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the **Bay of Blood** teaser!

World-renowned painter Thom Tyler is murdered in Georgian Bay, Canada. The consensus is that Tyler had no enemies. Why would anyone murder him?

Detective Eva Naslund goes to work with a homicide team from OPP Central. They find no useful blood, print, or DNA evidence. They turn to financial forensics and criminal psychology. Tyler's paintings are worth millions, yet he's deeply in debt to banks and his art agent. Just as the investigation opens a new lead, courtesy of Tyler's friend, J.J. MacKenzie, MacKenzie is murdered. The team is back to ground zero—with two murders to solve.

*For information about the complete book,
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Bay of Blood

A. M. Potter

A Black Opal Books Publication

GENRE: MYSTERY-DETECTIVE/WOMEN SLEUTHS

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Print ISBN: 9781644370971

First Publication: MARCH 2019

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DEDICATION

To Stan & Em. They gave me the tools.

Ars longa, vita brevis.
Art is long, life is short.

Chapter 1

Colpoys Bay, Georgian Bay, Ontario, July 8th:

Predawn stars salted the sky. Thom Tyler pushed his skiff off the dock, paddled hard to point her nose into the wind, and immediately raised the sail. Off he tore, skimming across the water toward White Cloud Island.

To the east, the sky shed its blackness. A pale red flush crept across the bay. He settled in the cockpit. A few moments later, his neck-hairs bristled. He sensed hostile eyes burning into his head. Shifting nonchalantly, he leaned portside to inspect the shore. All quiet. Just the inky outline of Mallory Beach. Still, he was sure someone was there.

A car engine started. Very strange, he thought. There were never any cars about at this hour. He saw no lights. The slowly revving engine headed north. Was someone tracking him?

Forget it, he told himself and faced forward.

He turned his mind to sailing, easing out the mainsheet to spill some speed. Still, he flew over the water. He could smell the north: the clean sharpness of boreal forests. However, in the back of his mind, he felt uneasy. He

sensed something out there waiting for him. His neck twitched. The strange car fueled his anxiety. Something was waiting for him.

Chapter 2

Warton, Bruce Peninsula. Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Station, July 8th:

Got a little run for you, Naslund.” Detective Eva Naslund looked up to see the detachment chief standing at her desk. Ted Bickell’s pants were perfectly pressed. The creases looked like they could slice someone’s throat. “A boat just washed up near Cape Commodore,” Bickell said. “Caller reported blood. Lots of it.” He paused. “But I’m sure you can handle it.”

Naslund nodded. Fair point. She’d had nothing but B&Es for the past two months.

Bickell handed her a slip of paper. *Donnie Rathbone. HW 1, 100220.*

“Not an emergency,” he said. “No speeding.”

She shrugged. On a day like today, she’d drive anywhere in the Bruce, fast or slow, the farther from Staff Sergeant Bickell, the better. As she drove east, the morning sun tinted Colpoy’s Bay a deep golden red. The limestone cliffs above Mallory Beach not only reflected the sun, they shimmered like suns themselves. A convoy of high white clouds raced across the sky.

Fifteen minutes later, she pulled off Highway One at a

weathered blue bungalow with an unobstructed view of Georgian Bay. A run-down barn flanked the house. Across the highway, parched-looking Christmas trees stretched inland as far as she could see. It'd been a hot, dry summer. As she stepped out of her unmarked car, the wind whipped her pants around her legs. Georgian Bay was running high, churned by a powerful northwesterly. The Georgian was usually restless. It was essentially an inland sea. On calm days there was often a sea roll, even if only long and slow. Today there was a wave train. Line after line of breakers roared ashore.

She knocked on the front door. The man who answered was tall and fit, bearded, about fifty years old.

“Donnie Rathbone?” she asked.

The man nodded.

“Detective Sergeant Naslund, OPP.”

“Detective Sergeant, eh? Sent out a top dog, did they?”

She chuckled and covertly pressed the recording button on her duty phone. “No, sir. They had no choice. I’m the only detective in Wiarton.”

“Come on in then. Place is a bit of a mess. Wife’s away.”

“When the cat’s away,” Naslund said.

Rathbone grinned and led her to the kitchen. Passing the stove, she noticed a pan of congealed bacon. It was almost full. He pointed out the window. “There it is.”

She followed his finger and saw a boat seemingly hauled up on the shore. “When did you spot her?”

“About seven. I got up a bit late, at six, went right to the barn, fed my pigs, and came back for breakfast. I noticed it then. So I walked down.” Rathbone paused. “That’s when I saw the blood. A helluva lot of blood. I came right back and called nine-one-one.”

“Did you touch the boat?”

“No.”

“Did you touch anything aboard it?”

“No. I watch them CSI programs, you know.”

“All right. So, you noticed the boat about seven?”

“Right. Like I said, I was running late. Got up and went straight to my pigs.”

Rathbone sounded a bit nervous. In any case, the boat could have been there well before 0700 hours. “Did you happen to look out to your shore last night?”

“Nothing there last night, not when I went to bed. At ten-thirty that was.”

“Did you see or hear anyone on your property this morning?”

“No.”

“Notice anyone in the bay? Boats? Swimmers?”

“Didn’t see any.”

“Did you see anything strange on the highway?”

“No.”

“No one walking or running? No unusual vehicles?”

“No.”

“Thank you.”



Given the apparently large amount of blood, Naslund drew a hooded clean-suit from her trunk and stepped into it. Instantly she felt constricted, yet twice as big. She pulled on shoe covers and gloves and walked carefully down the path to the shore, examining the ground. One set of boot prints going, one coming back. Rathbone, if the man was telling the truth. She’d impound his boots on the way out.

As she reached the fine-graveled shore, she eyed the boat. A skiff, about six meters long. The bow faced southeast. The stern was still in the water, but the boat

wasn't moving. She'd settled into the gravel, as if she'd been there for days. Naslund figured the wind had driven her hard into shore. The mast and boom were intact, the sail torn to shreds. The hull was wooden, dove-gray with white trim.

That dove-gray hull. It looked like her friend Thom Tyler's skiff. She stepped to the side and read the boat's name: *West Wind*. Christ, it *was* Thom's skiff. Had he been forced to abandon ship?

Digging inside her clean-suit, she fished out her duty phone and called Thom's cottage. His other half answered. "Morning, Carrie. Eva here. Is Thom there?"

"No. He's out fishing."

"When did he leave?"

"About five."

Naslund glanced at the time—0738. "Did he go out alone?"

"As far as I know. I was in bed when he left. Anything wrong?"

Naslund ducked the question. "Are you sure he went out this morning?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Call me when he gets home." Naslund gave Carrie her OPP cell number, telling herself Thom would show. He'd abandoned ship and swam to shore, or a passing boat took him aboard.

Knowing that Thom always wore a blue lifevest, Naslund pulled a pair of binoculars from her CS kitbag. Focusing the binoculars, she turned her head slowly, scanning the bay in sweeps.

No sign of a blue lifevest, no floating bodies.

Follow the wind, she told herself. The northwesterly will drive anyone southeast. She stepped to the edge of the bay and scanned again and again.

Nothing.

Let it ride, she thought. Thom would show. He was the strongest swimmer she knew.

She walked up to the skiff and immediately saw a lot of blood, most of it inside the hull. She knew there'd been even more. The wave train would have washed some away. She paced the starboard side. At midship, two large splatter patterns spread from the gunwale down to the bilge, both about half-a-meter in width and a meter in length. She leaned closer. The main pattern presented wide-angle spray consistent with blows from a blunt force weapon. A lead pipe, she thought, maybe a crowbar. The other pattern resembled the spurting caused by a stab wound. Near them were two lines of fat circular drops, indicating blood falling at a fast rate, exiting large wounds. From the vector of the lines, she knew the source fell forward, toward the gunwale. Or was pushed.

She started down the port side. Halfway along it, she found the centerboard keel sticking out from the hull, almost completely detached, like a broken limb. No surprise. The skiff had grounded. She kept walking, finding no blood on the port side and none on the mast, sail, or mainsheet. However, there was blood on the starboard side of the boom. Had it hit Thom and knocked him overboard? Maybe. She re-evaluated the scene. No sharp protrusions on the boom. Two splatter patterns. If the boom had hit Thom, there would likely only be one—consistent with blunt force blood, not spurting blood. She filed the thought away.

Returning to the stains, she bent down on one knee. Her clean-suit felt even more constricting. She sniffed. The stains didn't smell fishy or gamey. She looked for scales or animal hair. Nothing. She stood and surveyed the blood again. It couldn't be from a small animal, like a dog or cat—there was too much of it. Could be from a deer, she reasoned, or a cow. Or a pig. Rathbone? Could be. But

there were no other signs of animals present. The blood was likely human.

Seeing no signs of activity near the skiff—no prints or scuffs, no evidence of a struggle—she assumed the shore wasn't a crime scene. But the blood splatter suggested the skiff was. She had a blood kit in her car, but decided to call the white coats. Pulling out her duty phone, she called Central.

“Serology. Gerard LaFlamme.”

Hot Doc, she thought, not that LaFlamme appreciated the nickname. He'd filed a complaint against two female detectives. They'd admitted wrongdoing then relabeled him THD, Très Hot Doc. “Morning, LaFlamme. Detective Naslund, Bruce Peninsula.”

“Naslund, what gives?”

“Got some blood on a wooden boat. Suspicion of assault. I'd run it myself but I need a foolproof ID.”

“Okay. Where are you?”

She gave him the location and hung up. Starting at the bow, she paced twenty steps inland, away from the skiff. Head down, eyes focused on the ground, she searched a grid about 200 meters square. No boot or foot indentations in the loose gravel, no prints on harder ground, no wheel or tire tracks leading away from the skiff. No butts, bottles, or cans. No wrappers. Nothing.

She walked back to the skiff and deliberately paced the starboard side from the waterline to the bow, this time with a magnifying glass. No hairs or fibers. Four partial fingerprints, wet and faint. Difficult to lift. Best left to a white coat. She paced down the port side to the waterline, but found nothing. Yet she sensed something was wrong.

She stood still and surveyed the whole boat, her eyes finally returning to the bow. That was it. No anchor rode-line tied to the bow. And no anchor. Why would Thom go out without an anchor? He'd just added a new

rode-line. She'd watched him do it at the marina three mornings ago...



“Good afternoon,” Naslund had said, as she always did first thing in the morning. She gauged a person's mood by how they responded.

“Good evening,” Thom replied.

Naslund grinned. As usual, Thom liked to be kidded. He wore old shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt. His tanned arms had the appearance of weathered leather. With his outdoorsman's face and long black hair, he looked like a Great Lakes voyageur. He moored his bigger sailboat at the marina, but was working on the skiff from his cottage boathouse.

She surveyed the skiff, a Mackinaw whose boom was raised so that a six-footer could easily slide under it.

“Want a muffin?” he asked and pointed to a paper bag. “Go on, have one. You need to eat more.”

She did, but didn't want to show it. Since she'd split up with her husband Pete, she wasn't eating much. Although life had returned to normal, her appetite hadn't.

“You're always on the go,” Thom said.

“Me?” she deadpanned.

“Yep, you.” He chuckled. “Curiosity killed the cop.”

“But luck brought her back.” She reached for a muffin. As she ate it, Thom tied a new anchor rode to the bow with a solid knot, a tight bowline.



Now, eying the scene, Naslund took two steps back and dropped to her haunches. The clean-suit protested, slowing her movement. From hip-level, she studied the

skiff. Something about it told her that Thom was dead. In her sixteen years on the force, she'd seen plenty of dead bodies. They'd all seemed vacant, abandoned by life. The skiff looked like them. Abandoned forever.

Naslund grimaced. Hoping for the best, she called in a Search & Rescue and then notified Bickell by radiophone. Although she normally used her duty cell, old-boy Bickell preferred radio-comm. He'd order his daily fish & chips by radio if he could. Afterward, she stood and faced the bay, trying to muster her optimism. Maybe they'd find Thom alive. Maybe he'd show up.

Turning her back to the wind, she called Carrie, who answered immediately.

"Eva here. I found Thom's boat, but not him. I called the Coast Guard for a search."

"What? A search? Why?"

"No need to worry. Thom probably swam into shore. He'll show up soon." Naslund stopped. She didn't feel like lying. Besides, Carrie had one of the sharpest minds she knew.

"Then why search for him?"

She had no good answer. She held back the information about the blood. "His skiff came ashore near Cape Commodore. Now we need to find him."

"Find him then. Find him!"

"We will."

"I want to help. Where are you?"

"You can't come here." Naslund knew the Coast Guard would call in the OPP Marine Unit from Wiarton. "Phone the station," she told her. "They'll be organizing search teams."

"Okay." Carrie hung up.

Naslund sighed. As much as she wanted to, she couldn't join the search. She had an investigation to run. Worse still, she felt sure Thom was dead. Her friend

wouldn't simply walk out of the bay, laughing off the northwesterly.

She inhaled deeply, held her breath for three seconds, exhaled slowly, and repeated the cycle five times—a trick she'd learned from Pete, a sports-therapist. It stilled her mind.

She eyed the skiff again. If the blood was human, they'd need a full forensic team. In the meantime, she needed one constable to secure the site and another to canvass the neighborhood to the east. After they arrived she'd revisit Rathbone then take the west. She glanced up at Rathbone's kitchen window. The man was watching her. She called the station. The dispatcher answered.

Naslund identified herself and gave the address. "Got a CS. Send two PCs."

Chapter 3

Wiarton, July 9th:

Naslund poured a coffee, slid her porch door open, and walked out into a humid morning with a sagging sky. The sun hadn't appeared. Colpoys Bay lay flat and sullen, darkened by leaden clouds. LaFlamme had identified the blood on Tyler's boat. It was human, Type O+, the same as Tyler's. When his DNA was available, the lab would determine if the blood was a match. Four white coats—a team lead, a CS video-photographer, and two forensic scientists—had arrived at the scene yesterday afternoon. They'd set up a MU, a mobile unit, next to Rathbone's barn.

Naslund dropped into a Muskoka chair and eyed the bay. Almost twenty-four hours had passed since she'd called in the Coast Guard. Hundreds of people had joined the search. From what she'd heard, Carrie had been tireless; she hadn't stopped all day. A PC had sent her home at 0400. No one had found any sign of Thom, or of his body.

Yesterday, Naslund had interviewed Rathbone again and cleared him of any suspicion.

The farmer had a "double" alibi. He hadn't been in bed with one supposed girlfriend; he'd been in bed with

two. The two hookers independently corroborated his story.

Naslund had also interviewed dozens of residents along Highway One. No one had seen or heard anything. Unlike in Toronto, there were no CCTV or surveillance cameras near Commodore. She was starting her investigation blind and deaf. She sipped her coffee and swallowed hard. She'd been working the case in her mind all night. Due to the powerful northwesterly, there was only one direction a body could have traveled. Southeast toward a shore that had been searched and re-searched. Three times. She hated to admit it, but it seemed that the time had almost come. The time to switch to a recovery mission. Thom Tyler was likely at the bottom of the bay.

Naslund was familiar with recovery missions. A dead body normally sank to the bottom unless stopped by an obstruction like a net. If there were no currents, it settled close to where it went under. It was usually found within a radius equal to the depth of the water. In her view, Thom had probably been concentrating on his fishing, which made him susceptible to being knocked overboard by the boom or, as appeared likely, assaulted.

Assuming Thom reached his usual fishing spot, off White Cloud Island, she pulled up the local marine chart on her phone and drew a mental line from the northeast corner of White Cloud to the place where Thom's skiff grounded. The depth along the line ranged from a maximum of seventy-two meters to three meters close to shore. Thom's body likely lay anywhere from three to seventy-two meters on each side of the line.

She noted the geographic co-ords of Thom's fishing spot and the skiff's grounding spot. The distance between the two co-ords was 5.2 kilometers. She fed three numbers into her phone's calculator: $5.2 * .072 * 2$. Result: .7488, about .75 square-kilometers. Well, she thought, a large

search area, but a lot smaller than the mouth of Colpoys Bay extending into Georgian Bay proper, over twenty square-kilometers. The OPP handled recovery missions, not the Coast Guard. She rechecked the co-ords and called the chief of the Underwater Search and Recovery Unit.

“Morning, Superintendent Coulson. Detective Sergeant Naslund, Bruce Peninsula.”

“Yes, Sergeant?”

“I’m calling about the Thom Tyler search. I don’t mean to interfere, but I have a thought.”

“Go ahead.”

“I suspect Mr. Tyler is at the bottom of Georgian Bay.”

There was a pause. “Quite possibly.”

“If the mission gets turned over to you, I might be able to save you some time. I know where the skiff likely drifted from and where it ended.” She supplied the geographic co-ords. “The maximum depth between the two co-ords is seventy-two meters. I think the body will likely be closer to the first co-ord, near the island.” Enough said. Coulson’s team could do the math.

“Might be,” Coulson replied. “In any case, thank you. I’ll keep you in the loop.”

“Thank you, Superintendent.”

Naslund downed her coffee, went inside, and got dressed: dark green slacks and blue-and-green short-sleeve shirt. Eight years ago, as an undercover narc in Toronto, she’d worn only black. Standing in front of the bathroom mirror, she brushed her auburn hair off her forehead. Two unruly locks fell back down. On the way out the door, she grabbed a stale Danish and left for Rathbone’s property.

As she headed up Highway One, the sky darkened. Passing through Oxenden, population 162, she sensed every soul was asleep. When she parked next to the MU,

the team lead, Forensic Sergeant Lance Chu, was opening the door. For someone who'd spent all night at a CS, he looked good. But he always did. She stepped out of her car.

“Morning, Chu. How goes the battle?”

“Howdy, Naslund.” He shrugged. “Sometimes you get lucky. Most times you don't. We're on the don't side.”

She followed him inside. It was one of the new units, with a brightly-lit workroom, whiz-bang kitchenette, compost toilet, and two supposedly tastefully decorated bedrooms, each with an upper and lower bunk. It reminded her of an up-scale house trailer. Not that it smelled like one.

Instead of air freshener, she smelled cyanoacrylate, a compound used to help process FPs, fingerprints. It seemed Chu's team had worked some prints.

“Any matches?” she asked.

“Not yet. Got five FPs. All partial. Plus two hairs. Long strands, black. No follicles.”

She nodded. Probably Thom's hairs, but they couldn't be conclusively linked to him. Only hairs with follicles, which held nuclear DNA, yielded individualization.

“Found them in the blood pool in the bottom of the boat, the...”

“Bilge,” she said.

After videotaping the skiff and going over it with a proverbial fine-tooth comb yesterday, the team called in a mobile crane to haul it out of the bay. Now it sat on blocks well above the shoreline, protected by a CS tent, cordoned off by police tape.

“And the blood, of course,” Chu said. “Gina Domani is on it.”

“Good.” Domani was the OPP's best blood-splatter analyst.

“Domani's completing her measurements. Will

probably take her a few more hours.”

“Do you mind if I go down to the boat?”

“All right, but don’t get in her way. I know you, Naslund.” He smiled. “Don’t hound Domani.”

“I won’t.”

He pointed a warning finger at her. “Hold your questions for later.”

She nodded. Chu and company were painstakingly brilliant. It was the painstaking part that sometimes frustrated her.

Three hours later, she left the scene, no closer to knowing what had happened, but partially mollified. Except for the hairs and one FP, she’d detected everything the white coats had found. But she needed to know more. While they delivered dots—facts and details—her job was to connect them. Although she suspected murder, the evidence didn’t yet support it. She was working a possible assault, not a homicide.

Thinking of Thom’s size, she drove toward Owen Sound. Thom was a powerful man. She’d met him at a sailing regatta, where he’d single-handed a CS 33. He’d beaten everyone, including her and Pete, and they’d been a helluva team. On the water. She turned her mind back to Thom. It would take a strong person to assault him. Very strong. Then again, he might have been accidentally knocked overboard by the boom. She re-thought both scenarios. Besides the blood splatter evidence pointing to two weapons, a blunt instrument and a sharp one, the boom had a high clearance. Five-and-a-half feet. She’d just measured it. Thom was used to maneuvering under it. Which pointed to an assault, not an accident.

Naslund concentrated on the road. She needed to set her mind free, to give herself a break. The traffic was light; the air, muggy yet clean. Southern Ontario smog rarely reached the Bruce. As the kilometers passed, the day

brightened. Early afternoon sunlight bounced off the bay. She attempted to stay focused on the day but her mind wouldn't let her. It returned to the case. She envisioned someone attacking Thom. One attacker didn't seem likely. What if there were two? That's more like it, she reasoned. That made an assault possible.

Having entered Owen Sound, she pulled into her favorite Chinese takeout. After eating chicken Kung Pao next to the harbor, she decided to return to Cape Commodore and systematically re-visit yesterday's interviewees. Surely someone would remember something new they'd seen or heard, some tiny detail that might begin to connect the dots.

By 1900, Naslund gave up. No dots, tiny or otherwise. No connections. She headed toward Wiarton.

Ten minutes along Highway One she received a call. She switched her cell to hands-free. "Sergeant Naslund, OPP."

"Superintendent Coulson, USRU. We found your man."

She didn't know what to say. "Good," she eventually replied.

"I understand you knew Mr. Tyler?"

"I did."

"My condolences."

"Thank you."

"By the way, he was near the island. About a hundred meters offshore. Looks like a suspicious death. They're bringing the body into Wiarton Marina."

"I'll be there," she said.

"A coroner's been called. A Dr. Kapanen. He'll join you there. One more thing. Good work, Sergeant."

"Thank you."

Naslund ended the call, feeling absolutely numb. She pulled off the highway and hung her head. She'd sensed

Thom was gone, and yet now she couldn't believe it. It seemed impossible, Thom Tyler dead at the age of thirty-nine, the same age as her. He'd been larger-than-life. He was famous, and not only locally. He was a world-renowned painter. She'd once watched him paint the sky in less time than it took to dream it. Two sweeps of cobalt blue, a few dabs of cadmium red, finished with quick strokes of thalo blue—and he was done.

Now, looking up, she saw a car in her side mirror approaching very quickly. As the car zipped by, Sergeant Lance Chu waved at her. She retook the road and followed him. In Wiarton, he turned right on Claude Street and headed to the marina.

Naslund parked next to Chu's car and caught up with him on foot.

"Hey, fast car," she said as they walked to the OPP jetty.

He grinned. "Yep. By the way, who's the coroner?"

"Rudi Kapanen."

"Huh. I heard he's friendly with Finnish vodka."

"How can you say that?" she protested. "He's not friendly, he's enamored."

Chu chuckled. "Another pickled coroner."

"Exactly."

Reaching the jetty, Naslund spotted an officer from her station, Constable Chandler of the Marine Unit, plus a USRU sergeant and two USRU divers. She took control, motioning for the USRU team to wait and assigning Chandler to block off the jetty. Journalists were already gathering at the marina clubhouse, hovering like vultures. There was no sign of Kapanen.

She and Chu boarded the OPP boat. Thom's body lay on its back in the cockpit. Forcing herself to concentrate, she bent down on one knee and studied the corpse. Thom's arms and legs were pinkish-white, the color of trout flesh.

He looked like a wrinkled version of himself. His auto-inflatable vest hadn't inflated.

Purposefully bypassing Thom's head, she scanned the body. No evidence of trauma. Her eyes settled on the right ankle. There was a line wrapped around it. Even after hours in the lake, it was unmistakable. It was the new anchor rode. The anchor lay at Thom's feet, attached to the end of the rode not around his ankle. She did a double-take. The anchor was attached to him. Christ, he'd been dragged down by his own anchor. Not even the best swimmer could fight the pull of an anchor. She bent closer to the anchorless end of the rode. It hadn't been cut. Maybe the knot tied to the skiff's bow worked itself free? She dismissed that idea. She'd seen Thom tie the knot. Perhaps someone untied it and he hadn't noticed? Not likely. To add oats to a bubbling porridge pot, there was the malfunctioning lifevest, which appeared equally suspicious.

Taking a deep breath, she turned to Thom's head. His mouth was open. His tongue had disappeared. His upper face was a bruised, swollen mess. His right eye could've been hit by the boom. But not the left one. She shook her head. It seemed to have been punctured with what looked to be a rapier, a thin one. She looked away. From what she'd seen, her friend wasn't only dead, he'd been murdered.

She felt momentarily lost. Almost immediately, her training kicked in. She turned away from the body and called Bickell. No radiophone this time. She didn't want civilians listening in.

"Naslund here. They found Tyler's body. I can vouch for that. We don't need anyone to ID it."

"All right."

"Looks like a murder. Pending the coroner's findings."

“I see.”

“I have to attend the coroner’s exam now, but I’ll inform Carrie MacLean later.”

“I’ll do it, Naslund. And visit his parents as well.”

“I should do it, sir. I knew him.”

“You can’t be everywhere, Detective.”

Occasionally, Bickell surprised her. He was a good man at heart. “Ah, sir?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t mention the murder angle.”

Chapter 4

Naslund stepped aside as Forensic Constable Noreen Ross, the MU video-photographer, boarded the boat and snapped dozens of shots. Thom's face was completely in the shadows. In the dwindling light, his body looked one-dimensional, more an outline than a person. Eventually, Ross edged back and took a series of wide-angle shots. Job done, she signaled to Naslund and left.

Naslund turned to the USRU sergeant and asked for a summary of his findings.

"The body was recovered sixty-point-two meters down," the sergeant reported and then referred to his notes. "Latitude forty-four degrees, fifty-one minutes, twenty-one seconds north. Longitude eighty degrees, fifty-seven minutes, forty-two seconds west. Which translates to one-hundred-one-point-four meters southeast of the first co-ord you gave us."

She nodded. "Water temperature?"

"Six Celsius."

"Thank you. We appreciate your work."

"And yours, Detective."

The USRU team took their gear and headed to land. With the area cleared, Naslund and Chu waited for

Kapanen. The sun dipped below the western horizon. In the cedars ashore, doves cooed wistfully, marking the end of the day. She felt wistful as well. Chu seemed to know her frame-of-mind. He spoke quietly about the FPs. There were three different sets.

The coroner huffed up to the boat a few minutes later. His face was red, his nose, redder. As usual, regardless of the weather and his weight, he wore a tight three-piece suit. “I was just starting dinner,” he complained. “Detective Naslund, are you in charge?”

“Of the case,” she said. “FID Sergeant Chu is in charge of the presumed crime scene, the victim’s boat.”

“I didn’t ask about the CS, did I?”

“No, sir.”

“Don’t call me sir.”

“Sorry, Doctor.”

She didn’t smell any alcohol on Kapanen’s breath or body. But that didn’t mean he was dry. It often took hours for alcohol to be emitted through one’s pores.

Kapanen and Chu boarded the boat. The coroner seemed steady on his feet. Naslund followed, switched on the boat’s twin searchlights, and pointed them aft. The deck was instantly lit in stark white light. Kapanen blinked and then blinked again. Giving himself a shake, he pulled on a pair of gloves and knelt beside the body.

“Looks like a wet drowning,” he soon said. “Note: I said, *looks like*. We need an autopsy to confirm that. Most drownings are wet. Eighty-five percent.” He eyed Naslund. “Do you know the difference between a wet drowning and a dry drowning?”

“Yes, sir. I mean, yes Doctor.” She often felt like a schoolgirl around Kapanen. She didn’t mind occasionally joking about him but also wanted to impress him. “In a dry drowning, fatal cerebral hypoxia, or oxygen deprivation, does not result from water blocking the airway, but from

throat spasms. Water never enters the lungs.”

“Very good. You’re learning.” Kapanen pointed at Thom’s mouth. “See that foam?” Naslund and Chu nodded in unison. “It contains blood and mucus, which usually signifies a wet drowning.”

“What about the head wounds?” Naslund asked.

“What about them?”

“Maybe Mr. Tyler was dead before he entered the water.”

“Oh? Why do you say that? Regard the foam, Detective. Foam,” Kapanen pronounced, “often oozes from the mouth and/or nose of victims of wet drownings. Its presence indicates the victim became immersed while still breathing.”

She nodded.

“Furthermore, the foam you see contains blood. The force of intruding water causes the lungs of a living individual to bleed. A dead individual’s lungs do not bleed. However, the evidence you see is not conclusive.” Kapanen shook his head. “The autopsy will determine if the lungs contain microscopic lake algae. If they do, we have a wet drowning.”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“It’s a good thing that the divers found the body. It might have taken weeks for it to refloat.” Kapanen stood and scrutinized the two detectives. “Why?”

Naslund and Chu said nothing.

Kapanen rolled his eyes. “The human body weighs slightly more than fresh water. When a person suffers a wet drowning, they sink. As a body sinks, water pressure compresses gases in the abdomen and chest. As a result, the body displaces less water and, therefore, becomes less buoyant the farther it sinks. And if it does not sink?” The question was rhetorical. “You detectives should suspect another cause of death.” Kapanen raised a finger. “So,

what about taking weeks to refloat? What factors can affect the length of time it takes for a body to refloat?"

"A weight," Naslund said. "Like an anchor attached to the body."

"Well, yes. I hadn't thought of that. You people, always looking on the dark side."

"We have to."

"Indeed," Kapanen allowed. "Now, let's return to medical science. Think food consumption preceding death. Plus water temperature and depth. Foods high in carbohydrates, such as beer or potatoes—"

Or vodka, Naslund thought.

"—feed bacteria that elicit a quick refloat. In warm water, gases form rapidly, resulting in a possible refloat within days. In deep, cold water, bacterial action takes place slowly, and a corpse might take weeks to refloat. As you're aware, Detective Naslund—" Kapanen turned to face her. "—in the summer months, Georgian Bay has thermoclines, different layers of water temperature. While the surface temperature can be fifteen to twenty Celsius, the temperature a hundred meters down might be three or four. Do you know the depth and temperature where the body was recovered?"

She nodded. "Sixty-point-two meters down. Six Celsius."

"That would certainly retard the re-flotation process."

She figured that she and Chu had had enough schooling. She pointed to Thom's head. "What caused the damage?"

Kapanen turned back to the body. A few minutes later, he looked up. "Consider the right eye socket and orbital bones. I detect two or three blows by a blunt force instrument with a rounded impact surface. About six centimeters wide. Most likely metal. I don't see any wood splinters, although they may have been washed away by

the lake. As for the left eye,” Kapanen paused, “it seems to have been pierced with a pointed instrument. Metal. Again, no wood splinters. Perhaps a thin blade. I can’t tell. We’ll know more after the autopsy.”

“Okay,” she said. “What about time of death, post-mortem interval?”

“You expect me to tell you PMI?”

“An estimate, Doctor, of course.”

Kapanen appeared to be appeased. “Well, we’ll have to adjust the usual hat trick.”

She nodded. The *hat trick*, she knew, was lividity, algor mortis, and rigor mortis. Lividity, or blood pooling, turned a body purple and pink. Algor referred to a body turning cold. With no blood flowing, body temperature dropped by about one Celsius each hour, until it matched air temperature. In this case, she realized, it had likely dropped by double that amount, until it reached water temperature. Rigor mortis, or body stiffening, generally started within two hours and became fully established in twelve.

“Considering the water temperature,” Kapanen cautioned, “I can’t be very precise. As for lividity, when the body is undressed we’ll know more. For now, I see traces of blood pooling in the throat area, which is what I’d expect in the case of a drowning. A drowning victim normally assumes a position of face down and buttocks up. Of course, the traces could be bruises. As for algor, when a body has undergone submersion in cold water, algor is unreliable.”

Nonetheless, Kapanen drew a liver thermometer from his medical bag and pierced Thom’s right side. “Six Celsius,” he read. “Given that thirty-seven Celsius is the norm, the victim died well over fifteen hours ago. That’s the best I can do with algor. Now, rigor.” Kapanen shook his head. “Again, the submersion complicates matters. I

can't tell you with certainty when he died. However, I can tell you one thing."

"Please," she said.

"The victim died in the water. He was not killed on land and then moved. Note the semi-fetal position. The arms and legs are slightly bent at the elbows and knees. Although he is lying on his back, the spine is curved and the chin is tilted down. When someone dies on land, the head is typically rotated to one side, a position almost never found in a drowning victim."

"Good to know."

"Try to remember that," Kapanen said brusquely. "Now, consider the victim's hands. They are turned toward his face, with the fingers clenched inward. Victims often try to cover their mouths to prevent drowning. Rigor reflects that. All right, back to PMI. When does rigor normally set in?"

Naslund glanced at Chu. *Class still in.* She turned back to the coroner. "After twelve hours."

"How and when does it diminish?"

"Gradually, after twenty-four to thirty-six hours."

"Correct, Detective. Very good. Extensive physical exertion before death may speed it up or even trigger instant onset. However, I don't see evidence of that. There are no signs of cadaveric spasm. On the other hand, we have an obvious temperature effect. Cold retards rigor. Given the cold water—six Celsius—the length of the submersion, and the victim's size, I'd estimate full rigor took much longer than normal, roughly twenty-two to twenty-four hours." He eyed the corpse. "The victim still exhibits signs of rigor, with the exception of the face and hands. Considering the obvious loss of rigor in the facial muscles, for example, in the labial region—" Kapanen pointed to Thom's lips. "—and the hands, but not in the largest muscles, such as the quadriceps, we can deduce the

body is currently losing rigor. I'd say rigor has been diminishing for fourteen to sixteen hours."

"Which means?" she asked.

Kapanen glared at her. "Which means the victim has been dead for approximately thirty-six to forty hours."

"Thank you."

"Approximately, Detective."

Naslund knew that, in itself, PMI was just a number. However, she always pressed coroners for it. With a PMI estimate, she could narrow down an investigation. If she could place a suspect at a crime scene during the PMI window, she could drill down. She had opportunity; she could probe for motive. "Your final findings, Doctor?"

Kapanen didn't skip a beat. "The victim suffered severe head trauma, but was alive when he entered Georgian Bay. He then drowned. The wounds he sustained were not self-inflicted. He was attacked. Cause of death: Drowning. Means: Homicide." Kapanen jutted out his chin. "Any more questions?"

She shook her head.

"I'll have my report delivered by midnight."

She had no problem with Kapanen's work ethic. His empathy was another matter. After he left, she waited on the jetty for the morgue transport. A full-moon rose above Colpoys Bay, its face redder than Kapanen's. It reminded her of a death mask. Up it climbed, dominating the sky.

Chapter 5

Wiaraton, OPP Station, July 10th:

In Naslund's eyes, Carrie MacLean was incredibly gorgeous. Over the past year, Naslund had eaten dinner with her and Thom at least ten times. She supposed Carrie was a friend. And yet, in her experience, certain people often tried to take advantage—among them, not surprisingly, the beautiful. Carrie had already squirmed out of a 1030 interview. She'd seemed very controlled when Naslund had called her at 0900 that morning, as if she were hiding something. Bickell had said she'd been antagonistic when he visited her the previous evening, to the point of outright belligerence.

Now Naslund sat in her desk chair and leaned closer to the speakerphone. "Eva again. We need to see you this morning."

"This morning?" Carrie asked.

"The investigation began yesterday," Naslund reminded her. "It's just a routine chat. How's eleven-thirty?"

"Let's say tomorrow...." Her voice trailed off. "I'm sorry, Eva, I'm just not myself."

"I understand, but we need to see you today."

"Tomorrow. Okay?"

Naslund fought to contain her exasperation. “It has to be today. Eleven-thirty. We can meet at your cottage or you can come to the station.” Carrie didn’t reply. She wasn’t a known suspect who’d be read her rights, but if she wanted to start off with a lawyer that was her prerogative. “You can arrange for a lawyer,” Naslund said.

“Oh, no. I don’t need a lawyer.”

“Home or station?”

“I’ll come to the station.”

“Fine. Eleven-thirty.”

Naslund hung up and turned her attention to the Tyler case file. An hour ago, Central had informed her that they were assigning a Detective Inspector to run the case. DI Lewis Moore was due at eleven. After the MacLean interview, Moore and Naslund had to hustle to Orillia for Tyler’s autopsy. In the meantime, she was saddled with her least favorite task: completing case notes.



Naslund observed Carrie MacLean enter the station via a security-camera feed running on her laptop. Carrie wore a loose-fitting pantsuit, not one of her usual body-hugging outfits. Although she normally let her strawberry-blonde hair down, it was piled on top of her head and knotted. Her cat-like green eyes seemed a few shades lighter. She looked strained, almost fragile—not herself at all, which, upon reflection, seemed appropriate. She *was* different now, a POI, a person-of-interest: Carolyn Cornelia MacLean, 414 Mallory Beach Road, Ontario D/L P6790-00530-53412, DOB 8/18/75, owner of Blue Bay Catering. She had no previous record: no arrests, no traffic infractions, no citations or complaints against. At the same time, she was on the wrong side of a murder line.

Inspector Moore had insisted on questioning her alone. After hearing about her delaying tactics, he'd informed Naslund that he intended to show MacLean her place. A POI couldn't be coddled, especially an evasive or belligerent one. Naslund hadn't replied. Besides, there was nothing she could say. Moore owned the case. Now she called him, a tall, thin man who moved with surprising quickness.

She pegged him at sixty. His shirt and suit were gray, his short hair grayer. He had the eyes of someone who'd seen it all a thousand times. "She's here, Inspector."

"Very good," he replied.

Naslund watched him materialize beside Carrie MacLean as if by magic. The POI almost jumped out of her chair. With Moore's height and bony face, he looked otherworldly, like a skeleton on stilts. MacLean stood and shook his outstretched hand. Naslund saw discomfort in her eyes then displeasure. *I'm not here to see you.* She switched camera feeds to watch as he led MacLean to the interview room.

No chit-chat, Naslund saw, no friendly gestures. Moore was all business. The two FID men who'd arrived with him had already departed for Tyler's cottage.

As soon as the door closed, Naslund left her office and took up her position in the shadow room. On the console screen, the interview room looked long and narrow. The ceiling hosted two sets of glaring fluorescent lights hiding high-tech cameras and microphones. Three flimsy wooden chairs flanked a small metal table bolted to the floor. The suspect's chair, known as the Slider, had a heavily waxed seat. Its front legs were a centimeter shorter than the back ones. The incline wasn't visibly evident, but anyone who sat in the chair slid slowly forward, right into the face of their interrogator.

Moore offered MacLean the Slider and sat across

from her in front of a stack of papers. "I'm sorry to bring you in so soon after the event," he began.

She stared at him. Naslund was sure she could read MacLean's face. *Event? How dare you?*

Moore smiled evenly. "Mr. Tyler's murder." He paused. "Miss MacLean, you seem annoyed by my word choice." He looked down his nose. "The word *murder*, I mean. You see, Mr. Tyler was murdered, we're sure of that."

"I am too."

"Why is that?"

"He was far too good a sailor to drown."

"But he did drown. The coroner's report concluded—" Moore stopped to pull some crisp pages from the pile on the desk, fished a pair of half-moon glasses from a pocket and put them on. "—that Mr. Tyler, and I quote, 'suffered traumatic head wounds but died from water inhalation when he entered Georgian Bay.'"

The inspector dropped the report and eyed MacLean through the half-moons, his gray orbs eerily magnified. With his glasses on, he looked more unearthly. "When a man inhales water into his lungs, Miss MacLean, he experiences severe chest pain. He suffers simultaneous circulatory and respiratory failure. The victim usually succumbs within four to eight minutes. Four to eight minutes of hell."

She flinched.

He jotted down a note. "Let's continue, shall we?"

She didn't reply.

"The coroner concluded that when the victim 'fell' into the lake he was alive. If a man were dead when he went overboard, he wouldn't draw water into his lungs the way the victim did." Moore leaned forward. "Dead men do not respire." His words hung in the air. "Miss MacLean?"

Her eyes seemed to say *enough*.

Moore kept going. “The coroner found foam in the nose and mouth containing blood and mucus. The force of intrushing water causes the lungs of a living individual to bleed. A dead individual’s lungs do not bleed.”

She turned her head away. *No more.*

“The victim’s auto-inflatable lifevest failed.” Moore eyed her silently. “If it hadn’t, he might have survived—even though there was an anchor line attached to his right ankle. You see, if the lifevest hadn’t failed, he might have had time to unwind that line or cut it.” Moore shook his head. “First, the victim’s lifevest fails and then somehow an anchor line, pardon me, a rode,” he corrected himself, “gets wrapped around his ankle.” He stopped. “Any idea how that happened?”

“No.” She pulled herself back in the Slider.

Moore pretended not to hear her. “I repeat, do you know how that happened?”

“No.”

He shrugged as if to say *you’ll tell me eventually.*

Naslund wondered about the inspector’s angle. He was breaking the usual rules of a first interview: make the POI feel comfortable, get them to open up by being pleasant. Apparently, it had served him well. Moore was a top gun. She’d heard that he had an eighty-six percent solve rate.

Moore leafed through the papers piled in front of him again, pulled out a thick booklet, and opened it. “This is a forensic report, Miss MacLean. Among other things, it details what is known about the victim’s lifevest. Our analysts found that the CO-Two gas cartridge failed to inflate the vest’s buoyancy chambers due to a blocked valve. Vests of that make and manufacture rarely fail. They have—” He donned his specs and glanced down. “—a one in five million failure rate. Miniscule.”

She nodded guardedly.

Naslund sensed her retreating into defense-mode, trying to decipher where Moore was going.

The inspector removed his glasses. “The vest showed virtually no signs of wear and tear. Apparently, it was almost new. So, a new vest, a first-class new vest, if I may say, failed.”

She said nothing.

“Do you know when Mr. Tyler bought the vest?”

“No. Thom and I didn’t shop together for boating things.”

Moore scribbled a note. “Do you know where he bought it?”

“In Owen Sound, I think. I’m not sure.” She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I’m not myself. My mind isn’t working.”

“What do you know about the vest?”

“It was blue,” she said. “Dark blue.”

Moore seemed about to lash out. He appeared to think she was stringing him along. However, he pursed his lips and sat back. “Given the blocked valve, the vest did not inflate automatically. However, the wearer could still have inflated it manually, with the mouth blow-tube. The report indicates Mr. Tyler tried to do so. His bite marks were found on the tube. Repeated marks, the bite of someone frantic, someone desperate.”

Enough! her eyes seemed to say.

“Speaking of the report,” Moore continued, “it states the anchor got released. Any idea how that happened?”

“No. I apologize, I rarely went aboard Thom’s skiff.”

“What about his bigger boat?”

“I liked it more, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Did you go aboard it?”

“Yes.”

“So you know how to sail?”

“Yes, well enough.”

“Then you know mooring lines, mainsheets, and jib sheets.”

“Yes.”

“And anchor rodes.”

“Yes, of course.” She seemed more at ease. “Whenever we dropped anchor, Thom would stay at the helm. I’d always go forward to handle the hook.”

“Very nice. The *hook*.” Moore smiled with insincere respect. “You’re not a novice sailor, are you?”

“Oh, no. I’ve been sailing for over a decade.”

“Is there anything you’d like to tell me about the skiff?”

“Tell you?” She looked confused.

“Why don’t you tell me about the last time you were aboard?”

She appeared to scan her memory. “It was over a month ago, more like five weeks.” She forced herself up in the Slider. Her face showed obvious exasperation. “Just at the dock.”

Moore made a note. “What did you do, Miss MacLean?”

“Do? Nothing. Thom and I sat in the cockpit and had a beer.”

“A beer?”

“Two beers, Inspector, to be exact. One each.”

“I’ll take your word for it. Very well, let’s step ahead, to the question of how Mr. Tyler ended up in the lake. Rumor has it,” Moore began then shook his head dismissively, as if to say *groundless gossip*, “that he fell overboard while taking a leak, or while setting his fishing lines, or hauling them in. The usual tropes.” He eyed the POI with apparent respect. “What do you think happened? Miss MacLean?”

Naslund saw that the *Miss* salutation was beginning to irritate MacLean. It was an old-school technique, designed

to unsettle a female POI. Both confuse and anger her. At times, Moore sounded respectful, at others, contemptuous, his tone saying *you're a disgrace to your gender*.

"Miss MacLean," Moore repeated, "what do you think happened?"

"I don't know."

"Care to make a guess?"

She shook her head.

"A small guess?" he pressed. "Come, you must think something."

Think? her eyes said. *I can't think.*

He scrutinized her then continued. "I assume you know the victim's body was submerged for many hours."

She nodded.

"Well, you might not know this. DNA evidence is not affected by immersion in water. Fingerprints often survive as well. They did in this case." He paused to observe her reaction.

She nodded again.

"Given that the body was immersed in deep cold water, we have excellent prints. We fingerprinted Mr. Tyler's skiff as well and scanned it for DNA. The whole boat." Moore leaned forward and studied her. "We'll soon know if anyone interfered with it." He leaned closer. "In any way."

She said nothing.

Naslund watched the inspector lean back. He'd used the "lean in/out" method. It was subliminal. You leaned in, you invaded the half-meter the POI thought they owned, and then you leaned back when you had what you wanted. The inspector had what he wanted. Naslund assumed he took MacLean's silence as an implication of unease, if not guilt. Naslund did.

MacLean stared at her hands then looked up. "I know

you have to question me, but it's horrible." Her lips quivered. She seemed about to cry.

"Would you like to take a break?" Moore asked.

She shook her head.

"Coffee or tea?"

"No thank you." She straightened her shoulders. "I'm fine."

"Well, Miss MacLean, as I mentioned, Mr. Tyler's skiff has been combed for evidence. It is being treated as a crime scene. As of half an hour ago, so too is the boathouse and dock at your Mallory Beach cottage. That area is now off-limits to everyone, including you. An investigation team is working the scene as we speak." Moore stopped and studied the POI.

She didn't seem disturbed or defensive.

He jotted down a note. "When did you last speak to Mr. Tyler?"

She slumped in her chair. "Sunday night, when he went to bed. About nine-thirty."

"When did you go to bed?"

"Around eleven." She pushed herself back in the Slider.

"What did you do between nine-thirty and eleven?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Well, what I usually do on a Sunday night. I relaxed, I watched TV."

"Anything else?"

"I read a while, for about half an hour I'd say. Before bed, I went down to our dock to cool off. I swam out from the boathouse for a few minutes and back. I always do that before bed."

"Was Mr. Tyler's skiff moored at the boathouse?"

"Yes."

"Did you go aboard?" Moore asked.

“No.”

“Did everything look normal on the skiff?”

“Yes.”

He made a note. “Where were you on Sunday until nine-thirty p.m.?”

“I worked a brunch function from seven in the morning until four. In Owen Sound.”

“And after that?”

“I was at home.”

“Meaning your cottage, Four-Fourteen Mallory Beach Road?”

“Yes.”

“What were you doing?”

“Cooking, until around six-thirty. Then Thom and I ate dinner.”

“It took you over two hours to cook dinner?”

“No. I also made meals for the coming week. They’re in the freezer.”

Moore studied her before speaking. “Was anyone else with you Sunday evening, other than Mr. Tyler?”

“No.”

“Do you have any idea who might have been aboard the skiff recently? I mean, did Mr. Tyler sail with anyone else?”

“Yes, some of his friends.”

“Who?”

She eyed the ceiling, apparently going back through her memory. “J.J. MacKenzie... Ward Larmer.”

Moore recorded the names. “To the best of your recollection, when did they sail with Mr. Tyler?”

“Ward went out with Thom last week, at least three times. J.J. hasn’t been out with him for months.”

“Just to confirm, by Ward you mean Ward Larmer?”

She nodded.

“Would you say this Mr. Larmer knows the skiff well?”

“Yes.”

“Would you say he knew Mr. Tyler well?”

“Yes. He’s known him for years. Almost fifteen. Not that they were best of friends.”

“Oh?”

“Ward’s a painter, a friend, yes, but also a competitor.”

“How so?”

Naslund sensed that Moore was being deliberately thick-headed.

“Artists, Inspector,” she replied, “they’re often in competition.”

“I’ll take your word for it. All right then, how *competitive* were Mr. Tyler and Mr. Larmer?”

“Very. Ward was always asking Thom how much he got for his work. And always envious when he heard the answer.”

“How do you know he was envious?”

“I’ve known Ward for fourteen years, Inspector. I lived with him for two.”

“And?”

“I can read him.”

“I see. Well, Miss MacLean, on the subject of art, just so you’re aware, the investigation team will be cataloguing all the sketches and paintings in Mr. Tyler’s studio. I trust you’ll cooperate fully.”

“Of course.”

“Two team members will be there well into the night. The studio contents are salient to a crime. *Murder*.” Moore stopped to emphasize the word. “Like the boathouse and dock,” he went on, “the studio has been cordoned off with police tape. Do not enter it. Do not remove or alter any-

thing, even things you think you own.” He paused to let his words sink in. “Is that clear?”

She nodded.

“I’d like to ask you a personal question.” He sounded solicitous.

“Yes?”

“What’s your favorite Thom Tyler work?”

She didn’t hesitate. “A painting he never finished. He considered it too realistic, but...”

“But,” Moore prompted.

“Well.”

“Go on, Miss MacLean.”

“Well, I thought it was perfect.” She seemed to be seeing the painting in her mind’s eye. “It was a portrait of our cottage, from out on the bay. Thom sketched it from his sailboat. Looking at it, you felt drawn in to shore. The bay seemed to vanish. You were drawn to the cottage. You felt that it contained the whole world.”

“Go on.”

“I loved that feeling. I loved seeing our cottage nestled amongst blue-green pines, bounded by a beautiful blue sky.”

“Sounds lovely.”

“It was. When he was there.”

“Ah. But he was never there.”

“Well.”

“Please, continue. It seems Mr. Tyler was rarely home.”

“I...I suppose that’s true.” She straightened herself in the Slider. “Yes, I hardly saw him this past year. Anyone can tell you that. I work long hours at times, I admit, but only at times. On the other hand, Thom was always painting or getting a boat ready for a painting trip.”

“Ah.”

“He was a workaholic. No, worse. He was obsessive.

He had no time for anyone.”

Wrong, Naslund said to herself. Even when Thom was busy, he found a few minutes to talk to her. People often mistook them for brother and sister.

“What about you, Miss MacLean? Did he have time for you?”

“Well.”

“Did he?”

“Yes, but not often.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” the inspector said. However, his eyes were ablaze, as if he’d discovered a hidden treasure. Almost immediately, he doused the fire. “We’ll be in touch. We may need to ask you more about Mr. Larmer.”

“Certainly.”

“And yourself.”

“Certainly,” she repeated, her eyes saying *sorry, I can’t think very well*.

Bull, Naslund thought. Behind MacLean’s eyes, she sensed her mind whirling. Carrie MacLean was on guard. While most of her words were straightforward, some of them were double-hinged.

Naslund felt confused. From what she knew of her, MacLean was always direct. Prickly at times, but direct. However, Naslund sensed she was withholding information. If so, what? She’d opted to come to the station. Was she hiding something at home?

Naslund shook her head. She was doing what she always did under pressure, trying to consider every angle. Relax, she told herself. Let the investigation unfold. Remember your father’s advice.

Her recently-departed father, a former Metro Toronto superintendent, had taught her that to work efficiently, you often had to slow down.

“One more thing,” Moore said. “We don’t want to

confuse your bio matter with anyone else's. We'd like to take a DNA swab and fingerprint you."

"Of course."

No hesitation, Naslund saw. Almost too cooperative.

Chapter 6

Orillia, OPP Central, Forensic Morgue. July 10th:

Every time Naslund walked into Central's forensic department, it felt like she was stepping into the future. The section was ultra-high-tech: a realm of whirring machines and stainless steel. As she approached the autopsy lab, she reflected again that in her society, in the twenty-first century, no expense was spared to solve murders. Murderers had to be found and prosecuted. The department always renewed her confidence that they would be.

Naslund followed Moore into the lab and nodded to the forensic pathologist, Dr. DeVeon Leonard. In many respects, Leonard was the opposite of Kapanen: humble and affable. Under his lab coat, he wore an open-necked blue shirt and jeans.

"Good afternoon, Detectives."

"Good afternoon," Moore and Naslund replied.

"Let's get right to it," Leonard said. "You two aren't rookies." He smiled. "We're audio- and videotaping this." He pointed to two cameras. "But please stop me if you miss something or have any questions."

The two detectives nodded. As Naslund knew,

Leonard was usually able to tell what had happened to a victim and in what sequence. Corpses generally divulged crucial evidence.

“First,” Leonard said, “Dr. Kapanen’s report was very thorough. I concur with his findings. In fact, I have relatively little to add.”

“Good,” Moore said.

“As you know, Detectives, logically, an autopsy proceeds from the outside in.” The pathologist beckoned them forward.

In death, Thom looked smaller than Naslund remembered. The long autopsy table emphasized his diminishment.

“We’ll begin with the head,” Leonard said. “Dr. Kapanen reported the right eye and orbital region were impacted by a blunt force instrument with a rounded surface. I’ve concluded the instrument was a metal balpeen hammer. The hammer head had a fifteen-centimeter circumference and was painted gunmetal gray. It deposited two paint chips of that color.” Leonard stopped. “Don’t worry. Besides the tape, my written report will include all the details. See here?” He pointed to deep circular indentations near the right eye. “There are three overlapping wounds. The orbital bones were crushed.” He slowly traced the indentations with his pointer, careful not to touch them. “Lengthy immersion in water leaches blood from wounds. They may look like bloodless postmortem injuries, but they are antemortem. The heart was pumping when they occurred. If you look closely, I think you can see three different wounds.”

Moore put on his glasses, bent closer, and nodded.

Naslund looked and nodded as well. “Doctor, could the victim have fought back after those blows?”

“Possibly. Everyone reacts differently to head blows. But given the depth of the imprints and the shattered

bones, the blows may have disabled the victim.”

“Would they have knocked him unconscious?” Moore asked.

“I don’t think so. I see evidence of defensive wounds, which I’ll point out later. An unconscious person cannot defend themselves. Furthermore, the victim had a thicker-than-average skull, about nine millimeters. The blows struck the orbital region, and thus didn’t impact the brain directly.”

“But surely they impacted it,” Moore said.

“Certainly, Inspector, but not, for example, like three blows to the crown of the head. One thing is certain, he would have lost a lot of blood. Head wounds bleed a tremendous amount. A human body contains about six liters of blood. It’s possible the victim lost half of it.”

“I suspect he knew his assailant,” Moore said. “Or wasn’t worried. To bash him like that, someone had to get very close to him without raising suspicion.”

“Valid point,” Leonard acknowledged. “I didn’t think of it. I can’t think the way you detectives think. I know—” He smiled. “—I wouldn’t want to.” He winked conspiratorially at Naslund and then refocused on the corpse. “Consider the left eye. As Dr. Kapanen noted, it was punctured with a pointed instrument. That instrument was a metal screwdriver. The tip was eleven millimeters wide and had a star-like bit consistent with a Phillips design. There were no other identifying characteristics. In conclusion, a balpeen hammer crushed the victim’s right eye and orbital bones. A Phillips screwdriver pierced the left eye.”

Naslund grimaced.

“It appears the assailant was right-handed,” Leonard said. “The victim’s left eye was attacked with the screwdriver, which suggests it was held in the assailant’s right hand. You need more motor control to target an eye with a

screwdriver than to bash an eye with a hammer, so it is likely that the assailant's dominant arm was the right one. As to the sequence of blows, we might make another assumption. The assailant likely delivered a few, or possibly all of the hammer blows first, to disorient or disable the victim, and then pierced the left eye. Any questions?"

The detectives shook their heads.

Leonard pointed at the victim's forehead. "The vector angles of the blows range from twelve to twenty-two degrees. Which suggests the assailant was taller than the victim or came at him from above." Leonard raised a cautionary hand. "I can't be certain which. In the stormy conditions prevalent, if the assailant were on a different boat, a wave could have raised the assailant above the victim. But three times? That again complicates certainty."

Exactly, Naslund thought.

"As I alluded to previously," the doctor continued, "there is evidence of defensive wounds. Look at the victim's right forearm. It appears he tried to protect himself by deflecting two blows. You can see indentations and bruising consistent with balpeen hammer blows, there—" Leonard directed his pointer halfway up the radius. "—and there, on the wrist. Sorry to muddy the waters again, but I said *it appears*. It is possible that the wounds I just pointed out were not defensive, but targeted arm attacks."

"How possible?" Moore asked.

"I can't say. I apologize, I can't be more definitive." Leonard gestured diffidently. "Let's move on. There is another site to consider." He pointed to the corpse's right shoulder. "Consider the abrasion and the bruising. It appears the victim fell or was pushed onto a hard surface. The abrasion is seven-point-eight centimeters long. I reviewed the crime scene report. The Mackinaw gunwale is eight-point-two centimeters wide. I'd conjecture the vic-

tim landed on the boat's starboard gunwale with his right shoulder. I'd also conjecture his head remained inboard, which led to the blood pool in the bilge."

Naslund nodded. The man had read the case notes, *and* he knew boats.

Leonard walked down the table and stopped at the right ankle. "Now, let's unravel this. Not the actual line." He smiled. "My assistant will handle that later. Having attacked the victim and severely impacted his eyesight, I suspect the assailant wrapped the line around his ankle and pushed him overboard. Given that the other end of the line was attached to an anchor, it's not surprising that he drowned. Of course, I can't tell you how the assailant did that. And my suspicion is only a supposition." He paused. "Any questions?"

Moore held his fire, as did Naslund. It wasn't the pathologist's job to establish how the rode ended up around the ankle. It was theirs.

"All right, to the drowning. Dr. Kapanen suspected a wet drowning. His observations were precise and, I think, correct."

Leonard applied a scalpel and made a deft Y-incision in Thom's chest. The skin, which had puckered and whitened due to Thom's extended immersion, peeled off instantly. Naslund gagged. The room suddenly smelled like rancid liver. Her stomach churned, as it always did, regardless of how well she'd prepared herself. The doctor handed out safety glasses—when the corpse was sawn open, there'd be airborne bone slivers—and sawed through the rib-cage, removed the chest plate, and then extracted the inner organs and placed them on a side table.

After dissecting the lungs, Leonard called the detectives over. "Note the appearance. The victim's lungs are distended and brick-red. That indicates a substantial ingress of water. Which supports the conclusion of a wet

drowning. Regardless, we'll analyze the lung tissues. I expect we'll find microscopic algae consistent with Lake Huron." Leonard turned to the heart and exposed the right ventricle. "Again," he announced, "we find water. A wet drowning victim often pulls water into their circulatory system." His eyes looked sorrowful. "Drowning's an awful way to go. A victim struggles fiercely, but succumbs in minutes. It's a horrible death."

Naslund silently agreed.

"Dr. Kapanen surmised the victim was alive when he entered the water and not placed there already dead. I concur with him."

Moore nodded.

"I also concur with his PMI estimate. The victim likely died somewhere between four a.m. and eight a.m. on Monday July eighth."

Moore nodded again.

"We'll be running a full toxicology screen," Leonard said. "The results will be back in three to four days. I'll release the body at six p.m. this evening, after we get toxicology specimens."

"Thank you," Moore said. "I'll inform the funeral home."

"By the way, I'm ordering burial rather than cremation, just in case we need to exhume. Any questions?"

Moore shook his head.

Naslund had one. She'd been thinking about Thom's assault. It was easier to attack someone on land than in a skiff in heavy seas. MacLean could be lying. She could have said that Thom left the cottage dock but attacked him near it. *Not likely*, an inner voice said. *She's not strong enough*. Maybe not, Naslund thought. However, if not her, someone else. An assailant could have attacked Thom on land, put him in the skiff, sailed out to White Cloud, and then pushed him overboard. In which case, the team would

need to look for an assault scene on land. “Doctor, I understand the victim didn’t die on land, but is it possible he was attacked on land, disabled, and then moved to the boat?”

“Possible,” Leonard said. “In that scenario, we’d expect to see evidence of him being dragged or carried. Possibly bound first, in case he began to struggle.” Leonard examined Tyler’s ankles and legs. “Other than the anchor line, I see no evidence of ligatures.” He moved slowly up the corpse to the head. “I see no ligature marks around the torso or arms and no abrasions consistent with dragging. And no evidence of a mouth gag. As to carrying, I see no bruises which indicate he was roughly handled or carried for any distance.” Leonard carefully turned the body over. “Again,” he eventually said, “I see no ligature marks, no abrasions consistent with dragging, and no bruises consistent with lengthy carrying or rough handling.”

Naslund nodded. Maybe she was getting carried away. Her land-attack idea was complicated. Likely too complicated. The truth was usually simpler.



Having stopped to eat dinner, the two detectives drove toward Wiarton after sundown. They didn’t talk much. Naslund sensed Moore thinking and remained silent. She tried to let her mind rest. For the first time since being called to Rathbone’s farm, she succeeded. The stillness helped. Dusk drew a cloak over the land. Other than in Owen Sound and a few built-up areas, they passed through the evening like a ghost, guarded by phalanxes of cedar and spruce and pine.

When they entered Wiarton station, the only person present was Constable Kraft, the duty officer. Chu and

company were at the MU. Moore's two FID men, Mitchell and Wolfe, were still at Tyler's cottage. It was too late to bring the team together.

Naslund followed Moore into the boardroom, a crowded chamber which was now the murder room. A few chairs had been shunted to the back wall. The boardroom table dominated the front of the room. Three computer hutches lined one side wall, desks for Mitchell, Wolfe, and Naslund. She'd willingly given her office to Moore, believing that a lead investigator needed their own space. Thinking room. A pair of hutches hugged the opposite wall, for two detective constables who were joining the team tomorrow, Conrad and Lowrie.

Earlier that day, Bickell had complained about losing his boardroom until Moore verbally drove him off. Naslund had enjoyed the show. It'd been like watching rams spar. Constable Chandler had enjoyed it as well. He winked at her as the bosses locked horns. Afterward, he pulled her aside.

"Did you hear what's new?" He grinned comically. "Bacon beer."

"You men," she said, "you have it all."

"Yep."

"What about us girls? There's chardonnay with oak chips. How about chardonnay with chocolate chips?"

"You could be on to something. Wine and chocolate. The wife would love that."

So would she, Naslund thought, and right now. Instead, she opened a bottle of water and sat at the boardroom table. Moore was just getting the full machinery of the investigation humming. To date, he'd assigned actions to four station PCs. Constables Chandler and Derlago were charged with questioning all fourteen cottage owners on White Cloud Island, Constables Singh and Weber, with canvassing the Mallory Beach area as well as the east side

of Colpoys Bay. Any suspicious results would be turned over to Naslund and the two DCs arriving from Central. She welcomed the help. The DCs would also interview Tyler's family members and local acquaintances. She and Moore would handle all POIs.

Moore joined her at the table. He looked tired. "Well," he said, "the real work begins tomorrow. I suppose we could round up all the usual suspects," He grinned. "But I'm guessing there're none up here."

Naslund smiled. So the inspector had a funny bone. "Pretty law-abiding up here," she said. "Mostly B-and-Es. Plus a string of pot growers, and a few ex-pedophiles, returned to the community. We can talk to all of them. See what they might have heard."

"Right. Any ex-murderers?"

"Two down in Owen Sound, totally reformed from what we know."

He nodded. "It'll likely be someone close to Tyler. It usually is. Someone who knows him well, like a family member or a friend."

"Or knew him well years ago."

"Exactly. Could be a local, or could be someone from Toronto. He had a condo there, right?"

"Yes."

"I'll talk to one of my contacts at Metro. He should be able to do some legwork for us. I'm sure he can get Metro detectives to interview Tyler's city contacts when we have a list." Moore eyed her. "Any problem with that?"

"None at all." She hated cop turf wars: old boy posturing. Good news, Moore seemed to agree with her. She sighed inwardly. You never knew with old boys. "I'll make a list. Might take a day."

"Fine." Moore stretched then stood. "Let's leave it at that. Good night, Sergeant."

"Good night, sir."

As Moore left, she glanced at the clock on the wall: 2310. Another seventeen-hour day.

Outside, she stood beside her car and gazed heavenward for a long time. The sky was salted with stars. Constellations spun through the heavens, rotating earthward, seemingly falling from the sky. It felt like they would fall forever, until the sky was dark.

Chapter 7

Wiarnton, July 11th

Naslund rolled over and read her watch: 0704. *Get up, you dozy head.*

After breakfast—porridge with dried cranberries (considered strange in Wiarnton, but she had some big-city tastes)—she walked to her front door and picked up the town paper. Thom Tyler’s picture dominated the front page. Underneath it was a color copy of his most iconic local painting, a depiction of Wiarnton from Colpoys Bay. The sky came alive with his signature blues. The harbor buildings were exaggerated-white, making a town located just below forty-five degrees North look more Mediterranean than Canadian, like an archetypal Greek port.

She flipped the small paper open. There it was, a tribute on the third page.

Much-loved Painter Remembered

*Visitation Today: 10:00 a.m. ~ 4:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m.
~ 9:00 p.m.*

Local friends and family, as well as art circles in Toronto and as far afield as London and Tokyo, were

shocked by the news that Thomas Norton Tyler was found dead in Colpoys Bay on Tuesday, July 9th. A visitation will be held today at Bartlett's Funeral Home, 232 Berford St, Wiarton, 10:00 a.m. ~ 4:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m. ~ 9:00 p.m.

Mr. Tyler's small sailboat ran aground on Monday, July 8th. There was a strong wind prevailing, but Mr. Tyler was an excellent sailor and swimmer. His body was recovered the following day, a hundred meters from White Cloud Island. Foul play is suspected.

Mr. Tyler, one of Canada's most celebrated painters, was especially fond of nature. He traversed the Great Lakes for months at a time in a sailboat outfitted with an artist's studio, in search of what he called the lost soul of Canada. He first won acclaim for his work over a decade ago...

Naslund dropped the paper. She could guess what was next: a glowing account of Thom Tyler's success, the world-wide appetite for his work. She shook her head. The Thom she knew didn't care about money or success. She pulled out her phone and called Moore.

"Detective Inspector Moore, OPP."

"Morning, Inspector, Naslund here. If it's okay, I want to attend Tyler's visitation."

The inspector didn't reply.

"I'll get a bead on his family and some of his acquaintances. Sort out who the new DCs should interview first."

Still no reply.

"I'll work from home until then," she added.

"When's the visitation?"

"Starts at ten hundred."

"Make it in by eleven hundred. I called a team meeting."

"Okay."

She signed off and strode to her dining room table. Mind focused on the case, she adjusted her laptop screen, navigated to Moore's interview of Carrie MacLean, and hit the play button. Forty minutes later, after frequently rewinding the video, she was still unsure about MacLean. She retrieved an apple from the fridge and ate it slowly. Savoring the simple taste, she tried to weigh the evidence.

Step back, she told herself. Consider the details. All her life, she'd remembered small details, like dates and times and things people said. She couldn't help herself; she was born that way. Now, rerunning MacLean's interview in her mind, she focused on the little things MacLean had said and done. MacLean hesitated more often than Naslund had originally thought. MacLean admitted to knowing about anchors and rodes. She admitted to being aboard the skiff. She seemed defensive at times. She seemed to be overstating her mental fog. *Seemed*, Naslund reflected. That was the problem. *Seemed* didn't translate to guilt. Nonetheless, Naslund had no intention of going easy on her. She didn't owe Carrie MacLean anything.

Navigating to her inbox, Naslund found a new forensic report, an update on Tyler's skiff. The MU team had processed the skiff's anchor roller. They hadn't uncovered any FPs or DNA carriers, but the clasp was missing. She sat back and envisioned the anchor roller. You had to open the clasp to release the anchor. Perhaps someone pulled the clasp off? Someone impatient, she thought, or someone unfamiliar with the skiff. The report next noted that the skiff's adjustable centerboard was damaged. No surprise there. Two screws had popped out from the centerboard housing inside the hull. Seeing no evidence of tampering, the report concluded they were forced out by the heavy seas and/or the grounding. Naslund wasn't so sure. The grounding would have snapped off the centerboard, but housing screws rarely popped out. Had some-

one loosened them or removed them?

Shifting gears, she began a list of Thom's city contacts. A Toronto art maven had christened Thom and seven other painters the "Gang of Eight," a tribute to Canada's exalted Group of Seven. Over the last few years, Naslund had met five of the eight at Thom's cottage. Four of them lived in Toronto. She found their particulars on the web and added them to a spreadsheet. She recalled that Thom had been vice-president of a Toronto artists union. She looked up the union president, phoned him, and convinced him to email a members list. By 1000, she had the full particulars of twenty-nine more names.

Shutting down her laptop, she walked to her bedroom closet, found her best navy suit, and selected a dark blue blouse. She had dozens of colorful blouses—all of them "preposterous," according to Pete—but she couldn't wear one today, not to a Baptist visitation.

Hair brushed back, she left her house and drove downhill. Other than a car coming uphill, William Street was empty. Maples lined the street, their leaves filtering the morning sun. After years of working Toronto's underbelly, she loved being stationed in Wiarnton. The town was low-key yet confident, an easygoing amalgam of past and present. It was home to about 5,000 residents, a mixture of limestone and tinted glass, of working boats and pleasure yachts. Not long ago, it demarcated the outer reaches of cottage country but now urbanites flocked to the Bruce, flooding the area with city money, which, as Naslund knew, wasn't all good news. The more money, the more B&Es, fraud, sham bankruptcies, and arson, not to mention Bickell's peeves: speeding and DUIs.

Although just opened, Bartlett's Funeral Home was packed. The low ceiling reminded Naslund of a dungeon. She made her way toward the casket to pay her respects. Most people she passed bent her ear, claiming Thom Tyler

had no enemies. She recognized the faces. As a cop, it was her business to know them. Half way to the casket, she got boxed out by a gaggle of church ladies. Why did they always set up shop in the aisle? Damned if she knew. When she'd gone to church as a girl—forced there by her mother—no one halted for a huddle in the middle of the aisle. Bit like parking your car on the Gardiner Express.

Slipping through the gaggle, she nodded to John R and John L then to another John, Johnny Mac, and yet another, Big John B. No surprise, she thought, in a town loaded with Johns. As her father had jokingly warned her, “The more Johns you find in that town, the more Baptist it'll be.”

With her nods delivered, she fell into line and eventually reached the casket. Given Thom's injuries, the lid was closed. She bowed her head. She didn't fear her own end, but she hated seeing the end of others. Right hand on her heart, she inwardly said her goodbyes.

You were a fine man, Thom Tyler. You were a fine painter too, but I didn't tell you that. Many others did, enough for you to know your worth.

There is one painting I can't get out of my mind: The Tamaracks. It is almost too beautiful. To me, those trees will always be Tomaracks, with their strong silhouettes and golden hue. Enough.

Anyway, you didn't take your worth from painting. You took it from your life. You laughed easily. You always saw the glass half full.

Giving Thom a final inner salute, she turned and walked down the aisle.

In the main reception area, she signed the Register Book. Thom's parents stood nearby. John Tyler looked devastated. His snow-white hair, once jet-black like Thom's, hung limply on his forehead. The enormous dark bands around his eyes reminded her of a dejected raccoon.

John's wife Deirdre seemed to be holding up better. She looked her usual self, with her still-youthful black hair piled on top of her head.

Deirdre was younger, true, but she also had more experience of death. Her side of the family, the Kellys, had lost more men to the Great Lakes than anyone in Wiarton, for they'd been schooner hands. Even today, many were laker crewmen.

Thom's siblings were scattered about the room, two from John's first wife Fiona Mitchell, who'd died in childbirth, and four from Deirdre. Fiona's oldest, Gordon, viewed the gathering like a captain surveying his crew. Being a successful accountant, he considered himself a big man about town. Naslund studied his face. He looked sad, but inconvenienced too. His sister Gillian looked even more inconvenienced. You never knew with half-siblings, Naslund thought. She decided to put Gordon and Gillian at the top of the family list and continued her survey.

Thom's younger siblings and extended family appeared to be in shock, the whole dark-swathed clan of them hanging their long-necked heads, looking like be-reaved black swans. Bottom of the list, Naslund decided.

She walked up to John and Deirdre Tyler. "I'm sorry for your loss," she said. The word wasn't adequate. *Desolation* came closer.

John managed a muted "Thank you."

Deirdre held Naslund's eyes. "Find out who did it."

She nodded. "We will."

Deirdre clasped her hands. "Get to the bottom of this."

"We will," she repeated.

Deirdre's plea intensified her sense of obligation. According to die-hard Baptists, people were put on earth to pray and obey, not to probe. But she didn't go to church, and she loved to probe. At the station, they joked that she salted her porridge with curiosity.

As Deirdre turned away, Naslund heard a commotion at the front door then a loud angry voice.

J.J. MacKenzie, she thought, and almost immediately John James MacKenzie, Thom's best friend, a local marine mechanic, burst into the reception room. His face was livid red. "I'm furious!" he roared.

The Baptist Sea parted.

"Damn right I am! You should be too!"

No one disagreed, at least not verbally.

John Tyler inched forward, approaching J.J. from the side. "Would you like a coffee, J.J.?"

J.J. stared at him then took in the gathering and belatedly, "He's not dead, you know! He was murdered."

Again, no one disagreed. And, despite the Baptist predilection for arguments, no one pointed out that a murdered man was, in fact, a dead man.

J.J. stormed out of the room.

Naslund made a move to follow him but Carrie MacLean was headed her way, dressed to kill. Loaded metaphor, Naslund thought, but true. In her sleek black dress, MacLean looked ravishing. She'd always been an exotic in Wiarnton but today she appeared even more striking.

Rushing up to Naslund, she hugged her. It was the hug of a woman who didn't give a damn what anyone thought. She kept hugging Naslund. She was crying now. "Why, Eva?" Another gust of sobs. "Why?"

Naslund guided her toward a chair. Finally she had her seated, shoulders back, head upright. "Can I get you something?" she asked.

MacLean shook her head.

"Sit tight," Naslund cooed. "I'll get you a sandwich."

MacLean forced a smile.

When Naslund returned, the chair was empty. She walked toward the door. There MacLean was, down at the

end of the hallway. Standing next to her was Ward Larmer. Although he'd rented a summer cottage in nearby Hope Bay, he looked like he'd just flown in from Manhattan. His thick red hair was swept-back and the lively cast of his eyes spoke of easy camaraderie. He needed a shave. But he always needed a shave. His burly torso was packaged in a tight blue suit framing a too-crisp white shirt and shiny blue tie. The clothes seemed more appropriate for a wedding than a funeral.

Naslund knew never to rush a judgement yet Larmer was an obvious POI. Arranging a friendly look on her face, she approached MacLean and Larmer.

Coming closer, she heard MacLean say, "Not now, Ward, later."

Naslund slowed her step.

"Now," Larmer insisted.

"Later!" MacLean hissed.

"Later? Christ, now!"

MacLean tore off in a huff. Her heels beat a furious tattoo.

Larmer turned to Naslund and shook his head. "Look at her. Thinks she's starring in her own movie."

Naslund nodded agreeably. She was in work mode: everyone's friend, everyone's confidant. "Sandwich?" she offered Larmer.

"Why the hell not? Got to fly."

"Where are you off to?" she casually asked.

"My cottage. Getting things ready for some of the Gang."

She nodded. Other than Thom, Larmer was the most famous member of the Gang.

"They're staying with me," he explained. "For the funeral and all."

"That's good of you." Or suspicious, she thought. His hospitality could be a cover-up, the kind of gesture a

murderer might make.

Chomping the sandwich, Larmer made for the door.

Naslund stepped back to study the crowd, to observe without being observed. Her eyes swept the room. There was Louise Hennigan, Thom's previous agent, black from head to foot, from dyed hair to pointy-toed shoes, looking like a voracious crow. The crow flew past Naslund, chasing a rich Torontonian.

Inching farther back, Naslund melted into the wall. Someone had attacked Thom Tyler. Ward Larmer came to mind. Another man did as well: Thom's current agent, Jock MacTavish. Thom had once said that although MacTavish was a good salesman, he was probably cheating him. Naslund hadn't been surprised. She knew MacTavish. Her mother Elaine had once been "friendly" with him. MacTavish was money-hungry. Perhaps Thom had caught him red-handed, and MacTavish had to silence Thom? It was a stretch, Naslund knew, but sometimes you had to stretch.

Having recently spotted MacTavish and guessing that he'd head to the refreshments table, she stood near it. Keeping watch, she ate a peach tart.

No MacTavish.

She considered heading off to "bump into" him, but instead ate another tart.

No MacTavish.

Persistence, she ordered herself. Wait.

Ten minutes later, she called off her mini-stakeout. As she veered toward the table to deposit her empty plate, she saw MacTavish coming her way.

The agent looked ready to impress a bevy of heiresses. Although he was over sixty, very few people knew it. He was muscular and tanned. His blond-white hair was moussed and tousled. He seemed more a collection of expensive items—ring, suit, shoes—than a person. De-

spite the mourning venue, he wore a light pink shirt and a cyan-blue Harry Rosen suit, the lapels as narrow as his cream-colored tie.

“Eva, my dear, terrible news.”

“Horrible,” she commiserated.

He pulled her aside. “I hear rumors of suicide.”

“Suicide?”

“Some say Thom killed himself. Attached an anchor to his leg and jumped overboard.” MacTavish shook his head. “I’m going to quash that rumor. Bad for business. An untimely death, au contraire, is good news: dwindling supply, growing demand. The value of his work will skyrocket. Don’t get me wrong,” he hastily added, “I’d rather Thom was alive. He had brilliant years ahead of him. Absolutely brilliant.”

“He did.”

“Speaking of supply,” MacTavish effusively said, “I have a wonderful selection. Why don’t you tell Elaine to come down to my gallery? I’ll give her first dibs.”

Ignore the man’s greed, Naslund told herself. Show a friendly facade. “I will. Thank you.”

He smiled, unleashing a crocodile grin. “By the by, how is Elaine? I haven’t seen her in months.”

Me either, Naslund thought. Elaine was playing with another new man. “She’s fine. Did you just arrive, Jock?”

“Half-an-hour ago. Traffic was awful near the city.”

“Always is,” Naslund lamented. “Been up much this summer?”

He shook his head.

“Too bad. I know how much you love sailing.” MacTavish had a thirty-eight-foot Dufour at the marina. “When was the last time you got out?”

“Mid-June. Too long ago.”

She nodded. She’d check that.

“Don’t forget. First dibs.”

“Thanks, Jock.”

Naslund eyed MacTavish as he sauntered away. Had he attacked Thom? He had a boat. He was strong enough. She shook her head. *Enough speculation. You need some dots.* Slipping away from the funeral parlor, she drove to the station.

Chapter 8

Warton, OPP Station. July 11th:

Naslund strode into the station at exactly 1059 and headed straight to the murder room. She already knew that Moore prized punctuality.

The double doors were open. The room was packed. The MU team had taken one side of the ten-person boardroom table: Sergeant Lance Chu; Constable Noreen Ross, the video-photographer, who was now working Tyler's cottage with Mitchell and Wolfe; and the two forensic scientists, Constable Jamil Chahoud and Sergeant Gina Domani. On the other side were FID Constables Dan Mitchell and John Wolfe and two new men. Naslund assumed they were the DCs from Central, Stu Conrad and Rob Lowrie. The local PCs assigned to the case sat toward the back: Senior PC Elmore Chandler plus PCs Warren Kraft, Vik Singh, Tom Derlago, and Rosie Weber. Even Bickell was present. The staff sergeant had taken the chair at the opposite end of the table, facing Moore. Naslund sat at her hutch.

Moore called the meeting to order. He wore the same suit as yesterday. It looked grayer. After introductions, he asked if all present had read the Tyler Case summary notes.

Everyone nodded. Moore then asked Chu to update the room. He rose, walked to the whiteboard, and wrote three words: *BLOOD, PRINTS, DNA*.

“Well,” he said and faced the room, “we have good news and bad news. The good news? We’re further ahead than two days ago. The bad news? We’re not very far ahead.”

There were a few chuckles.

Naslund glanced at Moore. He didn’t look amused.

“Let’s start with what we know,” Chu said. “Blood. By that I mean the victim’s blood and ancillary blood. As the summary states, the victim suffered severe head trauma. He bled profusely. We know what weapons caused the bleeding: a balpeen hammer and a Phillips screwdriver. And we know their characteristics.”

Moore raised a hand to stop Chu. “Pardon the interruption.” He addressed the gathering. “As it stands, the two weapons are missing. They are invaluable to our investigation. Absolutely vital. We need to find them.” He scanned the room. “If you’re tasked with questioning witnesses or POIs, don’t ask about the weapons directly. Circle around to them.” He turned to Chu. “Back to you.”

Chu nodded. “Central has processed the victim’s DNA and matched the blood at the primary scene, the boat, to the victim. The blood at that scene is all his. There is no trace of anyone else’s blood. So we have zero ancillary blood. Which suggests the victim did not inflict any wounds on his assailant.”

Or assailants, Naslund thought, but didn’t interrupt Chu.

“Regarding the victim’s blood, I want to point out an apparent anomaly. His blood was found near the end of the boat’s boom on the starboard side, starting two-point-four meters from the mast, extending to two-point-eleven meters. However, according to the autopsy, there is no indi-

cation the boom hit the victim. Our blood splatter expert—” Chu stopped and gestured toward Domani. “—determined the blood was placed there with a cloth. Whoever did so staged the scene. They attempted to make it appear the blood came from a blunt force wound. Whoever did so didn’t reckon with Sergeant Domani.” He smiled. “She established the blood was placed on the boom with three swipes of the cloth. The cloth was a tight cotton-weave. The lab traced the material. It was imported from Bangladesh. Did that help us?” He shook his head theatrically. “Where does sixty-four percent of the cotton cloth in this country come from?”

“Plants?” Chandler said with a grin.

Naslund glanced at Moore again. Not impressed with Chandler’s humor.

Chu chuckled. “And the other thirty-six percent?”

“More plants,” Chandler said, “as in more factories.”

“I can’t say you’re wrong.” Chu smiled then caught a glimpse of Moore’s face. The sergeant’s mirth immediately disappeared. “In any case,” he continued, “the full specifications are in the notes. As Inspector Moore stated, the assault weapons are vital pieces of evidence. So too is this cloth. It may contain trace material than can lead us to the perp.” He stopped, took a swig of coffee, and continued. “Regarding the secondary scene—the boathouse, dock, and studio—we found no blood there.” He took another swig of coffee. “Any questions about blood?”

There were none.

“All right,” he said and pointed to his second word, “on to Prints. Unfortunately, we only have FPs, fingerprints. No bootprints, no footprints, no tire prints. The primary scene yielded three sets of FPs. The secondary scene was a minefield, riddled with cross-contamination. It yielded no clean prints.”

Bad news, Naslund thought. But at least they had prints from the skiff.

“One set of FPs belonged to the victim, Thom Tyler, and one to his partner, Carolyn MacLean. The other is as yet unidentified. As to MacLean, we matched FPs on the boat’s bow mooring line to her. Her FPs were likely deposited on the line sometime during the previous thirty days. Which is conflicting evidence. In an interview yesterday, MacLean said she hadn’t touched the boat in five weeks.”

Moore raised a hand. “We’ll bring her back in a few days.” He eyed the room. “That doesn’t mean she’s a second-tier POI. It means we need to gather more evidence. Remember this: every POI is guilty until proven innocent. Absolutely *every* POI.” He waved Chu on.

Naslund realized the thirty-day FP estimate might not stand up in court. Any good defense lawyer could undermine FP evidence. However, she kept quiet, assuming Moore knew how fickle FPs were.

“Let’s move to the final category,” Chu said. “DNA. You’ve probably heard the old saw that the first rule of a CS is that anyone who’s been there leaves something behind and takes something away. They might leave behind DNA, in a carrier like hair. And they might take away fibers, perhaps from a piece of clothing. Leave. Take. That’s a pretty good rule. However, in this case, nobody left anything—other than the victim, that is. Our boat sweep yielded DNA carriers in the form of his blood, mucus, and skin. But we have nothing on the assailant, the perp. Or perps. We can’t rule out multiple perps.”

Right, Naslund said to herself.

“The perps didn’t leave anything, other than traces of the cotton cloth. No personal blood, no prints, no DNA. They weren’t likely greenhorns.”

Naslund wasn't sure about that. She'd run it by Chu later. They could be lucky greenhorns. Georgian Bay could have washed away their DNA, even though it didn't erase other bio matter, such as Tyler's FPs and blood. Hair and skin weren't as sticky as prints and blood.

"Regarding take-aways," Chu continued, "at this point, we don't know who took anything away, or what they took. We have to find them first, or their cars or homes. Then we'll get their take-aways." He nodded to Moore and sat down.

Moore stood. "Thank you, Sergeant." He surveyed the room deliberately, paying particular attention to the non-detectives. "It should go without saying that no one on this team—no one other than me, that is—is authorized to talk to the media. That means no communication with reporters or journalists, local, regional, or national, web-based or otherwise. And no web posts. No Facebook, no Twitter, none of that. Is that clear?"

Everyone nodded.

"On another note, I don't abide by lone wolves. We're in this together, so we work together. Make sure everybody on this team knows what you're doing and what you're thinking. How can you ensure that? Always update your case notes. Always! Understood?"

More nods.

"As Sergeant Chu stated, we know how the victim was assaulted and with what weapons. But we don't know much more. Yet. That's where you all come in. Everyone in this room can help, whether actively, or in a support role." Moore stopped and eyed Bickell. "*Everyone* can help us find those take-aways." He paused. "Mr. Tyler was murdered Monday. We're already three days out. They say a case goes cold after forty-eight hours." His index finger stabbed the air. "This one won't! Dig into everything and presume nothing! All right, let's get to work. I've drawn

up a list of actions. See the corkboard next to the door. Attend to your actions.” He dismissed the meeting.

It was almost lunch time. Naslund let everyone file out of the room ahead of her. As she left, Moore called out. “I want to run something by you, Sergeant.”

How about over coffee, she thought.

Moore had other ideas. He led Naslund to her former office. “Have a seat,” he said.

She sat in the spare chair.

“Conrad and Lowrie are currently reading the complete case notes. They’ll join us at fourteen-thirty. In the meantime, I want to explore a new avenue.”

“Okay.”

“As I said earlier, we’re not done with MacLean.” Moore pursed his lips. “We’ll bring her in again. But I was thinking of bringing Ward Larmer in first.”

From what Naslund had seen, although Moore liked to appear collegial, he did what he wanted. Regardless, she agreed with his plan. MacLean could wait. Given Larmer’s words and actions at the visitation, he was an obvious POI.

“Incidentally,” Moore continued, “Larmer will probably shed some light on her. This morning I went over the list of calls in and out of her cell number. Guess who phoned her three times yesterday?”

The answer seemed clear. “Ward Larmer?”

Moore nodded. “As it happens, he’s got a raft of unpaid parking tickets in the city. A brace of speeders too. Seems to be the me-first sort. You knew Tyler. Do you know Larmer?”

“A bit,” she said. “I socialized with him a few times at Tyler’s place. From what I know, he’s very self-confident. Self-centered too. Your me-first label fits.”

“Good. We can’t corroborate everything MacLean said, but I don’t think she’s lying about Larmer. According

to what she reported, he was envious of Tyler.” Moore smiled. “I know, she could be overstating things. Let’s say half-envious. Let’s call it potential motive.”

“Okay.”

“Larmer might have had another motive: Revenge. Remember what you told me about MacLean yesterday, on the way to the autopsy? Tyler stole her from Larmer.”

“Not exactly. It was before I was posted here, but the way I heard it, she left Larmer for Tyler.”

“Adds up to the same thing. I don’t think Larmer would forget that. Losing a *looker* like her.”

Looker, Naslund thought. Some men’s labels for women were so predictable. From what she’d seen so far, Moore wasn’t a full-blown chauvinist, yet he’d scored high on what she and fellow female officers called the CP—Chauvinist Pig—Scale, with *Pig* referring to *cop*, not *man*. After all, as her female friends joked, all men were pigs at one time or another. “That was ten years ago,” she said.

“I know,” Moore replied, “a long time to wait for revenge. But, as the crime psychologists at Central keep telling me, killings often arise from repressed emotions—desire, envy, love—the kind of sentiments that ferment for a long time. Ten years is not unusual. Despite what Larmer says, I wouldn’t be surprised if he and MacLean were still lovers.”

Really? Naslund thought. From what she knew, MacLean had eyes for Thom and no one else.

“As for opportunity,” Moore continued, “having frequently sailed with Tyler, Larmer had access to the skiff on multiple occasions.” He paused. “Potential motive and opportunity. A reasonable starting point.”

Naslund agreed. Even with no apparent motive, Larmer was suspicious.

“I took a little drive this morning, out to Hope Bay. Nice spot.”

She nodded.

“Our tip line got a call from one of Larmer’s neighbors, a Mrs. Carson, an elderly lady who thinks he’s suspicious. I went to see her. She saw Thom Tyler at Larmer’s place five times last month. She said they were often arguing, sometimes even yelling at each other.”

“Sounds plausible,” Naslund said. “Larmer’s a hot-head.”

“Beyond that, she doesn’t like Larmer—‘too sharply-dressed’—or his accent—‘snooty Englishman.’” Moore paused. “I’d like to take a run at him today, right after lunch.”

“Sure. Let me call him.” She looked up Larmer’s local number and called it for the inspector.

Moore switched on the speakerphone.

“Hello,” a suave British voice answered.

“Mr. Larmer?” Moore said.

“Yes.”

“Detective Inspector Moore, OPP.”

“What can I do you for, Inspector?”

Do you for? Naslund thought. Did Larmer think this was a neighborly chat?

“We want to speak with you about Thom Tyler,” Moore said. “I understand you’re at Hope Bay.”

“Correct.”

“Good, you’re close. We’ll see you at one o’clock.”

“This afternoon?”

“Yes,” Moore said.

“Well.”

The line went quiet. More delaying tactics, Naslund thought, the same as with MacLean.

“As you may know,” Larmer finally said, “many of Thom’s friends are staying with me. How about tomor-

row?"

"Today, Mr. Larmer. We'll be at your place in an hour."

"I have guests. That's not convenient."

"All right. Be at the station at one o'clock. Sharp."

"Pardon?"

"Sharp, Mr. Larmer."

"Oh, yes. Fine."

"Do you know where the station is?"

Larmer didn't reply.

"I'll arrange for a police cruiser to transport you. There's one near the end of your lane." It was bull, but a car could be there in less than fifteen minutes.

Naslund heard a screen door slide open. She sensed Larmer stepping outside to verify Moore's words and finding no proof one way or the other. "I know where the station is," Larmer eventually replied.

"Excellent. You are entitled to a lawyer. Bring one if you like."

"What for?"

"Please yourself."

As the inspector hung up, he shook his head. "Another ditherer. Can you interview him? I want to observe him from the shadow room."

"Of course."

Naslund returned to the murder room, booted up her laptop, and read the transcript of the inspector's Hope Bay interview. It was an understatement to say that Mrs. Carson didn't like Larmer. She detested him.

Chapter 9

Warton, OPP Station. July 11th:

At 1310, Naslund ushered Ward Larmer into the interview room. The POI had no lawyer in tow. He smelled of stale armpits.

“Have a seat,” she said and pointed to the Slider.

“No ‘have a seat, old friend,’” Larmer said. “No sandwiches?”

She ignored him and pointed to the Slider. He appeared to have aged a few months in a matter of hours. There were dark blotches under his eyes. He wore a tailored pinstripe suit and an open-necked shirt. Despite the change of clothes, he reeked. The confines of the room intensified his smell. It seemed he was nervous. Then again, it was a hot, humid day. “Mr. Larmer, I’m sure you know that Thom Tyler died in suspicious circumstances.”

“Is that right?”

“Very suspicious.” Naslund didn’t like his voice. It gave the impression that anything he didn’t know didn’t count. “Where were you between seven p.m. on Sunday July seventh and seven a.m. on Monday July eighth?”

“At my Hope Bay cottage.”

Larmer was using his legs to keep his back tight to the chair. He appeared to have prior experience with the Slider. They'd have to check his rap sheet again. She decided to needle him. "Address?" she barked.

He recited it.

She made no move to jot it down. She had his background details. "Occupation?"

"Artist."

"You claimed you were at Two-Twelve Hope Bay Road during the time period indicated. Do you have proof?"

"I phoned La Toya, my girlfriend, from there around eleven p.m."

"What's her full name and phone number?"

Larmer told her.

She wrote on a legal pad. "Did you use a cellphone or a land line?"

"Cellphone."

"As you may know, we can subpoena your exact geographical location." It was bull. They could get a close hit, but not the exact coordinates. All phone carriers were obliged to respond to a warranted location request. Using cell-tower triangulation, they could usually pinpoint latitude and longitude to within thirty meters.

"I have nothing to hide," Larmer asserted.

"Good. What other calls did you make during that period?"

"Which period?"

"The one just mentioned, Mr. Larmer. Between seven p.m. on July seventh and seven a.m. on July eighth."

The POI raised a finger to his lips. "Let me think. Okay, I know. I phoned La Toya again around midnight, then at seven a.m."

"Three times in eight hours?"

He nodded aggressively. "I love her, Sergeant."

Huh, a lover-boy. "Who else did you phone?"

"No one," he curtly stated and glared at her.

Naslund made another note. If lover-boy had been nervous, he no longer was. In fact, he was combative. "What about yesterday? Who did you phone yesterday?"

"Yesterday? Too many people to remember. I was helping organize the visitation and the funeral. As you know, many of Thom's friends are staying with me."

"Did you make any arrangements with Carolyn MacLean?"

"Arrangements?"

Naslund controlled herself. "Did you phone her, Mr. Larmer?"

The POI appeared to be scouring his memory. "Yes, I did. Three times, in fact."

She pretended to write that down.

He grinned. "You seem to like taking notes. I don't know why. I know you're recording me."

She eyed him disdainfully. "Let's go over things again, Mr. Larmer." She paused. "Just in case you 'forgot' something."

He shot her a look that said *Do-what-you-want, you fuckers always do.*

Naslund nodded sharply. *In your case, we certainly will.* "Do you have any proof of your whereabouts on July seventh, from seven p.m. onwards?" She smiled contemptuously. "Anyone who can verify your location? Other than you."

He shook his head. "I was inside."

"How about when you drove in from Toronto on Sunday? Perhaps someone saw your car?" She knew that Mrs. Carson saw him drive in on Saturday, not Sunday.

"I didn't arrive in Hope Bay Sunday. I'd been there since Saturday afternoon."

"What time Saturday?"

“Just after three. Three-oh-five, to be precise. I looked at the kitchen clock.”

“Very good,” she said. Bull, she thought, that’s too precise. She changed topics to keep him off-kilter. “How long have you known Thom Tyler?”

He didn’t hesitate. “Thirteen years.”

“So, you’re old friends?”

“Yes. Best friends.”

“How long have you known Carolyn MacLean?”

“Fourteen years.”

“Are you best friends?”

“No.”

“Good friends?”

“No. We’re ex-lovers.”

“And that bars you from being good friends?”

“In this case, it does.”

That seemed right, Naslund thought. She’d sensed as much with MacLean. “Did you visit Mr. Tyler and Ms. MacLean on Saturday or Sunday?”

“No. Thom and I were supposed to go painting on Tuesday.”

“Just you and Thom? No Carolyn.”

“Correct. Carrie, or Carolyn, if you prefer.” Larmer paused and gave her an ever-so-polite smile. “Carrie never joined us on our painting trips. She isn’t what you’d call a camping type.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because,” he slowly enunciated, “she said it.”

“It seems strange that you didn’t visit them. Mallory Beach is so close to Hope Bay. How far would you say it is on foot?”

“*On foot?*”

“Yes. Walking or hiking.”

“I don’t hike.”

“How many minutes by car?”

The POI took a sip of water then another. He examined the ceiling. Naslund eyed him. Did he want to waste time? She'd gladly toss him in a cell and come back next week.

The POI kept studying the ceiling, adopting a thousand-meter stare for a five-meter room.

She waited, carefully scrutinizing his face. Some POIs could crease or un-crease their foreheads at will. Their eyes shifted depending on the light. However, people couldn't manipulate their mouths for a prolonged period. Mouths didn't lie. From the set of Larmer's lips, he was at ease.

Enough, she decided. "I said, 'How many minutes by car?'"

"Ten minutes. As you know. Allow me to clarify something, Constable Naslund—pardon me, Sergeant. The last time I saw Thom was on Wednesday, July third at sunset, that is, just after nine p.m. We'd sailed his Mackinaw all evening, and the evening before, and the evening before that as well. I'll be happy to make a formal statement."

Naslund sat back. Larmer was slippery. Everything he said seemed right, but small bits seemed too right. He was too confident.

As she examined his mouth, her scrutiny was interrupted by a knock on the door. Striding to the door, she looked through its small window. Inspector Moore.

The man motioned for Naslund to let him in.

Huh, she thought, what's this? She opened the door.

Within seconds, Moore invited her to take a seat and turned to the POI. "Detective Inspector Moore," he said and thrust out his badge. "Homicide. But I'm sure you guessed that."

Larmer shot him a look that said *piss off*.

Moore grinned then stood directly across from

Larmer, head tilted back, as if to say *now the real interview begins*. “I’m curious, Mr. Larmer. I wonder if you can enlighten me. How do you think Mr. Tyler ended up in the lake?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t there, was I?”

“No? Well then, let me recreate the scene for you. It’s unlikely that Mr. Tyler was taking a leak, as the saying goes. The recovery team found his pants zipper up. As to getting caught in fishing lines, he had none set. Now, the boom could have knocked him overboard but that too is unlikely. The boom on Mr. Tyler’s skiff was attached to the mast at a height of...” Moore donned his specs and pulled some notes from a pocket. “One-point-six-seven meters.” He looked up and studied Larmer through the half-moons. “That’s five-and-a-half feet. Plenty of clearance, even for a six-footer like Mr. Tyler. Nevertheless, he ended up in the lake.” Moore approached the table. “How?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is that right?” Moore shook his head and then sat and slowly shuffled his notes then shuffled them again and again—a tactic often used to set a POI on edge. Eventually, he removed his specs and carefully pocketed them, holding his words, trying to ratchet up Larmer’s anxiety.

Larmer studied the ceiling.

Moore kept eying him, hoping to unnerve him with silence.

Larmer’s gaze didn’t waiver.

Naslund wasn’t surprised by the standoff. Larmer and Moore might be physical opposites, but they were two of a kind: pit bulls. She wasn’t surprised by Moore’s sudden entry either. He was obviously the “take-over-when-I-want” type. Old boys often were. She got along well with most male colleagues. She wondered how things would evolve with Moore.

The inspector broke the silence. "I like interviewees who answer promptly. Don't you, Sergeant?"

"I certainly do," she said.

"Not to mention, cooperate." Moore eyed Larmer. "So far, I'd say you're failing on both counts."

The POI shrugged.

Moore pursed his lips. "Mr. Larmer, I understand you're a sailor."

"Yes?"

"Well then, you must know what makes a good sailor." Moore had a smile on his face yet none in his voice.

The suspect shrugged.

"Let me suggest an answer. A person comfortable with complexity. All those pulleys and ropes. An organized person. Beyond that, a practical person. Someone who can splice ropes or, let's say, adjust an anchor clasp." Moore let a few heartbeats pass. "When did you last change a car tire?"

"A what?"

"A car tire, Mr. Larmer."

"I don't change my tires."

"Oh? I assume a person who drives like you has quite a few flats. What happens when you get a flat?"

"I call CAA."

"Good for you." Moore abruptly stood, planted his hands on the table, and leaned closer. "However, I'm sure you're capable of changing a tire. You look strong. Do you lift weights?"

"Sometimes."

"Box?"

"No."

"Enjoy inflicting pain?"

Larmer's eyes narrowed, his face hardened.

Moore harrumphed. *I know you do*, his expression

said. "Why do you think we're interested in your strength?"

Larmer didn't reply.

"Let me tell you." Moore assumed his tallest height. "Someone pushed Mr. Tyler overboard. He was a big man, which suggests his assailant was a strong person."

Larmer said nothing.

Moore didn't mention the hammer blows. As Naslund knew, he wouldn't reveal everything they had, not yet.

"I'd say you're very strong." Moore smiled menacingly. "Very capable."

The suspect glared at him. "Of what?"

Naslund stood and took a step toward Larmer.

Moore slowly circled the table, his methodical footsteps echoing off the cement floor. When he reached Larmer, he stopped.

A few moments later, he brought his bony chin to within an inch of Larmer's ear, as if he were going to speak. But he said nothing. He continued pacing until he stood behind Larmer again. "You are free to go." He paused. "For the time being."

The suspect seemed unmoved.

Smug snot. Naslund wanted to cuff him in the ear. Better yet, kick him in the crotch.

Moore walked away and stood across from the suspect. "We'd like to request your cooperation."

"What for?"

"We'd like to fingerprint and DNA you."

"I know my rights."

"We can arrest you."

Larmer shrugged.

"I'll have a warrant by three," Moore said. "Tomorrow. Meanwhile, you can enjoy our hospitality."

Naslund knew it was a bluff. Moore couldn't detain Larmer without arresting him and they had nothing on

him. Moore spoke into an intercom. “Constable Chandler?”

“Yes, Inspector,” a deep voice growled—Chandler putting on his hard-ass act. He was a big man, the size of a linebacker. His voice was even bigger.

“We need a cell for Mr. Larmer.” Moore eventually glanced at the suspect.

“All right,” Larmer said as if he didn’t care. “Process me.”

Moore nodded. “Fingerprint and DNA the *detainee*,” he said into the intercom. He smiled malevolently. “The interviewee, I mean.”

“You want him released?” Chandler grunted.

“For now.”

Moore eyed the man. “You are not permitted to leave the province.”

Larmer didn’t acknowledge him.

“Did you hear me?”

The suspect waited then nodded insolently.



Sitting in Moore’s office after the interview, Naslund gulped down a mouthful of cold coffee. On the one hand, she resented Moore’s interruption—a seven, she figured, on the CP Scale. On the other hand, she accepted it. Top guns weren’t known for their diffidence. They didn’t care about stepping on toes. As it happened, her father had warned her about cops like Moore. He’d advised her to ignore them. Naslund agreed with him. Besides, it made sense to railroad Larmer.

Across the room, the inspector was pursing his lips. He leaned forward in his chair. “Larmer’s a snake. No doubt about it.”

“Agreed.”

“If he’s our perp, I’d say there’s a good chance he left his cottage very early on Monday morning, before Tyler left his boathouse dock.”

“Possible.”

“Mitchell and Wolfe came with me when I visited Mrs. Carson this morning. They’re ninjas, those two. They melted into the bush and searched for DNA carriers and prints behind Larmer’s cottage, back to the Bruce Trail, which could take him to Tyler’s place on foot. But they didn’t find anything.” Moore shrugged. “However, he could have walked down his driveway, crossed the road, and got in a boat. Mitchell and Wolfe found a jumble of prints across the road. Good cover.”

She nodded.

“The man doesn’t own a boat, but he may have ‘borrowed’ one. I spoke with Chandler. A small boat with an outboard would get Larmer up Hope Bay, around Cape Croker, and into Colpoys Bay in a few hours. Let’s say he left around oh-three-hundred on the eighth, he’d arrive in Colpoys Bay in plenty of time to intercept Tyler’s skiff and attack him.”

She shrugged. “An outboard? I read your report on Mrs. Carson. She didn’t mention hearing any outboard that night and she said she never sleeps.”

“Right, but she might have dozed off.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll re-visit her. I think Larmer used a water route. If he didn’t use a motorboat, he could have sailed.”

“True.” It was a long shot, but worth pursuing. Naslund told herself to step back, to give Moore the benefit of the doubt. The inspector was a top gun. He had years of experience.

“I read the marine reports,” he continued. “There was an eight-knot wind that night, steady all night, until it picked up near dawn. I checked with Chandler again. It

would have taken about four hours to sail to Colpoys Bay in a small boat. I've asked Chandler to look into reports of stolen boats, plus all recent boat rentals on the Bruce, in any name. Larmer may have rented."

"Right," she said.

"Now we need some hard evidence. At this point, we're running on speculation. However, I'm sure of one thing. He lied to us."

She nodded. Lying was expected. Most people lied to them. Perps always lied.

"But I'm not sure what he lied *about*. His movements? His phone calls? His sailing routine with Tyler? By the way, Larmer could have other motives besides envy and revenge. There's always the old standby. Money. Other cultures murder for honor but North Americans usually do it for money. Let's examine the ownership of Tyler's paintings. Determine who inherits what. Ditto for his other assets." Moore raced on. "Let me take that up. I'll get a solid financial picture of who might have benefited from his death. I suspect Larmer did. If so, it'll give us ammo to probe his connection to Tyler."

"Right."

"We'll bring him back tomorrow, immediately after the funeral."

"Okay."

Moore stood. "I'll get Conrad and Lowrie."

Naslund nodded. After reading the Hope Bay transcript, she'd looked up the two DCs on the staff intranet. They were newbie detectives but not raw rookies, early-thirties, from what she could tell. Conrad was a former OPP PC, Lowrie, an ex-RCMP corporal.

Moore quickly returned with the DCs. Introductions complete, he pointedly asked the two if they had any questions about the case notes.

They had none.

“Nothing?” he asked again.

They shook their heads. Naslund sympathized with them. She probably wouldn’t have asked anything either.

Moore summarized the recent interview with Larmer, and then opened the floor to suggestions.

Conrad remained silent. He appeared to be cowed by Moore.

“Might be good to look into Larmer’s sailing ability,” Lowrie said. “Does he own a boat?”

Moore shook his head.

“Does he swim?”

“Good question,” Moore said. “I’ll leave that to you to find out.”

“Yes, sir. Do you know if he belongs to a gym?”

“Again, over to you.” Moore sat back. “All right, Constables, we’ll leave it at that. Sergeant Naslund, do you have a list of Mr. Tyler’s family members and local acquaintances?”

“Almost complete. I’ll email it to the DCs in fifteen minutes.”

“CC me as well. DCs, I expect you to start your interviews tomorrow at oh-nine-hundred sharp. Get your schedules solidified this afternoon.”

The DCs nodded and left.

A rush of annoyance surged through Naslund. The inspector didn’t have to micromanage them.

“I’m going to visit Mrs. Carson,” Moore said and shut down his computer.

Naslund watched him tighten his tie and assume his public face, his earnest, insistent face. The man seemed to have one gear only: full-speed ahead. Well, she decided, better follow Graysuit’s lead. Back at her desk, she quickly completed the Tyler family and acquaintances list then strode to her car. It was time to talk to J.J. MacKenzie.

Chapter 10

Wiaraton. July 11th:

Naslund had a good idea where to find J.J. MacKenzie. At this time of day, the mechanic was usually taking a coffee break. She drove downtown, surveying the streets as she went. All quiet—as usual. The afternoon sun burned through a thin layer of clouds. The town seemed to be in siesta mode.

Up ahead, she spotted MacKenzie striding toward the Berford Coffee Shop. She parked and started walking. Although a tall heavy man, MacKenzie moved like a mountain lion, all power and dignity. He surged forward chin first, showcasing a big, bushy beard. She quickened her pace. The traffic light turned red at William Street and the mountain lion stopped.

She called out. “Mr. MacKenzie.”

The mechanic looked over his shoulder then turned around. “Sergeant Naslund.” He feigned alarm. “You here to arrest me?”

“Might be,” she said.

“Didn’t do it, Sergeant. He was my best friend. But I know you have to ask. And I have an alibi.”

“Good. Tell me, for the record.” For someone so an-

gry at the morning visitation, MacKenzie now had a calm look on his face.

“I was in Hamilton for an Independents meeting. Left here Friday at four p.m., got back Monday at noon. You can ask my wife Marie. Plus about four hundred other mechanics.”

“That’s a lot of mechanics.”

“Plenty more out there. We’re going to put the Walmarts of the world out of business.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Demographics, Sarge. More and more folks like the local touch.” MacKenzie grinned then raised a hand in peace. “But we’ll let the Marters die on their own.”

“Good.” Naslund nodded. “I’d like to talk about Thom. We were close this last year or so.”

“He often mentioned you.”

That was nice to know. “How about a coffee?”

“Sure.”



“You’re right,” J.J. said as he stirred his coffee. “Thom loved being out on the water. He had a good life. A great life,” he corrected himself. “And to think he was taken by the bay. That’s almost the worst part of it.”

“It’s an awful irony,” Naslund said.

J.J. nodded.

She took a quick look around. The place was empty. “Can I ask you something?”

“Go ahead.”

“Why the irate act in the funeral parlor? You don’t seem angry now.”

“You’re right. It was an act. I want people to talk about the enraged mechanic, that crazy man from Colpoys.”

“They will.”

“Good.” He smiled. “Most locals are too taciturn. Too Scottish.”

“Aye.” Naslund mimicked her aunt. Growing up, she’d heard plenty of Scots burr. Her father was Swedish, but her mother’s side was Scottish. “Hang on, I have more to say. Nae, I canna say more.”

J.J. chuckled. “It’s long odds, I know, but if people talk, it might uncover the truth about Thom’s death. Gossip has wings. As my wife says, it flits around like a blue jay. Word will get back to me.”

“Sounds good.” Thom had once said that J.J. MacKenzie knew more about boats than anyone in Wiarton. With their canoe sterns and sharp prows, Mackinaws cut through the water like a porpoise, yet she figured they had a downside. “Can I get your opinion on something?”

“Any time.”

“Personally, I find Mackinaw centerboards narrow and a bit weak. What about you?”

“I’ll give you narrow,” he replied, “but not weak. Thom’s Mackinaw rode out dozens of heavy squalls. The centerboard was solid.”

“Would you be willing to give testimony in court? You know, for the police?”

“Me? For the police?”

“Yep.”

He eyed her without moving a muscle. “Maybe,” he eventually said. “I’ll be happy to give you an opinion at any time, but I’m not sure I’ll testify. History, Sarge.”

Naslund nodded. She knew that MacKenzie’s father had been jailed for labor unrest in the mid-80s and had died in prison.

She hesitated. “What I’m going to mention now is supposition. Pure supposition.”

“Understood. You never said it.”

“Exactly. I think two screws popped out from the centerboard housing and I think they got forced out by heavy seas or grounding. Does that sound right to you?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“If she grounded, the centerboard itself would be damaged, but not likely the inner housing. Centerboard screws don’t usually pop out—grounding, high seas or whatever—not in my experience. They’re Phillips screws, not flatheads. You can sink them in deep. Plus they’re inside the hull and behind a set of ribs. Pretty well protected.”

“Thanks.”

J.J. took a sip of coffee then looked up. “I’ve been doing a little investigating myself.”

“Yes?”

“I have a bead on what might have happened to Thom.”

“I’m all ears.”

J.J. grinned. “I’d say you’re more than ears.”

“Was that a compliment?”

He grinned again.

“All right.” She smiled. “Let’s keep on track.”

“No harm meant. I’m happily married. Would you consider my news an anonymous tip?”

Why not? she thought. “Okay.”

“Well, a young fella from Colpoys saw a Mackinaw about six-fifteen a.m. on the day Thom died.”

“A young fella?”

“Fine. My son. Doesn’t matter which one.”

For now, Naslund decided.

“My son saw one man onboard. He’s sure it was Thom. Thom was like an uncle to him.”

“That might not stand up in court.”

“Court? This is anonymous, right?”

“Right,” she said. “Completely anonymous. Pardon the line of questioning. Habit.”

J.J. eyed her.

“You have my word.” She told herself to get her head on straight. At this point in the investigation, court should be the last thing on her mind. She wasn’t prosecuting a murderer, she was trying to find one. If court came later, and hopefully it would, she’d cross the disclosure bridge with J.J. then.

“All right,” he said. “The youngster knows who he saw. I sat with him a long time. I believe him. He’s a boat spotter, likes to use a pair of WW-Two binocs my father once owned. Anyway, that morning, he was camping on Hay Island with two kid brothers. There’s a lookout on the east side. He was sitting there with the binocs when he saw Thom’s Mackinaw.”

“What exactly did he see?”

“Well, he saw a fishing boat moving fast, approaching the Mackinaw from the south.”

“Did the boats meet?”

“He doesn’t know. He had to get back to his campsite, to make breakfast for his brothers. You can’t see the water from there. It’s inland.”

“Too bad.”

J.J. nodded. “He identified the fishing boat as an Albin Tournament Express. There were two men aboard. He didn’t think they were fishermen.”

“Why?”

“According to him, they didn’t look like fishermen. They were dressed like city guys: tank tops and tight shorts. They were young too. Under thirty, he figured. Most guys who fish are older.”

“True.”

“Coincidentally,” J.J. added, “the Griffith Island Club has an Albin TE Thirty-Five. My cousin Marty Fox works over there as a guide. According to him, the club Albin was out that morning.”

The club, a private fishing and hunting operation, owned the whole of Griffith Island. “Did you report any of this to the OPP tip line?” she asked. “Anything at all?”

“No. I’ll be honest. I don’t want your crew questioning my family.”

“Understood,” she said. “How about the *Warton Echo*’s tip line?”

“No. Didn’t want anything interfering with my little investigation.” He sounded apologetic. “But you can report it now. Just remember, no mention of Colpoys or my family.”

“Absolutely,” she said. “Another coffee?”

“No thanks.”

“I’m going to jot down what you just told me. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure, Sarge. Scribble away.”

“Here’s my private number.” She handed her personal card to MacKenzie. “Call me anytime.”



Having left the coffee shop, Naslund sat in her car and called MacKenzie’s tip in to Moore. The inspector said he’d dispatch two officers to the Griffith club ASAP.

On the way home, she drove to the end of Bayview and walked to a lookout facing Colpoys Bay. Out toward Lake Huron, the water deepened, changing from turquoise to azure to navy. She gazed past the three islands at the mouth of the bay—White Cloud, Hay, and Griffith—to the larger waters of the lake, once called *La Mer Douce*, the Sweet Sea. On a map, the long finger of the Bruce Pen-

insula yearned toward the northern forests. She felt a yearning too. It felt like she'd been alone for years. She seemed to be slipping into spinsterhood. There were hardly any single men her age in the area. The ones that were didn't like cops. Lance Chu was nice—very nice—but she didn't want to date a cop. She'd learned that lesson in Toronto.

Leaning forward, she studied the bay. Two fishermen in a Lund drifted steadily offshore, trailing their lines. The wind had veered from northwest to southeast, a 180-degree turn. It was high time for her to make the same kind of turn. It was time to turn her home life around. She knew there were men in the city, yet she wanted to meet someone local, someone down-to-earth. There was a guy who worked at the *Echo*, Hal Bell, a journalist and writer. He wasn't a hipster, he wasn't a redneck. Two points already. He was exuberant and genuine. Two more. She liked his looks: tall, dark, the kind of hair she loved, longish in front, short at the back and sides. They'd chatted many times over the last few months. He seemed to like her.

She leaned farther forward. *Do it*, she told herself, *ask him if he wants to share a meal*. As it happened, he was running the *Echo*'s tip line for the Tyler investigation. She had a ready-made reason to eat with him—to ask if he'd share his tips more quickly with the OPP. The faster the team got tips, the better. She nodded to herself. *Call him*.



Naslund sat at her kitchen table, checking her bank account on her phone. Hell! Two hundred and eighty-two dollars left for the month of July. She needed at least three-quarters of it to buy groceries.

Her money troubles were a recent development.

She'd let Pete talk her into buying a huge house. She'd also paid off his crushing grad school debt, which put her deep in the hole before the house came along. These days, after shelling out for an enormous mortgage, what was left of her decent pay packet barely covered utility and social club bills, work lunches, and groceries. Although she owned a century-old grange, it looked two centuries old. The paint was peeling. The roof sagged like spinach in an August drought. She'd sold her sailboat, a Jeanneau-27. She'd probably have to sell her house.

Being half-Scottish, she knew how to weather financial trouble. "Avoid" spending money. Always eat at home. But she couldn't invite Hal to her place. That was too forward. They'd have to eat out. Go Dutch. Eying her account balance again, she did an instant calculation. A buffet dinner plus half a liter of wine, maybe an aperitif. With the tip, over forty dollars.

What could she do? Over-extend her credit card again? No. She'd done too much of that.

She couldn't cancel her golf or curling memberships. The OPP brass expected their officers to be in the public eye. She wasn't going to quit her women's hockey team. She loved ice hockey.

She had no choice. She had to cut back on groceries. *Move it*, she told herself. *Call him now*. He'd hinted that he'd go out with her anytime.

I've been thinking, another voice said. *Why don't you cancel your life insurance? It makes no sense to insure your life if you're living half a life.*

Exactly, she thought. Pulling out her personal phone, she called the insurance company.

Despite languishing in on-hold hell for what felt like hours and repeating that yes, she wanted to suspend her plan—no, not add to it, or buy another one, or buy car insurance—she finally suspended her plan. Mission ac-

complished, she called Hal. After a nod to the weather and expressions of sadness about Thom Tyler's death, she broached the subject of discussing the tip line over dinner that evening.

"That would be wonderful," he replied. "We're lucky, you know."

That's good, she thought. "We are?" she kidded.

"Yes. The tips are flooding in."

"I knew it. Dinner will be all business. No time for fun."

"Damn it. I finally dine with the most beautiful woman in town, and she has to talk work."

"Only until nine p.m."

Hal chuckled. "Can you meet at seven-thirty?"

"That's fashionably late."

"As always, Sergeant."

"Eva."

Chapter 11

Naslund exited the shower and wrapped a towel around her hair. Catching sight of herself in the mirror, she smiled. *Good move, young lady.*

Well, she had to admit, that was half-true. Calling Hal was good, but she wasn't exactly young. Leaning closer to the mirror, she surveyed the wrinkles around her eyes. Forget 'em, she told herself. Wrinkles or not, she wasn't the worst catch around.

At five-feet-seven and 144 pounds, she wasn't as lithe as Carrie MacLean, but she was fit, and, as her father used to say, still full of mischief. In her mother's eyes, she was a Tomboy. In her father's, she'd been a paragon of Swedish womanhood, other than her unruly auburn hair, statuesque and strong.

As she styled her hair, taming the wildest waves, her duty phone rang. She walked to the bedroom and found the phone. "Sergeant Naslund, OPP."

"Hello, Sergeant," said a tentative voice. "Constable Derlago."

"Yes, Constable."

"I'm—I'm at the main CS, Tyler's boat. Someone stole some things from it."

Jesus. "Where's Sergeant Chu?"

"He had to go to Orillia. To a meeting. So did the

other three. I—I was charged with keeping the site secure until twenty-two-hundred.”

“What happened?”

“Well, I was at the MU and I spotted a man sneaking around the boat. I called out to him. He started running. He got away.”

“Did you get a good look at him?”

“Not exactly. He was medium-build and bald, that’s what stuck in my mind.”

“Okay.” Naslund decided to go easy on Derlago. He was the station rookie, still on probation.

“And he ran like a middle-aged man,” Derlago said, gathering confidence. “You know, fast enough, but clumsy. He bolted and disappeared across Highway One. I tried to chase him down, eh, but he had a big head-start. He disappeared into the bush. I’m sorry.”

“Okay,” she said. “You did your best, Constable. So, what did the thief take?”

“I saw him carrying two lines. When I checked the boat, the bow mooring line was missing and the stern one too.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I did a once-over when I arrived. They were gone.”

“And they were mooring lines?”

“Yes.”

Well, at least the rookie knew boats. “Did you inform Sergeant Chu?”

“No. Not yet,” Derlago added.

“I’ll call him.”

“Thank you. Seems like the thief didn’t care,” Derlago said. “Operating like that in broad daylight, eh. He must think he’s untraceable.”

“Likely.” Naslund checked the time. An hour and a half before dinner with Hal. She better go to the scene. She

better phone Moore as well. “Stay close to the boat, Constable. I’ll be there in fifteen.”

Signing off, she shook her head. Moore would probably blow a gasket. Too late for that. There was a bigger issue: why had someone burgled the skiff now? It didn’t add up. The white coats had had plenty of time to lift any bio evidence. Perhaps the mooring lines held more than bio evidence?

She tried Moore’s number. It was busy. She dried herself, pulled on a pair of tight jeans and a white camisole, and then tried again. Still busy. She left a message, telling the inspector about the theft and that everything was under control. Grabbing a lightweight blue jacket, she ran out of the house.

As she drove up Highway One, she phoned Chu on her hands-free set.

“Sergeant Chu, FID.”

“Hello, Naslund here.”

“Howdy.”

“Bad news. Someone took two lines from Tyler’s boat.”

“You’re kidding. What about that PC? He was guarding the scene.”

“He was. But I don’t think he was close enough to the boat. He was at the MU.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah.”

Chu sighed. “What’s done is done.”

“The PC saw the thief,” she said. “He can probably ID him in a lineup. If we get that far.”

“Good for the PC, but we won’t likely need him. The whole CS is under twenty-four/seven surveillance. Ross rigged up two cameras.”

“Ah, that helps. I’ll let DI Moore know that. I reported the theft to him.”

“He’ll hit the roof. Surveillance tape or not.”

“I know. By the way, PC Derlago is on rookie probation. Let’s go easy on him. I don’t think he knew he should set up his station by the boat, not the MU.”

“I didn’t think to tell him. Thought he’d know.” Chu sighed. “But you’re right. Not totally his fault. I’m culpable too.”

“Not really. I’ll explain everything to Moore. Derlago would likely have used the MU toilet sometime during his shift. I’m guessing the thief was watching. He would have moved in then.”

“I suppose.”

“We can’t guard all sites twenty-four/seven. Don’t have the manpower.”

“Personnel-power, you mean.”

She chuckled. “Forget the political correctness. Okay, I’m heading to the CS now. I’m calling in Mitchell and Wolfe. We’ll see if we can get any goods on the thief.”

“All right.”

“How was the meeting?”

“Bor-ing.”

“Always are.”

“See ya, Naslund.”

Naslund called the ninjas, Mitchell and Wolfe, then drove to the scene, paying little attention to the speed limit. She had other things on her mind. There had to be a logical reason to burgle the skiff, for she was confident of one thing: Tyler’s killers were logical. Crime scenes were generally organized or disorganized. Ditto for killers. A disorganized killer left multiple traces of their crime. But Tyler’s killers didn’t leave any weapons or bio markers. The skiff was tampered with and Tyler attacked, all within a tight time window. The killers used a boat, so they were mobile, which was another sign of organized perps. If, as appeared possible, one of the killers was the thief, he was

not only organized, he was also daring. He hadn't waited until nightfall. Daring, or perhaps desperate.

Naslund concluded the mooring lines were important evidence. But why? She parked at the MU thinking why the mooring lines?

The afterglow of a long July day backlit the sky. The western horizon radiated streaks of red and orange. Jupiter dominated the southern sky. Despite the evening hour, the visibility was excellent. Naslund and the ninjas didn't need flashlights.

After conducting a slow, thorough search, they came up emptyhanded except for some crushed bushes and a partial shoeprint, too fragmented to be useful. She pulled out her phone and called Hal.

"Hal Bell." His voice was musical.

"Hello. Eva here. Sorry, I'm stuck at work. Busy day."

"I understand."

"How about we meet in half-an-hour?" She'd decided to leave the CS in fifteen minutes, regardless. The ninjas could finish the search. They were completely capable.

"Tonight?" Hal asked. "You're sure?"

"Yes. Eight-thirty."

"Very fashionable."

"I try."

She rejoined the ninjas, knowing that trying wasn't enough. She'd blown more than one relationship in the past.

During a major investigation, she usually had no home life—as her ex knew—until the investigation was closed. That was life as a detective. Work was first. And second. And third. She wondered if she could have a real relationship.

Sawyers Inn was hopping. Fool that she was, Naslund hadn't made a reservation. She and Hal were directed toward a small two-seater on the back wall by a youngster with a mammoth zit on his nose and what appeared to be week-old gravy on his tie. His moustache looked like a dead caterpillar. Naslund almost walked out. What was she doing? Sawyers Inn buffet was no place for a first date, albeit an unspoken one, especially with a man as handsome as Hal. With the twinkle in his eye, he looked like a contemporary Clark Gable. She chided herself for not dressing better. When a man like Hal was sailing offshore, approaching land, you didn't show a storm wall. No, you showed him how nice your harbor was. She discretely adjusted her camisole to show some cleavage.

Hal pointed toward a window table. "We'd like something with a view."

"I'm sorry," the dead caterpillar said, "it's reserved."

Naslund took a look around and pointed at a table with plenty of elbow room. "That one would be nice."

"I'm sorry, reserved."

She tried again. "How about that, then?"

"Actually, ma'am, they're all reserved."

"All?"

"Not to worry," Hal said. "Go on, Eva." He nudged her good-naturedly. "We can make a mess anywhere."

The buffet was loaded with turkey and roast beef and glazed ham and home-made pickles and all the fixings, plus velvety-smooth mashed potatoes, honey-baked squash, fresh peas, and parsley carrots, not to mention date squares and pies—chocolate pecan and strawberry rhubarb—butter tarts, and shortbread. Up-country food, she thought of it, as unpretentious as a groundhog. Not exactly avant-garde, but she thoroughly enjoyed it. She could tell Hal was enjoying it as well—he hadn't stopped smiling.

Having relished a main-course plate and a dessert, she rose to get another dessert. This man, this Hal Bell, was rejuvenating her appetite.

“Can I bring you something?” she asked.

“Sure. Thanks. Anything with chocolate.”

A man after my own heart, she thought.

After loading two plates with large slices of chocolate pecan pie, her eye lingered on the butter tarts. Why not? *Praise the Lard!* She fit two tarts beside each slice.

Dinner over, Hal pushed his chair back, almost impaling the guest behind him, and asked Eva if she wanted a liqueur.

“Thanks, no, I’m already a bit tipsy.” She smiled. “I shouldn’t have told you that.”

“No secrets here, my dear. A port maybe,” he suggested, “or a cognac? I’ll walk you home.”

“No thanks, Hal, really.”

Wine glass in hand, she felt ready to take the plunge. Many people used the *Echo’s* tip line because they didn’t like talking to the police. Such lines often got better results than the OPP line. “Our Thom Tyler tip line has been pretty quiet,” she began, then found she wasn’t ready to ask Hal anything. “It’s awful,” she wavered. “Thom was a friend.”

He nodded with sympathy. “Awful. A terrible loss.”

She grimaced.

He placed a hand on her arm. “I know you want to ask me something.” He smiled. “Ask away.”

What a beautiful smile, she thought. She leaned across the table. Honesty was the best policy. “Could you share the leads that come in on your tip line more quickly, you know, as soon as you get them. As soon as possible, that is. It’d be a great help to our investigation.” She stopped to gauge his reaction. He wasn’t frowning. Maybe he would help.

“I can’t, Eva, I’m sorry. I’d love to, but we have a protocol. We give people twenty-four hours to retract a tip.”

She’d heard that. “Could you reduce the time?”

He shook his head. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s Okay.” She felt deflated yet, at the same time, gratified. It seemed he’d be happy to help if it were possible.

“But we can do this again. I’ll cook for you next time.”

A man who could cook. Another point. She smiled. “What’s on the menu?”

He laughed. “Beans and toast.”

“With maple syrup?”

“Of course.”

“You’re on.”

Chapter 12

Wiarnton. July 12th:

As Naslund showered the next morning, her personal phone rang. She let it peal, its ring-tone crooning “Watching the detectives...”

Although her duty phone rang like a claxon, her personal phone crooned Elvis Costello. She’d set it to keep ringing, deeming it bad form to make callers leave a message.

“Watching the detectives,” Costello sang.

She ignored the phone. The hell with her “form.” Besides, she didn’t feel like leaving the shower. She’d had a late night. Hal had invited her in for a coffee. They’d had a few glasses of wine and talked for hours.

“Watching the—”

She tried to shut out the phone. She closed her eyes, thinking of Hal. He was more down-to-earth than she’d imagined, and at the same time funnier. His place was like a fine hotel, white and clean and modern—the opposite of her own house. He’d kissed her goodnight. Twice.

“Watching the detectives.”

All right, I’m on my way. Turning off the water, she grabbed a towel, left the bathroom, and found her phone.

“Eva here.”

“Finally,” J.J. MacKenzie said. “Are you that busy?”

“Always.”

“You’re the best cop ever.” He chuckled. “Just a moment. Call on the other line.”

She towed herself dry. When he switched back to her, he sounded impatient. “I think you better get out here.”

“Now?” She glanced at her phone screen: 0702.

“Yes. Marty Fox has some big news. I’ll be busy after the funeral. Got a trawler on the fritz.”

“Okay.”

“One request. Disguise yourself. Wear old clothes. Put on a ball cap. Wear it backward.”

“All right.”

“Good. Marty’ll pick you up. Be ready for hard work. We’ll talk, have breakfast, talk more, have a few doughnuts. You know, like any crime fighter.” J.J. guffawed. “Seriously, Marty’ll have you back in town for the funeral.”

“Sounds good.”

“From now on, we keep a very low profile.” His jocular tone was gone. “We’ll use Marty’s place. It’s very private. I don’t want anyone knowing about us putting our heads together. Some people have an Us and Them mentality. I don’t trust them.”

“Who are you referring to?”

He dismissed the question.

“Who?” Naslund pressed.

“Nobody in particular.”

“C’mon J.J.”

“Nobody,” he repeated. “See you at Marty’s place.”

“Fine with me, as long as I can report what I need to. Anonymously, of course.” She had no problem meeting J.J. privately, behind the barn, as it were. Sometimes you

had to. She had the wherewithal. After years of undercover work, she knew how to avoid prying eyes.

“Agreed,” J.J. said. “Okay, Sarge, Marty’ll be at the marina in about twenty minutes. He’ll be pretending to check out a C’n C Twenty-Nine for sale. It’s on Dock B.”

Naslund hurried into a pink T-shirt and a pair of baggy knee-length shorts—red plaid—then pulled on dingy tennis shoes. Uber-ugly, but she didn’t care. The team needed some leads. They still didn’t have a clear picture of what had happened to Thom. He might have had a run-in with a fishing boat. Or with Larmer. Then there was MacTavish, although she’d verified that his boat hadn’t been out since mid-June. Beyond that, there was the question of the mooring lines. Who burgled Thom’s skiff, and why?

Slipping out her side door, she skirted a hedge and headed uphill, cut through two empty lots and then moseyed downhill. She’d pulled on one of her father’s Tilley hats and a pair of his sunglasses. For a change, she wore lipstick and a wide circle of rouge. Effect: middle-aged bird-watcher or boater. Even though well after sunrise, Venus was still prominent in the east, twinkling brightly, hanging over the mouth of Colpoys Bay. She’d often used it to guide her Jeanneau home before sunup.

As she walked to the marina, deceptively rolling her gait, she considered the team’s progress. To be honest, they hadn’t made much. Although they’d processed over 250 exhibits, from blood and hair to anchor rollers and paintings, not one exhibit had been linked to a perpetrator. Late yesterday afternoon, they’d used J.J.’s tip about the Albin 35 to check out the Griffith Island Club but that lead had yet to pan out. Chandler and Weber had been dispatched to the club. The manager sheepishly admitted that someone took the club’s Albin 35 for a “joyride” on the morning of Tyler’s murder. However, Chandler and We-

ber didn't find anything to connect the incident to the murder. There was an APB out for the joyriders. At this time, they were still too inconclusive to count as suspects. So, who could the team count? MacLean. Larmer. Possibly MacTavish. That was their list of reasonable suspects.

Naslund felt frustrated. Walking on, she ordered herself to relax. They needed to adopt a long view. They'd have to dig into the past. While it was easy to murder someone in Wiar-ton, if a killer wanted to get away with it, he or she would have to plan. Naslund glanced at her watch. Better phone Moore. "Morning, Inspector. Naslund here. I'll be in a bit late today."

Moore remained silent.

"I'm pursuing a lead."

"Where?"

"Out Colpoys way." Enough information, she thought. Maybe too much.

"When will you be in?"

"After Tyler's funeral."

"*After?* We have a team meeting at oh eight hundred."

"Sorry," she said, "I won't make it. My case notes are up-to-date."

"I don't care about that. Well, I do. But meetings are sacrosanct."

Not to me, she thought.

"Don't miss another one."

"All right, sir."

"You're part of a team, Sergeant. Act like you are."

"Yes, sir."

Naslund ended the call, thinking that although the inspector was a good investigator, he was too combative, like her mother. Another old-school type who led with the sword. In Naslund's mind, murder cases and set meeting times didn't mix. Team members were far too busy to leave assignments and run to the murder room. As for

actions, Moore could assign them by phone or email.

She ambled on, a nondescript, middle-aged woman taking a morning stroll. She liked working on her own. She had made her a good undercover cop. Now it seemed to be a liability. Apparently, she wasn't a team player. Although she liked teamwork—the banter, the give and take—she didn't like meetings. Admit it, she told herself. You're not good with meetings *or* authority.

As she reached the marina her personal phone rang.

For the second time that day, she decided to let it peal. It could wait. Hell, she realized with a fond smile, she was being un-Scottish. If all it took to make her mellower was a meal with Hal, she couldn't wait for another one.

The phone kept pealing.

“Watching the detectives...”

Damn it. Who was it? She yielded to her Scots side and answered the call. “Eva here.”

“Were you still sleeping?” Hal kidded.

“Hey, I'm hard at work.”

“You're a good woman.”

“Sometimes.”

He laughed. “So, Sergeant Naslund, I have good news.”

“Wonderful, Mr. Bell. Pray tell.”

“Well, I talked to my boss and the *Echo* board. They decided we can share tips with the police more quickly—” He paused. “—*if* we get permission from the tipper. I just received an interesting tip from someone willing to share their information immediately, but not their name.”

“Understood. Thank you.”

“You're welcome. A pair of kayakers reported seeing two sailboats in Colpoys Bay around six a.m. on July eighth. The smaller boat was a skiff with one man aboard. It was near the southern end of White Cloud Island. The other boat was northwest of the island and larger, over

forty feet long, they guessed, with two or three crew aboard.”

“Hmm.” J.J.’s son hadn’t mentioned a large sailboat.

“The wind kicked up, so the kayakers had to turn back. When they got in to shore, both boats were out of sight. From the course of the skiff, they assumed it went up the east side of White Cloud. As for the sailboat, they think it continued north, toward Cape Croker. That’s it, Eva.”

“That’s great. Just to be sure, they said there were two boats?”

“Yes, two.”

“Thank you very much. By the way, I had a great time last night.” Why not tell him? Why hide her feelings? It had been a long time. Too long.

“Me too,” Hal said. “Can I call you this evening?”

“Call away, sailor.”



The marina was quiet, not a boater in sight. Naslund strolled along a jetty, pausing to examine each boat. She missed her Jeanneau. Eventually, she approached the C&C 29 for sale and stood in front of the bow, evaluating the design. A fine hull, with the seaworthy lines of a larger craft. She knew the owner, who’d raked back the mast and reinforced the keel to enable aggressive sailing. Reinforcing the keel, that was a step she wouldn’t have considered. Yet there was as much pressure on the keel as the mast and sails. If you had to beat hard to wind for hours, a weak keel could snap.

She studied the harbor. The wind trundled sacks of cloud across the bay. It was a good morning for sailing. Looking back to the jetty, she was distracted by a shaft of sunlight hitting the C&C’s hull just above the keel. The keel. If your keel snapped, you were snookered. If your

centerboard failed, ditto. She smiled. The sun had shown the way. Given what J.J. had said about centerboards, Thom's was likely disabled on purpose to throw off an investigation, to make it look like a damaged skiff contributed to his death. Another attempt at deception, like the blood planted on the boom. Coincidence? She didn't think so. Luckily, the storm hadn't sunk the skiff, but driven it ashore.

“Good looking C ’n C.”

She turned and looked into the dark eyes of a man with sunburnt skin and black hair: Marty Fox. The lines across his forehead seemed to be sliced by a knife. She didn't know Marty, but she'd seen him around town. He wasn't fazed by her appearance.

He gestured with his head at the C&C and strolled its length, playing the charade of a prospective buyer. After returning, he pointed to the *For Sale* sign on the bow, which read *Twenty Thousand OBO*. “She's worth that. My truck's behind the main winter shed. A red F-One-Fifty. Side door's open. See you there in five.”

Chapter 13

Sitting at Marty's kitchen table, Naslund surmised the man lived alone. Just as in her house, the counter tops were clear to appease the Scandal Brigade, but the sink was piled high with dirty dishes. Outside, the garden was a tangle of weeds and vegetables. Marty's F-150 reminded Naslund of her Mazda 3. The truck had seen better days.

J.J. sat across the table from her and grinned. "Nice war paint."

She winked.

"Nice shorts too. Who's the designer? Don Cherry?"

She raised her chin.

"Coffee?" Marty asked his two guests.

"Please," Naslund said.

J.J. declined.

"It'll help you think," Marty said.

"Like I need that." J.J. pointed to his head. "There's a herd of deer running around in there."

Marty nodded. "Milk and sugar, Sergeant?"

"Thanks. And call me Sarge."

J.J. pulled his chair into the table and eyed Naslund. "We can say whatever we want around Marty."

"Okay," she replied.

“Anything at all. Marty’s sworn to secrecy. He won’t talk about *anything* with anyone. Neither will I. That includes my wife. Everything in this room is confidential and anonymous.”

“Good.”

“Let’s make sure we’re on the same page, Sarge.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t mind what you report, but anything you report is yours. Your words, your conclusions. Marty and I are never mentioned. Same for my son. Same for anybody from my family—extended family, that is.”

“Exactly.”

“We are never going to court. We are not standing as witnesses.”

“As you wish.” That could complicate things.

J.J. sat back.

“You folks hungry?” Marty asked. “I’ve got some home-made deer sausages. I’ll fry ’em up with eggs.”

J.J. smiled. “A little later. Let’s tell Sarge what you know about the Albin Thirty-Five.”

“Sure.”

Naslund pulled out her duty phone. “Mind if I record our conversation?”

J.J. looked at Marty.

Marty shrugged.

“Why not?” J.J. said. He turned to Marty. “Let her rip.”

“Okay.” Marty settled into an old armchair near the table, his regular seat judging by the indentation made by his back. “I worked the Griffith Island Club this past weekend. I slept there Saturday and Sunday night. On Monday morning, July eighth, that is, the club Albin came in about seven a.m. I wasn’t at the dock when she went out, but I heard her diesel start up just after six. Anyhow, when she came in there were two men aboard, mid-twenties I’d

guess. Both of them were bruisers—white, big hulking bodies, and shaven heads. They were wearing sleeveless shirts, muscle shirts the kids call 'em. One guy was over six-feet-four, I'd say, and ran about two hundred thirty pounds, maybe two forty. The other guy was shorter but just as heavy—”

“Sorry to interrupt,” J.J. said. “Sarge, I spoke with my son and asked him for a fuller description of the guys on the Albin. He described them as big, bald, and white.”

“Thanks,” Naslund said. “Just wondering, Marty, did they see you?”

“No. I was in the bunkhouse, looking through the blinds. They couldn't see in, but I got a good look out at them. Both were wearing soft shoes and gloves. Even at the time, I thought the gloves were strange. It was early, but early mornings in July aren't cold. One sounded foreign. Russian or something. I didn't know what to think. The Griffith usually caters to rich men. Some are loud, but most aren't, let's say, very physical.”

“Marty didn't know either of them,” J.J. said, “and he usually knows everybody over there and almost everything about them.”

Marty shrugged. “Well, I know the important stuff, like do they go for salmon or whitefish, wild turkeys or ducks.”

“C'mon, you know what they like for lunch, what they drink, when the wives call. Just for starters.”

Naslund chuckled. She knew it was off-season at the club. Chandler had reported that there were five guests Sunday night. “Marty, do you think the bruisers saw any of the guests, or vice versa?”

“Not likely. The bruisers were gone just after seven. I know for a fact that the earliest guest got up at seven-thirty. They'd all had a late night, a poker night.”

“Okay. Did you consider calling for help when you saw the bruisers? Two strange men like that?”

“No. I suppose I should have but, to tell the truth, there was no one to call. I was the only one on duty. The manager was in Owen Sound. The chef was up but what could he do? Run out waving a knife?”

“What about us, the OPP?”

“Didn’t even think of you. Fact is, it’d be half an hour before your launch got out there. Besides, at the time, I had no notion the two did anything wrong.”

“Understood,” she said. “Well, there’s an APB out for them.”

“Good. For a change, I wish the OPP the best of luck.”

“Me too,” J.J. seconded.

“The way I see it,” Naslund continued, “they hijacked the Albin. Can we be sure they took her toward White Cloud Island?”

“J.J.’s young fella saw an Albin east of the island,” Marty replied, “which makes sense. When there’s a heavy northwesterly, like there was on Monday, smart boaters get leeward of White Cloud, out of the wind. Leeward is the east side.”

She nodded. If the hijackers knew what they were doing, they would have kept east of White Cloud. Or perhaps someone told them what to do. In either case, it still didn’t verify where they’d been. The kayakers hadn’t reported seeing an Albin. “Let me summarize things,” she began. “We know two men hijacked the Albin. But we don’t know where they took her. Is that fair to say?”

Marty glanced at J.J. “I know the engine hours were up by one. That’s a trip to White Cloud and back. And the youngster saw the Albin east of the island, heading north.”

“Could have been another Albin.”

“Could have.” Marty harrumphed.

“She’s just sayin’,” J.J. noted, smoothing things over. “Good points, Sarge.”

“Don’t mind me.” She pointed to her nose. “I’m an inquisitive bugger.”

Marty looked at J.J. They both laughed.

She joined them. She hadn’t meant to be so direct. Fact-finding could do that to her, turn her into a machine. She’d have to watch it. Perhaps the kayakers hadn’t seen the Albin because, from their vantage point, it was behind the island.

“You’re okay,” J.J. said.

“And you fellas too,” she replied. “I have a few more questions. Okay?”

“Sure,” J.J. said.

“Maybe the bruisers were poachers. Did they bring in any fish?”

Marty shook his head.

“How did they get into the Albin cabin and start the engine? I mean, did they break in and crank the diesel by hand?”

“They used her keys,” Marty said. “All the club boat keys are hanging in the shed near the dock, with the spare engine parts and all. The shed door wasn’t locked.”

“Is that normal?” she asked.

“Yep. No reason to lock up out there. Well, there wasn’t until Monday. The club changed that. You have to sign out a boat now to get her keys.”

“Seems like the bruisers knew where the keys were. Like someone told them.”

“Could be, but it wouldn’t take much to guess that shed had the keys. It’s right by the dock.”

She nodded. Detective work tempted her to see connections everywhere, often where there were none. Pete used to call her a conspiracy bloodhound. “Okay, but I

wonder, why would they go out to Griffith if they didn't know for sure they could use the Albin?"

"Good question. One of them had a kitbag. I heard it clanking, like there were tools inside. They probably had everything they needed to break in."

"How did they leave the island?"

"Used a little zodiac. I'd say it was a ten-footer. Had a small outboard, maybe a ten-horse. They headed to Big Bay. Closest spot to the island."

"Okay, but why use a zodiac to hijack another boat? Why not just use the zodiac to do what you want to do?"

"Probably not fast enough," Marty said.

"Those men were heavy," J.J. added. "A zodiac would be okay for a short run to Griffith, but a longer trip? Not on a windy day, and Monday was very windy."

"Right," Marty asserted. "The club Albin has twin diesels. She can do thirty, thirty-five knots, and handle any seas."

"Would the two know that?"

"They might."

"If someone told them."

Marty shrugged. "Anyway, I took a good look around Big Bay after I finished work Monday."

"About what time was that?"

"Around one."

She nodded. Too bad. A lot of evidence could disappear in six hours. Regardless, she'd ask the ninjas to sweep the Big Bay parking area.

"From what I saw, the two left no trace of themselves after they returned to the mainland. I'm guessing they deflated the zodiac, rolled it up, and tossed it in the back of their vehicle along with the outboard. I doubt anyone was around that time of morning, which isn't strange on a Monday, even in summer. Colpoys Bay is usually quiet

too. The young fella saw Thom's skiff, but no one else did."

Not true, she thought, not according to the tip Hal passed on. His tip confused things a bit. Besides a skiff, the kayakers saw a large sailboat west of White Cloud. So, Thom could have encountered the Albin or that sailboat. It seemed to her that J.J.'s son could have seen the sailboat. She eyed J.J. "Got another supposition. Pure supposition."

"Understood."

"If a sailboat was heading up the west side of White Cloud, would your son have seen it?"

J.J. shook his head. "His campsite had no sightlines to the water. When he spotted the Albin he was at a lookout on the east side of Hay. You can't see westward from there."

"Okay."

"Marty has more news. Do you want to pursue his lead?"

"Sure," she said.

J.J. motioned for Marty to continue.

"Well, whenever the Albin comes in, I always wash her down. Club orders. When the bruisers were gone, I set to work. I happened to find a smudge of blue-gray paint about two feet above the waterline, near the bow."

She sat straight up. Thom's skiff was dove-gray.

"The club Albin has a white hull. So, a little gray goes a long way. At least that's what my girlfriend says."

She chuckled.

"Now," Marty said, "what's the freeboard height of a Mackinaw?"

She let him answer.

"Two feet. So, this smudge on the Albin most likely came from an encounter with a boat hull painted blue-gray, a boat with its gunwale about two feet above the water. In

other words, a boat with a freeboard similar to Thom's Mackinaw."

She leaned forward. "Did you, by chance, take a sample of the paint? Wipe a bit off onto a handkerchief or something?" There were a few cans of skiff paint in Thom's boatshed. The white coats could look for a match.

"No. I wasn't that suspicious at the time."

"Right." It had been a long shot, yet worth the question. "One more consideration. How do we know the gray smudge came from Thom's skiff? Maybe it was already—"

Marty raised a stop-sign hand. "Sorry, I should have mentioned. I washed the Albin when she came in Sunday evening. No gray marks. She didn't go out again until Monday morning."

"What about gray paint on the club wharf?"

Marty shook his head. "It's not painted."

"What about other wharfs around here? Maybe the Albin pulled into another dock that morning?"

"Could have," he allowed. "But I don't know any docks painted that color, not anywhere round here." He sat with his arms crossed, thinking. "Nowhere within a one-hour run at thirty-five knots."

Naslund nodded. Fair enough. "What about blood, Marty? Did you see any blood on the Albin?"

He shook his head.

"Just the gray paint," she prodded. She had to be sure.

He nodded patiently.

Thinking of Thom's blood, she cast her mind back to the Mackinaw CS. When Thom was assaulted, he fell or was knocked down. Before that occurred, his blood could have sprayed the attackers' boat. It was likely close enough. However, in the case of the Albin, there was no blood on it. Why? Her mind clicked. There was a possible answer. If the bruisers were the perps, they could have

shielded the Albin from most of the spray. They were big enough. They could have washed off the rest. In that case, although there was no blood on the Albin, there'd be blood on them or their clothes. Perhaps they'd jumped in the lake to wash it off? She caught Marty's eye. "Did the bruisers look wet? I mean, were their clothes or skin wet?"

"They looked completely dry to me."

She nodded thoughtfully. Perhaps they changed out of their bloody clothes and sank them in the lake after attacking Thom. If they'd changed clothes, the clothes Marty saw might be different than those the youngster saw. "Do you remember what the two were wearing?"

"Yep. Muscle shirts and shorts. Long tight shorts."

"Both of them?"

"Yep."

The same kind of clothes the youngster saw, she reflected. But maybe the colors were different. "How about the colors?" she asked.

"Both guys had khaki shorts. One had a blue-and-yellow striped shirt. Vertical stripes. The other guy's shirt was red, all red with a small yellow insignia near the heart."

"Good eye," she said. She turned to J.J. "Can you call your son and ask him what colors he remembers? Don't mention the colors Marty saw."

J.J. pulled out his phone and walked outside. He returned almost immediately. "My son said they were both wearing red shorts and tank tops."

"Thanks." It seemed the bruisers had ditched their clothes, red clothes to boot—the better to hide blood. The ditching pointed to the Albin, not the sailboat. She'd have Chu's team check the Albin for blood. Even after powerful waves and frequent washings, there might be some residue left. As for the bruisers, they could have attacked Thom or accessed his anchor from the Albin, but couldn't have

tampered with the centerboard mechanism. It was down near the Mackinaw's bilge, not accessible from the much higher Albin. One, or perhaps both of them, had boarded Thom's skiff.

Chapter 14

Naslund stared out Marty's kitchen window. The skiff boarding seemed to explain something else. When two boats rafted in mid-lake, they usually exchanged mooring lines. If the CS hoist was connected to the murder, it accounted for the fact that the thief took the mooring lines—to remove two pieces of evidence. Sure, the man committed a crime but, to a murderer, crossing a police line was nothing.

She considered the other side. Wouldn't anyone who wanted to undermine the centerboard do it at Thom's boathouse? It'd be more stable working there than in mid-lake. Careful, she ordered herself, that supposition has holes. All a perp needed was some stability. The Albin would provide a stable raft. If the Albin wasn't involved, so would a large sailboat.

There was more to consider. Thom always did a full boat-check before he left a dock. Even if, for once, he hadn't, he would have detected a damaged centerboard within minutes and turned around. She was certain of that. So, someone messed with it in mid-bay. On the other hand, there was no proof someone boarded Thom's skiff. No DNA, no prints, no blood. No damned proof at all.

Hell, she thought, another *on the other hand*. She felt as if she were climbing a huge mast in a gale, the way she always did when she had to go by guesswork. Relax, she ordered herself, that's the way it is. She was torn from her thoughts by the sound of running water. Looking up, she saw Marty standing at the kitchen sink.

"You two ready for breakfast?"

"Sure thing," J.J. and Naslund replied, almost in unison.

As Marty fried up sausages and eggs, she looked at his book shelves: *Chapman's Piloting and Seamanship*, *The Ashley Book of Knots*, tomes on Great Lakes history, the Vikings, the Phoenicians, a complete collection of *The Seafarers*. The same books her father had owned. She'd read many of them as a girl.

"How about a doughnut?" Marty asked after they'd eaten breakfast.

J.J. shook his head.

"C'mon," Marty said. "Every meal deserves a dessert."

Naslund grinned. "I'll have two."

Having dunked a donut in her coffee, she pointed to Marty's books. "I see you have a nautical bent. What's your favorite?"

He didn't hesitate. "The *Ashley*. Most useful, anyway. Got four thousand knots in it, but these days I mostly use one."

"Oh? What's that?"

"A bowline. You can tie it tight as a nun's you-know-what, but undo it in a jiffy. If it's really tight, just stick an awl in the heart, or a screwdriver. Loosens it right away."

Naslund nodded. *A screwdriver*. Her mind hummed. *A Phillips screwdriver*. Thom's eye was speared with a Phillips screwdriver. His rode was attached with a bowline.

His centerboard system used Phillips screws. Screwdriver to eye. Screwdriver to bowline. Screwdriver to centerboard. Attack Thom, untie the rode and wrap it around his ankle, release the anchor, destabilize the centerboard. Get the hell out of there. Do it all in thirty seconds, for speed was of the essence when you were in plain view in the middle of a bay, even around dawn.

She exhaled noisily. One person, no matter how strong, couldn't overpower Thom, untie a rode, wrap it around his ankle, release the anchor, and disable the centerboard—not quickly. There had to be more than one. In the case of the Albin, there had been. Same with the sailboat. She nodded to herself. And yet it seemed too easy. The team had a few things to sort out. Why use a screwdriver and a hammer? Why not shoot Thom?

Well, she thought, that would attract too much attention.

Not with a silencer.

True. So why the bloody assault? The team would have to look into that. The two-assailant scenario only considered the how. It didn't answer the bigger questions: Who, exactly, and why?

“Something eating you?” J.J. asked.

She shrugged then took a searching look at him. “Can I ask you a few questions about Thom?”

He nodded.

“When did you become friends?”

“When we were kids. Some thought we were unlikely friends.” He grinned. “Some still do. You know, him childless, me married with four kids. Him famous, me a mechanic. Despite what anyone says, we had a lot in common. I was into photography in high school. He was a great friend. Back then, I left a lot of bars in Owen Sound with blood on my face. Thom had bloodied knuckles after standing up for me. He was the better fighter by far.”

Hmm, she thought, Thom was a fighter. She switched gears. “Do you know Ward Larmer?”

“Pretty well.”

“What do you think of him?”

“He has an ego, no doubt about that. Doesn’t mind being the center of attention. Not that there’s anything inherently wrong with that.”

“Anything else?”

“He’s a bit of a hard-ass, likes people to think he’s tough. And he is—” J.J. smiled. “—for an artist.”

She grinned.

“Why do you ask?”

“History,” she said. “There could have been bad blood between him and Thom. Do you know anything about that?”

“Well, I know Thom and Ward go back a bit. I was there when they met. Thom and I were working in Labrador when Ward showed up. We’d been there for two seasons. Saved a stack of money.”

“When was that?”

“Twelve...no, thirteen years ago. Ward sat beside us in the mess hall one day.” J.J. huffed. “A red-haired guy with a red face, sunburned to hell in half-a-day. But he didn’t complain. His accent sounded British, mixed up—refined but also hard—as if he were both upper and lower class. Turned out he was from England. Birmingham.”

“First impressions?”

“He was solidly built. Looked like he could handle himself.”

“Did you like him?”

“He was okay. Other than his ego, but we all have them at that age.”

She nodded.

“Something about his eyes said *I don’t give a shit*. He

was always swiveling his head about, eying everyone, examining them for weaknesses. I couldn't quite read him. Still can't. Anyway, he was into art, like us." J.J. smiled fondly. "That was a helluva place up there. There was a bluff not far from the mine, above the Moisie River. You could watch the river charging through a canyon, rushing over rapids, swirling with tannins. On a clear day, the sky was turquoise, more like a sea than a sky. Thom was always sketching there."

She nodded. "Did you have much to do with Larmer?"

"You could say he insinuated himself into our company."

"Insinuated? Consciously, you mean?"

"I think so. Or maybe he was just lonely. He followed us around. I remember this hike Thom and I took. Great summer evening. We headed for a rock outcrop about five kilometers from camp, a hump of Canadian Shield that looked like a giant mushroom cap. When we reached it, we scrambled up and sat on the crown. The sun started sinking. Thom pulled out his sketching pad and charcoals. I had my camera. The outcrop beneath us seemed to be sending out signals. *Wait, wait.*" J.J. shook his head. "Some days, some places, you never forget. Anyway, the sun sank and then sank some more. We kept waiting. Suddenly the sky began radiating reds, oranges, and purple golds. Amazing! We worked quickly. Thom still has that sketch. I didn't save any of my photos. Maybe I should have. For my kids."

She nodded and smiled. She wanted J.J. more focused on Larmer, but she didn't want to stop his story. "Please, go on."

"Well, as we were finishing our work, Ward climbed up and sat down beside us, as if he'd known us for years. We said nothing. I wanted to see if he could just sit. He

could. The night sky slowly awakened. Hundreds of stars erased the blackness of space then thousands more appeared. The moon was full. The night seemed as bright as the day. I could see stones on the ground below. I thought of Colpoys on a clear, moon-lit night—the North Star, the Dippers, the Bear. I was homesick.” J.J. shrugged. “Always the homesick one. Not Thom.”

“And Larmer?”

“Right, Larmer. Well, he seemed to know Thom was an artist. Maybe it was instinct, or maybe he’d been through Thom’s locker. Nobody locked their stuff there. Anyway, I think he figured Thom could help him, almost as if he knew Thom was a ticket to something big, which is how things turned out. The Gang of Eight and all. That night on the outcrop, he reached out and took Thom’s sketch. ‘What do we have here?’ he said. I wanted to tell him to get lost but, really, he was just like us, struggling to make something of himself. He held the sketch up to the moon for a long look. ‘Good lines. Not bad for a shaded piece.’ I laughed. ‘You a critic?’ I said. He eyed me then winked at Thom. ‘He’s a wild man, Thom, an uncouth larrikin.’ I almost clocked him. Thom got between us. Then Ward told us he was an artist too. Surprised the hell out of me. I hadn’t figured him for the artsy sort. Told us his father was a commercial illustrator, that his mother was a right snob—a *Lady*—who hated anything created for the masses, not to mention the people who do it. Said it was a wonder she boinked his old boy.” J.J. chuckled. “One minute you wanted to clock Ward, the next you were laughing with him. He said whatever popped into his head. Still does. Apparently, his mother sent him to Antwerp to study at the *Academie Royale des Beaux-arts*. ‘Pillock of a name,’ Ward used to say, ‘but a great school.’ He ran out of money after two years, and she wouldn’t fork out. She sent him to a sister in Canada. That’s how he ended up in

Labrador. He wanted to save forty grand. Enough brass, he claimed, for another year in Antwerp. Sounded like a lot of money to me.” J.J. shook his head. “In those days, tuition might have been ten grand. You wouldn’t need thirty G a year for living. But Ward liked his creature comforts. Still does.”

“I can see that. Do you trust him?”

“Trust him?”

“Could he kill Thom?”

“Don’t know. But I think the question would be why.”

“You’d make a good detective.”

“No thanks.”

“What happened after Labrador? Did Thom see much of Larmer?”

“A lot. Thom went to OCAD, the art college in Toronto. Ward ended up there instead of Antwerp.”

“Okay.” She knew that Thom had moved back to Warton ten years ago. “Did Larmer come up here to visit Thom?”

“Yes. I’d say five or six times a year.”

“Did you ever see Thom and Larmer fight? Physically, I mean.”

“No.”

“Argue?”

“Sure, plenty, but that was Ward. Considering Ward’s ways, they got along well. Thom always cut him some slack. He was like that, Thom, a good friend.” J.J. stopped. “Do you think Larmer had something to do with Thom’s death?”

She shrugged. “We’re all suspects. You better keep an eye on me.”

“You’re joking.”

“I am. But, in a sense, I’m guilty. I’m a detective. I should have noticed Thom was in danger.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Sarge. I know how that feels. Don’t go there.”

She nodded. “Speaking of suspects, what do you think of Carrie MacLean?”

“Carrie MacLean? Huh. Well, I like what I see. What man wouldn’t? Seriously, I think she’s nice. Keeps herself to herself, but nothing wrong with that. Thom often told me she was good for him. Kept him grounded.” J.J. tilted his head. “You think *she* had something to do with his death?”

“You never know with relationships, let alone marriages.”

“True.”

“You see it a lot. Someone goes wacko and pulls a gun. Who knows what couples are like when they’re alone. The last few times I saw Thom with Carrie there seemed to be a fence between them. More than a fence. A huge emotional barrier.”

Naslund was familiar with emotional barriers. She and Pete had built a few.

J.J. shrugged.

“All right. One last thing, and don’t take offense, but I’m not sure the crazy act will help much, not to mention help your reputation.”

“I don’t care what small-minded townies think.” He grinned. “By the way, I’m going to play a new role at the funeral today: Drunken Scotsman.”

“Drunken Scotsman? Isn’t that a bit—”

“Hell, what’s the world coming to?” He shook his head in mock despair. “A Caledonian, a bonafide clansman, can’t call himself a Scotsman.”

She laughed. “It’s the drun—”

“Screw them.”

“You can call yourself whatever you like.”

“Yep. And you know I will. People will start talking soon.”

“I hope so.”