

Blind Overlook

(Book 3 of the Jay Leicester Mysteries Series)

by [JC Simmons](#)

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PROLOGUE

The two people stood at the edge of the water looking across the bay from Port Clyde, Maine, toward the Atlantic Ocean and Africa. The cloudless sky was moonless, the wind calm, the night quiet. It was near midnight and stars sparkled like tiny diamonds. A fish rolled violently fifty feet from shore, its prey now sustenance for life.

The man felt the barrel of the gun against the back of his head a fraction of a second before his world ceased to exist. His limp body fell into the cold, salty water at the end of the pier. The shooter turned and calmly walked back up the hill to the parking lot where the other man waited in the front seat of the rental car.

"Well, did you two come to a decision, or are we going to spend the whole night in this godforsaken place?" It was his last words. The .9 millimeter slug exploded through his skull and scrambled his brain.

The shooter exited the rental car, leaving the limp, lifeless body as it lay, slumped across the front seat, and entered a dark-colored van parked nearby. The van, loaded with a half-million dollars worth of oil paintings, and the lone driver, pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward the Rockland, Maine, airport, where a chartered jet waited. Quickly loading the forty-eight bulky canvases aboard the airplane, the shooter, breathing rapidly, sat down in a passenger seat and stared intently at the paintings. They had just been stolen from one of the most powerful Mafia figures in the United States.

A few minutes later the sleek, German-made airplane climbed swiftly into the clear night sky like some evil, dark angel. The lone passenger unscrewed the silencer from the barrel of the small automatic pistol, examined it with a satisfied grin, put both pieces into the black leather case, zipped it up, and settled back into the plush seat of the jet. It would be a long flight back to Houston.

CHAPTER ONE

I hate Saturdays. They always bring something I don't want to deal with. It's usually a hangover. Or someone walks into my office unannounced while I'm trying to catch up on paperwork I've neglected all week. This Saturday proved to be no exception. A friend to whom I couldn't say no asked me to try to talk some sense into his teenage son, who was making the wrong decision to live a short life of extremes rather than a long one of moderation.

The kid was late, and I had a hangover. I made coffee. I can always tell the degree of the hangover by the way that the coffee smells while it's brewing. This morning it smelled like my old bird dog, wet and lathered from a hard workout with the quail on a hot day.

Going into the small bathroom, I washed my face in cold water. The weathered reflection in the mirror stared back at me. Not too bad, Leicester, I said aloud, studying the image. A few more wrinkles, a gray hair here and there, but passable. The wrinkles help hide the scars. Scars acquired over the last ten years learning a business where I'd made every mistake that could be made. But I'd survived, was smarter, more careful, and much wiser. At six feet two and two hundred forty pounds I always thought my size could carry the day. It didn't take long to learn that in the private investigation business size doesn't matter. Sneaking a last glance in the mirror, I said, No, not too bad. At least my old bird dog still thinks I'm handsome.

Dabbling at some paperwork, I didn't want to get too involved before the kid showed. Tires squealed in the parking lot. It sounded like a teenager. Getting up, I walked to the outer door. Jeff, Jr. was climbing out of a red '57 Chevy convertible daddy gave him for getting through high school. If I were his daddy, I'd start by taking away the car.

He was a big kid with long blond hair, sharp, high cheekbones, and sculptured nose. He had deep bottomless blue eyes, and perfect pearl-white teeth, which accented a mischievous grin on a clean-shaven face. He was as tall as I am, with wide shoulders, and powerful arms. He had slim wrists, big hands, and long delicate fingers. Hands a surgeon or concert pianist would envy. He headed for my office with the vulgar swagger of youth.

Sitting back down at the desk, I waited for him to enter. He did, without knocking.

"Mr. Jay. How you doing?" He said, with a grin that had melted many a young girl's heart. "Boy, the coffee smells good. Can I have some? Late night." Another telling grin. "I didn't get up in time to have any at home."

Pointing to the coffeepot, I watched his lithe, athletic movements with jealousy.

"What's cooking?" He asked, pouring the coffee. "Dad said you wanted to see me. Need some help solving a case? Boy, I'd like that."

Pouring myself a cup, I slopped in a big dollop of Tupelo honey. Jeff, Jr. made a face at the honey.

"Yeah, Jeff," I said, stirring the coffee. "I've got a case needs some help. You see, I've received this report of a red Chevy convertible riding around passing out marijuana and cocaine to young girls, one who ended up at the emergency room when her parents couldn't wake her from a drug induced sleep. The parents asked me to look into it. If I can get enough on this guy in the Chevy I'll turn the information over to the Mississippi State Narcotics agents. They can push for ten to twenty-five on Parchman farm. If he's selling, they may get a longer sentence. Want to help me with this case, Jeff?"

Carefully watching his expressions and body movements, I saw the ears turn red first, then the neck and cheeks. He shifted position three times in ten seconds, played a drumbeat on the coffee cup with enough force to cause whitecaps on the steaming liquid. One didn't need a polygraph machine to tell this kid was guilty. Jeff, Jr. wasn't selling dope, but I knew he was messing around with it. Someone needed to get his attention.

"Ah, Mr. Jay. I never sold any dope. Listen I..."

"No! You listen, Jeff. Being a football hero with a red convertible doesn't mean shirking responsibility. You can pick just as much cotton from a hot, scorched Parchman penitentiary field as any other dope dealer, robber, or murderer."

"You're getting on me pretty strong, Mr. Jay," he said, with a bit of youthful defiance.

"By God, I'm entitled. I was at the hospital the day you were born. I've seen you almost every day of your life; attended the first football game you ever played, haven't missed many others."

More shifting position, more whitecaps on the coffee.

Continuing, I said, "Your dad and I played pro ball together, took our first flying lessons together. Your mom and I lived next door to each other from the time we were born until the day she married your dad. So I've got a right. You'd better believe I do. I'll not sit by and let you throw away a good life because you're thinking like some big city pimp and passing out grams of Snowpowder. I won't do it."

His face was getting redder, his feet were shuffling.

"Think about your football scholarship. If you get caught with drugs just once, it's over. And the young girls, I know they flock around you, I've seen it. But you've got to take the responsibility for your actions." I threw the spoon I'd used to stir the coffee onto the desk, staining a client's bill. "You've been very lucky, Jeff. Now is the time to straighten up and fly right."

Jeff sat still, staring into the coffee cup. "Why can't my dad say this to me?" He asked, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "Why does he have to get you to do it for him?"

His intuitive question surprised me. "If it came from him, it would only alienate you. You're too headstrong, and he knows it. You know I won't bullshit you. You know private investigators have inside connections the police don't." Splaying both hands on top of the scattered paperwork, I said, "Jeff, I even know where you're getting your stuff, how much you're using, and what you pay for it."

There was no way I could know any of this. It was a bluff, but it worked. He started the guilt thing again.

"Mr. Jay, I don't..."

"Well, you are getting on him pretty strong." A voice suddenly said from the front door.

"Who are you?" I asked, irritated, raising both hands in a questioning gesture. I had not heard her come in. She was standing there leaning against the doorframe, relaxed, a smile on her beautiful face. There was no way to know how long she'd been in the office.

"You Leicester, the P.I.?"

"Yes, I'm Jay Leicester, private investigator. This is a personal conversation. If you have business, call the office Monday, make an appointment."

This didn't faze her, she kept leaning on the door smiling at Jeff, Jr., who was becoming very uneasy. He used the intrusion as an excuse to leave.

"Mr. Jay, I gotta go," he said, jumping from his chair, spilling coffee. "I'll straighten up, I promise. Look, I'm late for a tennis match, okay?"

The pleading in his eyes made me relent. I hoped I'd had some effect. He was a good kid who was getting a little too big for his britches and dealing in some things he didn't truly understand. His future was bright. I'd keep my fingers crossed that he wouldn't screw it up.

The woman quickly sat down in the chair Jeff, Jr. vacated. I looked at her with an expression I hoped conveyed my irritation.

It must have been effective.

"What I need can't wait," she said, quickly. "I apologize for barging in. We tried to call last night but couldn't reach you. I took a chance, drove up this morning, hoping to catch you."

Leaning back in my chair, I took a long look at this lady. She was close to six feet in height, wore no jewelry or rings. There was nothing gaudy about her appearance though she gave off an aura of flashy vulgarity. Her hair was ash-blond, shoulder length and curled at the ends. The forehead was broad and high with wide, dark eyebrows covering greenish eyes. Yet there seemed to be harshness deep down waiting to surface. Her mouth had a permanent grin, a smile that seemed to say I can love you or I can kill you. The nose, sharp, perfect, teeth straight and white as a fresh spring snow.

She wore a black, one-piece dress. It was tight fitting, open at the top, and held up by thin straps, which revealed wide, strong shoulders. The dress was more appropriate for a Friday evening dinner than for ten-thirty on Saturday morning.

I could not judge the age, thirty-ish, five years either way. It would depend on what she'd been through. In a nutshell, she looked like a young Lauren Bacall. I expected Bogie to come walking up behind her at any moment growling a line from *To Have and Have Not*.

Making a decision, I said, "So what's on your mind?"

"Thank you. You're very kind," she said with an arrogance which let me know she'd won the game up to this point.

I offered coffee. She declined.

She now sat stiff and erect in the chair. The relaxed, sultry pose she'd had leaning against the doorframe had dissipated. It was a complete change.

I looked for the flaws. Seeing flaws in people is something I work on. Not because I've become languid towards humans, even though I've seen every aspect of our noble race from rotten bodies to deadly, evil

people. But because when they come to me there's always a problem. Something is wrong with everyone to some degree.

She stared straight at me, unflinching. The cognac from last night had my nerves on edge, and her intrusion was irritating.

Finally I could stand it no longer. "Look, lady, it's Saturday, I've got paper work to do, then I have to be somewhere. What's on your mind?"

"I need some help." Her body was tense and bent. Her arms folded in front of her as if she were trying to protect her chest and belly.

I had seen people change from a facade of bravery to one of cowardice, but I'd never seen a person change so dramatically, and so fast. It caught me by surprise. I was still admiring her beauty, looking for flaws.

Giving her a moment to settle down, I asked her name. Head bowed, she didn't respond. She started a nutational movement in the chair, which would have been sexy and alluring had it been under different circumstances. Moving around the desk, I approached her to offer comfort.

"Don't you touch me! Don't you put your hands on me." She leapt up, turned to face me, and clinched her fists. There was hatred in her eyes, and a deadly seriousness.

She'd startled me. Jumping back, I felt guilty, wondering what made her react so violently. Then her eyes focused and the tears started flowing. She came into my arms and I held her until she stopped crying. Her body was hard and firm like an athlete.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, pulling away, sitting back down. "I'm not a crybaby. It's just been a rough couple of days. It all just came out. Please..."

"I have some cognac," I said gently. "Would you like a drink?"

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes. "That would be wonderful."

Pouring two ounces of cognac in a coffee cup, I fought the urge to join her. Instead, I had another cup of coffee. She drank the cognac down in one swallow, made a bitter face, shook her head, set the cup on my desk. The tears were still there.

"Thank you, Mr. Leicester," she said, attempting a smile. "That helped. May I call you Jay?"

"Feel free," I said. "You haven't told me yours."

"Sandy. Sandy Rinaldi," she said, wiping more tears.

"Well, Sandy Rinaldi, what can I do for you? How did you know about me?"

"I have a business associate in Gulfport, Guy Robbins. I believe he's a friend of yours. I'd driven over to the Mississippi Gulf Coast for some business, and was with him and his wife when I received word about my brother. Guy said to get in touch with you. You were the only person he'd recommend. He said you were honest."

"I'll have to thank Mr. Robbins for the kind remarks," I said, sipping the bitter coffee and wondering why Guy hadn't called. Maybe he had, she'd said they'd tried. I was out late last night. "What about your brother?"

"They say he's missing. His rental car was found in the parking lot of the Ferry Company. He didn't take the ferry. The car was unlocked; the police say his bag was still inside. That's how they knew to call me, I was listed on his driver's license as the one to contact in an emergency. I'm really worried about him. I have a feeling something bad has happened."

"Sandy," I said, beginning my usual spiel. "The police are working on it. How could I do anything they aren't already doing? Why don't you just let them do their job? He'll probably turn up. Maybe he met a lady in one of our new Mississippi Gulf Coast casinos, lost track of time. Is he married?"

"No, he's not married, and he didn't meet a woman." She stood, clasped both hands together as if starting a prayer, circled the chair then sat back down, still holding her hands together. "The police say they have a body fitting the description of my brother. Please, Jay, I need someone to go with me. I'm not sure I can do this alone."

"Why didn't you get Guy to go with you? The ferry to Ship Island is only two blocks from his office. You could have looked at the car, then went to the morgue and viewed the body. Why drive all the way up to Jackson for my help?"

"It's not the ferry to Ship Island," she said with a desperate expression. "It's the ferry to Monhegan Island."

"Monhegan Island? Where's Monhegan Island?"

"It's off the coast of Maine."

God, I hate Saturdays, I said to myself. And I think I hate Guy Robbins, too!

CHAPTER TWO

Sandy Rinaldi told me she'd been in Biloxi last night having dinner with Guy Robbins and his wife at a restaurant called the French Connection. She was to make a bid on an art collection from an estate Guy was handling. Sandy and her brother, Renato, owned a small gallery in New Orleans. She'd checked her answering service from the restaurant and was informed about her brother.

Guy took her back to his house where they called the police detective in Rockland, Maine, for the details. Guy listened in and asked pertinent questions. He and Mildred insisted Sandy spend the night with them. She drove up this morning in hopes she could find me. They'd tried last night, but my answer service told them what they'd been instructed: I was in town, but would not be available until Monday morning.

I wanted to talk with Guy Robbins about Sandy Rinaldi before making a decision whether to take the case. Maine was a long way from Jackson, Mississippi. It would be good to know if her pocketbook was deep enough to handle my fee. Surely she was okay, or Guy wouldn't have recommended her. It never hurts to check, though.

"I'll tell you what, Sandy," I said, stalling until I could think it through. "There is some cold pasta salad in my refrigerator at home. Let's go there, have lunch. We can talk over the details. You can fill me in on why your brother was in Maine. I can finish with some work, then decide what the best course of action will be."

"Course of action," she said, looking at me incredulously. "It seems pretty simple, I want you to go with me to Maine and find out what's happened to my brother. We can leave on the next airplane. If you're worried about getting paid, I'll make out a check. Just name your price."

There was the hardness again. The lady could change emotions. Too fast, I thought.

"I would need to go by my place and pack," I said calmly, looking into her eyes. "There are appointments I have Monday which must be re-scheduled, and things I must finish now."

"Oh," she said, holding my stare, rolling over the reasoning of my comment.

"But I am going to call Guy Robbins," I said, dialing his home phone number from memory.

Sandy gave what I took to be an approving nod.

"Robbins' residence." A voice bellowed into the receiver.

"Hello, Guy," I said, laughing at his formal voice. "How's my boat doing?"

"Leicester, I was hoping Sandy would find you. The answer to all your questions is yes. She and her brother are worth more money than you or I will ever hope to see. Is she there?"

"Yes," I answered, looking up at Sandy. "Sitting right across from me."

"Jay," Guy said with a serious inflection. "It's a long story, but I'll make it brief. She and Nat acquire expensive artwork, mostly oil paintings. They sell to the ultra rich and to wise guys, mostly New Orleans mob types, who don't care what the cost, or how the artwork was acquired. I don't think Sandy and Nat are dirty, but they do play around the fringes, and they make a lot of money. Just keep on your toes."

"Thanks, I'll do that. Tell Mildred hello for me. You taking care of Picaroon?" It was the name of Guy's sailboat. "She still afloat?"

"She's in great shape. We are still counting on the sail to Key West in June. Mildred says if you screw this trip up she won't love you any more."

"I'll be there," I said, meaning it.

We said our good-byes.

"Well, Sandy," I said, hanging up the phone. "Guy says you're okay. The offer for the cold pasta at my place still stands. We can talk."

"Does this mean you're going to help me?"

"It means I'm still thinking about it," I answered without any sarcasm.

She followed me to my house. It's not often that I bring a client to my home, but today was Saturday and this lady seemed as if she'd fit in any surroundings. Also, living in Jackson, I knew that the best lunch to be had was in my kitchen, and there were several excellent vintages in my wine cellar.

Deciding to help her had been easy. The art world has always fascinated me. Sadly, I knew little about it. Maybe I could learn something. There was also the hint of involvement with the Big Easy wise guys; that could always become eventful. Then there was this enigmatic beauty.

Driving slowly along Lakeland Drive so Sandy could follow, I was enjoying the weather. This was spring in the South and, when no fronts are working their way through, it is the most pleasant time of the year, except for the early fall when there are no hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. Way

up, among the fragile tendrils of cirrus clouds, a lone eagle worked its way toward Alaska.

Watching Sandy in the rear view mirror, I thought, high stake players in the art world. Who would have imagined such things existed? It stood to reason, though. A foreign billionaire just paid forty-eight million for a painting of a vase of sunflowers. I had followed cases of paintings stolen from private collectors or museums that were valued at a million or so, but forty-eight million for a single piece of canvas? Shows what I know about the art world.

* * *

Sandy entered my house and immediately went to the few 'objets d'art' hanging on the small living room walls. There wasn't much; a tiny watercolor of a woman walking away in a cold fog with bare trees and faded sky, given to me by an old friend. There was a rendition of Ahab standing on the deck of Pequod, a storm raging around him, donated by another friend, and a drawing of my favorite writer I'd picked up in Key West. A photograph of Robert Frost, and three signed Ansel Adams posters put out by the New York Graphics Society years ago completed the collection. She made no comment about any of them and ignored my books, of which I'm proud.

Throwing a cold pasta and shrimp salad together, I opened a bottle of 1985 Hanzell Vineyards Pinot Noir. Sandy sat at the kitchen table silently watching every move I made. The pinot went well with the pasta. She surprised me with her knowledge of wine.

"In the style of a true Burgundy," she said, holding the glass up to the light. "Reminds me of a Clos Vougeot. I love the earthy pinot flavors. Nice."

"Why was your brother in Maine, Sandy?" I asked as we finished the salad.

She thought for a moment, looking at me. "He was to meet a man who wanted to sell a complete collection of art work by an artist named Rockwell Kent." She paused, as if to ponder how much to tell me. "The man is from Chicago, but the collection was supposed to be on Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine. Renato was to go over the collection and, if all was as represented, buy it. The man had insisted on being paid in cash. No checks, no bank drafts no money orders. Cash."

"Isn't that unusual?" I asked, pouring us both more of the Hanzell pinot. "Does the art world deal in cash?"

"We conduct some transactions in cash," she said, twirling the wine in her glass. "People have an aversion to paying taxes on works of art, and I don't blame them. There are also paintings for sale where one doesn't ask too many questions about their origin."

"And not too many questions asked by the people to whom you sell," I said, more sarcastic than I intended.

"Don't judge me, Leicester," she said, setting her wineglass down hard on the table, splashing the red liquid on the outside of the glass, anger flaring. "You've no right." She wiped the wine off the stem, licked her finger.

"I'm not making a judgment, Sandy. I'm only trying to understand what I'm getting into." Changing directions, I said, "Was your brother supposed to let you know if he bought the collection?"

"No," she answered, wiping the wine stain from her fingers. "I was to see him on Monday at the Gallery. I had planned on being with Guy Robbins all weekend. He was to show me the art collection up for bid."

"What do you know about the seller from Chicago?" I prodded.

"Nothing. Renato handled the whole thing. I don't know anything about it except that we'd never done business with the man before."

"Why your brother?" I asked, shoving my plate to the side. "Why not you? Or both of you?"

"Because Renato knew a lot about Rockwell Kent. I know almost nothing." She ran manicured fingers through blond hair, sat back in the chair, and seemed to relax a little. "Oh, I know he did some murals which are still on the walls of Government buildings in Washington. He was some sort of socialist who visited Russia back when they were our enemies. Idiot McCarthy brought him up before his committee once. So, it was Renato's deal. Besides, I had the meeting with Guy Robbins to make the bid on the Moran collection."

"How did the seller get in touch with Renato?" I asked, watching a tufted titmouse scatter seed from the feeder at the kitchen window.

"I'm not sure," she said, thinking back. "Renato will tell us."

Yes, I said to myself. Renato will tell us, if he isn't the stiff lying on the slab in Rockland, Maine. "How much cash was he traveling with?"

"Four hundred and fifty thousand," she said nonchalantly, fingering her wineglass.

I sat back in my chair, scaring the titmouse. "Jesus. What if his plane had crashed? Or what..."

"Sometimes," she interrupted. "One must take chances in life if one is to live. Don't you ever take chances?"

"Maybe with my life," I said, smiling. "But not with a half a million in cold cash. Did the police detective say anything about finding the money?"

"I didn't ask." She sipped the last of her wine as if that huge amount of money meant nothing to her.

There was nothing I could think of to say.

Finally she said, "I'm concerned about my brother, not the money. I just want Renato to be okay." She sat upright, defiant. "The body they have is not Renato. I know it."

There were no tears. Her defiance was directed not at me, but the world. A strange half smile etched its way across her face like a breaking wave. A smile which could possess you, or break your heart.

"Give me the name and number of the police detective in Rockland. I'll call him, find out if they've learned any more, and tell him an approximate time of our arrival."

"Then you've decided to help me?" She asked, stretching both arms out beside her in triumph.

"Yes, I've decided to help you."

Getting up and going into the bedroom I'd converted into a small office, I brought back my standard form. "You need to read and sign this, then write me a check for a two thousand dollar advance. My fee is five hundred a day plus expenses. I'll bill you when the job is finished."

She signed the form without reading it and made out a check for the two thousand.

"Do you need to go back to New Orleans for clothes or anything before we figure out how to get to Rockland, Maine?" I asked, taking the form and check from her.

"No, I'll buy whatever I need here." She looked around at the house. "Do you mind if I take a shower? I didn't take time for one this morning."

"Sure," I said, amused. "Let me make some phone calls, then we'll go to a clothing store. There's one just around the corner. You can shower when we return."

"That'll be fine. Let me help with the dishes."

CHAPTER THREE

Sandy gave me the detective's name and phone number in Rockland, Maine. Calling the airline first, I made reservations for a flight leaving at six a.m. tomorrow morning, arriving Boston at ten thirty a.m. There was a connecting flight on a small commuter airline to Augusta, Maine, but from the map spread across my desk, it looked like no more than a three or four hour road trip from Boston's Logan airport. Deciding to drive, I figured we would arrive in Rockland by five o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Sunday.

Placing a call to the police department in Rockland, Maine, I asked to speak to Detective J. L. Chamberlain.

"I'm sorry, sir," the Desk Sergeant who answered the phone said. "Detective Chamberlain isn't working this weekend. Maybe someone else could help you?"

"Then I'll speak to the detective in charge this weekend," I said, throwing my pen on the desk, expecting the usual bureaucratic runaround.

"Well, sir," the Desk Sergeant said. "Detective Chamberlain is the only detective we've got. He won't be back until Monday, that is unless we have some kind of emergency. Then the Chief would have me call Detective Chamberlain. We don't have a large force."

"Put the Chief on the line, Sergeant," I said, picking my pen back up. "I'll talk to him."

"Ah, I'm sorry, sir, but the Chief isn't working this weekend, either. Of course, unless there's an emergency."

"Then put whoever the hell is in charge on the phone, Sergeant." I was growing tired of the game. "I'll talk to anyone."

"Well, sir," he said, rather proudly. "I'm the one in charge. What can I do for you?"

"Sergeant," I said slowly, calmly, clenching both fists together until the knuckles were white. "I want you to get in touch with Detective Chamberlain, tell him Sandy Rinaldi will be arriving tomorrow around six p.m. We'll meet him in his office."

"Ah, sir," the Sergeant said officiously. "Just who are you?"

"My name is Leicester, Jay Leicester. I'll be accompanying Miss Rinaldi to Rockland. We're traveling over a thousand miles to see Detective Chamberlain. We expect to see his smiling face. Understand, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," he said. "But Detective Chamberlain isn't going to like this."

"Good-bye, Sergeant," I said, quickly hanging up the phone, then holding my head in both hands in disgust.

* * *

"There's a flight leaving at six in the morning," I explained to Sandy on the way to the clothing store. "Puts us in Boston by eleven. We can drive up to Rockland from there. Detective Chamberlain will meet us at his office around six o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Sound okay to you?"

"Sounds fine." She ran manicured fingers through her silky hair. "You couldn't get us out tonight?"

"Not without an overnight layover in Atlanta," I answered, searching for a parking space in the busy shopping center. "We might as well stay here as in Atlanta."

"Will you arrange a room for me, a hotel somewhere close by?"

"Certainly, but you're welcome to stay at my house." I maneuvered the car into a narrow parking space. "There's a spare bedroom with a lock on the door."

"Awful hospitable of you, Mr. Leicester," she said with that strange half-smile. "I accept."

* * *

The flight to Boston was uneventful. Getting the rent-a-car and driving out of the city was, to say the least, interesting. It took us an hour to get through the tollbooth at the airport perimeter. Sandy, navigating with the road map, helped. But the traffic was bumper to bumper, stop and go, until we were ten miles north. And this was Sunday.

Once outside of Boston traffic on the turnpike thinned. It was foggy when we landed at Logan, but by the time we'd settled in for the drive the fog had burned off, revealing a deep blue early spring sky. The air still had a chilly brace and the trees were just beginning to leaf out.

We went through the State of New Hampshire in the blink of an eye and, except for the tollbooths at each state line, we would not have known we'd been through it.

We stopped in Kennebunkport for a break and something to eat. Another toll to get back on the turnpike, and we headed up along the coast. Taking the exit at Bath, we followed Highway One through some of the

most beautiful country I have ever seen. Bayou country, I thought, without the heat and mosquitoes.

The time spent driving gave me a chance to find out a little about Sandy. As could be expected, she'd been tense and irritated since her brother disappeared. I tried to get her to relax, talk about herself. It took awhile, but she finally warmed.

"Were you born in New Orleans, Sandy?" I asked, catching glimpses of silver-sharded slices of the Atlantic Ocean as we neared the coastline at different points on the road.

"Yes," she answered, glancing at the same spots of ocean. "Renato and I both were born there, or rather in Metairie. It's a suburb, out near the airport."

"I know it well. When I flew for Southern Airways, we had a crew base at the Candlelight Inn on Airline highway."

"I was born on Army Street, right behind the Candlelight Inn," she said excitedly. "The area's run down now, but I loved it there when I was a little girl. The airplanes would take off and land over our house. They were so exciting, going to far off places. I used to dream of getting on one, flying to some exotic land where there was an ocean and white sand beaches. I had a calendar in my room with a picture of an island in the Caribbean. I guess that was where my airplane was going." She looked down at her lap, picked at a fingernail.

"Your parents still live on Army Street?"

"My mother's dead." Sandy bowed her head for a moment, then gazed out the front windshield into the far past. "She killed herself when I was fifteen years old."

"I'm sorry."

"It devastated me. Had it not been for Renato, I don't think I would have survived. Our father left the family shortly after I was born. I always thought it was because of me. It took a long time before I realized it wasn't my fault. Mama had a rough time raising us kids. Then there were the men in her life...God, could she pick'em. One or two even tried to hit on me."

"What did you and your brother do after your mother died?" I slowed for a gravel truck on the now two-lane, winding road.

"Renato was old enough to work. We had no other family. The house was paid for. It wasn't much, but we owned it. We survived."

"How did you two get into the art business?" I asked, finding a safe stretch of road and passing the truck.

"Renato opened the gallery. He brought me in a few years later." She turned and looked at me. "It's a long story, Jay. I'll tell it to you some time."

She was being vague. I decided not to push it. She probably had her reasons.

"Tell me about Jay Leicester," she said, turning in the seat, facing me, now. "You flew for the airlines?"

"Yes, I spent twenty years as a pilot, eight of those flying for the now defunct Southern Airways. The rest of the time as a corporate pilot, learning great lessons about the nouveau riche."

"What does that mean?" She turned back, faced out the side window.

"Never mind," I said, smiling. "It's a long story, I'll tell you about it sometime."

She laughed at that, a long, infectious laugh. I was glad to see she had a sense of humor.

We drove for half an hour in silence, enjoying the countryside. Sandy leaned back in the seat, crossed her ankles.

"You ever been married, Jay?"

"Married?" I rubbed my chin. "No, came close one time, though. It wouldn't have worked out. She made a wise decision, sent me on my way. What about you?"

She laughed, as if there was some absurdity even to the thought. "I've never considered the idea. Men intrigue me, but they don't fascinate me."

Making no comment, I thought it one subject better left undisturbed. Instead of saying anything, I watched the scenery change from wooded flatland to hill country and pristine seaside.

"How did you end up a private investigator?" She asked, holding her hair back with both hands, forming a sort of ponytail. "Seems a stretch, from flying airplanes?"

"My grandfather was a judge, my father and brother both state highway patrolmen. I grew up around law enforcement. It was the only thing I knew besides flying."

This seemed to satisfy her. At least she was intelligent enough not to pursue it further. I was glad she didn't. She let her hair fall back into its original shape and gazed out the window.

We arrived in Rockland, Maine, four and half-hours after leaving Boston Logan Airport. It had been a long and tiring trip.

We drove through the small town looking for the Police Department. Main Street ran along the waterfront. Penobscot Bay glistened in the late afternoon sun. Large islands in the middle of the bay blocked a view of the open ocean, but you knew it was there, you could smell the clean salt air.

Stopping at a service station, I asked for directions to the Police Department. The attendant laughed and pointed at the small, red brick building a half block away.

Detective J.L. Chamberlain was waiting for us. After the usual introductions, he ushered us into his tiny, bare office. Waving toward two spartan, wooden chairs directly in front of his desk, he told us to sit and offered coffee. Sandy declined. I said yes.

Chamberlain went out and returned with two styrofoam cups of black, steaming liquid. "May be a might strong." He handed me one of the cups. It was not drinkable.

Chamberlain was tall man with gray hair. He had the grave, naive look of a college professor. His eyes were dark and serious with a hardness from too many years of dealing with the wrong side of human nature. His handshake was firm. His movements, while not athletic, did not belie his age, which I guessed around sixty. There was an underlying professionalism about Chamberlain. He was probably smarter than he appeared. Spying the graduation certificate from the FBI Academy on the wall behind his desk, I knew that he was.

"Came up from Mississippi, did you?" He said, leaning back in his chair, locking his hands behind his head. "Spent a year at Keesler, back in sixty-five. Got to know Biloxi pretty well. Too hot down there for me."

There was an awkward silence. I didn't say anything. Wasn't anything to say. It seemed everyone in the Air Force migrated through Keesler Air Force base sooner or later.

"Well, Miss Rinaldi," Chamberlain said, sitting up in his chair. "I'll get to the point. We have a body over at the morgue. It matches the description on the driver's license we found in the rent-a-car at Port Clyde. We'll need you to make a positive identification. I'm truly sorry about your brother."

"Cause of death?" I asked.

"One bullet, back of the right ear." Chamberlain held up a finger to a spot behind his right ear. "Probably a thirty-eight. We're waiting for an I.D. before we do the autopsy."

Sandy gasped, turned her head to the side, and put her hand to her mouth.

"I'm sorry, Miss Rinaldi," Chamberlain said.

"Any mention of finding a large amount of cash money with the body?" I asked, watching Chamberlain closely.

"His personal effects are at the hospital. The hospital's where the morgue is located," he added. "We're a small town. Not too many bodies. I believe there was about seven hundred dollars in his wallet. A lot of money to be carrying around."

"Yes," I said, not elaborating.

"You want to view the body today?" Chamberlain asked. "Or wait until tomorrow?"

"As soon as possible." I looked at Sandy. She nodded in approval. "If you could recommend a place to stay for a couple of days we'd appreciate it."

"Sure," Chamberlain said. "I'll arrange it." He picked up the phone, called the hospital, and a hotel.

We rode with Chamberlain. Sandy sat silently in the back seat, looking out the window at the water. Dark was closing in quickly on Rockland, Maine.

An old man, stoop shouldered, and walking with a limp, escorted us down a dark hallway. His nametag read: JIM-HOSPITAL ORDERLY. The unpainted concrete floor echoed our steps. The small room Chamberlain referred to as a morgue was dank and cold.

The body lay on a stainless steel autopsy table covered with a white sheet. Detective Chamberlain tried to be as gentle as he could. He looked at me, then at Sandy. I nodded. He pulled the sheet from the head of the body. Sandy leaned closer, turned and walked out of the room, saying nothing. Taking a quick look at the face, I saw the hole where the bullet entered. There was no exit wound.

Going out after Sandy, I found her leaning against a far wall, head bowed, arms across her stomach.

"I'm sorry, Sandy," I said, putting my hand gently on her shoulder, remembering how violently she'd reacted to me approaching her yesterday. "I know this is hard on you, but..."

"That's not my brother," she said, not looking up at me.

Denial is sometimes a manifestation of events like these. Seeing someone lying on a slab, especially someone you love, does strange things to some people's mind.

"Sandy," I said gently. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm sure." She looked me directly in the eyes. "I've never seen that person before in my life."

Chamberlain was still in with the body. When I walked back into the room, he looked at me expectantly. "It's not Rinaldi."

"Jesus," Chamberlain said, throwing his head back, and looking up at the ceiling. He pulled the sheet back over the unknown body.

CHAPTER FOUR

During the ride back to the Police Station, I had the opportunity to watch Chamberlain's mind at work. His true professionalism showed through.

"I was sure the body we had was Renato Rinaldi." He gripped the steering wheel so hard that the muscles bulged in his forearms. "So sure I didn't pursue it further. Poor police work. We had the body, found in a rental registered to Rinaldi. A satchel with his identification, clothes with his name in them. Plus the description on the D.L. fits the body to a tee."

"Anyone would have surmised the same thing," I offered, trying to be sympathetic.

"Extremely poor police work," Sandy said from the back seat.

Chamberlain grimaced, but wisely didn't say anything, just tightened his grip on the wheel. He looked at me. I shook my head. Turning, I looked back at Sandy. She was staring out at the darkened Maine landscape. She wasn't smiling.

We pulled up in front of the police station. Chamberlain shut the engine off and turned around to Sandy. "Miss Rinaldi, I'm sorry we caused you to come so far. It's all my fault; I should have done better work. But the way I see it, we have a dead person with a bullet in his brain that was found in your brother's rental car, and your brother seems to have disappeared. We will identify the body, but I need to know the rest of the story." He turned and looked at me with a no-nonsense expression. "What the hell's going on?"

Sandy's perfume, a musk oil I recognized but couldn't recall the name of, enveloped the small space of the car's interior. Cracking a window, I said, "It's been a long day, Chamberlain. Let us get a good night's sleep. We'll tell you all we know in the morning."

He looked at me piercingly, silent. The only sound was the occasional car passing in front of the station and the blast of a boat's horn somewhere out in the darkness of Penobscot Bay. Finally: "Alright, we'll meet for breakfast, but I want it all then, understand?"

* * *

We had no trouble finding the hotel Chamberlain recommended. It was on Main street, the marquee read: THE NAVIGATOR INN. The desk

clerk said Chamberlain called and informed him we were on the way. He said it was still the off season, and only two other guests were registered.

We were given adjoining suites on the fourth floor.

"Compliments of the Rockland Police Department," the clerk said, waving away my American Express card. "You'll have to park around back. There's no entrance to your rooms from the front."

Strange, I thought, but the rooms were free. I'd have to remember to thank Chamberlain tomorrow.

"Great view of the sunrise at six-thirty in the morning," the clerk said, as I walked away. "Don't miss it, it's worth the effort."

The Navigator Inn was an old, four-story building, which had recently been remodeled. A smell of fresh sawn wood, paint, and new carpet permeated the air. The rooms were huge, with wide balconies overlooking the bay. Suddenly I was extremely tired and fell into bed, making myself a promise to get up and watch the sunrise.

The alarm clock went off at six a.m. I felt like I weighed two tons. A warm shower helped. Wrapping a towel around my waist, I stepped quietly out on the balcony.

The islands, Vinal Haven and North Haven, as I later learned, were beginning to appear in the growing light. The wind was dead calm. Water in the bay lay flat and smooth, like a giant blue-gray mirror. A scattered cloud layer hovered low on the horizon beyond the islands.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" A voice suddenly said to my right. It was Sandy, wrapped in a robe, sitting in a corner of her balcony. Failing to notice her, I was glad that she wasn't the enemy.

"Morning."

"I didn't sleep well," she said, not moving from the chair. "I'm worried about Renato."

"Yes," I said, not knowing how to console her. "But at least we know he wasn't the one in the morgue." It was the wrong thing to say. She went inside. The sunrise was spoiled, so I went in and dressed.

At seven o'clock the phone rang. It was Chamberlain. He was downstairs waiting in the restaurant.

Knocking on Sandy's door, I expected the worst. She opened it with a cheerful smile, seeming to have forgotten her concern about her brother for the moment.

"Chamberlain's waiting."

"Good," she said, walking ahead. "Renato will show up today and explain everything. You'll see."

Shutting her door, I followed her to the elevator.

Chamberlain stood as we walked into the restaurant. The waitress poured coffee all around. When she'd walked away Chamberlain shoved a folder across the table to me. Opening it, I saw that there was a computer print out and a fax of a rap sheet.

Sipping the strong, hot coffee, I read the printout. It was an NCIC, National Crime Information Center, I.D. It showed a complex set of numbers referencing a set of fingerprint classifications. There were sixteen points of reference. I looked up at Chamberlain.

"I went back to the hospital," he said, answering my stare. "made a set of prints from the body."

"You classified them yourself?"

"Yes," he said nonchalantly. "I sent the classification through NCIC. They spit out the I.D. The prints will have to be sent to the FBI for verification, but I'm pretty sure we have a positive."

Holding up the fax, I saw that it was from the Chicago Police Department.

Chamberlain pointed at the page and said, "I sent them the I.D. They sent back the rap sheet."

This was good police work, I thought. Chamberlain must have spent hours classifying the prints. It's a time-consuming process. "You get any rest?" I asked, laying the fax down on the folder.

"Not much," he replied, rubbing both eyes. "But I'm used to it. My wife's been ill for some time. She doesn't sleep well."

"I'm sorry. Is she going to be okay?"

"No." He dropped his head, then looked up at me with a pained expression. "But we've learned to accept it. Thanks for asking, though."

Reading over the information in the folder, I saw that the fingerprints identified the dead man as Tony Bilotti, d.o.b. 13 May 1960, Chicago, Ill. Five feet nine inches in height, one hundred seventy-five pounds. No scars, marks, or tattoos. Turning to the rap sheet, I read that he'd been arrested twenty-five times. Served a short stretch in Joliet for armed robbery and assault with intent. Paroled August, 1990. There was a handwritten note at the bottom of the fax: 'Whatever he gets, he's earned it.'

Looking at Chamberlain, I said, "You think he's a made member from Chicago?"

"An old friend works the south side," he said, tapping a spoon on the table. "I'll call him a little later this morning. He'll be able to tell me. Now, let's hear it."

Setting my coffee cup in the saucer, I leaned back in the chair. "Sandy contacted me yesterday after they received your call. She asked me to accompany her to identify the body. Her brother was in Rockland to meet a seller of an art collection. The seller was from Chicago. No, we don't know his name. It could be Bilotti."

"Nobody has heard from Rinaldi?" Chamberlain asked, sliding his cup and saucer to the side.

"No," Sandy spoke up. "I called my service in New Orleans this morning. Renato hasn't called in. We were supposed to meet at the Gallery today."

"Gallery?" Chamberlain asked, looking around for the waitress.

"Yes," I interjected. "Sandy and her brother own an art gallery in New Orleans. They deal in expensive works of art." All of a sudden I'd become an expert.

Sandy looked at me, amused. "Yes, Detective. My brother and I deal in the art world. We sometimes, through necessity, deal with people who may seem unsavory. But they spend big money for authentic works of art. We make no apologies for our clientele."

"Which brings me to something you need to know, Chamberlain," I said, sorry now that I had not told him last night. "Rinaldi was traveling with four hundred and fifty thousand in cash."

Chamberlain looked at me with disbelief, leaned back in his chair. Then, when he had thought it through, he said, "You wait until now to tell me?" There wasn't animosity in his voice, it was disappointment.

"We wanted to be sure..." I began, but Chamberlain held up his hand and stopped me.

"It's okay," he said, waving his hand from side to side. "I understand. You wanted to check out the small town cop, see if he stole a half a million in cash. Smart, Leicester. What convinced you I'm clean? I might still have the money stashed." He gently lay both hands on the white tabletop, splayed his fingers, and stiffened his arms at the elbow.

I deserved the digs. They were less than I'd expected. Sandy changed position in her chair, watching Chamberlain.

"I saw that you have been through the Academy. It takes some integrity to do that. And a lot of other things, too. Besides, I'm pretty good at making quick judgments of one's character."

Deep down in the back of Chamberlain's eyes, I could see into the recesses of a mind working hard and fast. Every millisecond the words Leicester, private investigator, half a million in cash, Renato Rinaldi,

Sandy Rinaldi, Tony Bilotti, expensive art, were all flying across synapses geared to making quick and correct judgments. It was going to be fun working with J.L. Chamberlain, once I did assure myself he had not, in fact, found the money with the body and stashed it somewhere. The probability was minuscule, but still...

"Tell me where they found the car with Bilotti's body. I'll go take a look."

Chamberlain stared at me, then smiled. "Not much there but a parking lot. The car's been towed to a local wrecker yard. They're holding it for us. You know where the body is."

"I want to see, too," Sandy said, picking up her coffee cup and blowing on the black liquid.

"It's about six miles south, Port Clyde. The ferry to Monhegan Island leaves from there. The car was left in the parking lot. Bilotti was slumped over the steering wheel. A ferry passenger by the name of Wilma Sturgis found him. They called from the chandlery. The rest you know."

"You check to see if Rinaldi took the ferry?" I asked, writing the name 'Wilma Sturgis' on top of the folder.

"Wasn't listed on the ship's manifest." He motioned for the waitress who had emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray. "Nobody recognized the photo on the driver's license. I'd like to have a better picture of him to show around."

"I have one taken last year during Mardi Gras," Sandy said, reaching for her purse.

"Thanks," Chamberlain said, taking the small photo. "Yes, that's much better. I'll get an enlargement made. We'll pass it around."

"By the way," I said, holding my cup for the waitress as she poured fresh coffee. "Thanks for the rooms. It wasn't necessary, but it was a nice gesture."

"It was the least I could do after my 'extremely poor' police work, as Miss Rinaldi so aptly pointed out."

Sandy smiled. "You took the point quite well, Detective Chamberlain."

"Please, call me J.L.," Chamberlain said. "Look, I'd like to take you down to Port Clyde, but I need to get to work on Bilotti and start things rolling concerning your brother. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," Sandy said. "From now on, I'm Sandy, this is Jay. We'll all be one, big, happy family."

Chamberlain smiled.

Looking at Sandy, I wasn't sure whether she was being friendly or taking a subtle smack at Chamberlain. I was going to have to learn to read her a lot better.

CHAPTER FIVE

We adjourned our meeting with Chamberlain. As Sandy and I walked back through the lobby the same clerk who had checked us in last night was behind the desk. Making friends with people who run front desks at hotels has proven to be advantageous. Valuable information can be learned from them. They see who comes and goes, and at what hours of the night and day.

"You work all the time?" I asked with a sympathetic smile as we walked by.

He grinned, waving a hand over his head. "During the off-season I live here at the Inn. Work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week."

"Rough."

"Not really." He stood up, leaned on the counter, and shuffled some papers. "I lock up at midnight. Few people check in after then. They can rouse me out by ringing the bell at the front door. The extra money helps."

"Well, don't work too hard," I said, walking away, making a mental note to give this guy a hefty tip.

"I wonder who the other two people are?" Sandy asked, resting her chin gently on a long, slim finger, as we got on the elevator.

"What?"

"I wonder who the other two people are the desk clerk said were registered here at the hotel?"

"I don't know," I answered, cursing myself for not thinking of this. If one of them had been Nat Rinaldi surely the desk clerk would have said something when I signed Sandy's name on the check in slip last night. The other guest could be Bilotti.

When I got to my room, I called the front desk. "This is Leicester, 412. I was just talking to you."

"Yes, Mr. Leicester, I remember." He laughed. "What can I do for you?"

"The other two guests, who are they?"

"I can give you their names," he said officially. "But I can't give out their room numbers. Against the rules, you know. Although I can connect you to them."

"If one of them is named Bilotti, it'll be a long distant call," I said, fumbling with the telephone cord. "A very long distance."

"We do have a Mr. Tony Bilotti registered. Has something happened to him?"

Good, I thought. He catches on quickly. "Who's the other guest?" I ignored his question.

"A Mr. and Mrs. Waterbury, from South Carolina," he answered quickly, without the bureaucratic inflection. "What's going on, Mr. Leicester?"

"I'll explain later, I promise. But for now, don't let anyone, and I mean anyone, into Bilotti's room until I can get in touch with Detective Chamberlain. Okay?"

"You got my word, Mr. Leicester. Nobody will bother the room." We hung up.

Immediately I dialed the Rockland Police Department. Chamberlain was out, but would be relayed the message.

Sandy was expecting us to leave in an hour for the drive to Port Clyde. There was no reason to tell her Bilotti was registered here until Chamberlain and I had looked over his room.

My phone rang. It was Chamberlain calling from a pay phone. "They radioed me and said you needed to talk. What's up?"

"Bilotti's registered here at the Navigator Inn."

"Meet me at the front desk in five minutes."

* * *

"It's the cleanest room I've looked over in years," Chamberlain said, opening and closing drawers. "Nothing. The guy didn't even unpack."

A small carry-on bag was lying on the bed. It contained the usual stuff, change of clothes, toiletries. Not a thing to indicate who, or what, Bilotti was about.

We walked back to the lobby. Chamberlain brought Bilotti's bag along.

"Thanks Henry," Chamberlain said, tossing the room key to the desk clerk. "You can rent the room, Bilotti won't be needing it any more."

Henry didn't say anything. He took the key, slid it back into its slot on the wall, and then looked at me.

Walking Chamberlain to his car, I said, "Wonder where Nat Rinaldi was staying? There can't be that many places in the area."

"I'll get right on it," he said, unlocking his car door. "I'll check in Rockland. He could have booked a room in Tenant's Harbor, Port Clyde, or maybe on Monhegan Island. We'll look at all of em."

"What about this couple from South Carolina, the Waterburys? We need to run a check on them, don't you think?"

"Yes," Chamberlain said, smiling and sitting down hard behind the wheel. "You're pretty good, Leicester, much better than I expected."

"I'll call you when we get back from Port Clyde." I shut his car door for him.

"Alright. By the way, you and Sandy don't plan anything for dinner. It's lobster night down at the Angler's Inn. My treat." He drove away.

Henry was waiting for me when I walked back inside. "You promised, Mr. Leicester."

"Come on, Henry." I motioned toward the restaurant. "I'll buy you a cup of coffee."

In the cafe the waitress brought us coffee, then left us alone. An old couple, probably the Waterburys from South Carolina, were talking with her, the man with great animation, and flailing of arms. They were laughing, seemingly enjoying life.

Henry was sandy haired, rawboned, freckle faced, mid-thirties. His eyes were dark brown and, if it had not been for his perpetual smile, you would have thought him a dull person. It was his hands that caught my eye: thick, callused, bulbous tips on all digits. The nails were clean, but chipped, erode. Not the hands of a motel desk clerk. Henry was not a big man, but well proportioned, and going a little soft around the middle.

"So, Henry, what's your last name?" I needed to probe him a little. This was a small community, one never knows...

"Randan. Henry Elijah Randan. Fifth generation to live in Maine. Family came over from the Isle of Mann, across the pond." His smile turned into a wide, proud grin.

"How long you been working at the Navigator Inn?"

"Almost two years," he answered, waving at the waitress. "It was the only thing I could find after our boat building business went keel up. You're keeping me in suspense, Mr. Leicester."

Boat building...that explained the hands.

I told him the man my client's brother was here to meet was the one murdered down at Port Clyde. The one and the same, Mr. Tony Biloti. And that my client's brother was missing. I didn't elaborate any further. No need to spread rumors about the money.

"Talk to me, Henry. You see this Bilotti fellow coming and going, anyone with him?"

He thought for a moment, rubbed the back of his neck with a callused hand. "I only saw him twice, the day he checked in, and one day later. He was leaving in a hurry, seemed to be cursing under his breath, like he was angry at something."

"Anything else?"

"I never saw him with anyone. If I remember anything, I'll let you know."

"What about the Waterburys?" I pointed toward the couple sitting by the window. "That them over there?"

"Yeah. Here about a week, checking out today. Nice people, friendly, said they've been visiting relatives."

The waitress came by with the coffeepot and a smile. Declining another cup, I laid a five-dollar bill on the table, thanked Henry, and excused myself.

Back on the fourth floor, I knocked on Sandy's door. She took a long time answering. I was beginning to worry.

"I'm sorry," she said, when she finally flung it open. "I was on the balcony. What were you and Chamberlain talking about? I saw you at his car."

"After you wondered about the other people who are registered here, I checked." Crossing my arms, I leaned against the doorframe, gazed out at the sparkling water in the bay through her balcony door. "One of them was Tony Bilotti. Chamberlain came back; we went through his room. There was nothing of significance."

"My brother?"

"No, he wasn't the other guest. They're a couple named Waterbury, from South Carolina." Shoving off the doorframe, I uncrossed my arms, started for my room. "You ready to drive down to Port Clyde?"

"Yes, I'll just be a minute." She disappeared into the room.

Sandy Rinaldi was a beautiful woman. I've made it a hard rule not to get involved with a client. Maybe when this is finished, I'll spend some time in the Big Easy.

* * *

We retraced our route back down Highway one until we came to state highway one thirty one. We turned left. It would take us to Port Clyde.

At the intersection of the two highways, high up on a hill, stood a huge, white mansion. "Now that's a nice house," I said, impressed with the imposing building.

"Yes," Sandy said, nonchalantly. "It's an exact replica of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia plantation home, Monticello."

Well, I thought to myself, wonder how she knew about the house?

"It says so right here in this brochure I read this morning," she said, chuckling, reading my mind.

I laughed out loud. Sandy looked at me with an impish expression.

The highway to Port Clyde threaded its way through forested valleys and hills cleared for cattle grazing. Pastures had started greening, bright sunshine brought out the stark verdigris of the hills. We passed through the quaint fishing village of Tenant's Harbor, set in a picturesque cove, sheltered from the storms of the north Atlantic. More winding, climbing, descending through rural countryside brought us to Port Clyde. Here the road ended in a steep descent at the dock. Beyond lay the Atlantic, blue and glistening against the old oak trees and colorfully painted houses of the village.

The parking lot at the ferry dock was not hard to find. The highway dead-ended into the small, bi-level, gravel covered lot. There were only two cars parked in the upper level. There was no one to be seen. We'd only met one car since turning off Highway one. It truly was the off season.

We parked in the lot next to one of the cars. Sandy and I got out and stood in the bright sunshine.

"Detective Chamberlain was right," Sandy said, looking out to sea. "There's nothing here, not even people."

Surveying the area, I saw that there were several buildings along the dock. Out in the harbor, a dozen boats lay at anchor. None were moored at the long, weather-beaten pier. Where were the people?

"This doesn't make sense," Sandy said, still looking out to sea.

"Why was Tony Bilotti in Renato's rental car? Who shot him? It wasn't Renato. He hated guns, wouldn't touch one. What about this Waterbury couple?"

"Chamberlain's running a check on them." I said, leaning against our rental car.

"Let's get out of here, I don't like this place."

We got back in the car. Remembering a rooming house a block back from the end of the road, I parked in front and went inside. A sign hanging from a post in the yard, in the motif of a whale, read: BARSTOW INN – OFF-SEASON RATES.

A young, gray-headed man materialized behind the counter. "Yes, sir, what can I do for you?" He asked, extending his hand. "James Barstow, proprietor."

"Supposed to meet my brother in Port Clyde," I said, shaking his hand. "I hope this is the place he's staying."

"We're the only Inn in Port Clyde. Sorry, but we have no guests. Was hoping you were going to register. Off season rates still in effect till the first of the month, then all hell breaks loose."

"Maybe he went on the ferry to Monhegan."

"Could be. But the ferry hasn't run in two days."

"How often does it run?"

"Here," he said, reaching across the counter, pulling a brochure from a holder. "Take this, it's their schedule. Runs as advertised except for bad weather, or when there's no passengers, freight, or mail."

Thanking him, I started out.

"Say, we had a fellow killed here couple days ago. I don't suppose..."

"No, talked to my brother last night. Thanks."

Driving back from Port Clyde proved to be as good going as it was coming. With clear skies, the higher the sun rose, the greener our surroundings.

Sandy sat reading the ferry schedule. "Renato must have gone on across to Monhegan Island," she said suddenly. "That's it. He's staying on the island waiting for Bilotti to show. Why can't we call over and find out if Renato is there?"

"Chamberlain said he'd check. Besides, I don't think they have phone service to the offshore islands. Communications is usually by radio."

Sandy was silent, brooding.

When we entered the small village of Tenant's Harbor, I noticed a sign advertising lunch at the East Wind Inn. It was almost noon. Asking Sandy if she were hungry, she said she could eat something.

Turning off the highway into the East Wind Inn drive, we descended a curving, paved lane down to a beautiful old house situated at the

water's edge. A huge porch ran around two sides of the house, overlooking the cove and the Atlantic Ocean beyond.

At least here, in the East Wind Inn restaurant, there were other people. We were led to a table next to a big picture window facing east towards the sea.

There's something about a restaurant overlooking the ocean in the daytime. The brightness of the surrounding hills, wafting of salt breezes, and amethystine hues of the sea makes the atmosphere more striking. Maybe the people being locals, not vacationers, made for a better ambience. Whatever it was, the East Wind had it. And I liked it.

We both had a thick, creamy, seafood chowder, which was too good to describe. Wanting to ask for seconds, but too embarrassed, I sipped on the 1990 Acacia Chardonnay, which was superb with the chowder. The wine was rich, buttery, with nuances of honey, pear, and lemon. It was the first time I'd tasted this vintage. I made a mental note to buy some to cellar.

"Before I forget it, Sandy," I said over coffee. "Chamberlain invited us to dinner tonight. It would be a good chance to get to know him better. You game?"

She smiled. "Never turn down a free meal, Jay."

When we arrived back at the Navigator Inn there was a message from Chamberlain. It said he'd pick us up at six thirty for dinner. That was good, we could talk tonight.

With nothing else to do for a few hours, I sat on the balcony watching the activity in the harbor, thinking about Nat Rinaldi, Tony Bilotto, wondering where the four hundred and fifty thousand dollars could be, and truly hoping Rinaldi was waiting on Monhegan Island.

Then there was this old couple from South Carolina staying here at the Navigator. Both were dressed casually and inexpensively, like retirees on a fixed income. They didn't seem to fit the high stakes world of art collecting. It couldn't hurt for Chamberlain to check them out, though.

CHAPTER SIX

Chamberlain rang my room at the appointed time. Collecting Sandy, we met him downstairs at the check in counter. Riding in silence, Chamberlain eased along the quaint waterfront to the Angler's Inn.

"I hope you both like lobster," Chamberlain said, as we walked across the parking lot. "If you do, you're in for a treat."

"We get live Maine lobster flown into New Orleans," Sandy said. "But they are outrageously expensive."

Chamberlain laughed, winked at me.

Inside, a woman with a loud, squeaky voice showed us to a table. As she walked away her voice lingered on like the whining of a dentist's drill. Thank God our waitress didn't sound like her.

Chamberlain ordered the nights special for all of us, and began to look over the wine list. "They have a 1990 Chablis Grand Cru, from Les Preuses. It's dry, steely, and goes great with the lobster. Is that okay, or would either of you like something else to drink?"

Sandy said the wine would be fine. It delighted me that Chamberlain had an appreciation for the grape. Wine has been a hobby of mine for twenty years. The Chablis was familiar, though not the vintage. It should be fun.

The lobster arrived. Three, steaming, pink Maine lobster per person. Unbelievable! Gluttony at its finest. The wine was superb; a yellow gold color, a rich, honeyed nose with plenty of refreshing acidity to offset the sweetness. It was outstanding with the lobster and, for the second time today, I promised to add to my cellar.

Holding my glass up to Sandy, I said, "What do you think?"

"Wonderful." She twirled the wine in the glass, smelled the bouquet. "This is truly good. A great choice, Detective. You can be my sommelier anytime."

Chamberlain smiled; obviously pleased we appreciated the wine.

Sandy ate every succulent morsel of her lobster. I was only able to get two of mine down. Finishing with a satisfied grin, she was happier than I had seen her thus far.

We sat, sipping on the second bottle of Les Preuses, listening to the noise of the now full restaurant, smelling aromas of steaming lobster and clarified butter wafting across the room.

"Tell me, Jay," Chamberlain asked. "How did you get into the private investigation business? If you don't mind my asking?"

"Don't mind, J.L.," I lied. "Spent twenty-five years driving airplanes around. Got tired of a lot of things about the business, not the least of which was the nouveau riche that wanted pilots for servants. Wouldn't wash with me. Government bureaucracy, however well-meant, was squeezing us too tight."

"Why this business?"

Talking about myself made me feel uneasy, especially in front of a client. Cutting him short, I said, "I grew up in a family of law enforcement people. It's the only thing I knew besides flying. How about you?"

"Me? I don't know." He pulled his lobster bib off, wiped his hands in the lemon water. "Joined the Air Force right out of college. Trained as an electronics officer. Ended up doing surveillance against the North Koreans at the end of that conflict. I guess I just naturally gravitated toward law enforcement. Kind of enjoy working in a small town. Grew up here, know everybody. We don't get a lot of complicated stuff. Makes life easy, you know?"

"Well, you've got something complicated, now," Sandy said, pulling at her bib. "Bilotti's dead and my brother has still not contacted us."

"I checked all the places your brother could be staying," Chamberlain said almost defensively. "Haven't located where, yet."

"What about Monhegan Island?" I asked, following suit with the bib and finger bowl.

"No, he's not registered at the only place open this time of year, Barbara Hitchcock's guest house. They stay open year-round. I talked to her by radio this afternoon. He could be staying with someone, maybe in a private residence."

"Not likely." Sandy said, dejected. "He doesn't know anyone in Maine."

"Well, he's got to be staying somewhere. I'll keep looking."

Miss Dental Drill came to our table. "Telephone call for you, J.L.," she whined away. "You can take it at my desk."

"Thank you, Lucy." Chamberlain excused himself, slid out of his seat. "I'll just be a minute."

After Chamberlain was out of earshot, Sandy looked at me and said, "Do you think this man's capable of handling this situation?" She wiped her mouth, looked toward where Chamberlain had disappeared. "Maybe we ought to call the sheriff, or the state police."

"He's capable," I said, defending Chamberlain. "He works at his own pace, in his own way. Don't underestimate him, Sandy." I'm not sure I convinced her.

Chamberlain returned shortly. Whatever the phone call, it was troubling him. But all he said was, "Just routine." It probably had to do with his wife.

Over coffee Chamberlain said the photo enlargements of Nat Rinaldi would be ready in the morning. He would pass them around throughout the area. Maybe someone would recognize him.

"You find out anything on Bilotti from your friend in Chicago?" I asked, surprised he hadn't mentioned anything about this all evening. He had seemed pretty preoccupied since the phone call.

"No. My friend didn't know him, but he's going to check and let me know tomorrow." Chamberlain fidgeted with his coffee cup. Finally, he said, "My wife is interested in art. You never said what collection Nat Rinaldi was here to purchase. It might brighten her day if she knew I was working on a case involving the art world. She might even know the artist's work."

Looking at Sandy, I deferred to her expertise.

Sandy smiled at Detective Chamberlain. "The collection was by Rockwell Kent. I know little about him, except that he did some government murals and worked in several mediums. He was some sort of socialist. Renato's the expert on Kent."

Chamberlain's smile turned into a strange, slanted grin.

"What?" Sandy asked, agitated. "Did I say something amusing?"

"No, no," Chamberlain said, leaning back in his chair, holding up both hands in defense. "It just surprised me. I know of Kent. My wife bought a book written by him, GREENLAND JOURNAL. It came with six lithographs. She framed them; they're hanging in our hallway. One of them named, On Earth Peace, is my favorite. It shows a young Eskimo girl with angel wings soaring over the world."

"I'd love to see them," Sandy said.

"Yes." He looked off in the distance. Then, "You know, Kent lived on Monhegan Island when he was a young man. Worked at odd jobs, well digger, fisherman, carpenter. They say he built two houses on the island which are still standing."

Well, I said to myself, this is coincidental. Maybe it was by design for the seller to meet Rinaldi on Monhegan Island. The collection could be stored somewhere over there. Interesting.

Chamberlain looked for a long time at Sandy. "You and your brother's business is located in New Orleans?"

"Yes," Sandy replied, clasping both hands together on top of the table. "We have a small gallery in the French Quarter, adjacent to Jackson Square. We deal only in oils and a few block prints. My area of expertise is with the impressionists: Monet, Gauguin, Picasso, Manet, Van Gogh, etc."

"I've certainly heard of all of them, but it's way over my head. I know nothing of the art world. My wife is the family art expert. I leave all that to her."

Sandy smiled, didn't say anything.

"You are a beautiful young woman, Miss Rinaldi. Never married?"

Sandy looked at him. "No, J.L., no one ever asked. The name is Sandy, remember?"

Chamberlain nodded. "Well, there must be something wrong with those young men in Louisiana. Why if I were thirty years younger and single, you would have to beat me off with a stick."

I laughed.

"Why thank you, kind sir. If you weren't a Yankee, I would take you for a true southern gentleman."

Chamberlain and I both laughed.

After the dinner, which was only twelve bucks a person plus the wine, Chamberlain drove us back to the Navigator Inn. He was strangely quiet during the drive. The phone call must still be bothering him. We watched as he drove away, then went up to our rooms.

Sandy said she was tired and full and was going to turn in. We said good night. Leaving her at her door, I walked out on my balcony. Lights on the islands in the bay twinkled in the cool night air. The ferry was unloading people and cars at the dock straight across the street from where I stood.

My phone rang. The desk clerk, Henry, I thought. No doubt wanting to catch up on the latest. Picking up the receiver, I had no time to say anything.

"Leicester, it's J.L.," he said, sounding rather depressed.

"What's up, J.L.?" I asked, sitting down on the bed. "You alright? You don't sound so good."

"I didn't want to say anything at dinner in front of Sandy, but the phone call I got; we have another body. Washed up down by Tenant's

Harbor. It matches the photograph. I just wanted to be sure. I'll run the prints."

"I understand, J.L., thanks for calling. I'll be in touch with you in the morning."

Hanging the phone up, I stood there for a moment looking out the sliding glass doors toward the Atlantic Ocean and Europe. Maybe I should tell Sandy. After all, she was my client. Nat Rinaldi is, or was, her brother.

Lightly tapping my fist on the doorframe, I made a decision to allow her a good night's sleep. Death could be dealt with tomorrow. Chamberlain would have the rest of the night to work on a positive identification of the body they fished out of Tenant's Harbor. Maybe he could get a match on the fingerprints.

What I needed was a drink. The small courtesy bar contained assorted liquors. Finding two tiny bottles of Courvoisier cognac, I opened both, pouring them into a wineglass. Carefully cutting the end off one of my seven inch, fifty-four ring, long filler, handmade, Ernesto P. Carrillos cigars, crafted by old country Tabaquero's on Calle Ocho in the heart of Miami, I carefully lit it, admiring the aroma. It's been my habit to never travel without them.

The wind was calm on the balcony. The cigar smoke curled slowly upward, a bluish-gray line dividing the black void of my world into two equal halves. Checking Sandy's balcony to be sure she wasn't curled up in a corner, I sat in one of the wooden chairs, and propped my feet up on the railing.

Tony Bilotti was dead. Now, almost surely, Nat Rinaldi was dead. Four hundred and fifty thousand in cash hadn't turned up. A collection of artwork by an artist named Rockwell Kent was probably stolen, also.

A boat, invisible except for a white masthead light and a red port-side running light, made its way northward in Penobscot bay. Here I sat on a balcony, in a strange motel, in the State of Maine. As usual, surrounded by dead bodies, unhappy clients, and missing tangibles people think are worth human lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The water was cold, icy cold, and black. Something was pulling me down, down. Unable to breathe, I was drowning. Something pulling me to the place where the dead who do not die, but may not live, wander aimlessly forever.

Awaking with a start, I was covered with sweat, sheets wrapped tightly around my neck. The phone was ringing.

"Yes," I said into the foul smelling handset.

"Leicester?" It was Chamberlain. "I'm downstairs, meet me for coffee, I have some more information. We need to take Sandy for a positive I.D."

"What time is it?" I asked, trying to shake off the nightmare.

"Jesus, Leicester, it's eight-thirty. You're not still in bed?"

"I'll be there in half an hour."

Dialing Sandy's room and getting no answer, I headed for the shower.

After dressing, I dialed Sandy's room again. Still no answer. Walking out on the balcony, I peaked over into hers. She was not there. On the way to the elevator, I knocked on her door. Nothing. Where could she be?

Waving at Henry who was standing behind the registration desk, he smiled, and gave me a half salute.

Entering the restaurant, I was relieved to find Sandy sitting with Chamberlain.

"Better late, than never," she said jokingly as I sat down.

Chamberlain hadn't told her about the body.

Looking at him, he answered my stare. "I wanted to wait until you were here."

"Wait for what? Have you found out something about Renato?" Sandy's voice rose in pitch. She clinched her fists on the tabletop. "You tell me right now."

"Take it easy, Sandy. Chamberlain's only trying to spare you any more pain. He didn't want to repeat the Bilotti thing."

Chamberlain was looking at his coffee cup, head bowed. He looked old and tired.

"You tell me now!" Sandy demanded, standing up suddenly, rattling the cups and saucers on the table.

The waitress looked at us with concern.

Holding my hand up to the waitress, I shook my head. Then looking at Chamberlain, I said, "Tell her."

"Please Miss Rinaldi, Sandy," he said, looking up at her with watery, pleading eyes. "Last night at dinner when I got the phone call, a body had been found. Couple of fishermen for the Port Clyde Foods Company found it washed up at Tenant's Harbor. I wanted to be sure, not put you through another unnecessary trip to the morgue. The body had been in the water for several days, I couldn't get fingerprints, crabs had...well, it looks like your brother."

Sandy sat down, her anger gone.

"I need you to make a positive I.D.," Chamberlain said softly. "I'm sorry..."

* * *

We followed the same stoop-shouldered old man with the limp, down the same cold, dank hallway. He gave off an odor of sour booze and fresh hospital laundry.

The body lay on the familiar stainless steel autopsy table Tony Bi-lotti had occupied two days before. The air in the room had a sweet putridness to it, reminding me of a tidal flat on a hot August afternoon. Gentrification doesn't mean a thing when you arrive here; orifices ooze, blood pools. It is the same for everybody.

They are all the same, places like this, and I hate them. Never in my lifetime could I become used to being around death. No matter how many times I have to dip my hands into stranger's blood, I'll never become hardened to it. Never.

Sandy walked over and stood across the table from Chamberlain, at the head of the sheet-draped body. I eased up beside her. The bright overhead lights made the room seem sterile, clinical. A trickle of water echoed eerily around the walls.

Chamberlain looked at me, I nodded. He pulled the sheet back. Sandy moaned, fell to the floor. I reached for her, but she fell too quickly.

Her crumpled body lay limp and still on the concrete floor. The long, ash-blond hair splayed out in a neat, circular pattern around her head. Anywhere else it would have been sexy and alluring.

Chamberlain was at her side instantly, moving much faster than I imagined. We picked Sandy up off the floor and took her outside to a

small couch in the hallway. Blood from a small cut discolored the hair on the back of her head.

"Jim, get Doctor Reinbold," Chamberlain said to the orderly who had been waiting in the hall. "Now, Jim," he said again, angrily. The old man shuffled off down the hallway.

Soon, a nurse with a gurney, followed by stoop-shouldered Jim, came hurrying down the hall. "Doctor Reinbold is with a patient," the nurse said. "What happened here?"

"She fainted and hit her head," I answered. "She's still unconscious."

The nurse gave her a quick look. "Okay, get her on the gurney. We'll take her to an examination room. The doctor will see her shortly."

We followed them to the exam room. The nurse took her vital signs, and started filling out the usual lengthy forms. Answering the questions as best I could, I wondered what the world do without paperwork. The nurse shuffled more pages, keeping an eye on Sandy.

A giant of a man entered the room. "I'm Doctor Reinbold," he said, extending a massive paw.

We shook hands. He was as strong as a Bull Moose.

"Hello, J.L., how's the wife today?" He asked Chamberlain, turning his attention to Sandy.

"She's holding her own, Bill. Nausea's let up some this week."

"Good, good," the doctor said, nodding, feeling of the vertebra in Sandy's neck. "What have we here?"

"She fainted, hit her head," I said. "After viewing the body of her brother."

The big man turned and looked at me with compassion in his eyes. "Yes, the one they fished out of the water at Tenant's Harbor. I looked at it this morning. That could be rough on anyone."

"Yes," I said, shifting weight from one foot to the other. "Could be."

"Well," the doctor said after giving Sandy a cursory exam. "I don't see anything here. The cut doesn't need stitching, but I want to get an X-ray, keep her for awhile just to be sure."

Sandy regained consciousness before the doctor left. He seemed satisfied she was stable, and said he'd look in on her later.

As gently as I could, I said, "Chamberlain's got to know, Sandy, for official reasons. Was it your brother?"

She nodded, tears streaming down her lovely face. Suddenly, I felt a great deal of compassion for her.

"Yes. Oh God, Jay. Renato." She turned her head to the wall, sobbing harder.

"I'm sorry," I said, feeling helpless and inadequate.

"You rest now," Chamberlain said, stepping up to the bed, touching Sandy gently on the shoulder. "Everything will be alright. We'll take care of all the details. You get some rest."

Sandy turned and looked at us. "I'm sorry I fainted. I'm stronger than that. It was such a shock. You'll find out what happened?"

"Yes," Chamberlain said, patting her arm. "We'll find out. Don't you worry, we'll find out."

The nurse came back in and ushered us out. She said that they were going to take Sandy for X-rays. She would be back in the room in an hour.

Chamberlain and I went to the hospital cafeteria.

"She took it pretty hard," I said, watching Chamberlain stir sugar into the weak hospital coffee.

"One cannot weep with dignity, Jay. But one should weep for the loss of a loved one."

Realizing Chamberlain must have been thinking of his own wife's death, and how he would deal with it when the time came, I felt sorry for him.

He seemed to sense my thoughts. "If there's one thing I've learned over the years about life," he said, blowing on the hot coffee and looking at me. "Is that it goes on."

"How'd Rinaldi die?" I asked, changing the subject. "Drown?"

He grunted, put the cup down. "Same as Bilotti, single bullet hole behind the right ear." He pointed as he did before, behind his head. "Ballistics will tell us if both bullets came from the same gun."

"You hope," I said, knowing how bullets deform exploding through bone. It's only when they pass through a Kennedy and a Connally at the same time do they remain pristine. "Even so, it won't help much unless we find the shooter holding the gun."

"Yeah," he said, rubbing the rim of his coffee cup. "We've got to try, though."

"You said on the phone this morning you had some other information?"

He nodded. "I heard from Chicago. Bilotti was nothing, a soldier in the crew of a capo named Stefano. He's an associate of the Gino Anastasio crime family." He paused, letting me assimilate Bilotti's resume.

Analytical thinking is not one of my strong suits, but this was pretty plain. "Rip off," I said, more loudly than intended. "Anastasio sets up Nat Rinaldi by insisting he bring cash. Uses Bilotti, who's really made'em mad about something else, to do the legwork. Then they whack'em both. Two birds with one stone, and half a million richer."

"We think a lot alike, Jay," Chamberlain said smiling, sitting back in his chair and crossing his legs. "But if you got any ideas on how we can prove any of this, I'd like to hear them."

"When are they going to do the autopsy on Rinaldi?"

"Tomorrow. We should get a preliminary on both Bilotti and Rinaldi by the end of the week," he answered, ducking a tray carried by an orderly. "The photo enlargements of Rinaldi are ready. I'll pick them up this afternoon and get my people to work on getting them out."

"I'll help pass them around. Every resident of your community needs to see a copy of the photos, both Rinaldi's and Bilotti's. Somebody had to have seen them together. Rinaldi spent the night somewhere in the area."

"You're not going to take over my case, are you?" He asked, watching the orderly find a table.

"Will if I have to."

Chamberlain laughed and looked back at me. "I believe you would."

"I'll work with you Chamberlain," I said, putting both hands on the tabletop. "But I won't, I don't, drag my feet."

"You going to stay with Sandy until the doctor releases her, I suppose?" He asked, ignoring my comment.

I nodded.

"I'm going to get some work done." He rose from the table. Two young nurses walked by carrying food trays. He watched them until they sat down. "Lord, I'm getting old, Jay." He was gone.

Leaning back in my chair, I watched the nurses chatting, eating their salads. Yeah, J.L., I thought, I'm getting old, too.

I went to check on Sandy.

* * *

Sandy was lying quietly on her back with her eyes closed. When I walked up to the side of the bed, she slowly looked up at me with a tired expression. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, a little dizzy. But I'm ready to leave this place."

"I'll see if you can be released." Heading for the door, I turned and said, "Let me check with the nurse, won't be but a minute."

Walking down the hall to the nurse's desk, I spotted the same one who had worked on Sandy bending over writing furiously in a patient's chart.

She looked up, watched me approach. "Oh, there you are." She smiled, held up a file. "Doctor Reinbold said Miss Rinaldi can go. If she develops any symptoms such as headaches, nausea, or dizziness over the next twenty-four hours, bring her back in immediately."

"Thank you. I'll keep an eye on her."

Realizing our car was at the motel because we had ridden to the hospital with J.L., I asked the nurse to call a taxi for us.

Stoop-shouldered Jim, the orderly, rolled Sandy to the front door in a wheelchair. "Hospital policy," he said, pointing to the wheelchair, breathing fresh whiskey breath into my face.

During the ride back to the Navigator Inn Sandy curled up in the seat facing away from the sun. She reminded me of the position some plants assume during the night.

Back at the motel, Sandy threw me a curve that I wasn't expecting.

"Make us a reservation on the earliest flight for tomorrow. I want out of this place."

"Wait, Sandy. Don't you want to find out who killed your brother? What happened to the money?"

"I don't care about the money. Renato is dead. There is nothing I can do about it. The police can handle it from now on. Please get me out of here, tomorrow." She slammed the door leaving me standing, stunned, in the hall.

Going to my room, I walked out on the balcony. The ocean to the east was a brilliant blue, covered with a field of diamond topped waves. Puffy white clouds drifted above seabirds feeding along the shore, boats worked in the bay. I did not notice any of this. Sandy's request was rolling through my mind.

Sitting down in one of the small chairs, I realized that Sandy wanted to run. But why? Maybe I would want to flee, too, if it had been my brother rotting away in some dank hospital morgue. After some rest,

maybe she would change her mind. Or I could change it for her. At least I hoped that I could.

Sandy could fire me tomorrow if she wanted, but I wasn't making any reservations to leave. Someone had to find out who killed Nat Rinaldi and Tony Bilotti, find where the four hundred and fifty thousand dollars went. Then there was Rockwell Kent. I still did not know anything about this artist, or even if a Kent collection existed.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Sergeant," I said to a familiar voice. "I need to speak with Detective Chamberlain."

"I'm sorry, the detective isn't in. Can someone else help you."

"No, Sergeant. Tell Chamberlain that Jay Leicester needs to talk with him. I'll be at the Navigator Inn."

"Yes, sir. As soon as I hear from him, I'll give him your message."

"Thank you, Sergeant." I hung up. A loud horn blew outside my balcony door. Must be the ferry arriving, I thought. Peering over the railing, I saw that the ferry was preparing to leave the dock. Cars were scurrying aboard like tiny ants.

Sitting down at the small table beside the bed to make a few notes, I remembered Chamberlain mentioning that his wife had a book on Rockwell Kent. Maybe I could borrow it, increase my knowledge of the art world, and see how big this Kent collection truly is. Nat Rinaldi was familiar enough with the collection to bring four hundred and fifty thousand in cash to buy it. He was certainly sure a handsome profit could be made, or he wouldn't have gone to all the trouble to travel to Port Clyde, Maine.

Reading about Rockwell Kent would not further this case. But anything I learned about him and his work couldn't hurt.

My phone rang.

"Jay, J.L. here. I got your message. What's up? Sandy alright?"

"Yeah, she's fine," I said quickly, throwing the note pad on the bed. "Resting in her room. I was wondering if I might borrow your wife's book on Kent? My ignorance in this area embarrasses me."

"Funny you should ask," he laughed. "I'm home, doing the same thing. Look, I have an idea; Kathleen's feeling real good today, why don't you both come over for dinner. It would do her a lot of good to talk to Sandy about the art world."

"Not a great idea, J.L. Sandy's taking her brother's death pretty hard. She seems to want to be left alone. I'll check on her and see if she's okay. If so, I'll come out alone. It's important I look at the Kent book."

"You're right. I should have thought of that myself. She wouldn't want to visit, especially today. Insensitive of me. You come on out to the house. We'll see you at six-thirty." Chamberlain gave me his address.

Sandy answered her phone in a sleepy voice. "How are you feeling?" I asked, watching the ferry sail toward Vinal Haven. "Hope I didn't wake you?"

"No, I was just lying here. Did you arrange our flight out?"

"I'm working on it," I lied. "Chamberlain called. I'm going to meet with him later. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thanks. I just want to rest. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine."

"Chamberlain's expecting me at six-thirty. I'll check on you when I get back."

Hanging up, I sat down hard on the bed feeling exhausted. Doing nothing the rest of the afternoon would be a welcome interlude.

* * *

Finding Chamberlain's house was not a problem. It sat high on a hill at the end of a narrow, winding lane. Located on a promontory south of Rockland called Owl's Head, the house was a two story Victorian with a square balcony on the roof. A broad porch ran around the house, adorned with big square columns. Rocking chairs and swings were spaced appropriately along the wide veranda.

Shutting the engine off, I got out and looked at the huge water oaks and old growth fir trees standing thick on the hill. They did not completely hide a tremendous view of the Atlantic Ocean fifty yards down the slope behind the house. The view from the rooftop balcony must be breathtaking.

Very nice, I thought, standing quietly in the silence, not wanting to disturb the peacefulness.

The house was brightly lighted and, as I walked up on the porch, a faint, woeful strain of music wafted on the night breeze. It was hauntingly familiar.

Chamberlain met me at the door. He seemed rested and relaxed. Standing behind him, at the bottom of a curved staircase, was a most beautiful lady. She had lightly grayed auburn hair, a rounded, angelic face with a gracious smile. She wore a blue suede dress with a soft, pleated skirt. A simple bodice with a rounded neckline fitting smoothly against her slender neck was accented by her only jewelry, an elegant, three strand pearl necklace. She was a rather small woman who gave off a warm aura. J.L. had said she was seriously ill but, at least to me, she looked the picture of health.

Chamberlain introduced her with obvious affection and pride. She came forward and extended a friendly, firm handshake. I complimented her on her dress and pearls.

Kathleen fingered the pearls with embarrassment. "J.L. gave them to me on our tenth wedding anniversary," she said, shyly, proudly, looking up at him. "They've been handed down to the Chamberlain women for generations. His mother had them last, God rest her soul."

"Well, they are beautiful, and they look wonderful on you." I patted her hand.

Chamberlain walked to a small table where drinks were already poured. "Here," he said, handing us each a small flute-shaped glass. "It's a custom of our family to welcome you to Owl's Head with a drink of century old sherry from our own cellar." He raised his glass. "*Saludé.*"

The dark, thick sherry was so good I wanted to get on my knees with my head bowed.

Chamberlain observed my reaction and told me about the sherry. His great, great grandfather shipped it over from Spain shortly after the Civil War. A hogshead, a half-sized barrel of about sixty-six gallons, had been in the cellar of the house, undisturbed, since it was put there in eighteen sixty-eight. It was still about half full.

This was impressive.

Chamberlain asked Kathleen if he could help with anything in the kitchen.

"I've already set the table, only thing left is the salad." Then to me she said, "We don't have much company, Mr. Leicester. I've been excited all day, since J.L. told me you were coming. It will be nice to have someone to talk with."

Kathleen disappeared into the kitchen.

Chamberlain took me by the arm. "Come, Jay, let me show you the rest of the house."

The elegiac music still played softly in the background.

"What's the name of the song?" I asked, pointing at the ceiling, as if that was where the music originated.

Chamberlain laughed. "It's part of Owl's Head tradition. The music is original scores from the Civil War. Lorena is the one playing at the moment."

"Yes, of course."

Chamberlain continued, answering the question mark on my face. "You see," he said, waving his arm around the room. "Joshua Lawrence

Chamberlain, my great, great grandfather, was a Civil War hero. He fought at a small, rocky hill called Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg. Wounded six times, he was brevetted Major General for heroism at Five Forks. He was chosen by General Grant from all other northern officers to have the honor of receiving the Southern surrender at Appomattox. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his day at Little Round Top. Later, he ran for governor of Maine, and was elected to three terms.

"After his political career, he went on to be president of Bowdoin College. He was president there when he retired. He died in June of 1914, at age eighty-three. This was his home. So you see, the music must be played."

I did not want to fight the Civil War again with Chamberlain. But in a slack moment of my life, I read Shelby Foote's three volume, one million six hundred thousand word history of that sad war. Nowhere do I remember mention of a Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. I would look it up when I got back to Rebel country.

"Well," I said grinning, raising both arms in surrender. "Lorena was a southern song."

"Yes," he laughed, bowing graciously. "I'm aware of its origin. But no more of the Civil War. I only wanted you to know the history of Owl's Head, and why I can afford to live here. It's all inherited, with a big trust fund to boot. Wouldn't want you to think I might be in need of an extra four hundred and fifty thousand to keep it up."

"The thought had crossed my mind," I said smiling. "But after meeting Kathleen I dismissed it. Such a wonderful woman wouldn't put up with a crook."

"Thank you," he said seriously. "She's the most important thing in the world to me."

Chamberlain showed me the rest of the downstairs. After the tour, we went out back of the house. The yard was green, with big trees standing like sentinels, guarding the grandeur of Owl's Head. The sea lapped at a narrow, sandy beach in a small cove at the bottom of the yard.

"Your wife looks in such good health, J.L.," I said, my curiosity getting the better of my manners. "What exactly is wrong with her? If you don't mind my asking?"

He looked at me with sad eyes. "No, I don't mind. Kathleen has melanoma. It has spread to the liver. She's been suffering with this damn-able disease for six years. They thought it was in check after the first

round of chemo, radiation therapy, and interferon treatment. It was, for three years. Then six months ago it returned with a vengeance. The second round of chemo isn't working, although we're talking daily with the people down in Houston, Texas, at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Research Center. They're mixing up different soups everyday. Anderson is the center for melanoma treatment in the U.S. They keep giving us hope, not wanting us to give up."

"There's always hope, J.L.," I said, feeling helpless in the company of such despair.

"I'm a realist, Jay." He leaned his head back, gazed skyward. "It's not working this time around."

I could see the hurt in Chamberlain's face, feel the pain in his voice.

"Bill Reinbold, the doctor you met at the hospital, is a good friend of ours," he continued. "We depend on him to tell us the truth. And he does. Kathleen only has a couple of months."

It was hard, cold, ugly facts. J.L. and his wife deserved to know the truth. If it were me, I would sure want to know.

"My sympathies, J.L.," I said, meaning every syllable.

We walked down the slope to the water's edge.

"If it wasn't for the pain..." Chamberlain said, looking far out to sea. "I can't bear to see her in pain."

An old saying, something about death's extreme disgrace, that monster called pain, flashed through my mind, but it didn't seem an appropriate quote at the moment. "I'm sorry, J.L. I truly am sorry."

Chamberlain looked at me. "She has such a determined will to fight that the recurrence of this disease is almost untenable for me."

There was nothing I could think of to say. I stared out towards Africa.

Chamberlain slapped me on the back. "Enough of this. I do appreciate you asking. It should do her good to have company. Let's go build a fire in the grill. How do you like your steak?"

"Still moving," I said, suddenly having a great deal more admiration for one Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, great, great grandson of a Civil War hero.

While the coals burned down to grilling temperature Chamberlain took me into the basement of the house. Sitting in the middle of the huge room was the hoghead of sherry. It lay in old, hand-hewn blocks, shaped like a cradle. The head of the barrel was elegantly carved with the words:

SACAR SANLUCAR de BARRAMELA OLOROSO, around the edge of the barrel. Grapes and vines and vineyard workers adorned the center of the carving.

Along three walls of the brick cellar were square bins filled with wine bottles. There must have been two hundred cases of wine lying quietly in this old, cool cellar. I looked in disbelief at Chamberlain.

He smiled and shrugged. "Most of it came with the house. I noticed you appreciated the wine we had at dinner last night. Thought you'd like to see this. I try adding to the cellar from time to time, but it's hard and expensive in this part of the country. The trust fund is only enough to keep Owl's Head in good repair, not a lot extra for replenishing the cellar."

It would have been a pleasure to spend a whole day looking through the wine bottles; some covered with half an inch of dust.

Chamberlain picked up a bottle of champagne. "Here," he said, handing it to me. "Let's sip on this while we're cooking. I have something special to open for dinner. We'll decant it about half an hour before we eat."

We took the already cool bottle of champagne up to the living room. Chamberlain sat it in an ice bucket and retrieved three champagne flutes from a cabinet full of cut glass.

Sneaking a peek at the bottle on the way up from the cellar, I saw that it had no label.

Chamberlain called for Kathleen. She appeared from somewhere toward the rear of the house.

"Oh," she said, seeing the champagne. "You must be a wine person, Mr. Leicester. J.L. rarely opens the good stuff."

"Well, I'm flattered, and no more of this mister stuff, okay?"

"Okay," she answered, nodding.

The champagne rated alongside the sherry. It had a deep straw gold color with tiny bubbles racing to the top of the glass. A yeasty, toasty nose with damp straw odors indicated great age. Dry and fruity on the palate, it was perfectly balanced with a good finish.

"Outstanding," I said, admiring the wine, holding the glass up to the light. "What is it, and where can I get some?"

Chamberlain sat his glass on the table and picked up the dark bottle. "I honestly don't know what house made this wine. It was never labeled. I do know two things about it, though. It is from France, and the year 1911 is etched on the bottle."

"It's a rare treat," I said, raising my glass to him. "Thank you for sharing this. You're not going to do this with the dinner wine, are you?"

"No," he laughed, setting the bottle back on the table and picking up his champagne flute. "I promise. The label's still on the one I've selected for dinner, which we'd better decant now. We eat in thirty minutes, my dear," he said to Kathleen.

We went back to the cellar. Chamberlain set a dusty bottle on the wooden table before we went upstairs to open the champagne. He lit a candle and gently picked up that same bottle. "Here," he said, holding it so I could see the label. "What do you think this will be like?"

The label was covered with dust and mostly eaten away. But I could clearly make out, Chateau Lafite, 1875. This was astounding. The wine was almost a hundred and thirty years old. There was no ullage, and a perfect wax seal. Sitting my champagne glass on the table, my attention was riveted on the Lafite.

"You really want to do this, J.L.?" I heard myself saying. "It's probably way over the hill. It would surely bring a lot of money at auction."

"Hog wash," Chamberlain said, carefully removing the wax seal. "Wine is to be drunk, enjoyed. Not sold."

"Still..."

"There were six bottles originally," he said, ignoring my comment. "I've opened one before. I think you'll be surprised."

Holding the decanter while Chamberlain poured the wine over the candle flame, I noticed when he was finished that there was almost two inches of sediment remaining in the bottle. The cork was in perfect shape. The wine in the decanter had a deep garnet color.

"We'd better get the steaks cooking," Chamberlain said, handing me the decanter. "We don't want this to breathe too long. Take it up to Kathleen. I'll put the meat on."

Obedient like a child, I sneaked a smell on the way. There was not a whiff of decay.

Refilling my champagne glass, I noticed Kathleen had not drunk any of hers. Carrying the bottle out back to where Chamberlain was grilling the meat, I also noticed that there were only two steaks on the grill.

He saw me looking. "Kathleen won't eat meat. It's the chemo, throws off her taste."

"Understood," I said, refilling his glass.

The steaks were perfect. And the wine! The bouquet, closed at first, developed quickly in the glass. It had a delicate fruit, with a rich warm wholemeal-bisquit character, which, to me, is the essence of the finest claret, as it blossoms in the glass. It was slightly sweet, lightish, rich but soft, with a silky texture in the mouth. There was a delicate acidity on the aftertaste. Again, I wanted to get on my knees.

"The meat was too much for the wine," Chamberlain said, holding his glass up to a candle. "Should have tasted this with no food."

He was right, but I wasn't complaining. Kathleen, bless her heart, only sipped at hers.

After dinner Kathleen showed me the prints she had framed of Rockwell Kent. There were six from a set issued with his book, GREENLAND JOURNAL. They were enclosed in black wood with red matting. The one Chamberlain said was his favorite, PEACE ON EARTH was nice. Another, showing an Eskimo boy carrying a huge bird across his back, appealed to me. He obviously had just slain the bird and was proudly returning home with his quarry. Kent had titled it, SMALL BOY and BIG BIRD.

"They are beautiful, aren't they?" She said, looking fondly at the prints.

"Yes. Excellent lithographs," I said, as if I was an expert.

Kathleen laughed, patted me on the arm. "Here," she said, handing me two books. "If you want to learn about Kent, these will inform you. One is his autobiography, the other is a catalogue of his work."

Looking at the titles, I saw that the autobiography was, IT'S ME O'LORD; the other, THE PRINTS OF ROCKWELL KENT, by Dan Burne Jones. Thanking her, I promised to return them tomorrow.

"No hurry, Jay," she said softly, taking me by the arm. "Take your time, enjoy them."

Declining Chamberlain's offer for dessert wine, I'd had enough greatness for one night, I said that I wanted to get started reading about Rockwell Kent.

Preparing to leave, I thanked Kathleen for everything and told her the music, it had been the Civil War tunes all evening, was very pleasant.

"Yes," she said, looking deeply into my eyes. "The songs of that war do convey powerful emotions. I'm truly glad you enjoyed them."

Sitting in the car for a moment before starting the engine, I looked at J.L. and Kathleen Chamberlain standing on the porch of Owl's Head on

the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in a far northern state called Maine. It was a moment I would long remember.

CHAPTER NINE

Back at the Navigator Inn, I knocked on Sandy's door. She opened it slightly, then all the way. In the dim light of the room she appeared a truly beautiful young woman. Her blond hair flowed down around her shoulders like an island waterfall. But all I could see was Kathleen Chamberlain's face. A face with only a few months of life.

"I'm not leaving," I said, gripping the door handle for support.

"What?" Sandy asked, looking up at me, puzzled.

"There is no way that I can leave Chamberlain with two unsolved murders," I said, tightening my grip on the handle. "The man needs my help. If you don't want me to continue working for you, then I'll stay and look into them on my own."

Sandy reached over and turned on the overhead light. She was silent for a moment. Then: "You're right. I guess I wanted to flee from this place where Renato was killed. Yes, I want you to stay." She was silent again for a few seconds. "But I've got to go back to New Orleans. The Gallery needs to be opened. Plans must be made to finalize the purchase of the Moran collection with Guy Robbins. There are other deals in the works. I need to leave tomorrow."

"Certainly," I said, releasing the door handle, a little confused. She had mentioned nothing about shipping Nat's body back for burial. "I'll drive you over to Augusta in the morning for a flight out to Boston. When I get back to my room, I'll see what kind of connection we can make from Boston."

"Great," she said, sounding relieved. "You'll call me every day, keep me abreast of what you find?"

"Agreed."

We stood in silence some few moments.

"What about the remains, Sandy?" I asked, gently. "You want them shipped back to New Orleans?"

She turned her head slightly, wiped away a tear. The question needed asking.

"Will you handle it for me, Jay? Please?" She leaned against the wall, her voice shaky.

"I'll call you for the details as soon as the autopsy is finished. Everything will be taken care of, it's part of what I get paid to do."

"Thank you," Sandy said, sniffing. "You're a big help. I appreciate it."

Leaving Sandy in her room, I took the two books on Rockwell Kent and prepared for a long night of reading.

Sliding my glass doors open allowed a sea breeze to blow refreshing, cool, salt air into the room. A Delta Airlines agent confirmed that a regional airline left Augusta, Maine, at ten a.m., connecting with their flight to New Orleans. I booked Sandy a first class, one way ticket.

Sitting back in my chair, I thought about Nat Rinaldi. Whatever he had stumbled into, or fell victim of, it wasn't getting him a first class ticket home. I intended to find out exactly why.

* * *

It was near dawn when I finally dosed off. Rockwell Kent led a fascinating life. He was the consummate artist. The man never did anything in his life which was not artistic.

Politically, Kent believed in the rights of the individual, and used his art to that end. Subpoenaed to appear before the McCarthy committee in 1953 at age seventy-one, he was not intimidated by Joe McCarthy and took the Fifth Amendment on the question of belonging to the Communist Party. He had never been a member and considered it nobody's business whether he was or not.

There was one exchange between Kent and McCarthy, which made me smile. He asked if he could give a statement for the record. McCarthy rejected the request: "I'm not going to listen to a lecture from you." Kent snapped back, "You're not going to get one. I get paid for my lectures."

I fell asleep looking at the extensive collection of prints brilliantly put together by Dan Burne Jones in his book, *THE PRINTS OF ROCKWELL KENT: A CATALOGUE RAISONNE*. Those Kent did of the sea were my favorite. One titled, *GODSPEED*, is the best that I have ever seen.

Henry, the front desk clerk, rang my room at seven thirty, as I had asked. Sleepily thanking him, I struggled to the shower.

Later, while drying off, I called the police department. My road map showed Augusta only about forty miles from Rockland. Thinking I had better check to see how long the drive would take, my old friend, the Desk Sergeant, confirmed my guess.

"Take highway seventeen, Mr. Leicester. It should take about thirty or forty minutes. Drive carefully, the roads are crooked. Yes, sir, I'll tell Detective Chamberlain you will call him this afternoon. Good-bye."

If we left the motel by eight-thirty we should have plenty of time to get Sandy to the plane on time.

Knocking on Sandy's door at eight-fifteen, she opened it naked, holding only a towel in front of her. Her blond hair was wet and hung in strings across her shoulders.

"I just got out of the shower," she said, not embarrassed at all. "Come on in, I'll only be a minute."

She turned and padded barefoot toward the bathroom. Her naked spine made a delicious curve down to what used to be a tail, and now begins the upper insertion of the gluteus maximus, the ass. As she walked away, her spine traced imaginary curves in the small space of the motel room. How lucky, I thought, to see these firm young muscles, bathed in early morning light, dance together so perfectly in absolute synchronization. Walking out on the balcony, I gazed far out into the North Atlantic Ocean, and tried hard to get my mind off of raw sex.

* * *

Sandy appeared soon from the bathroom, dressed in black slacks and a sweater. Her damp hair was bound with a cockade-like band wrapped around the head. She looked like a palefaced Indian princess.

"Ready," she said, smiling, pulling the sleeves up on the sweater. "Did I run us late? God, I hope not."

"We have plenty of time," I said, taking her small ditty bag, wondering where she had acquired the bandanna.

We drove north out of Rockland, picked up highway seventeen and headed for Augusta. We rounded high hills covered with majestic fir trees. Patches of obsidian rock, black and shiny in the crisp, clear, spring air, glistened down at us. An endless flight of blackbirds, early for this time of year, crossed the sky like visible wind, undulating and whipping.

"Are we now an expert on Rockwell Kent?" Sandy asked with a sly grin.

Laughing, I said, "My definition of an expert is any s.o.b. a way from home with a briefcase."

Sandy smiled and ran her fingers through the rapidly drying blond hair. "I wonder where the Kent collection is?" She said, more to herself

than me. "With Renato and Bilotti dead, it could be sitting somewhere undetected. Maybe forever."

Sandy was an enigma to me. One minute she did not seem to care who killed her brother, or where almost half a million in cash went. Now she was thinking about an art collection. It would be a logical question coming from Chamberlain, but Sandy? I probably would never understand this lady, or her mood swings.

"It could have been a slick setup, Sandy," I volunteered, slowing the car as we rounded a sharp curve in the two lane road. "The collection may not exist. Your brother may have been killed for the money. The Kent collection merely the tool used as part of the scam."

"You will find out, won't you?" She squeezed the ends of her hair as if to wring water from it.

"You can count on it," I answered, accelerating back to the speed limit.

Watching Sandy walk toward the sleek, new-generation turboprop, her black slacks stretched tight, reminded me of those same muscles I had admired earlier. Trying hard to think about what I knew about airplanes rather than those muscles did not work.

* * *

On my way back, I stopped by the Navigator Inn. Henry flagged me down.

"I tried to catch you before you left this morning," he said, handing me a note. "It came in just as I saw you driving away."

"You can check Miss Rinaldi out of her room," I said, handing him her key. "She's on her way back to New Orleans." I looked at the note with amazement. "You say this came in as we were leaving?"

"Yes. He was a rude bastard, too." He slid Sandy's room key back into a small cubbyhole. "Does it have anything to do with the two murders?"

News travels fast in small towns.

"I don't know, Henry," I said, folding the note and putting it into my shirt pocket. "Thanks for the message. You do good work."

Walking into the restaurant, I ordered a cup of coffee from the same waitress who had witnessed Sandy's little outburst at breakfast the other morning. Pouring a spoonful of honey into the coffee, I took the note out and reread it: 'Miss Rinaldi, please call Gino Anastasio at, it listed the

number, regarding sale of Kent collection to Renato Rinaldi. It is imperative we talk. Today.' The note was in Henry's handwriting, but I could sense the message, and the urgency. Interesting development, I thought. A good cover-up in progress. Or I had been dead wrong about the rip-off.

The waitress came over with a refill.

"How's the little wife this morning?" She asked, pouring the coffee.

Putting the note in my shirt pocket, I looked up at her. She had graying brown hair, a nice face, and appeared to be around forty years old. A good-looking woman who had kept her figure, probably from working hard all her life.

"The wife?" I stirred more honey into the coffee. "No, I work for the lady. She's gone back south."

"You going to be in town for awhile?" She asked, throwing a hip out to one side and resting a hand on it, flirting.

"Few days," I said, thinking about firm, hard, rippling muscles.

"Maybe we could have a drink sometime?"

"Maybe."

As I started to leave, the waitress handed me a folded ticket.

"Coffee's on the house. Name's Mabel, that's my number," she said, pointing to the ticket. "Use it."

"Thanks for the coffee, Mabel," I said, saluting her with the folded ticket. "I may just do that."

Leaving, I cursed firm muscles and well-kept bodies. I needed a cold shower. Or a long night of slow, passionate, uninhibited lovemaking.

The drive to the police department helped me refocus.

"Sergeant, is Detective Chamberlain in?" I asked, not wanting any bureaucratic runaround today. "It's urgent."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Leicester. He's been waiting for your call."

The Sergeant was getting better.

"Jay," Chamberlain said, looking up from a file he had been reading. "Enjoyed last night. It did Kathleen a world of good. She liked you. Maybe we can do it again real soon."

"Hello, J.L.," I said, sitting down in the hard, wooden chair.

"Sandy's on her way back to New Orleans."

Chamberlain looked quizzically at me.

"Pressing business," I said, answering the silent question. "I'm going to stay on, help you anyway I can."

"Rather sudden, wasn't it?" He asked, leaning back in his chair. "Her departure, I mean."

"She's a strange lady, J.L." I crossed one leg over the other. "I've never been able to figure out women, quit trying a long time ago."

"That's because they are smarter than us." Chamberlain laughed, laced his fingers behind his head.

"How's Kathleen feeling this morning?" I asked, ashamed it wasn't the first thing I had said to him when I walked in the office.

"She woke feeling fine. It's uplifting to see her have a good day."

"I'm glad," I said, handing him the note. "Came this morning, shortly after we left for the airport in Augusta. Henry took it."

Chamberlain read the note, a frown forming on his college professor face.

"Interesting," he said softly. He thought for a few minutes, rubbing his chin. Finally: "Let's call him. You talk, tell him you represent the Rinaldi's. We'll tape the conversation, perhaps know more where we stand after he's had his say."

Nodding in agreement, I shifted position in the chair.

Gino Anastasio did not need explaining between Chamberlain and me. He was as famous as Sam Giancana, Meyer Lansky, Paul Castellano, or John Gotti. He was the Chicago mob. It was now a fact that Nat Rinaldi had been dealing with Anastasio. The question was, why would such a powerful Mafia figure concern himself with something of this nature?

Chamberlain set up the call to Gino Anastasio. He had some surprisingly sophisticated equipment for a small police department. Seeing me admiring some of the machines, a few, which I'd never seen before, he said, "Federal funding for municipalities."

I shook my head.

Sitting at a desk in a back room, I punched in the telephone number. Someone answered on the first ring.

"Mr. Anastasio, please," I said, in my most polite voice.

"Yeah," the voice said. "Who should I say is calling?"

"Tell Mr. Anastasio my name is Jay Leicester. I represent Sandy Rained." Sitting stiff in the chair, I felt the tension along my spine.

The voice didn't say anything, but a moment later someone whom I assumed was Gino Anastasio said, "How do I know you represent Miss Rinaldi? You could be anybody."

"Well," I said firmly, the tension tightening my back muscles. "Try this on for size. You think up a scam to rip-off an art gallery, which you

know does some shady deals, of half a million dollars by offering a Rockwell Kent art collection as bait. You insist on being paid in cash. Then you send a mole, who's stolen from you, or broken some stupid code of silence, down to collect the money. You whack the mole and the art dealer. Now you're rid of a rat, plus half a million richer. Only the art dealer's sister hires me when the brother fails to show up. And guess what? I'm not stupid. Nor is the local detective who's got two bodies with similar bullet holes in their heads. Does any of this help convince you I represent Miss Rinaldi?"

The voice laughed. "You have quite an imagination, Mr. Leicester. All of this for half a million? Come on! I pay my chauffeur that much a year."

"Maybe you paid the shooter the half million to kill both men, used the art scam to throw off the police?"

I was grabbing at straws, but you never know.

"My equipment shows your equipment is recording this conversation, Mr. Leicester. I will say only this, the offer was legit. My man is dead, the art collection is missing, and I have no half million. If you represent Miss Rinaldi, I suggest we talk. I'll land at the Rockland airport tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. You and Miss Rinaldi be there."

He hung up before I could answer. It wasn't a request to meet the plane. I rubbed my back.

Looking at Chamberlain, I said, "Can he do that?"

"What? Oh, know if we're taping him?" He began to rewind the tape recorder. "Yes, he can."

Laughing uneasily, I stretched my back and neck, and promised myself to get abreast of the latest in electronics. "What do you think?" I asked Chamberlain.

"I don't know. It's hard to believe the man would make himself visible if it was merely for a rip-off. He could still be running the bluff, or maybe we've been wrong about this thing from the start."

"Could be," I answered, standing, putting my hands on my back and twisting from side to side. "I guess we'll know after the meeting tomorrow. In the meantime, why don't you get your people in Chicago to tell you all they know about 'Mr. Big,' besides the fact he controls Chicago and everybody calls him, Don Gino. Also, you get anything on the Waterbury couple who are staying at the Navigator?"

"I'm expecting something today." He shut the tape recorder off, then he added, "All my people are passing out the photos of Nat Rinaldi

and Tony Bilotti. Hopefully we can piece together their movements in the area. Any more ideas?"

"Give me a couple of sets of the photographs. I'm going back to Tenant's Harbor and Port Clyde and poke around. I will show them around, ask some questions."

I did not know if it would do any good, but at least it would give me some quiet time to think about what I was going to say to Gino Anastasio tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER TEN

Chamberlain gave me two sets of the photographs of Tony Bilotti and Nat Rinaldi. Retracing our drive back to Tenant's Harbor and Port Clyde, I again admired the Monticello clone sitting, majestic, high on the grass-covered hill. Thomas Jefferson would have smiled.

The noon temperature was warm. The sky, a Gulf Stream blue. All of a sudden I felt hungry and thought of the thick, creamy chowder at the East Wind Inn. Entering the steep, winding drive down to the restaurant, through big, old, high-trunked trees and grass that was green and smooth and newly mowed, I marveled at some of the loveliest country in the world.

At the bottom of the drive, far out into the bay, at the entrance to the ocean, an island sat like a sailing ship at anchor, its trees like tall masts. There were no cars in the parking lot. Early for lunch, I was the only customer. The chowder was even better than before.

None of the restaurant personnel remembered seeing either of the two men. The cashier said I should check with the owner. The two men could have stayed at the Inn and not eaten in the restaurant. It was good idea.

"I'd like to speak with the owner," I said to the silver-haired, elderly lady behind the registration desk.

"What are you selling, sonny boy?" She asked, looking at me with sparkling green eyes and a wonderful, warm smile.

"Nothing, looking for information," I answered, reaching for the photos.

"Library's in Rockland. They have lots of information there." Another mischievous grin.

"I'm a private investigator," I said, laying the two photos on the black marble countertop. "You remember seeing either of these two at the East Wind?"

"Oh, that one's dead," she said, pointing to Bilotti. "Is he the one killed down at Port Clyde?"

I had forgotten the photo was taken in the morgue.

"Yes, ma'am. I apologize for the picture, but it's the only one we have."

"Don't worry about it. I'm a retired nurse." She pointed to a tiny pin on her blouse. I had no idea what it meant. "My son owns this place. I live

here and help out with the front desk." She turned, held the photos up to the sunlight. "You working with J.L. on this?"

Small towns, I thought. They are all alike.

"Yes, we are working together on this investigation," I said, pointing to Rinaldi's picture. "This one's sister hired me to find out what happened."

"I know." She turned to face me with a fond, unsurprised gaze, eyes focused, piercing. "Your client's from down south, New Orleans. Her name's Sandy. An art dealer, I believe."

Taken aback, I said, "How did you..."

She laughed with a round-eyed, risible expression, and extended her hand. "I'm Betty Anders. Kathleen Chamberlain and I are cousins. We visit every morning. She's dying, you know?"

"Yes, J.L. told me," I said, still befuddled. "What about the photos?"

"No, I've seen neither of these men." She spread the pictures on the countertop. "Let me get my son, he should look at them, too."

Betty Anders disappeared into the back, returning shortly with a man about my age who could not deny his lineage. Gray-haired, short, same green, sparkling, mischievous eyes as his mother.

He introduced himself in a warm, friendly manner, looked closely at the photos, then at me. "No, Mr. Leicester. These men have never been to the East Wind Inn. I wish I could be of more help."

"Me, too," I said, gathering up the photos. "Thanks anyway. It was nice meeting you both. Mrs. Anders, please say 'hello' to Kathleen for me."

"Well, I certainly hope you plan on seeing her again while you're here," she said firmly, placing small hands on both hips.

"I hope so," I answered, walking toward the door. "She truly is a wonderful person."

Driving back to Port Clyde, I could not help thinking about Kathleen Chamberlain.

A sea breeze had freshened. High up in the sky, mare's-tails wafted gently in an easterly direction. They foretold of an approaching cold front. It would rain within forty-eight hours.

Pulling into the lower tier of the small parking lots at the Port Clyde dock, I got out of the car. A stone clattered from under my feet and went bouncing down toward the clear water, echoing drops of sound rolling in the sunny clarity of the spring air, ending with a plop.

The wind was blowing fifteen knots, now. The waves showed a saw-tooth effect along the amethystine horizon. It indicated the seas were running rough. Boats strained at their mooring in the bay, halyards clanged against masts.

The pier was deserted. Looking at the buildings bordering the dock, I could see one was a real estate office. Next to it, a curio shop. The last building was the chandlery.

Walking along the rear of the buildings, across a narrow, worn and warped plank walkway with a low overhang, I noticed a ship tied alongside the pier with the name, MOMA C., carved into an old timber and fastened to the stern. A small, patina colored deckhouse had been built amidships. The hull, once painted black, was streaked with aerugo and verdigris. Remembering from the ferry schedule I had picked up at the Barstow Inn that this was the name of the Monhegan Island ferry, I sincerely hoped she was a lot more shipshape than she looked or I would not want to be aboard in a heavy running sea.

At the back door of the chandlery, I could hear voices, laughter. Pulling open a sagging screen door, I pushed on a heavy, solid wood door, which appeared to be at least a hundred years old.

Inside the barn-like structure a dozen men sat at a long, wooden table playing some sort of a game on a square board drilled full of holes. A potbellied stove sat unlit in the corner. Tobacco smoke hung heavy around the table. Up toward the front, a young woman worked behind a counter filled with tins of food.

The men around the table, all dressed as seamen, fell silent, staring at the stranger.

"The ship to Monhegan going across today?" I asked to no one in particular.

No one in particular answered me.

I stood for an uneasy thirty seconds while the men puffed on their pipes and cigars, sizing me up.

Finally, one of the younger men, without looking at me, said, "Captain's not going across today."

"Oh, is he ill?"

"No, he's scared," the same man said, relighting his pipe with a kitchen match.

They all laughed.

"You be wanting to go to Monhegan, Mister?" The man asked, blowing out the match, throwing it at an ashtray and missing.

"Might," I said, playing it easy.

The man stood up. "I'm the Captain. I'm not running across today, too rough."

"Too rough?" I asked, with disbelief in my voice.

"Well, I could get you across," he said, puffing on his pipe. "But I can't lay up to the dock. She's running ten to twelve feet outside. Monhegan's dock is open to seaward. Besides that," he smirked, blowing smoke toward me. "You wouldn't like the ride."

All the men guffawed.

I was amused at their little con game being played against me. I did not mind, for I had been around seamen all my life. They are good people. But a con man's antics are a lot less amusing when you're the sucker.

Deciding not to push, I played it straight.

"Yes, I understand," I said to the Captain, shrugging my shoulders and looking at him closely for the first time. "No problem. There's always another day."

"You a fisherman, Mister?" One of the older men, chewing on an unlit cigar stub, asked.

"Not any more. But I did my time as a deck hand."

It wasn't a lie. I had spent a lot of time at sea. Electing not to tell them it was mostly aboard luxurious sportfishermen and well-founded sailboats, rather than working fish boats, seemed a wise decision under the circumstances.

You could see all the men around the table relax. I had passed their test.

"I'm Jim Barstein," the younger man said, leaning back in his chair, resettling his pipe. "You come back at eight o'clock in the morning, I'll get you across."

Approaching the table where they sat, I said, "Listen, men, name's Leicester. I'm a private investigator. Any of you ever see either of these two before?" I lay the photographs on the table. They all gathered around.

One of the men picked up Bilotti's, held it up to the bare light bulb, studied it for a while, and handed it back to me. "This is the one was shot in the parking lot the other day," he said, relighting his pipe. "Never seen the other one."

"I've seen'em both," the young Captain said.

"Where'd you see this one?" I asked, pointing to Rinaldi.

"He came down the morning before this one was killed." He indicated Bilotti's photo. "Wanted to get to Monhegan. Seemed disappointed I

wasn't going across, something about a meeting on the island. Asked me if I knew anybody who'd charter him across."

"Did you?" I asked, leaning back, crossing my arms.

"Nah, nobody does that." He sat up straight, ran a hand through greasy hair. "Be cutting into my ferry business."

Somebody needs to, I thought to myself.

"Did any of you see the two of them together?" I asked, picking up the photos.

"Annie..." The young Captain called to the girl up front. "Come back here and look at these pictures."

The girl wasn't so young. Early thirties, I guessed. Scraggly hair, hard face. Her hands were callused, unpainted fingernails chipped and bitten. She probably worked on a fishing boat during the season and in the chandlery the rest of the year.

Handing her the pictures, she looked carefully at both of them.

"That's the one Wilma found shot in the parking lot. Scared the fool out of her. I ain't seen the other one." She looked at the photos again, shaking her head slowly, then said, "Wait, ain't that the guy was upset when you didn't run that day?" She pointed at Barstein with the photos. "Yeah, I remember him, now. He bought some wool mittens, a cap, and some other stuff. Said they were a gift. Yeah, that's him."

"Are you sure about this?" I asked, suddenly alert.

She stood without moving, looking sternly at me, her feet planted apart, her shoulders thrown back, her arms hanging straight at her sides. "I said it's him, didn't I?"

They all laughed.

"Yes, I guess you did, at that."

Thanking them all for the help, I walked out the front door of the chandlery. If the cash had been in the car when Bilotti's body was discovered...

Getting in my car, I headed back toward Rockland.

* * *

Arriving at the Navigator Inn, I went into the lobby and picked up a local newspaper. Having a cup of coffee with Mabel crossed my mind, but there was some serious thinking to be done before meeting with Gino Anastasio. Mabel would not be of any help with it.

Henry waved me over to the registration desk.

"Message for you from Detective Chamberlain." He leaned on the counter, picked at a callused knuckle. "Wants you to call him. Didn't matter what time you got back. Said if he wasn't at the office, he'd be home."

"Thanks, Henry." I folded the newspaper under my arm, and started out the door.

"Oh, Mr. Leicester," Henry said with a sly grin. "I think Mabel's taken a liking to you. Consider that a compliment. She don't cater to many men. In fact, I can't remember any she's been with since starting to work here two years ago."

"Again, thanks, Henry." I waved the newspaper at him. It would probably make headlines in the local news if I did go out with Mabel. Small towns...

"Anything happening with the dead guys?" He asked, shuffling receipts, not looking at me. "I mean, you making any progress with solving the crimes?" He glanced up, then quickly looked back at whatever he was doing.

Putting the paper back under my arm, I said, "We're always making progress, Henry. You can count on it."

He cracked a nervous grin.

It made me suddenly remember how fast he knew of Nat Rinaldi's demise. Could he be somehow involved in this? Did he know who killed these men, or maybe that the four hundred and fifty thousand fell into local hands and he knew whose?

"See ya, Henry." Walking out of the lobby, I glanced back and saw him hurrying across the hall, heading toward the coffee shop and Mabel.

The door to my room was standing open. Reaching in my jacket pocket, I took out my old worn magnum. We had been together many years, through some rough times. This model sixty-six had been with me long enough that I thought of it more as a living thing than an inanimate object of death.

No one was in the room; nothing seemed out of order. Putting the magnum away, I chalked the open door up to a careless maid. For a fleeting moment one desk clerk named Henry, who had a passkey, crossed my mind. He would not leave the door open when he was finished, though.

Scratching my head, I sat on the side of the bed and phoned J.L. He was still at the office.

"I've got some information on Anastasio from Chicago. Thought maybe you'd like to hear it. You want it over the phone?"

"Sure, why not," I answered, thinking it didn't matter who overheard it anyway.

"He's bigger than I thought. They refer to him as the Chairman of the Board. New York, Miami, Vegas, the West Coast. He sits at the head of the table. The Boss of Bosses."

Lying back on the bed, I looked up at the sprinkler system hanging from the ceiling. "So he's the one they elected at the meeting at Apalachin in upstate New York a few years ago. The one the FBI found out about and made such a big to-do in the news media."

"He's the one. The Wise Guys refer to these get-togethers as commission meetings. Can you believe it? The FBI had a tap on the place. One of the Dons made the remark that organized crime was second only in size to the government itself. Anastasio spoke up and said they were at least as big as IBM."

I had heard the story differently. The message was the same, though.

"Anything else?" I asked, sitting back up.

"Only that this guy is powerful. Wouldn't make sense for him to be piddling with stuff like this. It just doesn't wash."

Thinking for a minute, I pulled at the telephone cord. "The hit had to be planned for Bilotti. Rinaldi may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time by design. It was a cover for the hit."

"I don't know," J.L. mused.

"It does seem too complicated for a hit on a mole." Kicking off both shoes, I rubbed my feet together. "They could have just dropped him off the Sears tower, or let him wash up on the beach from Lake Michigan. Something's out of kilter. Tomorrow's meeting should prove interesting."

"Well, you've got to be careful. I'll put a wire on you. Jay, he could get you aboard his airplane, shut the door, fly off, and you'd never be heard from again."

"Well, it'd be a hell of a ride." Scratching a little toe, I said, "No wire, J.L. He's not stupid. They'd find it before I was within ten feet of him."

"Okay, if that's the way you feel," Chamberlain said, relenting, sounding unhappy. "I'll be taking you to the airport. I want Gino Anastasio to know I'm there, waiting if anything should go wrong."

"Sounds fine to me," I said, meaning it. "I'll see you in the morning."

Easing the phone back into its cradle, I took the newspaper and went out on the balcony. It was dusk dark, the peaceful transition period between light and night. A good time of day for some, a lonesome time for others.

The evening ferry was off-loading cars and people. Lines were forming for those finished with the day's work, heading home to the idyllic life on offshore islands. The wind had calmed as the sun set. It was going to be a nice spring night in Rockland, Maine.

Propping my feet up on the banister, I unfolded the paper. An article in the lower right hand corner of the front page caught my eye:

STOLEN RUBENS RECOVERED IN FLORIDA

Miami Beach – A stolen 17th-century oil masterpiece by Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens was recovered in Miami Beach on Tuesday, six years after it was taken from a museum in Spain. The five-by-eight inch painting entitled AURORA was recovered after four men offered to sell it for \$3.5 million to an undercover agent, officials said.

If the thief's offered it for \$3.5 million, wonder what its real value would be?

I had never heard of the artist, Rubens. My knowledge of art was still next to nil. Rockwell Kent, I knew about, though. It was a start.

Night fell quickly, like someone pulling down a window shade. The ferry pulled out, taking people to warm, clean homes, laughing children, and loving mates. Sitting alone on a balcony in a hotel, I thought of two dead bodies, a mournful sister, the dying wife of a friend, a man who headed the entire crime families in the United States, and Mabel.

Finishing the newspaper, I called down and asked Henry to ring me at seven in the morning, then went to bed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The appetent and limbic parts of my brain worked embarrassingly well during the night. Henry called precisely at seven o'clock. Thanking him, I headed for a stinging, ice-cold shower.

After dressing, I opened the sliding glass doors and walked out on the balcony. The air was cool and smelled faintly of salt. A light breeze rippled the blue water of the bay. The sun was already up, but hung like a giant red ball above the offshore islands. The early ferry, returning the same people it had carried the night before, appeared to emerge from the blazing orb.

Chamberlain was to meet me at eight o'clock for breakfast. Securing the door to my room, I walked down to the end of the hall. The elevator doors opened instantly when I punched the button, as if waiting to draw me into the cold, empty space for some evil purpose. The doors closed, clicking like valves, a pulsating rhythm in their sound.

Chamberlain was standing, talking to Henry, when I entered the lobby. After the usual pleasantries, we went into the restaurant. There were no other customers. Mabel emerged from the kitchen with a pot of fresh coffee.

"Hello, you two," she said, smiling, waving the coffeepot in a broad sweep. "Be a few minutes for a table."

"Morning, Mabel," J.L. said laughing, selecting a seat by the window and sitting down. "Always the kidder, aren't you?"

"Keeps me young. How's Kathleen doing?" She asked, pouring us coffee.

"She's not feeling too well today. But thank you for asking."

"And you, sir," Mabel asked, looking at me. "How are you today?"

"Very well, Mabel," I said, thinking of the limbic part of my brain. "Do you work all the time? You're here every time I come in."

"No," she said, taking out a pen and pad from an apron pocket. "Sometimes I sit by the phone and wait for it to ring."

Sitting with my elbows on the table, I felt my face flush.

"What'll it be, Gentleman?" Mabel asked with a sly grin.

Chamberlain ate like a horse. I only had coffee.

"You heard anything from South Carolina?"

"Waterbury's are clean," Chamberlain answered between bites. "Fax came in this morning from the South Carolina State police. He's a

retired Aerospace Engineer, worked with NASA. Neither he or his wife have ever had so much as a parking ticket."

"We keep looking." I fingered a knife, and watched Mabel disappear into the kitchen.

"Yes, we do."

Henry entered the restaurant, went behind the counter, poured himself a cup of coffee, came over to our table, and sat down with us. He said the hotel was empty, except for me. Silently, I wondered where Nat Rinaldi could have stayed. He had to have slept somewhere. I made a mental note to discuss this with Chamberlain on the way to the airport. His men were working on it, I knew, but we needed to know.

Watching Henry carefully, there was nothing outwardly noticeable that indicated he had more than a layman's curiosity of what had happened in this small community. He had not been scratched off my list, not yet, anyway.

On the way out of the restaurant Chamberlain insisted on paying. At the cash register Mabel asked if I still had the piece of paper she'd given me. I said that I did.

"What you don't use, you lose," she said, walking away toward the kitchen.

When we got in Chamberlain's car he asked, "What was that all about?"

"You mean with Mabel?" I fastened my seat belt. "What do you know about her?"

"I've known her for thirty years. Lost her husband to the sea." He started the engine. "She's hard working, never remarried. Doesn't play around much. Why, you interested?"

"Just wondered," I said, looking out the window to the blue waters of the bay.

"Yeah," Chamberlain said, with a smile, putting the car in gear. "Let's go meet with the Chairman of the Board."

"We've got to find where Nat Rinaldi was staying," I said to Chamberlain while looking at the buildings along the waterfront as we drove south toward the airport.

"Yes," he said, nodding, both hands gripping the steering wheel. "Sooner or later we'll get lucky. One of the advantages in working the confines of a small community is your chances are better at finding the bad guys. Or anything else you might be looking for."

"You think he might have stayed on Monhegan?"

"I don't know." He turned and watched a squad car speed down the street in the opposite direction. Bending forward, he turned up the police radio. "It's a possibility we won't rule out."

"I talked with Barstein, the ferry boat Captain out of Port Clyde," I said, turning and watching the blue and white round a corner. "He said Rianldi was at the dock wanting to get across to Monhegan Island the day before Bilotti turned up with a bullet in his brain. Only the ferry didn't run. Rinaldi was upset, asked about a charter boat."

Chamberlain hit the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. "I asked Barstein, personally, if Rianldi had been on the passenger list. He said no, which was the truth. He should have volunteered he'd seen him."

"Well, you know seamen are a closed mouth group," I said, remembering being among them yesterday.

"Yes. But, by God, this is murder." He slapped the steering wheel again, then as an afterthought, adjusted the volume on the police radio. "Two of them. They know it!"

Chamberlain was mad. He knew the people in his community. All of them. He knew there were times when they'd lie; illegal fishing, running some grass, stealing. There are things where one draws the line. Murder was one of them.

"I thought one of the locals might have lifted the cash from Bilotti," I said, feeling out his thoughts. "If it was still there when the body was found."

"Forget it," Chamberlain said, looking at me. "They couldn't keep it secret for twenty-four hours. They'd probably go buy a new sports car, a boat, and a house. All in one day, paying cash." He laughed, exercised the fist with which he'd hit the wheel. "I don't think so, Jay."

Maybe, I thought. But half a million would go a long way to keeping up an old ferryboat.

"We may have to go over to Monhegan Island," I volunteered, rolling down a window, smelling the clean salt air. "If we come up dry finding where Rinaldi was staying on the mainland. He may have gotten over. It could be where the money and the Kent collection are located."

"Yeah," Chamberlain said, cracking his window a few inches. "If you want to believe Anastasio didn't perpetrate some elaborate scheme to whack a disloyal mole. Let's wait and see what the Boss of Bosses has to say."

Knox County Regional Airport, Rockland, Maine, is a small airport by today's standards. It has two runways; one, four thousand five

hundred feet in length; the other, four thousand feet. Long enough to accommodate aircraft up to and including medium-sized turboprops and jets.

There are two fixed base operators on the field. We had no way of knowing where Anastasio's plane would park. There were no transit aircraft at either business. It was five minutes until ten o'clock. We waited.

Chamberlain spotted it first.

"There," he said, pointing into the blue sky. "Over the water tower."

"Pretty good eyesight for an old man," I said, laughing, still trying to locate the aircraft.

Finally I did catch the sun glint off of metal. A small speck in the sky emerged into an aircraft. We watched as it intercepted the electronic landing system, which would guide it to within two hundred feet above, and on the centerline, of the runway.

The sleek jet descended gracefully, blue smoke erupting from the tires as the main landing gear took the full weight of the aircraft. It rolled out slowly to the end of the runway, taxied back towards the fixed-base operation where we were standing. Several local pilots came out to watch, the jet obviously an unusual sight at the small airport.

"I'll say one thing for Don Gino, J.L. The man rides in style."

"Nice looking plane," Chamberlain said, unimpressed.

I was impressed. The aircraft was the Gulfstream GIV, a twenty-five million-dollar investment by today's money. This airplane was familiar to me. Back during the years I made my living flying, I watched with great interest the development of the Gulfstream GIV. It was a plush, roomy, fast, long-range aircraft. Yes, Mr. Anastasio traveled first class.

The GIV pulled into the parking area. As the engines spooled down, the airstair door opened. A man descended the steps and headed for where Chamberlain and I stood. As he approached, I noticed he was dressed in a three-piece pinstripe, red tie, and wing tips. A young, good-looking corporate type. Not the usual, tough bodyguard facade you see in the movies.

He stood for a moment, looking at us. Then, staring directly at me, he said, "Mr. Leicester, Mr. Anastasio will not be deplaning. He would like to meet with you aboard the aircraft." He looked at J.L. "Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Anastasio asked that you wait here while he speaks with Mr. Leicester."

Chamberlain gave him a stern look. "I have no intentions of talking with Mr. Anastasio, young man. I just want him to know I'm here."

"I understand, sir," he said, unperturbed, and motioned toward the aircraft. "Mr. Leicester, will you follow me."

It wasn't a request.

As we walked across the tarmac, I wondered how this man could possibly know who we were. Anastasio must be a lot more thorough than I imagined.

One must see the inside of a GIV to appreciate it. Most of these aircraft are outfitted to the specifications of the individual owner. I had seen the factory demonstrator back in eighty-seven. I did not think it possible to improve on that layout. I was wrong.

The plane's interior had eight individual seats, all with their own small television. Behind a divider was a three-place couch with a board-room type conference table. A small, auxiliary turbine engine hummed softly in the background. It provided power to run all the electronics and environmental systems while the aircraft was on the ground with the main engines shut down. Keep the boss comfortable, is the key phrase.

Glancing into the cockpit upon entering the cabin, I saw that the crew sat, stone-faced, staring out the windscreen. I did not blame them. If I flew for the head of the entire organized crime syndicates in America I would stare straight ahead, too. The instrument panel looked like five television screens. I was not sure if I could get used to that kind of flying. Button pushing.

Young Mr. Corporate Executive ushered me back to the conference room.

Seated at the head of the oval table was a cadaver. I thought for a second that this was some sort of morbid joke. Then the cadaver spoke.

"Sit down."

The voice was high pitched, each spoken word dragged out, every syllable enunciated and stretched. The few strands of hair on the pale, vein-laced head went in all directions. His eyes were black holes in a yellow face. The mouth, thin-lipped and tight, stretched across black, neglected teeth. Dressed in a blue jogging suit, the body seemed thin and frail. He was seated, so it was hard to guess his weight. He looked like something rescued from a German concentration camp.

Trying to remember if his voice had sounded this way over the phone when we had talked in J.L.'s office, I could not.

"Miss Rinaldi won't be joining us today."

"I'm aware of Miss Rinaldi's whereabouts," he said, looking past me, nodding.

The suit left us, going forward, toward the cockpit.

"What is it you have to tell me?"

The question took me by surprise.

"What are you talking about? You called this meeting, remember?"

Anastasio's eyes seared into mine. A look that had probably sent many a man to an early grave.

He sat up a little straighter in the chair. "I hoped you were not going to be stupid."

"My client's brother is dead, Mr. Anastasio. The four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash, the money you insisted he bring, is missing." I looked back into those black holes.

He lifted his head and looked at me, the faint contraction of boredom in the corner of his eyes letting me understand that this moment of attention was a favor. He spoke in a tone of emphasized patience. "My wife loves paintings. I try to give her the best. We had no children, so she found interest in the arts."

Shifting position in my chair, I put both hands on my knees and leaned forward, attentive.

"I take care of my business. I've done very well with it, but I know little of art. To me, it is merely a product of the untalented sold by the unprincipled to the utterly bewildered."

Shifting position again in the chair, I laughed.

He ignored the laugh and continued. "Two years ago I overheard my wife talk about this Rockwell person. I thought I'd give some of his work to her as a birthday gift. We found this entire collection. I had it authenticated, appraised, and I paid a fair price for it. My wife didn't like it. Turns out she wanted Norman Rockwell, not Rockwell Kent."

"So you decided to sell the Kent collection," I offered.

"Exactly. Not a penny profit did I ask," he said, waving the bony hands. "Mr. Rinaldi did business with associates of mine in New Orleans. He was highly recommended."

Yes, I thought. By whom, the Marcello family.

Anastasio continued. "I sent my man down to New Orleans to meet with Mr. Rinaldi. He agreed to come to Monhegan Island to view the collection, purchasing it for cash if it was as advertised."

"Why was the collection on Monhegan Island? I thought you lived in Chicago?"

He shot me an impatient glance. "The lady who had the collection for sale has a summer house on the island. That's where the collection was

located." He paused, as if to catch his breath. "We arranged for several of the oil paintings and a few of the prints to be shown to my wife. She didn't like them. But you see, I'd already bought the entire collection. I couldn't very well go back on my word, now could I?"

I didn't say anything.

"My employee, Mr. Tony Bilotti, brought the paintings and prints with him to Rockland. The rest of the collection remained in the summer-house of the seller. We arranged for Mr. Rinaldi to view everything together, on Monhegan Island."

"So the entire collection is still on Monhegan?" I asked, following his logic.

"No," Anastasio said, flailing his arms. "The entire collection is missing." His voice rose to a higher pitch, the death-like face reddened. "My employee is dead, the collection is missing, and I don't have the money. I want to know why!" His whole body began jerking in the chair.

The suit came back and stood quietly at the entrance to the conference area.

Anastasio calmed down, waved his man away. "So you see my problem," he said, holding his head to the side, ugly, thin lips stretched tightly across still uglier teeth. Bony hands shaking as if afflicted with palsy.

"I can see your problem, Mr. Anastasio," I said slowly, carefully. "Now here's my problem..."

The most powerful Mafia figure in the world looked at me incredulously. No one had probably spoken to him in a long time without being subservient and intimidated. I was neither. All I could see was an old man who thought he had been cheated. That is if one chose to believe him. I did not.

"I'm getting paid to find out who killed Nat Rinaldi, and what happened to the four hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I could care less about Tony Bilotti. You already heard my thoughts over the phone. Change my mind."

This was a dangerous situation. Anastasio could squash me like a bug. Sometimes the fray must be met to bring out the dimensions of men.

Anastasio settled into his chair, looking disappointed. "I'm not a well man. Without health life is not life, it is only a state of languor and suffering; an image of death. I don't need to have stuff like this art thing aggravating me. I want it over with."

He pushed a button on the table. The suit appeared with a small glass of blue liquid. Anastasio drank it and handed the glass back to the young man, who went back forward.

"Listen to me well, private eye. This will be the only time I say this." His speech was lucid. His voice was thin and dry as dead leaves, but clear. He spoke in a rapid monotone such as one might use in giving a legal deposition, not having much time. "The art collection is gone, Tony Bilotti is dead. I had nothing to do with it. Someone will pay for their actions. It is a matter of honor. All my people are working on this full time. I will find out.

"You have almost crossed the bounds several times. I would be very careful. I have let you make your stupid accusations only because they made sense. You are now informed."

Leaning back in my chair, I watched the frail hands wave as he spoke, suddenly starting to believe him.

He continued, seemingly revived by the blue liquid. "I've done a thorough check of you. Integrity is what they tell me about your character. So I don't think you're involved. One of my men flew to New Orleans with Miss Rinaldi. We are watching her. Your Detective Chamberlain, an interesting man, good cop. Too bad about his dying wife."

If this kind of information was supposed to get my attention, it did.

"If you had nothing to do with the two deaths," I acquiesced, "then tell me if you have any ideas. It was a professional hit on both men. I've seen the bodies, and the reports."

"So have I. If I had ideas, we wouldn't be having this conversation. You have my private number. I expect a call if you find anything before we do. Now get out of here, out of my sight."

The meeting was over. I stood up. The suit was already waiting for me at the door to escort me out. Turning, I started up the aisle.

"Just a minute," Anastasio said, waving me back, motioning for me to sit. He leaned across the highly polished table, splayed both ugly hands wide. Through some illusion, no doubt a trick of light and shadow from the sunlight coming in through the cabin windows, his withered, translucent face seemed to go smooth, his eyes sardonic under lowered lids. "I almost forgot. You might like to have this back."

He reached a shaky hand under the table, retrieved something, and placed it down gently on the polished top. It was my magnum. My mouth must have dropped open.

"How in the...?"

The old man grinned, turned in his chair, and looked out at the Maine landscape. Then glancing at me, he said, "Motel maids are poor people. Some have husbands who need medical attention. A few hundred bucks for a quick look around a hotel room...you should be more careful, private eye."

There was pure sarcasm and contempt resonating in his voice, as if even having to speak to an underling such as myself was beyond his stature.

Picking up my pistol, I gave Anastasio one last glance, and exited the aircraft.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sitting down heavily in the car and hanging my head, I said, "J.L., even with the maid letting them in, it seems impossible for someone to have retrieved my magnum from the hotel and gotten it to Anastasio aboard that aircraft."

"These people are good. They can do things we can not, or would not, think of doing." He rubbed his chin, a serious expression on the scholarly profile. "What do you want to do about the maid?"

It was an easy decision. "Nothing."

Chamberlain kept glancing over at me as we drove back from the airport to the Navigator Inn.

"Two men are dead, J.L." I had forgotten to buckle my seatbelt, so I did. "The people we're playing with are powerful, connected, and deadly. Anastasio said he'd already read the autopsy reports."

Chamberlain slowed, allowing an oncoming car to get back into the proper lane after passing another vehicle. "Yeah, the medical examiner's office sends the results to the State Police Headquarters via computer. If high school hackers can tap into the Pentagon and get classified files, I'm sure Anastasio wouldn't have any problem with a state computer network. All the information goes over the phone lines."

Realizing that fact was sobering.

"Sandy must be informed about the meeting with Anastasio. You got any idea when we can get Rinaldi's body released? It's my responsibility to take care of it."

"Probably today," Chamberlain said, glancing in his rearview mirror. "I'll check as soon as we get back to the office. What are your plans?"

"To find out if Henry knew about my magnum being lifted from my room."

"Don't go off half-cocked, Jay. I've known Henry a long time. He comes from good people."

"One advantage I have, J.L., is not being bound by any preconceived ministrations with the local populous. I can work my own investigation without what we in the South call 'the good ole boy' syndrome interfering with rational thought." Propping a foot up on the corner of the dash, I said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but I'll just make my own decisions about Henry, or anyone else I think may be involved."

"Point well taken." He shot me a glance that betrayed the harshness of the statement.

Chamberlain dropped me off at the Navigator Inn. He didn't seem to have taken offense at my comment. He was a good cop, but sometimes even good cops can get too close to their subjects to be objective.

Henry was coming out of the coffee shop as I walked into the lobby. He saw me and waved.

"Come over here, Henry. I want to talk with you."

Henry went behind the registration desk, sat on a stool, and motioned to me. "Come on back here, Mr. Leicester, have a seat. What's on your mind?"

Going behind the counter, I sat on a stool identical to Henry's. A young couple emerged from the cafe and waved at him. When they left the lobby, I said, "I've got a problem, Henry. Returning to the hotel yesterday, I found that the door to my room had been left open."

Watching his face closely for any indication of guilt, I found none.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Leicester." He leaned back against the wall and crossed his legs. "It has happened before. We have warned the maid about being careless, but she's old and she forgets. Management would have fired her a long time ago, but she's been here forever, and needs the work. I don't think she could find a job anywhere else. I'll talk to her today."

"There was something stolen from my room, Henry. Something valuable."

I watched his expression.

He uncrossed his legs and sat up straight. "Stolen. Oh, my goodness. The maid's never been accused of stealing anything from guests, ever. We have insurance. I'll call them right now. What was taken?"

Henry was either cleverly good at lying, or telling me the truth. It was hard to decide.

Standing up, I said, "It wasn't the maid. The item has been recovered. You need to know there's been a breach in security at your hotel."

Henry got up from his stool and stood beside me. "You recovered what was stolen? I don't understand?"

"Let's just say someone had a change of heart, returned what they took." Walking from behind the counter, I waved and said, "See you later, Henry."

Rounding the corner for the elevator, I stopped and looked back. Henry was making a hastened dash for the coffee shop.

Back up in the room, I slid open the glass doors, walked out on the balcony, and sat down. I wanted to make some notes on the conversation with Anastasio. The mind has a strange way of forgetting fifty percent of what it learns in about six months. Making a written account has proven its worth a thousand times, especially for dates, times, and exactly what was said or done in given situations.

The sky had turned a gunmetal blue. The wind had picked up and there was a cold, rotting smell of the sea in the air. The mare's-tails were being vindicated by the approaching cold front. A pelican flew low over the ferry dock, gray like a piece of newspaper blowing across a deserted street.

Finishing the notes, I leaned back in the chair and watched a flock of seagull's fight for positions on the pilings along the waterfront. They told me the wind direction was from the northwest. Seagulls always sit facing into the wind.

Still troubled about Anastasio having my magnum, I remembered hiding the gun shortly after discovering the door to my motel room open. Nothing else was missing. Even with the maid's involvement, whoever stole my gun entered the room while I was out for a moment, sitting on the balcony, or asleep. Henry had access, but if he was involved, he had played a good hand when confronted. I'll say this for whoever it was, they are good, really good.

The phone rang. Going inside, I picked up the receiver, "Yes?"

"You can have Rinaldi's body anytime you want," Chamberlain said.

"Thanks, J.L. Listen, I need your recommendation for a funeral home to handle the body for me, get it ready for transport, do the paperwork, deliver it to the airport."

"No problem. Wilson's Mortuary can handle it. Dave Wilson is the owner. He's a good friend. They're listed in the book, but I'll give him a call for you."

"Thanks," I said, making a mental note of the funeral home. "I'll call Sandy, then let them know the details after I speak with her."

"You talk with Henry?"

"Yeah. I don't know what to think, yet."

"You'll tell me if you learn anything about his involvement?"

"J.L., I'm not working against you. I thought we understood each other?" Finding a pad, I jotted down the funeral home's name.

"I just wanted to be sure. Call me after you talk with Sandy."

"Will do. We've got to get organized. There's lots of work to be done. Two murders, half a million unaccounted for, a missing art collection, remember?"

"Yes," Chamberlain said. "I remember."

* * *

"Rinaldi Art Gallery. This is Sandy. How may I help you?"

"Hello, Sandy, it's Jay."

"Oh, Jay," she said, concern in her voice. "Have you found out who killed Renato?"

"No, not yet," I answered quickly. "But I did meet with a man named Gino Anastasio this morning."

"You mean the Mafia Don from Chicago?"

"Yes, he was Bilotti's boss," I answered, stretching the phone cord across the bed, sitting down at the small table, and thinking how familiar Sandy was with the name. "It was Anastasio who was selling the Kent Collection."

"My God, Jay," she gasped. "Did he have Renato killed for the money?"

"Chamberlain and I both think the stakes are too small for Anastasio. We're working on other angles which could involve him or his organization." I drew a circle around the funeral home name.

"What angles?" She asked. "If not Anastasio, then who?"

"Don't worry, Sandy, we'll find out." I hesitated and drew another circle. "We'll have some help. Anastasio's whole organization is looking into it, according to him. Seems he planned to give the Kent collection to his wife as a birthday present. Only she wanted Norman Rockwell instead of..."

"Rockwell Kent," Sandy interrupted. "It's not an infrequent mix-up."

"Yeah, well, Anastasio's taking this one personally. He's lost the collection and a hired hand. He hasn't been compensated for either."

"Upset then, is Mr. Anastasio?" She said, in a strangely amused tone.

"He's serious, Sandy. He knows all about you and your brother. My background, as well as Chamberlain's, was thoroughly researched. He even followed you to New Orleans. They're watching you now."

I heard her gasp.

"Sandy, you okay?"

There was a pause. Then, "Yes, I'm fine. I just hadn't thought about anyone following me. The idea doesn't sit too well."

"There's one other thing," I said, as gently as I could. "Your brother's body is ready to be returned. What do you want me to do?"

"Send it to Bluillot's Crematorium," she answered, quickly. "I've made arrangements with them."

"Okay, spell the name for me." I grimaced, having always hated the thought of being cremated. "Give me their address and phone number. I'll let them know which flight and the time of arrival."

Sandy gave me the information and, after promising to keep her informed on our progress with the investigation, we hung up.

Sitting on the bed, I thought about cremation. It didn't matter to the dead, but it did to me. I had a bad experience watching a fellow airman burn to death in an airplane crash one cold and snowy day after they slid off an icy runway. The only fire I have been able to tolerate since was in a fireplace.

Standing, I walked to the sliding glass doors of the room. The wind was really whipping. The workboats in the bay were pounding, their bows throwing salty spray high into the leaden, overcast sky. The rain would come soon.

Stepping over to the phone, I punched in Chamberlain's number. It was time to go to work.

* * *

Turning out of the hotel parking lot onto the road paralleling the ocean, I headed toward the police department. A lonely traffic light hung far ahead, a flash of changing red, yellow, and green in a bleak, gray sky. The rain started in earnest as I arrived at Chamberlain's office.

"Mr. Leicester," the Desk Sergeant said, as I entered the front door of the police station. "A good nor'wester blowing in. Should be the last one of the year."

Looking at him closely for the first time, I observed that he was slightly less than six feet, compactly built, with a ruddy, clean-shaven face, and receding hairline. He had broad, powerful shoulders, with well-muscled arms. He was in his mid to late thirties or early forties. His name-tag read: SERGEANT BOWERS. He was a man more suited for the outside than a desk job, I thought.

"Does the temperature usually drop this much in the spring?" I asked, wiping the icy rain off my face with a handkerchief.

"We've had heavy snow this time of year," he said, grinning, bending forward, forearms on the desk, his two hands closed before him. "Not like being in the South, is it?"

"Not in your wildest imagination, Sergeant."

He laughed, a big booming sound that seemed to shake the building.

"Is Chamberlain in his office?"

"He's expecting you. Go right in."

"J.L.," I said, sitting down in one of the spartan chairs in the bare office. "Your friend Dave Wilson's a nice man. He's taking care of all the arrangements to ship Rinaldi's body back to New Orleans. He's even working with the crematorium there to pick up the body. He said to tell you thanks for the business."

"He's a good man," J.L. said, leaning back in his chair, putting his hands behind his head. "Let's look at what we've got."

Chamberlain went through the whole scenario from the time the body was discovered in the parking lot at the Port Clyde ferry dock with me filling in the blanks where Sandy and I were involved.

The only identification on the body in the car at the ferry dock was that of Nat Rinaldi, which turned out to be Tony Bilotti. Chamberlain called Sandy, who was listed as next of kin on the Driver's License, who in turn contacted me. Nat Rinaldi washed up on the beach two days later. Both men had been killed in the same way; a .9mm slug behind the right ear, execution style.

Nat Rinaldi was supposedly traveling with four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash to purchase an art collection by renowned artist, Rockwell Kent. Both money and art collection are missing.

Tony Bilotti turned out to be a low-level Mafia mole from Chicago. This led to the suspicion that the Wise Guys may have killed both men and ripped off the money. But the head of the crime families, Gino Anastasio, informed us he had nothing to do with the murders.

"Well," Chamberlain said, after an awkward pause. "We've got to list our possible suspects."

"Okay," I agreed, leaning forward in the chair, grabbing the edge of his desk with both hands. "I'll put Anastasio at the head of the list. Your turn?"

Chamberlain looked at me. I could see the brain working through his eyes.

"It could have been one of the local people in Port Clyde, or someone here, in Rockland." He paused.

Remaining silent, I enjoyed watching his investigative thought processes continue in their current vein.

He continued. "Maybe someone on Monhegan Island that we don't know about..." His voice trailed off. Then suddenly: "Or, by God, it could be me. I carry a .9mm automatic, shoots the same slug as the ones dug out of both brains. Don't you want to run my gun through ballistics?"

"Why, are you guilty?"

Chamberlain slid a piece of paper across his desk. It was a ballistics report from the state crime lab, saying a bullet fired from Chamberlain's gun did not match those taken from the two bodies.

"Wanted the record absolutely clear," he said, a mocking grin on his face.

This may have been amusing to him and me, but it was still sound police procedure.

"That only leaves one other possibility," I said, sliding the ballistics report back on his desk. It was something I felt had to be placed before us. "Sandy had her own brother killed, along with Bilotti. Stole her own money back, and made off with the art collection."

"Why would she hire you if she did it?"

"We're listing possibilities," I said, shrugging both shoulders. "She's on the list."

Chamberlain nodded.

"We need to pay a visit to Monhegan Island. When can we get across?"

"I'll arrange it, now." Chamberlain picked up the phone and punched in a number from memory.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

J.L. booked us two tickets to Monhegan Island aboard the ferry out of Port Clyde. It was scheduled for a ten- thirty a.m. departure.

"You mean, if it goes across," I said, laughing. "Young Captain Barstein seems to run when he needs the money."

J.L. looked at me with a seriousness I had not seen before.

"We can't control the weather," he said, shoving the phone to the side of his desk. "But the ferry will run tomorrow unless a hurricane blows out of the north."

I laughed. J.L. knew the sea as well as anyone. He understood that Barstein ran across when he could. But J.L. was still miffed at the Captain neglecting to say he had seen Rinaldi. Captain Barstein was in for a rough day tomorrow, both from the sea and Chamberlain.

"This weather should blow through tonight. It usually doesn't last long this time of year," J.L. said, looking out his window at the rain pelting down from the darkening sky. "The wind will blow early, then lay about noon. We shouldn't have any problem. I'll pick you up at the Navigator around eight o'clock in the morning."

"Sounds great to me," I said, looking at my old Rolex GMT-master I bought twenty-five years ago as a young aviator. It showed the time, both in local and Greenwich Mean Time, and now read three o'clock. "So what do we spend the rest of the day accomplishing?"

Chamberlain looked up at me with sad eyes. A gust of wind rattled the window behind his head. Rain spattered on the pane, running down in crooked lines.

"If you don't mind, Jay, I'm going home. Kathleen's having a rough go of it this afternoon. Bill Reinbold called while you were on the way over. He's at the house, giving her something for the pain." He looked down to his desk, shuffled some papers.

"Anything I can do?"

"No," he answered, looking up with watery eyes. "I'll see you in the morning."

Leaving the office, I headed for my rental car.

"They're forecasting snow flurries by midnight, Mr. Leicester," Sergeant Bowers said, as I passed his desk.

Shaking my head, I shuddered, but made no comment.

I did not notice the cutting wind, or the icy, stinging rain while walking to the car. My thoughts were on Kathleen Chamberlain. Slamming the car door, I started the engine. Only fools and little children think there is any fairness in this world. I pounded my fist on the steering wheel.

Driving back to the Navigator Inn, I passed old houses with pointed roofs crouched low to the ground, hunched under the weight of a hundred years and a heavy sky. The streets were empty and hollow, echoing the sound of the car's engine. Parking in the back, near the entrance to the elevator, I sat for a moment watching the wipers scrapping pelting sleet and snow from the glass. Rainbow patterns spread across the windshield as the rubber blades lost the battle with the build up of road grime.

Deciding to pick up a newspaper, I went around to the lobby. Henry was sitting behind the desk watching a game show on a tiny, color television.

"Mr. Leicester," he said without moving his eyes from the set. "Nasty afternoon. Hope you hadn't planned on dining with us this evening?"

The thought had crossed my mind.

"Mabel closed early," Henry said. "No guests, except you, in the hotel. No sense in staying open. Hope you won't complain?"

"No, but I would take a cup of that coffee you've got brewing," I said, smelling the fresh aroma.

"Sure," he nodded, still watching the game show. "Be about three more minutes."

"How about some change so I can get a paper?" I laid a dollar bill on the counter.

"The Grapes of Wrath, you idiot," Henry said, getting to his feet, answering the question being asked the contestant on the game show.

He turned off the set.

"Jeopardy...boy, I would love to get on that show. I could make a fortune."

Henry looked at the dollar bill on the counter. He picked it up and handed it back to me. "Sorry, no papers left. They only deliver six a day. You can have mine, I've finished with it. I keep the crossword puzzle, though" he said defiantly, grinning.

"Thanks," I said, taking the paper and folding it up. "I'm not smart enough for the crossword puzzles. Put me down for a wake-up call at seven in the morning. I'd appreciate it."

"Done." He made a notation on a pad. "I talked with the maid today. She promised to be more careful."

Shaking my head, I did not reply.

"Oh, by the way," Henry said, as I took a styrofoam cup of the fresh brewed coffee and started walking away. "Here's a couple of phone calls for you, and an envelope."

He handed me the messages.

Attaching a tiny piece of clear tape to my hotel room door this morning before leaving, I found it undisturbed. Throwing the newspaper on the table, I sat down on the bed and went over the messages.

One of the calls was from Guy Robbins. Dialing his office number, his secretary said he had gone for the day, took his boat out for a sail. Informing her I would call him back tomorrow, I silently wished I was aboard Picaroon with him. The other call was from Sandy. There was no answer at the Gallery. I would try her later.

My name was hand-printed across the front of the small white envelope in bold, block letters. There was no return address. Opening it, I took out the blue sheet of paper. It read: 'What you don't use, you lose.'

I had wanted to avoid this, but I had a vision of Kathleen Chamberlain, of death and dying, of how short life can truly be, and of the few pleasures we truly have. Having committed it to memory, I dialed the number Mabel had written on the restaurant check.

Finding Mabel's house was easy. Her directions were explicit. She met me at the door with a warm hug, and a kiss on the cheek. A roaring fire blazed brightly in a wonderful old stone hearth. The house was small, but neat and well furnished. It had the feeling of being lived in.

"You like wine?"

"Sure."

"Red or white?"

"Whatever you're having."

She went into the kitchen. I could hear the tinkle of glass, a cork being pulled from a bottle. It afforded me time to look around. The walls of the living room were decorated with prints of the sea. A photograph on a small table over by a window was of a handsome man in a wool sweater and a sailor's watch cap. Chamberlain said that her husband was lost at sea.

Mabel returned with two glasses filled with red wine and a small tray of cheese and crackers.

"Let's sit on the couch in front of the fire." She indicated the small sofa.

We sipped the wine, talked, and worked our way through those awkward first moments.

She was a plain woman, hardworking, with a serious quality. My kind of person. We seemed to get along well.

"More wine?"

"Yes, thank you."

She went to the kitchen and brought back the bottle.

"Tell me about Mabel," I said, holding the wineglass up to the fire, admiring the ruby, orange-tinged color.

She laughed out loud. "Now there's an interesting subject for you. I was born here, live here, and I'll probably die here."

She said it without sarcasm.

"Any children?"

"No children," she said, looking across my shoulder.

Getting up, she walked over, picked up the photograph of the man, brought it back, and handed it to me.

"My only true love, my husband. The sea took him."

"I'm sorry," I said, holding the frame gently. "He looks like a fine man."

"Yes," she said, taking the photograph, looking at it as if for the first time. "He was as good as they come. I loved him deeply."

She put the photograph back in its place.

Smiling as she sat back down, she said, "That's my life story; Billy, love, tragedy, work. I've gotten used to it, but I'll never forget him. Now, let's hear about you."

We drank more wine, talked.

"You have any leads as to who killed those two men?"

"We're working on it."

"Rumor is that there was a lot of money missing. Is that true?"

"Where did you hear something like that?" I asked more harshly than intended.

"In the restaurant, I guess. Why are you so defensive? I'm merely curious."

Sitting my wineglass on the small table beside the couch, I said, "I get like this when I'm on a case, especially when someone who's not involved asks questions about things which only the investigators should know."

"Then there is a lot of money missing?"

"I didn't say that, and I'd still like to know where you heard it?"

"I told you...the restaurant." She folded her legs under and looked at me.

"What about Henry? You talk to him about the murders?"

"It's a small town, Jay." She got up and walked to the fireplace and put on two sticks of wood. "Everybody's talking about the murders. When something like this happens in Rockland, it's all anybody talks about. It could be one of our own involved."

We were two strangers trying to get to know one another. This evening was awkward enough without the investigation interfering. The situation was becoming uncomfortable.

"Discussing your work is making you uneasy. Let's change the subject to something pleasant." She came and set beside me, putting her hand on my shoulder. "Tell me about living in the south?"

Her intuition surprised me, and pleased me. My trust in people was shaky, at best. I wanted her to be genuine, to not be a part of these horrible murders. I also had to be extremely careful.

The rest of the evening went well, and shortly after midnight, I said, "It's getting late. You have to get up early. Maybe I'd better go, let you get some rest."

When we stood, Mabel moved up close to me, held my hand, looked deep into my eyes. "You don't have to go. You can stay, if you want."

* * *

Slipping in the rear entrance, I arrived in my room just as the phone rang. It was Henry with my seven a.m. wake up call. He had not seen me come in.

"Thanks, Henry. I appreciate it."

Listening for sarcasm in his voice, I could not hear any. Maybe last night would not make headlines in the local paper.

After a long, stinging, hot shower, I shaved and dressed. Chamberlain would be here shortly. I hoped I could stay awake today. There was not much sleep in some quarters last night.

Walking into the lobby, I saw Chamberlain drive up.

"How's Kathleen?" I asked, as he entered the front door.

"Bill put her in the hospital last night," he answered, looking a lot more tired than I felt. "He said she was dehydrated, needed some IV fluids."

"Look, J.L., we can put this Monhegan thing off for a couple of days. There's no rush. You look like you need some rest. Go, stay with Kathleen. We'll go across some other time."

"No. Bill's taking care of her. He assured me it's nothing critical, just part of the process. Let's get some breakfast."

Henry, standing behind the registration desk, said the restaurant wasn't open. Mabel had called; she was running a little late. "Funny," he said, scratching his head. "First time she's been late since coming to work here."

"Come on," Chamberlain said, motioning me out the front door. "We'll stop somewhere on the way to Port Clyde. There is plenty of time."

We got in Chamberlain's car and headed south. He drove a different route, keeping close to the bay. It was new and unfamiliar country to me, but was as pleasant as traveling along the state highways.

The sky was still overcast. Low, rain-laden clouds blew swiftly out of the north, indicating frontal passage had already occurred. I estimated the wind at twenty knots. The rain had stopped. Here and there breaks appeared in the overcast. If the wind didn't lay as Chamberlain predicted, it would be a rough crossing to Monhegan Island. Assuming that young Captain Barstein decided to go and wasn't somewhere counting four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cold cash.

When we got to the small hamlet of Tenant's Harbor, J.L. pulled into the East Wind Inn.

"They serve a breakfast buffet here that I think you'll like," he said as we parked under a huge water oak.

"I've eaten lunch here a couple of times." Unbuckling by seat belt, I got out and looked across the ruffled bay at the small island.

"I know," J.L. said. "Once with Sandy, once alone."

I had forgotten about Betty Anders, spry, ex-nurse, and mother of the owner of the East Wind Inn. Kathleen Chamberlain's cousin.

"Is there anything that goes on in this county that you don't know about?" I asked, as we walked upon the porch.

"Not much," he answered, opening the screen door. "I even know where you spent last night."

This stopped me in my tracks. "But how..."

Chamberlain kept on walking. Over his shoulder he said, "Officer Bowers, our Desk Sergeant, has been trying for two years to get Mabel to go out with him. She won't give him the time of day."

Chamberlain walked on into the dinning room. Hurrying, I tried to catch up.

"He drives by her house on his way home every night. Seems your car was still there when he came back to work this morning. He's heartbroken."

Small towns...

* * *

We arrived at the Port Clyde dock at ten-thirty. The ferry, the MOMA C., was tied alongside the pier. Several people milled around, waiting to board. As Chamberlain predicted, the wind was down to around ten knots. Overcast skies had given way to a scattered-to-broken layer. The temperature was still cool, but warming. I brought my old, worn, leather flight jacket. Chamberlain suggested I bring it, as the temperature on the island might be a bit cool. I followed his advice.

We saw Captain Barstein emerge from the rear of the chandlery. Chamberlain headed for him. Deciding not to follow, I watched them meet, then go aboard the ship into the wheelhouse. There was no way for anyone to hear their conversation, but with the animation coming from Chamberlain and the head bowing of Barstein, I imagined it would have been interesting.

After about ten minutes Chamberlain stuck his head out of the wheelhouse door, searched the dock with his eyes until he spotted me, and waved for me to come aboard.

Upon entering the small, cramped space Chamberlain said to me, "I understand you've met Captain Barstein. He's invited us to sail across in the wheelhouse, keep him company."

We shook hands. Barstein remembered me from the other day. It was hard to tell if he was mad at me for informing Chamberlain he had seen Rinaldi. If he was, to his credit, he didn't show it. Barstein signaled one of the two deck hands, who began boarding the few passengers. A small amount of freight was loaded and secured on the aft deck.

Barstein started the big twin diesel engines. They created a muffled rumble somewhere deep in the bowels of the ship. On a silent hand signal from a deck hand, he expertly maneuvered away from the dock, turned the

vessel around on its own axis, and headed out of the harbor and the open sea.

"What's the length of the MOMA C.?" I asked Barstein after he had settled onto a heading out of the harbor.

Without diverting his eyes from the bow, he said, "Ninety-six on the waterline, one hundred ten overall. Draws twelve feet when loaded. She's an ex-supply ship. Named her after my Ma. Her paint may not look good, but she's well founded and sea worthy. I take care of her personally."

I looked at young Captain Barstein, intense in his concentration on getting the ship safely out to sea, remembering the long, jagged scar running from just below his right eye all the way across the face, ending below his chin. He was a serious man, six feet tall, slenderly built. Coal black hair stuck out from under a wool seaman's cap. His arms were thick and powerful looking. Not a big man, but I imagined strong and quick enough to take care of himself. I thought the thick scar on his face might be proof of it.

"How long you been running to Monhegan?" I asked, wanting to draw him out a little.

"Ten years," he said, still without moving his eyes. "All with the MOMA C."

Chamberlain sat on a small bench inside the wheelhouse, his eyes closed. He seemed unconcerned with our conversation or the trip across. Not me. Any sojourn to sea gets me excited, even after thirty years of sailing small boats in the Gulf of Mexico.

As we cleared the harbor, Barstein eased his ship around to a heading of one hundred and eighty degrees.

He turned abruptly to me, his face a scant few inches from mine. His eyes were startling, wide, round, and jet-black. "You said you were a sailor of sorts. Let us see. Here, take the wheel, steer one eight zero till clearing the Georges Islands up ahead on the starboard side, then two two zero till Monhegan."

He stepped away from the wheel. Taking over, I was as delighted as a kid.

"It's illegal for you to do this when we have passengers aboard," he said, his dancing eyes twinkling. "But we'll keep a sharp lookout for any law enforcement."

Chamberlain did not respond. His eyes were still closed, his head bobbing back and forth with the roll of the ship.

Wondering if he were really asleep, I thought not.

The MOMA C. began to feel the North Atlantic. The swells were running six to eight feet, but she handled them easily. Made love to them. All I had to do was let her have her head. She would climb a wave, roll off to one side, then the other, as she climbed up the next one, always coming back on course. Barstein was right, she was a well-founded vessel. I was having the time of my life.

Barstein stood, silent, behind me for about ten minutes. When he was satisfied I would not founder his ship, he disappeared from the wheelhouse.

At the first movement of the Moma C. answering the ocean waves, I felt a familiar gnawing of seasickness. It passed quickly with my new-found responsibility.

On passing abeam the Georges Islands, I eased the MOMA C. around to a heading of two hundred and twenty degrees. The water turned from the shallow, inshore shades of green to a deep, bluish-purple. A flock of birds, too far away to identify, headed toward the mainland, flying in a vee pattern, their wings out of sync and fluttering in the broken sunlight like waves crashing on a beach.

Off in the distance Monhegan rose out of the sea, stark and majestic. It was an island I looked forward to visiting for many reasons, not the least of which was finding out who put a .9mm pistol to the back of Nat Rinaldi's head and scrambled his brain.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Young Captain Barstein reappeared in the wheelhouse and took command of the MOMA C.

Chamberlain stirred, stood and looked out at Monhegan Island. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Yes, even more than I imagined."

"You going to have any trouble docking?" Chamberlain asked Barstein.

"It'll be a little tricky, but we'll make it. Wouldn't want to delay local law enforcement from their appointed rounds." There was no animosity in the statement. He turned and grinned at Chamberlain.

Nothing else was said among us. To my utmost admiration, Barstein laid the MOMA C. alongside the pier on the first attempt. He was good.

When the engines were shut down, Chamberlain told Barstein we would be aboard this afternoon for the four- thirty return trip. Barstein, with another scar-faced grin, said that he would save us a seat.

Chamberlain and I walked ashore. The island was a ruggedly beautiful place. The harbor, formed by Monhegan and the nearby island of Manana, is dotted along its shoreline with colorful summer cottages and homes of the fishermen who live here year-round. This is one of the finest fishing and lobstering grounds on the East Coast. The land sloped gently up toward forest of tall spruce.

"Come on," Chamberlain said. "I want to see the owner of the Monhegan Store. He's a friend. Maybe he can tell us who had the Kent Collection here on the island. We'll have to walk, there are no cars."

"There was a truck at the dock."

"Belongs to the Monhegan Truckers. They carry luggage, goods for the few hotels, restaurants and general store, but you gotta walk."

Following along behind Chamberlain, I admired the beauty of this place. The sky was clear. Spruce trees and rocks formed an interesting contrast of colors against the azure blue waters and pale horizon. The wind blew, and I was glad Chamberlain had encouraged me to bring my jacket.

"If we have time, I'll take you to the other side of the island. There is a path through the forest, a shortcut. The headlands are worth the effort."

"I'm game."

Chamberlain and the owner of the Monhegan Store greeted each other like long lost brothers with a lot of handshaking and backslapping.

Introducing me, Chamberlain said, "Jay, this is Shorty Williams, one of my oldest and best friends." We shook hands. "Shorty taught me everything I know about the sea."

"Yeah," Shorty nodded. "He still can't get from here to Rockland without getting lost." We all laughed.

Chamberlain told Shorty we would like to go into his office and discuss some private police business with him.

In a small, cluttered room at the rear of the store, Chamberlain explained the situation to Shorty, surprisingly telling him everything. I hoped he knew what he was doing.

When he was through, Shorty sat silent, rubbing his wrinkled, weather-beaten face. It was hard to tell his age. He was a lot older than Chamberlain with a thin, lanky frame, and a small head. His hair was gray and receding. He had quick, jerky movements, which seemed to echo his black, dancing eyes. A wide grin made him seem eternal, like the purple sea pounding on the rock a hundred yards from where we stood.

Finally, rubbing his gnarled and weather-beaten hands, he said, "J.L., an old couple, Barnes, they were big Kent lovers. Live in one of the houses he built. I think they are related to him in some way. The old man, Ben, ain't been around in several months, but his wife comes in every once in awhile. She has seemed rather out of sorts the last few times, come to think of it."

"Where do they live, Shorty?"

"Way up the hill, yonder." He pointed toward the tree line. "In the gray house at the end of the path, bordering the preserve. You can't miss it."

Chamberlain later explained to me that two-thirds of the island is held by the Monhegan Associates to be kept forever wild.

"One other thing you might be interested in," Shorty continued. "There was a helicopter made a couple of trips up near their house a few days ago. Don't know if it's important or not."

Yes, I said to myself. A helicopter, of course. Why didn't I think of that? Nat Rinaldi could have chartered a chopper to bring him to the island when the ferry didn't run. Anastasio's men could have done the same thing.

"Well, Shorty, we'll walk up and pay a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes."

"When you get back," Shorty said, grinning, "I'll feed you two some of that smoked cod you like so well."

"Deal." Chamberlain slapped Shorty on the back.

We followed the old storekeeper through the narrow aisles to the front of the building. The similarity of the merchandise to that of the chandlery in Port Clyde was amazing. Pausing, I looked at some of the caps, gloves, coats, and boots. Things fishermen would need. There was the usual junk for the tourists who crowded the small island during the summer. For some unknown reason, I had a gnawing sensation about this collection of goods. Memory mechanisms deep down in the recesses of my brain were trying to tell me something. Dismissing them, I followed J.L. and Shorty outside.

We stood in front of the Monhegan Store. Shorty pointed out the lane leading to the gray house belonging to the Barnes couple. The house was hidden among the tall spruce trees.

"Shorty seems like a nice sort," I said to Chamberlain as we negotiated the narrow road up the hill, which soon turned from pitted stretches of paving brick into a gravel lane, our steps crunching in the silence, sharp and even, like the cracks of a radial piston engine. "He seems to be someone I would like to have as a friend."

"He's one of the good people, Jay. Born to the sea. Toiled all his life in a lobster boat right here on Monhegan Island. He got old, his heart went sour." J.L. paused, turned, looked back down the gentle slope toward the store. "Bill had to force him to go down to Portland for the inevitable triple bypass. He wasn't able to convince him until his heart stopped beating, and he resuscitated him, bringing him back from the dead."

"Seems like he's doing okay, now."

"Bill says he'll probably outlive the both of us. He hates being landlocked, though."

"Wouldn't you?"

"Yeah." J.L. continued up the hill.

We rounded a sharp curve in the now three foot wide path. Almost hidden in the trees was the small gray house. I had expected something bigger. This one was about eight hundred square feet. Big enough, I guess.

J.L. knocked on the front door. We waited, no one came. He knocked again, louder.

"Ain't no tourist allowed," a hollow voice said from behind the door.

"This is Detective Chamberlain from the Rockland Police Department. Need to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes. Shorty Williams told us where you live."

The front door opened a crack. "You got some I.D., young man?" Asked a female voice.

It was funny, her calling Chamberlain young.

"Yes, Ma'am." J.L. held up his badge case to the crack in the door.

"What's this about?"

"Could we please come in, Ma'am? We want to talk with you about some artwork. A Rockwell Kent collection."

The door opened, we walked inside. The house was small, but immaculately kept. The curtains were drawn. When the front door closed it was completely dark inside.

"Please have a seat," the woman said, opening the drapes, flooding the room with light. "I'll get my husband." She disappeared down a narrow, dark hallway.

Looking around the small living room made me feel like being back in the nineteen twenties. The furnishings were spartan, but comfortable. There wasn't a speck of dust to be seen. An old, battery operated radio sat in one corner of the room. A fireplace took up one wall; a small, hand-carved writing desk next to a tiny window took up another. A sofa and two wooden chairs with cushions completed the furnishings.

Moments later the woman returned with her husband. We all stood for a few awkward seconds, looking at each other. Finally the woman said, "This is my husband, Ben. He's not feeling well. I'm Betty Barnes."

We introduced ourselves.

The man, Ben Barnes, stood erect and proud. He appeared near eighty years old, and was balding with gray veins lacing his shiny scalp. As he spoke one could see that he had but one canine tooth left in his mouth. The arms were bony, with long delicate fingers. His skin was so thin it seemed transparent. Dressed in a clean, wool shirt, he wore blue khaki pants with the zipper half open, as if forgotten from his last trip to the bathroom. On his feet were brown leather slippers, no socks. His handshake was frail and weak.

He did not offer us a chair; instead he walked over to the writing table, opened a drawer, and took out a white bottle painted with blue birds. Turning to his wife and holding up the bottle, he said, "Mother..."

She disappeared, returning in seconds with four small shot glasses.

Carefully pouring a tiny amount of a purple liquid into the glasses, he handed one to each of us. Raising his glass in a salute he said, "Welcome to our home."

It was solemn and sincere. We handled it that way.

"Please be seated, Gentlemen," he said, as his wife took the glasses away. "I've been expecting you."

Chamberlain and I looked at each other in surprise.

Tasting the thick, sweet liquid, I did not have the faintest idea what it was. Probably something homemade and precious to this old couple.

The wife, a tall, slim, proud lady, returned and sat by her husband. Her age appeared to equal his, but her energy and vitality were strong, his was gone. She had the thin, scraggly hair of the aged, but not a single strand was out of place. The color was a beautiful silver-gray. The face was wrinkled, the skin, brownish and spotted. Her eyes were green and full of life, though.

"Why were you expecting us?" Chamberlain asked.

"Because they stole our Kent collection," the old man said. "I heard over the wireless about the two men being killed." He pointed towards the radio. "We listen to the news every day."

"Now, Daddy," his wife spoke up. "Don't be saying crazy things." She fidgeted with a small, white handkerchief in her lap and tried to smile. Then she said to J.L., "Aren't you the one who married Mac and Lucy Delaney's daughter, Kathleen?"

"Yes, Ma'am," he answered, leaning forward and placing both elbows on his knees.

"The Delaney's that owned the ship dock and marina?" The old man asked his wife. She nodded. "Well, I'll be. She's a fine young girl. How's she doing?"

"Pretty as ever," Chamberlain said with great patience.

Breaking in, I said, "Mr. Barnes, you said someone stole your art collection. What did you mean by that?"

Betty Barnes bowed her head, worked the handkerchief around her fingers.

Chamberlain gave me a sharp glance. If he wanted to handle this, he should have said something. Shrugging my shoulders at him, I said nothing else.

"You tell them, mother," Ben Barnes said with a vacant, faraway stare in his dead eyes. "You tell them how I ruined our lives."

Betty Barnes went to the window. She stooped over her folded arms as she walked. Staring straight ahead, she looked out across the Atlantic Ocean. No one could know what she saw. Wearing a freshly cleaned and ironed blue dress with little red and white deer patterned throughout the material, she had on no makeup or jewelry, only a thin, worn, gold wedding band.

Ben Barnes stared vacantly at the back of her head. His mouth hung loose, the single tooth shining in the dim light of the room.

Betty Barnes turned, holding the handkerchief as a crutch. There was something in her eyes which I knew she did not want to be there. "We had a grandson, Mr. Chamberlain. He did not turn out so good."

Chamberlain's eyes darted, his brain searching through memory, trying to place their grandson. Shifting position in the chair, he did not say anything.

Betty Barnes continued. "His name was Ansel. We raised him from a baby after his mother and father were killed in the boat accident over by Owl's Head. His mother was our daughter. We tried to raise him right, only we did something wrong. I don't know what. He left home when he was seventeen and went to Chicago. The only time he'd ever contact us was when he was in trouble, or needed money." She paused and looked back out to sea. She was a thin restless woman with delicate features that made her look beautiful for a few years of adulthood and never afterward.

Yeah, I thought to myself. How many times have I heard this same, sad lament from parents and grandparents?

"I remember the accident," Chamberlain said. "An explosion caused by gas vapors in the bilge."

"Our grandson was killed when he was twenty-five years old," she said, ignoring Chamberlain. "We don't know how he died. The police said he drowned in some canal in Chicago. We had the body shipped back and buried over in Port Clyde. That's where our family plot's located, over in Port Clyde."

"He was murdered," the old man said suddenly. His stare still vacant and unfocused.

Betty Barnes said, "About six months after we buried Ansel, a man came to the house. He said Ansel owed his boss a great deal of money and he expected us to pay it. He said Ansel bragged that we were rich art collectors and would take care of the debt. My husband told him to leave. We

wouldn't be paying any money. The man laughed and said we'd pay, one way or the other."

"When did all this happen?" Chamberlain asked, leaning back in his chair, and crossing his legs.

"It started about two years ago. They threatened us in every way possible. They wouldn't let us alone." She twisted the handkerchief into a tight spiral.

"They threatened to kill Mother and send her to me a piece at a time," Ben Barnes said, shaking violently, spilling the dark, purple liquid on his shirt. "I got scared, Mr. Chamberlain. I'm a coward. I let Betty down. I gave in to them." Tears ran down the old man's cheeks.

"It's alright, Daddy," his wife said, going over to his side, wiping the tears from his face and the wine from his shirt. "You did the best you could."

"Why didn't you go to the police, or call my office?" Chamberlain asked, his face reddening.

"Because they said if we contacted the authorities they would kill us both." Betty Barnes clasped her hands together. "No one could stop them. We were helpless, don't you understand? Helpless."

Chamberlain did not press the point. It was useless.

"We're not rich," she continued. "We had enough saved to live out our lives comfortably here on Monhegan Island. We are not wealthy art collectors. All we had was Rockwell Kent's works. My mother was his aunt. When Rockwell's mother died, she left my mother all the things she had of her son. We ended up with it, and this house. Rockwell built it himself for his mother. We added to the collection during the years."

"How much were these people from Chicago trying to get out of you?" Chamberlain asked.

"All we had," the old man said.

"It started with a hundred thousand," Betty Barnes said. "Then the man told us the interest on the debt was doubling each week."

We know these extortionists, I wanted to scream. Instead, I let Chamberlain bring it out in his own way.

"What did you mean when you said you ruined your lives?" Chamberlain asked Ben Barnes.

He did not answer. Tears ran down his cheeks. His frail hands shook, his mouth quivered.

"He feels he failed because he couldn't protect us from these people," his wife said, patting his shoulder. "That's nonsense. No one could have done anything about these vultures."

Yes, I wanted to shout. There is something you could have done.

"What finally happened?" Chamberlain asked.

"My husband offered them the art collection if they'd leave us alone."

"Who were they?"

"The one killed over in Port Clyde. The Bilotti man," she said.

"His boss had a funny name. I can't say it."

"Anastasio?" I asked.

"Yes, that's it." She looked up at me and nodded.

"What happened to the art collection?" Chamberlain asked.

"This Bilotti fellow, he took some of it to show his boss a few weeks ago. Then he came and got the rest of it the night he was killed."

"How did he move it?"

"He brought a man with him who crated it up. They flew it out in a helicopter. It took them three trips to get all forty-eight pieces hauled away."

Glancing over at Chamberlain, I said, "The helicopter has a small cabin and the paintings are bulky." He nodded. "Was the man that Bilotti brought with him named Rinaldi?" I asked.

"I don't know. We never heard his name."

"Nat," the old man said. "He called him Nat."

Reaching into my jacket pocket, I took out the photos of Nat Rinaldi and Tony Bilotti. "Are these the two?"

They both looked at the pictures, nodding in unison.

"You never saw or spoke to the boss, the one named Anastasio?" I asked.

"No, only the one called Bilotti," Betty Barnes answered.

For some reason, I felt it necessary to explain to these two old people that Nat Rinaldi was not a member of a crime family.

"Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, I just want you both to understand that the man, Nat Rinaldi, did not work for Anastasio. He was a legitimate art dealer from New Orleans."

"Then why was he here working with this thug, Bilotti?" Betty Barnes asked, shaking her head.

It was a fair question. I explained how Anastasio was going to give the artwork to his wife. That it was the wrong artist. That Rinaldi was going to buy the entire collection from him.

"How much was Mr. Rinaldi going to pay?" She asked.

Another good question.

"A half million."

"Ha," she muttered. "It was worth twice that amount."

"I gave it to them, sir," the old man said to me, tears continuing to flow down his wrinkled, weathered face. "I just gave it all to them. Our entire investment we had worked so hard for. I've ruined everything." Heavy sobs wracked his entire body.

Betty Barnes stood beside her husband, patting his frail, drooping shoulder.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Chamberlain guided us through tall, old growth spruce trees, thick with animals and birds, to the edge of a steep, black rock precipice. The Monhegan Associates had indeed kept this part of the island in a pristine, natural state.

Out to sea, a quarter of a mile or so, the headlands, White Head and Black Head, rose more than one hundred and fifty feet out of the purple ocean. Nearby Gull Rock, one hundred feet high, stood stark and alone.

We were silent for a long time, looking, feeling, experiencing the moment. I thought that I would not mind having to look at this sight forever and that I would not mind never seeing it again. I would always have the memory. It had indeed been worth the trip.

"You know, J.L., maybe Anastasio is telling the truth. Bilotti could have been ripping the Barnes' off. Anastasio may have given him the money to pay them. At least some amount he thought fair after deducting their grandson's debt, plus interest. Maybe Bilotti pocketed the difference. Anastasio found out and whacked him."

"It's a thought."

"Yes, but why kill Rinaldi? Where's the art collection, the money? How was it all done? I want another face to face with Mr. Anastasio."

Chamberlain looked closely at me. A grin formed in one corner of his mouth, then spread across his entire face. "I was hoping you would."

Off in the distance we watched a ship working against the heavy running sea. She would climb a wave, fall off and almost disappear, only to emerge again, spray flying like sparkling diamonds across her bow.

Chamberlain pointed, "There's your ride, the MOMA C., and young Captain Barstein making another run. Come on, if we hurry we'll have time for some of Shorty's smoked cod before sailing for Port Clyde."

Returning through the forest was as interesting as it had been coming to the headland. Wind whistling through the tall spruce made a pleasant sound.

Shorty's smoked cod was outstanding. We washed it down with a bottle of red wine of unknown origin. It was not Domaine Romanee-Conti, but it was excellent with the hard bread and cod. When queried, Shorty said he had salvaged six cases of the wine from a shipwreck more than

three decades ago. All the labels had washed off or fell away years before. The only word he remembered from one of the labels was Hermitage.

Could be, I thought. A wine from the Rhone Valley. The bottle was the right color and shape, but it could have been any one of hundreds.

"Thanks, Shorty," Chamberlain said, as we were leaving. "Good to see you again. You need to come and see Kathleen. I would do it pretty soon."

"I don't know, J.L." He looked down, scratched the floor with his shoe. "I'm not too good at that sort of thing. Tell her I love her."

"I understand, old friend. I'll give her your love."

We shook hands. J.L. and I walked down to the dock where the MOMA C. was waiting.

Captain Barstein greeted us at the gangway. "Seas are running good, Gentlemen." There was a telling grin slanting downward from the ribbed scar. "You're welcome to ride in the wheelhouse."

"No," Chamberlain answered. "We're going to go below. We have some things to talk about."

"Suit yourself," Barstein muttered, disappearing forward.

Once away from the lee of the island, the MOMA C. rolled, pitched, and yawed violently in the heavy sea. It was making me a little queasy. Chamberlain seemed unaffected. There were six other people in the cabin with us who did not seem to notice the movement of the ship. My smoked cod began to have doubts about staying put.

"You look a little green around the gills," Chamberlain said, smiling. "You going to be alright?"

"Yeah, always get a little queasy the first couple of days at sea. It's nothing serious."

"Any more thoughts about Anastasio?"

Steadying myself with an arm to keep from banging into the side of the bunk we were sitting in, I said, "We need to look seriously into Bilotti working his own extortion scam. Maybe Rinaldi was just an unlucky person."

"It doesn't explain the bodies being in two different places, though. They should have been shot together. Where is the art collection? I can see the money vanishing, but what does one do with the paintings, drawings, prints, and all the other works the Barnes' said Bilotti took. They had to make three helicopter trips to haul it off the island."

"It's got to be somewhere. Maybe Sandy can find out if any of it turns up on the market." Swallowing hard, I forced the cod out of my eso-

phagus, back down into my stomach. "Surely there is some sort of a network in the fine arts world where things are bought and sold. I'll call her tonight."

"Good idea." Reaching an arm out, Chamberlain steadied himself as the ship fell off a wave and shuddered.

Suddenly I had another thought. "You know, J.L., Anastasio's airplane, the G-IV, is certainly big enough to carry the art collection. We've got to find out who the helicopter operator was that made all the flights to Monhegan, and where he took the cargo."

"There are only two helicopter operators in the area. They are not allowed to land on Monhegan."

"Yes, but a chopper could have been hired from anywhere, and ignored the regulations. It could have been Anastasio's own personal helicopter."

"You have a good investigative mind." The seat cushion squeaked slightly as Chamberlain repositioned himself.

"Thank you." I held on to the MOMA C., swallowing hard. "We might not see eye to eye on everything, J.L., but at least we're always looking at the same thing." Grinning, I stood and started for the head. The cod had won their battle for freedom.

* * *

As soon as the MOMA C. docked at Port Clyde we walked over to the chandlery so Chamberlain could phone to check on his wife. I browsed among the aisles while he called.

The lady who I met before was working, putting up canned goods on shelves along one side of an entire wall. Tables in the center of the building held all sorts of goods; pants, shirts, shoes, rain slickers. Seamen's gear. Picking up a wool cap, I thought about buying it.

"Get cold enough where you're from to wear wool?" Asked the woman, with a smile.

"Not often." I put the cap back and picked up a brightly colored scarf.

"You and J.L. find out anything more on what happened to those two dead guys?"

"We're working on it." Putting the scarf back on the table, I was suddenly alert to her question. "You wouldn't have heard anything, would you?"

"Nah." She shoved a case of Vienna sausage along the floor with her foot. "If I had, I would have called J.L."

"Yes, of course." I glanced around at the other merchandise. Unless you have a vested interest, I thought.

Chamberlain walked up. "Bill says Kathleen's doing fine. She's back at the house. You mind if we stop by on the way in? I'd like to check on her."

"Certainly not."

"Afternoon, Annie," Chamberlain said to the woman. "How's your Mama doing these days?"

"She's fine, J.L. How's Kathleen?" She stacked the cans of Vienna sausage on the shelf beside the Spam.

"Holding her own, I guess. Business any better?"

"Mighty slow." She threw the empty cardboard box at a pile of other empties in the far corner behind the counter. "Season starts next month, thank goodness. I hope it's a good one. God knows, we need it."

"Yeah, don't we all. Well, we'll see you, Annie. Keep your husband in line, and say hello to your Mama for me."

"I will, J.L. The same to Kathleen."

We walked out to Chamberlain's car. "In case you didn't know," he said, unlocking his door and flipping a switch to unlock mine. "Annie is young Captain Barstein's wife."

"No, I did not know. They failed to mention that fact the first time I was here." Annie and the Captain, I thought. A half a million in cash..

"Annie's Mama is in the late stages of Alzheimer's." J.L. shook his head, and started the car. "That's rough."

Fastening my seat belt, I said, "Whatever else happens to me, I hope that I do not outlive my brain."

We drove in silence to Chamberlain's house. Kathleen was resting in one of the wooden rocking chairs on the wide front porch of Owl's Head. The wind was calm, but a chill was still in the air. She was wrapped in a blanket, head tilted to one side as if asleep. A gray-haired, elderly lady sat in a swing next to her, reading.

Kathleen stirred as we walked up on the porch. J.L. went to her and kissed her lightly on the mouth. She smiled weakly and held her hand up to touch his face. "How was your trip to Monhegan?"

"Fine, fine. We saw Shorty. He sends his love." J.L. embraced his wife tenderly.

"Oh, Mr. Leicester." Kathleen looked at me. "It's good to see you again. I'm sorry I can't get up. I'm a little weak."

"I understand." Walking over, I took her hand in mine. "How are you feeling?"

"Besides being a little queasy, I'm fine. Bill gave me one of his magic potions." She attempted a smile. "J.L., please introduce Mr. Leicester to Nora."

Chamberlain introduced me to Nora Welsh as a close friend who stayed with Kathleen when he was away. She had a slender body; its lines long, fragile, and so exaggerated that she appeared unreal. She had gray eyes that were not ovals, but two long slits, and a narrow, vicious mouth. There was an air of cold serenity about her.

Nora Welsh was reading a book titled, A HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE. I had an inscribed copy by the author, Ernest K. Gann.

"Great book," I said to her.

"Yes." She held up the book as if seeing it for the first time. Her skin was clear, almost translucent, and transmitted a faintly crimsoned, peach-glow of health. "My husband knew Mr. Gann. They both flew for American Airlines, and for the Air Transport Command in World War Two. Wendall was killed then, Mr. Gann was not."

"I'm sorry. We lost a lot of pilots in that war. I read recently where Mr. Gann died."

She looked strangely at me and smiled. It was not a happy smile; it was not a graceful one. It was a simple, easy smile and it was amused.

"Yes, we all do, don't we?"

J.L. rescued me. "We've got to run into town. I'll be back in a couple of hours, Nora." He kissed Kathleen good-bye. We left.

"Strange woman, Nora Welsh."

J.L. laughed. "You don't know the half of it. I'll only say this about Nora; she's a true genius. A four page resume. Three degrees from MIT, speaks seven languages. Her field is Computer Science. She was a colleague of Admiral Grace Murray Hopper, the inventor of computer business language. They worked together building the first computer ever, for the Navy."

"She should make for an interesting evening of conversation."

"I used to leave the room when she and Kathleen got into one of their intellectual debates. Feelings of inadequacy would flow over me like a tidal wave. I was forced to leave, or be severely embarrassed."

"Let's stop by the airport," I said, changing the subject before Chamberlain asked me what I knew about computers. "Maybe some of the local pilots could help us with this helicopter thing."

"Good idea. We can check with the two local helicopter operators later. They both fly from the docks, downtown."

The airport was strangely quiet in the dusk-dark of the late evening. There has always been something intriguing about lonely airports at night. I've never been quite sure what.

Chamberlain stopped in front of the FBO where Anastasio's G-IV had parked. We walked inside.

In the lobby of the brightly-lighted fixed-base operation an instructor and student were sitting at a table going over a flight plan. A lineman sat listening, obviously a student, also. They looked up as we entered. We were intruders in their world, a world I had been an intimate part of many years ago. A world I sometimes missed so desperately it ached.

"Hello, Gentlemen," Chamberlain said. "This is Investigator Leicester. I'm Detective J.L. Chamberlain, Rockland Police Department. We want to ask you some questions about helicopter operations around here a week or so ago."

The three men looked at each other and laughed. It was puzzling. They seemed downright disrespectful.

Then the young lineman spoke up. "Oh, Mr. J.L., what you trying to pull with that formal sounding stuff? You helped raise all three of us, coached our Little League teams. Mr. Leicester, we know about him, the private investigator from down south, working with you on those two murders."

Small towns...

Chamberlain laughed. "Bill, Carl, Junior. Last week a helicopter made several trips to Monhegan. Had to refuel somewhere. We thought maybe it could have been here."

Junior, the lineman, stood up and scratched his head. "Last week? Yeah, an old FH-1100. I fueled him twice. I didn't know he was running to Monhegan, though. That's illegal."

Jackpot! I thought to myself.

"How did he pay?" J.L. asked.

"Credit card." Junior's young face lit up. "I've still got the original hard copies. We send this month's receipts in to the Oil Company next week."

"Jackpot," I said out loud this time. "Did they transfer any cargo from the helicopter to an airplane? Maybe to the G-IV that landed here the other day? Did it come in before and pickup the cargo?"

Junior looked at us with a blank expression. "I didn't see any cargo. I remember a pilot, two passengers, but no cargo."

Scratching the back of my head, I said, "They must have off-loaded it somewhere else."

"Yeah, but where?" Chamberlain said, following Junior behind the counter to get the credit card receipts.

"That helicopter wasn't from around here," the flight instructor offered. "I'd guess Portland or Augusta."

"How do you know it's not from around here?" I asked.

He looked at me with the tolerance the young sometimes have for the aged. It made me feel stupid, rather than old.

"Both helicopters operating out of Rockland are Hughes 500's. They are based down at the docks. You can check."

"I'll take your word for it," I said, trying to salvage some dignity. He smiled.

Chamberlain returned with the tickets. "Come on, let's go to the office. We can check this out from there."

On the way back to the police department, I looked at the credit card receipts. The imprint read: WHOPPER CHOPPERS-- YOU CALL, WE HAUL. 1386 Airport Boulevard, Portland, Maine.

Holding the receipts up to Chamberlain, I said, "We may have a break with this. They can tell us a lot."

"Let's hope." He accelerated around a line of slow moving cars. "Let us hope."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

On our way through to Chamberlain's office we passed by Sergeant Bowers' desk. He spoke to Chamberlain, ignored me. Chamberlain got a big kick out of it. I was not amused.

"Don't worry about our esteemed Desk Sergeant," he said, with a grin. "He's been suffering from S.P.T.A. ever since he met Mabel two years ago."

"S.P.T.A.?"

"Slow Progressive Testicular Atrophy. In his case, it's a condition in which his ego has been destroyed by a good-looking woman leading to sleeplessness, humiliation, and confusion. A cumulative collapse of confidence and pride." Chamberlain was laughing. "He'll get over it."

It was good to see Chamberlain's sense of humor intact. What he was facing with the slow deterioration of his wife must be extremely hard. As far as Sergeant Bowers and Mabel were concerned, I would have to worry about them later.

"Let's see what we can find out about this Whopper Chopper outfit. We need the information from them before we call Anastasio tomorrow."

"I agree." Chamberlain sat down stiffly behind his desk. "This flying thing is in your realm of expertise. I'll listen in. You do the talking." There was a swift, involuntary look of eagerness on his face, the look of a competent person's appreciation. Smiling, he glanced at me and said, "Let's do it."

I punched in the numbers.

"Whopper Choppers. You call, we haul." A male voice answered the phone.

"Let me speak to the owner. This is the Rockland Police Department."

"You got him. Name's Charlie Walters. What can I do for you?"

"Last week, on the dates of the 13th through the 16th, did you have a helicopter operating in this area?"

"I could check." He was hesitant. "Who did you say you were?"

"Name's Leicester. I'm an investigator working with Detective Chamberlain of the Rockland Police." I said, putting as much officialdom in my voice as I could.

"Okay," he mumbled. "Give me ten minutes, I'll call you back. Collect."

"Fine. We need this information now, not tomorrow."

"I said ten minutes." He hung up.

"What do you think?" Chamberlain asked, propping his feet up on the desk.

"We'll wait ten minutes.

"Whopper Choppers calling for Investigator Leicester." Sergeant Bowers' cold, professional, voice droned over the intercom exactly ten minutes later. Chamberlain smiled.

"Leicester here," I said into the mouthpiece after Chamberlain picked up the extension so he could listen.

"We had a charter operating in Rockland on the 14th and 15th," Charlie Walters said slowly, as if reading from a printed flight schedule. "Is there a problem?"

Looking at the dates on the fuel tickets, I saw that they matched. "We need to know who chartered your helicopter, and we need to talk with the pilot."

"Just a minute, now. We can't give out that kind of information." He sounded arrogant. "That's against company policy. You would need a court order."

Winking at Chamberlain, I said, "A Fairchild-Hiller, model 1100, N819WC, made four trips to, and landed illegally on, Monhegan Island the 14th and 15th of this month. We have six witnesses willing to testify to that effect. I'm sure the local FSDO, (Flight Standards District Office) which oversees your certificate, would like to have this information. On top of the Federal Aviation Regulations your pilot violated, he also hauled a cargo of stolen goods extorted from an old couple on the island." I paused, waiting for Mr. Walters to assimilate this information. It did not take long.

"My pilot who flew the charter is out on an overnight. He will call you tomorrow afternoon around three o'clock with all the information you requested. Is this satisfactory, Mr. Leicester?"

"Yes, thank you. I'm glad you were able to come around to our way of thinking, Mr. Walters. We'll be waiting to hear from your pilot." I hung up.

"Well done." J.L. smiled and hung up his receiver. "We'll wait until we talk with the pilot before contacting the 'Chairman of the Board.'" He got up and turned out the lights. "Come on, I'll escort you out past the Desk Sergeant's office. I want to be sure you get safely out of the building."

Chamberlain dropped me off at the Navigator Inn. It was seven-thirty. Entering the lobby to get a newspaper, I found that Henry was nowhere in sight. The place seemed deserted. A toilet flushed somewhere in the rear. Henry appeared, wiping his hands on a paper towel.

"Ah," he said, spying me. "Room 412. We have messages for you. How was Monhegan?"

"Nice. Let's you and I retire, liquidate our assets, and build a house on the island. Spend the rest of our days fishing."

"I'm ready," he said with overt eagerness. "Here are your messages."

"Newspaper?"

"Sorry, they didn't deliver any today."

Shrugging, I started out the door, then paused. Looking back at Henry, I said, "Don't wake me in the morning. I'm going to try and sleep late."

"Okay. Sweet dreams." He reached over and turned on a small television.

Up in my room, I opened the sliding glass doors to the balcony and let the cold night air pour in. Sitting down at the table, I read the messages. They were the same as last night. One was from Guy Robbins, the other from Sandy. There was one sealed in a white envelope. I opened it: 'There's a fire in the fireplace and a bottle of champagne in the fridge.' There was no signature.

Feeling the chill of the night air against the back of my neck, I dialed Guy Robbins, but got no answer. Reaching Sandy's answering service, I left a message saying I would call at ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

It took me ten minutes to get to Mabel's house.

* * *

We lay on a blanket in front of the fireplace. The flames had burned low. One log lying atop the grate still kept its shape. It was checkered into squares and glowed without flame. Sweat glistened off both our bodies. Mabel lay, one leg draped across me, rubbing the hair on my chest. I had no idea what time it was. Or cared.

"Are you and J.L. going to find out who killed those two men?" She asked, holding me unashamedly.

"We already know. Proving it will be something else." Running a hand through her hair, I smelled the soap in it, a clean, earthy, musky odor.

A car light flashed through the window. I wondered if it was a certain policeman on the way home. "You know, Sergeant Bowers won't speak to me anymore because of you."

"Sergeant Bowers never had a claim on me." She climbed on top of me, and straddled my waist. "No man's had a claim on me until you came along. I still don't know why I'm attracted to you."

It did not matter why me as long as she didn't figure it out in the next few minutes and stop what she was doing.

* * *

Awaking cold, I was wrapped in the blanket. A breeze wafting down the chimney ruffled the remnants of last night's fire in the fireplace and blew a faint scent of charred ashes and wood into the room. Mabel was gone.

Shivering as I dressed, I read a note on the dining table that said Mabel had gone to work, and asked me to stop by for coffee.

Driving back to the motel, I went up the back way. There was time to shower and shave before calling Sandy.

Deciding to give Guy a call first, his secretary said he was in court. I told her I would try again, tonight.

Sandy answered on the first ring. "Have you found out anything?" She asked immediately.

"We're pretty sure Anastasio's responsible." I explained all we had learned on Monhegan Island, telling her about the upcoming meeting with the helicopter pilot.

Sandy sighed. "I know someone's following me. I don't like it."

"It's Anastasio's people." I reminded her of our earlier conversation. "Don't worry about them. They want to see what you do, if you go to the police, or contact anyone else. He's playing a game."

"Well, it's not a fun game." Her voice was cold and serious.

"I'll let you know what we learn from the pilot. Also, if someone were to dump the Kent Collection on the market, could there be any way to check and find out about it? Some 'Art World' network?"

"No way. Too many avenues. Think about it, the thousands of galleries, museums, boutiques, and private collectors. Impossible."

"Well, I needed to know," I said, feeling stupid. Maybe I should have known, but I was going through a learning curve with this art thing. "I'll be in touch."

"You call every day. You promise me."

"I promise."

Walking out on the balcony, I saw a low cloud line lying barely visible far out to sea, the last vestiges of the cold front. The wind was calm. The sun was warming the air into a truly nice spring day in the State of Maine. A flock of sea birds, too far away to identify, moved in an ever-changing line toward Vinal Haven.

Leaning back in the chair, I let the morning sun wash warmly over my face and thought about last night, and Mabel. She is quite a woman. It was going to be hard to leave when the time came.

Then I thought about the face of defeat. The helpless look of Ben Barnes as he stared vacantly in despair. His courage had failed. The sad thing about courage is that a man must be a little careless of his life in order to keep it. Courage to me had always been not in blindly overlooking danger, but in recognizing it and conquering it. But what could a little old man on an isolated island in the Atlantic Ocean do up against a powerful Mafia figure like Gino Anastasio? I made a silent promise that Mr. Boss of Bosses would somehow pay for the suffering he had caused this old couple.

The coffee shop was empty except for three people sitting around a table near the cash register. Two of them were Mabel and Henry. The other one had his back to me. I did not realize it was Sergeant Bowers until we looked at each other face to face.

Expecting some form of antagonism from Bowers, he surprised me with an invitation to sit and have coffee. Henry excused himself, saying he had work to do. Mabel went for the coffeepot.

"Look, Mr. Leicester," he said, peering into his cup. He had a prominent nose and brown, intense eyes. The hair at the sides and on the back of his head curled like shavings in a boat-builder's shop. "I'm sorry about the way I've been acting. It's been childish. I had a talk with Mabel. She pointed out some things I seemed to have overlooked. You being from out of town, a stranger and all..."

It took guts to say what he was saying. "Forget it, Sergeant. Water under the bridge. I'd feel the same way if the situation were reversed."

What motivated Sergeant Bowers to have such a change of heart? Had he done it on his own, or from something Chamberlain said to him.

He and Mabel could be involved in these killings in some way. Maybe she pointed out how his petty jealousy could blow their scam.

Sergeant Bowers excused himself. I spent an hour talking with Mabel, drinking coffee, drawing her out. We had not had much conversation since that first night. She told me how her husband died, drowning at sea, his body never recovered. We talked a little about the murders. Henry finally interrupted us, saying Detective Chamberlain wanted to talk with me on the phone.

Leaving, I promised Mabel that I would see her tonight.

* * *

Picking up the phone at the front desk, I said, "Yeah, what's up, J.L.?"

"Mr. Walters from the helicopter service phoned, his pilot's flying in from Bangor. He'd planned a fuel stop in Augusta; he'll stop in Rockland, instead. Walters said he would have all the information we'd need."

Looking at my watch, I asked, "Arrival time?"

"In about forty-five minutes. I'll pick you up out front of the Navigator in ten minutes." He hung up.

* * *

"How's Kathleen?" I slid into the passenger side of J.L.'s unmarked police car.

"She had a good night. Bill was by this morning checking on her. He seems to think this crisis is over."

"I'm glad." We turned onto the highway in front of the hotel and headed for the airport. "Did you say anything to Bowers about this situation with Mabel?"

Chamberlain looked at me for a moment. "No, I didn't think it necessary. Why? Something happen?"

"No. Bowers apologized to me this morning in the coffee shop for the way he's been acting. That's all."

"Bowers is a good man, Jay." Chamberlain slowed for an old man crossing the street with a small dog on a leash. "All of us let things cloud our judgment from time to time. I knew the jealousy thing would pass with him."

"I wanted to know if he did it on his own. It took guts. I'm glad it wasn't coming from you. One more thing, was Bowers involved in any of the investigation on Bilotti's killing?"

"Yes. In fact, he was the first officer on the scene. He's only working the desk until the regular officer returns from vacation. Why?"

"You figure it out."

Chamberlain looked intently at me, but didn't say anything. Leaning back in the seat, I clasped my hands behind my head, and stared at the car's headliner.

Parking in front of the FBO, Chamberlain shut the engine off and rolled down his window. I did the same. We heard the helicopter long before it appeared. The whop, whop, whop of the blades were unmistakable. There is only one machine which makes that sound, a Bell HU-1, better known as the 'Huey.' The helicopter was designed for the Vietnam War and used as an air ambulance, a gunship, and a troop carrier. It now serves many rolls in civilian life. I did not fly helicopters, but I had never heard pilots who flew them ever say anything bad about the Huey.

The pilot air-taxed the helicopter up to the fuel dock, and kept the engine running for a few minutes while it cooled down. After engine shut down, the pilot and passenger exited the Huey and walked into the fixed-base operation. We followed. Chamberlain and I waited until the pilot finished with his duties before introducing ourselves. He gave the brusque, limp handshake of someone with little patience for basic pleasantries.

The man was apprehensive in talking with us. "Look, we're not from the FAA." I was trying to put him at ease. "The only thing we want to know is who hired you, and where you off-loaded the art collection."

He was an extremely tall man. How he managed to fold himself into the cockpit of the Huey was beyond me. Slim and lanky, with coal black hair, his face was scarred and pitted. They were not acne scars, they were from wounds. The eyes were black, piercing, and alert.

"What's this all about?" His gaze flitted erratically around the ramp as though he was tracking an enemy fighter plane. "My boss called all upset, said you were bitching because I landed on Monhegan and threatened to go to the Feds."

We told him about the murders, the strong-arm tactics against the old couple, and the Mafia connection.

"Wow..." He sat down slowly in a cushioned recliner in the lobby. "Both those guys killed? One of'em was an asshole, probably no great loss. The other one was a nice-seeming sort."

Would not be hard to figure out which one was the asshole, I thought.

"Look," the pilot continued. "I plead guilty to landing on Monhegan. I had nothing to do with any murders or pushing two old people around. I didn't even get out of the helicopter while we were on Monhegan."

"Who hired you?"

"I don't know, truthfully. Charlie said the charter came out of Chicago. He said to tell you a company called Vittoria Enterprises wired the money for the two-day charter, in advance. The guy I dealt with was Tony Bilotti."

"The asshole."

"Yeah," the pilot grunted. "You knew him?"

"Just a lucky guess."

"You spent the night in the area," Chamberlain said. "Where?"

"A motel in Thomaston. Bilotti had a van. He directed me to land in a field next to where it was parked. We'd unload the stuff into it and make another run. Made two trips the first day, and one the next."

"What else can you tell us?" I prodded.

"Not much. I had my own room at the motel. They disappeared right after we got there. Did not even invite me to eat with them. The next day, after the run, I flew over to Rockland, refueled, and headed to Portland."

"Think hard, man. Did they say anything, mention any names, talk about money?"

"I'd really like to help, but there's nothing else to tell. Are you guys gonna report the Monhegan thing to the Feds?"

"We told you from the start what we're interested in. Let the FAA do their own police work. It won't come from us."

"Just stay off Monhegan," Chamberlain added.

"No problem."

We shook hands. He gathered up his passenger and walked out on the ramp towards the Huey.

Halfway to the helicopter the pilot suddenly turned around and came back. "There was one thing. I don't know if it means a lot, but the other guy, the nice one, he kept saying something about his sister looking at the cargo. It stuck with me because I never saw a woman."

"His sister?"

"Yeah. He kept saying his sister was going to look at the cargo. The asshole would just nod, not seeming to pay any attention to the fact."

"Okay, thanks." I waved good-bye. "Have a safe flight."

"Wonder what that means?" Chamberlain asked.

"Sandy said Nat was supposed to meet her at the gallery the Monday after he bought the Kent collection, if he bought it. Maybe the deal was a lot better than he thought, and he wanted her to see it. Then he and Bilotti got whacked before he could get in touch with her."

"Could be," Chamberlain said, watching the blades start to turn on the Huey.

"We find the art work, we find the killer. Let's check out some truck rental agencies. Maybe we can find out something on this van. Then we need to call Gino Anastasio."

"Right," Chamberlain shouted, holding his ears against the whine of the turbine engine on the helicopter, leading the way out to the car.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Leaving the airport, we drove to Thomaston. Our first stop was the motel where the helicopter pilot said they had spent the night.

"Yes," the desk clerk said, looking at the old receipts. "There were two rooms paid for with cash by a Mr. Tony Bilotti."

We had finally found where Nat Rinaldi stayed.

"No," the clerk said. "There was nothing left in the rooms. It is the slow season. We haven't rented them since. You're welcome to look, although they've been cleaned."

We looked. There was nothing. Bilotti must have had a reason for putting Nat Rinaldi up here in Thomaston. He had stayed at the Navigator Inn. It could have been a mere unfamiliarity with the region. Rockland and Thomaston are only five miles apart. Thomaston is actually closer to Port Clyde than Rockland. It was something to keep in mind.

Chamberlain called Sergeant Bowers and had him start checking with rental agencies on the van. Stopping by the Avis office in Thomaston produced nothing. They had not rented a van in over a month. We headed back to Rockland to call Mr. Gino Anastasio.

Sergeant Bowers stopped us as we walked into the police department. The van, rented by Bilotti, came from the local Budget Truck Rental. He had paid cash. The van was left for pickup at the airport.

"What airport?" I asked.

"Here in Rockland, the Knox Country Airport."

"They loaded the art collection aboard an aircraft and flew it out of here. We're getting close to Mr. Anastasio." Looking at Chamberlain, I said, "We'd better get back out to the airport, find out which airplane picked up Mr. Kent's life work. If it's a Gulfstream G-IV, we've got him cold."

Junior was working the line at the airport. "No, sir," he said assuredly. "The only time the G-IV landed here was the day Mr. Leicester went aboard."

This was disappointing. "What about the other fixed-base operation? Could they have landed and parked over there without you knowing it? Is that possible?"

"Not likely." Junior looked across the field toward the other operation and shook his head. "I work everyday from open up to closing. It's the

slow time of year. We have little traffic except for a few locals. Over there, they close before we do, and don't sell jet fuel."

"There was a rental van left here at the airport on the night of the 16th. Do you remember it?" I pointed toward the parking lot. "Some people off-loaded cargo onto an aircraft."

"Not while we were open for business. We usually close at midnight." Junior scratched his head. "They could have landed after we locked up. You could ask the night watchman, or one of our flight instructors. They sometimes fly late, conducting night lessons with students."

"Can you check the aircraft rental logs and find out who may have been flying on that night?" I raised my voice over the noise of a small twin-engine plane that taxied up to the front door before shutting down the engines.

"Yes, I can do that." Junior looked out at the airplane and frowned. "If the instructor was giving dual in the pilot's personal aircraft, we wouldn't have a record of it. He would be paid by the aircraft owner, not by us."

"What time does the tower close?" I asked, hoping they would have kept a record of arriving and departing aircraft, maybe even an audiotape.

"Same time we do. If it was after hours, you won't get any help there. Maybe you could check with Center?"

It was a good idea. Aircraft arriving in the area would be handled by the local control center. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare getting information from them, though.

"Thanks, Junior. That's a good idea. In the meantime, give us a list of the local flight instructors and the name of the night watchman."

"I know the watchman," Chamberlain spoke up. "He's a retired city policeman."

Junior said they only had two flight instructors working out of the fixed-base operation. There were also two who worked across the field. He gave us all four names.

Chamberlain and I drove to the Budget Rental Office and talked with the manager.

"Yes," he said, filling out a rental contract for a customer. "Someone called and left a message on our answering machine. They said the van was going to be left in the parking lot at the airport. That isn't allowed, leaving the van like that, but I didn't have a choice. I guess we were lucky there was no damage."

We thanked the man, and drove back to the police station.

Back at Chamberlain's office, I phoned Sandy. When she answered, I said, "Did your brother contact you after he arrived in Maine?"

There was a short pause. "No, I was over in Gulfport with Guy Robbins making a bid on the estate sale of the Moran art collection."

"You're absolutely sure Nat did not call you from up here?"

"He didn't talk with me. The Answering Service said nothing about him calling and leaving a message." She paused again. "From the time we got the call at the restaurant about the body everything became chaotic. The Service could have overlooked it. Why do you ask?"

Writing 'no call' in big letters on a pad, I held it up for Chamberlain to see. He nodded.

"The helicopter pilot overheard Nat saying his sister was to look over the Kent artwork. He assumed it was to be that day by the way your brother said it."

"Well, obviously he was wrong, Jay. I would certainly have gone over each piece with a fine-tooth comb before we decided to put it on the market. That would have been several days after the collection arrived here at the Gallery, though."

"Okay. We are merely trying to tie up some loose ends before we contact Anastasio again. Would you check with your Service for me, just to be certain Nat didn't call while you were in Gulfport?"

"Sure. I'll do it right now. You want me to call you back?"

"No, it's not necessary. I'll be in touch with you tomorrow. You can tell me then."

"Fine. I'll wait until I hear from you." We hung up.

Shrugging my shoulders at Chamberlain, I said, "Her brother never called her from here."

"I see." He made a notation in a file folder that I had not seen before.

Looking at my watch, I said, "It's four o'clock. Why don't I take the flight instructors? You talk with the night watchman. If you will take me back to the Navigator, I'll pick up my car. We can meet for breakfast in the morning. I'd like to wait until we check out this movement of the art collection before we contact Anastasio."

"Agreed." Chamberlain stood up. "What about fingerprinting the van. Think it's worth a shot?"

Waving the thought away, I said, "After it was picked up at the airport, washed, wiped out, and readied for another customer? What would

we learn if by some miracle a print showed up? We know Bilotti, Rinaldi, and the helicopter pilot were in the van."

"You're right." He threw his pen on top of the file folder. "It was only a thought."

* * *

It was close to five o'clock when I arrived at the Knox County Airport. Deciding to stop by the smaller fixed-base operation first, I drove across the field to the other side from where Junior, the lineman, worked.

The young lady behind the desk said both of their instructors were in the back, giving ground school. If I would have a seat, she'd see if they could take a break.

My eyes wandered around the lobby. Aviation decor dominated the room. Most of it was as familiar to me as the back of my hand.

A short while later, two young men came out from the rear of the building. Both wore leather flight jackets, sunglass cases strapped to their belts, and big wristwatches. They carried styrofoam cups of coffee.

Introducing myself, we shook hands and I asked if either had been teaching on the nights in question. One said he had not flown at night in over three weeks. The other went to retrieve his personal logbook. "No," he said, running his finger down a column of entries. "I was not flying on any of those nights."

Neither of the instructors had noticed a van loading cargo on board an aircraft at the operation across the way. Thanking them both, I said good-bye and drove across the field to where Junior worked.

Inside the office, I saw the flight instructor who I had met that night with Chamberlain. His name was Carl.

He recognized me. "Oh, Mr. Leicester. Junior said you were asking about the van unloading some cargo into an airplane. Yeah, I saw them."

"You did? Was it the G-IV?"

"No, it wasn't a G-IV. It was one of those Hansa Jets. The one with the wings on backward."

So disappointed at this information, I had trouble understanding what he was talking about. "Wings on backward?"

"Yes, sir, the German made jet. You know, the wings slant forward instead of to the rear, like the wings of most jet aircraft." Carl spread his arms and angled them forward, emulating the sweep of an aircraft's wings.

Then I remembered. The Hansa Jet, sure, a roomy, German built, corporate aircraft with the wings swept forward. It did not sell well in the United States for many reasons, the least being its short range.

"When was it here, Carl? Tell me everything you can remember about seeing it. Also, I need to know about the people in the van."

"It was the night of the sixteenth. I was giving dual in a twin Comanche. We landed around ten p.m. The Hansa Jet was sitting on the ramp with the right engine running. The van was already pulling away."

"You didn't see anyone in the van?"

"No, I only saw it pulling away from the Hansa Jet. We shut our engines down and walked over to the office. I remember the copilot of the jet talking on the payphone outside the building, trying to get a clearance. The noise of the engine was drowning out her ability to hear."

"Her? It was a female copilot?"

"Yes. I unlocked the door and invited her inside to use the phone away from the whine of the engine. She came in, got her clearance, and left."

"Did you hear the clearance, where they were headed? Or maybe an 'N' number?"

"We were going over a post-flight, I didn't pay attention. Sorry."

"What did she look like? Can you describe her?"

"Around twenty-five, short, brown hair, slim figure. That's all I remember."

"Thanks, Carl. If you remember anything else, please give me or Detective Chamberlain a call."

"Will do, Mr. Leicester. You might want to check with old Johnson, the night watchman. He let the van in through the gate to get out on the ramp."

"Good idea. Detective Chamberlain is talking to him. Thanks again, Carl."

Heading back toward Rockland, I thought of ways to find out where the Hansa Jet originated and where it took the Kent collection. Most important of all, though, I wanted to know who hired the aircraft.

There was no moon and it was dark when I turned onto Highway One, heading for town. Suddenly, up ahead to my right, I saw something I did not know still existed, an outdoor theater, or drive-in movie. Pulling over to the side of the road, I watched two men beating each other on the tall, lighted screen that rose against the night sky like a giant dream of vi-

olence. After a few minutes, I drove on, feeling an ominous chill, like an omen of bad things to come.

Henry was standing behind the registration desk with a serious expression on his usually happy face. "Lose your best friend, Henry?" I asked, walking up and leaning on the counter.

"No, not really. There is a message for you." He looked down at some paperwork, obviously not in the mood for conversation.

"Okay. How about waking me up at seven in the morning?"

"Sure, no problem." He reached under the counter and pulled out an envelope. "It's from Mabel."

"It must be awful bad news for you to be so somber."

"It is." He shuffled papers on the desk.

"I'll read it up in the room. Good night, Henry."

"Seven a.m.," he said, referring to the wake up call.

Checking my room carefully, I found no one had bothered anything. Anastasio having my magnum had tightened me up.

Pouring two fingers from a bottle of Martel cognac I'd bought earlier, I cut the end off one of my Ernesto P. Carrillos, fifty-four ring, seven inch, long filler cigars, all the while eyeing the envelope. Picking it up, I walked out onto the balcony.

Lighting the cigar, I looked out across the bay. A full moon had risen and hung in the sky above the sea, like a flat, round spotlight without rays, a haze of light floating in space, not reaching the surface, and the illumination seemed to come from the white brightness of the cold water.

Putting off opening the envelope was not going to change the contents. Ripping open the flap, the two page letter started out: Dear Jay, We probably won't see each other again...

Her mother had passed away in Saint John's, Newfoundland. She would be away for at least two weeks and knew that I would be gone when she returned. She wanted to say good-bye.

Reading the letter over again, I gazed out into the night. Had she run with the half million? Was Bowers soon to follow? Was that why he suddenly became friendly? He was the first on the scene of Bilotti's murder. Was the money there? Did he take it hoping to get to Mabel with the cash? If this was true, who killed Bilotti and Rinaldi? Was it Mabel and Bowers?

Wispy clouds were drifting like smoke across the moon. In the diffused glow I thought I could distinguish Nat Rinaldi and Tony Bilotti lying on stainless steel tables amid a thousand foul smells, water flowing

under and around them down longitudinal channels, falling into a drain at the base of the table with an obscene sucking noise.

Life has a way of kicking you in the gut when you least need it. Leaving the cigar in the ashtray to die a natural death, I went to bed.

* * *

I was waiting in Chamberlain's office when he arrived.

"My, aren't we the early bird." He grinned and threw a foot thick pile of folders on his desk.

"Didn't sleep so good last night. How's Kathleen feeling?"

"Better than she's felt since you were out at the house. Heard Mabel had to leave town. Her mother died up in Newfoundland."

"Yes, she left me a good-bye note," I said, no longer surprised at the speed of the small town grapevine. "It would have been nice to see her before she left."

Chamberlain nodded, said nothing.

"Listen, J.L., hear me out before you say anything. We need to look onto Bowers and Mabel. Now I'm not saying they're involved, but look at the facts. Bowers was first at the crime scene; he had opportunity. Mabel has asked a lot of questions about the case. More than normal. She got close to me and pumped me for information. Then there's the Bowers and Mabel connection. It begins to add up, J.L. Maybe Bowers didn't whack Rinaldi and Bilotti, but he could have taken the money that Rinaldi was carrying from the murder scene and given it to Mabel. Now she's gone to Newfoundland, or God knows where."

"If one of my cops..." Chamberlain threw his head back and stared at the ceiling. "Her Mama better be dead as a hammer!"

"All I'm saying is check it out."

"Any luck with the flight instructors?" He asked, changing the subject and rubbing the back of his neck.

"Carl, the flight instructor you introduced me to the other night, saw the airplane and the van. What about the night watchman?"

"He's old, Jay. His eyesight's bad. His hearing is worse. He remembers the airplane landing and letting the van out on the ramp, but not much else. He couldn't even remember the date."

"What about the people in the van?"

"He said the driver was alone and didn't get out until the van was on the ramp parked next to the airplane. He remembered the driver wear-

ing a baseball cap, but can't tell us anything else. Did Carl get a look at anyone from the van?"

"No. The van was pulling away from the aircraft as he was taxiing in from a night lesson with a student. He never saw the occupants of the van. He did see the jet which picked up the Kent collection, and spoke with the copilot."

"Good." Chamberlain stood up and smiled.

"We can find out where it went, and who chartered it. It's not going to be easy. Carl didn't get an 'N' number from the aircraft." Chamberlain looked at me with a question mark on his face. "The 'N' number is a group of identifying marks on the tail. The aircraft was a Hansa Jet. There are probably no more than half a dozen still operating in the United States. It'll take some time, but I think we'll be able to run it down."

"How much time?"

"Two days, three at the most. I may need some help with bureaucratic red tape, though."

"You let me know if any agency balks at giving you full cooperation." There was fire blazing in the back of his eyes. "I'll straighten it out."

"We know Anastasio shipped the art collection out from Knox County airport. Let's set up another meet with him, now. I can work on finding the charter in the meantime."

"Good idea." Chamberlain pushed aside the thick stack of folders. "I'll set up the phones."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

While Chamberlain set up the equipment to record the conversation with Anastasio, I thought about what needed to be said. He had lied, which certainly did not surprise us, about paying a fair price for the Kent collection. Although in his mind he might believe it due compensation by canceling Ben and Betty Barnes' grandson's debt. We wanted, somehow, for him to pay for sending Bilotti to Monhegan Island to intimidate the old couple.

The more I thought of what had been done to the Barnes' the madder I became. By the time Chamberlain was ready, I had to force myself to calm down. Nothing would be accomplished by being angry, it could only impede the investigation. No one was going to intimidate Anastasio.

"Dial him up," J.L. said. "Everything's ready."

Taking a deep breath, I punched up Anastasio's private number in Chicago.

"Yeah?" A familiar voice said.

"Jay Leicester for Gino Anastasio." It was hard to keep my voice calm.

There was a pause on the line. Clicking noises echoed in the background. Finally the bored voice asked me to hold for a moment. It gave me time to take another few deep breaths. Two minutes went by.

"Do you have news for me?" The whine of Anastasio's voice drilled through the receiver, reminding me of his cadaver-like facial movements. "Have you found my money and my art collection?"

Now both the money and the Kent collection belonged to him. What audacity.

"We need to have another meeting, Mr. Anastasio. You've kept some things from us. We are very angry about the way you had Mr. and Mrs. Barnes treated. I thought we understood each other."

"I know nothing about mistreating the Barnes'." He paused for a minute. I clinched a fist so tight the knuckles turned white. "Have you recovered the art collection?"

"You know very well the Kent collection was flown out of Rockland aboard a Hanza Jet on the night of the sixteenth." Pausing, I swallowed hard. "We believe you whacked your man Bilotti and Nat Rinaldi. What you did with the money, we don't have any idea, but I'd bet my last

nickel you know exactly where the Kent collection is at this very moment."

"You may be right, I may very well know exactly the whereabouts of the art collection. It is necessary we meet again. The day after tomorrow at the airport in Augusta, Maine. Ten a.m."

Chamberlain started shaking his head and pointing at the floor.

"How about the Rockland Airport, Mr. Anastasio?" I said, taking the cue from J.L. "It would be much better for us."

"Don't be late, private eye." He hung up. I threw the telephone receiver at its cradle.

"Why Augusta?" Chamberlain asked out loud, more to himself than me.

Shrugging my shoulders at the question, I said, "Anastasio's right about one thing, J.L., we do not want to be late for this meeting."

"Don't worry," Chamberlain said with a firmness I appreciated. "We won't be late."

Exiting the room where the sophisticated electronic equipment was located, we went back to Chamberlain's office.

"You want some coffee?" Chamberlain asked as we sat down.

"No thanks."

"Detective Chamberlain," Sergeant Bowers said over the intercom. "There's a call for you, line three. It's a business burglary."

Chamberlain punched the blinking button on the telephone. Listening to the one-sided conversation, I watched him scribble information on a note pad. "I'll be there in ten minutes," he finally said into the receiver. Looking up at me. "Duty calls. Dope addicts hit one of our local pharmacies. Want to come along and watch a pro work?"

"If you don't mind, I'll pass. I need to get in touch with Guy Robbins. We've been missing each other for a week. He's the attorney friend down in Gulfport who recommended me for this case. Sandy was with him when she got your call about the body."

"Yes." Chamberlain put on his coat and straightened his tie. "I spoke with him on the phone the night Sandy returned my call. He seemed like a pleasant sort."

"He's one of the best, and a close personal friend. We grew up together. He throws a lot of work my way."

"I shouldn't be over a couple of hours," Chamberlain said as we walked out.

Stopping out front on the sidewalk and looking around at the several police cars parked in the tiny lot, I said, "Let's meet back here, say around three o'clock? We can go over this whole thing. Plan some tough questions to ask Anastasio."

"Fine. I'll meet you then." Chamberlain headed for his car, a stern expression on his face. He was already pursuing pharmacy burglars.

Back at the Navigator Inn, Henry invited me for coffee in the restaurant. His sister was filling in for Mabel until she returned. She had reddish-brown curls, wide-set eyes, and a few freckles on the bridge of an upturned nose. A carbon copy of Henry. One would call her face attractive if one ever noticed it, but there was no particular reason to. She had a look of alertness, of eager interest, a look that expected the world to contain an exciting secret behind every corner.

"So how's your murder investigation going?" asked Henry.

"It could be better. We think we've figured out who did it. Proving it is another matter. We're making progress, though."

"The Mafia guy, right?" Henry said with a knowing look, blowing on the hot coffee and raising his thick eyebrows at me. "The Mafia hit'em both, stole the money and the art collection." He sat back in his chair, a satisfied grin on his face.

Sipping the coffee and looking at Henry's sister, I did not respond. She stared back, a smile at the corner of her tight, thin-lipped mouth.

"I read a lot of mystery books. Always figure out who did the crime by the time I'm halfway through."

"How did you know about the Mafia guy, Henry?"

He blushed and rubbed a callused hand behind his head. "Mabel or Sergeant Bowers told me, I think. Oh, the lights blinking on the phone at the desk. Excuse me."

Right, I thought, Mabel and Bowers, and they told Henry.

Thanking Henry's sister and leaving a five-dollar bill on the table, I went up to my room to call Guy Robbins. His secretary put me right through to him.

"Jay, I'm glad we finally caught up with each other. How's the investigation going? Any breakthroughs?"

"We may be getting close. There are two locals we suspect may be involved with stealing a half a million in cash from the crime scene. That's how much money Sandy's brother brought to buy the art collection. One of them is a Police Sergeant. There could even be a boat captain and his wife involved. As to who did the killings...we're still working on it."

"What about the local detective? Is he involved?"

"Not a chance. Would bet my life on it."

"You be absolutely sure, Jay. By the way, Sandy was over in Gulfport day before yesterday. She bought the Moran collection. We talked about her brother. I inquired as to who was handling his legal affairs."

"Who is handling them?"

"I am. Sandy asked me represent both of them when we finalized the Moran deal."

Picking up a pad beside the phone, I propped my feet in a chair, and made some notes. "Isn't that a little strange? One would think they'd have an attorney on retainer. Especially if they are as wealthy as you say."

"I don't know, it surprised me, too. Sandy said something about not trusting Nat's lawyer. I didn't press her."

"Well, good luck with your new client."

"I've got to go, Jay. Keep me informed. I have a vested interest now. Also, keep in mind that the smoke ascends as lightly from the cottage hearth as from the haughty palace." He hung up.

Sitting on the side of the bed, holding the receiver, I did not truly know why Guy had wanted to talk with me. He usually was not given to inane conversation. What did he mean by that rising smoke expression? Did Guy know something that he was not telling me?

The phone started making a beeping noise. Replacing it in its cradle, I stood up and walked out on the balcony. The soft murmur cars made passing along the highway created a humming noise, remote yet intimate, like the rushing of blood through my own veins. That quote about the smoke rising was familiar, but from where? What could Guy have meant by it?

Sitting down in the chair, I glanced over at the next balcony, remembering Sandy curled up, almost invisible, in the corner. No one was there.

Watching two sea gulls fight for position on top of a piling at the ferry dock, I mentally listed the people who could possibly be involved with these two murders. J.L. Chamberlain was not on my list. Barstein and his wife, Annie, Sergeant Bowers and Mabel, they could, together or separately, have stolen the money. The ferry captain and his wife were certainly on the scene. Sergeant Bowers was the first officer to arrive. Mabel had an inordinate interest in the developments of the case. So did Henry. There was the woman who supposedly discovered Bilotti's body, what was her name...Wilma? J.L. checked her out and found nothing. Then there's

Anastasio and his connection. Though, as J.L. pointed out, why draw the heat for so little gain? There's also my client. If she were involved, why hire an investigator?

Could this case be so simple as a local mugger who stumbled into something bigger than he could have imagined? Is the Kent art collection sitting somewhere never to be discovered again? I went back inside.

* * *

Down in the motel restaurant, I had lunch with Henry and his sister. We were the only ones there. This time Henry did not want to play sleuth. He wanted to know about the South. It seems that the man had never been out of the state of Maine. Explaining that our progress into the twenty-first century is in fact edging us forward toward becoming an industrialized section of the nation, I said not everyone lives on a farm, plows a mule, and grows cotton. Though it surprised him when I said that was exactly where I longed to be. Henry's image of the South remained an enigma to him. Leaving the two of them to ponder the situation, I left to meet with Chamberlain.

Sergeant Bowers flagged me down as I passed his desk. He asked if I had heard from Mabel. I said that I had not, and wondered to myself if he had."

"Detective Chamberlain's in the back filling out the report on the Pigott Pharmacy burglary." Bowers pointed toward J.L.'s office. "He's expecting you. You know the way."

"Hello, J.L. They leave any clues?" Plopping down in one of the spartan chairs, I propped my feet up on Chamberlain's desk.

He looked up at me and didn't smile. "They went through the roof." He held up a hand-operated auger. A maul and a handsaw lay on the desk. "First time I've seen this modus operandi. They usually break out a window, or jimmy a door. But through the roof.."

"So what did they get?"

"Not much. A few Empirin compound #3 tablets, a hundred Seconals. They missed the good stuff, thank goodness."

"You able to lift any prints off these?" I pointed at the tools.

"They're clean except for a few smudges. We found a red bandanna, but not much else."

"Alright." Taking my feet off Chamberlain's desk and changing position in the chair, I said, "We've got the rest of the afternoon and all of

tomorrow to figure out how to confront the 'Chairman of the Board.' Any ideas?"

Chamberlain felt the tip of the wood auger with his thumb, and laid it back on the table. "We know he's not going to let me aboard the airplane. You're going to have to go it alone, again."

"Don't mind being alone with the man. Nothing's going to happen to me. We need to confront him with good, clean, hard facts. See how he reacts. Let's go prepared."

Chamberlain rose from his chair and took two steps to the window, his leather shoes squeaking on the concrete floor. Turning, he looked at me, scratched his chin, and pondered the situation, but said nothing.

"I agree with what you said earlier. It doesn't make sense for him to draw all this heat and risk the amount of exposure that could result over an investigation for so small a problem. He certainly would not want the police digging into why one of his moles was executed."

"Who can figure the Mafia mind?" Chamberlain gathered up the burglary tools and put them in a box on his desk. "Sometimes they do the stupidest things for a warped sense of honor. They will destroy everything they've built for the Mafia code of ethics."

"He's going to have to explain why he felt it necessary to destroy an old couple, and where he took the Kent art collection." Standing up, I paced the small room. A hawk flew in erratic patterns beyond the office window.

Chamberlain reached in the box and picked up the auger. He looked at it, turned it over in his hand, letting me continue.

"I want to confront Anastasio for what he did to Ben and Betty Barnes. He needs to know we're turning up the heat. J.L. Chamberlain and Jay Leicester are not going away. We're like two old pit bulls, once we get what teeth we have left into him, the only way we let go is when we're dead. Or he is."

Chamberlain lay the auger on the desk, sat down, leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head, and smiled. The hawk dove toward the ground outside the window.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Leaving Chamberlain with his pharmacy burglary, I drove back to the Navigator Inn, taking copies of the files on both murders with me. We agreed for tomorrow to both spend the day with our respective endeavors. Chamberlain was to catch up on police work that he had been neglecting for the last two weeks. I would review all the information collected during our investigation and work on the meeting with Gino Anastasio day after tomorrow in Augusta, Maine.

It was almost dark when I left the police station. The streets glistened with early dew, leaving dark blotches on the walls of buildings. The town looked bathed in a cold sweat and the air was heavy with a sea smell of low tide, disquieting like premature old age. Stopping two blocks from the Navigator, I picked up a pizza and some wine.

Going straight up to my room, I put the wine and pizza on the table and phoned down to Henry. There were no messages for me. After telling him I didn't want a wake up call for in the morning, we said good night, and hung up.

The wine, a 1988 Brolio Chianti Classico, was a little old, but went well with the pizza. After finishing the entire bottle, I contemplated a cigar and cognac. Deciding against them, I went to bed pleasantly drunk.

Waking sometime later with a headache and a dry mouth, I had no idea what time it was. The alarm clock next to the bed glowed a bright red six a.m. Not able to go back to sleep, I decided to watch the sunrise.

It was cold on the balcony. The dew made everything damp and wet. Going back inside, I put on my old leather flight jacket. The sun rose from the sea, slowly melting the world as it inched its way upward. It soon cleared the horizon causing the morning to break fresh as new paint. Getting up to see this had been worth it.

After a shower and a shave, I went down for coffee with Henry and his sister. My only plans for today were to study the files and to work on the meeting with Anastasio.

Henry's sister had made blue berry pancakes. I could not resist. During my third cup of coffee a fly lit on an empty breakfast dish. Henry shooed it away. Watching as it flew; I followed the flight path until it landed upside down on the ceiling, causing me to remember an old friend who owns an aviation management company in Dallas, Texas. He and I used to argue whether a fly did a loop maneuver or a half roll to land up-

side down on a ceiling. We never settled the debate, but it suddenly dawned on me that his computer system would have data on how many Hansa Jets were still operating in the United States, and who their owners were.

Excusing myself, I went to make a telephone call.

* * *

"Ashley, you old reprobate. How are you?"

"Leicester, is that you? Well I'll be. Long time no see, son. How you been?"

"Good, John. It's a pleasure to hear that raspy old voice again. Listen, I need some information."

"Information? I was hoping you were looking for a steady flying job. Got one open right now, flying left seat on a Saberliner. Start you out at eighty thousand, plus benefits. Guarantee you'll never have to fly at night, on weekends, or when it's raining."

Ashley was probably serious about the flying job, but I wasn't interested. "No thanks, John. Unless something drastic happens, I'm through with that life."

"Too bad. Well, if you ever change your mind..." he said, trailing off. "How can I help you?"

"I'm trying to run down a charter, or a private flight, which landed in Rockland, Maine, on the night of the sixteenth of this month. Don't have an 'N' number, but it was a Hansa Jet. The only other information I have is it was flying with a female copilot."

"Well, son, that don't mean anything. There are about as many ladies flying airplanes today as men. I hear the Government's going to let them start flying combat. They'll do a good job, too. I work over a dozen in my charter department. They are a lot more reliable, and not nearly as rough on my airplanes, as some of these old fighter jocks."

"The Hansa Jet, John." I was trying to slow him down. Once he started on a subject, he would talk for two days. "Can you be of any help with locating it?"

"If the thing flies, I know where it's based, who owns it, and how many hours left until the engines need an overhaul." He laughed a deep resounding laugh. "Give me a couple of hours. I'll see what I can come up with and call you back."

Giving Ashley my phone number at the motel, I said good-bye. Sitting down at the small table, I picked up the file and started reading at the front.

* * *

The file was eclectic, but well organized. I read it carefully. It began with Tony Bilotti's death and continued through the conversation we'd had with Anastasio yesterday morning. This was an excellent and up-to-date piece of work.

The autopsy report on Bilotti showed nothing other than what had truly happened; someone stuck a .9mm pistol behind his right ear and pulled the trigger. Too bad. I hoped he enjoyed his last day, but I felt no sympathy. A son of a bitch alive is a son of a bitch dead.

Nat Rinaldi's autopsy report read the same as Bilotti's, except he had been in the water for a couple of days. Seeing his face after the crabs had been at it was still fresh in my memory. The mouth was a dull smear of red, like a poorly painted clown's face.

I felt sorry for Nat. His time came early, but death is implicit in birth. The poor innocent art dealer played on the fringe and ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The rest of the file was a concise record of all the information we'd collected, people we'd interviewed, places we'd been. At the end was a one page summary, written in Chamberlain's own style of prose. The next scheduled meeting with Gino Anastasio was the last thing entered in the file. There was a big question mark at the end.

Throwing the file on the table, I leaned back in the chair, and stared out at Penobscot bay. Suddenly a feeling of exigency swept over me, but I felt chained.

The phone rang.

"Leicester," the booming voice said. "Get a pen, boy. I've got a listing of six of these German jets. You ready to copy?"

"Go ahead, John." I reached for a writing pad and pen next to the phone.

"Only one is flying as a charter aircraft. The rest are in Detroit hauling auto parts for the car makers."

"Outstanding. Who runs the one on charter?"

"Aeroair, Inc. They're based in Houston, operate out of Hobby, and owned by an old codger named Charlie Garino. He's a straight shooter. When you call, tell him you're a friend of mine."

"What'll that get me?"

Ashley laughed. "Why you need this information, Jay? I know old Charlie hasn't done anything wrong."

"Keep this under your hat, John. The Hansa Jet hauled a cargo of stolen artwork. If Garino's clean, he might not have known what was on board. I need to find out where the airplane landed."

"You can bet your boots on Garino, son. Charlie Garino would have nothing to do with anything illegal." There was a serious inflection in his voice. "I've known him for thirty years. I'll vouch for him."

"Thanks. Appreciate your help. I owe you one."

"Any time, Jay. Stay in touch."

"Good-bye." Untwisting the tangled cord, I hung up the receiver.

The room seemed stuffy. Walking over, I opened the glass doors to the balcony. Fresh air flowed into the room, followed by the sounds of the waterfront and auto traffic on the street.

Back inside, directory assistance gave me the number for Aeroair in Houston, Texas. I punched in the eleven digits.

"Mr. Garino won't be back until tomorrow," the woman who answered the phone said. "May I take a message, or could someone else help you?"

"No, Ma'am. Will you tell Mr. Garino that I'm a friend of John Ashley? I'll get in touch with him tomorrow."

"I'll be glad to, Mr. Leicester. Thank you for calling Aeroair."

"Oh, one more thing. Do you employ female pilots?"

"Yes, we do," the lady said. "We have six young women flying with us. Why do you ask?"

"It's not important. I'll talk with Mr. Garino tomorrow." Hanging up the phone, I scratched my chin.

By the time I finished studying the file and making a mental list of questions to confront Anastasio with, the sun had set, leaving long wisps of gray clouds like streaks of ashes pale against the evening sky.

The world seemed to pause between day and night. Still feeling anxious, I wanted to confront Anastasio now, not tomorrow.

* * *

The dream was so real. Gusty winds blew through the marina slamming the hulls of boats against fenders. Loose halyards and shrouds clanked against masts. Flags flapped and snapped. In the narrow bunk of Picaroon my hands found the warmth of her, followed the familiar hills and valleys of smooth skin. Dim, reflected light played around the cabin, glinting off her narrowed eyes. We made no pretense of playing games of faked restraint, quickly passing the boundaries of no return and came in a mounting passion which seemed to create a closeness nothing can provide. The wind made breathing sounds through the mast of the boat, then subsided, as we did. The slow tilting and creaking of the hull seeming to echo, in a slower pace, our lovemaking just ended. Mabel lay beside me breathing slowly and easily. I began to sweat and gasp for breath. A hand covered by face, another closed tightly around my neck.

The phone ended the dream and brought me back to reality. Henry was saying something about J.L. waiting for me in the lobby. "What time is it?" I had forgotten to leave a wake up call.

"Eight o'clock," he said, laughing.

"God, I overslept. Tell Chamberlain to have a cup of coffee with your sister. Give me twenty minutes."

Of all the times to oversleep, I thought. The day we are to meet with Anastasio.

Chamberlain, true to his character, didn't comment about me being late. "Have a cup of coffee," he said. "There's plenty of time to reach the airport in Augusta."

The day was a mirror image of yesterday with the sky clear and blue. We let the windows down in the car as we drove slowly through the town even though a chill was still in the air. Wind circulating in the car was bracing. I could smell wood smoke from someone's fireplace or cook stove.

Once outside of Rockland, it turned cold. We rolled the windows back up. The sun shining on the obsidian rock of the mountains gave off an amethystine glow. Trees gleamed green and bright. We rounded a curve and were presented with the bare face of a hill eroded by wind and rain and snow. Etched by time, it reminded me of flying over the Rocky Mountains. That anxious feeling suddenly swept around me again.

Chamberlain glanced over at me. "You alright, Jay? You're pale as a sheet."

"Yeah, I'm fine. Still trying to wake up."

"So, lay it out for me. How exactly do you plan to approach Anastasio this time?"

Over the next twenty minutes, I explained to Chamberlain my ideas. We discussed them until we both were satisfied and in agreement. His input was both incisive and helpful. He was a good investigator and a smart man.

The drive, winding through the hills, was familiar to me. It was the same route Sandy and I had driven days earlier when taking her to catch the airplane back to New Orleans. I thought of how she looked that day, her hair tied with the bandanna, the tight, black slacks. I remembered the towel and her nakedness in the motel room that morning. I also remembered her dead brother.

Tell me about Jim Barstein, J.L.? Is he capable of doing these two murders?"

J.L. gave me another of those scholarly-like looks, thought for a few minutes. Then: "I sent him to prison when he was nineteen years old. He beat a man to death in a bar. All the witnesses testified he'd been pushed into the fight and could not avoid it. He got off with a plea to Man two. Served eighteen months of a three to five."

"Then he's capable of the violence?"

"Oh, he's capable alright. There's been some scrapes since he's been out, but nothing serious."

"Yes, scrapes..." I said absentmindedly.

Chamberlain looked at me with a quizzical expression.

Answering the question mark on his face, I said, "There's a possibility Barstein and his wife showed up early that morning at the chandlery, saw the car in the parking lot, and went to take a look. They found the body and the four hundred and fifty thousand in cash, took the money and left the body to be found by some other poor soul."

"It could have happened that way. I don't know..." His voice trailed off.

"Maybe Barstein made the hits. Why don't we sweat him? See what wrings out?"

"It's an idea." Silence. Then Chamberlain said, "Let's give it a while, see what happens."

We arrived at the airport and drove around until we found the fixed-base operation. Anastasio's G-IV was nowhere in sight.

"Sit tight, J.L. I'll go see what I can find out." Inside the office, the young lady behind the counter said that she had heard from a Gulfstream

G-IV. One had called in twenty minutes ago. They should be on the ramp in about five minutes. Thanking her, I went back outside to where Chamberlain stood beside the car.

"There he comes." Chamberlain pointed to a dot in the sky.

We watched the profile of the G-IV grow larger. It slid down the glideslope like a giant eagle to a perfect landing. Blue smoke erupted from the main gear tires. The aircraft thrust-reversers opened and the engine noise increased to a roar.

Chamberlain looked at me and smiled. I wasn't anxious anymore. The next hour was going to be an interesting one. One I would not have missed for anything in the world.

CHAPTER TWENTY

We watched the big jet taxi slowly into a parking space on the ramp. The lineman ran to the airstair door and unrolled a red carpet. It's a gesture most customer oriented fixed-base operations make today.

The crew took their time shutting the engines down. Finally the door opened. The same young man with the three-piece suit exited the aircraft and came toward us. We watched his slow determined walk.

"Mr. Leicester, Detective Chamberlain," he said with educated politeness. "Mr. Anastasio is preparing for your visit. It will be a few minutes. If you both will follow me, you may wait aboard the aircraft."

"Both of us? Anastasio wants to see us both?"

The young man was unperturbed by my question. "Yes, sir," he said without smiling. "Mr. Anastasio wishes to see both you and Detective Chamberlain." He turned and started for the aircraft.

Chamberlain looked at me and winked. We followed the man aboard.

Inside the G-IV, the crew sat in the cockpit, still staring into oblivion. The young man indicated two seats across from each other. Chamberlain seemed more than a little impressed with the inside of the cabin.

The young man asked if we cared for anything to drink.

"Coffee would be nice."

Chamberlain nodded he would take coffee, also.

Surveying his surroundings like an excited computer operator, Chamberlain pressed a button on the small TV built into his armrest. A picture appeared asking if he would like to see the nearest television station or videotape of his own selection. He pressed the off button, looked at me, and shook his head.

The young man served our coffee, then disappeared. It was quiet in the cabin. If you listened hard enough the hum of the onboard auxiliary power unit could be faintly heard. The soft gray colors of the walls had time to slowly work us over.

Looking across to Chamberlain, I said, "Pretty nice for an airplane, don't you think?"

He was toying with a satellite-linked telephone. Putting it back in its holder, he raised up in his seat, and scanned the cabin, then stared me in the eyes. "When a wolf drapes a caribou skin over its thin, long legs and attempts to improvise a caribou's bearing and a caribou's grunt, the truth is

immediately and funnily apparent to all sensitive eyes and ears and to all discriminating noses..."

Point well taken.

As soon as we finished our coffee, the young man appeared and said Mr. Anastasio would see us now.

We followed him back to the conference room, which was partitioned off from the rest of the cabin. Anastasio was sitting in the same seat at the oval table, wearing the same blue jump suit as before. A flash of Howard Hughes with long hair and fingernails, lying naked, pumped full of codeine, and starving to death in a dark hotel room crossed my mind. At least Anastasio's surroundings were better.

His shaky, bony arm waved us into the two chairs. The high, squeaky voice ordered, "Sit down."

Anastasio was even more cadaver-like than I remembered. Under the thin, almost clear skin of the balding head, I could see the steady pulse of a blue vein.

"Detective Chamberlain, how is your wife? Cancer is a very bad thing."

J.L. looked at me, then back at Anastasio. "My wife's fine. Thank you for asking."

"What have you for me?"

Chamberlain spoke first. "We don't have anything for you. We're here to ask you some questions."

A deadly smile curled from the side of Anastasio's face, then quickly disappeared.

"Look, Mr. Anastasio," I said, sitting up on the edge of my chair. "We're here for some hard answers."

The dead eyes burned into mine. "Proceed."

"We wanted to believe you, Mr. Anastasio. You lied to me the last time we met, saying you paid a fair price for the Rockwell Kent collection, claiming it belonged to a lady who owned a summer home on Monhegan Island. The truth is, the collection was extorted from an old couple who have lived on Monhegan all their lives. They were treated with undue cruelty during the process." Pausing, I watched his reaction. He seemed almost amused at my accusations, but his eyes narrowed when I said the Barnes' had been treated cruelly. Sitting back in my seat, I crossed one leg over the other. "Their grandson owed you money. The police fished his body out of a canal in downtown Chicago. We think you decided to put the arm on the grandparents for the grandson's debt."

Chamberlain stood, walked around to the back of his chair, his leather shoes still squeaking, even on the plush carpet. "Was it necessary to treat the Barnes couple so harshly? To destroy the dignity of an old man in front of his wife? How would you feel if it was done to you?"

Anastasio held up an arm, looked at both of us. "You don't question me about how I conduct my business. A debt is a debt. It must be paid." The eyes narrowed, thin lips stretched tight across ruined teeth. "It is true, the art collection was to settle the debt of the child. That is the way it is, but no one was to treat them wrongly. If it happened, it was not by my order."

Uncrossing my legs and holding up both hands in a question, I asked, "Is that why you whacked Bilotti? You found out he'd gone against your orders and roughed up the old couple?"

"You are an idiot, Leicester." He sat further back in his seat, rubbed bony fingers through the few ugly strands of scraggly hair.

"I don't think it bothers you a hell of a lot that he's dead." J.L. sat back down, and stared intently into Anastasio's eyes.

The old man returned the stare. In a quiet, scratchy voice he said, "Detective Chamberlain, death is sometimes a punishment, sometimes a gift. To many it comes as a favor. To Mr. Bilotti...well, who knows, but I had nothing to do with it."

He wasn't used to being grilled by anybody, especially those from the police. Why he was allowing it to continue was a mystery?

In a voice that now sounded tired, Anastasio said, "I have had my people check across the country. There has been no Rockwell Kent work sold in the past two weeks. Whoever has the collection is sitting on it. When we find out who, they can tell us the rest."

"The collection could have been sent out of the country," J.L. said calmly. "Though you wouldn't know where unless it went to some Mafia controlled city." He said it bluntly, with no animosity, merely stating a truth.

"You two are starting to bore me."

Reaching over, I grabbed the edge of the table with such force that it shook. "We'll try to be more entertaining. Right now, you'll just have to endure us."

The fragile old man turned and looked out the other side of the aircraft. He spoke as if to himself. "I know a man who was hired by a Japanese gentleman to steal certain works of art from museums and to ship them directly to Japan. Expensive, but he got what he desired."

"Sounds like something you wish you'd thought of," J.L. said, with a smile that only moved one side of his mouth.

Turning loose of the desk and sitting back in my seat, I spoke quickly, "We know the art collection was flown out of Rockland on board a charter flight the night of the sixteenth. You are the only one connected to this case with the money and knowledge to have the collection moved out of the area in this way."

Anastasio's dark eyes set in deep black holes, opened wide. This interested him. "If I'd wanted to fly the art collection out of Rockland, I would have done so with this twenty-five million dollar machine we're sitting in." He waved an arm around the cabin. "I wouldn't have chartered another aircraft and involved other people."

It was a good point.

Chamberlain leaned forward and aimed a finger at Anastasio. "Maybe someone who owned a charter service had a child who owed you money. You collected on another debt."

"Give me the information on the charter flight," Anastasio said to me, ignoring Chamberlain's theory. "I'll have my people check it out."

"No thanks, Mr. Anastasio. We won't do that. We have no way to be sure you're not involved. We'll do our own checking."

"I see." Anastasio stared out the oval cabin window next to him. "You may be making a big mistake. Anything else you and Detective Chamberlain wish to discuss?"

"Call your moles off my client, they're upsetting her."

"Yes, she recently purchased an art collection from the Mississippi Gulf Coast."

"I'm aware of the transaction. The Moran collection. A private estate sale. An attorney friend of mine handled the deal."

"You surprise me with the thoroughness with which you stay abreast of some things, disappoint me with the neglect of others."

The suit appeared in the doorway. "Sir, the people for your next meeting are here."

Anastasio nodded. Raising both hands as if to lift us out of our seats, he said, "I'd better hear from you two, and soon."

"We'll call with a warrant as soon as we link you with the murders," Chamberlain said, standing and crossing both arms across his chest.

Anastasio looked at him for a long while. "Take care of your wife." With that we were dismissed.

We followed the suit down the aisle of the aircraft. Sitting in the seats we had recently occupied were two young men dressed like Mafia hoods. They looked up at us. One of them had a fat, blank face and the eyes of a killer; a man impervious to any sort of feeling. I saw in the tightened lips, in the jutting chin, in the narrowed eyes, the look of an adolescent bully. The other man had scared eyes and was sweating. His smile looked forced, and I detected other false notes in his bravado: A hand raised to his tie, a tug at shirt sleeves to make sure the right amount of cuff showed from the jacket sleeves. He was a man full of self-doubt. I wondered how much they owed the 'Chairman of the Board,' and if their fate held a .9mm slug to the back of the right ear.

We were escorted down the airstair door and left to find our own way back across the ramp. The door shut quickly behind us.

We sat in the unmarked police car and watched as the crew of the G-IV started the engines, taxied out, and took off. The big plane climbed swiftly into the blue sky.

"Seems as if the two young men who boarded after us are in for a ride." Chamberlain gripped the steering wheel with both hands.

"It could be a ride into forever."

Chamberlain started the car and drove away from the airport. "We didn't come away with much," he said as we left the city limits. "I didn't expect him to confess, but he truly gives the impression he's not involved."

"He's had a lot of practice, J.L. He does have a unique way of dominating the situation, especially in that environment. We're just going to have to work harder." We rode in silence, each deep into our own thoughts.

"Wonder what he meant when he said he admired some things you did, others he didn't?"

"What?" I asked, coming back from my thoughts. "Oh, at my thoroughness at some things, neglect of others. I don't know. I'm sure it wasn't meant as a compliment."

"Probably not."

We rode in silence, again.

The weather had warmed. The sky was now a cobalt blue. You could feel spring in the air. The ride back to Rockland was good, both coming and going. J.L. dropped me off at the Navigator Inn. He was going home to check on his wife and would call me later in the afternoon.

Henry flagged me down as I walked into the lobby. "Mr. Leicester, my sister's made a pot of chowder. Have you had lunch?"

The chowder was comparable to that at the East Wind Inn when I first ate there with Sandy. Suddenly that lunch seemed a long time ago.

While dining on the chowder Henry gave me three messages which had come in this morning. One was from Guy Robbins and one was from Sandy. The last message was from Charlie Garino of Aeroair saying he would be in his office the rest of the afternoon and would be expecting my call.

Even though I was anxious to make the phone calls, Henry's sister's chowder was too good not to have seconds.

Henry kept me company. We talked about Maine, the weather, and about his sister. He never came right out and said it, but I got the impression he wanted me to ask her out. She was a pleasant enough woman, but there was no way. Mabel was still too much of a presence.

Excusing myself, I went to my room, checking it carefully. Nothing had been bothered. Maybe Anastasio had found out all he wanted the last time his 'people' were here.

As was his custom, Guy Robbins was out of his office. His secretary was emphatic that Guy wanted to talk with me today. Telling her where I'd be, I hung up, wondering what the urgency was about.

Sandy's answering service said she was gone for the day. Leaving her a message saying we had met with Anastasio, I promised to call her tomorrow and fill her in on the details.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The mid-afternoon ferry was leaving for North Haven and Vinal-haven islands. Sea birds followed behind a fishing boat, squawking, diving, and fighting for a morsel of food to sustain life another day. Far out to sea the horizon was sharp, and well defined against a light blue sky.

The phone rang. I went inside and picked up the receiver. "Leicester, here."

"Glad I caught you," the familiar voice said. "Sorry I've been missing you, but it's been hectic down here."

"Hello, Guy." I sat down on the edge of the bed. "What's all the urgency about? Your secretary sounded as if it were important?"

"Don't know how important, but I thought you should know as soon as possible."

"Alright, let's have it."

"When Sandy bought the Moran art collection, she paid with cash."

"I understand that's not so unusual in the art world. Where does this lead, Guy?"

"I'm not sure. Remember me telling you that Sandy and her brother were worth more money than you and I would ever see. When she paid in cash and hired me to handle Nat's estate, something told me to check their current financial standing. I found out Sandy's broke."

Gripping the phone tightly, I did not say anything. My mind was reeling.

"She and Nat made some bad real estate investments. They had a huge stake in an insurance company that went belly up in New Orleans. They lost a total of eleven million in two years."

"Not the insurance company that brought down the Insurance Commissioner and the Lieutenant Governor?"

"One and the same. Hard to believe, isn't it? The crooks who ran the company took a lot of good people for their hard earned money."

"Sounds like something truly fishy went down. Maybe one crook stealing from the others."

"Could be," Guy said with a sigh. "I don't know if it means anything, but I felt you should know. Sandy could have had a half million stashed away, trying to rebuild by using that money to buy the Moran collection and reselling it for a good profit."

"Or what else?"

"I won't make any assumptions, but put these figures in the back of your head. Nat had a double indemnity life insurance policy worth three million. The half million in cash missing from his person in Maine was insured. That's right, it was insured. If someone collected on Nat's life insurance, plus the insurance on the cash, and had stolen the cash in the first place...it comes out to a pretty good sum. Something for you to think about."

"You've made my day, Guy. I do appreciate it, though. Thanks."
We hung up.

Going back out on the balcony, I sat down to think this through.

Sandy and Nat made some bad investments and lost a bundle. So what, lots of people lose fortunes. Sandy paid Guy Robbins a half million in cash for the Moran art collection. The same amount, give or take a few thousand, missing from Nat Rinaldi. Does this make Sandy guilty of two murders? A good possibility, but where's the motive? Half a million plus the insurance money and the art collection is plenty enough motive by some people's way of thinking, but to kill your own brother for money...

Leaning over the balcony, I watched a ferry slide slowly into the dock. People started lining up like ants. They were all in a row, shuffling, bumping; wanting to get home for dinner, to the wives and kids.

Familial killings have taken place since time began, and for a lot less than what was involved in this case. Sandy Rinaldi was starting to climb up the guilty ladder to the same rung as some locals, and Gino Anastasio.

Pacing around the small balcony like a bear in a cage, I tried to make some sense out of this. I sat down, stood back up. Anastasio! The S.O.B. is smart. He is setting Sandy up. He has the resources to know her finances. He has had her tailed since she left Rockland, maybe long before. Also, the main player in the failed insurance company was reputed to have strong ties with the mob. Where is that Rockwell Kent art collection?

Going back inside, I punched in Charlie Garino's number at Aero-air in Houston, Texas. Little did I realize that this phone call would be the turning point in solving two murders, locating the Rockwell Kent art collection, and revealing who had possession of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars in blood money.

"Charlie Garino, please. My name is Jay Leicester."

"Oh yes, Mr. Leicester, Mr. Garino is expecting your call. Please hold for a moment."

"Thank you." I paced around the edge of the bed as far as the telephone cord would reach.

"Hello, Mr. Leicester," a deep voice said. "John Ashley told me you'd call. How can I help you?"

Skipping the usual formalities, I went right to the point. "I need to know if one of your Hansa Jets flew a charter to Rockland, Maine, on the sixteenth of this month?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," he said in an accommodating tone. "If I can get this computer terminal to work, the information should pop right up." Keys clicked, then I heard Garino utter an oath. "Mr. Leicester, the screen went blank. I'm sorry, I'm still a stick and rudder man when it comes to computers. Hang on a minute, I'll get Betty to find the information for us."

"I understand."

It was a minute or more before Garino came back on the line. "Sorry for the delay. I have the information I think you're looking for."

"Great." I grabbed a pen. "Go ahead, I'm ready to copy."

"We did have a charter on the sixteenth in the Hansa Jet. A good one, I might add. They paid in cash. The flight plan reads: Houston Hobby direct Rockland, Maine, with a fuel stop in Richmond, Virginia. A quick turn around in Rockland, then back to Richmond, direct New Orleans Lakefront, then on in to Houston Hobby. Flight time was seven point five hours, one passenger all the way around. A twelve hour day for the crew, but legal with the FARs." (Federal Aviation Regulations regarding flight and duty time for crewmembers in a given period.)

"Did the passenger originate in Houston with the airplane?"

"Yes," Garino answered. "Remained aboard the entire round trip."

"I need to know about the passenger. Is the Captain of that flight available?"

"Let me check." He lay the phone down, and I paced the floor. He was not gone long. "The pilot who flew the trip is on his way to Anchorage, Alaska. He'll be gone for over a week."

"How about the copilot?"

"Let me see who that was...yes, Felicia. She's in the back right now, flight planning a trip to Denver. Hold on, I'll get her for you."

"Thanks, Charlie. You've been a lot of help."

"Any friend of John Ashley's is a friend of mine."

"Felicia Markham," a soft voice said.

"Hello, Miss Markham. My name is Jay Leicester. I'm a private investigator looking into two murders that occurred in Rockland, Maine, around the time you flew a charter up here. Tell me everything you can about the passenger, the cargo, or anything else you remember about the flight."

"I remember it being a long day," she said, laughing. "It was the longest trip I've ever flown, and the first time I'd been north of New York. Our passenger was a woman around my age, I'm twenty-four. She was very quiet. Come to think of it, she never did introduce herself. She paid in advance for the charter, almost fifteen thousand dollars." She paused, as if searching for something else to say.

"Describe her for me," I prodded. "Was she tall, short? What color was her hair? How much did she weigh?"

"She had blond hair. She was much taller than me, I'm five-six. I'd guess she weighed around one-ten, one-twenty. That's about all I remember."

"That's okay. Tell me about the cargo, Miss Markham. Who loaded it on board?"

"When we got to Rockland, I went to file a flight plan. Didn't pay much attention to what was going on around the aircraft. I do remember a van pulling alongside, though. There were no other people. When I got back to the aircraft, the cabin was full of stuff that looked like paintings, all sorts of frames and things. I did a quick walk around, climbed aboard, and shut the door. We took off for Richmond, Virginia, our fuel stop. The captain said that he hoped our passenger left room to sit in the cabin. The cargo was bulky, but light. He wasn't concerned with the weight."

"What happened when you got to New Orleans?"

"I saw to the refueling. The linemen helped unload the cargo. They were taking it inside the hangar. I couldn't see what they were doing with it. We were ready to depart in half an hour."

"So your passenger did fly back to Houston with you?"

"Yes, sir. We landed back at Hobby around three a.m. The passenger just disappeared. Strange."

"Yes, Miss. Markham, I tend to agree with you."

"My goodness, did she have something to do with the murders? I'd hate to think we were flying around a killer."

"She probably had nothing to do with them." Trying to allay her fears, I said, "She was probably a courier hired to transport the cargo to New Orleans."

"Thank goodness." She sounded relieved. "Mr. Leicester, I've really got to run. I hope I've been some help."

"You have. I'll tell Mr. Garino you were more than cooperative. Good-bye."

Walking back out on the balcony, I saw that dark was falling fast. The first stars of the evening were visible far out on the ocean. Glancing at the piece of paper I was holding, I saw that I had unconsciously written the flight plan Charlie Garino had given me in the shorthand of pilots: HOB > RIC > RKD > RIC > NEW > HOB. Houston Hobby direct to Richmond, Virginia; direct to Rockland, Maine; direct to Richmond, Virginia; direct New Orleans Lakefront airport; direct Houston Hobby airport.

Holding it up to the light coming from the room, I read it again and again. If Gino Anastasio was setting up Sandy Rinaldi to take the fall for the murders, the theft of the money, and the art collection, then I would be willing to bet the .9mm pistol used in the shootings would turn up in New Orleans along with the art collection. He could have hired the female mole, who looked like Sandy, to charter the aircraft and fly the Kent collection to New Orleans. It was a clever scenario, if it were true.

The thing that I didn't have was a motive. Why would someone as powerful as Anastasio go to all this trouble and expense to cover a single hit on someone as insignificant as Tony Bilotti?

It would be bothering Chamberlain, but I had to run this by him, tonight. He answered on the first ring. "J.L., am I disturbing Kathleen?"

"No. As a matter of fact, we were talking about you. She's feeling quite well. We were thinking of making some fresh fettuccine. Why don't you come out? We'll make the pasta and open something good from the cellar."

"Give me forty-five minutes. Can I bring anything?"

"No need to bring a thing. Kathleen will be happy to see you."

Taking a quick shower, I dressed in slacks, my fifth and last clean white shirt, and put on my old leather flight jacket. It's about as formal as I get. I don't know why, but I put my magnum in the right hand pocket of the jacket. Maybe I didn't want Anastasio stealing it again.

Driving slowly along the winding lane leading to Owl's Head, the car tires made crunching sounds on the loosely packed gravel. At the top of the hill the house suddenly appeared like a ship emerging from a fog bank. The two-story house surrounded by fir trees and water oaks was impressive.

Standing beside the car for a moment, I listened to the night sounds. A bird cried somewhere high up in the dark treetops. Whispering surf rolled gently on the small beach below the house. Random night wind rustled new spring leaves. Faraway, I heard the eerie pulsing of a siren. Then, as if on cue, the mournful strands of LORENA wafted out to me. Walking up on the porch, I knocked gently on the door.

"Mr. Leicester." Kathleen greeted me warmly. "What a great pleasure to see you again. Come in, come in."

"Only if you promise to call me Jay from now on."

"Alright, Jay it is." She ushered me inside.

Following her down the hall, I watched the way she walked, saw the slump of her shoulders, then the effort that lifted them, saw the slender figure that seemed to sway, then marshal all of its strength to remain erect.

At the doorway to the kitchen, she turned and said, "J.L. is elbow deep in pasta flour. He could use your help."

I handed her the two books on Rockwell Kent she so graciously loaned me. She took them gently into her bosom. Unknown emotions softened the lines of her face, giving it the quality of a smile, of pain, and something greater that seemed to lift her spirits.

"I hope you enjoyed them."

"There was much to learn."

She turned and walked away.

J.L. did, indeed, appear to be in need of help. I almost laughed at him when I entered the kitchen. He wore an apron, his shirtsleeves were rolled up above his elbows, and flour was scattered everywhere. His face and arms were covered, the floor was covered, even his hair. He looked like a snowman.

Spying me, he said, "Glad you're here. Help me with this cutter." He pointed to a small, chrome-plated machine sitting on the table.

"You look like you're having fun, J.L."

"I do enjoy it. Fresh pasta is one hundred percent better than store bought. Don't you think?"

"Never made it before, so I wouldn't know."

"Here," J.L. said, offering me a glass. "Pour the champagne from that cooler over on the buffet. I think you'll enjoy this one."

He went to the sink and washed the flour from his hands while I poured the straw gold liquid into the flutes, careful not to let it boil over the top.

J.L. dried his hands and took a glass. He held it up to the light. "Look at the tiny bubbles. Have you ever seen any this small?" I admitted I hadn't. "The smaller they are, the better the champagne."

"I've heard that." Smelling the yeasty nose exploding from the glass, I said, "But the proof is in the tasting."

J.L. nodded and grinned.

The nose turned quickly to a damp straw smell, an indication of old age. Sipping the wine, I found it dry with a nutty, rich flavor and a good finish. "Well, you're right so far with the tiny bubble theory. This is excellent champagne."

The smile across J.L.'s face indicated my approval meant a lot to him. "1904 Moet & Chandon," he said, as my mouth fell open. "The last time I opened a bottle, I peeked at my notes, was September, 1967." He held his glass toward me. "It's my pleasure."

There wasn't much for me to say except thank you.

"By the way," J.L. said, setting the champagne flute down on the table. "I forgot to ask, why did you call tonight? You find out something?"

Making a decision not to ruin the moment, I said, "Let's enjoy the wine and pasta. After dinner we'll discuss business. This is too good to spoil."

J.L. looked at me with a strange expression. We cut the pasta dough into fettuccine.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

After carefully cutting the dough into long, thin fettuccine, we laid it gently on a clean towel to dry, then went down into the cellar to select a dinner wine. J.L. seemed to be seeking a particular bottle, going through several of the dusty, musty bins.

"I think," he said, holding up a bottle so covered with dust that the label was unreadable, "To have great Italian food and drink anything other than Italian wine would be sacrilegious, don't you?"

"If you have anything not wrapped in a straw basket," I offered, still amazed at all the old wine in the cellar.

J.L. put the bottle back in its resting-place and moved to another bin. "Here," he said excitedly. "Here's what I'm looking for." He gently lifted a dark bottle and set it carefully on a table. "This is a Brunello di Montalcino, from the Siena hills of the Tuscany area. It's made by the Biondi Santi family." J.L. stepped back and looked at the bottle. "They leave it on the wood for five years."

Brunello wines were not my forte. They had always been too rare and too expensive for me to indulge in. "What's the vintage?" I asked, unable to see the label.

J.L. took a cloth rag and carefully wiped the bottle clean without moving it from the table. "Nineteen forty-five. I'll be willing to bet it's still a baby. They often take fifty years of aging in the bottle before reaching their peak. We must decant it now and let it breathe as long as we can before dinner."

He poured the wine with the aid of a candle, leaving a good two inches of sediment in the bottle. We went back upstairs, carrying the decanted wine, and started the water boiling to cook the pasta.

While J.L. prepared his sauce, I talked with Kathleen, who appeared to be as healthy as anyone else, only I knew she wasn't. She wanted to know if I planned to return to Rockland after this mess with the murders was finished. I said I hoped so, because this was such wonderful country. Complementing her on the beautiful table caused her to blush.

"The sauce is just about ready," J.L. announced from the kitchen. "By the time Jay pours the dinner wine, it will be."

Soon J.L. entered the room. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Fettuccine Verdi con Gamberetti."

It was delicious. A green, spinach pasta with shrimp in a heavy cream, lots of milled pepper, garlic, and rich, heart-stopping butter.

J.L. was right, the Brunello was astounding. An intense ruby-red color with orange tints indicating the age. Dry and tannic, with a warm, robust, and lively taste which was mellow and velvet on the mouth. Finally, an aftertaste lasting forever.

"Well, Mr. Chamberlain, you have once again made an humble man feel as if he's dined with royalty." I lifted my glass.

"It's one of our favorite meals," Kathleen spoke up, smiling. "Although, I must admit, the wine list does improve when you come to dinner, Jay."

Watching her, I remembered how little she ate the last time. Tonight she ate what was on her plate and drank an entire glass of the luscious Brunello.

Soon after dinner, Kathleen excused herself, saying she was tired. "I know you two want to discuss business. I'm going to bed. Good night, Jay. Do come again."

J.L. escorted Kathleen upstairs. Sipping the Brunello, I was amazed as it got better with each taste.

"Probably should have opened it yesterday," J.L. suddenly said, from behind me. "Some of the younger vintages are reputed to need twenty-four hours of breathing to fully open.

"It's an amazing wine." I held the opaque liquid up to a candle. "Thanks for sharing this with me."

"I'm enjoying your appreciation. In this part of the country it is a rare occurrence to meet someone with a knowledge of wine. It has been several years since we've opened some good bottles. Now," he said, beaming. "I have some old cognac for us to try. Did you bring any of those big cigars of yours?"

"I'm never without them."

"Good. Let's get the bottle and go up on the deck. You can tell me what's on your mind."

Following J.L. up to the big square deck on the roof of Owl's Head, I found the view even better than imagined. Smaller trees to the south and east did not obstruct the view. Sparkling like tiny diamonds, lights twinkled on Vinal Haven and Isle Au Haut. To the south, Tenant's Harbor and Port Clyde blinked like beacons on a dark sea. The sky was clear and the stars seemed so close that you could reach up and pluck one from among the billions.

We were silent for awhile. Then J.L. said quietly, "It is nice, isn't it?"

Sitting back in the Adirondack chair and propping my feet up on the railing, I said, "Truly, J.L. I'd probably spend all my time on this balcony if I lived at Owl's Head."

"Kathleen and I do, every spare moment, when the weather is right." He looked far out to sea.

I knew he was thinking about death. "Tell me about the cognac?" I asked, hoping to lighten the moment.

"Ah," he said, holding up the bottle. "I think you'll enjoy this. It's fifty years old..." He paused to see if I got the implication.

Sitting up in the chair, I asked, "You mean it's a fifty year old cognac, or you've had it fifty years?"

"Right on both counts," he said, delighted. "Oh, it's been in the cellar longer than fifty years, but the notes I have say it was 'early-landed' in London, kept in barrel by customs for fifty years before being bought by my namesake, who bottled and shipped it to this cellar."

"Amazing," was all I could think of to say.

The pale old cognac was gentle, exquisite, and faintly sweet with a finesse to please the gods. To light a cigar would interfere with the delicate nuances of the aroma. But then...

"So what's on your mind?" J.L. asked after we sipped on the wine for awhile.

Rolling the cigar between my fingers, I watched the glowing end turn to ash. "Guy Robbins called today. He checked into Sandy and Nat's financial situation. It turns out they are broke. Sandy paid Guy five hundred thousand cash for an art collection he was handling in an estate sale. She could have gotten that money from many different places. Still..."

Chamberlain sniffed the cognac and didn't say anything.

"The Hansa Jet was chartered by a young woman in Houston, Texas. The crew landed in New Orleans, where the Kent collection was off-loaded. The passenger remained aboard, flew back to Houston with them.

J.L. twirled the brown liquid around in the glass, looked up into the starlit sky. "Anastasio's trying to set her up. He is aware of their finances, and flew the collection to where Sandy is, will probably plant the gun used in the shootings, also."

Breathing deeply, I was relieved Chamberlain had arrived at that conclusion.

"Jay," he said, standing up and leaning on a rail. "What's his motive?"

"That's the problem. I don't have a clue."

A light wind whispered through the trees. Far out to sea, on the dim horizon, a ship worked its way south against the Gulf Stream. An owl hooted in the distance. A car horn blew far away. Silence settled in on the roof of Owl's Head, broken only by the crackle of cigars burning Connecticut seed wrapper.

"Have you thought about Sandy being our killer?" J.L. asked softly.

It was a fair question. One which I had contemplated more than once.

"Why would she hire me? You think maybe it was a front? Could be possible." Pausing, I let the hard facts work their way through my thoughts. "Seems we have limited possibilities. Anastasio, whose motive we know not, or Sandy, who would have had to hate her brother an awful lot to blow a hole in his brain for money. Then there is Captain Barstein and his wife, Annie, and something we haven't discussed thoroughly, Mabel and Bowers."

"Yes, Mabel and my Sergeant."

"She left town all of a sudden. Maybe she and Bowers have a thing worked out. You said he was the first on the scene. Maybe he took the money and used it to gain favor with the lady."

J.L. took a long pull on the cigar, blew the smoke out, knocked the ashes off the end, and glanced at me. "I like the way you think Leicester. I'm still checking to see if Mabel's mother did, in fact, die. We should know by tomorrow. I have my eye on Sergeant Bowers. You can bank on it."

"What about Captain Barstein?"

"He better not make any major improvements to the Moma C. in the next few weeks."

Sooner or later everything comes to an end. So it was with the great cognac, cigar, and the view from the rooftop of Owl's Head.

J.L. walked me out to my car. "We'll talk tomorrow. Don't worry, this thing will work itself out."

"You bet. Thanks for the food and wine. Be sure to tell Kathleen good night for me."

Easing the car slowly out the winding lane, I turned onto the main road leading back to Rockland. Driving on the narrow, two-lane pave-

ment, and deep in thought, I almost did not see the jogger. If he hadn't been wearing a red reflecting vest, I might not have. He was dressed in a blue running suit, which reminded me of the one Anastasio wore, a sweatband, and a fisherman's wool cap. Easing over toward the center of the road so as not to force the jogger off the pavement, he waved a 'thank you' as we passed each other.

A half-mile further down the dark road, I suddenly slammed on the brakes, skidding onto the shoulder. Gripping the steering wheel with both hands, my foot shook on the brake pedal as dust settled around the car. The engine stalled and made soft pinging noises as it cooled.

Small-disconnected facts, if you take note of them, have a way of becoming connected. Leaning back in the seat, I tilted my head as far back as it would go against the headrest. "I know who did it", I said, aloud. "I know who did it".

Suddenly becoming aware of a dangerously fast pounding in my chest, I sensed a familiar, bitter taste explode in my mouth, an acrid sensation. This had happened before, during battles with ugly weather while flying airplanes. But now it wasn't thunderstorms in dark nights, or fighting heavy ice in mountainous terrain that brought the taste. It was the knowledge of senseless murder by evil people.

* * *

I had been sitting in the same position for four hours. Only once had I gotten out to stretch and get the blood flowing. The small parking lot was deserted. The waters of the bay had an eerie calm. Fog drifted in silver, ghost-like tendrils along the tree line across the inlet.

It was of no use to drive back to the Navigator Inn. I could never have slept anyway. So I had turned around and driven back down to the Port Clyde docks. Here in the cold of the night, I sat watching the dawn come slowly, almost sneaking up on the world. Boats anchored out in the middle of the bay emerged dimly from the blackness.

Hearing the boat long before it appeared, the purring of a small outboard engine disturbed the silence of the stealthy dawn. The boat drew swiftly up to the dock. A lone figure expertly tied lines to cleats and started up the wooden pier. It has always amazed me how people who live and work on the sea use small skiffs and boats much the same way we use automobiles.

Getting out of the car, I stepped into a darkness scented by damp sea and the acrid smell of rotting trash fish from the seafood factory across the bay. It is an odor I could never grow used to.

The figure did not see me until I was within a few feet. "Who the hell are you?" The voice asked, startled and defensive.

Catching sight of her face as she emerged from the dark into the dim light on the dock, it appeared welled, almost ugly. A rope of muscle twisted her black eyebrows into a Vee shape. Her cheek was pulled back, and freckles spotted dark against pale skin.

"Annie," I said softly. "It's Jay Leicester, the private investigator."

"Oh, thank heaven," she said, holding a hand up to her throat, exhaling sharply. "You scared the hell out of me. What are you doing here at this time of the morning?" She stepped fully into the light and it lifted the shadows from her face and erased its appearance of old age.

"There are some things I need to see in the chandlery. It can't wait."

"Things in the chandlery, at five o'clock in the morning?" She took a hard look at me. "Hey, wait a minute, man. You ain't no weirdo or something?"

"No, Annie," I said slowly, attempting to calm her. She was uneasy, and I could appreciate her reasoning. "There is nothing funny going on, I assure you. It has to do with the two murders."

"Okay, but people will be here at any moment."

Following her across the worn, wooden planking to the rear of the chandlery, I held the screen door while she unlocked the big, solid, wooden door. Taking one last look at me, she went inside. There was something sad about her. Even her relieved smile suggested some deep disappointment in life; opportunities lost that could not be forgotten.

At the wooden table where the fishermen sat and played their board game, smoked cigars and wonderful old pipes, talked of the sea, and made fun of landlubbers, Annie pulled a long chain. The light was only a naked bulb and dim, but it gave her comfort. She seemed to relax some, being in familiar surroundings.

Walking toward the front of the barn-like structure, she removed her peacoat and wool cap. Turning slightly, her head moved part way out of the naked light so that her face became divided like a Picasso painting. Her illuminated side still showed a stern distrust. Turning again, she looked at me with fixed attention. Her eyes were like the bores of a double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun. "What is it you need to see that's

so all fired important, Mr. Leicester?" She turned on more naked light bulbs, never taking her eyes off me.

It was cool in the chandlery. I could see both our breaths when we exhaled. "How do you ever get this building warm?" I asked, rubbing my hands together, hunching my shoulders up around my neck. Even with the old leather flight jacket on, it was nippy in here.

Annie looked at me with an incredulous expression. To someone who lived in Maine and made her living from open boats on icy, wind swept seas, it must have sounded like a stupid question.

After eyeing me without saying anything for perhaps thirty seconds, Annie put her hands on her hips, squared her shoulders, and jutted a prominent chin at me. "What the devil you want here, man?"

"The first time we met, the day I showed the photographs of the two men who were killed, you said Nat Rinaldi bought some things here at the chandlery."

"Yes, I remember. So what?" She did not move, only stared. Did I see it in her dark northern eyes, a spark of fury? Directed at whom?

Moving toward the long, flat, tables where merchandise was neatly arranged, I said, "You think real hard about what he bought. Try to remember each item."

Working my way around the tables, picking up wool mittens and caps, I could not find what I was looking for. "Please, Annie, this is important. What did he buy?"

Without realizing it, my voice had risen in a crescendo. Lack of sleep had me on edge.

"Jesus, man," Annie said, looking at me weirdly. "Take it easy. If I can find the ticket, I'll tell you exactly what he bought."

A receipt. I had not thought about her writing a ticket for the purchases. I continued moving around the tables, searching.

"Here it is," Annie said, holding up the ticket. "Everything is listed. He paid in cash. You want to look?"

I read Annie's neat printing on the ticket.

1 Wool cap.....	\$4.99
1 pair wool mittens.....	6.99
1 hand painted bandanna.....	11.69
	Tax..... 1.66
	Total...\$23.67

"Yes, that's it. Do you have any more of these hand painted bandannas?"

"All this for a bandanna? You're here at five a.m. for an Indian scarf?"

The door at the rear of the chandlery slammed shut. A man stood looking at us. "Annie? What's going on?" He walked hesitantly toward us. Then he recognized me. "Leicester, what are you doing here this time of day?"

"He's looking to buy one of those Bandannas hand painted by the Indians."

"What?" He cocked his head and looked at me earnestly with a faint, ugly smirk.

"It's true," Annie said. "He's been sitting out in the parking lot all night, waiting to buy an Indian scarf."

"Leicester?" Barstein walked up close to me. His breath smelled of cigarettes and stale coffee. He stared, blinking rapidly. He had long eyelashes. They gave the black eyes an effeminate quality that made a stunning contrast to the brutish face with the jagged, welted scar.

"I can explain." I held up both hands in front of me in the cold air of the chandlery. At least I hoped I could.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

We sat in the unmarked police car at the Augusta airport, waiting. The sky was gray, and a low overcast hung depressingly across the landscape. Visibility hovered around a half mile. Intermittent rain fell bringing a damp chill to the air. J.L. kept the engine running to defrost the windshield. The wipers, set to pause, would swipe across the glass every thirty seconds, clearing away the mist, and revealing the airport runway.

J.L. sat calmly peering out through the windshield, his scholarly-like face not giving away his inner thoughts. He would have made a good poker player. I wondered if he did play.

We would watch as aircraft suddenly appeared through the dense fog, touch down on the wet runway, and throw up thick, foamy spray as the crew reversed the engines.

"I've often wondered how they do that?" J.L. asked, more to himself than to me.

"Do what?" I wiped at some fog forming on the inside of the windshield.

"Find the airport on days like today. The aircraft appear like ghosts from the clouds, perfectly lined up to land. It has always been amazing to me."

Laughing, I thought of how many days like today I had flown airplanes down to landing minimums, sometimes seeing the runway, sometimes not. "Maybe someday I will explain to you how it's done." It would take too much time to do it now. There were other things to think about.

"Humph," J.L. grunted. He pushed up his shirtsleeve and looked at his watch. "What time is this flight due in?"

"About ten minutes ago. They're probably running late due to the weather. The airport only came up to landing minimums a half-hour ago. There were probably several planes stacked up in a holding pattern waiting for the visibility to improve."

J.L. didn't say anything. He stared out the windshield, watching a Boeing 737 reversing its engines, kicking up spray.

* * *

Leaving the chandlery two days ago, I had driven back to J.L.'s home and explained what I'd found. We made our plans, working them

through as thoroughly as we could. Now we sat waiting for Sandy Rinaldi to arrive from New Orleans. It was necessary for her to return to Rockland in order to wrap up the investigation.

Convincing Sandy to make the trip all the way back to Maine took some doing, but she finally relented.

We watched the new-generation turboprop commuter aircraft taxi up to the gate. The ground crew immediately rolled a cart filled with umbrellas out to the exit door of the plane.

Sandy was the first to disembark. Even from a distance one could recognize her tall, lithe frame. Blond hair flowed down around her shoulders. Sharp, high cheekbones and dark eyebrows were a stark contrast to the gray, cloud-covered morning. She held the umbrella high above her head and moved swiftly toward the terminal with a determined stride. Her white, long-sleeved blouse, black slacks, and high-heeled shoes looked expensive and professional. She was an impressive woman. I could not escape the feeling of admiration I experienced the first time we met.

J.L. and I went inside the terminal. Sandy was standing straight, her head level. The planes of her face had a military cleanliness of precision and a feminine fragility. Her hands hung still, by her sides, parallel with the long straight lines of her black slacks. She spotted me and waved.

Walking to where she stood, I kissed her on the cheek. Her perfume wrapped around me like a warm embrace, reminding me of pleasant things long passed. She greeted me with overt cheerfulness. Her eyes switched back and forth across mine, inviting me to browse among her thoughts.

"I'm so glad to be off that little airplane. We've been circling around up there for over an hour. The pilot said at one point that if the fog didn't lift in ten minutes we would have to divert to Lewiston, wherever that is?" She shook her head, an ash-blond wisp falling across her face. She brushed it back with a flair.

"Well, I'm glad your plane landed here."

Sandy looked up and recognized J.L. "Hello, Detective Chamberlain. It's good to see you again."

"Sandy," J.L. said, extending his hand. "Welcome back to the North Country. Hope your trip wasn't too bad."

"It was fine except for the last hour. I'm here safe and sound, though."

"Let's retrieve your luggage before someone else does." I pointed toward baggage claim.

"I only have one small bag." She handed me the boarding pass with the baggage tag stapled to the inside. "It's blue with a red ribbon tied to the handle." She made a tightening, sidewise movement with her hips, the equivalent of a shrug, and walked toward the front of the terminal. J.L. winked at me and followed her.

Sandy settled into the backseat of the unmarked police car. She sat straight, the lines of her face relaxed, the shape of her mouth softened by the faint, purposeful suggestion of a smile.

Putting the bag into the trunk, we headed back to Rockland. The weather was getting worse. Wind gusted and shook the car; scud blew across the highway obstructing visibility. Chamberlain drove slowly and carefully.

We rode in silence for a few miles.

"Oh, by the way." Sandy tapped me on the shoulder. "Guy Robbins said to tell you hello. I called him yesterday morning before leaving New Orleans concerning some business we needed to discuss. I told him I would be seeing you today."

"Thanks. It's always nice to hear from Guy."

Chamberlain parked in the doorway of the Navigator Inn. He unlocked the trunk for me. As I retrieved Sandy's bag he said he would make sure Sergeant Bowers stayed put at the police station tomorrow. I nodded in agreement.

"I'll see you both in the morning." He got back in the car and started the engine.

Sandy and I waved good-bye.

* * *

The cold front of yesterday was gone. The sky was crisp and clear with a sharp, cold wind gusting across Penobscot bay. It was the ending of winter, the beginning of spring in the North Country.

We had set up a meeting with Gino Anastasio this morning. Chamberlain was right on time. Sandy and I were waiting in the lobby of the Navigator Inn.

We could see the airplane from the road as we drove into the Knox County Airport. The sleek, twenty-five million dollar Gulfstream G-IV glistened in the bright morning sun. We drove out on the ramp to the airplane. As we approached, the airstair door opened and our familiar escort came down the stairs. J.L. stopped the car and shut the engine off.

"Good morning, Detective Chamberlain, Mr. Leicester, Ms. Rinaldi," the well-dressed young man said. "Mr. Anastasio is ready for you. Please follow me."

"We're meeting him aboard his airplane? Why are we doing it this way?" Sandy asked with a smile that was amused, astonished, and involuntarily contemptuous.

"It's the only way he'll see us, Sandy. You've got to remember who this guy is, one of the most powerful Mafia figures in the world."

Chamberlain and I got out of the car and he opened the door for Sandy. Turning, I looked at her. What I saw was the easy, casual figure of a woman in a natural setting. I noted the uncommon lightness of her posture; a weightless way of standing that showed an expert control of the use of her own body. A tall body in simple garments; a thin blouse, light slacks, a belt around a nonexistent waistline, and loose silky hair that glittered like tinsel in the wafting wind. We went aboard.

The flight crew still sat in their seats, staring out the windscreen, probably ashamed of their employer, but cashing the paychecks just the same. The hum of the auxiliary power unit was soft and soothing, keeping the climate aboard to a comfortable level.

Sandy paused and looked around at the plush interior. She was impressed, but she didn't comment. J.L., as before, looked around, shook his head, and continued down the aisle of the cabin toward the onboard office with the oval table.

"The policemen and the woman are here," the young man said, announcing us.

Anastasio glanced up, said nothing, waved us into the leather chairs around the table. He wore the same blue jump suit, sat in the same seat. His cadaver-like appearance had not changed. Sandy was shocked at the man before her. She could not prevent the jolt of surprise that threw her head up.

"How about some coffee?" I turned and looked at the young man. He smiled at me. "Anybody else?" He said with a bored tone in his voice.

"Nothing for me," Chamberlain said. Sandy shook her head.

"Rinaldi, the art dealer," Gino said in his shaky, squeaky voice, the blue veins pulsating across the thin skin of the balding head. "I wondered what you would look like in person."

Sandy said nothing, but she held his glance. I saw the faint movement I'd noted as typical of her: the movement of her proudly intractable mouth curving into the hint of a smile.

A smirky grin stretched across Anastasio's ruined teeth. The scraggly, thin hair waved in the air as he nodded his grotesque head. Looking up at me and waving a bony arm, he said, "You're lucky to have such a client, Mr. Leicester. So beautiful, too." He looked back at Sandy with a leer.

Sandy crossed her legs and continued to look at Anastasio, staring directly into his evil, black eyes, but she remained silent. J.L. shifted position in his seat and crossed his arms. The suit returned with my coffee, placed it gently on the table, and disappeared.

"Your phone call was quite interesting. I was forced to cancel several important meetings and make many changes to arrive here today." His cold eyes stared into mine. The ugly grin changed from a smile to a sneer as he spoke, seemingly uncontrollable and unconnected to the content of his words. A bony arm waved an arc across the breadth of the cabin. "Let's proceed."

"Yes, Mr. Anastasio, it is time." Setting the coffee cup and saucer on the table, I said, "First, let me say we appreciate you taking time to come to Rockland for this meeting, time away from your business."

Sandy shifted position in her chair and raised her eyes at me with the rhythmical abruptness of the involuntary. Chamberlain uncrossed his arms and sat erect in his seat.

Anastasio raised his bony arm, and nodded.

Laying the thick file folder on the table, I opened it up. Everything was there, neatly, thoroughly prepared and typed. The latest fax copies were stapled to the inside of the front cover. "You know," I said, looking at Anastasio. "We could never figure a motive for a man of your power to so overtly hit a mole like Tony Bilotti. Most murders are done for revenge, spite, money, possessions, or by an irate family member. None of these things fit. If you wanted Bilotti whacked, why do so in such a high profile manner? Then kill an unknown art dealer at the same time, adding more publicity? All this wouldn't wash, not with me, not with Detective Chamberlain."

Sandy, looking intently at me, uncrossed, then recrossed her legs. The fabric of her slacks made a swishing noise. Chamberlain remained silent, unmoving.

I continued. "The odd thing was the Rockwell Kent art collection. Your statement that you acquired, 'or paid a fair price for,' I believe were your words, the collection as a gift for your wife put you at the scene. The fact that she wanted a Norman Rockwell collection was irrelevant. Then we found out that your mole roughed up an innocent old couple on your instructions to extort the Kent collection from them for the sins of their grandson. That kept you involved. But the motive? The missing four hundred and fifty thousand in cash means nothing to a man of your power and wealth. You, yourself, said you paid your chauffeur as much in a year. The motive. It still eluded us."

Anastasio's death grin stretched tightly across the transparent skin on his ugly head. He nodded at what I was saying, but made no other comment.

Turning over a page in the file, I said, "Your open cooperation and honesty confused us at first. We thought it was a way of learning how our investigation was progressing, finding out what information we were garnering, a way for you to prepare a defense for your mistakes. But if you wanted that kind of information you would have tried to buy it. You didn't do that. Not from Detective Chamberlain, not from me, and not from any of the hard working, but poorly paid officers of the Rockland Police Department who were working with us. Every time we thought we could put you in the middle of these murders, we'd run into a brick wall. There were only two conclusions to draw: you were too smart for us, or you were...innocent."

The swiftness with which Sandy's eyes moved to me was an involuntary answer to an unexpected question, but the swiftness with which they moved away – to look down at the table, at the cabin walls, at Chamberlain, anywhere but at me – was the conscious answer to the meaning of the question.

Anastasio's grin grew even tighter across his ruined teeth. The man was enjoying this. For that I was sorry. J.L. looked at me and nodded. Things were on schedule.

Beads of sweat appeared on Sandy's face. She wiped a finger under her right eye. Reaching into my back pocket, I pulled out a handkerchief. It was a large, hand painted bandanna made by local Indians. I had purchased it from the chandlery the other morning at 5:30 a.m. Offering it to Sandy, I said, "Here, do you need this?"

"Thank you." She reached for the handkerchief, taking it without looking. Then, seeing it for the first time, her head jerked up. It was only

an instant pause, her eyes did not move, but it seemed to me that her glance was stressed, as if in special awareness of seeing me. Deep down in the inner core of her brain synapses fired between neurons. Electric current made connections faster than any computer ever designed, creating memory, analyzing data. Finally, realization turned to undeniable truth.

The look of a peculiar panic grew in her eyes. It was not the look of understanding, but of a ferocious refusal to understand – as if she wanted to turn the violence of her emotion into a fog screen, and she hoped that it would not blind her to reality, but that her blindness would make reality cease to exist.

Taking a deep breath, I sat back in my chair, placed both hands in my lap, and looked out the oval cabin window of the plush corporate jet. I was going to both hate and enjoy the next half-hour.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Gino Anastasio sat up erect in his seat. It was the first time he had done this. He seemed much taller than I imagined. "Give me the bandanna. Where did this come from?"

Sandy turned from me and looked at Anastasio. She reluctantly, hesitantly pushed the bandanna toward him.

Taking it, he sat back in a slouch, managing to make his sloppy posture look insolent.

Looking over at J.L. to see if he agreed it was time to reveal all that we knew, he nodded and crossed his arms.

"It's made by local native Indians." Looking at Sandy, I saw that she sat rigid, staring down at her lap. "They are sold only at three places, the ferry dock here in Rockland, the chandlery in Port Clyde, and at the general store on Monhegan Island."

Turning to Sandy, I pointed to Anastasio and said, "Are you going to make me lay it all out, here, in front of this man?"

She raised her head a little, there was no perceptible change in her posture, and any suggestion of defiance came from the faintly stressed spacing of her words. "I don't know what you're talking about. Lay what out?"

Sighing, I removed some pages from the folder, truly hating to do this in front of Anastasio, even though we had insisted he be here, and had told him all about it. I still didn't like it. Though we did have something in store for him, later.

Anastasio stayed in his slouched position, laced his ugly, bony fingers together. His hands appeared raw and red, the hands of a germ phobic. He spoke in that irritating voice. "Amateurs should never commit murder. They always make mistakes. To fix a pipe one should always call a plumber."

Sandy did not answer. She sat still and her face was expressionless, but her eyes seemed too large and they were fixed on mine, as if she were now intent upon nothing but hearing me to the end.

J.L. suddenly stood up. "Get on with it, Jay."

"Sandy, we know just about everything. The man's right, you made several mistakes. The biggest one, besides the two murders, was hiring Guy Robbins to handle your brother's estate. He checked on your financial

affairs and found out you both were broke. It didn't matter to you that he knew. You just never figured on his telling me."

The ferocious spring with which she whirled to me was involuntary, as was the naked twist of hatred in her face. "What difference does this make? Renato and I made some bad investments. You act like I killed my brother. That's ridiculous. Why are you doing this?"

Looking back down at the file folder, not wanting to continue, but knowing she would have it no other way, I said, "Here's how we have it figured. We know that you must have hated your brother enough to kill him. We just don't know why. Your ploy to throw the blame toward Anastasio was a good one, and it was working. Only you didn't know your players well enough, and that was truly a big mistake." I paused, letting the words sink in.

Sandy smiled. It was a thin smile, amused and cold. Then she looked down at her hands lying in her lap.

"A Hansa jet is an unusual airplane, Sandy. It creates a lot of interest among pilots wherever it lands.

Her head rose half an inch. Her eyes looked up for a fraction of a second. There was no other emotion.

"We knew the art collection was moved from Monhegan Island by helicopter to a waiting van. We found people who witnessed the contents of the van being loaded aboard a Hansa jet at the Rockland Airport. It was easy to trace, since there is only one such aircraft in the United States used for civilian flying. We found out that a young woman chartered it in Houston, Texas, paid cash, up front. Here's a statement from the Captain and copilot of that airplane identifying you in a photo we faxed to them."

Sliding the fax across the table, she did not acknowledge it.

"Guy Robbins found your picture in the New Orleans Time Picayune. The story they ran on the insurance company collapse had pictures of Nat, the owner of the company, the Louisiana Insurance Commissioner, the Lieutenant Governor, and you. We have used that photo to identify you each step of the way."

Sandy remained silent. J.L. stood up and walked behind his chair. He held on to the seat back and switched his weight from one foot to the other, which gave the impression he was pacing. Anastasio looked like he was dead except for the deep-set, black holes from which his evil eyes peered.

"We figured you flew into Rockland, then told the flight crew you would be ready to depart within the hour. Nat picked you up at the airport

in his rental car and drove you to meet with Bilotti. You viewed the Kent collection, killed both of them, drove the van back to the airport, unloaded the artwork into the Hansa jet, and then left the van in the parking lot. You found the rental contract in the glove compartment and called the agency, telling them where the van was being left, hoping they would come pick it up so as not to draw attention to it being left at the airport."

Sandy moved in her chair, then her eyes fixed on me. There was nothing wrong with the way she looked at me, only it was as if I was not there.

I kept going. "Clever, you thought. Fly up, whack your brother, steal the cash, keep the art collection and sell it off somewhere, then collect on Nat's insurance and the insurance on the money. Not bad, close to six million, if my figures are correct."

Chamberlain sat back down in his chair. Anastasio stared fixedly at Sandy.

"Nat bought several items at the chandlery in Port Clyde, most of them for you." I slid the purchase list Annie gave me over to her. "You must have put the bandanna in your purse when Nat gave it to you that night and forgot it was there. It is the only possible explanation. We had to buy you clothes in Jackson before we departed for Rockland. You were never out of my sight long enough to buy a bandanna here."

She sat looking down. I saw the strands of her hair swing jerkily as she shook her head in desperate protest.

"I happened to see the bandannas at the chandlery while showing Nat's and Bilotti's photos around. I remembered seeing one identical to them holding up your damp hair on the way to the airport in Augusta. I didn't put it together until after Guy told me you and Nat were bankrupt. When we could find no motive for Anastasio being involved, we had to concentrate elsewhere. It's funny, isn't it, how memory works?"

She raised her eyes, knowing that I knew the nature of her despair and that it was useless to hide the truth. Her eyes dropped, then her head moved down a little, then a little farther. It went on dropping slowly, in long, single jerks, then stopped. She sat still, her shoulders hunched, her hands huddled together in her lap. "I believe I would like to call my attorney, Jay."

Anastasio suddenly sat forward on the edge of his seat and waved a scrawny arm in the air. "I have been extremely patient with you, Miss Rinaldi. I have even admired some of the ways you've operated in the past few weeks. This has caused me much trouble, focused the attention of the

police on my business. That is not good. It must cease." He spit the words out in angry syllables. His ugly head turned blue, the veins rising and pulsating. "No lawyers." He pointed a crooked finger at her. "You tell the law exactly what they wish to know, and you take your punishment. If you're smart, instead of the electric chair, what you'll get is life in prison." He sat back in his seat. "If you do not do this, I assure you there are things which will happen to you that you cannot imagine. Remember, I can get to you anywhere." His face was cut by prominent cheekbones and by a few sharp lines, and it was ugly because it was unyielding, and cruel because it was expressionless.

Sandy Rinaldi and Gino Anastasio looked into each other's eyes for a long time, then she bent over, put her head on her arms. She did not move, but strands of her ash-blond hair, hanging down to her ankles, trembled in sudden jolts once in awhile. Finally she turned to J.L., and said, "Detective Chamberlain, I'll make a statement explaining everything, only not here. Could you please get me off this airplane?"

J.L. looked at me. I looked at Anastasio. We all nodded. Anastasio motioned toward the door where his young aide was now standing. "Show the policemen aboard." A policeman and policewoman appeared and took Sandy away.

"No cuffs," J.L. said. "She's not going anywhere."

Sandy looked back at me and, for one final time, her face broke into that enigmatic half-smile. It was the strangest smile I had ever seen: it held secret amusement, and heartbreak, and an infinite bitterness. It was the smile I never figured out, and would never forget.

* * *

We all three sat for awhile, silent, each with our own thoughts. The soft, steady hum of the auxiliary power unit seemed to have a soothing effect.

Anastasio finally broke the silence. "She is a smart young woman. To bad that I did not train her myself, she would have made a good operative."

"You mean a mole, don't you?" I said angrily, tired of being nice to this old man.

He ignored my remark, waved it away with a frail arm, and continued. "She was clever in focusing the blame toward me, even smarter in trying to make it appear I was setting her up to take the fall for the mur-

ders. Very good. I wonder when the murder weapon would have showed up?"

"Yes, I wish we had the pistol," J.L. said, standing and pacing the small interior of the cabin. "It would help solidify our case against her."

Anastasio's face stretched into a taught grin, ugly teeth showed brown against thin, chalk-colored lips. He reached under the oval table, pulled out a sealed, clear plastic bag containing some paperwork and a .9mm blue steel, Glock automatic, and slid it across to Chamberlain. "A Commander on the New Orleans police department is a friend of ours. My people recovered the gun at the art gallery. I had him see that the documentation was complete for court admission. An unbroken chain of evidence, is the way you people like to phrase it, I believe. You'll find that the ballistics will match. It is a gift to you, Detective Chamberlain. Don't ever forget where it came from."

J.L. stared at him, but said nothing.

It was all I could do to control my anger. Placing both hands on the table, fingers splayed, I said, "Now hear me well, Anastasio. We'll take the pistol, but it would have surfaced anyway. Your grandstanding here means nothing. It carries no strings, no favors, and no paybacks. Detective Chamberlain will not be intimidated or threatened. If you think that, you're wrong."

Anastasio sat back in his seat, a smirk on his face, but said nothing.

"You will do the following things: you will take this twenty-five million dollar aircraft, fly it to New Orleans, and bring back the Rockwell Kent art collection. You will have it transported to Monhegan Island and returned to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes. Since your Mr. Bilotti treated them so horribly, an addition of two hundred thousand dollars to their bank account seems appropriate."

"If I don't?" He sat up, a confident, powerful figure, ready for the confrontation.

"If you refuse, there'll be more heat than you've had since the John Gotti thing. We'll inform the FBI, the IRS, and national television..."

"Enough!" He shook his head and gazed out the window of the aircraft. There was a look of disappointment in his evil eyes. "You two amuse me, a small town cop and a private investigator of no importance. You have the unmitigated audacity to threaten me with the FBI, the IRS, and television? Come on! These people have been after us to no avail since before you were born." He sat back in his chair, a maniacal expression on the withered face. "I'll tell you what I will do, the art work will be

returned to the couple on the island. Now both of you get out of my sight." He waved us away.

I stood up. Having rehearsed this speech a hundred times in my mind, I hoped I would not forget anything. "Before we leave, I want you to know what a slime..." Stopping, I realized how inane and useless my words would be. All the harsh rhetoric would merely roll off Anastasio and be a waste of my breath.

Leaving the room, I walked up the aisle toward the cockpit and exit door, cursing myself under my breath for, in my anger, I had not said what I wanted to say to Anastasio. Upon reaching the exit door, I stopped and looked into the cockpit. Sticking my head in between the two pilots, I said, "Hey, you two..."

They turned in unison, looked blankly at me, said nothing, and then looked at each other. I saw the uselessness of venting anger. Shaking my head, I walked slowly down the airstair door.

Stepping out onto the ramp, I felt an icy sense of relief. I felt heavy and tired, but drearily proud of myself. Sandy Rinaldi had done this terrible thing. She was guilty, and I hated her for it. The reasons? It was not necessary to wonder about the reasons. It was necessary only to hate, to hate blindly, to hate patiently, to hate without anger; only to hate, and let nothing intervene, and not let oneself forget, ever. Heading toward the terminal building of the fixed-base operator, I never looked back.

EPILOGUE

J.L. Chamberlain and I were in the wine cellar at Owl's Head. We were alone. Outside, the sky was clear, the wind calm. It was an unusually hot summer day in Maine. The temperature in the cellar was cool and comfortable. A bottle of cognac and two snifters sat on the old, hand-hewn wooden table.

Arriving in Boston three days ago, I rented a car and retraced the route to Rockland Sandy Rinaldi and I had driven almost three months ago. Driving through the wonderful country, I thought about Jeff, Jr. He had cleaned up his act, gotten into tremendous physical shape and reported early to football training camp at Mississippi State. His head coach told me that he expected great things from the kid. In some way I hoped I'd been a positive influence.

Henry arranged for me to have my old room at the Navigator Inn. The motel was full of summer vacationers. I was lucky to get the room, but it was unpleasant with all the other people around.

Hoping to see Mable, Henry informed me that she had moved permanently to Newfoundland.

Returning to Rockland was a sad occasion. It was to attend the funeral of Kathleen Chamberlain. It was a nice funeral, if such a thing can be said of this barbaric ritual. I was here not for the dead, but to support J.L. We had become good friends. The service and burial was yesterday. Now, after all the well wishers had gone, the ritualism over, J.L. wanted to get drunk. He wanted me to get drunk with him. I thought it an excellent idea.

Lighting a single white candle, J.L. poured the pale gold liquid into the snifters. Picking up the fresh bundle of El Credito, Charlemagnes, I brought as a gift, he opened the package, and handed me one of the big cigars.

"What are you going to do if we run out of cognac?"

"Well, there's always this sherry." He patted the huge barrel lying in the wooden chocks."

I laughed.

We lit the cigars in silence. The blue smoke rose slowly to the roof of the cellar, floated softly among the rafters. I often wondered about the hours a man sits alone, watching the smoke of a cigar, thinking. What great ideas have come from such hours? When a man thinks, there is a fire

alive in his brain. It is proper that he should have the burning end of a good cigar as his one focal point.

"I'm sorry about Kathleen, J.L. She was a fine woman. It was a pleasure to have known her, even for the short time that I did."

"Thank you, Jay. Kathleen died quietly, and bravely. To me, that was the true measure of her character. She was a fun woman; we laughed a lot together. More important, though, we laughed a great deal toward the end."

"I admire your candor in this situation."

J.L. sat down, propped his feet up on the table. "One must not lose his sense of humor in the face of death." He paused, twirled the cigar between his fingers, and looked up at the blue smoke. "I have learned much on this journey."

I did not know how to reply. Instead, I took a big sip of the cognac, welcomed the harsh, hot, burning feeling in my mouth, waited for the smoky, wood, and caramel flavors to work their way to my olfactory system, anticipated the taste the cigar would add. It is what I did instead of saying anything.

"Sandy's trial is scheduled in about a month. You'll be getting a summons."

"I'm prepared, my notes are in good shape. I have been over the facts of the case a hundred times."

"Good. I understand she's hired some heavy hitters from New Orleans to defend her."

"It was sad, what her brother was doing to her."

J.L. twirled the cognac around in the glass, then inhaled deeply. "Saved her from a life of prostitution and drugs, taught her the art business. He wouldn't leave it alone. They made a lot of money dealing stolen art to the wise guys, but Nat kept blowing it. The collapse of the insurance company is what triggered Sandy's rage. We'll probably never know."

"You're right. After coming back from having sunk so low, and finally making something of herself, she couldn't handle losing everything. Knowing that her brother, who she had grown to hate, was responsible, put her over the edge."

"The records show most of the money from the insurance company was being skimmed off. Where it went...it's anybody's guess. Mostly to Anastasio's people, I presume. We know, now, that Sandy wasn't in on the cut. If she had been maybe none of this would have happened."

Reaching over, I poured more cognac in both snifters. "I never understood her hiring Guy Robbins to settle Nat's estate? She could have done it herself."

"It was for legitimacy she hired your friend."

"What do you mean?"

"If she used a professional, an attorney, it would legitimize collecting on the insurance. It came to a pretty good sum, remember?"

"Yes," I said, thinking back. "Her brother had a double indemnity policy worth three million, plus the half million in missing cash was insured."

"A good sum? You bet," J.L. said, knocking ashes off his cigar. "If she got the three mill, plus the insurance payoff on the four hundred and fifty thousand, and added it to the cash she'd gotten off Nat the night she killed him, and what she'd get from selling the art collection...add it up."

"Close to six million, if she carefully pieced out the Kent collection. Not bad."

We drank in silence for awhile. The cognac was starting to work its way into my bloodstream. It was a good feeling.

"The way Nat Rinaldi's body drifted around to Tenant's Harbor, did that all check out?"

"Yes," J.L. said, sitting up straight. "We checked the tides, currents, winds, etc. It could have worked. She met Nat at the Rockland airport and rode back down to Port Clyde with him. Bilotti met them with the van containing the art collection. She looked it over, and then they all three got back into Nat's car and discussed money. She probably suggested that she speak with Nat, alone, about the deal. They walked down to the end of the dock. She shot him and he fell into the water. The muffling effect of the silencer kept Bilotti from hearing the noise. Walking back to the car, she shot Bilotti, took the cash, and drove the van back to the Rockland airport. Then she unloaded the art collection into the Hansa Jet, then parked the empty van in the lot."

"Good plan."

"For an amateur. Anastasio was right, one should leave murder to the pros."

"Did he get the Kent art collection back to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes?"

"Yes, it was returned. He even deposited a good sum of money in their bank account. They'll be comfortable."

"Anastasio really doesn't want the publicity, does he?"

"Would you?"

"What about the gun? Does the DA think she can get it admitted?"

"She's going to try, but it's doubtful. The circumstances of the recovery is way too convoluted. If Sandy's confession is allowed, the weapon might be irrelevant, though every bit of evidence is essential."

We drank again in silence, the cognac working its charm, making life easy.

J.L. raised his glass. "To the future, Jay. It ain't what it used to be, and what's more, it never was."

Then I heard it. From somewhere above, the old civil war song, LORENA, wafted softly down into the wine cellar of a place called Owl's Head. If music was emotion and emotion came from thought, then this was the lament of the soul, the song of the rational, of joy, of man's eternal endurance.

I lifted my glass to J.L. Chamberlain.

THE END

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