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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.

Bay of Blood

A. M. Potter

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GENRE: MYSTERY-DETECTIVE/WOMEN SLEUTHS

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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 inrushing 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-blond 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 belted, "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 Torontonion.

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.

For a longer teaser (to the end of Chapter 14),
email **amp-northnoir@outlook.com**