

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

A Short Novel

by

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

MRS. RADCLIFF'S REVENGE

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Chapter 1

THE BILLIONAIRE MRS. ELLEN Radcliff had not always been the billionaire Mrs. Ellen Radcliff. Once upon a time she'd been a young, single maiden, free as the wind, by the name of Ellen Yorkshire.

Ellen's father, Randolph Washington Yorkshire, a serious New York shipping magnate, had spared no expense on Ellen's upbringing. For example, on prom night at her high school, actually an upper-class college prep school, she and her date had been chauffeured in a Rolls-Royce rather than the usual Cadillac or Lincoln limo and like the wealthy butterfly that she was she'd worn a latest-style Paris fashion gown to the elegant prom. When she'd attended Yale, she'd had her own magnificent penthouse with a panoramic view of beautiful Long Island Sound.

Independent minded as she was, Ellen had married James Radcliff, a middleclass photojournalist, against her father's wishes—nonetheless he'd spared no expense and had seen to it Ellen and James had the most expensive wedding New York City had been privileged to up to that time.

Before Ellen's aristocratic mother, Muriel, had married Ellen's father, Randolph, she'd been Muriel Collington, the only daughter of the filthy-rich Collington-Welsh Textile founder, Ezra P. Collington.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Ezra Collington saw himself as a debonair race driver, flowing scarf and all, and he could well afford the luxury of his expensive hobby. On the occasion of his untimely death in a racing accident, he had long-since divorced his wife, Catherine, Muriel's mother, so his entire textile fortune had gone to their daughter and only child, Muriel.

When Muriel had died giving birth to Ellen, Ellen's father, Randolph, had inherited Muriel's fortune.

Ellen and James had a son, Carl.

Carl and his wife had three sons, Richard, Jacob, and Lawrence.

During a vicious winter storm, the Yorkshire freighter that Randolph had insisted he, Ellen's husband James, and James' and Ellen's son Carl be passengers on—to demonstrate how macho the Yorkshire males were—broke up in heavy North Atlantic seas off the coast of Holland and all hands were lost.

Ellen inherited her father Randolph's entire huge, huge fortune.

In the year 2000, at the age of sixty-one, Ellen packed up, filled a ferryboat with belongings, left New York City, took her vast fortune with her—moved to Nantucket Island—bought a grand, luxurious ocean-side mansion with sprawling flower and statuary gardens, two Olympic-sized swimming pools, and elaborate spas.

Nantucket Island was discovered by Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, an English mariner, in 1602. The last of the native Indians died in 1854. Quakers and the whaling industry took over the island. It soon became a vacationer's dream location. Thirteen miles long and four miles wide, fifty

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

miles out to sea from the nearest land, the island was a captivating destination, famous for its unbridled, wild, unpredictable lifestyle. It was a quiet, unpretentious escape from New York daily life.

Ellen had loved the sea ever since she could remember. *Moby Dick* had been one of her favorite stories. She'd also loved buccaneer stories and had delighted in assimilating a rustic vocabulary along with a very refined one. On more than one occasion she'd raised eyebrows with her down-to-earth diction.

Ellen's private boat dock jutted out into the Atlantic with four yachts and three sailboats moored to it, but her favorite boat was a simple, twenty-foot, blue, fishing runabout. A large, old-fashioned outboard motor dangled over its transom.

Having the desire to help them, Ellen had invited her deceased son Carl's children—Ellen's grandchildren, Richard, Jacob, and Lawrence—to come live with her.

Lawrence, the eldest, had been closest to his mother and had taken on many of her undesirable characteristics. His grades in school were average and below, but his mother had coached him until he'd graduated from a mediocre high school. He was the tallest of the three grandsons. He wore his blond hair long so it came down below his shoulders. He usually wore a sweatband, with a peace symbol on it, around his forehead. He was most comfortable in leather sandals and cut-off Levis shorts. Like his mother, he had a tendency to lie and cheat. However, even with all these undesirable qualities, Lawrence was looked up to by his brothers Richard and Jacob and had become their mentor.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Ellen soon learned that her grandsons, now in their teens, had no common interests with her and most of the time may or may not even be living in the same, vast mansion as far as she could discern.

Ellen was a rambunctious woman, always busy, frequently helping one charity or other, a philanthropist of the first order.

She was athletic, short, red-headed, blue-eyed and stout. In spite of her sophisticated upbringing, she preferred trousers to dresses. She went for bright colored clothing and sandals in summer, preferred casual to stuffy, loved fishing, but wasn't keen on sailing.

She liked to stretch out in a lounge on her private beach under a gigantic umbrella, watch sailboats and think how nice it would be if her husband James could still be sharing it all with her. She'd loved James dearly. She thought, *maybe if he were with me now I might learn to enjoy sailing with him.*

She liked to stroll the beaches with her spirited, golden Airedale Terrier, Ruff, and sometimes walked many miles with him before returning home before dark. She always returned before dark as the darkness of the beach and its bond with the never-ending, unseen ocean, which could be plainly seen during daylight, at night conjured up visions of violent nighttime storms and shipwrecks—like the one that had taken away her father, her husband, and her son.

Besides her three gardeners, two chefs, and four maids, while still living in New York, Ellen had hired a stalwart accountant named Connie Forecastle and had brought her to Nantucket Island to continue managing Ellen's huge fortune.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Connie was a fragile, intelligent lady about Ellen's own age, a tall, beanpole slender, brown-eyed brunette who used a little too much mascara. They'd first met at Yale, but hadn't seen each other again for years. One day they'd happened to meet in a library. Ellen had offered Connie the accountant position and she'd accepted on the spot.

Unassuming Ellen found Connie to be very knowledgeable about a vast variety of things, felt she could be trusted completely, not only with financial matters, but also with matters of the heart and information of a confidential nature. She confided in Connie frequently and visa versa. They were more like sorority sisters than employer-employee.

One afternoon, while having tea in the Grand Garden, Mrs. Radcliff confided in Connie. "I've been thinking of having one of my lawyers draw up my will, leaving most of my, I must say vast, because that's what it is, vast estate to my grandchildren, and bits and pieces to you, the servants, and my dog Ruff, of course. I'd like your opinion of the idea," Mrs. Radcliff said, lifting her delicate eggshell China teacup to her lips.

Connie felt a glow of gratitude, smiled. "It's very generous of you to include me. I appreciate your gesture, but it may well be that you'll outlive me, as we're about the same age. Do you get on well with your three grandchildren, Richard, Jacob, and Lawrence?"

Mrs. Radcliff took in the sight of a bank of purple Asters that edged a marble fountain at the south end of the garden. "It's hard to say, actually. Since their father, my son Carl, died in that stupid adventure on the freighter in the North Atlantic, I've had very little contact with them. I don't know my grandsons very well. I was in hopes we'd become better acquainted now that

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

we're all together here on the island, but it turns out that I seldom see them. They're always too busy to spend time with their old granny," Mrs. Radcliff lamented.

"You say your son Carl died during an adventure in the North Atlantic?"

"Yes, my maternal grandfather Randolph Washington Yorkshire was a very headstrong individual. One winter he got this crazy idea it would make for favorable publicity for his Yorkshire Shipping Company if he, my husband James, and our son Carl were passengers on one of Randolph's freighters that worked the North Atlantic Ocean that winter. By the way, Randolph demanded that he not be called grandfather, so we all called him Randolph. Connie, you'd never believe how *bullheaded* that man was. The weather in the North Atlantic was predicted to be terrible that winter. Randolph insisted they take passage on the freighter, anyway. What it was really all about was Randolph's ego. He wanted to show the world that the Yorkshire males were rugged, tough, and fearless. Well, he showed the world alright. The freighter got caught in a storm off the coast of Holland and..." she hesitated. Tears came to her eyes. "My husband James...and Carl, and the idiot Randolph were all killed."

"I'm so sorry."

Mrs. Radcliff wiped away her tears with the back of her wrinkled hand.

"So," Connie said, taking a sip of tea, "your grandchildren don't quarrel with you or be abusive to you in any way."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"No, I don't really know what they're up to most of the time. I heard from a maid that Lawrence likes sailing, but what else he does with his time, I haven't the slightest idea."

Connie was admiring the large, bronze statue shaped like a tree in the center of the fountain, bronze birds sat on its limbs. Water gushed from knotholes in the tree limbs. "I guess if I were in your situation, I'd probably put them in my will then."

"I'm somewhat reluctant, because of their mother."

"Your daughter-in-law?"

"Yes, even though my son, their father, was a very fine man, I had a dreadful time trying to get on with Carl's wife, Teresa."

"Then perhaps you should wait and give your will some more thought."

"No. I've thought about the damned will far too long already. I've finally made up my mind. So it shall be written! So it shall be done! I think it was Yul Brynner who said that."

"Or his *writers*," Connie added.

They laughed.

"Is your daughter-in-law still living?" Connie asked.

"As far as I know she is. After Carl's death, I guess she thought she'd have to work for a living, if she didn't find a new husband to support her."

"So she remarried?"

"Yes, she remarried and dumped my grandchildren in the process—moved to California, I think."

Two bluebirds gracefully glided through the garden in front of them.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Left the kids in New York?"

"Yes. So, I felt sorry for them—invited them to come live with me."

"*Some* people aren't very close to their children."

"I tried to persuade Carl not to marry Teresa, but he said he loved her, wanted her, needed her, and all that crap." Mrs. Radcliff took another sip of tea.

"Why didn't you want Carl to marry her?"

"She was basically a lazy slut. She had a history of doing drugs. She drank too much—spent Carl's money like it would never come to an end. Teresa's mother was a fine woman, but her father was in jail more than he was out. I think there was bad blood in Teresa's genes."

Mrs. Radcliff called one of her maids to her. "Maria, do you suppose you could locate a bottle of my favorite brandy? I think our tea is lacking something."

"Right away, Mrs. Radcliff!" the attractive, Hispanic maid said, left.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Chapter 2

IT WAS JUST LIGHT enough to see that the sky was mostly blue. Silver-lined clouds billowed here and there.

"It's a great day for *fishing*!" Mrs. Radcliff cried above the roar of the small boat's engine, adjusted her floppy hat over her eyes as they made their way out to sea.

"Looking at you with your floppy hat in this common little boat, one would never suspect you were a *billionaire*," Connie said, removing the cap from a coffee thermos. "Coffee?"

"Yes, coffee, please."

Connie removed the red cap from the thermos, poured the cap almost full of hot coffee, handed it to her.

"Not being suspected of being rich has its advantages," Mrs. Radcliff said, taking a sip. "This coffee hits the spot! Yeah, most people are either put on guard, or start sucking up, when they think you're rich—makes them not easy to talk to."

"I suppose," Connie said, sipping coffee from a paper cup. "Where are we *going*, by the way?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"I have this special fishing spot. The ocean is very deep right at that place. Large-mouth bass like it for some reason."

The dawn was just breaking its golden fingers over the horizon. The light ocean breeze was cool, moist and salty.

Connie pulled the collar of her windbreaker up around her neck, yawned. "I don't know the first thing about deep-sea fishing. What all kinds of fish can you catch out here?"

"Many kinds! I catch bass mostly, but now and then I catch a nice trout. There are swordfish and blue marlin. I'd like to hook one of those devils. They put up quite a fight," Mrs. Radcliff said, changing the bouncing boat's direction to catch a gently-rolling wave head on.

"Which, the blue *marlin* or the *swordfish*?" Connie asked.

"Either one—they're both fighters."

"Look out there—lights!" Connie cried. "What do you think they are?"

"They're campfires along the beach. People camp out on the beach and fish all night."

"And probably smoke pot and bark at the moon, too," Connie quipped.

"Maybe, but I think most fishermen take the sport seriously."

After an hour they reached Mrs. Radcliff's fishing spot. She killed the engine.

"This is the place," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Well, it doesn't look any different than the rest of the ocean. How did you *find* it?"

"Just lucky."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"And a better question, how do you know when you've *found* it again?"

"This little *box*," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Connie turned her body half-around, looked. "What *is* it?"

"GPS! Satellite navigation system! And, this other little box has a window in the top that shows us where the *fish* are and how deep the water is!"

"Wow, and I thought we were *roughing* it."

"We *are*! We didn't come fishing on a *yacht* like we *could* have!" Mrs. Radcliff said, handing Connie a deep-sea fishing rod.

They laughed.

"How deep *is* the water here?" Connie asked.

"Can't tell, but it's so deep the depth finder can't reach the bottom."

"So, what do I *do* with this thing?" Connie asked.

"Just watch what I do with mine."

Mrs. Radcliff baited her hook with a live sardine from the bait can, swept her rod back over her shoulder, let 'er rip, cast the bait far out away from the boat.

"Nice *toss*!" Connie said.

"The term is 'nice cast' and thanks for saying so."

Connie baited hers, made a few unsuccessful casts, finally a good one.

Mrs. Radcliff began slowly reeling her line in.

Connie began to slowly reel hers in. *Suddenly*, something hit her line. The tip of her rod dropped abruptly. "Now, what do I do? *Quick!* What do I *do*?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Jerk back—*hard!*"

Connie did, set the hook. "*Now* what?"

"Start reeling in—not like that—put your thumb on the line—guide the line with your thumb as you reel in. Yes, that's better! Steady now—don't give the fish any *slack!* Okay—you've *got* him!"

Soon a long, large-mouth bass darted back and forth on Connie's line near the surface. Mrs. Radcliff grabbed the net, brought the fish close to the boat, reached into the net, pulled the fighting bass out of the water.

"Wow! I actually caught a *fish!*" Connie cried. "I can taste it *now*—with new potatoes and carrots *Julianne!*"

Mrs. Radcliff chuckled, carefully removed the barb-less hook from the fish's mouth then held the fish up for Connie to look at. "Take a good look," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Yeah—it's a *nice* one."

Mrs. Radcliff produced a hook scale, weighed the fish. "*Eight* pounds!"

"Is that unusual?"

"Yes, they usually run around five. Take *another* good look!"

Connie did.

Mrs. Radcliff let the fish drop back into the ocean.

"What did you do *that* for?" Connie cried.

"Oh, we don't *keep* them. It's called catch and release. It's the sport of it, you see."

"Oh, I see. Where I come from we *ate* any fish we caught."

"Where *do* you come from?" Mrs. Radcliff asked.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"Maine."

"Well, yeah—you wouldn't throw back a nice Maine *lobster*."

"You know about as much about catching lobsters as I do about deep-sea fishing!" Connie quipped.

They laughed.

"If you *really* want to have a nice bass with new potatoes and carrots *Julianne*, I'll have a chef prepare them for you," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Oh, that would be great! But really, I was just caught up with the excitement of the moment! I'll have whatever you already have planned for dinner."

Chapter 3

"Maria told me she heard the old lady tell Connie that the old lady has put us in her will. We'll get most of her estate when she croaks off," Mrs. Radcliff's grandson, Lawrence said, then deeply inhaled smoke from a marijuana reefer, smiled, passed the reefer to his brother Jacob.

Jacob was eighteen. He kept his bright red hair cut short. Lawrence and Richard, both having long blond hair, had occasionally wondered if they and Jacob had the same father and, considering their mother's frequent indiscretions, that may well have been the case.

Lawrence was Jacob's idle. Jacob tried to dress and act like him. Richard admired Lawrence, but didn't idolize him as much as Jacob did.

Richard was tall and thin like Lawrence. Jacob was shorter than either of his brothers and tended toward pudgy.

"Grandma Radcliff put us in her *will*?" Jacob asked, laughed, took a drag on the weed and passed it on to Richard. "That's *crazy*, man!"

Richard, the youngest, took a drag, held the smoke in his lungs, exhaled slowly. "Cool!"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

All three cracked up thinking about it, laughed hysterically. The effect of the Mary Jane made the thought strike them as being super-funny.

"Just think—someday the three of us won't have to kiss granny's ass for our *allowances* anymore! We'll be *rich*—filthy rich! We'll have *billions*! Richard, what would you do if you had a *billion* dollars?" Lawrence asked.

"The first thing I'd do is build a 'lodge' in upstate New York," Richard said then laughed far too long about what he'd said.

"Let me guess—you'd build *fish* ponds by the lodge and stock them with rare *fish*!" Jacob cried.

"Hell *no*—to hell with *fish*—I'd stock the lodge with young, hot *pussy*!" Richard cried. "*Hundreds* of them!"

Lawrence laughed so hard he rolled off the couch onto the carpet.

"Like *Maria*!" Richard added, loudly.

"Maria likes *me* best!" Jacob cried, taking another drag.

"Ah, she gives us *all* pussy whenever we want," Lawrence said.

They all laughed out of control.

"Only because we keep her in *money*," Jacob cried.

"Yeah, we lay the *bills* on her and she lays her *fern* on us!" Richard said.

They cracked up.

"So, will you let Jacob and I come share your pussies when you get your *lodge* built?" Lawrence asked.

"Share and share alike!" Richard cried.

They all laughed.

"Why *wait*?" Lawrence asked.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Why wait? What would I pay for the lodge with?" Richard asked.

"I was thinking...", Lawrence said.

"Oh, oh, watch out, Jacob—Lawrence is *thinking* again. Remember the last time he had a thought? He damned near got us drowned with his inflated-raft-on-the-ocean bit!" Richard interrupted.

Jacob and Richard tittered.

"Okay, so what were you *thinking*, Lawrence?" Jacob asked.

"What if...just what if something *happened* to old granny Radcliff—like something that made her *croak* right *away*?" Lawrence suggested casually.

Suddenly, the den became deathly quiet. Even the effect of the Mary Jane couldn't numb the magnitude of what Lawrence had just said in Richard and Jacob's minds.

After quite some time, Jacob spoke. "You mean like *what—kill* her?"

"Well, yeah—not *us* exactly—well us, but make it *look* like it *wasn't* us," Lawrence said.

"How the hell could we do it without getting *caught*?" Richard asked. "Just hypothetically!"

"Just hypothetically," Lawrence mocked, "we could make it look like a *burglar* got into her bedroom and stabbed her old ass to death."

"What if we *do* get caught?" Jacob asked, anxiously.

"We won't get caught. We'll leave nothing behind—no evidence. And, even if we *did* get caught—we have friends in the police department, remember?" Lawrence said. "Remember when we got caught buying shit

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

from that dealer? I put a few thousand in the right pockets and we didn't even get *booked*."

"It still sounds risky," Richard said, "and, the old lady *does* give us a lot of dough for our allowances."

"That's what we'll use to bribe the *cops* with, if it should come to that—which it *won't*," Lawrence assured. "Lamborghini's—wild pussy—trips to Europe—*more* wild pussy! *Think* of it!"

"So," Richard asked Lawrence, "exactly how *are* you going to do her in?"

"Me?"

"Yeah—you!" Jacob chimed. "It's *your* idea!"

"Yeah!" Richard repeated. "It's your idea."

Chapter 4

THE GRANDFATHER CLOCK IN the great room sounded out one o'clock in the morning as Lawrence eased his way down the dark hallway toward Mrs. Radcliff's bedroom, butcher knife in his gloved hand.

He stopped, listened, assured himself that no one else in the house was awake, eased open the door to Mrs. Radcliff's bedroom, slipped inside.

The room was dimly-lit from moonlight shining on the window curtains. He could see the outline of Mrs. Radcliff's body covered by a blanket, hear her heavy breathing.

As he moved closer to her, wondered exactly how to go about killing her without her waking up, screaming. He decided to put his left hand over her mouth and stab her with his right. He'd have to take both actions at almost the same time, he reasoned.

Lawrence bent over Mrs. Radcliff's body. Then, just as he began his lunge to make his knife attack—just as he forced his hand over Mrs. Radcliff's mouth—*so I can thrust the razor-sharp butcher knife into her chest without her being able to scream*—her dog *Ruff*, let out a loud, high-pitched yap.

Mrs. Radcliff opened her eyes just in time to feel the hand on her mouth—see the knife plunging toward her. She involuntarily raised her arms

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

in defense. The blanket shielded the main impact of the butcher knife as it ripped through, but the blade cut Mrs. Radcliff's arm. She screamed.

Ruff continued barking, darting about, trying to bite the leg of the intruder.

Mrs. Radcliff freed her hands, slapped the would-be-killer alongside his head, got a grip on his knife-wielding wrist—struggled to tear the knife away from him. They rolled onto the floor. He broke free, bloody knife still in his hand.

She made out his face in the dimness. "*Lawrence!*" you ungrateful little *bastard!* You tried to *kill* me! You must have heard I put you three in my will!"

Still dazed from her blow to his head, Lawrence struggled to his feet, scrambled out into the hallway—disappeared.

Ruff jumped up on Mrs. Radcliff's bed. She petted his head. "Good *dog!* You nipped that cowardly bastard good! Good *boy!*"

Connie burst into the room. "I heard you *scream!* What *happened?*"

"Can you believe it—*Lawrence* just tried to *kill* me with a *knife!*"

"Your *grandson?*"

"Yes!"

"Your *will!* He must have *heard* about it somehow."

"Exactly. I told the little bastard so, too!"

"You're *bleeding!*" Connie cried. "I'll get some *bandages* and call the *doctor!*"

Servants came rushing into the room asking what had happened.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Call the *police*!" Mrs. Radcliff cried. "*Lawrence* just tried to *kill* me with a *knife*!"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Chapter 5

TWO HOURS LATER, three police cars pulled up into Mrs. Radcliff's mansion circular driveway.

One officer got out of each car, went to the door, were let in by a maid.

Mrs. Radcliff, arm bandaged, met them in the great room.

Connie joined her.

"You sure took your time *getting* here! Whose in charge of this investigation?" Mrs. Radcliff exclaimed.

"I am. You must be Mrs. Radcliff. I'm Lieutenant Walsh. This is Sergeant McKay and Sergeant Rogers."

"Have a seat, gentlemen," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Mrs. Radcliff and Connie were already seated on a sofa. The officers sat on a sofa opposite to them.

"So, tell me what happened, Mrs. Radcliff," Lieutenant Walsh began, opening his notebook.

"I was sleeping soundly in my bedroom when my little dog, Ruff, barked and woke me up. When I opened my eyes, I saw a hand with a knife in it raised to strike me."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"What did you do, then?" Lieutenant Walsh asked, making a note in his notebook.

"I guess it was one of those automatic reactions a person has at a time like that—I involuntarily threw my arms up. That protected me somewhat from the knife thrust, but the knife still cut my arm. It could have gone into my *chest*. The little bastard tried to *kill* me!"

"*Who* do you feel it was that tried to kill you, Mrs. Radcliff?" Lieutenant Walsh asked.

"It was not a *who*—it was my grandson, *Lawrence*! The little...!"

"How do you *know* it was Lawrence?"

"I saw him!"

"You're *sure* it was your grandson Lawrence, not someone else?"

"Yes, I just told you—it was *Lawrence*!"

"Then what happened?"

"I grabbed his wrist—the one with the knife. We fought. I couldn't get the knife away from him. Then he got to his feet and ran out."

"Have you seen the intruder since?"

"No. And it wasn't just *any* old *intruder*—it was my grandson *Lawrence*!"

"Please try to calm yourself, Mrs. Radcliff. You're getting extremely upset. Do you mind if we take a look at the room where this happened?" Lieutenant Walsh asked.

"Of course, I don't care if you take a look at it. I insist you *do*," Mrs. Radcliff said. "It's just down the hall."

Mrs. Radcliff and Connie led the way to Mrs. Radcliff's bedroom.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

They all entered.

"So, this is the room where it happened," Lieutenant Walsh said, blandly.

"Yes," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"You were asleep over there in your bed when, all of a sudden the door flew open, an intruder burst in with a knife in his or her hand—and tried to stab you. Is that what happened, Mrs. Radcliff?" Lieutenant Walsh asked, as though Mrs. Radcliff had not previously spoken of how it had happened.

"It was not a 'his or her' hand! It was *Lawrence's* hand! And, I don't think he made any noise or he would have alarmed my dog, Ruff, sooner," Mrs. Radcliff said, quickly becoming impatient with the stupidity of the lieutenant's questioning.

"Was the light on in this room, like it is now?" Lieutenant Walsh asked.

"No."

"I'm going to have Sergeant Rogers turn the light off."

The sergeant dutifully did so. The room instantly became completely dark.

"You say you saw a person try to stab you in this room when it was pitch-black in here like it is now?" Lieutenant Walsh asked in the darkness.

"Turn the light back on sergeant."

The sergeant did.

"Please answer my question, Mrs. Radcliff."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yes. But it wasn't as *dark* when it happened. The moon must have been shining on the *window*. I tell you, I saw Lawrence's *face*. It was *him*!" she cried.

"I suppose the moon has *moved* since then," Lieutenant Walsh said, a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"It must *have*," Mrs. Radcliff answered, defensively.

"Of course, Mrs. Radcliff, we understand."

Mrs. Radcliff took his remark as indicating she had not really been through what she'd really been through.

"Sometimes," Lieutenant Walsh continued, "sometimes when someone is awakened before they have their sleep out—let's say by their dog, for example—they're not fully awake, yet not asleep. Sometimes—I'm not saying *you* did understand, Mrs. Radcliff—but sometimes they think they've seen things they really *haven't*."

"I don't like your line of questioning," Mrs. Radcliff said, matter-of-factly.

"I suppose not. Sergeant McKay—Sergeant Rogers, get on with the investigation," Lieutenant Walsh said, abruptly.

The two sergeants began their investigation in a most unorthodox manner, guaranteed it seemed to Mrs. Radcliff, to guarantee failure. First they unceremoniously tore the comforter, blankets, sheets, and pillows from the bed, threw them on the floor.

"This blanket has some *blood* on it," Sergeant Rogers said. "You want us to cut the blood spots out?"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"Take the whole mess down to the station for examination," Lieutenant Walsh said, pretending to make a note in his notebook.

"That's very *expensive* bedding," Connie protested. "Surely you're going to compensate Mrs. Radcliff for it."

"That'll be up to my superiors," Lieutenant Walsh said, closing his notebook. "That raps it up! Let's get *out* of here, sergeants!"

"You didn't check for Lawrence's *fingerprints*, or bits of his *hair* for DNA evidence," Mrs. Radcliff protested.

"Just following the code. Besides, Lawrence *lives* here. His fingerprints and hair must be all over the place," Lieutenant Walsh said.

The sergeants bundled up the bedding, bagged it.

"We'll take this stuff to headquarters," Lieutenant Walsh said.

The three left the premises, took the bag of bedding with them.

"'Just following the code', my *ass*!" Mrs. Radcliff exploded after the police were out of earshot.

"I agree. That was the lousiest excuse for an investigation I've ever *heard of*," Connie said.

"Did you see how that 'lieutenant' or *whatever* he really was turned everything *around*—like I'd *imagined* it all?" Mrs. Radcliff cried.

"Yes, and I watch Crime Scene Investigations on TV and have never seen such a messed-up investigation. Why do you suppose they *did* it that way?" Connie asked.

"I don't know, but I damned well intend to find *out*," Mrs. Radcliff cried. "That was a *ridiculous* showing! *Ridiculous*!"

Chapter 6

MRS. RADCLIFF AND CONNIE were having breakfast out on the large ocean-side patio. The air was cool and crisp. Mrs. Radcliff was watching a ship probably ten miles out to sea, was about to say something when Maria came to the table with the morning newspaper in her hand.

"I wasn't sure if I should bring you the newspaper this morning, or not," Maria said.

Connie detected a hint of what she thought was pleasure in Maria's voice.

"Why ever not?" Mrs. Radcliff asked as she took the paper from Maria, looked at the headline.

ECCENTRIC BILLIONARE HAS BAD DREAM

The article went on to say, "According to an undisclosed source, Mrs. Ellen Radcliff, a billionaire and newcomer to the island, has allegedly had a bad dream: that she was attacked with a knife by her grandson, Lawrence Radcliff and almost killed. She allegedly said she suffered a cut on her arm..."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Mrs. Radcliff slammed the newspaper down on the table. "*Eccentric* billionaire—bad *dream*? That's *slander* or defamation of character, or something! I'm going to demand a retraction from the newspaper!"

"Or sue the idiot who wrote the story," Connie suggested.

It seemed to Connie there was a weak smile on Maria's lips as Maria walked away from the table. *I wonder if Maria knows something about the headline?* Connie thought.

Connie had scarcely completed her thought when she noticed a maid escorting a gentleman toward them. Connie noticed the man was very tall, had sandy-blond hair, was dressed in a long-sleeve white shirt, spiffy blue and white tie, and his black shoes glistened like he'd just gotten out of boot camp.

The maid brought the man to the table, left.

"Good morning Mrs. Radcliff! I'm Anthony Sparks, chief investigating detective for the police department. I see you've seen the morning paper. I'd like to ask you some questions about the night your grandson, Lawrence, I believe his name is, allegedly tried to kill you."

Mrs. Radcliff studied Sparks with her keen eyes, sized him up. *At least, he's very presentable, handsome, actually,* she thought. "This is my accountant, Connie Forecastle."

"Pleased to meet you Connie," Sparks said.

"Likewise, I'm sure," Connie replied. "Won't you have a chair?"

"Of Course," Sparks said, seating himself.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

He has manners, but if he's in charge of idiots maybe he's one, too, Mrs. Radcliff thought, "Well," she retorted, "I hope you do a better job than the clowns you sent out to investigate!"

Sparks was put on the defensive. "Yes, well, their investigation is what I came to talk to you about and follow up on. I didn't actually pick them for the assignment. They volunteered, so I thought why not. "Why do you say you hope that *I* do a better job? Did they do something wrong?"

Mrs. Radcliff could not contain her fury any longer. "They did *everything* wrong! They asked the wrong *questions*! They flung the bloody *bedding* from my bed onto the *carpet*, then took the whole bundle to police headquarters. At least that's what they *said* they were going to do with it."

"I'll check into that."

Mrs. Radcliff's blue eyes were popping with indignation. "The lieutenant, Walsh, I think his name was, said I had to be *lying* when I told him I recognized Lawrence's face in the moonlight, from the moon shining on the bedroom window. He took us to my bedroom two hours after the attack and there was no moonlight shining on the window. I guess the moon *moves*. I never thought about that before, but it must move."

"Yes, the moon will move quite a distance toward the west in two hours," Detective Sparks said. He could tell his men had ruffled Mrs. Radcliff's feathers. He needed to placate her if he was to learn the truth about what happened.

"My dog, Ruff, saved my life, detective," Mrs. Radcliff continued.

"How do you mean?"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"Ruff barked just as Lawrence started to do his dirty business. The bark woke me up. I threw my arms up, instinctively. The blanket warded off his direct blow, but the blade still cut my arm, I tried to get the knife out of Lawrence's grip. We struggled, but the little bastard got away!"

Sparks had heard that Mrs. Radcliff was well educated and was surprised when she used the word 'bastard' to describe her grandson. "Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He ran out into the hallway, then vanished. Nobody has seen him since."

"Does he have friends he may have gone to?"

"He may have. I don't really know if he has friends or not."

"I take it you don't know Lawrence very well."

"That's true. I don't know any of my grandsons very well. We haven't lived together for very long."

"You have other grandsons besides Lawrence then?"

"Yes, his brothers Jacob and Richard."

"How old are your grandsons, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"In their teens, seventeen, eighteen and nineteen."

"How old is Lawrence?"

"Nineteen."

"Could I have a look at your bedroom, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"Of course," Mrs. Radcliff said, getting to her feet.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

After they entered the luxuriously appointed bedroom, Detective Sparks asked, "Is the room still the same as it was the night of the attack, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"Yes, I haven't been in it since, or let anyone else in it."

Sparks looked around, shook his head. "Wow, Walsh really *did* botch the investigation."

"You're telling me," Mrs. Radcliff said, dispassionately.

Sparks sensed there was some warmth in her statement. "It looks like they didn't do *anything* by the book. Unfortunately, as a result, I doubt if a shred of evidence can be obtained from this room to substantiate your story of attempted murder."

"But you *will* try, correct?"

"Yes. I'll send out a team of experts—fingerprint experts—DNA techs, but like I say, I doubt if we can put a case together against your grandson that a judge will buy."

Connie liked the sound of Sparks' 'we'. "I like your attitude, detective. Too bad you weren't the one investigating from the beginning," Connie said.

"Well, I plan to find out what happened, and *why*," Sparks said.

"Thank you both for your cooperation."

Chapter 7

THE NEXT MORNING CHIEF Detective Sparks went to the newspaper office, located the columnist who'd written the eccentric billionaire story.

"I'm Henry Calhoun," the underfed, sprightly, young columnist said by way of introduction.

"Chief Detective Sparks." Sparks produced his credentials, sized up the short, young man's brown suit that looked like it'd been slept in, and probably had. Sparks was amazed to see that Calhoun's brown hair was parted down the middle. Sparks thought the style had gone out in the twenties or thirties.

"Have a seat. What can I do for you detective?"

Sparks sat down in the chair in front of Calhoun's desk. "I have a few questions regarding the column you wrote about Mrs. Ellen Radcliff, the alleged 'eccentric billionaire'," Sparks said.

"Oh, yes. Quite a story. Shoot!"

Sparks took out his notebook, wrote down the date and time. "How did you get the *scoop*, as I guess you guys call it?"

"Oh, that was easy. A guy named Walsh dropped by. After I heard the story, I knew right away it was good headline stuff."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Sparks made a notation in his notebook. "Of course. Did the guy named Walsh say where he worked?"

"No, just said his name was Walsh."

"Did he have a large mole over his right eye?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, he did."

No doubt was left in Sparks' mind as to whom Calhoun had interviewed. *Lieutenant Walsh*. "Did he pay you to write the story?"

"No, actually, we paid him for it."

"How much?"

"The usual amount—\$500, I think it was."

Sparks jotted that down. "Did the newspaper do any investigating to corroborate the story before printing it?"

"No, I suppose not. Maybe yes, maybe no. That's another department's job."

"If the newspaper didn't check it out and the story turns out not to be true, doesn't that let the newspaper in for a lawsuit?"

"Naw. We always put in caveats like 'allegedly' to cover that possibility."

Sparks immediately went to police headquarters, to the evidence cage. The clerk recognized him instantly.

"What can I do for you, Detective Sparks?"

"Hi Burt. I want to see an evidence bag that was turned in earlier in the week. The evidence in it was taken from an attempted murder scene, the attempted murder of Mrs. Ellen Radcliff."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"The billionaire?"

"That's the one."

"Got a ticket number?"

"No."

"Okay, let me check the computer file." He did. "Nothing logged in under that name."

"It would have been brought in by Lieutenant Walsh or sergeants McKay or Rogers."

The clerk checked again. "Nothing!"

"Could it have been taken directly to the lab for analysis?"

"No. All evidence has to be logged in here before it goes anywhere."

"Thanks Burt."

"No charge, detective."

Chief Detective Sparks went directly to his office, pressed the intercom button.

"Yes, Detective Sparks?" his secretary answered.

"Call Lieutenant Walsh, Sergeant McKay and Sergeant Rogers to my office."

"Yes sir."

Within five minutes, the three stood before Sparks' desk.

"I'll start with you, Walsh," Sparks said. "You three were the ones who investigated—if I may be so liberal with the term, 'investigated'—the attempted murder of one Mrs. Ellen Radcliff earlier this week, correct?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Walsh could tell by Sparks' question that Sparks must not have liked how the investigation had gone. "Yes, Chief Detective," Walsh said.

"In your opinion, how did the investigation go?" Sparks asked.

"Fine. Everything was done by the book," Walsh said.

"Exactly *who's* book, was it done by?" Sparks queried. "The department's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mrs. Radcliff tells me you turned her account of the incident around—suggested *she* had dreamed up the whole thing. How do you account for the fact she was stabbed in the arm?"

"I think she must have done it to herself to make it look like she'd been stabbed by her grandson," Walsh lied.

"And why would she do that?"

"So she'd have an excuse to disinherit her grandson from inheriting from her estate if she died."

"Then, you know that her grandson would have inherited from her estate if she died. How did you come by that information?"

Walsh could tell the jig was up. He remained quiet.

"I *thought* so! Who paid you to put the phony story in the newspaper—'eccentric billionaire has bad dream'. Mrs. Radcliff was almost *stabbed* to death! After you did the so-called investigation 'by the book', what did you do with the evidence from the crime scene?"

"Took it to the evidence cage," Walsh lied.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"*Wrong!* I checked," Sparks said, snapping the pencil in his hands in half. "Intentionally bungling an investigation and destroying evidence are major *offenses*—do you three *understand* that?"

They nodded that they understood.

Rogers began squirming, decided to come clean. "It was the money."

"Shut *up*, you idiot!" Walsh said.

"Yes, Sergeant Rogers, go on! Who paid you to bungle the case and destroy the evidence?" Sparks asked sternly.

"Mrs. Radcliff's grandchildren," Rogers blurted.

"How much were you three paid for the 'job'?"

Walsh saw there was no need to hold out any longer. "Ten thousand apiece," he said.

"You each got ten thousand dollars to bungle the investigation? *Why?* Don't answer that! If it were only up to me, I'd *fire* the three of you right this minute, *with* prejudice. As it happens I've received word from the police commissioner that, for whatever in the hell reason, you three are only to be *suspended*, pending an internal investigation," Sparks said.

"With pay?" McKay asked obnoxiously.

"Yes, damn it—with *pay*," Sparks cried, infuriated.

Chapter 8

MRS. RADCLIFF GLANCED AT Connie across the patio lunch table, "It's been a month since the DNA and fingerprint experts were here," Mrs. Radcliff said, biting into a pickle. "It looks like Detective Sparks knew what he was talking about when he said he didn't think they'd be able to put a case together that would hold up in court."

"When was the last time you talked to Detective Sparks?" Connie asked.

"Last week. He told me he had evidence that my grandsons had bribed the three clowns that did the first investigation—to the tune of ten-thousand dollars for each of the three crooked cops."

"You surely would have heard something by now if anything positive was going to develop. The police haven't located Lawrence, have they?" Connie asked, sipping her iced tea.

"No. Last week Detective Sparks said they had an APB out for him and Jacob and Richard, too. They want to question them, but with all the allowance money my grandsons have been bribing police with—who knows who else in the police department has gotten a chunk? Now I'm *positive* the court is not going to see justice served."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"I've asked around. None of the servants have seen any of your grandsons."

"Well, I can tell you, Connie, I'm not going to just sit back and let that little bastard Lawrence get *away* with trying to kill me!"

Connie was about to fork some salad onto her plate, changed her mind. "What do you *mean*?"

"I mean just what I said."

"You mean if the police and court aren't going to do anything about Lawrence—you *will*?"

"*We* will. I'll need your help."

"Me?"

"I have a plan, but I'll need your help to carry it off so to speak."

Connie looked around to see if anyone was within earshot. "You mean you're—*we're* going to *kill* the little bastard?"

"Yes. We're going to find out where the little cowardly bastard is staying, pay him an unexpected visit, and do him *in*—just the way he tried to do me in!"

"You mean *stab* him?"

"Exactly—right in the *chest* with a *butcher* knife—just like he tried to do to me!"

"You'll—we'll get *caught*!"

"Not the way I have it planned we won't."

"If the police can't find him, how do you expect *us* to find him?"

"Snitches."

"Snitches?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yes. One of the maids found marijuana in Lawrence's room when she was cleaning. He won't stop smoking marijuana just because he's in hiding. A little money placed in the right hands—*snitches* hands—should get me an address quicker than you can say Jack Robinson," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"I don't know if I can *do* it. I've never killed anyone before."

"Neither have I. Do you think we should just let the little bastard go *free*?"

Connie thought a moment. "No."

"Well, then."

"How do we go about it, after we find out where he is?"

"We don't have a team of crooked cops to botch our crime investigation after we do it, so we will have to be absolutely sure we take investigative *precautions*."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll wear gloves, leave no fingerprints. Wear some kind of outfits like they wear in laboratories when they want to make sure not to contaminate whatever they're examining," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Chapter 9

MRS. RADCLIFF WAS SURPRIZED at the little amount of money it had cost her to find out where Lawrence was located. She'd disguised herself as a down-and-outer, and in the wee hours of the morning had bought a small amount of illegal marijuana from a dealer. She'd shown him a photo of Lawrence. The dealer had recognized him and for only a hundred dollars had told her where a 'package' had been delivered to Lawrence.

Lawrence had taken one of Mrs. Radcliff's yachts and had surreptitiously moored it among other yachts in a small cove along the coast of Nantucket Island.

All preparations having been made, Connie drove she and Mrs. Radcliff to the location in Mrs. Radcliff's Bentley.

It was about midnight when they arrived at the boat dock. Mrs. Radcliff recognized her yacht. "That's it over there," she said, looking out the passenger-side window of the car.

"I don't see any lights on," Connie said.

"That's probably a good thing."

"Everything we need is in this plastic bag, right?" Connie asked.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yes. I don't think we've forgotten anything. We'll have to be very quiet."

The two of them, dressed from head to toe in black anti-contamination suits, stealthily made their way like secret agents through the darkness out onto the dock, soon were alongside the yacht. They didn't see anyone onboard or anywhere. Connie followed Mrs. Radcliff onto the deck.

"Maybe he's not here," Connie whispered.

Mrs. Radcliff signaled to her to be quiet, then carefully opened the hatchway door, and they descended the dark steps down into the cabin.

In the dim light from a distant streetlight they made out Lawrence's slender face. He was sprawled out on the bed, asleep.

Mrs. Radcliff slipped her hand into the plastic bag, brought out a chloroform-soaked sponge—quickly clasped it over Lawrence's nose and mouth.

Lawrence woke, struggled, but was quickly subdued by the drug.

Mrs. Radcliff put the sponge back into the plastic bag.

As rehearsed, Mrs. Radcliff rolled Lawrence onto his side. Connie put one of his arms at a time behind him, slipped handcuffs on his wrists. They rolled him onto his back again, taped his mouth closed and his ankles together with duct tape.

"What do we do now?" Connie asked.

"We wait until the little bastard comes *out* of it."

It was probably half an hour before the drug wore off. Lawrence finally came around, opened his eyes.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Mrs. Radcliff shined a flashlight into them. "Well, well, you little greedy bastard—looks like things are turned around, against you," she said. "How do *you* like it?"

As rehearsed, in surgical fashion Mrs. Radcliff handed the flashlight to Connie. Connie trained it on the butcher knife Mrs. Radcliff was removing from the plastic bag, then back into Lawrence's eyes. He tried to call out, but only muffled grunts issued from his nose. His eyes grew very wide. At first, he thought his grandma was just trying to frighten him, then he realized she really intended to kill him. He shook his head violently from side-to-side, stared wildly, like an animal caught in a trap.

Light glittered from its blade as Mrs. Radcliff slowly removed the butcher knife from its cardboard scabbard, raised it in her right hand to strike. "Am I doing it *right*, Lawrence? Is this the way you had in mind to kill *me*?"

Lawrence's terrified eyes were pulsating with fear.

"Granny's thousands of dollars in allowances wasn't enough for you, *was* it Lawrence? You greedy little worthless bastard, you wanted more—even if it meant killing old granny!" Mrs. Radcliff cried—then quickly, before she could change her mind—plunged the knife through Lawrence's greedy heart.

Connie noticed that Mrs. Radcliff was crying.

"The little bastard had it coming," Connie consoled, wiping away a tear from her own eye.

"I know, but it's too damned bad. I don't know what gets into kids nowadays. What makes them so greedy? So desperate they would kill their own grandmother?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Lawrence kicked a few times, then it was over.

"What do we do with his body?" Connie asked.

"We'll put it in the mansion's garage—just like we rehearsed," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Connie got a large plastic sheet from the bag, unfolded it.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Chapter 10

"Did I understand you to say you'd talked to one of your lawyers about Lawrence?" Connie asked.

"Yes. Just in case," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Just in case of what?"

"It might look odd that I didn't seem to care at all about a grandson who had been living with me. I've been labeled eccentric. No need to add fuel to the fire."

"What did she say?"

"She said just for the record, I should file a missing person's report."

"You didn't mention our little visit to see Lawrence."

"Of course not."

A few days later, Chief Detective Sparks showed up at Mrs. Radcliff's mansion with a search warrant and team of experts. Maria took them to the ocean-side patio where Mrs. Radcliff and Connie were having tea.

"I can't apologize to you enough, Mrs. Radcliff," Sparks said. "What I mean is—it wasn't my idea to come here and search your premises."

"Sit down, detective. Whose idea *was* it?" Mrs. Radcliff asked.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"The police commissioner's," Sparks said as he sat himself down at the table.

"Tea?"

"No thank you, Mrs. Radcliff."

"You have a warrant, I presume," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Sparks showed her the warrant.

"Well then, get on with it," Mrs. Radcliff said. "What exactly *is* it you're looking for—maybe we can help you find it?"

Sparks signaled his team to begin their investigation, which left him alone with Mrs. Radcliff and Connie.

"Again, I apologize! I know how absurd it is, but we're supposed to search your property for the body of Lawrence Radcliff, your grandson."

"He's *dead*?" Mrs. Radcliff said with forced concern.

"I didn't say he was dead, but he might be. The police have been trying to find him for weeks now. The commissioner insisted we search your place."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of," Connie chimed in. "If he's *dead*, why in the world would his body be *here*? The servants haven't *seen* Lawrence since he disappeared after his attack on Mrs. Radcliff."

"Yes. I read the missing person's report."

"So, that's why the commissioner is having my estate searched! The missing person's report," Mrs. Radcliff said. "I wonder how much of my grandchildren's allowances the *commissioner* ended up with?"

"Oh, please don't go there, Mrs. Radcliff. The commissioner and I don't exactly see eye to eye on anything as it is. If someone were to tell him

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

that I'm siding with you on this case, I definitely would never be able to stay with the department long enough to collect a penny of retirement."

"I get the picture," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Sparks took a notebook from his chest pocket. "I have to ask you a few questions. Just for the record. I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I mind. As far as I can tell, you're the only policeman on this case who has shown a *lick* of common sense," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Have either of you seen or heard from Lawrence Radcliff since he tried to kill you, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"Just for the record—like Connie said, Lawrence never came back after his attack on me. None of the staff has seen or heard from Lawrence that I'm aware of."

"Did you ever give Lawrence a reason for wanting to kill you?"

"Absolutely not! I gave those boys a ridiculously-high allowance. And, let them live here—in this *mansion*. Lawrence had no reason to attack me whatsoever!"

"Other than the fact he would have inherited a large part of your estate if you were killed say by a burglar," Sparks said, more as a question than as a statement.

"Yes. That was his motive, I'm sure. Why he couldn't wait until Mother Nature finished me off, I have no idea. Maybe he was in debt."

"Did he have any bad habits you're aware of, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"I understand he liked to go sailing."

"Is that all?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Mrs. Radcliff thought telling Sparks about Lawrence's pot smoking might lead the investigation to the dealer she'd learned Lawrence's yacht location from. True, she was disguised at the time she approached the dealer, but why take the chance? "That's all I know about."

"Did Lawrence have any friends he might have gone to stay with?"

"I don't know. We were never very close."

"You say he liked sailing. Are all of your sailboats accounted for?"

"Yes. They're all still moored down there at my private dock."

"What was he wearing the night he tried to kill you?"

"I really couldn't say. I was just able to make out his face. I don't know what kind of clothes he was wearing."

The investigation team leader came to the table. "We've finished our search, Detective Sparks."

"Good work. Did you search the garages as well?"

"Yes. We took the usual samples, but as far as I can tell, there's no sign that the suspect was here recently. And we definitely didn't find a dead body."

"Good news! You see, Mrs. Radcliff, now it's official that you have no dead bodies lying around waiting to be discovered," Sparks said.

"I could have told you that at the beginning," Mrs. Radcliff said, smiling.

"Have a great day. Again, sorry to have had to bother you," Sparks said, getting up.

"Would you and your crew like to have a cup of tea before you go?" Mrs. Radcliff offered.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"No, but thanks for the offer. We have to be getting back," Sparks said.

Chapter 11

MARIA'S LARGE BROWN EYES were bright with anticipation as her golden, naked body undulated on Jacob's to the Latin beat from the stereo.

She was anticipating the glorious orgasmic feelings she always experienced as she came, time and time again, and again. That experience was the highlight of her life. That, and *money*, was what she lived for. Her eyes were glassy with excitement as she gazed down into Jacob's.

Neither spoke.

She loved the feeling of his thumbs slowly caressing her dark nipples, back and forth, back and forth, roughly squeezing, then releasing, squeezing, releasing her ample breasts with his youthful hands.

They reached the summit at the same time, then cascaded into delirium tremors, racked with the intimate passion that has been human's delight since the beginning.

After he was completely spent, she continued surging, getting every last orgasmic thrill she could from his wilting phallus.

Finally, exhausted, she rolled onto the bed beside him.

"You're really good," he said.

"You really think so?" she asked.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"Yeah!"

"You're a tender lover, but I get the feeling you could be cruel if you wanted to be."

He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "I could be."

"I knew it." A few strands of long, black hair remained drooped over one of her eyes as she tossed her head back in a flare of reckless abandon.

He laid back, stared at the ceiling.

"You guys give me a lot of money. Lawrence gave me even more than you and Richard."

"You just said Lawrence 'gave you'. What's happened to him? Do you know where he *is*?"

"He might be dead."

"What makes you *think* so?"

"The police searched the mansion looking for his body."

"Are you *sure*?"

"I'm positive."

Jacob's face contorted with anger. "How would you like to make a *really* lot of money?"

"How much are you talking about?"

"A million dollars."

"A million dollars?"

"Yeah. Would you help me kill old lady Radcliff for a million dollars?"

"*Kill* her?"

"Yeah. I think she may have had Lawrence killed."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"What makes you think so?"

"He would have called me on his cell by now."

"So, you want to kill her because you think she had Lawrence killed?"

"No, silly little pet. I want *us* to kill her so I'll inherit a big chunk of her *money*."

"But that would be *murder*!"

"It's only murder if we get *caught*, which we won't. All you have to do is slip a little *pill* into her teacup."

Maria was on the verge of backing out, then thought about what choice things a million dollars could buy, finally asked, "What *pill*?"

Jacob rolled over to the edge of the bed, opened the end table drawer, and rolled back with a pill between his thumb and forefinger, held it up to the light so she could see. "It's a gel."

"You can see right through it," Maria said.

"Yeah, almost invisible in the bottom of a teacup. As soon as the tea is poured over it—poof—it disappears."

"Then, old lady *Radcliff* disappears, too! And I'm a million dollars richer."

"*Now* you've got it."

They laughed.

Chapter 12

THE GRANDFATHER CLOCK BONGED three in the afternoon.

"Do you wish to take your tea in the great room, or out on the patio?"

Maria asked Mrs. Radcliff.

"We'll take it on the patio, Maria," Mrs. Radcliff said.

When Mrs. Radcliff and Connie had seated themselves at their usual glass patio table, Maria brought the tea tray. Maria had put the pill in the bottom of Mrs. Radcliff's cup. She would have liked to have steeped the tea in the kitchen in the teapot, taken it to the table and poured it herself, thus quickly dissolving the poison pill, making it disappear, but she knew that was impossible as to do so, to change the custom of how the tea was served would raise questions and might undo her stealthy plot to kill the old lady.

Maria set the eggshell China cups and saucers in front of Mrs. Radcliff and Connie. Maria hoped she might be able to do the next least detectable thing and pour the tea herself, thus not even give Mrs. Radcliff or Connie an opportunity to notice the pill in the bottom of Mrs. Radcliff's cup. "Shall I pour the tea?" she asked, her face as emotionless as a Vegas poker player.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

To Maria's disappointment, Mrs. Radcliff said, "No, let it steep awhile longer on the table. Thanks for asking. Go along now, we'll pour it when it's ready."

"Very well, Mrs. Radcliff," Maria said, left, went back into the mansion.

Maria sat herself near a window where she could observe Mrs. Radcliff and Connie.

"I've been thinking of selling this place, Connie—moving back to New York," Mrs. Radcliff said casually.

"Why? It's wonderful out here. Fresh, open air. The ocean. Freedoms you don't have in the bustling, big city. I love it here."

"I do too, but even with the increased security since Lawrence tried to kill me, I still feel uneasy. I wish the police could locate Jacob and Richard. I'd feel much safer, I think."

Maria was nervous, brushed her hair to try and calm herself as she watched from the window. *Pour the tea, you old bat! Pour the goddamned tea!* she thought.

After a few more minutes of chatting had passed, Connie asked, "Well, the tea must be ready, shall I pour?"

"By all means, pour away."

Connie lifted the teapot, filled Mrs. Radcliff's cup almost to the brim.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Okay! Now drink it you old bat! Drink that million dollar cup of tea! Maria thought, giggled, nervously brushed her hair with rapid strokes.

Connie slowly poured herself a cup of tea, set the teapot back down.

"You probably want to move because of the bad thoughts associated with this mansion. Why not move to another place on the island. I'm sure that would help," Connie suggested.

"Still would be too close I think, besides I have a lot of friends in New York and don't seem to be able to make any here."

"Well, that's no wonder considering the undeserved, bad publicity you've received," Connie said, taking a sip of tea.

Mrs. Radcliff lifted her cup. "But I would hate to leave the wonderful fishing we have here."

Drink the damned tea! Maria thought. *Drink the goddamned tea!*

Finally, Mrs. Radcliff took a sip of her tea. "Of course, there's Fifth Avenue. I always loved to...to shop...on..." Mrs. Radcliff grabbed her throat.

"What's the *matter*? Are you okay, Ellen? *Ellen—?*" Connie cried with alarm.

Mrs. Radcliff's eyes rolled back up into her head. Connie could see she was about to fall off her chair. "*Help!* Someone *help!*" Connie cried. "Call an *ambulance!*" She jumped up, caught Mrs. Radcliff—kept her from falling onto the patio.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Maria didn't make a move to help, just soaked in the moment and stroked her hair with the brush. *I'm rich! I'm rich!* she thought.

Two maids and a security guard rushed to the patio.

"What's *happened*?" the guard asked.

"Just use your damned cell and call an *ambulance*—I think Mrs. Radcliff's been *poisoned*! She was just fine a moment ago—before she drank her tea!" one of the maids cried.

Within four minutes of the guard's call, an ambulance was at the mansion. Attendants rushed a gurney to Mrs. Radcliff's side, quickly loaded her onto it—departed in great haste.

Connie followed the ambulance to the hospital emergency entrance in Mrs. Radcliff's Bentley, parked the car—rushed into the hospital.

It seemed forever that Connie sat in the waiting room waiting for news of Mrs. Radcliff's condition. It had actually only been three hours when a doctor came striding up the hospital corridor to where Connie sat.

"Are you Connie Forecastle?"

"Yes. How is Mrs. Radcliff, doctor? She isn't...." Connie couldn't finish the sentence.

"No. She's going to be okay. We did a lot of work on her in a hurry. Fortunately, Dr. Isaac Ashad, the best toxicologist in the business, happened to be here at the hospital visiting another patient when Mrs. Radcliff was brought

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

in. Dr. Ashad directed the emergency personnel and is following up on Mrs. Radcliff's treatment. He was very puzzled at Mrs. Radcliff's poison symptoms. He said he'd never seen anything like them before."

"That's wonderful! That's she's okay, I mean," Connie cried. "Can I see her?"

"Just for a moment. She's in 205, but make it short. She needs all the rest she can get. We'll have to keep her at least overnight for observation and treatment."

As Connie entered Mrs. Radcliff's room, a nurse was adjusting her I.V.

Mrs. Radcliff turned her eyes toward Connie. "Hi," she said weakly. "You saved my life. The doctor said if it'd taken ten minutes longer for me to get to the hospital, I'd be..."

"Don't speak," Connie said. "Get your rest. We can talk about it all later, when you're well."

"My grandsons probably had something to do with it...," Mrs. Radcliff murmured.

"Just so you know, I called Detective Sparks and told him what happened. He said he'd leave immediately for the mansion. He said he'd have a team of experts get to the bottom of it," Connie assured, then noticed Mrs. Radcliff was quiet and her eyes had closed.

"She'll be fine," the nurse said. "I gave her a sedative. She's just asleep, in case you're worried. When she wakes up, I'll tell her what you said about Detective Sparks."

"Thanks. It did give me quite a start, seeing her so quiet."

Chapter 13

IT HAD TAKEN LONGER for Mrs. Radcliff to recover than the doctors had thought, but she was finally her old self again.

Mrs. Radcliff and Connie sat chatting at the same table where Mrs. Radcliff had been poisoned.

"Where's the maid with the tea?" Mrs. Radcliff asked, looking out at some sailboats on the ocean.

"Here she comes now," Connie said. "I hear you've changed the way tea is served."

"Yes. From now on, it'll be steeped in the kitchen before being brought out."

The maid who brought the tea was not Maria.

The maid set the teapot on the table, then place-set the cups and saucers. "May I pour now?"

"You may. What happened to Maria? She's usually the one who brings the tea?" Mrs. Radcliff asked.

"No one has seen her lately. In fact, no one has seen her since you...since your..."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"I understand," Mrs. Radcliff said. "I see you brought a 'taster' cup as I requested."

The maid poured herself some tea into the 'taster' cup from the teapot, drank it then poured tea for the ladies.

"That's part of your new procedure, too," Connie remarked. "A little insurance."

"Yes," Mrs. Radcliff said.

The maid took the 'taster' cup from the table, put it on her tray, left.

"So," Mrs. Radcliff asked, "what did Chief Detective Sparks learn from his team's investigation of who tried to *poison* me?"

"The only fingerprints they found on your cup were those of yourself, and Maria's. Detective Sparks said they haven't been able to locate Maria. He said he wants to ask her a few questions."

"Yes, I suppose they have to ask her. She's been with me ever since we moved here. She's such a lovely girl. I can't imagine she'd have anything to do with it."

Connie wasn't so sure. She'd noticed some suspicious things about Maria that apparently Mrs. Radcliff hadn't.

"Well, anyway, Detective Sparks said they had an APB out for her. They'll find her sooner or later," Connie said.

"Poor child. I wonder if she left because she thought I'd hold her responsible because she brought the tea."

"Detective Sparks said they're also having the cup analyzed to find out what *kind* of poison it was."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"The best bet on finding that out would probably be to talk to Dr. Ashad."

"Who?"

"The medical doctor—the toxicologist who saved my life at the hospital," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Oh, yes, I remember now. I wonder who *did* try to poison you," Connie said, taking a sip of tea.

"Whoever it was, they almost got the job done."

A security guard came to the table, an envelope in his hand, handed it to Mrs. Radcliff. "I found this. It has no stamp, which is very irregular. Someone must have dropped it in the mailbox. I thought you'd better have a look at it."

Mrs. Radcliff took the envelope, opened it. Removed a note from it, it read:

MRS. RADCLIFF. YOUR GRANDSON JACOB WAS THE ONE WHO TRIED TO POISON YOU.

ANY MOUSE.

"What idiot would sign a note 'any mouse'?" Mrs. Radcliff exclaimed.

"Let me see," Connie said, took it, read it. "Probably someone who didn't know how to spell 'anonymous'."

"*Maria...*!" they both said at the same time.

"Give this note to Chief Detective Sparks of the police department," Mrs. Radcliff said to the security guard.

Chapter 14

"Isn't that the limit?" Connie said. "The police haven't located your grandsons, or Maria!"

"I think someone higher up the police ladder is keeping them from looking very hard for them," Mrs. Radcliff said, taking a sip of tea. "The *commissioner* perhaps. I think he's tied Detective Sparks' hands, so to speak."

"What happens next?"

"Well, the judge has made it crystal clear from Jacob's preliminary hearing that the judge apparently thinks my attempted murder by poisoning is a joke of some kind. He dismissed the case for lack of evidence. *My* lawyers couldn't even stop him."

"Didn't even slow him down, did they?" Connie added, taking a sip of her tea.

"The real problem is, they can't or won't lay their hands on Jacob. They have the note saying he was responsible for the poisoning, but Maria obviously wrote the note and she may have known Jacob was behind it. I still can't believe she could be involved in something like that," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"It's a sure thing the police and judge have put the kibosh to the case, just like they did when *Lawrence* tried to kill you."

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yes. *So*, it seems you and I have another little job to do."

"You mean?"

"Yes. We have to find the little bastard Jacob and turn the tables on him," Mrs. Radcliff sighed.

"I'll be glad when this nasty business is all over."

"So will I," Mrs. Radcliff agreed. "Now, down to business."

"You plan to poison the little bastard, correct?"

"Yes. Do unto him exactly what he tried to do unto me!" Mrs. Radcliff said, taking another sip of tea.

"We can't use the same kind of poison. We don't even know what kind it was."

"*Rat* poison will be good enough for Jacob, the greedy little bastard."

"I understand that's a *terrible* way to go."

"Whatever the poison was he gave me didn't make me feel like celebrating," Mrs. Radcliff pointed out.

"So how do we go about it? They say it's *easier* to kill the second time."

"First, we have to find out where Jacob is staying," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Chapter 15

"One of the maids told me old granny is going to try to kill you, Jacob," Maria said, took a drag on a reefer, passed it to Jacob.

"What made her suspect I had anything to do with trying to poison her?" Jacob asked Maria.

Maria didn't answer.

"Besides, the old bat doesn't even know where I *am*," Jacob snorted, inhaled some smoke, passed it to Richard. "To damned bad they got her to the hospital in time."

"Yeah, but they fixed her up. *Now* she's after your *ass*," Richard said.

"I think you *like* that!" Jacob cried. "When in the hell are *you* going to hold up *your* end of the bargain—and kill her *yourself*?"

"When the time's right," Richard said.

"How much *righter* does it have to *get* before you *do* something? *Lawrence* is gone—may be *dead* for all we know. And, that old broad is hard as hell to kill. The guy I got the pill from said it would kill a dog within ten minutes," Jacob cried, half-silly from the marijuana.

"To hell with the old broad—let's make *love*, Jacob," Maria cooed.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"I'm going for a walk, but I'll be back in half an hour—ready for *my* piece of ass. Got that, Maria?" Richard said, opened the door, went out then slammed it shut behind him.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Chapter 16

"I want to *escape* from this rat hole," Maria cried.

"We *will*!" Richard said.

"I want a mansion of our *own*!"

"I'll have a great big mansion built in upstate New York—just for the *two* of us," Richard said.

"What about Jacob?"

"What if there *was* no Jacob—and Grandma Radcliff was pushing up daisies?" Richard said, tipped up a bottle of whiskey, drank deeply from it, passed it to Maria.

She took a couple of swallows, gasped. "What *is* this crap?"

"It's the best I could get on the sly."

"So, what were you saying about Mrs. Radcliff pushing up daisies?"

"Let's just say something happened to Jacob."

"To *Jacob*?"

"I know, you like him best, but now that he blew his chance to kill the old lady, you won't get a penny from Jacob for your part, you see?"

"Yeah."

"And you can't go back to work for Mrs. Radcliff, right?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yeah."

"So that leaves you *penniless*, right?"

"Yeah. I really never thought about it, but yeah, it *does*."

"So, like you said before—the old lady is going to take revenge on Jacob for trying to kill her, right?"

"Yeah, that's what her maid told me."

"So, what if we help the old bat *find* Jacob so she can do him in?"

"He's your *brother*! You'd kill your own *brother*?"

"To have billions of dollars, and you and I—in a mansion in the Catskills?"

Maria thought a minute, softened up to the idea somewhat. "Yeah. Go on."

"She's going to kill Jacob sooner or later, *anyway*."

"What makes you think so?"

"Don't you think it's suspicious that Lawrence disappeared without a trace?"

"Yeah, I suppose. They haven't found his *body* though, but you're right, she probably had him killed. I'd have had him killed if he'd tried to stab me to death," Maria said, taking another sip of whiskey.

"I didn't think you had those kind of connections."

"You don't know everything about me."

"Do you want to share my billions and a mansion in the Catskills?"

"And another one in the *Bahamas*?"

"Yeah," Richard cried, taking another drink. "And another one in the Bahamas!"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"So, how do we let the old lady know where Jacob is, so she can do him in?"

"Now you're talking!"

"Well?"

"You drop her a note through that maid of hers you know so well."

"What do I say?"

"You tell the old lady that Jacob will be at this address at ten o'clock Thursday night."

"Where will *we* be?"

"I'm going to take you to a motel and screw your brains out that night," Richard said, taking another drink, laughed.

Maria giggled.

"Yes?" Richard asked.

"Yes, but I don't understand how we're going to collect the old lady's billions, after she does Jacob in."

"Leave *that* to *me*," Richard said, taking another drink. "I have a plan."

Chapter 17

"Thursday!" Mrs. Radcliff exclaimed, after she'd read the note from Maria a maid had handed her. "That's day after tomorrow."

"What's the note about?" Connie asked.

"I don't like the sound of it. It says if I should happen by this certain address at 10 p.m. Thursday, I'd find Jacob *alone*."

"Sounds like a trap," Connie said. "Why would Maria try to get you to go there?"

"My guess is she learned somehow about what you and I talked about the other day."

"About doing *Jacob* in?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand how Jacob's death would help Maria."

"Well, with Jacob out of the way, Richard would be the only one left."

"But *you* are the one who'd have to die before Richard could collect your inheritance," Connie pointed out.

"Precisely, which makes one think *Richard* might be behind this note."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"I still think it may be a trap. Maybe Jacob and Richard are in on it together, planning to do you in or have someone else do it, when you show up at that address."

"Could be. So, we must take *precautions*," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"Like call the police?" Connie asked sarcastically. Laughed.

"Yeah. Like call the police. That's a good joke."

"What did you mean, exactly?"

Mrs. Radcliff glanced around to make sure no one was within earshot.

"Do you know anything about *guns*, Connie?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, you soon will. We have to be prepared for *anything*. There's a little uninhabited Island, not far by boat. The locals call it Bird Shit Island. We'll go out there and have some target practice."

"You mean like practice shooting *derringers*?"

"I was thinking more along the line of *Oozys*."

"You mean *rat-a-tat-tat* type guns?"

"Exactly!"

Chapter 18

"Just where in the hell do you two think *you're* going?" Jacob demanded.

"Maria and I are going somewhere and try to *screw* each other to death," Richard snapped.

"The *hell* you are!" Jacob cried. "Maria, say he's *joking*!"

Maria curled her lips into a pout. "I'm only with *Richard* now."

"What the hell did he *promise* you?" Jacob cried. "A mink coat?"

"Maybe. Like you can talk. You haven't delivered on *your* promise," Maria whined.

"That's because you didn't *kill* the old bitch," Jacob said.

"That's because you planned it all *wrong*!" Maria cried.

"Let's *go*, Maria, it's getting late!" Richard said.

Jacob's anger flared. "Yeah, *okay* damn you—you two were *meant* for each other. You're both just *alike*! Get the hell out of here—*both* of you! Get the hell *away* from me—leave me alone!"

"*Goodbye*, Jacob," Maria said with finality.

Jacob didn't answer.

She closed the door behind her on their way out.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

The whole thing had put Jacob into a depressed state of mind. Nothing had worked out the way he'd planned. He'd liked Maria. Now she was gone. He hadn't been bullshitting her about giving her a million dollars, if she'd succeeded in poisoning the old woman. A million dollars would be like peanuts if he'd inherited.

He sat down in a stuffed chair that had a broken spring sticking out one side, almost went to sleep, got up, paced the floor, grabbed a bottle half-full of whiskey, changed his mind about drinking it, sat back down in the chair and dosed off.

Through the window, Mrs. Radcliff and Connie could see that Jacob was asleep in the chair.

"Same procedure as before?" Connie whispered.

"Yeah," Mrs. Radcliff sighed.

Dressed in black anti-contamination suits, they quietly got out of Mrs. Radcliff's Bentley, Oozys in hand, carefully scanned the neighborhood for movement, saw nothing suspicious, hung their Oozy's on their belts, made their way to the door of the run-down house, slipped inside, saw no one else was there, easily chloroformed Jacob.

"Make a little tab in the end of the tape before you put it over his mouth, so we can rip it off with no trouble when I'm ready to poison the little bastard," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Connie followed Mrs. Radcliff's instructions, taped Jacob's mouth then his legs. They handcuffed his wrists behind his back, waited for him to come out of the chloroform.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

Like Lawrence's had done, when Jacob came around, his eyes grew wide with terror. What he wildly mumbled through the tape was unintelligible.

"So, you like *poisoning* people do you, you sorry little *bastard*?" Mrs. Radcliff berated. "What did you think you'd *gain* by *poisoning* me?"

Jacob shook his head violently as if to deny the charge.

"Whatever you promised Maria, she squealed on you, anyway," Mrs. Radcliff continued.

Jacob lunged his head toward Mrs. Radcliff. She smacked him in the forehead with her elbow—back into the chair.

"Before you die, I want you to know that I killed your worthless brother Lawrence with my own hand. I stabbed the little bastard to death like he tried to stab *me* to death—and I'm going to poison *you* to death like you tried to poison *me* to death!"

Jacob produced rapid, high-pitched noises through his nose as he watched in terror as Mrs. Radcliff removed a bottle of liquid from a plastic bag, unscrewed the cap.

Jacob shook his head back and forth madly.

Connie removed a small plastic funnel from the bag, held it above Jacob's face.

"Ready?" Mrs. Radcliff asked.

"Ready!" Connie replied, hands trembling.

In one smooth motion, Mrs. Radcliff ripped the tape from Jacob's mouth—Connie quickly plunged the funnel into his gullet, before he could scream.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Mrs. Radcliff firmly held Jacob's hair in her clenched fist—as she poured liquid rat poison down the funnel into Jacob's throat.

Jacob squirmed, gagged. Within minutes blood began to trickle from his nose. His gums began to bleed. His body lost all its strength, became limp as a wet dishcloth.

As Mrs. Radcliff watched, Jacob's breath began coming in gasps. Then grew shorter and shorter—then stopped altogether. She removed the funnel, replaced everything they'd used into the plastic bag.

Mrs. Radcliff checked his pulse. "Let's go," she said quietly.

"We take his body to the garage, right?" Connie asked.

"Right!"

Chapter 19

WHEN RICHARD AND MARIA returned to the house in the wee hours of the morning, they found that Jacob was gone.

"He must have *really* been pissed!" Maria said.

"Either that, or *dead* like we planned," Richard said.

"But if he's dead—where's his *body*?"

"Maybe the she-devil took it with her."

"Naw, I know Mrs. Radcliff. She wouldn't do that."

"Let's just crawl into bed and forget all about it," Richard said, kissed her.

"You've been really *hot* tonight. Are you still? You want me again?"

"Yeah, I want you again—maybe *twice*!"

She giggled as he led her to the bedroom.

The next morning, Maria was shocked to see that Richard was also gone. No note, nothing. She thought he'd return.

Three days passed. Richard hadn't returned. Maria had no money, no food, no way to pay the rent and utilities. She was penniless. She decided to go to

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

the police. At least, if they tossed her in jail, they'd have to feed her, she reasoned.

Maria sat across the desk from Chief Detective Sparks, looked into his steel-gray eyes.

"What did you say your name was?" Sparks asked.

"Maria. Maria Sanchez."

"What can I do for you, Maria?"

"I was at the mansion when you came there to investigate the attempted murder of Mrs. Radcliff by her grandson Lawrence Radcliff. That's why I came directly to see you."

"I take it you're talking about the Radcliff mansion."

"Yes, I worked for Mrs. Radcliff."

"But you don't work for her now, right?"

"Right. I tried to kill her. I poisoned her tea."

"It was *you* who *poisoned* Mrs. Radcliff's *tea*?"

"Yes."

Sparks knew with every sensational case there were publicity-hungry kooks that came forward to 'confess'. He wondered if she was on the level. "Why did you poison Mrs. Radcliff's tea?"

"Her grandson, Jacob, said he'd pay me a million dollars to do it."

The mention of the grandson and million dollars grabbed Spark's attention like as clap of thunder. *Maybe she really did poison Mrs. Radcliff's tea.* "Are you getting all this, Jenny?" Sparks said to his secretary over the intercom.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Yes sir."

"*Did* he pay you a million dollars, Maria?"

"No, the deal was he wasn't supposed to pay me until he'd collected the inheritance from Mrs. Radcliff who would be leaving a big part of her estate to him when she was dead."

"But Mrs. Radcliff turned out to be hard to kill, and recovered."

"Yes."

"So, you didn't get the million dollars."

"Right."

"Where's Jacob now?"

"I don't know. We're not living together, anymore."

"You were living together?"

"After Lawrence disappeared, Jacob and Richard and I lived together in a house. A dump really."

"How did you pay the bills?"

"Mrs. Radcliff had given her grandchildren large allowances. We were living on that."

"But she stopped giving them allowances?"

"Yes, after Lawrence tried to stab her to death—disappeared—Jacob and Richard got scared—moved out of the mansion."

"How do you know Lawrence was the one who tried to stab Mrs. Radcliff to death?"

"I heard Lawrence talking to one of your policemen in the park."

"One of *my* policemen?"

"That's what I understand, a Lieutenant Walsh, I think his name is."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"How do you happen to know his name?"

"He came to the mansion to investigate Lawrence's attempted murder of Mrs. Radcliff."

"Did this policeman have a large mole above his right eye?"

"Yes."

Sparks pressed the intercom button.

"Yes, Chief!"

"Put out a Code 199."

"Who shall I say to call on Chief?"

"Walsh, McKay, and Rogers."

"Yes, sir."

"What were Lawrence and Lieutenant Walsh talking about?"

"I couldn't hear everything, but I heard Lawrence say to Lieutenant Walsh, 'I'm going to kill the old bitch...here's your money' and Lieutenant Walsh asked Lawrence if he wanted the same protection as before. Lawrence said yes."

"Maria, this is very important. Did you see any *money* change hands?"

"Yes, Lawrence gave Lieutenant Walsh a bundle of bills. It had a wrapper around it. I have no idea how much money was in the bundle."

"Are you willing to say all this in court?"

"Well, I'm in a lot of trouble for poisoning Mrs. Radcliff, right?"

"Yes, but if you testify against Jacob—the judge will go much easier on you."

"Okay, I *will* then. Are you going to put me in jail?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"I'm afraid so, Maria. That's the law."

"Good."

"Why good?"

"So I can get something to *eat*."

Chapter 20

DETECTIVE SPARKS STOOD STRAIGHT and tall in front of police commissioner, Clarence F. Davis' desk.

"What's all this nonsense about you putting out a *Code 199* on my...," Davis began, then, catching his slip of tongue, changed his question, "on three fine police officers in your section, Walsh, McKay and Rogers?"

"With all due respect, sir, there's a witness prepared to testify in court that Lieutenant Walsh was paid by Lawrence Radcliff to protect him from prosecution if his attempt to kill Mrs. Radcliff should fail."

Davis raised his snowy-white eyebrows. "And who *is* this star witness?"

"Her name is Maria Sanchez. She used to work for Mrs. Ellen Radcliff."

"The billionaire?" Davis asked, pretending he was not already very well aware of whom Sparks had been speaking.

"Yes."

"What makes you think she's a creditable witness?"

"She has too much at stake to be lying."

"What do you mean?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"She confessed to putting poison in Mrs. Radcliff's tea, said she was to be paid by Mrs. Radcliff's grandson, Jacob, to do it."

"Where is she now?"

"In jail, on suspicion of attempted murder."

Davis fidgeted with the pencil in his hand. "How much is her bail?"

An interesting question for a police commissioner, Sparks thought.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Why so *high*?"

"The *new* judge thinks she's a key witness who might allow the court to throw the book at Lieutenant Walsh and others in on the deals."

Davis laid the pencil down, looked sternly at Sparks. "*Others* in on the deals?"

"Yes, Judge Evens apparently said where there's one rotten apple, there's usually more in the same barrel. He thinks there may be others in the department who've been taking bribes from Mrs. Radcliff's grandchildren."

Davis' old companion-in-crime-judge had apparently been replaced by a judge named Evens. Davis began to perspire. "It's hot in here," he said.

Yes, and it's likely to get a lot hotter, Sparks thought. "Now, you see why I put out the Code 199, sir."

Davis coughed. "Yes, good work detective. You're a fine cop, Sparks. Keep up the good work. So, where are Mrs. Radcliff's grandchildren now?"

"We've had an APB out on them for months now, nothing."

"That's very strange."

"How so, sir?"

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"It seems odd to me they'd leave all that lovely...all that money and just vanish."

Sparks was quite positive Davis was pretending not to know anything about the attempted murders on Mrs. Radcliff, so Sparks decided to humor him. "Her oldest grandson, Lawrence tried to kill her with a knife."

"Seems like I read something about that. The case didn't go to trial as I understand it."

You should understand it, Sparks thought, *you were the one who stopped it from going to trial*. "No, it didn't. Lack of evidence. During my follow-up investigation I found out Lieutenant Walsh, Sergeant McKay and Sergeant Rogers bungled the investigation. I think they did it on purpose."

"That's just your opinion, detective. If I were you, I'd be careful whose *toes* I stepped on."

"Am I stepping on someone's *toes*, sir?"

Davis didn't answer the question.

Chapter 21

"The booking officer needs to know what charges to book Lieutenant Walsh, Sergeant McKay, and Sergeant Rogers on," Sparks' secretary said over the intercom.

"Tell him suspicion of bribery and suspicion of destroying evidence in an on-going investigation," Sparks said.

"Yes, sir."

"And Jenny?"

"Sir?"

"Has there been any news on the Jacob Radcliff APB?"

"He has not been found."

"Thanks."

"Oh, detective, the commissioner is on line three."

Sparks picked up the phone. "Yes, sir! No, the APB on Jacob Radcliff has turned up nothing. You think Mrs. Radcliff may have had something to do with his disappearance...I'm to investigate her mansion. I'm to find evidence—or I'm fired. Yes, sir." Sparks hung up the phone.

"Your wife is on line two."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"Jenny—please tell her I can't make it for lunch. I've been ordered out on an investigation."

As Sparks sat having tea with Mrs. Radcliff on the ocean-side patio, as much as he'd have liked it to be otherwise, he couldn't help but wonder if there was something to the idea that Mrs. Radcliff had something to do with the disappearance of her grandson, Jacob. A nation-wide database search had revealed no sign of any of the grandchildren.

"Again, I profusely apologize for having to investigate your estate, Mrs. Radcliff," Sparks said, taking a sip of tea.

"I appreciate your concern, detective, however, the police can investigate all they want. I have nothing to hide. You'll find no dead bodies around here," Mrs. Radcliff answered, taking a sip of her tea. "Do we have dead bodies around here Connie?"

"Absolutely not," Connie said matter of factly.

Sparks detected what he took to be a touch of tenseness in Connie's tone.

"You had a maid working for you by the name of Maria. Is that correct, Mrs. Radcliff?"

"Yes. Maria Sanchez worked for me. Why do you ask?"

"She's confessed to putting the poison in your cup."

"*Maria poisoned my tea?*"

"I'm afraid so."

"Why?"

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"The idea was that she'd be paid a million dollars of the inheritance money by Jacob—after your demise."

"But I didn't die, so she didn't get anything."

"Exactly."

"Where is she now?"

"She's in jail with a quarter-million bail on her head."

"That's a high bail. Why so high?"

"There's a new judge that's taken the situation in hand, Judge Walter T. Evens, was strongly recommended by a member of the state supreme judicial court, I understand."

"What *situation*?"

"Maria said she'll testify—as part of a plea bargain—that she witnessed your grandson Lawrence giving money to Lieutenant Walsh in return for protection from prosecution if his attempt to kill you failed."

"Lieutenant Walsh really stuck his neck out on that one," Connie said. "He must have been promised a *huge* amount of money from Ellen's—Mrs. Radcliff's—estate after Lawrence did her in."

"Yes, so it would seem. Anyway, Judge Evens suspects there's more to it than has been uncovered."

"You mean like someone *else* was involved in the attempts on my life?"

"Yes. He suspects a person or persons in the upper level of the police department had their hands out for the take."

"Money does strange things to people," Connie added.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"But my immediate problem is that the commissioner is on my neck. He sent me here to investigate and to find evidence that you, Mrs. Radcliff, are involved in the *disappearance* of your grandsons. He says he'll fire me if I don't find some evidence to that effect."

"The commissioner is obviously as crooked as my dog Ruff's hind leg. Let him *fire* you! My lawyers will have you *un-fired* before the ink dries on the order the commissioner fires you with!" Mrs. Radcliff declared.

"That's comforting to know," Sparks said.

"Oh, how *rude* of me, your tea's getting cold," Mrs. Radcliff said.

"No. No, it's fine."

The head of the investigation team came to the table. "We've finished the investigation, Detective."

"Did you do a thorough job—check the *garages* and everything?" Sparks asked.

"Just like you *told* us to," the young man said.

Mrs. Radcliff and Connie noticed that the young man had given Sparks a *wink* as he'd said it.

"Excellent work! Well, ladies, as much as I've enjoyed your company, we must get back, so the lab can analyze the evidence we've found here."

"And what *evidence* would that be, detective?"

"No dead bodies, I'm sure, probably just lots of dog hair. By the way, you still haven't spoken to any of your grandsons lately, correct?"

"Correct. I guarantee, no one here has spoken to any of them for a long time," Mrs. Radcliff said.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

After they'd left, Mrs. Radcliff remarked to Connie, "It would seem Detective Sparks was going to let himself be fired by that corrupt commissioner rather than trump up evidence against me."

"Yes, it seemed that way to me, too. Otherwise, why would the team leader have winked at him like that. I don't think Detective Sparks had any intention of finding evidence of Jacob's *being* here, even before Detective Sparks came here to investigate," Connie agreed. "Turnaround's fair play."

Chapter 22

"You have your floppy hat on crooked!" Connie said as she placed a cooler into the little blue runabout.

"That's what floppy hats are for," Mrs. Radcliff said, laughed.

"I hope the big ones are biting today. I want to catch a really *huge* bass," Connie said.

It was a cool morning. The sun hadn't yet broken through and a few clouds lay like works of art along the horizon. Seabirds glided effortlessly above the beach. A pelican sat on one of the dock's pilings.

"Okay, is everything loaded?" Mrs. Radcliff asked.

"Everything's in the boat."

"Well then, let's get aboard—get on out to sea and do some *fishing*!"

"We'd better put on our heavy jackets," Connie said.

"We can do that after we get moving. That's when it will really feel cold."

The two climbed aboard.

"I really think you should get a motor on this thing that has a push-button starter. Pulling on a rope to start the engine seems archaic to me," Connie said.

Don Lewis Wireman, Sr.

"Exactly the point! There's a whole different feel to it. A feeling of being part of something that's slipping *away*."

Mrs. Radcliff got a good grip on the little wooden handle attached to the starter rope, and was about to give it a good yank when—all of a *sudden*—a man in *scuba* diving gear *leaped* up out of the water alongside the boat—grabbed Mrs. Radcliff by the throat—dragged her *overboard*—shoved her head under *water*—proceeded to try and *drown* her.

Connie *screamed*, was uncertain as to what to do, looked around, saw an oar in the bottom of the boat, picked it up.

Mrs. Radcliff struggled—tried to free herself from the man in the water, finally was able to force herself to the surface, grab a gulp of air. The man forced her under again and again.

Again Mrs. Radcliff forced the two of them to the surface.

Connie saw her opportunity—brought the oar crashing down onto the assailant's *head*.

As the water was not very deep, Mrs. Radcliff got her footing on the sandy bottom, stood up coughing and sputtering, got a grip on the man, who was out cold from Connie's rap on his head with the oar, lifted his head above water.

Connie jumped into the water on the opposite side of the man from Mrs. Radcliff.

Mrs. Radcliff tore away the face piece covering the man's face. "*Richard—!*" she cried. Then to Connie, "The little bastard tried to *drown* me!"

"*I saw!*" Connie cried.

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Richard came around, looked around, saw Mrs. Radcliff, grabbed her by the hair—tried *again* to drown her.

Mrs. Radcliff surfaced. She and Connie glanced at each other—simultaneously laid hands on Richard's head—forced it and his writhing body under water.

"How long does it take for someone to *drown*?" Connie asked.

"I don't know, but we're about to find out."

When Richard stopped struggling, became perfectly limp, the two ladies managed to hoist his water-soaked, dead body into the boat, struggled aboard it themselves, stripped off all of their cold, wet clothing, towed down with some dry rags Connie found in the boat, put on their heavy jackets over their nakedness.

Mrs. Radcliff started the engine, headed the boat toward the open ocean. "You take over steering. I have *work* to do," Mrs. Radcliff said.

As Connie steered the boat she watched Mrs. Radcliff carefully wrap anchor chain around Richard's body, secure the anchor to his legs.

"*Now* then, you greedy little *bastard*!" Mrs. Radcliff cried with finality, admiring her handiwork. "You'll soon be joining your sick-o brothers at the bottom of the *sea*!"

Chapter 23

CHIEF DETECTIVE SPARKS' HEAD was silhouetted against the breaking dawn.

Richard's feet dangling over the transom of the little runabout were still barely visible through Sparks' binoculars as the little boat, with its three passengers, made its way on out toward the deep.

Detective Sparks let the binoculars, attached to a leather strap around his neck, rest against his chest. "Good for Mrs. Radcliff," he said aloud.

Sparks had been standing alone on the beach watching through his binoculars for at least an hour. He'd seen the attack on Mrs. Radcliff, but by the time he'd ran ten yards up the beach to try to help her, he'd seen she and Connie had the situation well in hand, so he'd stopped and watched through his binoculars as the ladies had slung a dead body into the boat, slipped their jackets on over their nakedness, then had watched them head out to sea.

Sparks was surprised by a voice at his side. "Did you *say* something, Detective?"

Sparks turned, saw who'd spoken, his investigative team leader, Mike.

"Hi, Mike. Naw, just thinking out loud."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

"What brings the Chief Detective out to the beach on a brisk morning like this?"

"Watching justice *literally* being carried out," Sparks said, turned the collar of his trench coat up around his neck.

"I don't understand. All I see is *seabirds*."

"I'm sure you don't understand. Occasionally a person can see things out here one would never expect. I'll explain it to you sometime. Did you come to give me a lift?"

"Yeah. Jenny said where you told her you were going."

"Jenny is certainly conscientious this morning. It's much too early for her to be at the office. I told her last night I'd be here this morning."

"She was worried about you—said you've been acting strangely lately—thought you might need help this morning."

"In that case, let's go pick her *up* and I'll take you both to *breakfast*," Sparks said, smiled.

Mike smiled.

They headed for the car.

Chapter 24

MRS. RADCLIFF AND CONNIE sat at their usual ocean-side patio table having tea.

"I've had one of my lawyers update my will," Mrs. Radcliff said, taking a sip.

"Oh?" Connie said, more as a statement than question.

"Yes. I'm leaving my entire estate to *you*—with a proviso."

"Well, I think your odds of *living* a long life have greatly increased now that your grandsons aren't trying to *kill* you," Connie quipped. She turned her eyes out toward the ocean depths.

Mrs. Radcliff also looked out over the vast ocean. "Yes, you're probably right."

The attempted murders and revenge killings had aged Mrs. Radcliff noticeably and had taken a toll on her nervous system. A tear slid down her wrinkled cheek.

"Anyway, so what's the proviso?" Connie asked.

"The proviso is that you keep Ruff in the manner to which he has become accustomed."

Mrs. Radcliff's Revenge

Connie laughed. "You have my word on it. He shall want for nothing! By the way, have you heard what happened to the police commissioner?"

"No."

"According to the news on TV, he's been indicted on corruption charges."

"Good news for a change," Mrs. Radcliff said, taking a sip of tea.