked from one of us to the other. "I suppose I have to tell you what happened that night, don't I?"

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“Well,” Mireille began, “the arrogant bastard didn’t even have the grace to tiptoe. I switched off the reading light above my bed as Lawrence was coming up the stairs. He knew there was nothing I could do to him even if I did find out he’d been with that rutting bitch. I could do something to her though, plenty. Give her a damn good scare.”

Mireille could not be stopped now. “I waited for Lawrence to get in his shower, then slipped out of bed, arranging the pillows to look like my sleeping body. I was wearing a rain jacket and the matching rain pants I’d used many times on hiking trips. There could be a lot of blood. Rubber deck shoes were under my bed and ready to slip on when I got downstairs.”

Mireille continued, “I knew I was safe in leaving the house – Lawrence would not come to my room to say goodnight, not even to bother with a post-mortem on the evening. No, he’d be too worn out from whatever he had been doing with Ingrid Spoto. God, the besotted fool had barely contained himself in getting out of the house so that he could hare over to his lover’s.”

Mireille realized she was smiling, anticipating the effects of what she was about to tell us. Who said revenge was a dish best eaten cold?

She said she was glad Ingrid had come to dinner. How clever to have invited her, to be so charming to her during the evening. In truth, Mireille had found Ingrid a tiresome woman with a sense of daunting entitlement, but she had cultivated her as soon as she knew what was going on. Throw off any suspicions. It had been comforting that Lawrence and Ingrid really didn’t suspect that she knew exactly what was going on. But no one did this to her, no one. Their marriage was a working partnership that he had betrayed. He risked holding her up to ridicule in having a liaison with someone they both knew, and in the very same neighborhood as the one in which they lived. It was only a matter of time before someone spotted him, recognized him, ruined what they had built up so carefully. Spoiled things for her.

Now it would be payback time, Mireille admitted. Now he would know what happened when he got careless. As if she didn’t know what

whispering had gone on between the two, even in her own house, just that evening. She had almost bitten the hand Lawrence had put on her shoulder after he had seen that snake out of the house.

What a shock Ingrid would get, what an even greater shock for Lawrence when he next sneaked out to fuck her and she wasn't where he expected her to be. Mireille smiled: no, no, what would be even better would be if he was down at the hospital – and he saw her name as a patient. Saw what she really looked like. Mireille now said that she had opened the closet and felt in the pocket of her winter coat. Yes, there it was, the sock with the rolls of pennies in it. It felt solid in her hand, heavy.

She was out of the house in seconds.

Ingrid had stood in the doorway wearing a tacky towelling bathrobe that looked as if it had been washed a thousand times. Probably getting ready for bed – for the second time that night, Mireille had thought bitterly. She could smell Lawrence's vetiver aftershave on Ingrid. God, the slut hadn't even showered. Her hand grasped the sock full of pennies, now stashed in the pocket of her rain jacket.

"Mireille?" Ingrid had looked mildly shocked. "Has something happened? Come in. What time is it? Aren't you out sort of late?" She did not sound pleased to see Mireille, but why would she, all things considered?

"Oh, I couldn't sleep, so I went for a walk –."

"Bit cold for that, isn't it?" They were now in the dingy foyer.

"I suppose," Mireille held up an old red scarf of her own. "You left this so I thought I'd bring it by."

Ingrid looked at her and shook her head. "That isn't mine and you know it. What's going on – oh, I get it." She actually laughed. "I would have thought you'd have more finesse."

Mireille had never seen a woman as confident as Ingrid. Was she used to this kind of confrontation? Or was this simply the kind of confidence that comes with beauty, because that's what having that advantage did for women. That would change and soon.

Ingrid shrugged. She started up the stairs. "Well, are you coming? I was working. If we're going to have a catfight, we can have it in comfort, it's warmer up in my office."

How cool Ingrid was. She certainly had no problem with dissembling in front of a betrayed wife – her performance tonight had been very polished. Practice, Mireille thought bitterly, made perfect. She followed Ingrid into a large, poorly lit room that, from the presence of a computer and all the books, identified it as an office. She saw the screensaver was on and there was a half empty glass of white wine – the woman had actually been working after what she'd been doing.

She wasn't quite ready, though. Had to ask: "Why Lawrence? You can have anyone –."

"Because he wanted me so badly," Ingrid told her. She smiled, opened her robe. "This way."

Mireille gagged at the sight of Ingrid's body bound in submission, the nausea rising up her throat. She tried to draw her gaze from a body that, to add insult to injury, was nearly twenty years younger than her own. She hated herself for envying Ingrid a body that was toned, the skin that had not entirely lost the sheen of youth. A body her husband wanted more than her own, even if he wanted only to do the things she couldn't stand. "Are you out of your mind?"

"You know his tastes, why pretend you don't?" Ingrid smiled. Was she enjoying herself? What a question – of course she was. Mireille had to hold herself back. Ingrid went on. "What he can't get from you –."

"He gets from you?" Mireille shook her head.

"How did you find out, by the way?" Ingrid wanted to know. "Surely Lawrence didn't spill his guts, he doesn't have any."

She was right about that and Mireille hated her all the more for it. "I saw you together."

Ingrid looked surprised. "When? Where?"

"At your birthday party. I saw you coming out of the bathroom and he grabbed you. His hand went up your skirt and you said something about 'Later' and I knew what he was up to." She sighed. "He's done it before."

"With anyone you know? "

Damn her, Mireille improvised. "Let's just say he likes someone who . . . well . . ." she searched for the right expression.

"Who's his equal, who can go toe to toe?" Ingrid actually smiled. "He's not my equal. I just get a kick out of letting him think he is. Makes it more fun when he thinks he's such a man, is powerful, strong. We both know how soft he is at the center."

"So, that's the fun part is it?" Perversely, she hated Ingrid for seeing through her husband like she did. It strengthened her resolve. She'd needed this little chat. It was vindication. "So, you take my husband because you like playing him off against himself? Aren't there any feelings?" Mireille wondered how Lawrence would take it if he knew how Ingrid really felt about him. In a fit of humiliated rage, would he do what she was thinking of doing? No, he wouldn't have the balls, Ingrid and she were in ironic agreement about that. Oh, that precious ego of his. Just wait until she had the pleasure of telling him. "Why Lawrence though? There are plenty of easy pickings around," she persisted.

Ingrid looked at her, head to one side. "I liked undermining that image

of yours. Knowing how phony you are as a couple. It's satisfying to see the underside. Interesting to be running on a parallel track to all that perfection, that golden couple shit, that status seeking. My relationship with Lawrence is how he really is and we both know that. Shall I tell you something else?"

"Why don't you?" Mireille was close to doing what she had come here to do. Show Ingrid Spoto and that fool Lawrence who was running the show. She just needed her anger to peak, needed the adrenalin to surge. "Tell me what you're dying to tell me."

Ingrid walked over to her. Mireille could feel the heat from her body. "I like the kinkiness, I like the leather, love the things we do together. I just might keep Lawrence around. I might even take him away from you, permanently. I can, you know." She smiled, impressive white teeth flashing. "Oh, dear, you'd be the middle-aged divorcee who got dumped for the younger model and one that is more of a catch, as well. You'll hate that." She stopped smiling. "Being beautiful is a bonus, you know. It isn't everything but it can get you what you want if you use it. People are so vulnerable to beauty. Silly, really, it's only an accident of Nature, after all, and yet if you have it you get all credit."

Mireille thought: *So this is what it's like to feel mad with rage*, then immediately realized Lawrence would never leave her, at least, not for someone with so overweening an ego as Ingrid's; he couldn't stand the competition. Oh, the irony. Still, she felt every nerve end egging her on to do what she wanted to do so badly – to spoil Ingrid so that Lawrence wouldn't want her at all. Come to think of it, no one would want Ingrid ever again when it came to that – if someone took away the beauty Ingrid used to spoil other peoples' lives. She was about to perform a public service. Mireille wrapped the end of the sock in her hand and withdrew it slowly.

"No, he won't want you," she told Ingrid now. "Not if you aren't beautiful anymore."

She swung the sock straight into Ingrid's face as hard as she could and didn't stop . . .

Perhaps she hadn't meant to go this far, but so be it. She had been right to wear the waterproofs. She realized she was breathing heavily. Ingrid was on her knees, trying to speak, but there was only the mockery of movement with those bruised lips. Her cheekbones, jaw and mouth were badly injured, the tissue starting to bruise and swell terribly. A broken tooth lay by Mireille's knee and her stomach turned over.

"I got carried away, but that was your own fault for not knowing when to shut up," she murmured as Ingrid struggled unsuccessfully to get up from the floor. "Now listen very carefully. You'll tell the police and anyone who asks that this was the work of an intruder. If you tell them I did this, I will have

nothing to lose and I'll let the world know what you and Lawrence have been up to. He won't thank you. You underestimated me. Ingrid." Mireille looked down at the mess she had made, knowing exactly what she'd done. "I've taken away your power, haven't, I?"

She stood. "You picked the wrong one this time, Ingrid, what's mine is mine and no one does anything that threatens the way I live – ." Mireille froze. Was that a sound from somewhere in the house? She waited. No, she was safe. She could leave now, no one the wiser.

Except that is for Lawrence, when it pleased her to tell him. She would hold this over him forever.

Her story finished, Mireille Prudhome was calm, which was more than could be said for me. I hadn't come across many elegant academics given to acts of violence. Neither Janet nor Herb had anything to add, so I assumed their experience had been pretty much the same.

I cleared my throat. "Why the sock and the coins?"

"I saw it on TV once."

Oh, that cleared up that mystery. "What did you do with your clothes? Your shoes? They must have been covered with blood?"

"I took them off in the kitchen at home. I put them in the washing machine in the utility room and washed them the next morning with bleach. They're in the downstairs closet where I keep them."

Herb paged, "We'll get someone to check those out with luminal." "Why?" I asked, "I mean why not throw them away?"

Her composure was unnerving. "I planned to at some point in the future. I couldn't take the risk of the police finding them in the garbage, so I would wait until they had stopped looking for them – if they ever did look for them."

Well, I'd no reason to think her stupid. Mireille and her husband were quite a couple. It was a pleasure to break them up. I knew from the autopsy that the wounds to the face and the fatal blows were dealt at different times by differing weapons, but I wanted her to confirm that finding during this interrogation. "You're sure you didn't kill her?"

"Yes. Oh, God . . ." She was becoming agitated as she realized in what direction our chat was going. After all, we only had her word for it that she hadn't finished the job on Ingrid. In the heat of the moment – wham! Mireille went into back-tracking mode. "You aren't pinning this on me. She was already sitting up, trying to come after me. I didn't hit Ingrid on the head, or on any other part of her body. I just wanted her face to be spoiled. I didn't mean to go as far as I did." Saying it out loud it was as if she realized for the first time what she'd done. "Oh God," she repeated then put her face in her hands, shaking her head back and forth, shoulders quaking.

I got the picture. I had another concern. If Mireille Prudhomme hadn't killed Ingrid as she claimed, who had? God, the more we found out, the less we knew. I waited, letting the woman regain some degree of composure.

"Are you sure your husband was at home?"

She looked up, dry-eyed. "I suppose so. I didn't check, if that's what you're wondering."

"What was the sound you heard?"

"What?" She sounded dazed.

"You said there was a noise of some sort as you were leaving Ingrid Spoto's house."

Mireille nodded. She looked very pale, but she was calm. "Yes, I did, but I'm not sure how to describe it." She stopped, took a deep breath. "It sounded like wood being snapped."

Had she heard a door being broken into? "What time would you say this was?"

She thought about that. "Yes, yes, of course," all eagerness now. "As I arrived home, the clock in the kitchen read 12:45. I wasn't there for more than twenty minutes. She was conscious when I left. I couldn't have killed her. I heard someone else. Trying to get into the house. I must have heard them breaking in. Probably the back door."

"Why do you say that?" Janet asked.

"Because I left by the front door and *it* was fine." She spread her fingers on the table in front of her, looking pleased with her deductive powers.

All of this worked for me, however. Ingrid Spoto could have died at about 1:00 in the morning according to the medical examiner and give or take a few minutes we had pinned down the time with the help of a reliable witness. Well, the term reliable in this case could only be narrowly applied, but we knew she could tell the time and that she had been in the house. While I was thinking of all this Herb paged, "Read her her rights." It was time for an arrest.

"Mireille Prudhomme, I am charging you with felonious assault. You have the right to an attorney and . . ." I continued reading over her shrieks of: "You can't do this to me! You can't!" It was the first really spontaneous reaction I had seen from her.

Janet helped her to stand, a hand under her left elbow. She looked as if she was going to pass out, but stayed on her feet. "I didn't kill her. I told you. This is wrong, I want my lawyer."

I repeated her request into the tape recorder, officially finished the interrogation and turned off the machine. "I'm afraid you confessed to felonious assault and that is a chargeable offense – exclusive of the actual assault that caused her death."

She stared at me in disbelief. "Will I go to prison?"

“I have no idea, but it’s a possibility.”

“But I cooperated with you. Told you the truth.” Mireille clearly could not believe what was happening.

I nodded. “Yes, and that will be taken into account. For now though, you have to be charged.”

“Do I have to stay here? In the police station I mean?” She sounded appalled and who could blame her?

“You’ll go in front of a judge this afternoon and probably be granted bail.”

“I have classes . . .” her voice trailed off.

“Not for a while,” I told her.

I had lost count of the Con points she had earned, nor did I any longer think she looked like Fanny Ardant. The French actress had warmth, while Mireille Prudhomme had none.

None at all.

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Janet and I stood outside the station, getting a breath of air. The sun shone brightly, even though the air was biting cold. Janet wore Raybans with reflective lenses and the effect was as menacing as it was cool. I said so.

“Goes with the image,” she said blandly. She was so young. “So what do you think?”

“I think Mireille Prudhomme will be running the slammer within an hour of arrival and that her husband will be getting offers from women desperate to wear anything he wants them to, just for the chance of being his love slave.”

“Detective Pimlott, that is so, so cynical.” She sounded shocked to the core. I had forgotten that cynicism was not next to Godliness in the optimistic Midwest.

Yes, well police work does not tenderize the heart. “You’re right,” I thought for a moment. “How’s this? She becomes the mother figure to all who pass through the prison library where she spends her time running seminars on Canadian history. Lawrence will be waiting for her when she gets out and rich beyond their wildest dreams from selling their story to Fox for a docudrama, then they’ll retire happily together to Florida.”

“Florida, now that’s where I should be,” Herb said, walking out behind us. He was fiddling with his glasses, attaching clip-on lenses that he flipped down against the sun.

“Why don’t you buy some prescription sunglasses Lieutenant Fedewa?” Janet asked.

“Because I don’t want to look like someone’s sidekick from *Men in Black*.” Herb had other things on his mind. “Let’s catch the asshole who did this, okay? I think you need to check out anyone who might have had any kind of grudge against the History department at the university. I mean *three* from the same department? Maybe someone didn’t get the Ph.D they thought they deserved or someone didn’t get a job when they wanted it. A longshot, but what the hell. Who might know?”

Janet and I looked at each other. “Madge!” We said together.

“Madge is the History Department secretary and knows all. It’s how she controls the troops,” I explained. Herb looked from one of us to the other. “And you’re waiting for what?”

We hit the road and were walking into Olds Hall within minutes

Madge checked us out. “You were here before,” she told me, then looked Janet up and down, “I recognize the string bean. You were good on the court,” she said. Janet thanked her. Then she turned to me, large arms crossed against her even larger bosom. “Why did you drag Professor Prudhomme out of here this morning? Have you any idea of how upsetting that was to everyone?”

Not as upsetting as for Professor Prudhomme, I could have pointed out. I took a deep breath. “Professor Prudhomme is helping us with our investigation. She won’t be back for a while. On the campus I mean.”

“Hmm.” Madge glared at me. “Oh, and just who will teach her classes? She has a seminar tonight, as well. We’ve been going crazy trying to find people to take over for our faculty. Just what are you people doing to find their killer?”

I avoided the question, because I wasn’t all that sure myself. “We need your help.” I explained what that would be – “Anyone that you can think of who might have a grudge against the department? An unhappy student? An unsuccessful job applicant who might have taken that rejection to heart more than is appropriate?”

“A few of those, I can tell you.” She looked at me, with narrowed eyes and a grim expression. It was scary.

Janet and I made the appropriately sympathetic noises, then asked Madge, “Please e-mail a list to us as soon as possible.”

She said she would but she was not going to make it easy. “I’m real busy though, so I can’t swear it’ll be today.”

“Of course you can,” I encouraged her, then we walked out of the department office.

We left the building and walked toward my car. “Well that wasn’t much help, I’d half hoped she’d remember someone and Eureka, Watson.”

Janet smiled. “Yes, that would have been nice . . . oh – .”

“What?”

She pointed across the parking lot. “Isn’t that Professor Thomas?”

It was indeed and as smartly turned out as always, but he was still hobbling badly and carrying his knapsack instead of having it slung over his shoulder. I knew a bad back when I saw one. Probably had to do with his right hand being held in the small of his back. He waved and winced at the same time. We walked over. He greeted us with a smile, but it was an effort.

“I see your back is still troubling you?”

“I’m afraid so.” He nodded wearily. There were shadows under his eyes and an anxious expression on his face. His voice mirrored that concern. “Is it true you had Mireille Prudhomme brought to headquarters?”

I just smiled and said nothing. Why add a beat or two to the jungle drums?

“I don’t suppose you . . .?” He looked from me to Janet and back. He accepted my silence with grace. “No, no, of course you can’t tell me anymore. Please excuse me.” He checked his watch. “I’ve been feeling off all day because I overslept.”

“Because of your back, right?” Janet asked.

Charles nodded and offered a weary smile. “Yes, over-doing the painkillers, I’m afraid.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.”

“Oh, please.” He smiled ruefully. “I used to be so impatient with older people with ‘a back,’ as they used to put it. Look at me now. Had to come in by cab.” He checked his watch again. “In fact, I’m waiting for one to come now and take me home. I taught a class this morning and I’m exhausted.” He looked it.

“We could drive you,” I began, but his cab rolled up as I said that. We helped him into the car and got him settled and his knapsack tucked away. There was a flurry of “Thank yous,” “Not at alls,” and the inevitable “Not a problem.” As he drove off he waved through the window and smiled wearily.

I stood watching the cab roll out of the parking lot.

“What is it?” Janet wanted to know.

“Nothing,” I said, because it was more a shadow of something that had flashed across my mind, not anything I could articulate. But there was something, yes, definitely something fluttering in my consciousness. Oh, why did it have to remain so maddeningly elusive?

I was having a Hitchcock moment.

Chapter 45

Paul and I sat across from one another in an uncomfortable booth, with seats that seemed to be made of perspex and cardboard, in Billy's Bar and Grill on Delacroix. Whoever had designed Billy's had seen *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. I really should have been wearing white shorts with my midriff bared like Lana, but *she* would have caught a nasty chill if the weather had been as rotten as it was this evening.

I usually avoided red meat, which, beside the silly décor, was another problem I had with Billy's. It would be fish and salad for a week as compensation for courting beefy toxins, but when I'd called Paul at 6:00, as promised, he sounded so eager, the way men do at the thought of meat, that I had caved in.

It was raining again and I couldn't park as close to this crowded joint as I would have liked. My new mock crock high heels were not improved by a dousing. My hair was the paradigm of a dreaded bad hair day: frizz on frizz. I would have defied even Boris to fix that bird's nest.

I had wanted to wear a berry-colored wool dress that flattered my complexion and made my waist look slim, as a bonus, but there was a salad dressing stain on the front – right between my tits. I ended up in gray wool pants and a matching sweater that kept riding up. It was not my night sartorially.

Billy's had a salad bar but I didn't like food to be left out under lights; unpleasant things prosper in such circumstances. The baked potato with my main course was as big as my thighs would be if I ate it. The ambient music in the background had nothing to do with what was going on in the foreground – guests shouting over one another, because wooden floors and nothing on the walls does nothing for acoustical comfort. Discomfort was the kind of evening it promised to be.

Promises are made to be broken, however. I had the first real laughs I'd had since the case began and what a release. I was stumped by his question of which character said: "Anyone who believes that I'll turn informer for nothing is a fool."

"Peter Ustinov in *Spartacus*," Paul told me triumphantly.

That did it. "I think it would be fun to run a newspaper – ."

"George Coulouris in *Citizen Kane*. Please . . . Next you'll be asking me who wanted to round up the usual suspects."

We ate petit filet mignon that was far from "petit," but delicious, and we drank a fine merlot. Red wines have valuable antioxidants, so I did not feel guilty. Paul said he didn't feel guilty regardless, which I took in good part.

Telling Paul about Gavin had been a good thing to do for any number of reasons. I was beginning to feel better in myself. I told Paul that.

"Good," he said. "More wine?"

I shook my head, regretfully. "No, driving and I have a big day tomorrow."

"Have you made any progress?" Paul asked quietly.

"I've been finding out who isn't guilty, which is a help, but not all that much." I hesitated and then decided he was entitled to hear what had happened to his sister at the vengeful hands of Mireille Prudhomme and why she had behaved as she had.

He listened impassively, although I noticed he pushed away what was left of his steak. "There's no chance that her husband could have sneaked back?"

"No, we asked her and she says he was in the house when she got home," I offered.

He sighed. "I had hoped things would be more straightforward, although, with Ingrid, nothing ever was."

I had some other thoughts to explore on the subject of the lady herself. One thing was for certain: all roads led to Rome. The murders of Eve Bishop and Nancy Marcus piggybacked on Ingrid's— and it didn't take Sam Spade to figure that one out.

We were both quiet for a moment, sipping our wine.

"The odd thing about Ingrid is what a chameleon she was," I said, thinking out loud more than anything else. "Maybe that was how she seduced people."

"Yes," he said quietly. "Yes, she was seductive, no doubt about it."

An odd comment for a brother to make, but then again he wasn't her brother, really. He leaned back, then reached for my hand. "Is this okay?"

Oh, yes, yes, yes. "It's okay," was all I said though. I marveled at being so attracted to Paul that contact between our fingertips made me want to slide him down in the booth and have my way with him and to hell with either the sensibilities of our fellow diners, or my professional responsibilities.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he said, as if I needed reminding.

"Yes, I know."

We were both quiet.

“What next, for us, I mean?”

“Dessert?” The coward’s way out, but with a triple homicide investigation in full swing, messing around romantically with someone closely involved was unwise to say the very least. Putting that resolve into practice was going to be the trick.

Our server Will was over in a flash with a dessert menu as tall as I was. “I can recommend the ‘Death by Chocolate,’” he advised.

Yes, well, all things considered, his suggestion did what was needed to let some air into an intense atmosphere. After telling a disappointed Will that cappuccinos would do for us I called after him, “Skimmed milk for me.”

As to Paul and me, well it was time to get something straight.

“I don’t think we should see each other like this again, until the case is cracked. You understand what I mean, don’t you?”

“As long as the only obstacle is professional, yes,” Paul said, and there were little crinkles around his eyes when he smiled that nearly undermined my resolve.

Taking a deep breath I admitted: “It is.”

“So we will see where this is going when we can?”

“I’d like that.”

“Sooner rather than later?”

“Yes,” I agreed.

“As soon as this is over?”

I nodded.

“A long weekend in Chicago? I’ll book you into a hotel of course. We can get to know each other, properly.”

I nodded, temporarily having lost the power of speech. All women know that feeling. Those that say they don’t are either lying, or dead from the neck down. Speaking of which. “I have something to tell you. About Ingrid.”

“There’s more?” Paul looked unnerved.

“Do you know of anyone Ingrid might have been seeing two years ago?”

“Why do you ask?” Our cappuccinos arrived and Will pressed us to go mad and have a cognac, but we declined. He went off looking even more disappointed than when we had rejected dessert.

“Well . . .” Should I tell him what I was about to tell him? Yes, he was Ingrid’s only family, perhaps he would remember something that she had told him that would help. “Something happened that may, or may not have had any bearing on the case.”

“What?”

“She had an abortion.” I stirred my cappuccino thoughtfully, staring into the chocolate-flecked foam. “I suppose I was thinking that whoever’s

child that was might have been brooding about it, then done something. Of course – .”

I looked up at Paul and knew how Pandora must have felt.

Chapter 46

Mouth dry, I asked: “You last saw her two years ago, didn’t you? About this time of year?”

Paul licked his lips, as if they were as dry as my mouth. “Yes.”

“It’s what I think it is, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“You slept with her. And that was your child.”

“Yes.”

“You knew about the abortion.”

He took a deep breath. “Yes, I’m afraid I did.”

I said nothing.

“Let me explain,” he said.

I said “Okay” because it was my duty to do so.

“I remember standing with her in the living room of the house I’d grown up in – and feeling for the first time like an orphan,” Paul began.

“So this is it?” I had said.

“Yes,” Ingrid had agreed from across the cavernous room. “Daddy’s been dead for a year, it’s time to sell. The real estate agent said a house like this will go quickly.” She held up an instamatic snap of the two of them smiling into the camera. “It was nice of the agent to take this. It’s a wonderful likeness of you. Can I keep it?”

I had smiled, “Sure.”

“Thanks.” Ingrid had put the photo in her coat pocket as she looked around. “Shame, isn’t it. It’s too big for me and besides I’m living in West Rapids now and I’ve bought something there, mostly as a tax write-off. It’s just a house in the burbs. Silly really for a woman on her own who isn’t into yards and housey type stuff, but needs must. Do you . . .?”

“No,” I shook my head. “No. I’m settled.”

“We can split the proceeds, although I can’t get over how generous Daddy was to both of us.”

“She turned toward to me,” Paul continued, “I had forgotten how tall she was, how beautiful. Time seemed only to improve her, to have given her a

glow that made the brown wool coat she was wearing look even duller. Ingrid had never been interested in clothes, things. Not even as a girl. Our father had always laughed, said how odd that someone so decorative had no feeling for other objects with that quality.”

“You deserved your money,” I had said. “The jury’s still out on me.”

“Never make a defence or an apology before you have been accused,” Ingrid had said.

“Who said that?” I asked.

“Ingrid had opened her coat. ‘Charles the First, I think.’ The deep V of her black sweater showed the shadow between her breasts. I could not take my eyes off that swell of flesh; it was still holding the faint tint caused by the summer sun. I had always found her attractive, sexy even. My wife had known that, teased me about it. Did Ingrid know it, though?” Paul speculated.

“Ingrid’ . . .” – I tried to find the words, guilt and shame making my face feel warm and not just over the circumstances of our father’s death and my own dubious performance as his son. “I can’t thank you enough for what you did for Dad. I should . . . well, I wish I had been here.”

“I remember Ingrid walking toward me, smiling as she put her hands on my shoulders. It was disconcerting to be with a woman tall enough to do that. “What’s done is done. Anyway, at least you’ve gotten rid of the Fox.”

Paul laughed now, explaining that this had been the family nickname for his ex-wife, with her red hair and sharp features. “Yes, but still...” I had protested.

“Ingrid circled her arms around my neck. I wanted to push her away, I knew I should. I was aware of Ingrid as a woman, wickedly conscious of the warmth of her, the contours of her body. I didn’t want to feel that way, even as I knew I always had. I felt it was wrong for no real reason, except of course, the obvious one.”

“The same could not be said of Ingrid,” Paul added, “since she moved even closer to me.” “We need to see more of one another, don’t you think?” she had said.

“Perhaps,” I had answered warily.

“Ingrid had pressed her body into mine. ‘I’ve always found you attractive,’ she had said.”

“I felt my body reacting to her softness, her warmth. I could not push her away. I wanted to and yet I didn’t. She knew how curious I was and softly her lips brushed against my neck. I tried to pull back but she put her arms around my waist. She was strong. I tried joking. ‘Er, isn’t this incest?’”

“Ingrid had smiled. ‘No, but wouldn’t it be fun if it was?’ I knew I should get away from her, that what I was in danger of doing would be a stain on my memory forever. I could not stop my hands from cupping her breasts.”

I had never seen Paul look so miserable as he persevered with his recital.

“Ingrid laughed gently as I slipped the coat from her shoulders. Her hand began sliding into my pants as she kissed me, her tongue caressing mine. I knew I was gone, that I would have to sleep with her. ‘Who will know and what difference will it make?’ she had murmured.”

He would, and it would make all the difference in his world. Ingrid knew that too and yet Paul could do nothing to stop himself – and that made him ashamed. Ingrid would never let him forget that.

I stared into my cold cappuccino, foam gone. Who would want to drink such a disappointment? For once, I could not think of a single movie reference that touched on how I felt.

“It only happened that once,” he now offered.

Oh, that made all the difference. “You should have told me immediately.”

He looked angry. “Why on earth would I tell you? It happened two years ago, how could it have anything to do with her death?”

“Everything may have relevance in a homicide.” I leaned back against the back of the booth, to keep some distance between us as much as anything else. “When did she tell you she was pregnant?” And why had she told him? Of course, I knew exactly why. Why let a fish off the hook, when he might be of use to you later? Guilt made such good bait.

“It couldn’t have been more than a month after we . . .” To do him justice he sounded terrible.

“Were together?” I supplied, keeping my tone as neutral as I could. “She’d taken one of those drugstore tests,” he confirmed.

“Blue for danger,” I said.

Paul nodded, avoiding looking at me. “Yes. She told me that the abortion was scheduled; it would be nowhere near West Rapids.”

“How did you feel?”

He looked at me. “Surely you can guess?”

“Why don’t you tell me now?”

Paul’s eyes met mine for the first time in several minutes. “Because you know.” He waved to Will and indicated our need for the check. “I can only tell you I was ashamed. That even though we were not related, had never really had a relationship that was in any way that of brother and sister, I felt I was doing something very wrong, something that I would never fully forgive myself for, even as I was doing it. The point here though, is can *you* forgive me?”

“I don’t know,” I told him, surprised by myself. Minutes ago I should have said that as a couple our future was in the same state as our cappuccinos,

but it seemed that I wasn't as ready to write us off as I'd thought. Were the feelings I had for this man already so deep that it made coming to terms with what he had done seem possible? "I have to think about it."

He reached for my hand but I wasn't ready for that. "I'm going to take that as a sign not to stop trying," he said quietly.

Will brought the bill and whisked off Paul's Visa card.

What was I getting myself into? As I sat looking at Paul signing the check, I reckoned – again to my surprise – I was getting myself into something I was reasonably sure I wanted to be in. I was seeing Paul Spoto in focus for the first time: no editing, no fancy background music, no key light to soften the effect. I didn't know what to do next, though. I wasn't quite ready to share my feelings with him yet. He deserved to wait.

"We should go," I said. We left the restaurant and walked out into a rainstorm. I gave him a short thank you for dinner and promised that I would call him tomorrow.

"Wait, please, Sophie," he protested as I got in my car. "We can't leave it like this."

"I just don't know," I called out of the window as I drove off. The rain was coming down in punishing sheets. I drove home slowly, the rain getting heavier and heavier, the windshield wipers going faster and faster – which always sent me into a sort of trance. I started to think about the case – mostly to get my mind off Paul and Ingrid and where I stood in that equation – then put the brakes on suddenly. This came as a shock to the driver behind me, who let me know just how much of a shock it has been to him as he passed me. Too bad, I'd had an epiphany.

Now the pieces went together as neatly as a jigsaw. I knew who had killed Ingrid, Eve and Nancy and I was pretty damn sure I knew why. I dialled Herb on my cell phone and left a message telling him what I suspected, and asked that he meet me at home, pronto, then I left the same message for Janet.

We were going to pay a visit on a killer, so safety in numbers.

I arrived home and, shaking the rain off, I went immediately to the dining table where I checked through Ingrid's stash of photographs. I shuffled impatiently through them until I tracked down the one of her with that group from Oberlin. Yes, I was sure.

The killer was younger in the photo, very different, to put it mildly, but definitely the person I suspected. Well, well, we were on our way. A call the next day to Oberlin and a list of the graduating class of 1991, to confirm what I knew would be the truth, and we were on our way to an arrest.

The doorbell rang and with the photo in my hand I hurried to the door and opened it. "Herb, guess what – ."

"I think I have already." Someone told me this, but it wasn't Herb and

it wasn't Janet.

Oh bugger; bugger; bugger, as Hugh Grant would have said.

Chapter 47

My unwelcome visitor pushed past me into the house, letting in gusts of rain. Flipping down the hood of a black plastic rain poncho with one hand, I saw that the other held a soggy brown paper bag from Bon Appétit. Even as I heard the latch clicking firmly into place on the front door, I remembered where my gun was, or rather where it wasn't. I had left it in my daytime purse, so that it wouldn't look lumpy in my evening bag. I had left the former on the dining table, now blocked from my reach by guess who?

Oh dear.

My first thought was of Herb and Janet. Where were they? On their way here, I hoped, and on the double, at that. Oh God: say Janet had a date and he got lucky, which would mean the opposite for me? Was Herb someplace where his cell phone would be turned off? My second thought was about the piece of slime standing in the middle of my living room. I had the distinct feeling I was in for a time that would not only be bad, but my last, to boot. I looked desperately around me, but I had not a single idea of how to get out of the mess I was in. If only I had the martial arts skills of an Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill* – parts 1 and 2 – why skimp at such a moment? Bit late to learn, though.

A cold, wet hand encased in a surgical glove took the photo out of my hand and studied it. “Ah yes, I thought it might be something like this.” Lifting the rain poncho, the photo was slipped into a pocket. “Sit down.” A hand waved me in the direction of the sofa. “Sit down and keep your hands beside you – where I can see them.”

I felt a wave of fear and immediately needed to pee, but I kept myself in check and did as I was told. I had no idea if my guest was armed. I needed to keep the killer talking until I got an idea of what to do – as in kick the miserable shit out of my home and into the nearest prison cell.

“How did you know I liked you as the killer?” I asked. What was the point of beating around the bush?

“Call it woman’s intuition,” my visitor said with a smirk.

“Which told you what, exactly?”

“That I needed to have an urgent chat with you, privately. If you knew nothing, I would have used the excuse of a car problem and the dubious coincidence of stopping at your home for help, but coincidences do happen, don’t they? That would have been it – and I would have been on my way.”

“You didn’t think I might have been suspicious of such a lame excuse?” I was being asked what sort of a dodo did I look like? Why, the kind that opened the door to strangers when she had left her gun out of reach, that kind of dodo.

“Suspicious without proof, remain exactly that,” my visitor said.

A good point. “What gave me away this time?”

“You rushing to the door waving a photograph and calling out the name of the beefy Lieutenant Fedewa – as if you’d discovered gold. I suppose in a way you had.” The tone of voice was laconic to say the least.

“It could have been because a fuse had blown.”

“No, no, Detective Pimlott. Ingrid had already told me about the existence of a photograph – and there you were, waving it around.”

“Can I offer you a glass of wine or something? A nice cup of Earl Grey to take the chill off?”

At least that got a smile. “Oh how English, to offer me a cup of tea.”

“Yes, well, we like to handle a crisis in a civilized way.”

“I think I’ll pass on that though, this isn’t a social call and from your greeting at the door I assume your superior will be here sooner rather than later.”

I bloody well hoped so. “Well, we had no arrangement – .”

“Oh come now.”

“Take your chances,” I said. I would not show how frightened I was until I was out of options. Actually, they were thin on the ground already, but hope springs, etcetera. “I’ve guessed why you killed Ingrid – .”

“Oh?”

“She knew, didn’t she? About what you’d done, I mean?”

“I couldn’t risk her spreading what she knew about me. Oh, she hadn’t threatened me with direct exposure, but she did hint at sharing the news with others – she had something on Nancy Marcus and wanted to demonstrate her power at my expense. She liked tweaking my misery at the thought of what would happen if people somehow found out. and that’s why, finally, I killed her. I couldn’t take the mockery anymore. Couldn’t take the chance on her going public. Couldn’t trust her not to. She was enjoying herself at the expense of my life.”

“So you killed two other people as well.”

I got no response. “When did she know who you were? I mean was it ever since she came to West Rapids?”

“No, no. I thought I was safe. The very few times we ran into one another there was no sign of recognition.”

“But you recognized her?”

“Of course, how could you forget someone so beautiful, on the outside, that is. Inside, though, the woman was as poisonous as a toadstool. A stunted, ugly thing.” The rancor was almost palpable.

“What she was doing to me sounded like the sort of number she was running on other people as well. Winnowing out their secrets and using such information against them.”

“Does it? Well, *you* must know quite a bit by now about how Ingrid operated,” I proposed.

“What foolishness to think I was home safe, that I had got away with what I’d done with no one any the wiser. She came to me about two months ago, waving the photo in my face and of course she continued torturing me. Apparently she’d received a box of things from her father’s house and, not being the sentimental type, had only recently bothered to open it.”

“I’m sorry.”

I got a head-to-one-side look. “Yes, I should imagine you are, all things considered.”

I cut to the chase. “She recognized you from the from Oberlin photo.”

Ingrid’s killer sank into an armchair opposite me. “Yes. Oh, we weren’t in the same group at Oberlin, I had already started a graduate program and she was an undergrad, but we ran across one another occasionally. Funny isn’t it that I don’t even remember that photo being taken.”

“What was your name then?”

I got only a sigh. “Oh, why not tell you? You won’t be telling anyone.” My mouth went dry and I said nothing.

“I was *Caroline* Thomas then.”

Chapter 48

I nodded. “When did you have the . . . well . . . procedure?”

“Very tactful, and thank you for not asking why. The term is gender reassignment, by the way.”

“Regardless of the medical terminology, to undergo what you endured speaks for itself.”

Charles Thomas stared into space. “I hated being in a woman’s body, you know. Hated it, always. Oh, you can be a ‘tomboy’ when you’re young, but as you get older, there are expectations that were repellent to me. Do you know what it’s like to live a complete lie, to inhabit a body you despise?”

I had the impulse to say that all women feel that way at times, but the circumstances were hardly conducive to sharing girlish confidences about flabby thighs and bad hair days. Anyway, he was a man now, why should I? “No, but I can see how desperate you’d be.”

“No, you can’t,” he told me amiably enough, but I wasn’t fooled. He had suffered and Ingrid had threatened to bring pain back into his life. He looked regretful. “I only wanted to be myself, to feel at peace, but Ingrid wouldn’t let me be. Can you understand that?”

I understood, but only up to a point. What he had done to change his life so radically took courage, but Ingrid had threatened to hold him up to ridicule and just as bad, to unwanted curiosity. Unfortunately, he could no more trust me than he could trust Ingrid – and look what he’d done to her.

He continued. “I made the break after Oberlin. I went to Holland and had the surgical procedure I needed. Fortunately I had a sizeable trust fund, so money wasn’t a problem. Not cheap doing what I needed to do. Did you know it’s much more complicated for a woman to undergo gender reassignment than vice versa?”

I hadn’t thought about this. “No, but it must have been terrible at several levels. What about your family?”

Charles looked sad. “I have nothing to do with them anymore. Part of the price I paid. The price they paid was to pay me off, so that I wouldn’t embarrass them. I’m quite well off. An irony there, perhaps. Oh that’s right,

you English say Americans don't understand irony."

"Irony is a function of intelligence not nationality and only the talking heads on programs that go out so late that only their relatives tune in would be fooled by the difference," I said, wanting to keep him talking.

I got a shrug. "My brothers were particularly hostile. Worth doing what I did, though." He sounded defiant. "For the first time in my life I felt like myself, happy in my own skin. Can you imagine what a relief that is?"

Since all too many people had never experienced that relief, but merely played the hand they had been dealt, I almost told Charles Thomas to take his head out of his fundament – but mine was not the power position, so I played along. "Yes, I think I can. I can try, at least." I could, to say nothing of how much I wanted to keep him talking.

"I'd escaped from Caroline forever. It was wonderful, heady. When I changed my name by deed poll I was truly reborn. I came back to the US and applied for transfer to the PhD program at NYU. No one really questioned why Caroline Thomas was now Charles Thomas. I passed it off as an embarrassing administrative error by some clerk in some records office of the college, nothing to get worked up about and easy enough to rectify. You'd be surprised what being nice to people can accomplish. I've never had any trouble being nice though. It's in my nature."

I knew several people who might have disagreed with that, but I kept my counsel as he continued his story.

"I was at UC Santa Barbara for a few years. then six years ago I was offered tenure if I would come here. I've been happy, had a good life, one that I deserved, that I chose, that I suffered to attain." His expression hardened. "Then Ingrid threatened everything."

"Right, right." I needed him to relax, to let his guard down even for a second, so that I could take a chance and rush him. I had one or two good offensive moves that might stun him long enough to get at my gun on the table – just over his shoulder.

"God, the woman was relentless."

"She had no reason."

There were tears in his eyes. "Certainly not a reason to threaten ruin to another person's life, but there you are. Ingrid liked power, liked having something to hold over people's heads. Do you know what should be written on her tombstone?"

I shook my head.

"It would read 'When I said jump, they asked how high?'" He didn't seem to be enjoying his own dark humor. His hands gripped the arms of the chair in which he sat. "In my case, she couldn't accomplish that sexually, but, being a lateral thinker, she found the stick to beat me with. My own history."

“So you killed her?”

He looked at me beseechingly. “How could I possibly trust her to keep her mouth shut about it?” He stopped speaking, brooding over that unfortunate truth. “After Mireille had smashed her to pieces – .”

“So you knew about that?”

He nodded. “I delivered the coup de grâce. I’d better tell you about that, hadn’t I?”

I swallowed hard. “That would be good.”

Charles had waited for the front door to shut, then crept out of the kitchen into the dark living room. What had Mireille Prudhomme, of all people, been doing at Ingrid’s and so late? If what the gossips said of Ingrid, it must have had something to do with sex. That wandering eye of Lawrence’s, no doubt, had prompted Mireille to protect her property. She was such an accomplished woman and such a fine cook; the salmon had been superb and the lemon mousse delicious. He *had* found the banter during dinner to be rather tedious; all those high-flyers tooting their own horns – still, not a bad evening. He sighed now. Meryl Streep in *Silkwood* was the late show offering and he had so been looking forward to it. He really had to learn to operate that timing devise on the DVD.

He had seen the beam of light from upstairs at the same moment that he heard someone moaning. Climbing the stairs, he realized he was hearing Ingrid. What had happened? He stopped for a moment on the landing, wondering. What had Mireille done? Had things gone past the talking stage? Had Ingrid opened her ugly mouth once too often?

He was appalled when he saw the blood everywhere; even more shocked when he saw the condition Ingrid was in. She was on her knees, lurching back and forth. He could not believe what she was wearing: some obscene leather get-up that exposed her breasts. What had she been up to?

But it was her face that horrified him. Ingrid’s lovely face was nothing more than pulp. No nip and tuck genius could fix that amount of damage. For one moment his heart went out to her, then he remembered what she was holding over *his* head. How she’d threatened to turn his life into just such a disaster.

“Help me,” he thought she was trying to say. Her hands reached out, clawing at the air.

“What happened?” he had asked her. Of course, she couldn’t answer, only make strange, strangled sounds.

“Ingrid, Ingrid, Ingrid, have you been messing around with Lawrence? Is he the one for whom you’re wearing that hideous outfit? Did Mireille decide to do something about it?”

Ingrid tried to get up again, but couldn’t, then tried to say his name.

“Oh Ingrid,” he said, “Why did you have to tell me about that photo? Why couldn’t you have torn it up, never said anything? Let sleeping dogs lie? Let me keep my secret? What difference would it make to anyone?”

He took the statuette of Mao out of his Bon Appétit bag. It was so deliciously ironic to carry an instrument of death in so ecologically correct a container as a brown paper bag.

“Ingrid,” he told her gently. She was trying to stand, to get away from him, but he pushed her back on her knees. “This is payback, Ingrid. We could have been friends, but you couldn’t let that be, could you? Controlling me meant more than human sympathy, didn’t it? Beauty should be used to make people happy, not as a weapon. But you can’t just make your own rules because you have a lovely face. You had a great gift that you abused and now it’s been taken away from you.” Charles had touched her hair. “Why it’s almost not worth your living anymore, is it?”

Ingrid lifted her hands again in supplication, tried to rise but couldn’t. He raised Mao above his head and brought it down on the front of hers, as hard as he could. He heard a cracking sound from her brow. She went down then he hit her again. She twitched, so he repeated what he had done to the back of her head as well and then to the top twice to make sure. She was still.

Charles had checked her pulse then put Mao back in the bag. Was that a crack in the smooth ceramic backing? Surely no one would notice. He thought about what he had done, felt regret wash over him. He looked down at the body – as much in sorrow as in relief at being rid of Ingrid

He’d decided already that it was necessary to do something that would draw attention away from anything to do with *him*. It had to be about her, about sex. Everyone would take it for granted that she had been up to kinky things and that she had been murdered because of that. God knows what they would think they had – a bad sex scene gone wrong, a crime of passion? He ran downstairs, left the back door ajar and went back upstairs. How appropriate that, considering the rooting around Ingrid had done in other people’s back yards, she should be left dead in her own.

Gingerly pulling the robe around Ingrid he had carried her downstairs. God, but she weighed next to nothing. He staggered slightly and brushed against the walls, leaving a residue of blood on the carpets. As soon as he was out of doors he had lain her on the mass of leaves, rotten from the winter, arranging the robe so that her body was exposed. What a bonus that she was in that disgusting leather.

Charles knew what he had to do now. There was only one thing to do with someone who had as vicious a tongue as Ingrid’s. Let the police puzzle over that one. Who cared as long as there was no suspicion cast on him.

Reaching into his pocket he took out his Swiss Army knife. Charles

was trembling so badly he had to try twice to open what was left of her mouth. He slipped out her tongue and severed it – thank God, it took only one slicing movement. He felt incredibly sick, but took deep breaths and recovered. He slipped the slimy remnant of his victim into the outer pocket of his rain poncho. He gathered some leaves and threw them over her.

He stood. There were tears in his eyes. Poor Ingrid, he thought. Poor Ingrid. What a sad creature.

Chapter 49

Charles Thomas looked at me now, gauging the effect, no doubt, of what he had just told me. I said nothing, working on staying as calm as possible. I had to get to my gun.

“You believe me, don’t you? I mean about feeling so terrible about what I did?”

I nodded, because I couldn’t speak, not yet.

Charles could though. “Can you explain to me about Mireille? Why *did* she work Ingrid over? Was it about Lawrence?”

“So you knew about their affair?”

“I guessed as soon as I heard Mireille in the house, then saw Ingrid dressed like a dominatrix.” He brightened, some. “You wouldn’t think Mireille would have it in her to do what she did – or Lawrence, for that matter. What a stick, what a self-important, preening excuse for a man and she’s all vaunting ambition. But why such a thorough job on Ingrid?”

I shook my head. “Meant to scare Ingrid and went too far. Couldn’t stop once she got started.”

His mouth went down at the corners. “That’s what you think happened to me, isn’t it?”

“No, I don’t actually.” We were both silent for a moment, then I said: “So you smashed Ingrid’s head in with Mao. That’s where the crack came from?”

Charles now took the figure of Chairman Mao out of the Bon Appétit bag. “I took this with me that night. I washed it off afterwards and put it right back where it belonged – which is what I’ll do when I’ve finished here. Better not to leave things lying around at a murder scene.”

This man was very far gone. “You said you hit her in the back of the head?”

“And on the front and top. Made an ugly sound.” That seemed to upset him nearly as much as it upset me. I imagined my head would go crunch, as well, when Mao made contact with my skull.

“I don’t want to think about that,” I pointed out. I stopped my eyes

from straying to my purse. I didn't want him to catch on and confiscate my gun. I knew I was going to hate the answer to this question. "What did you do with her tongue?"

"Tossed it out the window into the woods – for the foxes – as I drove home."

Would my tongue meet the same fate? It had been wagging enough to tempt him. I really needed to pee, just at the thought. Time, time, I needed time. "Why did you kill Eve Bishop?"

He pointed to the Chairman. "She spotted the crack in the back, one that hadn't been there before. I could see she was curious, that it was only a matter of time before she put two and two together. She had already mentioned how she'd heard that Ingrid had been slain with something flat and heavy. To say nothing of Eve possibly having seen the photo. Ingrid shared a lot with her. Not the sex stuff, but everything else. I couldn't take a chance she would catch on, as you did. She was a good neighbor."

What an obituary – and now I knew what it was she had been going to tell me that afternoon at the university. Oh, God, if only Eve had shared her suspicions, she'd be alive today and I wouldn't be facing my own death. It was too late for "ifs" however. "Then you killed her?"

"Oh, I let it go when she showed an interest in the statue, but that night I went over to her place, faked a break-in, as I had at Ingrid's, and that was that. Took a knife from my kitchen."

"Why not use Mao?"

"I wanted to do something different. Researched how to do it on the Internet."

Ah, you couldn't beat the information highway. "Why did you have to degrade her so?"

"I'd done that to Ingrid and I suppose it was in the name of consistency." He looked and sounded ashamed. "I wish I hadn't. Hardly seemed fair. She was not a happy woman though, very discontented. It seemed all of a oneness, though, to leave her the way I did. For once, she would have something to be aggrieved by that would be truly justified. She was very bright, though."

Too little, too late: his score in the Con Column was mounting like no one's business. "I assume by the way, that the so-called bad back was nothing more than an alibi?"

"Yes. Not brilliant, but all I could think of under pressure. Worked though and there's no way to prove or disprove it, really, is there? That's the usefulness of a bad back – take a day off work for example, and who knows the difference? My back just seemed to go out and even the Medical Center took my word for it. I assumed no one would want to accuse a man who could

barely walk of cutting someone's throat. I was sorry about Eve, well you saw for yourself how upset I was. When you and your colleagues came over to the house?" I nodded and he continued. "I liked Ingrid well enough before she put the screws to me. Well, like isn't the operative word. Let's say I was delighted by her beauty." He leaned forward, a serious look on his face. "I don't think we would ever have been real friends. You see, the thing about her was that her intellectual resources were not equal to the task, the way Eve's were." He shrugged. "Ingrid, well, she rarely had a good word to say of anyone, which is always entertaining."

"Clever. Tell me about Nancy," I reminded him.

"That was the worst." Charles's voice was shaky. "As I told you just now, Ingrid told me she was going to give my file to Nancy – just to show Nancy how dangerous she could be with someone's secrets. I did try to find the file at Ingrid's but I couldn't –."

"It wasn't there, I checked," I responded. We found it on her office computer. It was in code, by the way, and her victims were all filed under Household Purchases."

"Oh." He thought about that. "Ah, yes. Well, I was looking for it after breaking into Nancy's house when she came downstairs. I tried to stall her, but she rushed at me and so I hit her – so then I had to finish the job. I heard Cameron call out – she must have heard us talking. I smashed the computer and got out of there."

"So you had to get out before messing Nancy's body up?"

"I wasn't going to do that to her, really." Charles looked shocked by the suggestion. "Please believe me. I wouldn't, especially since I knew Cameron might find her. I didn't want to kill Nancy, truly, but she saw me."

"We broke the code, incidentally. There was nothing about you in any file."

"What?" He had gone pale.

"You killed her for no reason, you idiot," I said in as steady a voice as I could muster. "Don't you feel anything for wasting Nancy's life, at least?"

"Yes, oh God, yes," he said and I believed him. "I liked Nancy so. To be honest, I like you. We have the same taste in furnishings, I think you're intelligent and attractive and sympathetic. I liked you the minute I met you."

"I felt the same way," I told him.

He gave a small sigh. "I'm sorry I have to kill you, but needs must."

It was time for the big question. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Do we have to talk about that?"

"Oh, getting squeamish?"

He smiled. "I think this will be the only quadruple homicide in West Rapids history. What do you think?"

“I say don’t count your chickens.” The adrenaline must really have been pumping to give me so much nerve, but I knew if he saw fear I would be finished. At least I could play for time. My eyes swiveled back and forth as I looked for ways to get past him, but it looked too chancy and my purse was that fatal few steps too far away. If I rushed him at the door, he would, no doubt, kick me senseless. He was strong enough, that I knew. Carrying Ingrid out of the house proved that. I had to keep him talking until I figured something out. It’s hard to draw someone out while you’re terrified, though. This man had murdered repeatedly and had nothing to lose by doing it again and to me.

“What are you going to do to?”

“You mean what will I do to you before the loyal Officer Jansen and that large Chief of Police find you?”

Yes, that was exactly what I meant. I nodded, feeling my dinner rise up my throat, and wouldn’t you know it. My last meal was red meat – how Roger would crow about that as he performed the autopsy.

Charles patted Chairman Mao.

“Will there be a lot of blood? Is that why the rain cape?” Come to think of it, this was the first time I had ever seen him not looking like someone out of the pages of GQ. I was not so sure of any Cary Grant or Fred Astaire connection anymore. Neither Cary nor Fred ever smashed a woman’s head in, then cut out her tongue.

He nodded. “Yes, works very well against blood spatter. Handy tonight as well, the weather is terrible. I’ll put it in the washing machine when I get home and hang it back on the hook in the utility room then pull it out when I need it again.”

Why, just like Mireille. Was there a protocol about what to wear when you risked blood splatter? Except of course, *she* wasn’t into recycling. Charles Thomas was a ghoul. A sad one, driven to extremes by a vindictive Ingrid Spoto – and carried away by hubris, perhaps? No, that wouldn’t do. No one can drive another person beyond his or her moral boundaries – Charles Thomas had crossed that divide on his own. “So that’s how you were able to fool the police when we came over to your place after she died?”

“Yes, it was in the washing machine.”

I had given up on Herb and Janet. I could only hope they’d feel awful when they realized how they’d let me down. Meanwhile, I was almost out of time.

Charles smiled diffidently. “Can I run this idea by you? Leave you bare to the waist and then something very personal and creative with your gun?” He stood, and walked toward me with the figurine of Mao held high.

“No wait,” I cried out and covered my head with my hands.

I had only one chance and I took it.

Charles Thomas assumed I was so terrified of being hit in the head that he didn't watch my knee or my lower right leg. As he reached me, I brought my right leg up as hard as I could up into his crotch, while at the same time I made a fist of my right hand and hit him equally hard in the gut.

He screamed out in pain and dropped the heavy figurine on my knee, I heard the cartilage rebel and it hurt, but I was already on my way. I got to my purse and was pulling out the gun when he tackled me around the waist, from behind. I drove an elbow backwards into his ribs and he screamed: "I'm going to kill you!"

"The hell you are," I managed to get him in the stomach again with my elbow. He released me just long enough that I could pull the gun out all the way, but he was on me again and, like an idiot, I dropped it.

I put my fingers in his eyes, but he had his hands around my neck and was cutting off my air. Everything was going red. Instinct took over and I removed my fingers from his eyes, losing my advantage. I tried prying his fingers from my throat with mine, but I was rapidly losing consciousness. I thought about the guys finding me with my tits hanging out and my gun inserted in a very private place and that pumped a bit of adrenaline – but not enough to dislodge the miserable bastard's hands.

We were rolling around on the floor when I heard the glass door to my patio smash, rain and glass sprayed into the room and a soaking wet Paul, of all people, was hauling Charles to his feet.

"What are you doing here?" I croaked. God, this really was like a movie. Was someone going to call "Cut!" and everything would be okay?

"Who is this?" Paul wanted to know.

"The killer!" I howled, scrambling on the ground for my dropped gun. "Don't let him go!"

I was too late. Taking him by surprise, Charles twisted around, slipped from Paul's grasp and gave him a right to the jaw that I could actually hear. Paul lost his balance and his hold on Charles, who was up and heading for the window.

"Stop, or I'll shoot," I called out and did so, as a warning shot. I heard a scream. Paul called out: "He's down, you got him in the left knee."

Well, that was a surprise.

As Charles writhed around on the floor, screaming in agony, the cavalry arrived. Now my front door was in the same shape as the French doors. Oh, great.

"For God's sake," Herb said, helping me into a chair. "Can't leave you for a minute without you getting into trouble." He turned to Janet who was at his heels. "Call the paramedics."

“Not a problem,” she told him, the phone already in her hand.

Chapter 50

Charles Thomas had been taken away in an ambulance, broken and weeping. For trying to kill me he had actually apologized through his tears – so dear of him. The forensics guys had poked around as I briefed Herb and Janet. The windows and door were soon boarded up and at least, the rain had stopped. Now, I was lying on the sofa with my swollen knee wrapped in ice bags, a black eye and a badly swollen throat. I had refused to go the hospital. I wanted my own bed; I wanted my own pajamas and I needed to cry into my own pillow. Paul was sitting on the edge of the sofa. His jaw was bruised, but not broken.

“How did you know to come after me?” I sounded hoarse to myself.

He took my hand. “Did you think I would have let you leave that way at the restaurant – without getting things straightened out between us? I got lost on the way here though.”

For once, I had nothing to say and it wasn’t just because of my sore throat.

“When I did get here I heard voices through the door. I was suspicious, so I went to the window and saw what was going on. I’m sorry about breaking the glass.”

“You’re forgiven,” I told him and gave him a return squeeze. “How’s the jaw?”

He rubbed it. “No teeth loosened, but sore.”

Herb and Janet came in. Herb sat opposite me, Janet standing behind him.

“Good work, that goes for both of you,” Herb said. “You okay, Sophie?”

“Yes. What’ll happen to Charles?”

Herb shrugged. “Locked away forever.”

“He’ll have a bad time.”

We were all silent. I wondered what Paul thought of the fate of his sister’s killer. We would have time to discuss that, but later.

“I can’t get over it,” Janet said. “Charles was a woman?”

“No,” I corrected her. “Caroline Thomas had a gender reassignment. *He* was a man, full stop.”

“Three women dead and for what?” Herb shook his head, “A selfish, manipulative woman who jerked someone’s chain once too often for her own good.” He stopped and looked at Paul. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

Paul shook his head. “I’ve said it myself.”

And would again many times, I was sure.

I leaned back into my pillows. “She pushed one too many envelopes, that’s for certain. Mireille Prudhomme had an investment to protect and Ingrid, even when she was confronted, didn’t know when to back off. Charles Thomas killed because he was afraid of his life being ruined – if exposed. I think in one sense she was like a cruising shark. She could smell blood in the water and she just lost control. Had to push him to the wall,” I concluded.

“I think he was wrong about the kind of reaction people would have,” Herb said thoughtfully. “I think that if people had known, it might not have made that much of a difference. People respect other people who make no bones about what they are and Charles worked and lived in a world that is a cocoon against the real one anyway. You know what they say about that ivory tower.”

I disagreed. “I think he was right to be afraid of exposure. He would have been an object of curiosity, no matter how benevolent. The token transsexual at the dinner table. Would you think I was crazy if I said I felt sorry for him?”

“After what he’s done, yes,” Janet said. “I know what you mean, though. He had probably lived in a state of anxiety for years. Ingrid must have made him see red and that was it.”

“He’s still a murdering bastard,” Herb said.

No one contradicted him, least of all me, as I thought of Eve, Nancy, and yes, Ingrid.

Janet cleared her throat and said: “I’ve really appreciated the experience of working with you, Detective Pimlott. Maybe we’ll work together again sometime.”

“I’d like that,” I said and it was true. She knew when to do what was needed and to keep out of things when the circumstances called for tact: my kind of partner. “And it’s Sophie, by the way.”

“Not a problem,” she told me and even Herb gave her the fisheye – but she seemed oblivious.

“Is that it?” Paul asked pleasantly.

“Are we in the way?” Herb asked pleasantly.

“Yes,” Paul said just as pleasantly.

After a flurry of goodbyes and Herb’s assurance that my coming in late

the next day would be okay, they were gone.

“What can I get for you?” Paul wanted to know.

“Could I have a cup of herbal tea? It’ll help me sleep and I’m down on my water intake, so you’d better bring a bottle of water too.”

He stood. “Whatever makes you happy, you’ve earned it. Anything else?”

I thought about that. “Could you get me that contract from the table and a pen?”

Paul did exactly that and loaned me his Mont Blanc. I thought of Lawrence Saxton’s pen and I shuddered. A lot of stuff was going to remind me of this case, and it would take time for those memories to fade. It would be ages before I could talk about China, for example.

“Turn around,” I told Paul and putting the contract against his back, I signed up for three more years with the West Rapids Police.

The professional issue settled, I turned my attention to more personal matters.

“Who designed Grace Kelly’s wedding dress?”

I knew that would stump him.

THE END

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About the Author



Dorothy Linick, né Dorothy Judith Goldstone, was born on October 16, 1940 in Bolton, Lancashire – the daughter of Hyman and Anne Goldstone, who had married in 1933. The family moved to a number of UK sites during the war as Hyman Goldstone followed various assignments related to his work for Rolls-Royce. Much of Dorothy’s early schooling was in Hastings – where she was the victim of a number of anti-Semitic incidents. A younger sister, Naomi, was born in 1947.

In 1953 the Goldstones, following the lead taken by other family members, emigrated to America, first to New York and then to the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles. Dorothy attended John Marshall High School and, after a stint at Los Angeles City College, moved on to UCLA in Westwood. She worked part-time in her mother’s beauty salon in Glendale and served as a page at the Democratic National Convention, the one that nominated JFK in the summer of 1960.

In 1964 she graduated from UCLA with a BA in History and in the same week married a graduate student in this department, Anthony Linick – who had earlier co-edited the avant-garde literary magazine, *Nomad*. The following year the Linicks moved to East Lansing, Michigan, where Anthony would now take up a post as Assistant Professor of Humanities.

In 1967 the Linicks undertook a summer-long exploration of European sites, also visiting Anthony’s mother and stepfather, the composer and conductor

Ingolf Dahl, a professor at USC. Many additional summer trips to European sites followed, particularly ones to London.

In 1972 Dorothy began graduate work at Michigan State in Theater, eventually earning an MA here. Her interests in theater also included both acting and directing. She played such roles as Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Mrs. Prentice in Joe Orton's *What The Butler Saw* and undertook the direction of a number of productions in local Lansing theater. Her work in the latter category earned her a Best Director award in 1979.

In 1979-1980 the Linicks enjoyed a sabbatical year in London, finding life here so congenial that after one more year in East Lansing they made a permanent move to England in 1981, settling in Maida Vale. They both served as substitute teachers at the nearby American School in London (in St. John's Wood), with Anthony joining the faculty on a permanent basis in 1984 and Dorothy undertaking the role of special projects coordinator for the high school – including work with the famous Alternatives program.

London provided a useful base for additional travel, with visits to Stockholm, Berlin, Rome, Florence, Bilbao, Sintra, Vienna, Prague, Budapest and, repeatedly, to Paris. There was also a period as kibbutz volunteers in Israel and, moving farther afield, trips to China, India, and Egypt. Many of these expeditions were taken in the company of Anthony's little magazine co-editor, Donald Factor, and the latter's wife, Anna.

In 1985 Dorothy began work as student activities coordinator at the American College in London, on the Marylebone High Street – where she also taught courses in theater and film. In 1992 she moved on to work in development for the St. Nicholas Montessori teacher training school in Princes Gate and after a year or so here she returned to the American School, resuming her role as special projects coordinator and teaching courses in film as well. She was responsible for the establishment of the school's distinguished speakers program and brought to ASL heroic hostage Terry Waite, U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins and American author Bill Bryson.

She retired in 2001, a year before Anthony, who had spent the last eight years of his tenure at ASL as chair of the high school English Department.

Dorothy had experimented with the writing of fiction while still in East Lansing but she returned to this activity in the '90's and, after retirement, she undertook many writing projects, of which *Sight/Bites* was the first to be made available in any form to the general reader and *The Corpse Wore Leather* the second. She was still at work on many projects when cancer ended her life on July 12, 2007. With her intelligence, wit and good heart Dorothy attracted the love and respect of many good friends throughout her life.