

1

Professor Davis had bullied too many people not to take the death threats seriously. Irene said he was threatened several times and the strange people arriving at his lake house scared her. Ever since Gus brought her to the lake for the summer, she had snooped on the professor more than she watched daytime TV. Gus was tired of listening to her claims about a bunch of students, people in ritzy cars, and the exotic dancer over there. Even Hamilton Fletcher, himself, frequented the house just that afternoon. He wondered about the dancer.

Irene finally removed the whistling teakettle from the gas burner as Gus gazed across the sandy road. The afternoon light reflected off the cars parked in the pine grove surrounding the varnished A-framed lake house. “ Irene!”

“ Have your coffee, Gus.”

“ Huh?” The coffee steamed upward from the brown tin cup on the end table. “ Oh, thanks, Irene.”

“ Don’t tell me I’m the one bein’ nosy, Gus Nickerson.”

“ You are nosy. But somethin’s going on. That long black car is Hamilton Fletcher’s car.”

“ No, Fletcher had the Caddie. The car out there is a Lincoln.”

“ The dancer drove the sports car.” Gus grimaced when he tasted the bitter coffee. “ What did you do, pour Fletcher paint in this cup?”

“ Make it yourself next time... Waste of propane. ”

Gus fully cranked open the cottage window, leaned forward and cupped his ear. “ I can’t hear nothin’.”

“ Get that puss of yours back in here. You might as well just run out in the road and wave them out of the house, Gus.”

“ Somethin’s confusing me.”

“ Wouldn’t take much.”

“ Hardy, har, har... Why did Hamilton Fletcher, the most powerful man in town, come up to the lake and visit a college professor? And furthermore, why did he yell at the professor and-”

“ Too much hanky panky,” said Irene. She produced the same buzz saw laugh he had heard for forty-two years.

“ Irene, you’re always comin’ up with them per-verted daytime talk show thoughts. You really see Davis smack Fletcher?”

“ Yup.”

“ Fiddle fat. He’d be fired on the spot. The Fletchers own Hamilton College!”

“ Fletcher had his handkerchief over his mouth, all bloody, when he got in the Caddie. You would have seen the whole thing, Gus, if you hadn’t made a career of hanging out in the john.”

“ Hardy, har, har. I didn’t see Fletcher but I saw that blonde in the skimpy outfit go inside about an hour ago. She had one nice-”

“ You would notice that.”

Gus rolled his eyes. “ Any-who.”

“ She wasn’t sellin’ Girl Scout cookies.”

“ Nope.”

“ And the professor beat on her, too,” said Irene. “ I wuz talkin’ to her by the mailbox. The professor has death threats.”

“ Ah... You and your death threats.” Gus checked the house through the pines. “ Woman like her is used ta being beaten on.”

“ What a macho thing to say!”

“ Macho-smatcho. There ya go with that talk show stuff again.” Gus shook his head, but spotted a sandy haired man in a white shirt and red tie. He and a grubby, balding, fat guy in a purple jersey and gray pants talked to the professor. “ Here we go.”

“ Whaddya see Gus?”

Gus was still miffed about being called macho. “ You ain’t turnin’ into one of them woman’s libbers, are ya, Irene?”

She pressured her elbow against his shoulder. “ At sixty-eight? Come on, Gus. What the hell is going on over there?”

“ I can’t see nothin’ if you knock me on my arse!”

Irene dug her nails into his arm. “ They’re gonna kill him or the woman!”

“ Stop it.” Gus pushed her hand away, but hid behind the curtains when the two men dragged the dancer through the open sliders. They carried her kicking across the yard, jammed her into the Lincoln and the engine started. The pudgy guy leaped into her silver sports car. From the sliders the professor watched both cars spin in the sand. He moved outside as the cars disappeared up the lake road.

“ Get the plate numbers, Gus!”

“ For what?”

Irene raced across the living room and pulled her tiny, red vinyl notebook from the kitchen drawer. Gripping her red pen, she traipsed back to the window and quickly scribbled something in the notebook. “ Hot damn, I gut em!”

“ Gut what? What in the name of kingdom come are ya gonna do with them plate numbers?”

“ Stubborn, Gus.” She carefully placed the notebook back in the kitchen drawer.

Gus shook his head and turned as the lake house’s screen door slammed. The professor marched across the main room into one of the side bedrooms, but quickly returned with a black cordless phone at his ear. He talked as he paced near the gray, stone fireplace, but his hand soon swung up wildly. Irene leaned over Gus’s shoulder.

“ Irene, my bad shoulder.”

“ I tell ya somethin' is brewin' over there. Somebody's gonna get him and you know it.”

“ The only thing I know is your overactive imagination.”

“ Too many women been comin' and goin' and they're all probably hookers. Even that college lady from Illinois.”

“ How do you know who she is and where she's from?”
asked Gus, his eyes still trained on the angry professor.

“ Gut her plate numbers. I gut all their plates.”

“ If they were hookers I would have gone over there myself.”
Irene stung his leg with her boot. “ Ouch!”

“ Let that be a lesson to ya, Gus. Hookers would croak that bum ticker of yours.”

“ Hardy, har, har.”

Irene stayed at the window. “ The Professor wuz yellin' at the woman professor, too.”

Inside the lake house the professor threw something toward the rear sliders. Gus could not hear his voice through the screen door as he tried to move Irene off his shoulder. “ How do you know he yelled at her? You can't hear a damned thing either.”

“ And Little Rusty, the student. He smacked her around and she still hangs all over him.”

“ What's the big attraction over there anyway?”

“ Ignorant, Gus.”

In the lake house, the professor made one final comment and stuck the phone in his back pocket. He strutted across the room,

picked up a drink and exited the rear sliders overlooking the bright blue lake. “ Well the party’s over and I don’t see no hookers. I have to use the john.”

Gus abandoned his position and Irene nestled herself in his spot as he stretched his long arms in front of the chair. “ He's made too many enemies. Sooner or later somebody will bag him. And bag him good.”

2

Jones looked his watch. Nigel's party guests were now squeezed into the new drawing room and the accumulated conversation was loud enough to drive him outside along the pool's aqua glow. Even with his Maine camping trip only hours away Jones stayed at the party, but wondered if he was merely waiting for Maggie McCay to arrive. He was all the more attracted to her when she rejected his suggestion to see a movie downtown.

He was about to check the time when Nigel's grandfather clock slowly resonated ten times inside the drawing room. Nigel's eyes opened wide behind his thick glasses as he spotted two students, bathing suits dripping on his new rug, near the atrium doors.

Jones grinned turned as Carl Rogers shuffled his well-toned frame along the pool tiles. Carl had done a great job since Woosey Williams' early retirement. Jones was about to talk to Carl when Nigel stormed through the atrium doors. “ What's the matter, Nigel? ”

“ I warned them not to track in pool water on my new Berber! They went right through the house!”

“ You need to lock the doors.”

“ I've been assured the rug won't bleach, but...”

In his orange bath suit Carl hobbled forward and Jones patted him on the back. “ Is Florida Western's Superstar on the disabled list?”

“ I was running as a matter of fact near your house on the common and twisted my ankle in a pothole.”

Jones raised his finger. “ I've stumbled on that pothole myself. You all right, wobble?”

“ Wobble? Should I add that to my nicknames?”

“ You want to have that ankle looked at?” asked Jones. “ I know some sports medicine guys in Prince William.”

“ Nah, a little water therapy and I'll be fine. You two going in? ”

“ Maybe Matthias will take a dip,” said Nigel, still looking into the drawing room.

“ No, no. I'm probably going to head home. We're leaving for Maine early.”

“ Maggie didn't attend the party,” said Nigel, still glancing at his drawing room rug. “ That's odd.”

The blue-eyed Carl removed his sweaty jersey, revealing his bronzed, well-developed chest. “ You look like an advertisement for one of those exercise programs on late night TV.”

“ Got to keep in shape,” he said. He turned and dove into the iridescent pool, splashing water onto the blue glazed tiles.

“ He's in great physical condition,” said Nigel. “ He's knows what he's doing.”

Carl swam over to two women on the other side. “ With the women or helping me coach?”

Nigel again looked toward the drawing room and raised his index finger. “ Speaking of women, Matthias, your Professor McCay is here.”

Jones' face tightened. “ She's *my* not Professor McCay.”

“ That gentleman that owns the lumber yard was by this afternoon with some finishing trim.”

“ You mean Arnie Dewars.” said Jones. “ I can just imagine what rumor he's spreading now.”

“ He said you... well, you and Ms. McCay-”

“ Nigel, I learned along time ago not to put credence in anything Arnie says. Besides, McCay's a pain. You've heard her at the faculty meetings. Little Miss Sassy. Not that she just has an opinion, but it's like she has a chip on her shoulder. Spoiled little rich kid with that monster black Expedition and she lives in the Marlboro Inn.”

“ They do rent rooms at the Marlboro, Matthias.” Nigel raised his brow. “ I believe I detect an inordinate interest. Perhaps, Mr. Dewars was right.”

“ Don't be ridiculous. She said no when I asked her out and that's that,” said Jones. Carl's powerful arms churned like a steamboat paddle wheel as he swam laps in the pool. “ Look at

him. There's a kid who worked his way up and got to Florida Western on a football scholarship.”

“ He won't last long here,” said Nigel. “ He'll have his own team somewhere.”

“ True,” said Jones. McCay, tall and slender in a tight fitting blue dress, appeared in one of the open atrium doorways. Her long dark hair, usually combed neatly, was wispy down her neck. She clutched her drink as Hank Wenzel from the Math Department approached. Jones listened carefully to her precisely enunciated words. Her green eyes were incredibly expressive as she fidgeted with the glass.

“ You're staring,” said Nigel.

“ Did you hire her?”

“ Yes, I was involved.”

“ I heard the Fletchers made a private call on her behalf.”

“ That is confidential.”

“ Ah, I knew it.” Her eyes darted as she lectured Wenzel.

“ Poor Hank. Too much pontificating. I wouldn't take her guff. Who does she think she is?”

“ Why don't you ask her? Here she comes.”

Jones looked to his right. McCay's lost expression was transformed into a wide smile and she extended her hand to Nigel. Her eyes brightened. “ Dr. Kent, a lovely party. I'm sorry I was a little tardy this evening. I was just remarking to Professor Wenzel

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that we should have more of these gatherings during the academic year.”

“ I think you're right," said Nigel.

Jones rolled his eyes, but her potent perfume caused his nose to itch and he sneezed.

“ Bless you,” she said with a snicker.

“ You of course know Matthias Jones, Maggie.” Jones glared at Nigel as he drifted away, leaving him alone with McCay.

“ Our beloved coach. Mr. Jones...”

Her smug attitude irritated him. “ You can call me Matthias.”

“ I see.” She looked him over as if he were not properly dressed.

“ Something wrong, Miss McCay?”

“ Ms. McCay”

“ Ms. and Coach,” said Jones, smiling.

Her face was rigid. “ Right.”

“ Just a joke.”

“ So, you have gained great notoriety in the small pond called Hamilton College, Mr. Jones.”

“ What do you mean by that?”

“ Don't be so defensive.”

“ Me? You talk like you're above everyone else.”

“ I could say the same of you, Mr. Jones.” Her eyes revealed an inner anger. “ And you are quite pleased with yourself, aren't you?”

“ Yeah, I guess I am,” said Jones.

“ Just remember this is only a small college in the corner of New Hampshire.”

“ I understand that,” he said through gritted teeth. “ This college has been good to me.”

“ Isn't that wonderful? I wish you more years of bliss.” In a graceful move, she turned on the tiles, and Jones watched her silky blue dress as she sashayed back inside the house.

" Hey, Coach," said Carl, still in the pool. The water had matted down his dark wavy hair. He folded his arms on the pool's tile berm.

" New love interest?"

" No." He crossed the tiles, eager to defend himself as he hovered over Carl. " And you should talk. I haven't seen you all night."

Carl produced a wide grin. “ Well... I met a woman from administration.”

“ I saw you leave with Mary Thompson.”

“ Well, we took off earlier and-”

“ You're a big party boy, Carl, but I guess when you're twenty something, you're entitled.”

“ Hey, can I ask you something, Coach?”

“ If it's a question about women, forget it.”

“ No, what Professor McCay said about coaching. Doesn't it bother you to be stuck at this level? There are other horizons out there.”

“ I like it here. I like my job and the town. I know you want to take the fast track... And you have big ears, Carl.”

Nigel's housekeeper leaned out the far atrium door.

“ Matthias, George Strickland is on the line for you.”

“ Oh, good. Thank you, Mrs. Johnson.”

“ Your trip?” asked Carl.

“ I can't wait to get away. It's been a long year. George and I have to meet Tom McGill in Maine tomorrow morning.”

“ If I don't see you. Have a good trip.”

“ Thanks, where you headed this summer?” asked Jones.

“ I'm going home to Seattle for a few weeks. I may drive.”

“ In that run down MG?”

Carl smiled. “ I know. I know. I've had that car since college. I'm looking at a SUV like Ms. McCay or maybe a van.”

Jones sneered and thought of McCay's belligerent attitude.

“ Forget Ms. McCay.”

“ She's an attractive woman.”

“ Have a safe trip, Carl.” Jones reached down and shook his wet hand. “ And behave yourself.”

“ Do I have to?”

“ Good night, Carl.” Jones scurried inside the doors and headed into the kitchen. Mrs. Johnson pointed to the red phone on the kitchen counter. Jones smiled and picked up the receiver. “ Let me guess, you’re backing out of the vacation, George.”

“ We’re not going,” he said as Nigel walked into the kitchen with the caterer.

“ Oh, I knew it.”

“ There’s been a murder.”

“ A murder?” asked Jones as Mrs. Johnson turned. “ Who?”

“ A biology professor at the college, Brad Davis.”

“ Nigel will flip.”

“ Murder? Did I hear murder?” asked Nigel, stepping away from the caterer.

“ Professor Davis, Biology,” said Jones.

Nigel closed his eyes. “ Oh, dear Lord, how many times have I told Hamilton Fletcher about that man? Hamilton will want to contain this. I know he will.”

Strickland yelled something to his deputy. “ We have a student, Amy Pollard, in custody.”

Jones leaned toward Nigel. “ He has a student in custody.”

“ Who is the student?”

“ An Amy Pollard.”

Nigel opened his mouth and staggered to the kitchen chair. “ The media outlets will be all over the town. I’m feeling ill.”

“ Do you want a drink, Nigel?” asked Mrs. Johnson.

“ Whiskey, straight up.”

Nigel looked up at Jones. “ Where did it happen?”

“ In the cottage colony at Tolby Lake,” said Strickland.

“ Tolby Lake, Nigel.”

“ Look, Matthias. Call McGill and tell him what happened.

We’ll have to postpone the Maine thing.”

“ He’s at the cabin. There is no phone. I’ll have to check with his old boss, that guy he left running the paper. Can I come out there?”

“ Give me a couple of hours. People across the street saw Pollard enter the house, but they’ve seen a whole raft of people coming and going over the past week. Look, Clayton is here doing the forensics with his people and we’re still sweeping the lake house.”

“ I’ll head over to the paper now and see if I can contact Tom. See you later.”

Jones hung up the phone and Nigel sprang from the chair. “ A disaster. A unmitigated disaster.”

“ What do you mean?”

Mrs. Johnson handed him a full whisky snifter. “ This is a burgeoning problem. Brad Davis has a notorious reputation.”

“ Oh?”

Nigel sipped the liquor. “ He’s a womanizer. He’s had charges filed... warnings. We gave him a chance. I thought it was all behind him. And now this.”

“ Why did you let him off?”

Nigel stood, set the glass on the table and motioned Jones out to the pool. They moved along the hedges. “ He’s engaged in genetic research. The Fletchers wanted the school have a specialist in that area.”

“ If I know Hamilton Fletcher he wants to make money out of the deal.”

“ Maybe, but Brad Davis was supposed to add to the school’s prestige. I managed to contain the scandals.”

“ Not too prestigious now.”

“ Absolutely correct. I should have pushed to get him out while I had the chance.”

“ Sounds like this could get messy. I’m going to head over to the paper and see if McGill left a number in Maine. Then I’m going out to Tolby Lake.” He put his hand on Nigel’s shoulder. “ Maybe you should call Hamilton Fletcher.”

“ You’re right, Matthias: nip it in the bud.”

3

Jones needed to contact McGill before he drove over to Tolby Lake. Maybe McGill's old boss, running the paper in his absence, could help. He twisted the radio volume when he heard the disc jockey announce a commercial for the re-election of Herbert Lane for District Attorney. Lane had clashed with Jones on nearly every murder case Jones had investigated. Jones pictured Lane in his office, stomach bulging from his vest and gray toupee flat on his large head. The commercial was set to Row, Row, Row Your Boat.

Her... Her... Herbert Lane
For District Att-rney
Vote, Vote, Vote, Vote
For Herbert Lane, DA

Jones clicked off the radio and abruptly stopped his jeep in front of the Enterprise's brick building. He exited the jeep and shook his head as the Herbert Lane commercial repeated in his mind. From the sidewalk the office lights shone through the blinds

and over outside shrubs. A lanky man in a light blue suit and hat was hunched over a typewriter and cigarette smoke draped the air around his crumpled, rimmed hat. Jones climbed the cement steps and rapped on the aluminum-framed door.

He waited, wondering if the student in custody was romantically involved with Davis. Inside the lobby, the man from the typewriter, his wrinkled powder blue suit, as creased as his face, appeared at the door with keys in hand. A multicolored feather pierced his matching cockeyed hat and a smoldering cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth. He fiddled with the lock, twisted the keys and opened the door. The heavy lobby smoke irritated Jones' eyes.

“ Three shots in the chest?” asked the man.

“ I don't think we've met. Matthias Jones.”

“ Jerry St. Clair, how are ya, Bub?” He locked the door and stepped back into the lobby. For a few seconds he was unsure where to tuck the keys and finally dropped them in his pants pocket. “ And a Hamilton student in cuffs?”

“ That's right.”

Jones followed him into the side office. Jerry returned to the typewriter, sat at the creaky wood chair and pounded on the keys. His gritty voice was sanded by time. “ Word's out on you, Jones.”

“ Me?”

“ Tom gives you the thumbs up,” he said, typing with both index fingers.

“ Tom got his start with your paper.”

“ He worked the grind for me on the city desk in Philly twenty-one years ago.” Jones raised his brows as the typing continued.

“ Sounds like we’ve got a homicide to investigate.”

“ What do you mean?” asked Jones.

“ Tom said you’re an old gumshoe.”

Jones raised his brows. “ Look, Jerry, I’ve investigated a few murders, but-”

“ We'll take the friends and associates angle on this one. Seen it a hundred times. People like Davis come and go over the years. I worked on a case in '47. Downtown Philly. The guy was taping every broad he could get his hands on. He liked the skirts.”

“ Listen, Jerry. Did McGill leave any number up in Maine?”

“ Incognito, pal.”

“ I’m going over Tolby Lake to meet George Strickland, but I think I’ll stay clear of investigating this one. We’re both eager to leave for Maine. But I think we’re leaving late.”

Jerry nodded and set the cigarette in a dirty glass ashtray loaded with spent butts. He leaned back produced a raspy laugh.

“ Bowing out, huh? I’m gonna detail this murder in a series of page one exclusives. Didn’t think you were yellow.”

“ What?.”

Jerry stopped typing and swiveled around. “ Don’t think the old duffer still has it, do you?”

“ I never said-”

“ Listen,” he said rapping Jones in the ribs. “ I spent forty years on the streets, hot shot. I know how to develop a story and bring in the readers.”

“ I’m sure you do.”

“ What do you know about newspapers?”

“ I don't-”

“ What?”

“ I said-”

“ What?”

“ Jerry. I don’t care,” said Jones in a louder voice.

“ Ah, the Coach has a temper. Everyone has a character fault, bud.”

Jones grit his teeth as Jerry sat down again and started typing. “ You been in retirement?”

“ You gut something against old people?”

“ Oh, boy. I can see this is going to be fun.” Jones looked up at the large wall clock above the table. Another half hour and he could head out to Tolby Lake.

* * *

At the edge of the marsh, less than a mile past Hansen's Marina a Hamilton cruiser's lights flashed blue across the brown and white sign for Tolby Lake. Jones wanted Jerry back at the news desk, but the old reporter had grabbed another pack of cigarettes and climbed inside Jones' jeep. Jones ordered him not to smoke until he left the car, but the stale smoke permeated his suit. For fifteen minutes he listened to stories from the Philadelphia streets as witnessed by Jerry St. Clair during the past forty years. Jones slowed at the cruiser and the gray haired Tully, toothpick in his teeth, stepped from the cruiser. "Matthias."

"Tul, what's up?"

"The party boy got blown away."

"Great headline. I'll use it in the morning edition," said Jerry.

"Morning edition?" asked Jones in a low voice. "There's only one daily edition."

Jerry leaned out the window. "Tell me, Officer. What's the dirt on the broad under arrest?"

"Dirt? What dirt? She's a student and I'm watching the entrance. Ask George about details."

"The copper wants money," said Jerry, grinning.

"Hey, watch it, old timer."

"They bring her downtown yet?"

"What?" asked Tully opening his eyes wide to Jones. He spoke in a lower voice. "This guy's right out of a dime novel."

“ I need a butt,” said Jerry from the passenger side. “ Stop stalling, Jones. Come on, get this jalopy moving.”

“ It’s a ways in there,” said Tully.

Jones, his anticipation about leaving on vacation nixed, waved to Tully and shifted the jeep onto the sandy road through the woods. The jeep bounced over the ruts and potholes carved into the constricted road. He crawled in first gear for at least ten minutes, the jeep bounding deeper into the woods. In the mirror, Jerry held a fresh cigarette between his fingers and a transparent butane lighter ready in his other hand. More cruiser lights through the branches alerted Jones to the activity near the lake cottages. The road leveled out under the pine trees and he maneuvered the jeep toward an A-Frame house with open sliders and a screen door, fenced in with yellow police tape. Lights from a single cottage across the road cut the darkness toward the woods.

He grabbed his cell phone and exited the jeep. Two Prince William cops, guarding the sliders, stepped forward as he vaulted the police tape. Jerry's butane lighter ignited to his right and the veteran newspaperman puffed the cigarette red. Jones turned toward the sliders but another vehicle caught his attention beyond the cruisers. Professor McCay's huge shiny black Expedition was parked under the pines next to a yellow Volkswagen.

“ What's she doing here?” asked Jones.

Jerry, cigarette stuck in his mouth, pushed past Jones. With notebook open and pen in hand he approached the two officers at

the sliders. “ You need to run a make on the junk boxes in the yard.”

Jones recognized the blonde cops. “ How you doing Rick?”

“ Matthias, you’re usually here before Clayton.”

“ I’ve got company,” said Jones, twisting his lips.

Jerry exhaled, but left the cigarette in his mouth as he spoke. “ Your boss know you're halting the press from an official investigation?”

“ Come on, Jerry, chill out,” said Jones, moving up the stairs. He saw Strickland talking with Wendell Harris behind a striped sofa. “ They’re not halting anything.”

“ Nobody needs to tell an old street reporter how to do his job.”

Jones winced and shook his head. Rick brought them both through the sliders. Jones scanned the lake house. A massive stone fireplace extended up the wall to cedar slats, neatly fitted in the cathedral ceiling. Upstairs bedroom doors were closed behind a balcony rail. The place had a fresh cedar smell and was clean. On the sofa was a thin, wood pole wrapped in clear plastic. A chalk outline and dark blood on the braided rug, indicated Professor Davis's demise.

“ Happy vacation, Matthias,” said Strickland, glancing up from the clipboard at the kitchen table.

“ Are we still going?”

“ Yeah, we're going. Maybe later in the morning.”

“ Good,” said Jones, looking at the pole. “ Somebody hit him?”

“ That’s the door wedge. He was shot not hit.”

Jerry’s smoke slowly masked the fresh cedar. He plucked the cigarette from his mouth, gripped his pen and held out his notebook. “ So, I can quote you on that”

Strickland turned from Jones. “ What?”

“ I said can I quote you on the fact you're abrogating your duties as Chief and leaving on vacation?”

“ Who the hell are you?”

“ St. Clair, the Enterprise.”

“ He’s taking McGill’s place.”

Strickland half grinned as Jones shrugged his shoulders.

“ Yeah, you can quote me on that and whatever the hell else you want to quote me on.”

“ What happened up here, George?” asked Jones.

“ Pretty cut and dry. What concerns me is the report from Mrs. Nickerson across the street. A Lincoln Continental was up here from Massachusetts. We traced it to a Bertram Trainer. He works for Albert Fiore.”

“ Fiore? You mean the crime family?” asked Jones.

“ Yes, the crime family. Look I just want to go to Maine. I don’t want to be checking out lead on Albert Fiore.”

“ Ditto.”

“ And another car. Silver Porsche. Owned by a Samuel Weiss.”

“ At least it’s not Fiore.” Strickland put his hand on Jones’ shoulder and nodded. “ He works for Fiore, too. Any other questions?”

“ Two cars are out front. One of them is Professor McCay’s-”

“ Davis's Corvette is out back,” said Strickland.

“ Well, why is Maggie McCay's Expedition up here?”

“ I didn’t know you kept such close tabs on her. Then again Arnie

Dewars said you and she-”

“ Well, Arnie Dewars should mind his own business.”

“ As far as McCay goes.” Strickland walked around the sofa, and glanced at Jerry, clutching his pen. “ Apparently, the girl knows her. She called for Dr. McCay before she called for a lawyer.”

“ *Doctor McCay?*” asked Jones, still miffed at her attitude at Nigel's party.

“ Are you comments a part of the record?” asked Jerry. The ash on his cigarette had grown long, flaky, and top heavy.

“ What is this? I don't want everything I say coming out in the Enterprise.”

“ You covering up something?” Jerry asked.

Strickland's dark eyes opened wide and his pushed his teeth together. Jones moved by Jerry and escorted Strickland to the

backsliders. Strickland's deputy smirked as they passed and Strickland pointed at him. "Don't you start, Wendell."

"Who me?"

Outside, Jones put his arm around Strickland. "George, calm down."

"I thought we'd be getting ready to leave for Maine. It could be a couple of days. Did you get through to McGill?"

"No. We'll have to wait for him to get to a phone." Jones furrowed his brow. "So, what did happen up here? Did Amy Pollard confess?"

"No, no, not at all."

"Did she do it?"

Strickland furrowed his brow and was about to answer when he looked inside the sliders. Jerry's cigarette ash fell near another plastic bag on the thick pine table. Strickland shot back inside "Hey. St. Clair. Get away from that!"

"Saturday night special. The broad own the gun?"

"I don't know yet."

Jerry stepped forward and held out his pen. "What about the shells?"

"Wendell has the shells."

Wendell waved another plastic bag with the brass shells.

"Right here."

"What about prints?" asked Jerry.

"No prints on the gun or shells," said Strickland.

“ I need forensics, Chief. Angle of entry, range of the killer.”

Strickland pursed his lips. “ This isn't a press conference. Call Clayton Morris. He's the Medical Examiner.” He wandered back to Jones on the rear deck. “ Where, the hell did McGill find him?”

“ His first boss in Philadelphia. So, what do you think happened?” asked Jones.

“ We recovered a gazillion foot prints on this deck and slider glass. I can't make heads or tails out of it, but I think she came in front sliders. Both sliders were open.” He gazed at Jerry, talking to Wendell. “ No prints on the slider handle either. Wiped clean. Davis had a reputation with women. We were called to his old apartment off campus last year. He attacked a Prince William woman. Charges were dropped. I think Hamilton Fletcher paid her off and then shipped Davis out here. There's more about Hamilton and Davis, but I can't tell you right now.”

“ Relating to the murder?”

“ I can't say. And I don't need Ace in there reporting that info... I think Pollard entered the house to deliberately kill Davis.”

“ Why, do you say that?”

“ Neighbors across the street. The woman saw Pollard over here all the time. Pollard was wild about Davis, but he may have abused her. Mrs. Nickerson has a whole list of license plates. She says exotic dancers, Mafia people... Wendell will check out the plates once we get the notebook.”

“ This may be more complicated, George.”

“ She was here, the gun was on the floor, and Davis was dead. What's complicated?”

Jones gazed across the darkened beach area. The outlines of the lake and shoreline were indefinite under the stars. He stroked his chin. “ Then why are the slider handles and the gun wiped clean?”

Strickland closed his eyes. “ I haven't talked to her, but I'm convinced she'll confess once Dr. McCay calms her down. Maybe she wore gloves and started to cover her tracks, but panicked.”

“ Come on.”

“ I say latex surgical gloves,” said Strickland.

“ Maybe somebody else did it.”

Strickland held the bridge of his nose. “ You know I've been waiting for this vacation for a year and a half. Isn't that when we first planned it?”

“ Yup...”

“ I called Herbert Lane.”

Jones smiled. The pudgy Lane hated Jones's involvement in murder investigations. “ Wake Herbert from his beauty sleep did you? I heard his silly commercial tonight.”

“ Actually he was at Club Max. Having dinner.”

“ Liquid dinner. He isn't coming over here, is he?”

“ He'll be over the station in the morning.”

“ How does McCay know Pollard?” asked Jones.

“ One of her students.”

Jones moved to the deck railing. “ What about the beach out there?”

“ Need daylight, my friend.”

As he stared into the starry sky, Jones was troubled about no fingerprints on the gun. Without bothering Strickland further, he wondered why Amy Pollard would have hung around if she had worn gloves to cover the crime. He followed Strickland back inside the house.

Strickland wrote something on his clipboard pad as McCay’s testy voice and a prolonged sobbing leaked out the cracked bedroom door. Jones requested to speak with Pollard. Strickland hesitated until Jones insisted. The police chief recanted and led Jones to the door. Before he fully opened the door, the Strickland panned the lake house. “ Where the hell is Jerry?”

“ He stepped out for another cigarette,” said Wendell.

“ Dr. McCay,” said Strickland as he knocked.

“ You make it sound like she’s an MD, George.”

“ That’s her title.”

“ She’s an professor of literature.”

The door opened quickly. The rusty haired Amy Pollard, eyes blood-shot and moist, sat on the edge of a yellow quilt bedspread and clutched a dainty white handkerchief. McCay had changed into jeans and her long dark hair brushed her teal sweatshirt. She moved forward and blocked the open doorway. “ Yes, what it?”

“ Matthias and I want to talk with Amy.”

“ What is *he* doing here?”

“ Me? What are you doing here?”

Strickland stepped between them. “ Matthias has worked with me before. I know this is irregular, but sometimes he has insights into these things.”

Amy Pollard, blue mini skirt tight over her petite body, stood. “ I didn’t kill Brad.”

“ Amy you need not say anything until Ms. Merkle-Brown is present.”

“ I told her that,” said Strickland.

McCay’s heightened green eyes darted between Jones, Strickland, and Amy. Her fingers were whitened at the knuckles. Either she was always high strung or the trauma of the murder had shaken her. Jones’ smile seemed to irritate her as he faced Amy.

“ Then who killed him?”

Amy’s eyes veered toward McCay. McCay creased her brow and shook her head. “ Chief, this questioning by a lay person is unconscionable.”

“ How do you know Amy, Ms. McCay?” asked Jones.

“ She is a student of mine. Now, that is irrelevant, Chief! I say we forget about any questioning until her lawyer arrives.”

Strickland moved closer to Amy. “ This is your call Amy, not Dr. McCay’s.”

“ Amen to that,” said Jones.

“ Matthias, that isn’t helpful.” He faced Amy. “ Well? “

“ I have nothing to hide. I will talk to the Coach.”

“ Excellent,” replied Jones. McCay rolled her eyes and paced the bedroom. “ Would you like to sit down, Amy?”

“ No...” She wiped her nose with the handkerchief. “ Brad called me and I drove over here around nine-thirty. I’m not exactly sure. I pulled in and walked through the front sliders.”

“ The front and not the rear sliders?” asked Jones.

“ Yes, Brad always said-”

“ Brad? Then you were quite familiar with Professor Davis.”

“ What is he driving at?” shouted McCay.

“ I’m trying to see what kind of relationship-”

“ I did some outside research on his work at the college. I was one of his students as well as Maggie’s.”

“ Maggie?” Jones grinned.

McCay raised her voice again. “ You have a certain arrogance, Jones.”

“ And just what kind of arrogance is it?” asked Jones.

“ Stop it,” said Strickland. “ You did work for the professor and he called you up to come over. You had no other type of relationship?”

Again she looked in McCay’s direction. “ Maggie?”

“ She doesn’t need to be answering questions like that.”

“ Then the relationship with Davis was more than just student-teacher?” asked Jones.

“ Can’t you see she’s upset?” McCay stomped over to Jones.

“ She doesn’t need your prurient inferences!”

“Don’t spin your words at me, Professor. What happened when you walked inside, Amy?”

Amy raised the handkerchief to her face and tears erupted. Her wailing intensified when McCay accompanied her to the bed and held her. “ You don’t have to continue, dear.”

“ I want to know what she saw,” said Jones from the door.

“ Brad, he was on the floor,” she whimpered. “ Dead, Brad was dead!”

“ Are you sure?” asked Jones.

McCay still held Amy. “ What did she just say, Jones?”

“ I stepped back. It didn’t hit me for a few seconds and then I screamed.”

“ Where was the gun?” asked Strickland.

“ On the rug.”

Jones walked slowly toward the sofa. “ And you didn’t own or use that gun?”

“ No.”

“ Is that all?” asked McCay, leaping to her feet.

Strickland turned. “ Yes, Wendell. Bring Amy down to the station.”

McCay raised her hands in the air. “ Why?”

“ I’m holding her for suspicion of murder.”

“ She says she didn’t do it!” yelled McCay.

“ Your Merkle-Brown can talk to the DA about that.”

McCay nodded once but sent Jones a vile look. Strickland and Jones drifted onto the deck again. “ George, she’s in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“ What? Come on, the gun was on the floor.”

“ Trace it.”

“ I will. Gloves or no gloves. She was involved with Davis. And it sounds like he had it coming. And we’ll check out the riffraff passing through here.”

Jones leaned on the deck railing again. “ It took me fifteen minutes by jeep to get in here... When was he killed?”

“ Not much later than nine-thirty according to when Mrs. Nickerson heard the scream. Clayton will verify the time of death. Mrs. Nickerson saw Davis fifteen minutes before.”

“ So, the neighbors saw Amy Pollard arrive?”

“ Yup.” Strickland dragged his notebook from his pocket and scanned his notes. “ Pollard arrived during Wheel of Fortune.”

“ But she didn’t hear the shots.”

“ Irene heard the scream.”

Jones faced his friend. “ George, how long was Amy Pollard in here before the Nickerson woman heard the scream?”

“ I see your point. If she didn’t walk right in and discover the body...”

“ Then she must have seen or committed the murder or not been too upset about seeing Davis dead.”

Strickland looked back inside. “ A few weeks from now and the cottages will all be open. But now the Nickersons are the only people up here.”

“ What’s the matter?” asked Jones.

“ That old reporter.” Strickland flew through the slider opening. Jerry argued with Amy Pollard and McCay on the sofa. “ St. Clair, what do you think you’re doing?”

“ Ever heard of the first amendment, bub?”

Strickland waved him out of the room. “ I’m in no mood for this! Get out of here!”

Jerry looked up, cigarette smoldering. He put away his pad and stood. “ This is going in the morning edition. And I wuz at the sliders, Chief. I gut notes.”

Jerry wandered out the screen door. “ He's an old wind bag,” said Jones.

“ He prints anything, I’ll lock him up.” Strickland turned to McCay and Amy Pollard. “ Miss Pollard. Tell me again what you did when you drove up here.”

Amy was more composed and cleared her throat. “ I drove up and finished listening to my tape.”

“ How long was that?” asked Jones.

“ Couple of minutes. Then I went inside.” Her eyes filled again. “ I didn’t kill him. Help me, Coach.”

Jones pressed his lips and glanced at Strickland. “ Who would want him dead?”

“ Brad knew a lot of people. I don't know.”

“ Wendell,” called Strickland.

Wendell looked up from a newspaper. “ Yo.”

Strickland faced her. “ Sergeant Harris, here is going to bring you back to the station.”

Jones thought she would be devastated by the news of being locked up, but she tearfully nodded and seemed to accept her circumstance. “ I understand.”

“ Again, you can talk with your lawyer-”

“ We will be using Susan Merkle-Brown,” said McCay.

“ Campus legal aid?” asked Jones. “ I know another lawyer.”

“ Why, have you needed a lawyer before, Mr. Jones?” asked McCay.

Jones squinted. “ No, I haven't. L.G. Bentley is right in town.”

“ Sure, a male lawyer.”

“ Oh, come on. What difference does it make? L.G. is an experienced man... I mean lawyer.”

“ May we use the phone to call Ms. Merckle-Brown?” asked McCay.

Jones rolled his eyes as Amy grasped his wrist. Her moist brown eyes drooped up like a puppy looking for food at the table.

“ Coach, I didn't kill Brad. Please... please help me.”

Jones paused. He wanted to leave for Maine and relax for ten days, but he did not think Amy Pollard killed Brad Davis. “ All right, I'll see what I can do.”