



"In the digital age,
technology can be *deadly*..."

Dial QR
for Murder

MARJORIE GARDENS MYSTERY

A.E.H. VEENMAN

Dial QR for Murder

A Marjorie Gardens Mystery



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DIGITAL @ GE COZY™
Est 2014

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Chapter One

Boston Common, on Tremont Street near Pemberton Square, was in full green in early spring. It was around three o' clock and vendors and shoppers crowded the sidewalks. I was at a hot dog stand where other customers ignored a man who was bent on selling me a shoe.

“Hey, lady, you wanna buy it or not?” He resembled a young Lieutenant Columbo, dated trench and all, and shoved the leather loafer in my face. “It’s brand new, and cost a pretty penny too.”

In addition to his illegal soliciting, his gloves and padded wardrobe indicated he was homeless. “Look...” I smacked the shoe from my line of sight. “I already told you. No.”

He tugged my suit jacket’s sleeve and held the footwear as if he were presenting me with a Fabergé egg. “You don’t get quality like this at Payless. This here’s Norman Marcus.”

I paid for my chilidog and cola then turned

toward him. “What am I supposed to do with one shoe? And it’s a *man*’s shoe.”

I walked off with my lunch. A distinct feeling of being followed, I peeked over my shoulder. He was still pursuing me as I went toward the tall, mirrored building of McCarter & French LLP.

“Why don’t you give it to your boyfriend, then?” he called to me.

I waited at the entrance for him, so I could end his sales pitch once and for all. “If I ever get a boyfriend with an amputated foot, I’ll be sure to come and see you.” I tugged the glass door open and said, “It’s *Nieman* Marcus, by the way.”

“Nieman, Norman...*pfft*...they all got money in the bag.”

I wasn’t about to give him another minute of my time. I entered and greeted Thomas guarding the doors. Immediately passing him, I heard, “Hey, buddy, you can’t come in here,” and turned.

Thomas had his palms pressed against my stalker’s chest. “Ms. Ferrelli, is he with you?”

“Absolutely not.” I contemplated the homeless man’s fortitude on the way to the elevator then watched Thomas get in a scuffle with him before ejecting him from the building.

The elevator’s up button blinked green, a chime dinged, and passengers unloaded. I wondered what it was that seemed off about the guy, and what was so important about the shoe I had to have it. A couple seconds before boarding, I got a hunch.

I whipped around and hurried toward reception, dropped my belongings off at the counter, then darted outside.

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“Hey, wait a minute!” Usually people did what I told them, but my single-shoe salesman raced onward to the intersection of Tremont and Bromfield Street. “Christ.” I flung off my Jimmy Choos and scooped them up.

For someone destitute in downtown Boston, this guy was fast, healthy, and fit, not the normal qualities I’d expect. Also out of character was his advice I give the shoe to my *boyfriend*. True, I didn’t wear a ring. Unlike most people who assumed I was married, he was more observant.

And why wouldn’t he *stop*? On Bromfield, I saw him turn right for Morris Meats’s loading bay, a dead end. I reached the maw of the alley and sidled the wall. There were large dumpsters, piles of crates, and a delivery van, plenty of hiding places. I had no idea if this was a setup, if someone else would join this party, or if my host intended to do me harm. I crept a few feet in and he came out in the open.

“Man...” He panted and chuckled. “Aren’t you a thick one?”

“Who are you?” He and I both were catching our breath as I inched near. “What do you know about Norman Kane?”

“Well, she caught on after all.”

Also true. It took me a while to realize the clever play on the name of my client, *Nieman versus Norman*, hence the expensive shoe for the charade. ‘Money in the bag’ alluded to rumors that rippled the surface when Kane was arrested, claims that a competitor hired him to sabotage his family’s business. Once I pieced it together, I had one—

“Uh-uh!” He stretched out a gloved hand and reached inside his trench with the other. “Close enough.”

I stifled my movement as a chill iced my spine despite the fair April weather, my sight locked on the breast of his coat.

His voice came low, “A gift from your uncle Lou.” I balled my hands into fists upon hearing the name and my fingernails dug into my palms. He then threatened, “Work quickly.”

He removed a manila envelope, let it drop to the ground, then whirled and hopped onto a wire fence. He climbed over in a parkour style and landed upright on the opposite side. A tenacious smirk, then in a less than graceful exit, he shot off through the side street.

I had to admit I didn’t see that coming. I breathed normally at last, put on my high heels, and picked up the delivery from Louis Fernoza. For the past seven years, I dodged family, old friends, and ex-colleagues, leaving no trace to my former life.

The realization he found me left me numb.



I returned to McCarter & French and stopped by the visitor’s desk. The lobby reeked of onions. A group of lawyers departed, and the receptionist gave me my purse and lunch bag stained with chili grease. I thanked her for holding my belongings, apologized for smelling up the place, and boarded

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an elevator.

A glimpse of myself in the rear mirror panel revealed my hair was tormented, skirt did a creepy-crawl toward my hips, and my silk blouse showed perspiration stains.

“Dear Lord.” I quickly spruced myself up, and without further embarrassment, made it to my office on the fifth.

Today was Tuesday, the second day of the Norman Kane trial. Assistant DA Jason Shahaman, whom I lovingly called the Shaman behind his back, claimed my client manipulated a patented QR system to obtain prescriptions for the black market.

I unwrapped a chilidog that had turned to mush, opened a warm can of soda, and ate while I reviewed hearing notes.

In court, Jason had risen from his seat, and fastened his Paul Smith blazer at his trim waist. He’d stepped out from behind prosecution’s table, flashed his amber brown eyes and gave me a dimpled-cheek smile, then stood before the jury.

He’d addressed the five men and seven women with an opening statement in query form. How could Mr. Kane be innocent when hospital records stipulate his scanner logged massive amounts of pills that had gone missing during his shift, combined with the fact the defendant alone was capable of rigging the software because he created it?

It was a fair question. True, Norman wrote the program and had access to the barcode application. It was software Kane Code & Technology supplied for Mercy General. He and other hospital staff used

the system to scan patient files and distribute medicine accordingly. By the same argument, anyone in ICU tech-savvy enough could scan doses repeatedly and pocket the extras throughout an extended period.

Nevertheless, when the Shaman had finished, he'd strode close to my aisle seat and wagged his head in a fashion customary to Punjabis, neither a shake nor nod but a bobble somewhere in between.

Cocky. I was now determined to recheck everything I'd collected during discovery to ensure I was on track with countering the State's argument tomorrow. No priors, a fairly model citizen, and not a whisper of substance abuse, the charge of pharmaceutical drug trafficking against Norman Kane would never hold up. I was confident the evidence against my client was circumstantial at best.

A couple hours later, God help me, I wanted to hear Jason's voice. I unlocked my cell phone and dialed him.

"Isis, you were supposed to ring me when you got back."

"Sorry, I had to chase down a lead." Literally. While I couldn't verify Norman or anyone else at Mercy General was affiliated with the Fernoza Family, I feared details I could now learn from Uncle Lou would prove detrimental to my case. The envelope lay on a corner of my desk, out of reach from an impetuous grab.

"Anything I should know?"

"Nope."

He made a scraping sound with his throat. "Ms.

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Ferrelli, why don't I believe you?"

"Believe what you want, Mr. Shahaman." I shut down my computer and switched off the green shade banker's lamp. "Oh, I will tell you though, the weirdest thing happened earlier." I told him the story, up to a point and absent certain details. I added, "He then had the gall to say—I can't believe he had the nerve—you know what he said?"

"Actually, I don't."

"He mocked, 'Nieman, Norman...they all got money in the bag.'"

The Shaman laughed. "My sentiments exactly."

"Oh, whatever," I grumbled. "You're going to lose and you know it. Anyway, he followed me to work and security kicked him out."

"Sounds like you had a fun afternoon."

"Yeah, well, it never stops around here. Gotta go."

"Me too. Talk to you later."

I placed the phone on the desk then crumpled the food wrapper and bag, and a nasty glob of chili dripped onto my leather Jimmy Choo. "*Christ.*"

Voices of the five o' clock exodus hightailing it from work passed my room, and I got a napkin and cleaned the toe of my shoe. I tossed the garbage in a metal filigree bin, and the elevator dinged in the hall. *Slam dunk.* The bell seemed to have set off an alarm in my brain, and I glimpsed at the mysterious envelope on my desk.

There was another item I should've gotten from my single-shoe salesman.

I sprang from my seat, packed the Norman Kane file in my briefcase, and tucked the "gift" from

Uncle Lou under my arm. I hurried and turned off the lights, stepped out and shut the door, then boarded an elevator.

Riding down to the garage, it stopped on the second floor and Thomas stepped in. "How are you, Ms. Ferrelli? That bum didn't upset you too much, I hope."

"No, I'm fine."

"If that wasn't the darnedest thing I ever came across...crazy." It had been the strangest encounter for us both. He bridled the cabin door on the ground floor and said, "Going to get pretty nasty outside. Got an umbrella?"

"No, it's all right. I drove."

"You have a good night."

"Wait, Thomas." I held the lift from proceeding. "Did he happen to leave something for me?"

"Who?" He came back. "That guy? Not anything I thought you would've wanted, but he dropped a shoe when I was throwing his butt out."

"Where is it?" It couldn't have been a coincidence that my stalker wore gloves when he attempted to pawn a man's shoe.

"I threw it away."

We went to the reception area and then behind the counter where the office trash brimmed to the top. I lowered my belongings then removed the garbage bag and gave it to him to hold. Underneath were clean sacks the janitor left for the next time he emptied the can. I tore one off and used it to fish out the loafer then bagged it without leaving prints.

Thomas set the trash back in the bin. "I guess it's important?"

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“Could be.”

I imagined Uncle Lou exhausted great efforts to make sure I got his delivery, especially since he wasn't supposed to know I was here.

“Hey, sorry about that.”

“It's all right,” I replied. “It might be nothing at all, but I have to make sure.”

I picked up my effects and walked downstairs to the garage with my brain stuck on the conundrum of the day. Why had the mob's henchman made good on giving me the envelope yet hadn't asked about the Nieman Marcus loafer? Maybe in the tussle with Thomas, he figured I retrieved the shoe before I hunted him down. Or, it was simply a prop to lure me back into Uncle Lou's ranks.

I decided, long ago, back-room negotiations with a nine iron and a pen, witness tampering, and suppression of evidence weren't for me. That's what was expected of an independent lawyer hired by Louis Fernoza.

I wanted the corner office overlooking a cityscape, the fine car and house, and the ability to sleep at night with a clear conscience. I'd say I achieved it all but not without a price.

Instead of working *with* the Fernoza Family by oath, I ended up working *for* them by fate. I didn't choose to represent them, and I failed to find the reason why my uncle became Sam French's client last year. Nevertheless, my boss sought certain insider knowledge not freely disclosed for obvious reasons. Even client-attorney privilege had its limitations as far as the underworld was concerned.

I was the best lawyer to give Sam a tutorial on

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how to deal with the mob. My relation proved invaluable to both our success. With a little firewall and server encryption, a name change, and offsite meetings, I fulfilled my duties getting small fry off the hook, those who wouldn't have known who I was anyway, while Sam took care of the big fish personally.

It had all worked out fine. Until today.

Chapter Two

Lightning ripped the dingy sackcloth above the Beacon Hill district. I drove my Jag toward the William F. McClellan Highway. Skyscrapers skirted the distance camouflaged in darkness. Their lit windows blinked in the rain, quite similar to how an unnerved Norman Kane had batted his enraged blue eyes during witness testimony against him.

He'd been a popular RN at Mercy General Hospital. Male nurses endured politics and social stigmata, and climbed the rose lattice dominated by women. My client was no different, a favorite colleague to many. Where other men had transitioned from military details or had endeavors for medical school, he was already established in the field of techno-pharmaceuticals.

It had been hard for us both to hear Sue Cotton on the stand today. I'd gotten to know Norman in the past eight months since his arrest, and there'd been plenty to admire. Working on his defense together, we'd connected—an intimate spark that could've blossomed if he hadn't been my client.

Miles out of Pemberton Square, cars seized at the flooded entrance of the North 1A tunnel. I slowed in the queue and glanced at the items on the seat beside me. My self-recorded ringtone came through the car speakers:

'Uh-oh, the Shaman.'

"Answer."

"Isis, on your way home?"

"You aren't triangulating my location, are you?"

It would've been oddly remiss of me not to assume.

He chuckled. "The thought never crossed my mind."

"All right. What *'taught'* did, why are you calling?"

"Wow, really? You tend to make fun of my accent when you're peeved. I played nice today, so, come on, let's have it. What did I do now?"

I had to admit, my heart splintered with shame. The lane cleared as if aliens had abducted a third of the traffic, and I pressed harder on the gas pedal, my tires slashing rain with a *whoosh*. "Funny enough, it wasn't you this time."

"Tat's a relief."

I giggled softly. He had accomplished methods of defusing me, while others had quite the opposite effect. I glanced at the envelope and bagged loafer. I was determined not to see an innocent man falsely imprisoned. Jason was one of few who knew my history, understood why I left my mob family in New York. But what I had to face right now was a choice between keeping him out of whatever Fernoza backlash loomed on the horizon, and staying true to the legitimate lawyer side of me.

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I chose ethics. “That homeless guy I told you about?”

“I remember.”

“Well, he actually dropped off a package related to the case.”

“What was it?”

I wasn’t about to admit I rummaged through trash for a shoe that may or may not be relevant. “An envelope,” I simply stated. “I didn’t open it yet, so I don’t know what’s inside.”

“Let’s have dinner at your place, and we can review it together.”

“Will you forget about my place?” This wasn’t the first time he hinted for me to reveal my current address. “Listen, I’m trying to be forthcoming with you. It’s from someone close to me. Don’t ask me who, or how this person got it.”

“When you know what you have, give me a call.” There was a click.

“Jason?” Three beeps confirmed he’d hung up on me.

Ours wasn’t exactly what I’d expect to be a lasting relationship. Our times together were like sadistic dates. Quarrels over plea bargains, witness’s statements, and acquittals I won for Uncle Lou’s thugs; plus a takeout or two in between, at either of our offices or at *his* place. I considered my home sanctuary from the judicial arena, far from the Fernoza Family legacy, and I had no intention of sharing it with anyone.

A break of twilight at the maw of the tunnel concluded my half hour drive from the concrete world of traffic, lawsuits, and criminals to serene

waterfront views, open recreational parks, and clean air.

White oaks, with ashen gray bark and budding leaves a soft, downy pink, littered the neighborhoods along the route toward the blustery shores of Winthrop. At Crystal Cove, moored boats bobbed within the confines of the marina as I drove along Shirley Street and into the Point Shirley community.

A little over a mile later, I reached Deer Island Park. Wildflowers sprang from the sandy dunes, and seagulls performed their ballet across darkened skies. The hum of the water purification plant droned on undeterred by the weather.

Then a right onto Tafts Avenue, and I passed Mr. Lockhart's for a glimpse of how his prize rose garden was faring after the harsh winter, and during what was now a temperamental spring.

Mr. Briggs, a couple doors down, normally would've been under the hood of his latest junk car restoration, but his television glowed blue throughout the living room.

I lowered my car window briefly to catch a whiff of Mrs. Mason's pies from next door. Then, I cruised toward my own moderately sized Colonial, a split shade of periwinkle and royal blue with white-trim sash windows and matching shutters, a dormered attic, and a two-level octagonal feature which housed my living room on the first floor and spare bedroom on the second.

I veered into the add-on carport, and the garage door whirred shut behind me. I turned off the engine, picked up the envelope and wrapped shoe,

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then remained seated for a moment. I'd navigated my relationship with the Shaman in the past quite masterfully, knowing when to come straight out with little gifts like these.

Usually, Uncle Lou's interference came in the form of information, divulged through attorney-client privilege with Sam French, and then trickled down the pipeline to me. But I received these items from a man who found it pertinent to hide his identity. That wasn't a good sign. I was the one in hiding.

I upheld my earlier conviction to reject Jason's impulse to visit my home, despite the judgment's rather brash delivery. I couldn't risk him accidentally divulging my location to a Fernoza in disguise. In my own way, I maneuvered to keep him safe from familial retaliation, the depths and extent of which I myself had no idea.

I got out and activated the Jag's alarm then went inside through the kitchen. A dawn of automatic lights rose as I dropped off my effects in the living room and lit the fireplace. The octagonal space had African woodcarvings, which complimented a décor with tints of nutmeg and saffron, and the Bulgarian art on walls the color of chervil.

Despite my eclectic tastes, I conceded to certain customs expected in my small neighborhood. I unlocked the front door for the incidental neighbor to stop by for a cup of sugar, to borrow a book, or to bend my ear. I turned the MP3 player on and set the volume low so I'd hear when Deidre Mason came over.

Miro's "Holding On" dueled with my growling

stomach as I swung my hips and collected ingredients for fusion-style pasta. A dash of cardamom from India added sweet-and-savory to the pork sausage. The spice's beige hue was comparable to my and my dad's olive complexion, the Fernoza side of the family.

Also indigenous to the Fernoza side of the family was my inept ability to carry a tune. I squawked part of the lyrics and wiggled then tossed in a pinch of rich, earthy *pasilla*. It added a South American kick to chunks of sun-ripened tomatoes, onions, and peppers, and was the same dark auburn as my hair, like cooling embers, all Mama Ferrelli.

As the mixture bubbled, I sprinkled brick-red chipotle and then laced boiling water with linguini, homemade following my Sicilian grandmother's recipe. I may have been tone-deaf, but I was quite the composer when it came to fusion gourmet.

Three knocks and the front door squeaked on its hinges. "Isis, dear?"

I couldn't tell the difference between an E Flat and an A Major, but I most certainly recognized the New England accent and mid-tone voice of the woman calling me from the foyer. I lowered the music and replied, "I'm in here, Deidre."

Mrs. Mason had a mushroom of ivory hair, wore a red London Fog, and always carried a book. Not exactly true, there were the final two months of caring full-time for her husband a few years back. Charles succumbed to his illness and it was a trying time, understandably. Nevertheless, a year later the fifty-five-year-old returned to whipping up homemade scones and hosting Point Shirley's

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monthly book club at the library.

I met her in the vestibule, where she hung her coat and tucked a transparent rain bonnet in its pocket. “Is that cardamom I smell?” she asked with an instinctive list toward the kitchen.

“Deidre, you never cease to amaze me.”

I accompanied her to the living room and offered her a seat on the rust-shade sofa, near the kindling ablaze in the hearth. “And when can I expect another batch of apple turnovers?”

“I don’t know about those anymore. They upset my stomach something awful lately.” The fullness of her cheeks made her pale-green eyes narrow. “How about cherry cobblers next time? Oh, this is for you.” She gave me the thick law book on white-collar crime. “Thanks for the loan.”

“Finished already?” I placed it on a wall shelf replete with other legal references spilled over from my home office. “I’m surprised you took an interest. It isn’t exactly light-reading.”

“I couldn’t put it down, always wanted to do law, you see. I volunteered to work for Charles when we were younger. I wanted paralegal experience.” I stood in front of her and awaited the continuation intoned in her voice. She added, “But, my Charles was the sole breadwinner, and he wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Her long-buried profession was no surprise to me. Her intuitive investigation skills were often the highlight of Point Shirley’s Mystery Week, sponsored by the book club, which alone couldn’t stay her gumshoe nature. She, like many Winthrop residents, had a habit of ferreting for local mysteries

to decipher. They were invested with the belief that television's fabled Cabot Cove was modeled after our own Crystal Cove. It was not. But who was I to take away their modest joy, or deprive my good friend of a little law practice.

"That settles it then." I helped her rise from the sofa. "You join me for dinner, and afterward you can give me a refresher course."

"Are you sure? I wouldn't want to impose."

"I wouldn't have it any other way."

A delightful melody chimed softly, swaddled by wool. "Oh," she quipped, and bustled for her coat's pocket as the sample of John Addison's composition for *Murder, She Wrote* ended. "I get notifications for a website Lee Canfield introduced to me," she said. "It's a blog with law material, cases, and debates. I love it."

That sounded like the crime blog I made under the name Marjorie Gardens. My online ego had a backstory and all. She was a seasoned attorney who filled her retirement with blogging true crimes and murder mysteries, written with a touch of fiction to protect the privacy of those involved. I usually scheduled new posts by "MG" to automatically publish around this hour, dinnertime.

Deidre pocketed her cell phone again, and we walked into the dining area and sat at the table. As I doled out helpings of fusion-style pasta, I wondered if my grandmotherly neighbor was alternately a "thugger," a MyThugShot.com member. People signed up for Marjorie Gardens's crime blog for various reasons I imagined, none of which I'd asked them about personally. MG was nearly mythical

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other than my entries—no interaction with users on the off chance one was a Fernoza on the troll. And today proved I couldn't take a stranger bearing gifts at face-value.

But there were those who seemed truly committed to the website's purpose. They contributed more than others by scrutinizing evidence and deliberating facts.

Could Deidre have been one of my amateur sleuths whose online feedback helped me with previous cases? Instead of wheedling for answers, I gave her a sheepish smile and a filled plate.

Behind the HTML5, I was Marjorie Gardens, and *she* was free to be herself. She didn't have a client at the firm who now appeared determined to seek her out. She didn't fear the day her uncle decided it was time to put her attorney services to use in fraudulent deals and to file motions that basically obstructed justice. And she hadn't abandoned her family in New York to escape the man responsible for getting her through law school.

She also hadn't witnessed firsthand as a paralegal what it meant to be a mob lawyer.

Marjorie Gardens was my escape, vicariously free from obligation.

On the other side of the monitor, in the real world, there were measures I'd meticulously placed to ensure my safety and of those I would come to care about. But this afternoon, that regimented life fell into disarray. A man's shoe and an envelope of undisclosed contents from Louis Fernoza—couriered by a henchman concealing his identity—who deliberately sought me instead of Sam French

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to receive them. As if that didn't already prickle my nerves, I had the Shaman pushing to know where I lived.

I feared my four walls of Fernoza anonymity, a wide berth between past and present, my work separate from my home, were all about to come crumbling down around me.

Chapter Three

At eight p.m. we sat on a gray tweed sofa in my home office. Inside the conservatory extension, we faced the rear garden where darkness plagued the windows and lamps projected our reflections onto the glass. It was a creepy effect I barely noticed before. Or at least it never bothered me until this afternoon's incident. I was so thankful for Deidre's company.

As I lowered a porcelain teapot and two cups onto the table before us, we drew into a natural discussion of correlated legalities between the Norman Kane case and her read on white-collar crime. At the time Kane Code & Technology entered its vendor agreement with Mercy General Hospital, it won over a single contender. Cornelius GMBH was a German pharmaceutical company with a research and development facility in Boston. It was a long-standing software provider but suffered a major blow when it lost its bid to KCT.

Over sips of jasmine-infused green tea, Deidre raised notions of revenge and corporate espionage.

On the same assumption, I'd already questioned key personnel at Mercy General and turned up nothing. Further inquiry would've entailed interviewing everyone at the hospital in search of a mole.

"Deidre, I must admit I'm quite impressed."

"We do work great together, don't we?" She scooted forward and set her cup on the table. "I'd be obliged to assist you in any manner legally possible."

I drained the last of my tea and placed my cup beside hers. "I'd like that. And you can gain more of the experience you've always wanted."

"It's a deal," she said gaily. "Much of my practice so far comes from that blog I was telling you about."

"Really?" It was time to peer inside the window and figure out how much of a view she had.

Her line of vision locked on my workstation area, another eclectic mash. My Alienware laptop had more processing power and high-resolution graphics than I typically needed. Its gold trim casing complemented the bronze inlay of the eighteenth century French walnut desk upon which it rested.

I rose and gave her a hand then escorted her over to the laptop and booted it. She lowered onto the black leather chair with walnut finishing and typed. "Lee and Jed Briggs," she began as she signed in. "I get online to chat with them and debate our favorite cases."

MyThugShot.com was thriving with activity, fifty members and ten guests online, and a hundred new posts. Followers called out in anticipation of

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Marjorie Gardens' next segment.

"Here's why I got an alert," she said. "A new post by the blog's owner."

April 8, 2014-Case File: Who Pied the Piper?

Ladies and Gents,

MG here, bringing you another pickled predicament perpetrated beyond a preponderance of doubt. Say that three times in a row.

Seriously, folks. This case involved the abduction of twenty-eight-year-old Piper Neumann of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. July 7, 2012, a Saturday morning, Piper was preparing her son Nathan's seventh birthday party.

At roughly 9:30 a.m., a masked man entered Piper's trailer with her and her son still inside. Police determined from the crime scene that an altercation took place after Nathan fled to get help. When the poor boy and a neighbor returned, Piper and the intruder were gone.

"*Delightful.*" She glimpsed at me. "Oh, not what happened, of course."

I laughed. "I know what you mean."

"Let's see here." She navigated to the archives and singled out another message. "Ah, here we are. This is our Lee."

08/07/2013 18:28 by Drivez Da Linux:

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The storeowner was shot in the arm, for Pete's sake. How does a rifle disappear into thin air?

I always found Lee Canfield's username perfectly suited for Point Shirley's computer whiz.

*08/07/2013 18:28 by Under the Hood:
Ballistics identified the bullet pulled from the victim as a 9mm, while the casing recovered at the scene was from a .22 semi-automatic shotgun.*

*08/07/2013 18:30 by Perennial PI:
Which leaves a professional like me to believe the shell was planted to throw police off. It's quite obvious to anyone who knows his elbow from his tailbone that the REAL weapon was a .38 Special. The bullet's the same size as a 9mm but packs more gunpowder for optimal damage, which explains the victim's shattered collarbone from a shot in the upper arm.*

"As you can see," Deidre resumed, "Jed and Ray are usually the ones with the most input on firearms."

Jedemiah Briggs restored old cars, but his actual hobby was guns. I noticed he was online, and the blue light I saw through his living room window may not have been a television after all.

Also logged in was Raymond Lockhart, sixty-year-old bachelor and retired private detective. He could be quite truculent at times, apparently as much online as in the flesh. Nevertheless, his

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horticultural talents made up for what he lacked in charm, his roses in the pink of health.

Farther down the page, Jed and Ray debated on the same quandaries I had during the Keith Douglas case. I'd raised enough doubt with jurors and had won an acquittal for the client in the end. Afterward, I'd discovered what firearm was used and where it was dumped. Another gift from Uncle Lou in the form of a tip to McCarter & French.

Today proved he was changing his MO with the conveyance of tangible evidence. Forefront in my mind was the relation between Norman Kane and the mafia. The envelope and shoe couldn't benefit my defense. And how could Uncle Lou send them to me personally? Had Sam French accidentally disclosed who Isis Ferrelli truly was?

Deidre pointed to the screen and drew me from my thoughts. "One guess who that is."

08/07/2013 18:35 by Good Book Sally:

Gentlemen, while your arguments are fine-tuned on the crime scene, you forget it is up to the State to present the evidence in court and prove the burden of guilt. Which, in this case, it did not.

"I think I have *her* figured out."

The office phone rang. It was a separate VoIP, Voice over IP, line which traced back to Norway should anyone attempt locating me, like my clients or a Fernoza. I picked up the receiver.

"Isis, dinner?"

The Shaman didn't address me as Ms. Ferrelli. That was a good sign, meant he wasn't miffed about our previous phone call. "Sorry, Jason, I already ate."

"Ready for a nightcap, then?"

I perched on the edge of my Louis XV. "Hey, about earlier—"

"Forget it. It's not your fault."

I heard rustling on the other end and voices in the background. "Where are you?" I wondered if he hung up on me again. "Jason?"

"I wanted to speak to you first, to prepare you." I reiterated my query, and he answered, "City coroner's office."

"What happened?" I pounced onto my feet, and Deidre closed the laptop and stood.

"I need you to meet me down here as soon as possible. There's been a murder."

"Who is it?" A short blast of air replied. "Jason?"

"It's Norman Kane."



I reversed my champagne-colored Jag from the carport, with Mrs. Mason in the passenger's seat. "A real, live case!" She shortened her enthusiasm with a hand raised in a solemn swear. "I promise I'll remain prudent with what I learn, and hold myself to the highest standard of confidentiality."

"I know you will."

Dial QR for Murder

After I'd explained my client had been murdered, Deidre and I had padded to the hall and gotten our coats. Safety in numbers, I'd thought, then hired her on the spot as my consulting investigator.

It was uncanny how much she could resemble Marjorie Gardens if I were to put a face to my online persona. And her predisposition for law was a resource I couldn't let slip through my fingers. Nevertheless, her involvement was a tightwire I'd have to walk carefully.

Blankets of clouds rolled southward as I drove along Tafts Avenue in the direction of Deer Island Park. "You know," she said with a piqued tone. "I can't help but think we were on the right track. From everything you told me, this has all the makings of corporate espionage."

"True, but I have no idea who framed my client...*former* client."

"I'm sorry, dear."

I nodded acceptingly. "It doesn't make sense. Why would anyone murder him for embezzlement or stealing medicine when he could've been facing imprisonment?"

"Perhaps the murderer wasn't convinced Norman would be found guilty."

Exactly as I suspected, and only someone with intimate knowledge of the case would feel the same. Clearly, Judge Mansfield wasn't buying the prosecution's claims. The defendant's accumulated net worth came in at over a billion. He could've fled, yet the judge granted him bail for less than a quarter million.

I stated to Deidre, “I guess the best way to ensure Norman disappeared was to silence him permanently.”

“Indeed. Though I say the killer could’ve waited for an innocent verdict to strike.”

I focused on Winthrop’s drenched landscape. Tracts of single-family homes with shingle siding and weathered beachfront properties were now dewed with an undercurrent of the torrential downpour hours earlier.

“Unless...” I sought her attention. “We’ve merely seen this entire matter after the storm.”

“What do you mean?”

“What if the claims against him were made *after* a precursor was committed?”

Her mouth rounded in a train of thought. “In other words, frame him to divert attention from another crime, which would imply—”

“Norman Kane stumbled upon something he shouldn’t have.” I sped toward the William F. McClellan Highway. “Surely he would’ve admitted being set up, or if he suspected someone at the hospital tampered with the software. He never mentioned anything of the sort.”

“I suppose we’ll have to dig deeper.”

I raced along the highway for the tunnel leading back into the city. “You made a good point though, Deidre. The killer could’ve waited. That tells me whoever murdered him was on a definite time schedule.”

“Why?”

“Kane Code & Technology goes public on the NASDAQ in three days.”

Dial QR for Murder

I didn't know anyone who'd profit from my client's death. Finance was an age-old motive for murder. But motive didn't amount to a twelve-inch roll of pennies if I had no one in my bull's-eye.