

*Fall*

*of*

*Indian*

*Summer*

*Kathleen Rhoads Carpenter*

*A Kado Mystery*

**This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any actual names of persons, living or dead, are used to honor them.**

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**Dedicated lovingly to Virginia, Gurrie, Paul,  
Mark, and Cheryl**

## Chapter 1

Through the motionless blackness before dawn, Chuck drove his old maintenance pick-up truck over the bumpy, crunching gravel driveway next to the Berry High School field house. He could see nothing except his weak headlights bouncing here and there like fireflies on a summer's night. As he pulled to a stop at the rickety shack, he grabbed his flashlight and slid out the torn front seat. Before he closed the door, he started looking through the countless keys on his heavy ring. Finding the one for the field house, he closed the truck door, tugged the collar of his red and black checked flannel shirt up against the brisk morning, and walked towards the field house door. A gentle "Thunk, Thunk" made his head snap up. He aimed his light at the door and saw that it was being slightly opened and shut by a gentle breeze.

"Oh, Jeez," he thought, "Don't tell me I

forgot to lock that after practice yesterday afternoon."

As he got closer, he could see that a few dead leaves had blown under the door, preventing it from closing all the way. His flashlight also picked up a dark, almost black, red hue; it probably wasn't an autumn leaf because none of the others around it were that color. He walked closer and knelt down to examine it and saw that the dark color was soaked into the door's deteriorated threshold. Something had invaded his field house, and he had no idea what it was; he felt more than a little uneasy. Carefully, he swung the door open and stepped through the door and saw that the deep hue continued as a long, dark line into the field house. He inched in the door, keeping his flashlight aimed at the dark line and flicked the wall light switch. Now, with the lights on, he could see that the line grew wider and wider and then broke around the third row of lockers.

"What in God's name is that?"

Stepping slowly and cautiously, he followed the line, being careful not to step on it.

"Oh, Jeez. Oh, Jeez," was all he could stammer as he saw the ghastly source of the line, a huge pool of dried blood in which lay

the mutilated, naked body of a young woman. The blood seemed to have come from every inch of her body. Horrified, he froze where he stood. Yet, he was still anxious to see if there was anything he might be able to do to help. He approached and carefully stepped over the body, avoiding the blood and her long, brown hair. She lay on her stomach. The strands of hair fanned out from the back of her head and across her face. One arm was extended above her head. With his stomach turning against him, he nevertheless felt compelled to reach out to feel her pulse, even though by now he knew she must be dead. Dropping her wrist gently, he carefully stepped back from the body and walked swiftly around to another row of lockers and then ran towards the door. Flashlight in hand, he raced to the truck, found his cell phone on the front seat, and dialed "911."

"She's dead," he shouted into the phone.

"Sir, are you in any danger?"

"No, I don't think so. No, I don't know, but I found a woman's body ...she looks...she is dead."

"Sir, who is this and where are you

located? Who is dead?"

"I don't know who is dead, for Pete's sake, send me help."

"Of course, sir. You must tell me your exact location. I will send help immediately, but I need to know where you are."

The operator continued to speak in a calm voice and tried to calm her caller down as well. After a few seconds he was able to tell her where he was. Somehow, he told the operator what he had found. She again tried to soothe him and asked him to remain on the line while she called for help. She came back in a minute to tell him that the police were on their way. She continued to ask him questions, but his ears were no longer listening; his mind could not focus on anything except the sight of the mutilated body. He stood shivering against the door of the truck, gulping back sobs.

He had never even seen a dead body, let alone one that had been repeatedly, viciously stabbed. He was positive she had been stabbed because of all the slashes in her body. The vision may have been out of his eyes, but it would be forever in his head. Within minutes, headlights flashed, and he heard the familiar crunch of gravel as a car

with red flashing lights headed towards him. He felt a strange kind of relief, as if he had transferred the boulder of his burden to trained, capable quarry miners.

## Chapter 2

"What is my kindergarten teacher doing at my college fraternity party? She's actually drinking beer and dancing with my roommate. Oh, no, she's coming towards me. Where can I hide my drink? What if she calls my parents?"

George would never know the answers to his questions. His weird dream was interrupted by the unwelcome ring of the phone by his bed. Lifting the blonde head from his shoulder and nudging the red-haired head off his feet, the chief of police of Berry Township twisted to pick up the receiver. His wife comfortably settled back down on her own pillow, but Tully, his Irish setter, jumped off the bed in anticipation for a new day.

"Clews," he answered crisply.

"Hi, Chief, sorry to bother you so early, but I think we've got a big case on our



hands."

"Tell me."

"A call came to 911 about twenty minutes ago from Berry High School. The caller reported a dead body, so we dispatched a squad car to the scene. The officers just confirmed that the body was there, all right. A female, fairly young. She was in the field house. School maintenance man found her."

"Goddamn. Okay, I'll be in soon, but call my cell if you need to talk to me earlier."

George's wife, now awake and turned toward him on one elbow, asked, "What's the matter, Honey?"

"Dead female body at the high school. Could be a murder or a suicide. Sam said she was young, so I don't suspect natural causes."

"How young? Could it be a student? Maybe it's one of Stacy's friends."

"We don't know who it is... was ... yet. I pray it's nobody's daughter, but...then again, she has to have been someone's daughter. We'll just have to wait. Listen to the news after I've left. I'm going to suggest that they cancel classes at the high school today."

Lois didn't respond. Her worried face turned away from him because she understood the nature of the job and knew

better than put any extra strain on him. She just bit her lip and rolled out of her side of the bed as George rolled out of his. Tully ran to the kitchen, her usual morning routine, and sat with head alert and front paws crossed in front of her. She seemed to understand that it was her job to protect and defend too.

Lois scrambled a couple of eggs and put a whole wheat English muffin in the toaster as George showered. He dressed quickly and raced down the hall to the kitchen.

He grabbed a paper plate from the cabinet, placed the eggs on the muffin. After he gulped his small glass of orange juice, he slipped on his jacket and picked up his paper plate and a napkin. Lois stood at the door holding out his coffee mug and gave him a swift kiss on his chin as he strode out the door to the garage. Alone, she sighed, looked at the clock, and decided the kids could stay asleep for awhile. Besides, if the possible crime scene were at the high school, there might not be any school today. She poured herself a cup of coffee and settled down in front of the television set to watch the events unfold.

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After his call to Chief George Clews, Sergeant Sam Fox called John Sullivan, the principal at Berry High School.

"Hi, John, this is Sam. Sorry to call you so early, but there's been an incident at the high school, and I knew you'd want to be notified. It's not good, not at all."

"For Heaven's sake, Sam, what happened?"

"Don't really know yet, but a dead body has been found in the field house. I'm on my way over there now."

"Good God! Do you know who it is?"

"No, John, we just don't have any information now, except that it appears to be the body of a young female. Don't even know if it's murder or suicide. I just wanted to give you a jump start on your day. It's going to be a busy one for sure."

"Right. What should I do?"

"Get dressed and wait. I'll call you back."

"Thanks, Sam. I do appreciate your thinking of me. Let me know as soon as you find out anything. In the meantime, I'll call the superintendent."

"That's a great idea. Later."

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Across town, Mark Sanford, an avid police radio scanner fan and sometime-stringer for the city media, called the news desk of his favorite TV station to report what he had heard a few minutes ago.

"Bud, Mark. Just picked up a transmission from the Berry Township police radio. It seems there's been a body of a young female found in the field house at the high school. Could be big. I'm on my way."

"Thanks, Mark. Keep in touch. Meanwhile I'll call Kyle Jenkins; he lives in Berry. I'll send him too.

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"Kyle, Bud. Get dressed pronto and get over to the high school field house. A dead female. I'll get a van and camera crew out to you right away."

The huge, clunky wheel of the news mill creaked into action for another day. Within two hours, it would be spinning fast, reaching even the national news services

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"Abe, John Sullivan here."

"Good grief, John. Why in the world are you calling me at this hour?"

"Had a call from a policeman friend of mine. He wanted to alert me that a dead

body has been found in the high school field house. She could be a murder victim."

"Oh, no. That's terrible. Good God. Any idea who it is?"

"Not yet."

"Let me think, let me think. Give me a minute. Well, I guess we have to close the high school...no, no, wait a minute, we'll have to close all the schools today. The parents probably don't want their kids out of their sight if they think that a crazy killer might be on the loose. We just don't have enough information to know if there is any danger for the kids, so we can hardly reassure them at this point in time. I'll make the necessary calls right away. The high school kids will be on their way to school in an hour or so. If there's indeed a murderer out there, we have to keep the students home....safe. Talk to you later."

"Yeah, I'll call you the minute I have more information. I'm going to the school as quickly as I can. Perhaps I'll stand at the front entrance in case any of the kids don't get the message about the school closing today."

"Good idea. I'll call my secretary to tell her what to say when the phones start ringing."

Thinking again about the body, Abe said softly, "Poor, poor lady. I pray it isn't someone we know."

"Yes, Abe, that would be a blessing."

### **Chapter 3**

"Morning, Officers. The body's in there," Chuck said, standing away from his truck and pointing with his thumb over his shoulder toward the field house. One of the policemen stayed with him as the other went into the field house. In a few minutes, he came back out, nodded his head "Yes" to the other officer, and then went to his patrol car to call Central Communications.

The officer who had stayed with Chuck said, "I have to check you for weapons, sir. Will you please stand away from your truck?"

"Uh, yeah, okay, I guess you do, but I'm just the guy who found the body."

"Yes, sir, I understand, but I do have to check you."

After the officer had finished frisking Chuck and all of his clothing, he opened the truck doors and searched it with his flashlight. Finally, the policeman nodded an

"Okay" to the other officer. In a matter of minutes, two more cars arrived. Out of one stepped Sergeant Sam Fox, and the other held two detectives from the crime scene unit. After stopping to talk to the officer who had gone inside, the sergeant and one of the detectives went into the field house; the other remained to question Chuck.

Taking out his notepad, the detective walked over and said, "Hi, Chuck. You've had a pretty bad shock this morning."

"Oh, hi, Rich. Yeah, it was pretty awful."

"It's never easy; that's for sure. Okay, for the record, please give me your full name and your purpose for being here this morning."

"Sure. My name is Charles Ludovico, and I'm a maintenance man here at Berry High School. I always stop at the field house first thing in the morning because I have a small office in the back of the building. I check the phone messages and the emails to see if any work requests have been sent in. Then I can plan my day."

"Good, thank you. Now tell me how you found the body."

As Chuck told his story to Detective

Tomlinson, the officers who had answered the call began to put the yellow crime scene tape around the field house. Then they walked around the immediate surrounding area looking for possible evidence. They noted and checked some possible hiding areas, but they found nothing.

Detective Tomlinson finished taking notes and asked Chuck to stay right where he was in case they needed more information from him. He then joined his partner and the sergeant inside the field house. They were standing by the body and had already taken some photos of the dreadful sight. Then they searched the entire building, including Chuck's office, and opened every locker.

"Hey, Sarge, come here; I've found something."

At the bottom of one of the lockers was a pile of neatly folded clothes and a pair of shoes. Disturbing them as little as possible with use of a pencil, they determined they were women's clothes.

"I'll bet they belong to our victim. I'll bag 'em and take them back to the station."

"Good," said the sergeant as he turned to Detective Tomlinson, "Did the guy who found the body say if he knew who she



was?"

"He didn't turn her over. All he did was to feel for a pulse."

"Get him back in here."

Reluctantly, Chuck re-entered the field house, following the detective the long way around the end of the row of lockers. When he saw the body again, he was ready to run out again, but he resolved to stay in spite of his extreme nausea. He must help the police as much as he can. The sergeant lifted the victim's head so that her face was visible.

"Do you know her?"

Horrified, he slammed his eyes shut, nodded, and stammered, "Yes. She...she's an...an English teacher here at Berry. Her name is Julie Dalton."

Another man appeared at the door and carefully made his way to the body. He nodded to the policemen as he crouched down, with an almost stoic face, to examine the victim.

"I'm going to do a prelim exam," the medical examiner told the sergeant. "The county guy is also on his way, but it's probably safe to say her multiple stab wounds were the cause of death."

The detectives noted the various blood

spatter patterns were all different and then pointed them out to their sergeant.

"Look at this one and this one. There's another one over here too. It's really weird. Most of the blood is on the lockers. The victim was probably dead after the first three or four stabs and would have fallen to the floor. How did all of these spatters get caused by a body lying on the floor?"

"I agree. That's weird all right. Can we get that FBI guy who was trained to analyze blood spatters in on this case? He's helped us before; he lives close...in Western Shore. Give him a call."

The sergeant's cell phone rang. "Yes, Chief. I'll fill you in with as much as we know at this point. The man who found her did know who she was. Her name is Julie Dalton; she was a teacher here at Berry, but I thought we'd better keep the name out of the news reports until we find out if she had a husband or parents. Once we contact someone close to her, we'll let the press know. Sure don't want her husband to hear about this from television. Yeah, the guy was positive about her identity. He said she had been teaching English here for about seven years. We just started investigating the crime

scene. The only thing we've found so far are her clothes; they were neatly folded and in a locker. Oh, yeah, did I forget to mention that she was nude? We've got a lot to work on here. Will you put someone else in charge of finding out about our victim...you know, family and friends information? Anything that might be helpful."

After he got off the phone, he went back to learn what else the detectives might have found.

"Yea, boss, I found something else. Do you see these thick threads around the pipe? We looked in a 360° circle around the body and found similar threads across at that pole over there. We'll bag them, but I'll bet they're from a small rope. Can't figure that one out. She certainly didn't hang herself."

Across the street, a man darting out in his robe and slippers for his morning paper saw the police cars and two others surrounding the field house. He ran back to his house, shouted to his wife and hurriedly phoned neighbors and friends. Before long, a small crowd had gathered in front of his house, gawking and chirping like a cluster of Katydid. An early morning dog walker didn't stop with the others but stared intently

at the commotion across the street for several minutes and smiled.

## Chapter 4

"My body hasn't been watching television lately," Kado grumbled to herself as her back let her know with a jab here and there that it didn't wish to get out of bed this morning. If, indeed, her back had been well-informed, it would have heard that 60 is the new 50 and would spring up happily, stretching and smiling. Instead, it reluctantly allowed itself to be dragged into a sitting position in order to make a mad dash to the bathroom.

Of course, it was still early - 6:00 am. That was one more thing her body didn't understand yet. After thirty years of teaching high school, it automatically assumed it was time to wake up. She looked out the window and thought the mornings were getting darker. Soon the weather would forget the lovely Indian summer they had been having. "Why do we call it that again?" she mused and made a note on the

pad of paper on her nightstand to look it up.

The hot shower made her feel somewhat better. "But I still don't feel 50 yet," she scolded her unheeding aches and pains. She brushed her teeth and swished her mouth with an absolutely horrible tasting mouthwash, which her dentist insisted killed more germs. Then she smoothed on her daily dose of moisturizer on her face and throat, musing, "I can't believe I've been using the same brand since I was sixteen. Whatever did I need it for then?" Dressing quickly in a velour sweatshirt and jeans, she found that the zipper was not playing nicely. After a couple of tugs, she took the jeans off. "I refuse to lie down on the bed to zip my Levi's like all those skinny-looking models do in the commercials; I'll bet their jeans fit all along; they were just pretending to struggle." A quick look in the closet was rewarded with slacks that had an elastic waist.

Then Kado looked in the mirror and quickly pushed her wet hair into place. Her curls were practically a memory from the past, but there was still enough wave to keep hair-fussing at a minimum.

A few minutes later she was drinking

the one cup of coffee that had become her limit. She smiled as she remembered that her daughter was so proud of her for cutting down on her 6-cup a day habit that she had bought her a fancy Keurig Single Serve coffee maker. Settling on a counter stool with her Special K, juice and coffee, Kado clicked on the television just in time to hear, "Woman allegedly murdered in area high school. Stay tuned for details." A sincere looking man replaced the anchor's image on the screen; he wanted to assure them that now was the time to buy gold and that they were the best company to obtain it for you; he was followed by a singing cat meowing her wares and a local car dealer shouting he had the best deals that had ever been known to man....ever!

"Why do they always do that?" Kado complained. "They could at least say the name of the school." She really knew the answer to her question. The headliner was a sure device to keep the viewers right where they were, watching their television station and boosting their ratings.

A concerned Kado moved from the kitchen area to the TV room area of the long room, sat down on the sofa, and worried

through a total of five commercials. Finally, the grim anchor announced that the murder had taken place at Berry Township High School. "Oh, my God!" cried Kado; it was the school where she had taught for thirty years.

The anchor continued, "We have a reporter at the school now. Kyle, what have you learned so far? Can you hear me?" A shot of a young man fiddling with the IBF in his ear came on the screen.

Finally, he answered the anchor. "Yes, Dan. A detective just told me that the name of the victim is being withheld until the family is notified; however, as I reported earlier, that the body is believed to be a teacher at the school. The body was discovered at 5:15 this morning in the field house. A maintenance man noticed that the door was ajar. He went to investigate and found the victim in an aisle between two rows of lockers."

After listening to the few other details that were broadcast, Kado raced to the phone. She hoped a few of the current faculty friends would have more information. Knowing they would already be awake because they would be getting

ready for school, she made several calls. Some had heard the same news announcement, but no one knew who had been killed; they all felt sad, worried, angry, helpless--all at the same time. Everyone also wondered why a teacher would be at school so early. One of her calls was to Jill Lakin, another retired English teacher, who asked her to come over for coffee. She agreed, realizing that today would be a more than one-cup day.

A light rain and darkness called for headlights, even though it had gotten somewhat lighter in the past 30 minutes. Had it really been only that long? Driving through the neighborhood she knew so well after almost 40 years, Kado saw that house lights were gradually starting the day. The homes appeared so peaceful. "I'll bet they haven't turned on the news yet," she thought to herself.

She reminisced as she drove that on 9/11 her mind and body had been in the same turmoil as today; she was almost physically ill then too. At that time she was still teaching and had driven to school with thoughts of her lesson plan for first period, wondering whether A-V had printed the



handouts for her classes yet and telling herself that she really must try to get her print jobs in sooner next time. The day hadn't exploded on America yet. During second period, the principal's grave voice came over the P.A. system to make the horrendous announcement about the suicide airplane attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Later in the day, the country learned of the actions of the brave passengers on Flight 93. They had sacrificed for their country as had many soldiers since the very day of America's birth...and even before. Still later the valiant rescue teams of men and women risked their own lives to save others. Sometimes that risk became the final gallantry of their lives, too. She sighed such a deep sigh of sadness, and her eyes teared at the horror of that day and at the fear of what today would bring. Now, the satellites bombarded them with the daily reporting of violence from far away, sometimes from places they had never heard of before. Sometimes the most optimistic of optimists would get depressed.

Jill was outside on the porch as Kado drove up the driveway. "That's odd," she thought. She got out of her car, pushed the

key button to lock the car, and walked up the sidewalk. As she approached, she could see that Jill was crying, so she started to run towards her.

## Chapter 5

"Josephine, are you up? Mandy's here."

Josephine Richardson flung her head over the upstairs railing, holding back her long, streaked blonde hair back with a still summer-tanned arm.

"Hi, Mand, come on up."

Mandy bounded up the stairs two at a time. She reached her best friend and put her tear-stained cheek on Josie's as she hugged her and screamed, "Did you hear? Did you hear?" Ms. Dalton's been murdered."

Josie didn't respond. She simply walked away from her friend's embrace and back to her bedroom. Mandy followed her, oblivious to her friend's aloof attitude, and babbled on about what the television was saying and what all the kids were saying and what her parents were saying.

Finally, Josie snapped her head towards her friend and said, "Enough already."

Yeah, I've heard everything! All the attention makes me sick. Everybody should be glad that she's gone."

Totally unaware of the her friend's last words or the lack of emotion accompanying them, Mandy flopped on Josie's bed. "Yeah, everybody is just sick about it. She was such a great teacher. So nice. To everyone."

Josie walked over to her window and stared out at the gold and red leaves. "Not to me," came out quietly, unemotionally.

The puzzled expression on Mandy's face changed in an instant of realization.

"Oh, of course. In all the commotion this morning, I had forgotten. The cheerleading thing!"

"Yes, Mandy, the cheerleading **thing**, as you call it. It only ruined my life, that's all!"

Suddenly Josie turned from the window and shouted at her friend, "She made me ineligible for the U.S. All Star Federation cheerleading scholarship. That's all. My folks probably can't afford to send me to college now. My entire future is destroyed because of her."

"Oh, Josie, I am sorry. I really wasn't thinking. Of course you didn't like Ms.

Dalton."

"Didn't 'like' her? Try 'hated' her. All of my dreams...**all** of my dreams...just gone because of her hateful decision."

"Aw, c'mon, it's not that bad. You can probably audition and show them your talent or maybe even make a DVD to send to schools. It'll work out fine. You'll see. Besides, you didn't really 'hate' her."

"Yes, I did. With all my heart. She was the meanest person I ever knew."

The girls sat side by side in silence. Mandy had no idea what to say next. Josie's thoughts drifted to a month ago.

*The senior cheerleaders all walked down the hall toward the main gym to see who had made the varsity squad. They spotted the list posted on the bulletin board, and each eagerly checked for her own name. Then the snotty comments began. "I can't believe she made it. She's so fat!" "Look who else is up here; that girl is totally uncoordinated." "Oh, I see old Mr. Banter's kid made it. Talk about sucking up!" "What d'ya mean? "You're a dummy. He's an assistant superintendent." On and on they giggled; very few of their comments were complimentary. Suddenly, Chrissy said,*

*"Hey, where's Josie's name? She's not on the list!" The rest protested that that was impossible, and finally decided Ms. Dalton had made a mistake. They turned to Josie to see her reaction.*

*Josie pretended not to have one, but her stomach was churning. "Oh, sure, I guess she forgot how to type my name. I'll stop by and see her some time today. In fact, maybe I'll go look for her now. After all, our first practice is today."*

*They all nodded their agreement, and the subject became the fall game schedule.*

*Josie found Ms. Dalton in her classroom, setting up for her first period class.*

*"Hi, Ms. Dalton. I just saw the cheerleaders list, and I'm not on it. Did you forget to put my name there?"*

*Julie Dalton turned to look into the bright, eager eyes.*

*"Hi, Josie. I tried to call you last night and the night before, but there was no answer. I didn't want to just leave a message. I called this morning too, but again I just got a machine."*

*"I must have already left for school, and both my parents leave early for work.*

*Anyway, why were you trying to reach me? Did you want to tell me I was captain instead of Sally? You probably didn't want to hurt her feelings by posting it before you told me."*

*Julie sighed. Her eyes were very sad.*

*"I'm glad you came to see me. Let me ask Ms. Roark to cover my homeroom so that we can find a place to talk."*

*Josie's stomach suddenly grew even more uneasy; she replied, "Okay. Will you call the attendance office to let them know I'm here?"*

*"Of course, I will, Josie," Julie answered over her shoulder as she went to find Ms. Roark at her post in the hall. After giving Ms. Roark a few instructions, Julie walked with Josie to the empty teachers' workroom, escorted her in, and closed the door. She sat down and indicated another chair to Josie.*

*Then she reached over to clasp Josie's hands and said softly, "Josie, I really thought long and hard about my decision; I've decided that you are not going to be on the cheerleading team this year."*

*Josie felt the only rejection she had ever had in life explode in her brain.*

## Chapter 6

Once Kado was on the porch, Jill grabbed her and hugged her hard and sobbed throughout her shaky announcement, "Kado, it was Julie; Julie is dead. They say she was murdered."

"Oh, my God, oh, my God," was all Kado could say, as the tears rolled down her cheeks. Her thoughts came like flashes, disorganized, "Julie? Everyone loved Julie. Julie? No! Who would want to harm her? Who would want to kill her? Why did some insane villain deprive all of us her energy and love?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, they just announced her name a few minutes before you got here and showed her picture."

"But I thought they were going to wait to notify family before they identified the body to the public?"

"That's what they said, but I guess

some eager and ambitious young reporter dug up the news. He must have talked to someone who had seen the body or overheard the police saying who it was and then found the picture in the yearbook."

"That was pretty flimsy evidence. I'm surprised the station went with it. It certainly will lose credibility on future "exclusive" stories if they are proved wrong. That's a small hope for us though. We're not certain it was Julie. Let's pray that the station is wrong."

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Not too far away, a still, quiet figure sitting in a darkened living room also heard the report that the murder victim was Julie Dalton. Smiling, the shadow clicked off the television set and walked over to a hall closet. A large carry-all was tucked behind some boots and sports equipment. Taking it out and carrying it down the basement stairs, the shadow went to a utility sink. It took out a 10-inch chef's knife and scrubbed it in the laundry basin. Then out came bloodied material. But the shadow just stood there holding it. "I know there's probably no use washing these things," it sighed. "They always know how to identify blood on



things. But it's so stiff; it won't fold away. Perhaps I'll use the heavy cycle and cold water and bleach. I should be able to fold it and hide it then...until I can find someplace to throw everything away. Maybe I could take a flight to Chicago and get rid of the knife there." It smiled at its own little joke. "Wonder who I could get for my 'dream team'? Well, I'll wash these and then just put everything back in the bag and hide it here in the basement. There's nothing to worry about anyway. No one will ever suspect me."

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Eventually, two other teachers came over to Jill's house, Ann Tandy and Beth Schwartz, both current English teachers. They had arrived separately at school. They had heard the announcement of the school closing on their car radios as they drove to school, but they were still not sure whether or not they were to report for work. When she saw the chaos at the field house, Ann stayed in her car. She spotted Beth's car across the parking lot and called her on her cell phone.

They decided to meet at Jill's because she lived close to the school. It was as if they thought Jill would know more because of her proximity to the high school. Jill greeted

each of them with a tight hug. They walked into the family room and joined Kado on the sofa. Jill gave them each a cup of coffee, and they all sat and stared at the television, which wasn't reporting anything new...yet.

All four of them had a special memory of Julie to share. They hit "Mute" on the television and talked.

Beth reminded them of Julie's first days at Berry. She was fresh out of college and had just survived her first four days of teaching. She had been sitting rather wide-eyed in the teachers' lounge when she asked,

*"How do you guys know so much? I thought I knew my subject matter pretty well, but I've never heard of some of things you talk about. I'm also beginning to realize that those education courses in college don't really teach anything you can actually use when you're standing in front of a class for the first time. Beside, your knowledge, you present the stuff to the kids just right and make at least some of them really interested in what you're saying."*

"Kado, I think it was you who answered that one!"

"Yes, I think you're right."

*"Julie, we have no magic, just*

*experience. One of the terrible realizations you have while student teaching is that those eager, young faces in front of you are not waiting for your pearls of wisdom. They are waiting for the bell to ring. So, you have to think of ways to do what you're supposed to do - teach them for forty-five minutes -without seeming to see the frequent glances at the clock, the glazed-over look of the eyes that is a dead giveaway that their minds have left the building, and the occasional not-so-stifled yawn. You will become very quick on your feet. A quick twist here, an unexpected spin there, keeps you going until you are at last sprinting through the goal posts to slam down the ball. The bell has rung. You will also realize that asking other teachers what to do is the most effective education class you will ever have."*

Everyone smiled, saying, "Ain't that the truth!"

"It wasn't long before Julie was the one helping new teachers," said Jill. "She was one of the best. Everyone, even the students, recognized that."

They all smiled and nodded, individual images of Julie capturing their thoughts.

As they sat talking, the numbness

never really left them. Glances at the screen and the repeated scenes brought back the horror of the day, and they started to speculate on the murder. At that point, Kado, who was always making notes (she always kidded that her notes had notes), decided to start taking down the information and speculation so that they could remember later. Ann told them that last year Julie had dated Jon Atkins, a new math teacher Jill and Kado didn't know because they had retired before he was hired. She added that their break-up last June had been a rough one as Julie broke the relationship off just before summer vacation; they had planned to take a trip together. Apparently, since the break-up, Jon makes derogatory remarks about Julie to other male teachers all the time.

"Oh," gasped Jill, "but surely he wouldn't be capable of murder."

Beth looked as if she wanted to say something but, after a short reflection, did not.

They turned on the volume when the Deputy Police Chief's face appeared on the screen. He announced that the Chief of Police would be holding a press conference at noon and urged everyone to leave the

school area and go home.

The four of them chatted for a short time about family and friends. Beth and Ann had some funny stories about their new classes. Then, they all just stopped talking. There was really only one thing on their minds. One by one they left Jill's and headed home to face...what? Nothing but more sadness.

## Chapter 7

Walking slowly up the wide stone steps and through the columns, the shadow looked up at the circular stained glass windows nestled in the gothic arches of the doors. They were gentle, pastoral scenes in deep hues of red, blue and green, sparkling against the rich mahogany tones of the wide, tall doors. Pulling the heavy doors open and slowly walking down the center aisle, the gliding shadow stared at the large crucifix in the front of the church. Two elderly ladies, arms full of gold and orange fall blossoms, stood in front of the altar. One of them noticed the shadow's approach, smiled and waved one of the flowers in a greeting of welcome.

"Hello there, welcome to St. Francis Xavier. Father will be hearing confessions in about 10 minutes. You can wait over there in the pew beside the confessional."

The shadow didn't speak but waved

and mouthed "Thank you." It passed by a statue of Mary and nodded, walking slowly back towards the small doors on the far side of the church. Then the silent figure slumped down in the near-by pew.

"Did you notice that?" whispered Amanda.

"What are you talking about?" asked Marguerite.

"Our visitor didn't genuflect to the altar before sitting in the pew."

"Oh, Mandy, not everyone who walks into a church is a member of the religion. Could be a Muslim for all you know."

Amanda reached out with one of her flowers and hit Marguerite's shoulder with it. "You always do know how to comfort people, Maggie, dear."

The shadow looked around, taking in all the statues, especially Mary's, and sighed. Presently the figure of a tall man in a long black cassock came strolling from the door to the right of the altar. He genuflected and turned to walk down the long aisle. He opened the middle door of the confessional, which was located towards the entrance of the church, and went in.

The shadow slid from the pew, entered

the door on the right of the priest's door, bent down onto the small padded kneeler, and whispered through the screen.

"Father, I'm not a Roman Catholic. Should I leave?"

"No. You are a child of God and I want to help you if you are troubled."

"I have committed a sin... I think you call it a mortal sin... I don't want to go to Hell. Even though I'm not Catholic, can the Lord be my salvation as it says in "Isaiah"?"

"Child, since you are not a Catholic, I cannot grant you the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but I would be very pleased to pray with you. We could pray together to ask God to ease your anxious soul and forgive you your sins. I know that God loves you as one of his children and wants to absolve you."

"Thank you, Father. I have been troubled for some time now, even before my sin."

"Yes, your troubled mind has falsely guided you to do something that your heart knew was not right. If you are sincerely sorry for having sinned against God, He will listen to your prayers."

After the priest said this, he leaned



toward the voice, waiting for the penitent's next words. There was only silence.

"Child, can I help you begin to pray?"

"Father, I cannot pray."

"Why is that, child?"

Again there was a tense silence.

"Because, I guess I'm not really sorry for my sin. The person I murdered was hurting me so much that I spent many hours crying."

This time the long silence came from the priest's side of the screen. After taking a few minutes to compose himself, he answered, "I see. But surely you know 'Thou Shalt Not Kill' is not a commandment to be broken as a result of personal injury or hatred."

"Yes, I suppose I do, but she was destroying everything for me."

The father sighed and asked, "Do you know the Lord's Prayer? Shall we say it together?" Again, silence. Then he heard a rustle.

When he spoke again, no one answered. He bent his head and whispered, "May God be with you, Child."

## Chapter 8

After leaving Jill's house, Ann Tandy decided she needed to stop by the grocery store on the way home. As she wheeled her cart toward the door, she heard someone call her from behind. She turned to see a nice-looking young man jogging toward her.

"Hey, Ms. Tandy. Remember me. I'm Josh McClure; I graduated from Berry High two years ago."

"Yes, of course, Josh. How nice to see you."

"It's nice to see you, too, Ms. Tandy. Yeah, I came home from school for Homecoming."

"That's great. What year are you in college now?"

"I'm a sophomore at Haskins, and I just love it. Did you know I'm an English major?"

"Yes, I did, I think Ms. Dalton told me...." Ann stopped, realizing what she was saying. "Oh, dear, Josh, have you heard?"

He just stared at her, tears forming in his eyes. "Yeah, I saw it on the news this morning. I just can't believe it. She was great. It's just not possible that someone would want to...to hurt her."

"You're right. It's just not possible. She was such a good person that it is very difficult to believe that anyone who knew her would kill her. It must have been a stranger. I hope the police catch the monster soon."

Again, he just stared at her. Then his lips developed a small half-grin. "Did she really tell you about me?"

"Yes, Josh."

"Did she say anything else about me?" His eyes pleaded with her to say she had. "I mean about my courses and such. Did she mention me often?"

Taken aback, Ann said, "Sure, Josh, she loved to brag about all of her former students."

An almost undetectable crestfallen look swept over his face, and his shoulders seemed to slump a little. Within seconds, Josh snapped back, stood up straight, and managed a broad smile.

"Well, it was good to see you Mrs. Tandy. I'd better get some groceries for

Mom. Will I see you at the Homecoming game on Saturday?"

"I always do my best to come. It's always such a happy time, and we all could use something good in our lives right now. Bye, Josh. Hope to see you there."

"I'll be there for sure. My girlfriend from college is coming down to spend the weekend with me."

"That's great. I hope I'll get a chance to meet her."

"Well, she's no one special, but she's nice enough, I guess."

"I'm sure she's lovely. Bye, again."

As Ann steered her cart between the produce bins, she hardly noticed what she was picking up. "Why did that conversation feel so creepy?" she asked herself. Finally, she pushed her cart to the side of the aisle so that she wouldn't block traffic. Then she took out her cell phone.

"Kado, this is Ann."

"Hi, what's up?"

"Nothing really. I just wanted to bounce something off you. I just ran into a young man named Josh McClure. He's a sophomore in college now, but he had Julie as a teacher when he was a sophomore at

Berry. As he was talking, I remembered that he had a terrible crush on Julie then. He would send her poems and offer to help her carry books back to the bookroom. Recently, Julie told me that he has been sending her emails, telling her about his English professors and his progress in their classes. She hinted that something bothered her about the emails but never told me what. Anyway, my conversation with him just now was a bit odd."

"Did he say anything that worried you?"

"No, his attitude was just a bit weird."

"Well, he's still just a kid. Maybe he isn't handling his grief that well."

"Maybe, but I just didn't feel good about his reactions."

"Okay. Tell me more, and I'll make a note of what you say."

Anne summed up her conversation with Josh, as well as his reaction to what was said.

"Yeah, his reaction makes me curious too. I'll keep these notes. We can both think about it. We can talk again later, especially if you have an idea what was going on in his mind. Bye."

"Bye, Kado. See you soon."

In the next aisle, unseen by Ann, Josh McClure had listened intently to her phone conversation.

He frowned as he tried to think.

"Kado? Who is she talking to?"

A second or so later, he remembered.

"Of course. Mrs. Dolan's first name is Kado. She retired after my freshmen year. That's why I had Julie for Sophomore Honors English. Thank you so much, Kado."

When he heard Ms. Tandy's squeaky cart start to move, he scurried back down the aisle and pushed his cart to the other side of the store, throwing in a few items as he passed them. He had no idea what was in his cart.

Then he thought, "I guess I should take out my mom's list and look at it....just in case I run into Ms. Tandy again."

He slowed down to a stroll and actually began to look for the stuff his mother had asked him to buy. But his head just repeated, "Oh, Julie, how can I live without you?" over and over.

*The first day of sophomore year wasn't as awful as his freshman first day had been. He kind of knew where he was going. He*

*even said "Hi" to a few kids he passed, but he didn't have any close friends. I guess they thought he was a snobby intellectual. Well, it was true that he preferred watching a BBC production of a classic novel to watching something stupid like the latest so-called hit situation comedy or a professional sports team. He didn't much care who won or lost those idiotic, sweaty games. People liked him well enough; he always got invited to go places. Once and a while he would go, but he was just pretending to enjoy himself.*

*He looked at his schedule and saw that he was to go to B246 for Honors English. When he approached the door, he almost collapsed. By the door, greeting students as they arrived, was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her long, light brown hair brushed her shoulders, and she would kind of flick it off her face after leaning over to hear each student's name. She smiled so sweetly at everyone. He looked quickly at his schedule again. Ms. Dalton. Ms. Dalton will be my teacher all year. Boy, am I lucky.*

*Soon after that first day, Josh went to the library to look at last year's yearbook. Her name was Julie. As the year went by, Josh worked as hard as he could, and he got*

*very good grades. He wanted to please her. His entire focus was on ways that he could please her...Julie Dalton. How did Julie McClure sound?*

*I know this is not a teenage crush. I will love her forever. She will be mine someday.*

Josh pushed his cart through the check-out slot, paid the cashier, and walked quickly to his car. When he got home, he hastily put the groceries away and handed his mother the change.

"Mom, I'm going to my room to listen to some music and maybe hit the books a bit."

"Okay, Honey. Thanks so much for the shopping. You should spend your break having fun with the kids, not running errands for your mother. I just had all this laundry to do. Got your stuff finished too."

"Great, Mom. No problem about the shopping. See you later."

He went to his room and sat at his desk. Taking out a snapshot he had taken of Julie at his graduation, he remembered that he had hailed her, "Hey, Ms. Dalton. Turn this way. I want a good picture of the best teacher I ever had." He caressed the photo



lovingly and then started crying uncontrollably. After a while, he reached in his pocket to read the last email Julie had sent him on the evening before she died.

"Hi Josh, I look forward to seeing you and meeting your friend Connie. However, I will not have time to see you privately. It's a busy weekend. Josh, you were a very fine student, and I enjoyed having you in class; however, I really do not appreciate the suggestions you talk about in your emails. I must ask you not to email me anymore. Take a good look at our age difference, and you will realize that we do not have a future together. Fondly, Ms. Dalton."

## Chapter 9

As Kado was walking through her front door, she could hear the phone in the kitchen ringing. She raced toward the kitchen, hoping to get there before her voice mail started after the fourth ring. On the way to pick it up, she dropped her purse and keys on the countertop and grabbed for the receiver.

"Hello."

"Kado, this is John Sullivan."

Recognizing the principal's voice, Kado said, "Yes, of course, John. How are you doing? We're all so shocked. You know how all the teachers loved Julie."

"Yes, I...all of us...can't believe it yet either."

"What can I do to help?" Kado asked.

"As a matter of fact, that's why I'm calling you."

"I'd be glad to help in anyway I can, John. I just know you must have a million things to do.... Oh, John, it's such a terrible

thing," she replied, her voice beginning to break.

"Yes, it is a very terrible thing. We can all help each other through it."

The principal began to explain the tentative plans. He had had a conference call with the superintendent, the president of the school board, and the Chief of Police. The Chief said that because the murder had taken place in the field house, the police investigation could be sealed off without closing the school. Officers would be based around it so that no curious kids, or their parents, could get near it. Everyone seemed to think it was important to get school going again as soon as possible. In the meantime, the superintendent would arrange for grief counselors to be in school for the students when they came back, and he would talk to other schools that had had to deal with similar tragedies to see what else to do. They had also made another decision.

"Kado, would you be willing to teach Julie's classes until we can find a replacement? She has the same schedule you used to have: three Sophomore Honors and two Junior Regular tracks. I have already talked to the state pension board, and they

assured me that since you would not really be a teacher again, just a long-term substitute, your pension would not be affected. We had a few good applicants last spring that we will interview again, so I don't think you'll be on the job for more than 3 or 4 weeks. It would be so much better for the students if they could continue the plans that Julie had started, and we know that you would be the best person to be able to do that."

Without hesitation, Kado said, "Of course, I want to help in any way I can. Okay, give me a minute to think. May I come into school this afternoon to read Julie's plans and generally find out what I'm jumping into?"

"Kado, thank you so much. That's a good idea. I'll tell the police guards to let you in. I'll meet you at her room, B246, at 2:00 to see if I can help. We want to start school as soon as possible, maybe even tomorrow."

"I just had another thought. I'll go online to look at her eboard postings for the kids. That will give me a good start."

"Great idea, Kado, and I'll have someone here see you through the police guards."

"Okay, but I don't have too many

concerns about that; several of those fine young men in blue were my students at some point in my thirty years at Berry."

After she hung up, she checked her messages...nothing urgent...and looked in her mailbox...mostly bills and cataloges (every year she felt less and less like tackling the mall, so she did a lot of shopping online. and then the catalogs followed unceasingly). One invitation to a retired teachers' party she opened and put the date on her calendar. Then she headed for the computer.

First, she checked her emails and answered or deleted them. She was aware of what she was doing... avoiding the school website. "Okay, let's go." Now, she clicked it on.

## Chapter 10

The day felt hot after the coolness of the church. The shadow collapsed on a bench under a tree and pretended to read a book so that its head could hang down, keeping its face hidden from possible passing acquaintances. "Did I sin? I suppose I did, but I don't feel bad about it and would probably do it again if the circumstances were the same." Slowly the eyes closed and the head drooped even lower.

*"Why isn't your homework done?" shouted the mother. "Where were you after school?"*

*"I was just playing on the swings with a couple of friends. We were having so much fun."*

*"Well, I'll see how much fun it is when you have to repeat fifth grade. You know you aren't as smart as the other children; you just have to put out more effort; then you'll succeed."*

*"But, Mom, I didn't get any grade*

*lower than a 'B' last marking period...well... except for the 'C' in science."*

*"And you think those grades are acceptable in this house? Your father and I work very hard to give you a nice house, good food, and all those fancy school clothes you have to wear. We expect you to show how grateful you are by holding up your end and getting all 'A's.'"*

*"But, Mom, I told you that I didn't need those new clothes you got me last week."*

*"Of course, you need them! Do you think I want other parents looking down their noses at us because we're poor? Nice clothes and manners will help you go far... even into the right college. There you will meet someone who is young and rich, and all of our troubles will be over. Do you hear me?"*

*"Yes, Mother, I know what you want. You tell me often enough."*

*"What? What kind of a smart aleck remark is that? Wait until your father gets home."*

*"Oh, Mom, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please don't tell him. You know what he does to me. Please, please don't let him do it*

*again. I'll go right upstairs and study. I'll study until midnight. I'll study without dinner. Please, please don't tell him."*

*"You study hard and show me what you've learned. Then I'll decide whether or not I'll tell him."*

*The little child grabbed a book bag and trudged up the stairs to the bedroom. After opening one of the books, the child started musing and read very little.*

*"Someday I'll be old enough to do what I want to, and I'll do it well. All I have to do is listen to my mother and get good grades and meet rich kids. Then I'll be free to do anything I want. Anything."*



## Chapter 11

The brightly colored logo of Berry Township High School burst on the screen. The border contained a variety of berries in reds and blues. "Funny, in all the years I've lived here, I never heard how Berry Township got its name. I wonder if it refers to those prolific berry producers in the next county. Have they been around that long?" She made a note to research that and went back to the job at hand. Then, with a heavy heart, she clicked Faculty and then the English Department and then the JDalton eboard.

She looked at the Sophomore Honors postings first. They were going to start *Julius Caesar* today. Well, if they let the kids come back tomorrow, we'll only be a day off schedule. She made a note on a pad of lined paper on her desk, "Find out which handouts they had gone over during the intro." She was happy to be starting off with a work she

knew so well - from "Hence! home, you idle creatures, get you home!" to the capping couplet ending Act V, "So call the field to rest, and let's away/ To part the glories of this happy day." She felt as if she must have taught the play 70 or 80 times! The eboard also told her that Julie had previously assigned a three to five page essay on the Greek Theatre after the classes had read *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* during the previous few weeks. The paper had been due this past Monday, so Julie must have collected them then. She made another note, "Look for Greek essays."

Next, she looked at the postings for Junior R track. They had just taken a vocabulary quiz and were reading *The House on Mango Street*. Although she had read Cisneros' book, she would have to read it again, as a teacher this time, looking for themes, imagery, characterizations, etc. She would have buy her own paperback copy so that she could highlight sentences or write notes in the margin; she would have to research some literary criticism for even more understanding; in other words, she had homework to do before she could teach the novel intelligently. She again wrote on her

note pad. "See if Julie has handouts or anything else in her files. Look for any have-you-read quizzes. Did she explain the setting, the dialects...whatever?"

She then thought it might also be a good idea to ask the students about what they had read so far, but she still needed to think of some questions that could lead the discussion in the right direction. Kado decided she had gotten as much as she could from the computer for now.

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Across town, the shadow also sat in front of the computer, also opening Julie's eboard. It read every item with interest and took notes. Then it made a To-Do list and smiled at the results. The shadow was particularly fond of the last item. "Attend Julie Dalton's memorial service."

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As Kado was about to log off, she saw one of her notes beside the computer and thought, "There's no time like the present." After typing "Berry Township" on to her Google homepage; she clicked "Search." A page full of articles popped up, and she browsed down the page reading the titles. The first one she looked at described Berry

as "a pretty old town with a few Victorian homes still standing; it is located not too far from the Atlantic Ocean. Although a schoolhouse and a church had been erected as early as 1830, it did not become an incorporated town until the late 1800's. It was not until the 1920's that the town actually began to grow and prosper." She kept browsing and finally came to one that mentioned the "Historical Society" and thought that would be her best bet. The article explained that "until 1995 the name of Berry Township was presumed to be a result of the numerous wild cranberries and blueberries once found in the Pine Barrens not far away. They thrived on the acid soil there. Even the Indians had picked fruit for food and medicinal purposes. Then, in the early 1900's, domestication and modern growing practices changed the berries' lives forever. However, a will had been found that suggested that was not the origin of the name after all."

Even though she was anxious to find out about the will, Kado left her computer. It was getting close to noon, time for the press conference. She considered lunch, but her mind and body were in such turmoil, she just

took a few grapes out of the refrigerator and turned on the TV again. As it got closer to noon, the reporters began forming a circle around the steps of the police station, waiting for the promised press conference. She noticed that the local reporters had been joined by reporters from the city and the national news services. Julie's murder was front page news across the country. Finally, the Chief of Police appeared.

## Chapter 12

After he had finished hearing confessions, Father McGlinn walked slowly back to the vestry. His face was troubled and his eyes sad. Gently he removed his white stole and kissed it before putting it away in its drawer.

He slumped in a chair, putting his head in his hands. He had felt drained ever since the first visitor to the confessional that morning. He had no idea what to do to help. Of course, he would pray, but he somehow thought he should be able to do something else. Something more physically active. He had always believed that he could bring more people to God if he actively participated in their activities, their lives. More than one young boy or girl started going to Mass after he had attended their basketball games and concerts and talked enthusiastically about them afterwards.

What could he do about this latest challenge God had left on his doorstep? He didn't know. But inaction wasn't possible; he was so afraid that his visitor might kill again. There had been no remorse. Only the possibility of Hell had motivated the murderer to come to confession. If another human did die and he could have prevented it, he would forever see himself as impotent in his chosen vocation.

First, he had no clues as to who the visitor with the muffled voice was. Besides acknowledging a mortal sin, no other facts were obvious.

"No, wait, I'm wrong. The stranger did ask if salvation were possible and mentioned *The Book of Isaiah*, so he or she must be somewhat familiar with the *Holy Bible*."

He put his head back and thought about *Isaiah*. Then he recalled one of its more famous quotes, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

"I'll bet that's why this person had mentioned *Isaiah*. The shadow in the

confessional remembered that the scarlet sins 'shall be white as snow.' This tortured soul was seeking salvation but was unable to face the truth of the sin."

Father McGlinn wondered again what he could do to reach this thus-far unrepentant sinner before another person lay dead. "God, help me think of the action you want me to take to aid my community and to save this desperate soul."

He mused and prayed a while longer, saying the Nicene Creed to himself, and put his own mental emphasis on "Through Him all things were made. For us men and our salvation."

The first, and so far only, thing he could think of was to get on the phone. Berry Township had a very strong ecumenical council, so he knew most of the church and temple leaders in town. He talked to all of them that morning. He asked each one if any of their congregants or members had spoken to them about something that was a recent heavy burden. He assured them that he did not want them to tell him who had talked to them; he just wanted them to be alert to any changes in behavior or personality and to seek them out



for counseling.

Many of them guessed that he was talking about the person who had killed that lovely high school teacher, but, because Father was bound to secrecy by the sanctity of the confessional, none thought that his calls were motivated by something specific that had happened to him. He would not be calling others if he were sure the person was one of his own parishioners. A very few were a bit insulted by his call. "Hmmp!" they would say after hanging up the phone, "and does he think I don't know how to care for my own flock?"

When he had finished, Father McGlinn decided to call George Clews. While George was not one of his parishioners, he had talked to him often at community functions and thought him a very trustworthy man.

"Chief Clews, please. This is Father McGlinn calling."

"One minute please."

"Thank you."

"Yes, Father. What can I do for you?"

"I saw the news about the murder this morning on television."

"Yes, it is very sad indeed. As a matter of fact, I was just getting ready to speak at a

press conference on the municipal building's steps."

"Oh, my, I won't keep you then. I just have one clue for you. As you know, I cannot say anything about what is said in the confessional."

"Yes, Father, I am certainly aware of that vow."

"However, I have given this matter long thought, and I have decided I would not be breaking that vow if I said one thing to you. I am quite certain the murderer is not a Roman Catholic."

"Thank you, Father. That information may come in handy. Thanks for calling."

"Good-bye, George."

Father McGlinn sat down in front of the television set to watch the press conference. Much later that afternoon, after tea, Father McGlinn knelt and began to pray for the soul of Julie Dalton and for the lost soul of her murderer.

## Chapter 13

A very distressed Chief George Clews came out the front door of the police station. He came straight to the huge bank of microphones but just stared at everyone; he appeared unable to speak. However, just his sharp uniform with its gleaming medals commanded respect and attention. After a few minutes, he began speaking slowly with a grim voice.

"It is my sad duty to inform all of you that Julie Dalton, our fine and much-loved teacher at Berry High School, was savagely attacked and murdered. The attack took place in the high school field house sometime late yesterday afternoon or early evening. The time is only a guess as of now, but we will have more accurate information for you after the medical examiners are able to give a report.

Her school records did not list any next of kin, so we were unable to notify

them. If any of you know the names of any of her relatives, please let us know.

Although we will still be investigating the field house where the murder occurred, we plan to set up a strong barrier around it so that we can open the school. In addition, at least two officers will be stationed outside to keep people away while we work. We have been asked to handle the situation that way so that school can be back in session tomorrow. Superintendent Cohen, Principal Sullivan, School Board President Smyth, and I have conferred several times. It is our opinion that we need to have the children back to their normal routine as soon as possible. In addition to our own police, several towns in the area have volunteered officers so that we can guard the schools well. Therefore, please be assured that your children will be safe. Even though we do not have any suspects at this time, all our clues so far seem to indicate that the killing resulted from strictly personal motives, and, therefore, the prospect of harm to others is not anticipated. I do not have any more information for you at this time, but I will keep you as informed as I can. Thank you."

"Well done, George," Kado thought.

She had him as a student 25 years ago. "Let's see, if he were about 15 then, he would be at least 40 now. What a young man to be in such an important job!"

Well, he always was bright, not that he loved English much, but he was always quick on the uptake and would invent funny, subtle, answers if he didn't know the real one. He had been so adorable then with blond, spikey hair that seemed to go in all directions, yet it managed to look good on him, and freckles and a toothy, ready smile. Now his hair was being forced to maintain the short, well-groomed style necessary for his profession. His smile was just as quick and warm, except when he had to make dreadful announcements like this or when he was keenly intent on keeping the town safe from both real and possible dangers. She had seen him around town or at meetings over the years, so they had kept up a close acquaintance, if not a close friendship. Maybe he would talk to her later on.

Before Chief Clews could go back inside, several reporters shouted questions at him. The only one he acknowledged was an eager young lady from the high school paper he recognized as one of his daughter's

friends.

"Sir, what about Homecoming? If the players can't use the field house, are we going to play the game on Saturday?"

"Thank you, Sandy, I had forgotten to give you that information. We received a call from our neighboring high school in Western Shore. They will be playing away this weekend, so they offered us their facilities. I'll let everyone know as soon as I have more details."

During the press conference, two Berry Township police detectives were busy searching Julie Dalton's town house. They had gone through the kitchen, looking inside cabinets and even the refrigerator and oven. They carefully checked every drawer and piece of furniture in the bedrooms. They even went through closets and looked on the backs of pictures or mirrors hanging on the walls. Next they went to the living room.

Again, the chairs and sofas and pictures were painstakingly searched, pillows tossed aside. In one corner of the room, a beautiful polished cherry secretary sat open. Julie's laptop rested on the opened tray. With gloved hands, Ted carefully put it in a bag to take back to the station. On top of a stand

next to the secretary, Julie's printer remained untouched. Not sure if it would be of any value to their investigation, Ted put it in its own bag anyway. Opening each available drawer, Ted rummaged through bills and letters; then he found two interesting envelopes.

"Hey, Bill, come take a look at these."

"What 'd 'ja find, Ted?"

He held two large interoffice envelopes, the kind with lines for a name and a department; the last lines had "Julie Dalton" written on them. She was apparently using them to store some papers. Over the entire back of one of the envelopes, there was drawn a large red question mark; it contained several emails from someone named Josh McClure. The detectives began to read them.

"Today is my birthday, so I am one year closer to becoming a man."

"Each passing year brings me closer to manhood, and I pray I will be the man you could love."

"I have a girl friend coming down for Homecoming, but she is just a friend! May I please see you sometime while I'm home so that we can talk about our future?"

"They're pretty weird, huh? Look,"

said Ted, "that one was just sent Monday morning."

"Yep, we'd better talk to the chief as soon as we get back to the station. What's in the other envelope?"

"A bunch of newspaper clippings from Crieghton; that's a town upstate. They all seem to be about a teacher leaving the high school there. I have no idea what they're about or if they're important, but we should bring them in, too."

They collected some of the framed photographs, some with Julie in them. They hoped to identify the other faces and see their connection to Julie.

Ted sighed, "She is...was one good-looking woman."



## Chapter 14

At 1:45 Kado walked up to the main entrance of Berry High School. It was a sprawling, unremarkable brick building hastily constructed in the 60's to accommodate a swelling suburban population.

One of the officers standing at the doors smiled and touched his hat, "Morning, Mrs. Dolan. The principal told us to expect you; he said he'll be waiting for you in B246. We all feel so bad about Ms. Dalton. I had graduated by the time she started teaching, but two of my younger sisters knew her. They said she was great. One had her for English, and the other had her as a cheerleading coach."

"Kevin, I'm sure she knew how they felt. Everyone thought she was a wonderful teacher. Your sisters are not alone; we'll all miss her. At times like this, we realize how

grateful we are to have a good police force; we're counting on you to find her killer."

Then she smiled and asked, "How's little Kev?"

"He's grown about 3 inches since you last saw him, and I'm afraid he's beginning to look more like his dad than his mom."

"Poor, Annie. She has to look at two of those Irish faces every day? I hope the next one will be a girl who looks just like her."

"Me, too," laughed Patrolman Kevin O'Donnell.

Kado walked through the lobby and down the hall to a staircase, passing the overflowing trophy cases and Hall of Fame photos, so many of those bright faces had gone on to success and wealth. She hoped they also had health and happiness. She climbed to the second floor and made a right. As she approached B246, she saw several men, including Principal Sullivan and Chief Clews, standing at the door.

John Sullivan turned to see her and waved. Kado came up and gave him a hug and one to George, too. For a minute, no one said anything.

"Mrs. Dolan," said Chief Clews, "we

need to search this room to see if there are any clues that might help us. We haven't found anything yet, but we still need more time. You can imagine the number of fingerprints there are in here since about 120 or 130 kids are in this classroom every day."

"Kado," John Sullivan added, "George would like you to hold class in the conference rooms for a few days. They have a folding door that connects them, so once we get that open and desks set up, it won't be too crowded. I told him you had to get some things in order to carry on Julie's lessons. A couple of these guys will dust and examine whatever you tell them you have to have to teach Julie's classes, and then we'll transport them downstairs."

"Okay, John. That shouldn't be a problem. Let me think for just a minute. Could we dust her file cabinet and her computer and have them moved to the conference rooms?"

"The filing cabinet is no problem; we just need to dust it and check the contents, so that won't take long, but we'd like to hang onto the computer for a while."

"Oh, of course, but I could probably access her grades and class lists from another

computer, couldn't I?"

"Yes," said John, "and I'll get another computer set up for you in the conference rooms."

"Thanks. It might be helpful to have the desk down there, too, or at least its contents. If your inspection of the drawers reveals that they just have school supplies, perhaps they could stay in the desk or be transferred to another desk to use in the conference rooms. Do you see any loose folders or trays with papers in the room? In particular, I am looking for an assignment Julie collected from her honors classes last Friday and some vocabulary quizzes her juniors took on Monday. Knowing Julie, I'll bet they're graded already."

"Those grades might also be in the computer, Kado. I'll get Julie's user name and password so that you can look there."

"That's good, but I would also like to see any comments she made on the essays. Her "R" classes may have had writing assignments collected also; I just didn't see any on the eboard."

"By the way, we found her purse in the wardrobe cabinet. We hadn't even started looking there yet, but we heard a phone

ringing over and over again. We opened the door and found a cell phone inside a brown leather purse. We decided not to answer it yet, but I have someone looking up the caller's number for a name."

John walked a few paces away and began using his pager to give the necessary orders.

"George, she may even have had individual folders in the classroom to hold each student's work. Oh, I did just think of something else. She probably had a regular grade book and attendance book in her room also....for backup...and possibly a book bag or briefcase."

"Got it, Mrs. Dolan, and I'll come find you in the conference room if we come across anything else you might need," George Clews assured her.

Kado stood at the door, looking around at the walls. As always, Julie, who tried very hard to make her classroom cheerful, had colorful posters and student projects covering all the walls. A model of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was resting on top of a file cabinet, and a huge picture of Marlon Brando as Marc Antony looked down from the top of the back wall. She smiled at the memory of

Julie's story of how some of the students she had her first year of teaching had gone to all sorts of lengths to get that that particular poster for her. She had raved about Brando's acting in that role so often.

"George, if it's possible at some point, I know Julie would have been pleased to have the student projects and her posters decorate the conference rooms. She liked a cheerful atmosphere for her kids, and I know the conference rooms are not even close to cheerful."

"I'll help you put them all up myself."

"No, George, you concentrate on finding the murderer. Then we'll be cheerful with or without decorations."

Then, taking one last look at Julie's room and saddened once again, Kado slowly headed down to the conference rooms.

## Chapter 15

In a nondescript, modest motel not far from Berry Township, a pretty young woman is pacing the floor. She is sobbing; her face is distorted with pain and her eyes are red and puffy. Every few minutes she walks to the phone and picks it up, but she always puts it down again. "Who should I call? Mom? Mom's best friend? The chief of police? Julie's boyfriend? Were they still together? Julie hadn't mentioned his name Monday night." Lisa Dalton stopped her pacing and sagged onto the unmade bed, overcome with tears again. "Oh, Julie. I'm so sorry. Why didn't we hug and make up? Why was the last time I saw you so terrible? It was my fault. It always is."

A phone rang. It took Lisa a few seconds to realize that the ringing came from her purse by the side of the bed. Fumbling through her purse, she looked for her cell phone. Finally finding it, she said "Hello" in

a tired, weak voice.

"Lisa, Lisa, is that you?"

Hearing her mother's voice, Lisa quickly sat up. "Yes, Mom, it's me."

"Oh, my God, Lisa. Do you know what happened? Where have you been? The television station just reported that your sister is dead. It can't be true. Where are you?"

"I'm so sorry I'm not with you, Mom. I'm near Berry Township. Are you all right? Is anyone with you?"

"Why are you there? Is it true? Have you gone to see her? To be sure? Maybe they made a mistake."

"No, Mom, I haven't gone to the police station yet, but I'm afraid it must be Julie; they showed her picture on television."

"But you must go there, Lisa. Maybe they're wrong. The picture looked like Julie, but it must be someone else or they might be showing the wrong picture. That's happened before, you know. Sometimes they're so anxious to get an exclusive, they don't check things out thoroughly. It is simply not Julie; I'm convinced of that. But you must go to see so that we can be sure. I know we'll laugh about the mistake some day. I'm sure of it!" Mrs. Dalton's hysteria grew with each



sentence.

"Mom, Mom, listen to me. Are you alone? I'll call Mrs. Tomsic to come over to stay with you."

"Lisa, go to the police station right now. Please find out what's going on. Maybe it isn't Julie. I've got to hear it from you. Why would anyone hurt her? She was a good girl...never had any enemies. Do you think there's a maniac running around town? Maybe you should call the police and ask for an escort. Go, Lisa. Please find out...find out that it isn't Julie."

"Okay, Mom. I'll find out everything I can and call you right away. I just have to get dressed, and then I'll leave right away."

"Why are you there? I didn't know where you were. Not dressed yet? What's going on? It just couldn't be Julie. You go find out. What do you mean you're not dressed yet? It's afternoon already. You go to the police station right away. Do you hear me? You call me the minute you know, but I'm sure it's a mistake. Did you try to call Julie's number? I've been trying her cell phone number every five minutes. Why isn't she answering? Did you see her? Is that why you're there? Oh, please help me. Lisa,

please help me. Please."

"Sure, Mom. I'll take care of everything. I'll leave for the police station right now. Are you alone?"

"Good, okay, that's good. You call me right away. Get off the phone and go."

First, Lisa called her mother's best friend, Mrs. Tomsic. She hadn't seen or heard the news yet. A few "Oh, no's" later, Lisa was able to hang up the phone, feeling a bit better as Mrs. Tomsic promised to go to her mother and make her some tea and wait with her until Lisa called.

After brushing her teeth and splashing cold water on her face, Lisa glanced at her reflection in the dull mirror of the medicine cabinet. Her face and eyes were red and swollen. "No point in putting any make-up on," she thought. Her light brown hair and hazel eyes were the same color as Julie's, but the similarity seemed to end there. For one thing, Julie was always prettier. Jill sighed. Quickly dressing in a pair of jeans and a light green turtleneck sweater, Lisa dashed to her car and sped toward Berry Township and the police station.

*Julie peaked out the window in her door and then opened it wide. "Lisa, what*

*brings you here? It's such a nice surprise."*

*"Mom brings me here."*

*Confused, Julie looked behind Lisa, and wondered what she meant; Mom wasn't with her or in the car. "Okay, Lisa, come on in."*

*Lisa walked with her head down, dragging her purse. She walked to the middle of Julie's living room. She looked at the soft black leather sofa, the ivory plush carpet, and the wonderful framed prints and the tastefully designed wallpaper. Then she spun around, her face furiously wrinkled.*

*"It's your fault! It's your fault!" she screamed at Julie.*

*"What is?" asked a bewildered Julie.*

*"It's your fault I can't leave, can't have an apartment like this," she said, still looking wildly around the room.*

*"Please, Lisa," Julie said, as she tried to give her sister a hug. "Please sit down and tell me what you're talking about."*

*Lisa pulled away and began to pace restlessly around the room. "I can't take it any longer. All by myself. No one to help me."*

*Finally, she allowed Julie to take her arm and lead her to a chair. Julie went to*

*the kitchen and brought Lisa a drink of water.*

*"Give me a real drink," mumbled Lisa, as she refused to take the glass.*

*"Sure. Tell me what you want."*

*"Do you have a beer?"*

*"Of course," smiling at her sister's choice of a 'real' drink, "Miller's Lite."*

*Julie headed back to the kitchen.*

*Returning in a few minutes with a bottle in each hand, Julie noticed that her sister had not moved but had begun to cry.*

*"What is it, Leelee, what's the matter?"*

*"It's Mom; she's driving me crazy."*

*"Well, that's not new," smiled Julie.*

*"Oh, Julie, you have no idea. She criticizes me day and night. She harps on me to get a 'real job like your sister has' but then keeps me busy all day long with errands or chores or crying about Dad. She says, 'If only you had studied in high school, you could have gotten a scholarship like Julie did. We were always so proud of her.'"*

*Julie laughed, "I would never have known that! She was always quick to find fault with anything I did, too. It's only been five months since Dad died; I'm sure she just*

*isn't through grieving yet," said Julie softly.*

*"But where are you, Julie? Since Dad's funeral we haven't seen you. You went camping or touring all summer and only stopped by the house once for one day. Then you tell her you're too busy getting ready for the school year and then you're too busy planning or grading. You only call once a week. Why aren't you helping me? I have no life."*

*"I'm so sorry, Leelee. I'll do better. Homecoming is this weekend, and I have to be here for my cheerleaders, but I'll come home the following weekend. I promise."*

*"No, you don't understand, Julie. I can't take it anymore. I've left home, and I'm not going back."*

*"Does Mom know?"*

*"No, and she's only called my cell number a hundred times; I just don't answer."*

*"Okay, Leelee, please let me help you. Talk to me. Tell me what you've been going through?"*

*Lisa settled down enough to tell Julie what her days were like. Her mother thought her job at the clothing store was beneath her; she thought she spent too much of her*

*salary on clothes; she told her to use the money for college instead. Then she could get a "real" job. The boys that she dated were losers; she wore too much make-up; she didn't take her mother out often enough; she never had any extra money to help with the household expenses; she was too quiet.*

*Lisa smiled for the first time, "That's actually funny. Quiet? When did we have a chance to talk when she fills every minute of air time available?"*

*Julie laughed, "You've got that right."*

*Lisa talked on for a couple of hours and at last seemed calm. She began looking around the apartment and admiring it. But, then, she stopped at a picture Julie had on an end table. It was of the four of them: Dad, Mom, Julie, and Lisa. She stared at it quietly for a few minutes, and then Lisa's shoulders began to tremble. She leaped up and whirled around to face Julie and screamed, "It's all your fault! You left me there! I hate you!"*

*With that explosion, Lisa ran out into the night, her car screeching as she pulled away.*

*Julie tried to call Lisa on her cell phone for about an hour. Deciding that she*

*was getting the same no-answer treatment as Mom, she finally went to bed, if not to sleep. She prayed for her sister and mother, and promised God that starting tomorrow she would be a better sister and daughter.*

Julie did not know that there would be no tomorrows for her to be a better sister and daughter.

## **Chapter 16**

The maintenance men had been very efficient. Most of the furniture was in place, filling the double conference room to capacity. The walls and tile floor were a dull beige, and a motley collection of desks crowded every inch of space. Thinking she might be able to improve conditions somewhat by reducing the number of desks, she thought out loud, "I wonder how many kids are in her largest class?"

"About 28," said a voice from under the table behind the teacher's desk. Startled, Kado walked over to find Rick, the computer technician for the school.

"Oh, hi, Rick, I didn't realize you were here."

"Yep, just about all set up here."

A few minutes later, Rick stood up and began testing the computer. Kado noticed a tear falling from his chin, but she didn't say anything. "Yep, it's working fine now." Rick wiped his sleeve across his face and turned to go.

Kado put her hand on his arm and smiled into his still moist eyes. "We'll all miss her, Rick."

"She was the best, Ms. Dolan. She'd always be so understanding if I couldn't get to her room right away; some of the others really get bent out of shape. But not her. No, she'd just be so grateful. And she was always trying to learn something new. She would take notes as I explained things, then trying it herself until she got it right. Then she'd say she hoped she wasn't taking up too much of my time. Sometimes she..." Rick stopped, unable to say anymore. He touched his forehead with a small salute and made for the



door.

"Thanks, Rick," Kado called after him. Then, suddenly remembering something, she quickly followed him and shouted down the hall.

"By the way, if you get a chance later, maybe you could give me some hints on how to work her grade book program."

He immediately came back. "Man, I should have thought about that. You were already retired before lots of new technology took over the school."

Behind him were two men pushing a platform truck cart with a desk on it. After asking Kado where they should put it, the men, following her directions, lifted it off to the space by the computer station. Then two more men with the filing cabinet on another platform truck came in; Kado asked them to put it on the other side of the desk.

In the meantime, Rick had rolled a chair in front of the computer. John Sullivan had used a Post-it to put Julie's User ID and Password on the monitor, so Rick opened up the program.

"Wait a minute please." Kado said as she dove into her large purse for a steno notepad. When she sat on the desk chair

with the notepad opened to a blank page and pencil in hand, she said, "I'm ready. As you can see, I'm a note taker too, but not as clever about computers as I'm sure Julia was. Fire away."

Rick showed her how the program worked step by step, and Kado scribbled away, hoping she would be able to read her scribbles when she typed the notes later.

"I probably should show you how the attendance program works, too...that is if too much information at once won't overwhelm you."

"Well, even if I can't really be classified as 'computer literate,' I do know most of the terms you are using, and I'll ask you if I don't. That does not mean that I won't be calling you frantically once and a while."

Rick smiled and told her what she needed to know to take attendance. "See, that program is a lot easier than the grade book one. You'll have that down pat in a day or two."

Kado took more notes. "That doesn't seem too difficult. Thanks."

Rick smiled, touched his forehead again, and left. Sighing, Kado sank into the

computer chair, thinking about what she needed to do. "Okay, Julie, I'm going to try my best to carry on for you, but you'll have to give me a nudge now and then if I'm off track."

"This is a nice program," she thought, as she saw that it kept a running average for each student. Long ago, when she had to turn in her first set of grades, she had been up all night adding and multiplying. She had to admit she just wasn't a math person. The next day, she purchased a sturdy desk calculator for \$150.00. She couldn't believe her folly as the price of calculators plummeted year after year. Oh, well, the desk one was still performing well, so divided by the number of years she had used it, I guess the purchase wasn't totally crazy. However, this program, in fact, computers in general would have saved her many hours over the years.

The honors sections had all the assignments and grades, including those for the Greek essay, and the R's vocabulary quiz was the last grade entered for them. Julie had been very busy and prompt with her grading and recording.

Kado stood up and looked around the

room. The filing cabinet was in place, although the Globe theatre seemed a bit unsettled after its big move. She noticed a couple of wire baskets underneath the Globe that hadn't been there upstairs. The police or the maintenance people must have found them somewhere and put them there. She moved them to the desk and saw that they were the graded essays and vocab. quizzes.

"Good," she thought, "I'll take the essays home to read tonight," thinking that she was glad she had the foresight to bring a large empty book bag with her. Kado found Julie's "hard copy" grade book in the middle drawer of the desk. She flipped through it and saw that Julie also kept both her grades and her attendance there, probably as a backup for the computer records. "I'll take that with me, too."

In another drawer, she found several piles of yellow index cards encased on rubber bands. She recognized them as the book cards. Several books had been assigned to the students, and the number of the book and the student's signature were on each card. Flipping through them, she noted that they were still using the Folger edition of *Julius Caesar*, and both the R-track and the Honors

track were still using the same vocabulary books she had at home. The next drawer brought a great discovery...a folder with Julie's lesson plans! Obviously, they would need some adjusting for the lost school day, but they would be a big help in keeping the classes heading in the right direction.

"Oh, Mrs. Dolan."

Turning towards the door, Kado saw Rick's grinning face peeking around the frame.

"I forgot to mention something. I don't know if it's important, but..."

"Tell me what it is, Rick, and maybe we can both decide."

"I noticed something when the police asked me to check out Julie's computer before they took it away. Only, I didn't realize I had noticed it until just now."

"What was it?"

"It was on."

"I'm afraid I'm not following you."

"I mean she hadn't logged off. Julie would never forget to do that, especially after that case of hacking we had last year."

"What do you mean? I get the logging off part, but what case of hacking?"

"Yeah, I guess they did a pretty good

job of squashing that story. A couple of clever senior boys got into a teacher's grade program and helped a couple of their friends by adding some points here and there."

"Oh, my God. Pretty soon the students will be instructing the teachers! Of course, I wouldn't suggest having any of them teach Ethics 101."

"That's really for sure. They even subtracted a few points from kids they had taken a **dislike** to. It really didn't take us too long to figure out who they were. I mean how many computer geniuses can one school have. More than one very unhappy and angry parent didn't get to see his child graduating to *Pomp and Circumstance*.

"I can imagine their parents were brokenhearted."

"They were indeed. These days parents can really thank their lucky stars if their kids turn out all right. I have two in junior high, and I am very nervous. There are so many bad influences out there. I guess we can only do the best we know how and pray. Well, see you tomorrow."

"You bet. I'm actually feeling a little anxious. It seems as if I haven't been in front of the classroom for a very long time. I hope

I remember how to teach!"

Rick grinned and touched his forehead again, "Like riding a bike."

"Hope you're right. Bye."

As she was looking around the room to see if she might need anything else, John Sullivan stuck his head in to tell her that everything was set to open school again tomorrow.

"Is there anything I can get for you?"

"Thanks, John. I'll just need you to sub in my Wednesday afternoon bridge group and babysit for my three-year-old granddaughter on Friday afternoons."

He smiled and told her that would be no problem. He would tell the faculty that there would be no more faculty meetings on Wednesday and then tell the superintendent that he would have to cancel the weekly Friday meeting with the district principals. They both smiled during the light banter, but some how it didn't really help. They were both still in the mist of disbelief.

## Chapter 17

Lisa drove into a parking lot next to the police station. She stayed in her car, hesitant - maybe afraid to open the car door - maybe afraid of the questions to come - maybe afraid of seeing Julie's body. The rather ugly stone building, which held all the offices that ran the township, didn't get many of the enormous property taxes the citizens paid spent on it. However, the plantings, abundant and mature, softened the gray exterior. Finally, Lisa got out of her car and walked up the front steps. She told the desk sergeant who she was, and, after a pitying look, the sergeant asked her to sit down and hurried down the hall to Chief Clews' office.

Chief Clews appeared almost immediately and held out his hand, "Thank you for coming in, Ms. Dalton. We had no information on Julie's family, or we would have contacted you right away. The school records had no names or telephone numbers



in case of emergency."

Lisa just nodded. She knew that Julie would not have acknowledged the family.

Holding one of her elbows, the chief guided her down the hall to his sparsely decorated office and threw some files off an old creased-leather chair and motioned for her to sit there. Lisa looked around the room at the numerous plaques and photographs on the wall, the half-dead plant in the window, and the stacks of papers and files in piles scattered everywhere. Except for a filing cabinet and the desk and its chair, the offered chair was the only furniture in the room.

Once they were seated, Lisa said, "I don't think Julie wanted anyone to know she had family close by. We're not exactly a model of domestic closeness."

"Is there someone in particular in the family that had a bad relationship with your sister?"

"Oh, no, there's only my mom and me. We're the only family Julie has...had. My father is dead."

Chief Clews had taken out a pad of paper, and he proceeded to write down all the details Lisa gave him about her family and Julie's friends in Millburg, their hometown.

He asked her about Julie's boyfriends and friends from college.

Then he asked her, "How did you get to Berry so quickly, Ms. Dalton?"

"Well, I came to see Julie; I've been here since Monday."

"I see. And where have you been staying?"

"The Scenic Motel in Western Shore."

"Did you see Julie?"

"Yes, on Monday night."

"Did she talk to you about anyone who might want to hurt her?"

"No, our conversation concerned family matters."

"Okay, have you talked to your mother today?"

"Yes, naturally she's very upset and thinks that it's all a big mistake. She wants me to look at the body to make sure it's Julie."

"Of course, I will arrange that. We do need a positive identification; however, I must warn you. Her body was quite...quite damaged by her attacker. Perhaps you would like someone with you when you view it."

"I have no one around, and my mother is most anxious to hear. I'd best get on with

it."

Chief Clews led her to the elevator and down to the morgue.

The room was brightly lit, such a curious contrast in the home of dark death. He left her for a minute to talk to the coroner. He returned to stand by her side as her sister's body was rolled out. The coroner lifted the sheet, and black swirls spun rapidly in her head as she fainted.

A short time later, Lisa was back in Chief Clews' office, sinking into the leather chair, crying and saying "no, no, no" over and over again. Then she looked up into the police chief's eyes.

"Yes, the girl is Julie Dalton, my sister. I only saw her face before I fainted. What did you mean when you said her body was "damaged?"

"Julie was stabbed many times; it was an unbelievably vicious attack."

"How horrible." Still sobbing, Lisa took more Kleenex from the box Chief Clews was holding for her. "Do you have any idea who did this to her?"

"No, I'm sorry to tell you that we haven't figured it all out yet, but we are looking very hard for clues. Do you know of

anyone who hated your sister enough to kill her so savagely?"

"No, of course, not. Julie was always well-liked by everyone. She was Homecoming Queen and a Merit Scholar and was voted 'The Most Likely to be the First Female President'....she broke off and with the deepest sigh said, "I guess I need to call my mother now."

Chief Clews quickly rose from his chair and told her to please use his phone; he left the office so that she could speak privately. "

Hello, Mom, it is Julie; I saw her body. Oh, Mommy, it's Jules...oh, Mommy, what are we going to do?"

She heard her mother's pain screaming through the phone.

Eventually, Lisa was able to whisper, "Is Mrs. Tomsic with you? I'll get home as fast as I can."

## Chapter 18

Kado put her key in her front door keyhole and was surprised to see the wasn't locked. Still a bit concerned about the unknown murderer, she stayed outside the open door, "Who's there?" She cautiously stepped inside and put her book bag on the credenza. She called out again as she got out her cell phone and, clutching it, made her way towards the back of the house.

An answer finally came from the backyard. "Hi, Mom, it's me and Little Me."

"Oh, thank goodness. I thought I had an unwelcome intruder. Instead I have two very welcome visitors."

Kado walked out the kitchen door and gave her daughter Mary a hug and held out her arms to her granddaughter, who was coming towards her, curls bouncing, saying, "Gammie." She scooped her up for a kiss.

"Hi, Cutie, are you having fun with the slide?" Little Me shook her head up and down vigorously, once more causing her ringlets to bounce, and then she said, "Yes." Of course, she really had outgrown the little red and blue plastic gym already, but it was an old friend. Kado put her down, and she

scampered back to go down the slide again.

"I'm so glad she's got more of a vocabulary than 'No' these days."

Mary put her arms around her mother, "Mom, I was so sorry to hear about Ms. Dalton. Kinder Kare went on a field trip to the petting zoo, and we just got back about an hour ago. Of course, I was too busy getting us ready this morning to watch the news, but several of the other mothers and the two Kinder Kare teachers had seen or heard what had happened. Nobody could understand how such a horrific thing could be happening in Berry. One of the mothers had kids in the elementary school. We still needed her to help chaperon the kids. When she found out there was no school today, she pleaded with her mother-in-law to keep them for the day so that her pre-schooler wouldn't miss his field trip. For once, her husband's mother gave her no grief; she said the entire town was planning to stay in their homes today anyway. They aren't sure that this would be the only murder if some wild maniac was in town. Wow, ...but how are you doing?"

"Okay, I guess. It just hasn't sunk in yet. It's just so unbelievable, isn't it? John

Sullivan called this morning and asked me to teach Julie's classes until they could find a replacement...as if anyone could replace Julie."

"Did you say 'Yes'?"

"Of course. I will feel as if I'm helping Julie and the kids, and she teaches...taught...the same courses that I did my last few years."

"And, besides, Mom, it will keep you busy, too. That's important."

"You're very wise for such a young woman, Mary."

Mary stuck her tongue out at her.  
"I've always been wise; you just didn't admit it when we didn't agree."

"Will you guys stay for dinner?"

"No, thanks. Daddy is actually home already making dinner. When I talked to him on my cell, he said that all the fathers in his office wanted to go home today in order to protect their families."

"I can certainly understand that. But as for the cooking...you do have him well trained, don't you?"

"Will you join us?"

"Actually, I have some papers to look at and some planning to do before

tomorrow."

"My goodness, they're opening school again so soon?"

"They thought it would be best for everyone to carry on, and we won't be interfering with the police. She was murdered in the field house."

"The field house? How in the world did that happen? That's so strange."

"Yep, we can't imagine how it happened either."

"It's so sad. C'mon, Little Me, it's time to go home to see Daddy."

The magic word "Daddy" brought Little Me hopping and skipping over to her mother. She shook her head "No" when Mary offered to lift her into the stroller. Then she said, "Walk," and started off towards the front yard in such a fast pace that Mary had to take off quickly. Over her shoulder she shouted, "Bye, Mom, call me tomorrow if you get a chance."

After Mary and little Mary left, Kado went back inside, kicked off her shoes. Wondering why she was so hungry, she remembered that she hadn't eaten lunch, so she poured some caffeine-free diet soda and put little squares of cheese on crackers. Then



she opened the book bag she had brought home and curled up on the couch. She flipped on the television to wait for the news but clicked it to Mute. One by one, she read the 16 year-olds' reactions to the Theban plays. She took out a pad of paper to make separate notes of her own, planning to find out if there were common errors she should teach the entire class. She smiled at Julie's comments, some complimentary, some less so, yet kindly couched. The thesis statements were all pretty decent, a fact that told Kado Julie must have approved them before they wrote the papers.

A change in the light coming from the TV screen made her look up. The news was on, so she turned on the sound. Chief Clews was standing in front of an even bigger bank of microphones than the one at noon. Kado realized that this was now a big news story, maybe even national. To begin, the chief recapped what had already been broadcast and then reported that the family of Julie Dalton had confirmed that she was the victim and that as soon as they let him know about any funeral arrangements, he would tell all of them.

He went on to say, "Miss Dalton's

murder was extremely vicious; she was stabbed multiple times. Please know that we will find her killer soon. The entire department is working on the case. Because the murder took place in the field house, we have decided that our investigation can continue while the high school is in session. Therefore, all Berry Township schools will be open tomorrow. I repeat that, all Berry Township schools will be open tomorrow. The superintendent has arranged for grief counselors to be in the high school in order to assist any students through this terrible trauma. I promise all of you that we are actively pursuing the murderer. We believe from the evidence we have found so far that the motive was personal. Please do not be afraid that anyone else will be harmed; however, please do inform the police immediately if you hear or see anything suspicious or anything that might help the investigation. As I told you earlier, several surrounding towns have assigned their officers to Berry so that all of our schools will be guarded. Your children will be safe."

When he had finished, he went back into the police station as the assistant chief fielded questions from the press, most of

which couldn't be answered yet.

## **Chapter 19**

The Shadow had watched Chief Clew's press conference with a wide range of emotions. At first, anger caused the brow to frown.

"They plan to open schools tomorrow. That means I will have to speed up my plans. Haven't they any respect for the dead? Haven't they any respect for me, for my skill in committing the perfect murder. Those children shouldn't be back in school yet; I hadn't planned on them coming back so soon. Maybe I'll have to do something more to show them they should have given me more respect! I've got so much to do to make sure I'm not hurt again."

"Grief counselors. What a scam that is! A bunch of dumb guidance counselors and youth psychologists will sit around listening to the youngsters babble and cry and then nod in feigned total understanding and sympathy. Don't they know the kids don't

really care? They just want to get out of class for a period or two."

The shadow laughed out loud at that thought. "I'll bet all those teachers who had tests planned are hopping mad that they might have to change their precious lesson plans. Besides the tax payers are going to be hit hard with all those unplanned hourly charges. Oh, well, they can afford it."

"They've decided the motive was personal. Aren't they a bunch of geniuses! Oh, yes, it was very personal. But, who knows who else might need persuasion? 'Please do not be afraid that anyone else will be harmed.' A lot they know. I don't even know myself yet. We'll see."

"There's another original suggestion: '...inform the police immediately if you hear or see anything suspicious or anything that might help the investigation.' Hey, that gives me a great idea. I'll plant a few false clues and report a veiled accusation or two."

With that thought in mind, the shadow dialed "911." An extremely harried voice answered.

"They must be overwhelmed with calls today," thought the shadow.

"Yes, I want to report that I saw a man

in a dark gray windbreaker walking down Elm Street. I know he doesn't belong in the neighborhood because I've never seen him before. I think he's hiding something because he isn't swinging his arms; he's got them around himself. Yes, that's right. Elm Street. In the 800 block."

"Oh, you're welcome. I'm just trying to help."

Rubbing its hands together, the shadow next called the police.

"I just heard a woman in the grocery store telling her friend that she was afraid her son might be the murderer. She said that he had been fired recently as a school bus driver because some kids told their teacher he was texting while driving. Apparently, he's bitter at the way the school handled it. They didn't let him explain why it had been an emergency."

"My name? Oh, I'm afraid to give it to you. He might find out and kill me."

Next the shadow called the high school switchboard.

Holding a handkerchief over the mouthpiece, the shadow found its deepest voice and said, "This is the murderer of Julie Dalton. You'd better not open school

tomorrow. If you do, expect a bomb explosion where it will kill the most people."

With that, the laughing shadow put down the phone and said, "Hey, I'm beginning to enjoy myself."

## **Chapter 20**

Something was nagging Kado's brain, but it would not come forward to identify itself. She turned off the television after the press conference and went back to reading the papers. When she finished, she checked Julie's grade book to make sure they were all entered there; tomorrow she would cross check with the computer records. Most of the vocabulary quizzes from the juniors were there, but two were missing from one class. Thinking that those students might have been absent, Kado flipped to the attendance section of the book. That was exactly what had happened. "I need to find copies of those quizzes and give them to these two students before I return the graded ones," she thought and made a note.

Then she found that, in the sophomore records, although everyone had a grade for the essay, she didn't have the right number of papers. She alphabetized the papers for each

class and began to check each paper with each name and grade. Finally, she realized that Alex Jordan had an "A" marked in the assignment column, but she did not have his paper. "Oh, dear," she thought, "with all the moving today, his paper must have gotten lost." She looked for a short time more and then decided to look for the paper at school tomorrow and added that search to her notes.

She then went to her filing cabinet to find any material she had for teaching *Julius Caesar*. She also took four books from her "teacher" bookshelf: the Shakespearean play, two vocabulary books, and a copy of *The House on Mango Street* she'd forgotten she had. Then she remembered the curriculum committee had decided to add it for the year following her retirement, and they had all read the book to approve it. "That's good; I won't have to buy another copy. I'll take this to bed with me tonight for a re-reading."

Back in the living room, she read Julie's lesson plans and made some notes as to what she might be able to do to try to get back on track. She also decided to incorporate some materials she had used, lessons she knew would work with the current plans.

She still hadn't figured out what the back of her brain was trying to tell the front of her brain. "Well, my best bet is to forget that I'm trying to remember. Then, when I least expect it, the idea will pop up and say 'Here I am.' I think that what I really want is to help find Julie's murderer. Everyone will feel more comfortable then. But what in the world can I contribute? There's only one way to find out." She decided to call Chief George Clews.

"Hi, George, this is Mrs. Dolan."

"Oh, hi, Mrs. Dolan. It's nice to hear from you."

"George, I've been thinking that I might be able to do more than just take Julie's classes. Perhaps on the 'inside' I'll hear or see things that you could use."

"Sounds good," George replied, mostly to be polite to his old English teacher, not really believing she could help solve Julie's murder.

"All right, may I see you tomorrow after school? I have some notes that I took when talking to some other teachers today I want to share. Also, I may come up with something new during the day."

"Sure thing. We can use all the help



we can get."

"Oh, by the way, what family did Julie have? You mentioned them on the television earlier tonight."

"Well, her sister came to the station this morning. She and her mother live in Millburg, but it turns out that Lisa, that's her sister's name, was already here...visiting Julie. She wasn't staying with her though; she was in a motel in Western Shore. I found that a bit unusual. The two detectives who searched Julie's apartment told me it was a great place with a full kitchen and two bedrooms. Anyway, she did identify Julie's body and then went home to be with her mother."

"Julie never mentioned her mother or sister, and they live so close by. That's another puzzle."

"Yep. Okay, barring anything else popping up, I'll see you tomorrow around 4:00."

"Thanks, George. I'll be there."

Unable to sleep in spite of the exhausting day, Kado went to the computer and typed up her notes from her visit with Jill, Ann, and Beth and her phone call from Ann. She typed them in complete sentences

instead of the quick scribbles she had put down. "I'll save these and then print out a copy for Chief Clews. As she read them over, she said out loud, "Well, Jon Atkins and Josh McClure, it seems you two have the honor of being the first suspects."

## **Chapter 21**

Just as Kado finished work at her computer, the door bell rang and a light knocking followed immediately. She switched on the porch light and through the narrow door window saw a stylishly dressed young girl looking anxiously at the front door. Kado opened the door and greeted her, "How may I help you?"

Bouncy and breathless, the girl blurted out who she was and why she was there.

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan. My name is Josephine Van Doren. Everybody calls me 'Josie.' I live right around the corner on Woodland. I came to see you because the

grapevine says that you are going to teach Ms. Dalton's classes. Is that right? If it isn't, I'm just so sorry I bothered you, but I was really anxious to know. Actually, I'm a senior, so I'm not in any of your classes, but I am a cheerleader. At the press conference, Chief Clews said that we are still going to have the Homecoming game, so, of course, we needed to know what is planned for us. Are you going to take over Ms. Dalton's job as cheerleading adviser, too?"

Throughout Josie's long introduction, Kado felt her welcome smile turn into one of incredulity at the young lady's seemingly one-breathed exposition.

"How do you do, Josie? Won't you come in?"

The unexpected invitation took Josie off guard; she just shrugged her shoulders and took a step into the house. Then, she saw that Mrs. Dolan was motioning for her to sit down. She thought, "Oh, boy, does she suspect something?" Josie sat down with perfect posture on the front edge of the well-worn lounge chair.

"Now, then, Josie, I have been asked to teach Ms. Dalton's classes. It happens that I taught the very same ones before I retired;

that must have been just before you came to Berry High. However, I never was the cheerleading coach and wouldn't have the slightest idea what to do. It may be that Mr. Sullivan hasn't even thought about replacing that position yet. He has so many other things on his mind."

"I see," Josie replied; she herself hadn't thought that replacing the cheerleading coach wasn't first on everyone's mind. She was not sure whether this was good news or bad news.

"I suggest that you call the girls tonight and arrange to meet after school tomorrow. I know that you seniors on the team will be able to plan what to do based on other years and other Homecoming games."

Now, Josie knew. This was definitely good news.

"Oh, thanks, Mrs. Dolan, that's a really great idea," Josie bubbled as she perked over and jumped to her feet and made for the door. I'll start making cell calls on my way home. Bye!"

"One more thing, Josie."

"Yes, Mrs. Dolan?"

"You might mention your plans to Mr. Sullivan and to Mr. Burton, the music

department chair. I think he is the one who coordinates the game plans as far as the band, the color guard, and cheerleaders are concerned."

"Yes. Of course, he is. I'll take care of everything."

As quickly as Josie had come, she left even faster. Kado laughed and closed and bolted the door.

Josie walked along, kicking the few leaves that had begun to fall. Her thoughts were not arranging themselves neatly. She had lied, but Mrs. Dolan wouldn't have any idea about that yet. Probably most of the faculty wasn't even aware that Josie Van Doren wasn't on the cheerleading squad this year; everyone just assumed she was, and most would assume she was a captain. Mr. Burton might be a problem, but I can handle him. Cheerleading had always been her only activity, and she had even hoped she might get a cheerleading scholarship; actually, she was sure she would. She had seen plenty of other high school cheerleaders, and she knew she was better than everyone. She would surely have gotten a scholarship. Then Ms. Dalton had crushed her hope and her life. How could she convince some college or

university she would be a great asset to a school if she wasn't a captain and hadn't even been on the team her senior year? She remembered every word of Ms. Dalton's rejection.

*"Josie, I really thought long and hard about my decision; I've decided that you are not going to be on the cheerleading team this year"*

*Josie's incredulous, stone face just stared back at her.*

*"You are a very pretty and talented girl, but you know that were many other very important considerations. Last year, you rarely came to practice, and, when you did, you were very unpleasant. You made fun of the newer girls when they didn't get a routine immediately. Often, you would say something like, 'I can't waste any more of my time here. These kids aren't even trying.' Then you would whirl away, leaving many kids depressed, especially because they were contrasting their own self-doubt with your abundant self-confidence. As a result, you did not help to bring us together as a team. I was very disappointed in you. If you recall, I spoke to you about trying to show more compassion for the rest of the girls. You*

*would nod and pleasantly agree to try, but you never followed through. So, I was stuck with a dilemma this year. Your poor attendance at practice set a bad example for the rest of the girls, and your unkindness kept the team from having the spirit so necessary for a group whose only purpose is to encourage the team and keep the fans in a good mood so that they would also urge the team on."*

*Julie tried to put her arm around Josie's shoulders, but Josie sat stiffly with her hands were clenched in her lap, and she turned sharply away from Julie's intended comfort. Josie leaped up and stormed from the room, only stopping to glare at Julie and say, "You'll be sorry for doing this to me. To me!"*

On her way home from Mrs. Dolan's, she called Mandy's cell.

"Hi, listen to me very carefully; it's important. Do you remember that after the cheerleading list came out that I told everyone that my parents had called Ms. Dalton? I said they had called her to tell her I shouldn't cheer this year because I had to concentrate on my grades for college. Then I said my parents hadn't told me and that was

why I was so surprised when the list came out."

"Sure, I remember. Did you ever tell your parents that?"

"No, I just told them that I had decided cheerleading took too much time from my studies, and, besides I wanted to take the SAT Review course. They were so pleased with my 'mature' decision. So you are the only one who knows the truth."

"Sure, I didn't tell anybody anything."

"Of course, you didn't. You're my very best friend in the whole world."

"And you're mine, Josie."

"Okay, here's what I'm going to do. I just went to see Mrs. Dolan...she's the teacher who is going to teach Ms. Dalton's classes...but she said she thought that Mr. Sullivan hadn't even thought about replacing her as the cheerleading coach. She only knew that she herself wasn't qualified."

"I'm sure that's the last thing on Mr. Sullivan's mind."

"Right, so here's my plan. I'm going to call the rest of the cheerleaders and tell them that my folks said it was all right for me to cheer since the girls had been left without a coach and since my interim grades had been



good. As one of the seniors, I could help them put together a routine for the Homecoming game. How's that sound?"

"Absolutely perfect! In fact, I'll get on the phone too...and on Facebook...and tell everyone that you are stepping forward to help out the cheerleaders, even though you are very busy. You just want to do what you can to help everyone through this tragedy. You will be a heroine. This truly is perfect!"

"You're so right; it's an absolutely perfect revenge for what Ms. Dalton did to me. I won after all."

## **Chapter 22**

Back in Millburg, Lisa drove into her driveway and saw her mother's face at the window. A second later, the door flung open, and Mrs. Dalton raced to the car to embrace her returning daughter, now her only daughter. Then, realizing that curtains were being drawn aside in windows all around, they quickly walked into the house. After giving Lisa a hug, Mrs. Tomsic picked up her purse, slipped on her jacket, went to the door, and turned toward the sad faces of her friends.

"You two will want to be alone now. I'm so very sorry. You must know how all of us cared about Julie. What a terrible, terrible thing. You'll let me know how I can help?"

"Of course," Lisa replied. "You've done so much already. Thank you. I really appreciate that Mom wasn't alone while I was driving back. We'll talk to you soon."

Her mother sat Lisa down on the best chair in the living room, a rarely used beige damask wing-back, and then pulled up a small foot stool, placing herself close in front of Lisa's knees.

"Tell me everything," her mother demanded...quietly but firmly.

As Lisa told her "everything" and then

began to talk about funeral arrangements,

"Yes, I guess we do have to make some decisions. I'm just not ready yet."

Mrs. Dalton moved to a more comfortable armchair and let her thoughts drift back to another sad time.

*Mrs. Dalton and her two daughters walked into their silent house after Mr. Dalton's funeral. They were dressed in black and walked like automatons. The doorbell rang, and Lisa went to answer it. A minute later she came to the living room and spoke to her mother,*

*"Mom, it's the caterers; I'll get them set up in the kitchen."*

*"Thank you, Lisa. Don't forget to put the best linen and china out."*

*"Right, and the best silver."*

*"I think the pastor told everyone to come see us at 1:00, so tell the caterers they have about an hour."*

*"Yes, Mom."*

*"Thank you, Lisa; you're such a good girl."*

*Then she turned towards Julie.*

*"Yes, she is my good child. So helpful."*

*She sat in the comfortably cushioned chair and motioned for Julie to sit in a chair*

*near her.*

*"It was good of you to find time to come to your father's funeral, Julie," her mother whispered sarcastically.*

*"Unfortunately, he didn't see enough of you these past several years. My goodness, you would have thought we lived hundreds of miles apart!"*

*"I came as often as I could, Mom."*

*"No, you didn't, and you know it. It broke your father's heart. He probably would have lived longer if you had visited more often. He always looked forward so to seeing you. He would always ask me if I'd heard from you or if you'd said you were coming for a visit."*

*"I'm sorry, Mom. You should have told me. I always called on Sunday, and you never asked me to visit. You were so cool to me that I just assumed you didn't want me to come for a visit. Whenever I asked to talk to Dad, you'd tell me he was too busy or that he didn't like to talk on the phone. You never called me, even when Dad found out about his cancer. Why didn't you let me know?"*

*"He didn't want you to know. He didn't want you to see him waste away."*

*"But, Mom, you just told me he was*

*upset because I didn't visit. Now you're saying he didn't want me here."*

*"He was ashamed of...what was he ashamed of, Julie? Why didn't you ever come home after college? Were you angry about the student loans? We couldn't help. You know that. You know we don't have anything."*

*"Please, Mom, please. You know I didn't mind the loans. They weren't very much. The scholarships took care of most of my college expenses."*

*"He was so proud of you for getting them. He felt terrible though that he couldn't afford to send you to college. He cried and cried."*

*"Mom, I'm sorry. Please don't be angry with me. I didn't know. You never told me."*

*"Oh, you knew all right. You never asked how we were. You never offered to help with our bills. You didn't even come home on his birthday."*

*"Mom, I explained all that to you. I had to attend graduation...every faculty member had to. Did you tell him that?"*

*"No."*

*"Did you tell him I had to leave the*

*next day to chaperone a group of kids touring the West? Did you explain that I needed the money for the summer?"*

*"No."*

*"Why not, Mom? Why did you let him think I didn't want to be here?"*

*"Because I wanted him to forget you. He should have loved...He should have been happy with me."*

*Stunned, Julie rose and went to her mother's chair. She tried to take her mother in her arms, but her mother pushed her away.*

*"Go away and don't come back. You weren't here when you should have been. It's too late now. Go away. He would have lived longer if he had known you loved him."*

*Before Julie could respond, there was a knock at the door; folks were beginning to come to offer the grieving family solace.*

Lisa asked her mom again. "Mom, should we have the service here or in Berry Township?"

"Here, of course, this is her home."

"All right, I'll let the Chief of Police know. He seemed to think that quite a few people over there would want to honor her memory."

"Oh, I see. He really thinks people will come to a service in Berry? I'm not sure about that; she was just a teacher."

"He told me that there would be other teachers, students, parents, and others. He said she was well respected there."

"Really? Well in that case, we'll have a service there and another one here."

"That's a good idea, Mom. Now then, I'll contact a funeral director there about the cremation."

"About the what?"

"The cremation. Remember, you agreed that because her body was so mutila...so damaged that we should have her cremated."

"Oh, yes, that's right. Yes, I don't want anyone to see her like that. She was such a beautiful girl. Yes, we'll have her cremated. I'm just not thinking clearly today."

They sat quietly for a moment until they heard a persistent knocking at the door.

"Mrs. Dalton, are you there? Please come to the door. It's me, Patsy."

## Chapter 23

Thursday morning dawned brightly; Indian summer had decided to hang around to welcome the kids back to school. The network news vans crowded around the main entrance. The students and teachers ran the gauntlet of microphones thrust in their faces. Few of the observations were original, falling into two categories, the "Ms. Dalton was great" and the "Hope they catch the monster" comments.

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The shadow eagerly watched every minute of the coverage and almost laughed at the "monster" indictment. "Pretty soon they'll be hunting me with flaming torches. Won't they be surprised to see I don't look a bit like Frankenstein's creation? They'll never think of me. Even if they ever happened to catch me, once I explain my reasons, no one will blame me for what I did. Everyone will understand and sympathize with me. They will realize that it was she who was a monster."

During homeroom, John Sullivan



spoke over the P.A. system. He asked the students to join together in a moment of silence for Ms. Dalton. He then told them that fifteen grief counselors were at Berry to help them.

"You will find them in the auditorium or the guidance department. Please go talk to them at any time. They are here to help you. Your teachers will give you passes whenever you ask them. Our primary concern is you. Please know that we all share your sorrow,"

Suddenly, almost as an incongruous afterthought, he added, "Ms. Dalton's classes will be meeting in the conference rooms today."

After the bell rang at the end of homeroom and students headed for first period, Kado anxiously awaited their arrival; she hoped she could find the right words to help them. The class entered very quietly. Kado realized that they were just as nervous as she. Very few, if any, had even experienced death in their lives, let alone murder.

Her first period class was juniors. She introduced herself and told them that she had known Ms. Dalton well and was very sad about her death.

"I want you to know you may ask me any questions you have or make any comments you wish."

The students were silent for awhile, but finally one boy began to talk about Ms. Dalton.

"Ms. Dalton used to come into the grocery store where I work once or twice a week. She bought lots of healthy stuff. I told her we had some great homemade pizza and cheese steaks in our 'Shoppers Cafe.' She would laugh and say, 'Can't, I'm in training.' I'd ask her training for what, and she'd answer, 'Why to have the strength to teach you, of course.' Or something like that."

One of the girls laughed and said, "Well, I'm a new varsity cheerleader. If you think she's hard as an English teacher, you should have her for a coach! I've worked out more in the last month than I ever did in my life. Pretty soon I'll be ready to join the football team."

"No way," said a big boy from the back of the room.

"Way!" she retorted.

Kado's eyes began to tear up as she watched the kids toss comments back and

forth. Their comments showed a true affection for Julie more than any flowery store-bought sympathy card could. They were obviously very fond of her and dismayed about her death, but they didn't talk about the murder very much. Their whole idea of murder was formed by episodes or *Law and Order* or some other television portrayal of a gruesome homicide. In the end, the actors would wash off their makeup and go home. Ms. Dalton wasn't really gone forever. In a way, as long as she was in their hearts, she wasn't really gone.

Kado had tried to answer their questions as best she could. When no other hands were raised, she gently tried to get them to focus on their learning.

She told them, "Ms. Dalton graded your vocabulary quizzes, and as soon as two of the students who had been absent take the quiz, you will get yours back. I want you to keep reading *The House on Mango Street*, which I saw by the eboard has already been assigned to you."

One of the two girls who had been absent raised her hand to tell Kado that she didn't have a book yet. She had also been absent on Friday when Ms. Dalton handed

them out.

"We didn't get them on Friday," a girl in front volunteered.

Apparently, Julie had given out *The House on Mango Street* the same day she gave the vocabulary quiz.

"I'm sorry I don't know where the extra copies are, but if you and the other girl who was absent would plan to come to make up your vocabulary quizzes after school today, I will find some by then. Okay? I did find the two copies of your quiz before school today, so we'll be all set there."

"Sure. No problem. Should we come here?"

"Yes."

The discussions of Julie were pretty similar during the rest of the classes. Having been unable to locate Alex Jordan's essay anywhere, she spoke to him at the end of his second period class. She apologized for misplacing the essay, but he insisted it was no problem. It was saved on his computer at home, and he would call his mother to reprint it and bring it to him during the day, so that he could give it to Mrs. Dolan right after eighth period. He arrived promptly at 2:35 to give her the essay.

After the two juniors finished taking their vocabulary quizzes, Kado headed down to the police station. George Clews greeted her and asked her to come to his office. She told George that several teachers were suspicious of Jon Atkins, a math teacher and former boyfriend of Julie's. She also told him about Ann Tandy's encounter with Josh McClure, a former student of Julie's. When she had finished, she handed him a copy of the notes she had typed on her computer. Chief Clews sighed and told her he would look at those two men further.

"Mrs. Dolan, I really appreciate your being our 'eyes and ears' at the high school. I think some information might come out inadvertently there that could be very helpful to us. People are always a bit wary answering questions from police. We have quite a few bits of evidence, but so far we don't seem to be zeroing in on the perpetrator."

Leaning back in his chair, knowing he could trust Kado and hoping she might be able to supply other information, he told her details of the crime scene.

"Apparently, the murderer made Julie disrobe. Her body was nude, and her clothes

were neatly folded and placed in a locker. Then she was stabbed repeatedly. The type of knife used was most likely a sharp kitchen knife, but we haven't determined that more precisely yet."

Kado bowed her head and put one hand over her eyes. "What a horrendous way for Julie to die. I just can't understand why anyone would..."

Chief Clews paused a minute to give Kado time to recover and then continued in his "official" voice.

"The medical examiners have told us they think she died between 6:00 and 9:00 PM Tuesday evening. We have an F.B.I. man trained in blood spatter patterns helping us, but he is still as stumped as we were by the variety and angles of them. Then one of the detectives working the case had an idea, and we think it's a good one. We found bits of twine--not quite as thick as rope--around a pipe and a pole. We had the M.E.'s look at her wrists again. They had made an earlier note that it looked as if her wrists had been tied, but this time we asked them to tell us if she could have been hanging from her wrists. They were convinced that she had been, so our guy's theory was right."

"I'm sorry, George, but I guess I'm just not following this as well as I might."

"Sure, that's easy to understand.

Apparently, the murderer held Julie's body up by roping her wrists to the pipe and pole."

"Why?"

"We have decided that he did not want her to fall down after the first few stabs. He wanted her body upright to stab at it over and over again. Maybe he wanted to see her face each time he stabbed her."

"That is really beyond belief. Julie must have been in great pain. How could anyone...? The murderer must be insane. Poor Julie. No one deserves to die like that, let alone a kind person who was always trying to help others. It's just too God awful to imagine. I just can't understand why anyone...well, I guess I'm repeating myself...but it's difficult to say the right words."

"It is. Honestly, this was the worst homicide I have ever seen. Terrible. You just don't expect things like this to happen in a peaceful town like Berry."

Then he added, "Don't have any doubt, Mrs. Dolan. We will find who killed her; it's just a matter of when. The whole town is

nervous, so the sooner, the better. We'll bring Josh McClure and Jon Atkins in for questioning. We actually have had some other information about both of them. We have Lisa Dalton coming in, too."

"Is Julie's sister a suspect?"

"Well, I don't really have too much to go on, but she wasn't staying with Julie for her visit, and she mentioned that the family was somewhat at odds. There is one more clue I didn't mention yet, but I'm beginning to think it's pretty important since you gave us these names, and others have mentioned them too."

"Oh, what's that?"

"When we were examining B246, one of the men noticed two letters written in the chalk dust on the front blackboard. They were almost at the bottom and at the edge of the board. We took pictures of them and also lifted them. They certainly appear to be 'JO.' The lab was able to determine that the fingerprint at the end of the 'J' belonged to Julie. She must have been trying to leave a clue. Now that you and two other people have given me a 'Jon' and a 'Josh,' those letters might be important. They also seem to indicate that the murderer was in Julie's



classroom with her before they went to the field house.

"And you're positive that is was 'JO'?"

"We won't rule anything out; it's always possible that she wasn't able to write exactly what she wanted. The corner of the board where the letters were was close to the wardrobe. Julie may have gotten a sweater or something from there, giving her the opportunity to draw with her finger on the board."

"Thank you, George. I won't tell anyone else about the clues you have so far, but I will certainly think about them. I think that besides the jilted suitor Jon and the spurned, lovesick Josh, you will have trouble finding people with motives. Everyone liked Julie."

"That's for sure. My daughter has kept me up on what the other kids are saying; she says that no one who knew her would possibly want to kill her. Thank you for coming in Mrs. Dolan. Please keep in touch if you hear anything else at school."

## Chapter 24

In Millburg, Lisa and Mrs. Dalton sat at the kitchen table. So many people had called or knocked on the door. A few television reporters had asked them to talk to the cameras; they said maybe they could make a plea for the murderer to turn himself in. They couldn't decide if that would be a good thing or a bad thing, so they hid out in the kitchen with the curtains drawn. Lisa poured her mother another cup of coffee. Mrs. Tomsic had just left after bringing them a coffee cake, which neither one of them had touched.

A light tapping noise on the kitchen door window, the only one without a curtain, made them look up to see Patsy Martin's face. Lisa got up to let her in, while fending off a reporter who had stationed himself at the back door.

"If I could have just a minute...", he pleaded, but Lisa just shook her head

"No" and closed the door.

"Coffee, Patsy?"

"No, thanks, I just came over to see if there was anything I could do for you. Last night, I'm afraid I was so shaken by your telling me about Julie's body that I forgot to offer my help."

"Patsy, you have always been such a good girl; I think you and Julie were friends since you were both two years old," Mrs. Dalton said as she patted Patsy's arm.

She then turned to Lisa, "I'm going upstairs to see if I can rest."

"Lisa and I didn't sleep at all last night. I just feel as if I will never sleep well again."

Mrs. Dalton moved slowly to the stairs and climbed them as if she were ninety years old.

"Is she any better this morning?"

"No, Patsy. I think sometime we're both going to wake up one minute and say 'It really did happen, didn't it,' but for now it's a wide-awake nightmare. I only had a brief glimpse at her body, but what I saw will be a recurring terror for the rest of my life."

After a wounded sigh, Lisa sat quiet with her own thoughts for a while and then looked at Patsy, "Did Julie ever talk to you

about our family? Did she feel anger towards us?"

"Don't be silly, Lisa. She loved all of you. In fact, we were planning a big party for your parents' 40th anniversary last March. We talked about renting a hall or maybe a large room at a restaurant and inviting lots and lots of friends. Julie thought we could carry it off as surprise; she said she'd enlist your help."

"What did she say? I didn't know anything about this."

"She said that she wouldn't even say she was coming home but would tell you to say you were taking them out to dinner. Then we'd all yell 'Surprise,' and Julie would come out wearing a red ruby dress and ruby shoes...because the 40th anniversary is Ruby. Then she would click her heels and say, 'There's no place like home. There's no place like home.'"

Lisa's face had tear streams on her face, and bubbles of tears were ready to fall from her lashes down the waiting rivulets.

"What happened to the plans?"

"When I called Julie last spring to sympathize with her about your dad's illness, she didn't even know what I was talking

about. Your mom never even told her that he had cancer. So, of course, we cancelled the party. Julie didn't know what to do."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she couldn't envision how she could call your mother to let her know she knew. She didn't want me to get in trouble for being a snitch. Then she thought your mother might blame you. She certainly did not want you to get in trouble; she was always afraid of your mother's reactions. Mostly, because she never knew what they might be. Since she couldn't come up with a solution, she just didn't say anything when she telephoned, but she kept hoping your mother would tell her. Every time she called she asked to speak to your father. Your mother would say he was too busy or out or some such excuse. And then your father died."

Lisa closed her eyes, "And now they're together again. Like always."

Patsy wondered a bit about Lisa's last words, but then she remembered a conversation she and Julie had had before they went away to college.

*"Hi, all packed?"*

*"Yep, how about you?"*

*"Almost."*

*"Julie, I'm going to miss you so much. I think we've been together every day for the last fifteen or sixteen years."*

*"I know! It'll be grim. Well, we'll call, text, email, and I'll see you every vacation. Maybe you can even come to visit me, or I can come to see your school."*

*"That would be great."*

*"Patsy, do you think your parents are all right with your going away?"*

*"I think they can't wait! My mother says that the Empty Nest Syndrome was invented by some kids who didn't want to pay rent some place else."*

*"Could be true. What is the new name they have for kids who come back home to live? Oh, I remember, 'Boomerang Kids.' I'm sort of worried about my folks."*

*"Why, Julie?"*

*"I've always been the peace maker, and Lisa's too young to even notice when the tension is building."*

*"I never noticed anything myself. Did something unusual happen?"*

*"No, it's been that way ever since I can remember. I would hear my mother yelling at my father and crying out threats, and then*

*my father would come take my hand saying, 'Hey, let's go for a walk.' We went for a lot of walks. Then he started planning outings with me without my mom and Lisa. We went to the zoo, the park, the swimming pool...just lots of places. I'm not sure if Lisa ever noticed that she didn't get to come; she was so young. You better believe mom was angry about it. She'd shout at him, telling him that I was the only one he cared about, the only one he loved. As I got older, I realized that my father was an avoider. He couldn't stand confrontation, so he would avoid it by getting away. I don't know what made my mother so unhappy in their marriage, but I think she eventually blamed me. It was as if I was somehow taking him away from her. These past few years, when I've been so busy with high school activities and school work, Dad decided to join a bridge club, probably to get out of the house. That infuriated Mom because she didn't know how to play. She started demanding that he teach her, and he would only reply that it was a very difficult game to play and, besides, no one talked while they were playing; he knew she wouldn't enjoy that. For the most part, they both seem to have accepted the situation and*

*just live their lives from day to day... separately. It's been calm for a while now, but I'm just worried about Lisa. What will she do if it starts again?"*

*"Julie, give Lisa a big hug and ask her to write you. Then tell her to call you if she needs you for any reason. She'll be all right. She's a sensible kid---oh, not as sensible as her big sister--but she'll be okay. Surprise her with a call every so often and tell her that you are making the call just to talk to her, not to Mom or Dad."*

*"Don't you think I should give her some warning?"*

*"I don't think so. As you said, things have been calm for a while now, so why worry her unnecessarily. Maybe it's all over now. Just emphasize that she must call you immediately if anything is worrying her."*

*"That sounds like a good idea, Patsy. Boy, am I going to miss you. Who in the world would know exactly what to say to me other than you?"*

*"I'll always be a part of your life."*



## Chapter 25

Kado finished cleaning the kitchen counter after dinner, undressed and put on a robe. Then she walked into the living room to sit and think. Suddenly she remembered Alex Jordan's paper and took it out of her book bag. Of course, it wouldn't have Julie's comments on it since it was a copy, but perhaps Kado could think of some pointers for him. She was taken aback by what she read. She re-read it with a puzzled look on her face.

It was perfect. No wonder Julie had given it an "A." There were no mechanical errors...not one misspelled word --even with spell check, errors sometimes made it through...not one missing comma. The paper was tightly organized, and the writing was so, so sophisticated. She was still trying to think about what she would write in her comment, when a loud knocking at her front door startled her. She looked at her watch; it

was almost nine o'clock.

The knocking continued, loud and insistent. Kado called through the closed door, "Who is it?"

"Jon Atkins. I'm a teacher at Berry Township." came the gruff reply.

"How can I help you, Mr. Aktins? It's quite late to come calling on a stranger."

"I must talk to you. Let me in."

"Not by the hair of your chinny-chin-chin," thought Kado, but instead she answered, "You'll have to wait a minute, Mr. Aktins. I need to slip on some clothes."

Kado walked into her bedroom, took her cell phone out of her purse, and phoned George Clews.

"George, Jon Atkins is pounding on my front door. I don't feel safe about letting him in. He sounds very angry."

"Okay, I'm coming. Don't open the door until I get there."

The hard knocking continued. Kado got dressed and went back to the living room.

"Please wait a minute, Mr. Atkins.

"I just need to talk to you, Mrs. Dolan."

"I'm waiting until Chief Clews gets here. You can come in and talk to me then."

After a few minutes had passed, Kado heard George's voice talking to Jon. Then he knocked, "Mrs. Dolan, Jon says he really needs to talk to you, but I'll come in with him. It's your decision."

"Okay, George."

Kado opened the door to see a nice-looking man in his thirties, but he had a deep frown and a tight, ugly mouth. He stood next to George with clenched fists. They both came in.

"Mrs. Dolan," Jon said in a quieter, but still irate, voice, "I'm Jon Atkins. I'm a math teacher at Berry. Because of you, I've spent the last three hours at the police station. You told Chief Clews here that I had a grudge against Julie and might have killed her."

"Mr. Atkins, you are misquoting me. I will be happy to talk to you if you can calm down and act in a civilized way."

He looked down, glanced over at Chief Clews, shrugged his shoulders, and, after a minute or two, grumbled, "Yeah. I'm sorry I spoke to you with such anger. I'm just so worried that the police think I killed Julie. He," nodding his head towards George, "questioned me for three hours."

Kado thought that, in spite of his

unruly manner, Jon seemed as if he were on the brink of crying.

George intervened, "Jon, Mrs. Dolan was not the only one who gave me your name."

"But she's the one that counts. She has friends all over the school. She's the one who has to tell everyone that I didn't kill Julie."

Kado motioned for Jon and George to sit down in two adjacent chairs.

"Please tell me what happened. I am sorry if I caused you trouble, but all of us are desperate to find Julie's murderer. First of all, I did not say that you killed Julie, but I was told that you were angry about your breakup last spring and constantly demeaned Julie to other male teachers."

"Yes, I did. I admit that. I guess I was just so hurt. I loved Julie, and I couldn't believe that she thought the story about me was true."

"What story is that, Mr. Atkins?"

First, he looked nervously at Chief Clews, and then he looked at her carefully, studied the room, and then talked to his shoes.

"The story was partially true. I went

out on several dates with a student of mine at my other high school. After a while, I began to get really worried that the administration would find out and fire me and that then I would never be able to get another teaching job. So, I broke it off. She felt so betrayed that she concocted a story. She told her parents that I had raped her. They went to the board of education, and, of course, I was fired, even though the charge was never proven. I was innocent, really. I moved away and got this job."

"I see," Kado responded. "But there's something I don't understand, Mr. Atkins."

"What's that, Mrs. Dolan?"

"Did you give the information of your employment at the other high school on your application to Berry?"

"Yes."

"Then why did they hire you here? Even if the rape charge was false, you admitted to dating a student."

"Well, as I understand it, I had tenure at the other school and that made it more difficult to get rid of me. The charge was only made to the board, not to the police, and my admission about dating her was only made to my principal."

"I guess I still don't understand, Mr. Atkins."

"You see, when Mr. Sullivan called my other principal to verify my employment and to get a recommendation, my principal there didn't tell Mr. Sullivan everything he knew."

"He lied?"

"Not really, he just didn't tell him about the incident. He told him that my observations were all positive and that the kids really seemed to make good progress in my class.....and all of that is true."

"I see, deception by omission, not exactly an honorable practice with a fellow educator."

Atkins shrugged, trying to hide his humiliation, and quietly said, "I guess he had to get rid of me. Since I had tenure, he was anxious to have me leave with as little commotion as possible."

"I'm afraid that doesn't excuse him. If he were a dedicated educator, he should have been thinking of the good of all students you would teach wherever you were, not just those in his district."

Jon's eyes flashed anger again. "I'm a damn good teacher, Mrs. Dolan. You don't even know about all the kids I've helped."

"No, I don't, Jon, but I guess my philosophy of teaching is a bit different than yours. I think we have to give them more than knowledge; we need to be role models of good character, too. Things have a way of coming out. How would you feel if some girl at Berry asked you to take her out? If you refused, she could say that she knew you did in the past, why not her? After all, you taught in the same state, not across the ocean in a tiny village. Why with Twitter and Facebook, your story could already be common knowledge among our students."

Crestfallen, Jon sighed, "You're right. Of course, you're right. I will keep those thoughts for the future...that is, if I have a future."

George stood up. "I think it's time to let Mrs. Dolan get some rest. I won't take you in again tonight, Jon, although I should. However, I will need some information from you so I can look into this previous incident you mentioned. Just come with me to my car, and I'll take down the names and facts I need."

"Thank you for coming over so quickly, George."

"Anytime."

After they both walked out the door and towards their cars, Kado closed the door, slid the dead bolt, and fastened the chain. Then she went around to all the windows and to the back door. Finally, she pushed the button on her home alarm system that said, "Stay."

Chief Clews walked down the sidewalk with Jon, talking as he went.

"You know, I trust, Mr. Atkins, that you could have been arrested for your actions tonight. You are lucky that Mrs. Dolan decided to call me instead of "911" and that she is an understanding person and won't charge you with any number of offenses."

"Yeah, I do know. I'm sorry. I was just so frustrated when I left the police station, and she was the only person I could think of to target with my anger. Believe me; it won't happen again. Also, believe me when I swear to you I am innocent. I would never hurt Julie. I loved her."

"I'd like to believe you, Mr. Atkins, but you know I have to question anyone involved in Julie's life. We cannot allow her murderer to roam freely in our town. Understand? We are working very hard to solve the case, and we must find out all we can in order for us to



do that. Now," he continued as he took out his notebook, give me some names so that I can verify your story."

"Yes, I will. I understand, but until you know who killed her, I hope you concentrate on others because I did not kill her."

After George took down the names that Jon gave him, there was nothing left to say except, "Good night."

Jon got in his car and drove only a short way before parking again. He wanted to think, but he didn't want to stay in front of Mrs. Dolan's house. They might think he was stalking her.

*The math department chairman held out his hand in greeting the newest math teacher. "Welcome to Berry, Jon. I think you will enjoy teaching here; it's a very nice community."*

*"Thanks, Lucas. I know I will. May I ask what courses I'm teaching this year?"*

*"Sure," he said, handing him a schedule of classes and room numbers. "For this year, you will be teaching the courses usually assigned to a woman who just retired. Then, if you have preferences for other courses, you can tell me in the spring."*

*All the teachers have a chance then to turn in their 'dream schedule.' Sometimes we can accommodate everyone; sometimes we can't. So much depends on the numbers...that is the number of students signing up for particular courses for the following year."*

*Glancing at his schedule, Jon replied, "This looks great, but I'll probably have many questions for you as I go along."*

*"That's my job; ask as much as you want. By the way, you have fourth period lunch; I do too. Meet me here and we'll go to the cafeteria together."*

*Later, settling down at a table with his lunch tray in front of him, he glanced around the room. Several teachers waved a "Welcome" hand. "That's nice," thought Jon. "It sure looks as if I've been fortunate to land the job here."*

*During lunch, Jon continued to look around at the faces in the faculty lunch room. He literally stopped and stared when his eyes fell upon a lovely girl with shoulder length light brown hair. She was animated as she told some stories to a group of teachers at her table. Her hazel eyes sparkled and her hands frequently emphasized a point she was making. "What a great-looking woman," he*

*thought. Then out loud, he asked Lucas, "Who is that lovely teacher sitting at the table near the windows?"*

*"Yes, she is lovely, and she's nice too. Her name is Julie Dalton; she's an English teacher. You finished?"*

*"Yep!"*

*"Okay, let's take our trash over to the large container right by her table. I'll introduce her to you."*

*"Is she married?"*

*"Nope."*

*The introduction soon led to dating which soon led to exclusive dating. They had so much fun together, laughing and sharing. Naturally though, Jon did not tell her why he had left his other school. He made up a barely believable story about wanting to try new surroundings. Since his old school was less than 100 miles away, she never quite understood the reason.*

## Chapter 26

Kado was up earlier than usual Friday morning. Her sleep had been troubled by Jon Atkins' visit and Julie's murder. She walked into the living room. Noticing Alex Jordan's essay on the coffee table where she had left it upon Jon's arrival, Kado put it in her book bag. The paper made her think that perhaps she needed a refresher course in the writing abilities of the current tenth grade class. An idea popped into her head, so she headed for her computer.

Choosing three quotes from Act I of *Julius Caesar*, the reading Kado had assigned for homework yesterday, Kado typed the quotes and gave instructions for each student to choose one of the quotes and write an in-class essay explaining why the quote was significant. She planned to spend some time at the start of class discussing Act I and answering any questions they had. The students would then have 20 minutes to write

a one to two page essay interpreting one of the quotes and perhaps relating it to a more modern situation, real or fictional. She dressed quickly so that she could get to school in time for an early morning run printing of the assignment.

On her way to homeroom, Kado passed Jon Atkins, who pretended he didn't see her. She thought about what he had said about Julia's breaking off their relationship because she believed the story about him was true. Kado thought, "I think, Mr. Jon Atkins, that it didn't really matter to Julie whether or not the rape story itself was true. The story probably gave her a deeper perspective on your character that gave her reason enough to end your relationship."

Jon had indeed seen Kado; he was still beating himself up for going to her house and revealing so much to her. Having more people know was not good.

He had thought back to last spring when he had confronted Julie in her classroom after eighth period.

*"Hey, Julie. You've been too busy to see me since you got back from your reunion with your friends. Is something wrong? What happened, Honey?"*

*"Jon, you never asked me where my friends live?"*

*"No, I didn't. Don't tell me that's what's upsetting you."*

*"In a way it is. My girlfriends live in Creighton."*

*John's face changed instantly, and the pebble of concern that had been growing in his stomach when Julie had started ignoring him became a heavy rock.*

*"I suppose they told you all the gossip about why I left Creighton. Honestly, Honey, that's all it is---just gossip. Please let me tell you what really happened."*

*"Unless you can tell me right here and now that a student wasn't involved in your leaving Creighton, I have nothing more to say to you."*

*"Well, yeah, a student was sort of involved, but those busybodies have added so much junk to the incident that they make me seem like a pervert of something."*

*"You've answered my question. Good bye, Jon."*

*"Julie, you're not being fair to me. I thought we loved each other. You know we even talked about having our trip this summer be a honeymoon. You can't shut me*

*out without even listening to me."*

*"Obviously, Jon, I will not be taking that trip with you. In fact, I have already begun to make other plans for the summer. I'll be away. Am I sad that you're not the man I thought you were? You bet. But I've done my grieving already."*

*With that definitely final remark, Julie had walked past him down the hall and out of his life.*

Again, the day started smoothly. The juniors during first period were enjoying *The House on Mango Street* more than they thought they would. They were beginning to realize that even though Esperanza's world and theirs were quite different, some of her neighbors and friends were like people they knew. They seemed to understand the concept of universality a little better.

The sophomores' discussion of Act I went very well; they certainly had done their homework. Although they grumbled a bit about the essays, they started writing and kept writing up to the bell. At the end of second period, Alex came up to Kado's desk.

"I'm really not feeling very well today, Mrs. Dolan. Could I please take my essay home to work on it tonight?"

"Well, you know I can't do that because it wouldn't be fair to the other students. However, if you're feeling better after school, you could come back here and have an additional ten minutes. How's that?"

"Okay, sure, I'll be here."

Kado watched him leave for his next class...almost in a run. "He didn't look as if he felt well," she mused, "but he seemed nervous rather than ill."

Beth Schwartz appeared at the door. "How about joining me for lunch? I know Julie had lunch 5th Period, so you must too."

"I'd love to, but I brought my lunch today."

"Well, if you're not busy with something else, bring your lunch to the cafeteria and join our table."

"Okay, will do."

Third period was her duty period, so she headed off to the study hall that she shared with another teacher she had known before she retired. Selma Jackson told Kado that she would take attendance today as she already knew most of the kids. Some of the kids were studying, but others were trying to whisper to each other or listen to iPods.

Selma leaned over to her. "I don't



know if you've been told yet, but iPods, cell phones, and any other type of electronic equipment were banned from school this year."

"No, I hadn't heard. Why?"

"Well, the iPods were being worn under hoodies, distracting the very kids who needed to listen to the lessons the most from listening to the teachers. Teachers could always tell when the heads started bobbing to the beat."

"Okay, I can certainly see that. But they're not allowed to have them in study hall either?"

"No. They had to make it a blanket rule, and, after all, we both can remember when a study hall was to study."

"Yes, I sure can. And what about the cell phones?"

"Oh, you'll like this one! They found out that a number of kids were texting each other during tests. If a kid in the first row didn't know an answer, he would ask his friend in the fourth row. Ingenious, huh? Sometimes the smart kid with the right answers wasn't even in the same classroom!"

"They've come a long way from crib sheets, haven't they? I think the cleverest

cheater I ever had was the kid who always beat me to class. He would then thumbtack notes on the ceiling tiles. During the test, he would stretch his arms while looking up, or he would simply pretend he was thinking and that his inspiration came from above. I found out one day when his notes fell on his face. Apparently I hadn't given him enough time to fasten the notes securely and down they came. The thing that always amazed me the most about that kid was that he must have had the best eyes in the world. Believe me, the printing on those notes was not large."

"Hey," Selma asked, "do you remember his name? I had a kid for math once that was enamored of the ceiling tiles too. I think I got taken in!"

Kado laughed, "Well, I'll go ask the kids with the iPods out to put them away. Thanks for the lesson."

Back in her classroom, the fourth period class was beginning to come in, whispering or shouting to one another. Kado smiled, "I really do enjoy being in the classroom again," she thought, "but I think I may get over that feeling by the time three weeks go by."

## Chapter 27

As her fourth period class filed out, Kado cleared her desk and started for the lunch room. Then, she turned back and took Alex's paper from the second period stack. She gave it a quick read and noticed that this writing did not begin to measure up to the perfection of the Greek paper; in fact, it seemed rather weak. Curious, she headed for Guidance.

"Hi, Gertrude, haven't seen you in a long time."

"Oh, Kado, I heard you were going to be teaching Julie's classes. How's it going?"

"Pretty well, so far. I'll let you know in a week or so if I'm still alive and kicking. Who is the counselor for sophomore 'J's'?"

"That would be Sue Ellen Paulsen. She's in her office now."

"Thanks. I'm sure you'll be seeing plenty of me during the next few weeks."

"Great," Gertrude responded, "we all

wish you luck. It must be so hard to have Julie' kids just now."

"Thanks, Gertrude, I appreciate all the support."

Making her way down the corridor of offices, Kado easily found Sue Ellen's office and opened the door.

"Hi, got a minute, Blondie?"

Sue Ellen laughed and stood up with her arms extended. After a brief hug, she asked, "How can I help you today, Old Lady?"

"Thanks a bunch. I'll pretend you didn't say that, and you can forget I mentioned your roots. Seriously, I'm here to ask you about Alex Jordan."

"Is there a problem?"

"Not really. I just have the feeling I should know more about him."

They settled down in their chairs, and Sue Ellen began to tell Kado what she knew about Alex.

"He's a very good student; he's taking several honors courses, a pretty tough road for a 15 year old, but he seems to be handling them all right. He had all 'A's' in eighth grade and last year here. I think his interim grades are all good. Let's see," she did some searching with her computer, "Julie gave him

a 'B,' and he had A's in all his other courses, except for Phys. Ed., but that doesn't count on his GPA."

"Do you get the feeling he's under a lot of stress with his tough schedule?"

Sue Ellen laughed, "Oh, he's always under a lot of stress, but it's not caused by his teachers. He's an only child. His parents both went to Princeton, so they expect that he must be a genius with their combined genes. They're both lawyers now; in fact, they're in practice together. What made you ask about him?"

"Oh, nothing I can put my finger on; he just seemed a bit nervous in class today. He had to write an in-class essay."

"Oh, I see. You know his mother told me that they have hired a tutor to help him with his writing; they're concerned about the new Writing section of the SAT's as well as the college essays he will have to write to get into college and want him to do well—very well."

"Aren't they being a bit premature? He won't have to write those for two years at least."

"What can I say? A bit of overparenting, I suspect."

"I guess you might say that, if I understand that new buzz word correctly. Thanks, Sue Ellen, your information will be helpful; I'm sure."

"Come back anytime. That's my job now. You are probably one of the few who remember I started out here as a history teacher."

"You were one of the best. I hated to see you leave the classroom, but you do a great job here as well. See you."

Kado stopped by the lounge to get her lunch out of the refrigerator. She then went to the faculty cafeteria and had fun greeting all her old friends at different tables. When she reached Becky's table, Becky said, "Oh, we're so glad you're here. We were afraid you had forgotten how to get here."

Kado said her "Hi's" to the other teachers at the table, sat down, opened her lunch bag, and tried to eat and talk at the same time.

Across the faculty lunch room, Jon Atkins also noticed Kado's arrival. He saw her chatting freely with everyone at the table. "I hope she isn't telling them what I told her last night. Well, at least she doesn't even know everything."

*Last year, after her visit with some old friends in Creighton, Julie acted very strangely and always seemed to be busy when he asked her to go someplace with him. She MUST have heard something about why I'm not teaching there anymore. Damn! Why didn't I just tell her in the beginning? Why did he again put it off when they began to talk about getting married some day? Well, the damage is done. All I can do now is find out exactly how much she knows. Then I can admit to whatever she does know and play the very contrite wrongdoer. I will smooth it over with her. I'll blame it on a character flaw that I have fixed after meeting and loving her.*

Then Becky said, "You remember at Jill's that we were talking about Jon Atkins?"

"Yes, I've since met Jon."

"You have? When?"

"Last night. He came to my house, hopping mad because the police had questioned him. He blamed me because I told Chief Clews about our conversation at Jill's."

"I'll be damned," Becky gasped. "His temper could make him more of a suspect. We were just talking about his being taken to

the station and so was Josh McClure; he's home from college."

"Yes, Ann told me." replied Kado, "It certainly is good to hear that the police are following all leads."

The table conversation became an unloading of today's problems with the kids, or today's praise of the kids. The same conversation that occupied every lunch, unless, of course, someone had seen a great show or had read a good book she wanted to share.

Becky touched Kado's arm as they both stood up after lunch. She whispered, "Walk with me towards our classrooms."

As they walked, Becky talked to her in a low voice, "Kado, my brother-in-law is a policeman up north in Creighton, the town where Jon taught. He told me last year, after I told him that Jon Atkins had been hired at Berry, that he had looked into his departure. The police arrested him, but not for rape. The student he was dating ran away from home, and Jon kept her in his trailer for a week. He was arrested for harboring a minor and for not notifying her parents where she was. He was released when the girl begged her parents to keep him out of jail; she asked



them to lie and say they knew where she was and that it was all right with them. In return, she promised them that she would transfer to a near-by parochial school and be home every night. She also swore she would never see Jon again. So her parents lied to the police. Harry, my brother-in-law, said that the real story became common knowledge; in fact, her father even told one of his friends that he had lied. He thought he had no choice and prayed that his daughter had learned her lesson. She had always been a 'good girl.' She had never even dated before this incident. So that's the true story."

"Wow," was the only word that came to Kado's mouth. She had also fallen for his act. She guessed she wasn't as good a judge of character as she thought she was.

## **Chapter 28**

The atmosphere in her seventh period junior class was quite different from that in first period. Although Periods 7 and 8 always seemed to be the toughest because the kids were gearing up for freedom, today seemed worse. There were some malcontents who had no intention of doing any reading or offering any positive participation in English, a totally useless class. As Kado learned who the unruly ones were, she asked them to switch desks with some of the students in the front of the class. They were angry, and two of them refused to go.

"These have always been our seats, and we're not going to move," shouted the self-appointed tough guy. He glared at Kado and sat back down in his chair. The other "tough guys" took courage from his defiance and returned to their desks as well.

"Gary, that is your name, isn't it?"

"Aren't you smart. Yeah, I'm Gary, and nobody messes with me."

"I see," Kado responded. "I do believe that I told you the first day I was that I was a retired teacher from this high school."

"So?"

"I just wanted to make sure you knew

because if I find your behavior unacceptable, I do know what a disciplinary card is. I do know about in-school suspension. I do know about Saturday school. And most importantly, I know Mr. Sullivan and the assistant principals quite well. As a result, they will believe me when I report your insubordination."

"Aren't you special!" quipped Gary, making his cohorts laugh and enjoy the exchange.

"Okay, I think I have given you fair warning. Now, are you going to change your seats?"

"Nope," shouted Gary, followed by the strong "No's" from his gang.

With that, Kado went to the phone hanging by the door, picked it up and punched in the numbers.

"Yes, hi, this is Mrs. Dolan in the conference rooms. I need the campus police to come to escort a few students to their assistant principal's office. Thank you."

One of the boys leaned over to another, "My parents are going to kill me if I get another suspension. I'm going to move."

"I'm sorry," said Kado, "but the deadline has passed. You will go with the

rest."

After the campus police had taken the five boys away, Kado turned to her class.

"I would like to explain something to all of you. I taught here for thirty years, and I had one philosophy. It is my job to teach students as well as I am able. If something, anything, keeps the students in my class from their learning time, I will not tolerate it. You all saw that I was polite to those boys. I do not dislike them, on the contrary, I am worried about them. Some of my students will not be going to college, and high school may be their last time to learn. I want you to learn, all of you. I want you to be able to speak well, write well, and I want you to understand how the ideas in great books will help you to make the right choices in your life."

No one said anything, but they sat quietly.

The rest of the class ran as smoothly as first period had. They all wanted to compare their own experiences with the folks on Mango Street. One boy who seemed to have good insight was, she thought, one of Gary's bunch. He came and left with them and sat near them, but he didn't behave like they did.

When Kado commented that one of his observations showed maturity, Joe slunk down in his desk, looking quite embarrassed, and looked out the window the rest of the period with a bored look on his face.

After class, Kado mused, "The funny thing I've learned over the years is that it is the very kids who give you the worst trouble in class are the ones who come to thank you after high school. They all somehow remember that they were my best buddies. Perhaps, it is similar to the maxim that parents who set reasonable limits on their children's behavior usually create good adults. However, it is a worrisome trend that it is not only children who are showing such disrespect; their parents are too. Not that I don't support those who disrespect those in authority who are undeserving of any; respect is earned. However, lack of respect need not be expressed with hostility."

Her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of smiling faces from a new class, a new class, a new chance to teach.

## Chapter 29

Within a few minutes after the bell rang ending eighth period, Alex appeared at the door. He asked for his essay and worked on it, erasing and writing, again and again. When he had used the ten extra minutes, Kado asked him, "I hope you're feeling better now. Will you have to wait for the late bus?"

"No," he answered, "I live in the development across from the school. I always walk, even in winter."

"That's handy. See you on Monday. I should have everyone's work ready to return by then. Remember to read 'Act II.'"

"I won't forget; in fact, I'll probably do it right when I get home."

Kado looked at the retreating figure, unsure how to react to his last comment. Was he sucking up, looking to make a favorable impression? Or was he really that dedicated to school work that he had no after-school break time?

She finished putting her papers and books in her book bag. Just as she was about to put on her cardigan, a handsome young man wearing a sweatshirt with a large Haskins printed on it stepped into the room.

"Mrs. Dolan?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"Hi, I'm Josh McClure."

"It's nice to meet you Josh. I've heard that Ms. Dalton was your favorite English teacher. She was a wonderful friend as well."

"Mrs. Dolan, I just wanted to meet you and tell you that I could never hurt Ms. Dalton. You know that the police questioned me yesterday. I think you and Ms. Tandy were the ones who gave them my name."

Kado thought to herself, "That's strange. How did he connect the two of us with his being questioned?"

"Julie was the best," Josh continued, "I would never hurt her."

Kado once again said in her mind only, "He called her Julie. That's not usually what a student does, even after he is no longer a teacher's student."

Josh continued, "She always encouraged me, and I think she probably was the strongest influence on my decision to

become a teacher."

"Of English?"

"Most likely."

"Well, before you decide for sure, keep in mind that the grading is endless and the pay is low and the rewards are few. I found out long ago that Hollywood really fooled me when they presented a Mr. Chips and a Miss Dove. I grew up thinking all my students would love and appreciate me the way that theirs did."

"Miss Who?"

Kado laughed and added, "And most of all the kids remind you of how old you're getting."

Josh smiled. "Okay, but I think that's where I'm headed anyway. Ms. Dalton told me about all the work too, so one day I asked if I could help grade some vocabulary quizzes or something. She welcomed the help, and because she would sort of tutor me by giving me tips on writing, I did anything I could to make her job easier. We became good friends, in spite of our age difference, but it wasn't the way the police think it was."

"Tell me what you mean, Josh."

"I guess I may have had a little crush on her in the beginning. After all, I was only



16 when I started her class, and she was beautiful. Later I started dating girls here at Berry, and I certainly have gone out with lots of girls in college. In fact, I've been seeing someone very special since the start of this school year. She's going to come down tomorrow for Homecoming, and I was hoping to have her meet Ms. Dalton. Connie always says, 'Should I be jealous of this woman?' because I talk about her so much. The police seem to think that it was a case of unrequited love and that I got so angry I killed her. It's not true, not at all. I cared about her very much, but I would never hurt anyone, let alone Ms. Dalton."

Kado took Josh's arm and they left the room together. He walked her to her car and left to get in his own. Kado decided to go to the police station; she should tell George about Becky's story and her encounter with Josh.

## Chapter 30

Pulling into the police station parking lot, Kado spied Chief Clews getting out of his car. She waved, and he made his way over to where she was parking her car.

"Hi, there. How's it going at school?"

"I have a couple of things to pass on to you. It's so nice out here. Why don't we just sit on the bench over there? We might as well enjoy this Indian summer while we have it."

"Sure."

Kado locked her car, and together they strolled to the bench.

"That was some confession from Atkins last night," declared George.

"Well, that was one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. According to Beth Schwartz, his story was only partially true."

"Yeah, I know. I talked to the police chief up there this morning. He gave me a lot of info on that mess. Jon's beginning to look

like the likely suspect. He certainly shouldn't have gone to your house. After all, you weren't, as I told him, the only one who mentioned him; others had told me about him. Sam Dillon, the manager of that steak restaurant on Route 10, called yesterday to tell me that Jon and Julie were there quite a bit last year. Also, Lucas Golding, his math department chairman, told me that Jon had indeed been badmouthing Julie in the teachers' lounge. We just don't have anything damaging to link him to the murder, and it appears as if he does have an alibi for all of Tuesday afternoon and evening."

"Where was he?"

"His new lady friend, a clerk in the Tax Office, said she was with him from 4:00 pm on. It's unlikely that Julie was murdered before then, what with so many people still around the school."

"Who is she?"

"Midge Collins."

"Oh, yes, I remember her from when she was at Berry. I think she graduated about six years ago. I would look into her recent history; she was a frequent flyer to the assistant principal's office when she was in high school."

George laughed and said, "Sure, we will double check that alibi for sure, especially since he threatened you."

"He didn't really threaten me, George. He was quite angry though, and who knows what kind of rage he would have for someone he felt had betrayed him."

"Unfortunately, we still don't really have any hard evidence. It looks as if the wounds were made with a ten-inch chef's knife, something almost every kitchen would have. Another interesting clue surfaced during the postmortem. A few of the wounds had strands of cotton fiber in them. They are hoping to narrow the origin of the threads down further with some comparison tests."

"That's odd. Oh, by the way, I wanted to tell you I had another one of your suspects came to visit me just now. Josh McClure came to my classroom after 8th period. He's that former student of Julie's you questioned, the one the other teachers thought had a serious crush on her. He was quite pleasant and went to a great deal of trouble to convince me he has moved on in the romance department."

"Yeah, he mentioned that his girl friend was coming down tomorrow."

After glancing at his hands and opening and closing his fingers for a minute, he added, "I think I might as well fill you in on that story, too. Maybe something will occur to you that will help us. Josh seems like a pleasant guy, but he wrote Julie some rather odd emails. We found them in a drawer of her desk when we searched her apartment. He would say things like, 'Today is my birthday, so I am one more year closer to becoming a man...' or 'Each passing year brings me closer to manhood, and I pray I will become the man you could love.' They were sent last month, so I don't think he was over Julie at all. In fact, one was sent Monday, the day before she was killed. She had them folded in an envelope which had a big red question mark written on it. I guess, she was trying to think of some way to answer him that wouldn't hurt him too much. She must have been a very caring person."

As he stood up, stretching and suppressing a yawn at the same time, George turned back to Kado. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you something important. Julie's sister Lisa called this morning. She and her mother have decided to have two memorial services for Julie, one here in Berry on Sunday

morning at 10:00 AM and one in Mill burg, her hometown, at 5:00 PM that evening. The DeKalb Funeral home here is arranging the cremation, but we haven't released her body yet. If we are unable to do so by Sunday morning, Lisa says they want to hold the services anyway. They will pick up the ashes for a private burial whenever they're available. We'll make announcements on television, of course, but you might want to get word to as many teachers as you can. Do you still have that tom-tom system?"

"What?"

"You know, I think you call it a Snow List."

## **Chapter 31**

Saturday morning dawned in a playful mood; it had decided to keep Indian summer for Homecoming. The air was crisp; the orange, yellow, brown, and gold leaves had begun to decorate the lawns and sidewalks. Mary, Little Me, and Rob picked Kado up for the game. Everyone in the car and at the Western Shore football field seemed a little bit happier today.

The festive floats had made their way over slowly early in the morning and could be seen waiting for half-time behind the field house. Both band buses had already arrived, and the eager musicians were seated on the opposite sides of the field. Berry's bright gold and maroon uniforms and the orange and brown uniforms from Hillsdale seemed to create another lovely autumn blend. Fans, old and young, were pouring in, laughing and waving. The happy mood was contagious, and eager anticipation for the game and for meeting with friends lifted everyone's spirits.

Before the teams came on the field, John Sullivan's solemn voice came over the PA, "We want to dedicate today's game to the memory of our dear friend and teacher Julie Dalton. Her tragic death..." His voice broke, and he seemed unable to go on. Then, he

finally continued hoarsely, "Her tragic death is such a loss to us all; we will never forget her."

The teams jogged onto the field. The crowd clapped and shouted their appreciation for the young athletes, anticipating the afternoon of fun these boys would give them.

Again John Sullivan spoke, and the reverberating sound came echoing from the field's speakers, "Julie Dalton was the cheerleaders' coach, and they have prepared a special tribute to her."

Kado scanned the girls' faces, and even though quite a few of them had long, blonde hair, she spotted her visitor from Wednesday night and paid special attention to her throughout the cheer. The girls stood in a line with their right arms raised in a fist and said in unison, "Ms. Dalton, this one's for you." At the end of their routine, they created a 2 1/2 high pyramid. After the dismounts, all of the girls formed a line. They then did back flips and held their arms up in a "V." The audience wildly applauded the difficult routine. The cheerleaders then put their hands over their hearts as the band began the National Anthem. "Well," thought Kado, "that Josie is certainly the perkier one out



there, and her gymnastic moves are flawless."

After the National Anthem, Josie seemed to be scanning the crowd. When she spotted Kado, she gave her a big two-arm wave and smiled. To herself, Josie was thinking, "I hope that nobody has said anything about my not cheering before today. No, they wouldn't have, and even if they did, the 'working on grades' and coming out to support Ms. Dalton's cheer would work. Absolutely perfect!"

Then someone brought a microphone to the captain of the football team. He took it nervously, grinned at the crowd, and, enthusiastically announced the members of the Homecoming Court. He allowed time after each name for the crowd reaction. The girls were screaming and hugging each other. One by one the court members joined the captain in the middle of the field. Finally, with extra enthusiasm, he announced the name of the Homecoming Queen. She started crying. Her parents stood up and applauded loudly, as did her many friends. Josie's name was not called. Inside she was fuming as she congratulated the other girls. Being the Homecoming Queen had also been

on her list for senior year accomplishments. "I'm sure I was nominated. I wonder who didn't vote for me," she thought angrily. She began to look carefully at each team member, checking off in her mind who might be guilty.

"I'll find out somehow," she whispered, "and he may have some difficulties this year."

The game began. Kado had always gone to athletic matches and performing arts shows when she was able because she wanted to support her students. Besides, it was a nice, casual way to see parents and others in the community. However, she really wasn't educated in sports rules and strategies, so she frequently asked her daughter or son-in-law to interpret the ref's arm gestures and their importance to the specific point during the game.

During half-time, the bands performed, and the floats circled the field, ending with the fresh beauty of the Homecoming Queen and her court. The queen held a large spray of yellow roses, and the members of the court sported huge chrysanthemums pinned on their jackets. Josie forced herself to smile and clap. She wouldn't forget the humiliation

of this day. This was really Ms. Dalton's fault, too. "If I had been cheering at the first games, more of the players would have realized that I would be the perfect queen."

In the stands, Kado looked around and spotted Josh McClure with a cute little brunette who smiled broadly as Josh introduced her to a friend. When Kado got up to stretch, Josh saw her and made a beeline up the steps.

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan. I didn't know I'd see you here. This is great. I want you to meet my best girl Connie Hill."

Connie stuck out her hand eagerly. Kado shook it. Still holding her hand and smiling at her, Kado asked, "Are you a sophomore at Haskins, too?"

"No, Ma'm, I'm just a freshman, but Josh has helped me so much. He found me wandering around the campus clutching a map, and we've been practically inseparable ever since. In fact, he's helped me make up my mind; I've decided to become a high school English teacher."

"That's great, although you may want to do some more thinking about the hours of endless grading; the papers seem to multiply inside your briefcase. The fact is that I still

haven't made up my mind what I want to be when I grow up."

Everyone smiled, and the young couple made their way back down to the sidelines. Kado felt a tug on her sweater. Kneeling to her granddaughter's level, she said, "Yes, Little Me, what's up?"

Little Me's smile was irresistible, "Hot Dog."

Kado turned to her daughter and mouthed, "Okay?" Mary shook her head yes, so Kado took Little Me's hand. Little Me dashed toward the refreshment stand, pulling Kado behind her. Jon Atkins and Midge Collins were chatting with some other teachers close to the stand. Kado thought, "Midge has turned out to be quite a nice looking young woman; her make-up isn't as dramatic as it used to be, and her clothes are tasteful."

Jon turned a bit so that his back was to Kado, but Midge spotted her and cried out, "Hi, Mrs. Dolan. Do you remember me? I was a student of yours at Berry--maybe eight or nine years ago."

"Yes, of course, I do. What are you doing these days?"

Midge chatted on about her job at the

Tax Office. Then she took Jon's arm to turn him around. "This is my boy friend, Jon Atkins; he teaches math at Berry. Do you guys know each other?"

Kado answered immediately, "Yes. In my very short time back at Berry, I've seen and met Jon a couple of times."

Jon smiled at Kado. She could see that he was relieved that she didn't go into details. He shook her hand.

"Is that cute little girl with you? asked Midge. "She is madly motioning for you to go to the refreshment stand."

"Yes, that's my granddaughter. I think she wants her hot dog now, right now."

On their way back to the bleachers, Kado stopped and chatted with many of her former students or parents of her current one. Little Me tolerated all the stops because she was busy eating her hot dog. Besides, everyone leaned down to meet her face and told her how pretty she was. A girl of any age appreciates being appreciated.

Once Kado and Little Me were safely back in the bleachers, Kado's thoughts turned to her encounters with Josh and Jon. "I must be slipping. I used to be able to tell when someone was hiding something from me.

They both seem so straightforward, and yet one of them may be a vicious killer."

A minute or so later, Kado felt a tap on her shoulder. It was George Clews. Since Mary had also decided to make a trip to the refreshment stand herself and to get another treat for Little Me, there was room for him to sit beside her.

"Anything new to report?"

"Oh, hi, George. No, not yet. However, did you see that Jon and Josh are both here? I've spoken with both of them. They certainly appeared calm. Did you see them?"

"Only at a distance. Could be they're trying to avoid me."

"That's a definite possibility."

"Did you know that the lovely brunette on the Homecoming Court is my daughter? The one with the beige sports coat."

"No, I surely didn't make the connection. Congratulations. Either the PA system is not working well or my ears aren't. I'm afraid it may be the latter."

"Couldn't be that! Anyway, my daughter said I am allowed to come to the dance tonight if I didn't come near her. 'Dad, it would be so embarrassing to have you

chaperon.' I did remind her that her mother and I were Berry alums and that, after all, this was the Homecoming Dance. I've already seen her in her dress and admired it and her, so I guess I'll do as I'm told and keep away. However, I cannot vouch for my wife; I'll bet she already has a camera tucked in that tiny beaded purse she's bringing."

Berry won the game, but the score was so close, the opponent's fans were not upset. It had been an exciting afternoon. Some of those young men were definitely going to be on college teams next year. On the ride home after Berry's victory, Mary asked Kado if she could come over and stay with Little Me so that she and Rob could stop in at the Homecoming Dance.

"Okay, but don't be surprised if the baby-sitter falls asleep before the baby."

After a short rest at home, Kado changed to more casual 'baby-sitting' clothes and walked to her daughter's home just four blocks away. "It was the players and the cheerleaders who got exercise today, not me."

She arrived at Mary's house and opened the door calling out, "Hi, I'm here." Little Me came rushing down the hallway

arms outstretched. "I wish my grandchildren would never outgrow that stage," but, of course, the other two, her son Tim's boys, were teenagers now and believed a stoic 'Hi' was showing as much emotion as they should show for any adult, grandmother or not." Mary came down the hall too.

"Oh, don't you look pretty. You'll outshine all those youngsters. Doesn't it seem that it was just yesterday when you came down our stairway with shining eyes ready to attend your first Homecoming Dance."

"Thanks, Mom. But I don't even want to figure out how many years have passed since that night."

That night Little Me and Kado played "shopping" for a while because she had gotten a new toy cash register from her other grandmother. After a "Backyardigans" DVD, Kado held Little Me's hand, walked down the hall to her bedroom, changed her to her "jammies," tucked her in bed, and kissed her.

"G'nite, Gammie, I 'ove you."

"Love you back, Princess."

Back in the family room trying to read, for some unwelcome reason, Kado's thoughts turned to Julie's mom and how she must be



feeling tonight. Burying any loved one is hard, but to bury a child is to lose a piece of yourself forever.

## **Chapter 32**

Sunday morning Kado's telephone rang as she sat reading the newspaper. Recognizing the caller I.D., she answered, "Hi, son, how are you doing this fine fall day?"

"Great, Mom. I'm a little behind on my news. I was at an overseas conference all week. JoAnne told me about the murder at Berry High School when I got home. What an awful thing! In Berry, yet, the typical calm small town."

"Over the years, I've seen lots of tragedies set in lovely little hometowns. Crime isn't exclusive to the big cities."

"That's true. I guess it's just hard for me to imagine my own hometown as the setting for a gruesome murder. Was the teacher someone you knew?"

"Yes, dear. She was a wonderful teacher and friend. The entire community is very sad."

"Oh, Mom, I'm so sorry. What was her name?"

"Julie Dalton. She didn't start teaching there until long after you graduated."

"She was young then."

"Uh, huh. I think she was only 28 or 29. The memorial service is today."

"I won't keep you then."

"Well, you're going to stay on long enough to tell me how my Midwest family is doing. I certainly have time for that."

"Everyone's just fine. Zach is getting used to being in high school although he's still in shock at all the homework they load on ninth graders. Dylan just took his PSAT and is beginning to learn what they will expect him to know in college. Seriously, though, they are loving high school. I'm so glad; it's a tough time for a parent."

"Tell about it!"

"Right. How ever did you put up with me? Took me a while to mature, didn't it? Oh, by the way, JoAnne has decided to go back to work part-time, probably for a florist. You know how much she loves her flowers."

"Sure do. That's going to be fun for her. By the way, I'm going to be teaching Julie Dalton's classes for a few weeks."

"Mom, is that safe?"

"Yes, I'm sure it is. The murder seems to be decidedly a personal one. Whoever did it is not after English teachers in general."

"Okay, if you say so, but please be careful. I know how you are about searching out the truth. Don't put yourself in harm's way by asking questions."

"Who me? I would never think of it."

"No, never."

"I'll send an email every night to tell you I'm home safely."

"Yeah, right. Bye Mom, love 'ya."

"Love you too, Tim, and give JoAnne and the boys my love, too."

Expecting a large crowd, the DeKalb Funeral Home decided to have the memorial service at the Berry Township Concert Hall. It could hold from 3,500 to 4,000 people, and there was an orchestra pit and a choir loft that the school could use.

When Gregg Burton, Berry High's music chairman, had been asked on Friday whether or not he could coordinate the music, he was happy to do so. In fact, the choir had been learning *Amazing Grace* for a competition in December. As soon as he learned of Julie's death, he anticipated a

memorial either in school or elsewhere and had been rehearsing his singers. He discussed appropriate pieces for the orchestra to play with its director. They thought of several, but finally decided on the one that the kids could learn in such a short time. Finally, he asked his most advanced soloists, Cheryl and Virginia, if they would sing; he knew them both to have sung at their own churches for similar services. They were proud that he asked them and gave him a list of the songs they had performed in the past. Once he selected the songs he thought were most suitable; they promised to practice with the pianists who had accompanied them before.

DeKalb's had already enlisted two of the local florists to decorate the church, so they just told them to plan for the Concert Hall instead, and many other private arrangements arrived on Saturday after the service was announced. It amazed everyone how they had pulled it all together in such a short time.

As Julie's body had not yet been released by the county medical examiner, only her picture and a simple bouquet of flowers were in front of the hall. However, a

relatively new practice was in place for the people as they entered. Two television screens showed a continuous video of photographs of Julie. Lisa had contributed many of them, but once Julie's friends heard what she was doing, they also went through their albums for good pictures of Julie. Everyone smiled as they saw Julie in diapers or in a scout uniform or in jeans climbing a mountain. It would seem that looking at the pictures would make everyone sad, but it seemed to have the opposite effect. Instead, they could remember a happy, sweet young lady who enjoyed her life immensely and be grateful that she had.

People filed in slowly, stopping to sign the one of two condolence books and giving sorrowful hugs to friends. That is the way of this world. We keep on surviving the horrendous hurts of our lives with the touch of others. Then all sit in assembly, waiting for solace.

First, Lisa Dalton read a passage from the Old Testament, "For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace, the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall

come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Isaiah 55:13."

Lisa looked up slowly, her eyes filled with tears. Finally able to speak she said, "Julie always heard the song of the hills and the mountains. She loved to walk and hike and enjoy the beauty around her. She always said that all of nature was certainly a gift from a God who loved us."

Lisa closed her Bible and stepped down from the stage, but instead of sitting with her mother, she walked swiftly to the back towards the entrance along a side aisle.

Julie's girlhood friend, Patsy Martin, gave a reading from the New Testament, and John Sullivan smoothly presented the eulogy without a falter. The entire service was lovely, but, of course, as all such services are, painful.

There is a large paved area in front of the concert hall, and people gathered there after the service. People would greet people they hadn't seen for a while and shake their heads in disbelief at their reason for meeting now. Then they would move on to the next mourner. Occasionally, someone would remember something funny Julie had said or

done, and a gentle laughter could be heard, lifting everyone's hearts just a bit.

As Kado went from friend to friend, acquaintance to acquaintance, she went, as they all did, with slow incredulous movements. Suddenly, a handsome, beautifully groomed woman stuck out her hand. As Kado shook it, the lady introduced herself as Alex Jordan's mother. It took Kado a minute to focus and remember that name. Oh, yes, the boy in second period.

"Yes, it's nice to meet you, Mrs. Jordan."

"Oh, please, call me Elizabeth; all of Alex's teachers do. You see, I'm quite interested in my son's education. But, I suppose, all mothers are."

"An involved community always results in a better school," Kado nodded and responded prosaically.

"I hope you don't mind that I take this opportunity to bring something up about Alex's work."

"Of course, I mind," thought Kado, but she said out loud, "No, not at all."

"He told me that he was feeling ill when he wrote his in-class essay on Friday, and he just feels awful that he didn't do his

best. He is so afraid a bad grade on that one little essay will hurt his average. You see, good grades are very important to him. Besides, he is so afraid of disappointing his father. Boys do worry about that, don't they?"

"Yes, I suppose they do. I haven't actually had a chance to grade those essays yet, Mrs. Jordan, so I don't know how Alex did. He did tell you I gave him extra time after school, didn't he?"

"Yes, and he appreciated it so much, but he still felt he wasn't up to par."

"It was nice meeting you, and I assure you that I will be in touch if I see that Alex needs any extra guidance from you," Kado turned as if to leave.

Mrs. Jordan didn't look as if she had quite finished, but she smiled and nodded her head saying, "Thank you so very much."

Kado spotted George Clews and walked over to him. She waited as he finished his conversation with another mourner and then asked, "Why did Lisa leave after she spoke? Her mother looked so alone."

"I was standing in the back and watched her go into the ladies' room. When



she came out, I asked her if she were all right. She told me that she never had spoken in public before and that she was unable to keep down the breakfast her mother had insisted she eat this morning. When she came out, she thought it would take away from the service if she made her way back down the aisle. I believed her. Remember I questioned her the other night, too. I think I've got a read on her. As soon as the last song was over, she scooted down the side and reached her mother. Neither she nor her mother knew any of Julie's friends here in Berry, so they went out a door on the side of the building and went back home. They wanted to rest up before the service there tonight."

Kado nodded and then with her eyes directed George's attention to Jon, who was making his way swiftly toward the parking lot. He looked at no one and swept by other teachers without a word.

"George, I babysat for my granddaughter last night so that my daughter Mary and her husband could go to the Homecoming Dance. When they got home, they told me that there was somewhat of a commotion at Jon's table."

"Oh, I didn't notice one. What happened?"

"Mary wasn't sure, but her table was next to Jon's, and she said it appeared as if Jon and Midge were arguing. One of Midge's friends from her graduating class was sitting at the table with them.

Apparently, she had come alone, and Jon was making sure that she had a good time by repeatedly asking her to dance. When the other couples at the table left to dance, Midge was left alone, and she sat there fuming.

When Jon and the friend would return to the table, Jon would always kiss her on the cheek and say, 'Thanks for the dance. You are a fabulous dancer.' Naturally, Midge was not having a good time, and finally she stalked off long before the dance was over. Jon followed, turning to the table, shrugging his shoulders, and winking at Midge's friend."

"I'd say your daughter is as observant as you are."

"What you really mean to say is that she is just as nosey."

At this point, Lois Clews and their daughter Stacy came to join them.

George held out his arms, "Honey, you came just in time to save me. Mrs. Dolan, I

don't believe you know my daughter Stacy."

"Hi, Stacy. It's a pleasure to meet you.  
Hi, Lois.

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan. It's nice to meet you."

"Congratulations for being chosen for the Homecoming Court. You looked lovely."

"Thanks. It was a very nice surprise."

"And the cheerleaders' routine was unbelievable. I can't believe you all learned it in such a short time."

"Well, we had used parts of it in a couple of earlier games, but, at Josie's insistence, we added quite a bit."

"Is she your captain?"

"No, actually I am co-captain with Sally, but when Josie sweeps in, no one argues."

"I don't understand. What do you mean by 'sweeps in'?"

George and Lois had turned away from them to greet other people who had come to talk to them. Stacy turned slightly away from them and said in a low voice, "Well, she wasn't on the team this year, but she showed up at practice for the Homecoming game, giving orders and criticizing what we were doing and the way we were doing it. Let's say nicely that she has her own strong

opinions. Sometimes she isn't careful about hurting feelings, but we all have to admit that she is very good. So many people have complimented us on the routine, so I guess we have Josie to thank for that."

A surprised Kado replied, "Funny. I had the impression that she was still an active member of the squad."

"No, Ms. Dalton didn't put her on this year."

At the mention of Ms. Dalton, George turned back to listen to his daughter.

"She has always claimed that her parents didn't want her to be on the squad because she needed to focus on her grades to get into college, but no one believed it. When her name wasn't on the team list, she went to find Ms. Dalton. The rest of the day she was in a rotten mood. The next day she told the "grades" story to anyone who would listen. She also started badmouthing Ms. Dalton, so we all guessed she was lying and that Ms. Dalton hadn't put her on the team. We all figured out that it must have been because she rarely attended practice last year."

George put his arm on his daughter's shoulder, "What did you say this girl's name

was?"

"Josie Van Doren."

"Josie," Kado repeated and then looked into George's eyes and saw that he had thought the same thing—'JO'."

Kado's attention was then diverted by Connie Hill, who practically hopped to her side.

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan, Mrs. McClure is having some people over for coffee and cake. She sent me over to ask if you could stop by for a few minutes. I know you're probably busy, but I'd love to talk to you about teaching. Would you come?"

"Why, yes, Connie, I'd be glad to. Thank you."

"Just in case you could, I wrote down Josh's address. Here it is."

"All right, Connie, I'll see you in a bit."

With that settled, Connie skipped back to Josh and his friends and began talking animatedly to them. Josh, on the other hand, didn't seem to be contributing. Connie was still busy chatting with his classmates she had met at the game or at the dance yesterday. Once and a while, she would glance nervously at him but didn't urge him to talk.

Doing their best to reassure others, John Sullivan and his wife Sarah circulated among teachers, students, and parents. Even Superintendent Abe Cohen managed to offer condolences to all as he assured them the police were making wonderful progress on solving Julie's murder. In fact, he even directed some people over to Chief Clews, hoping that he could give them further encouragement..

As one such group approached the spot where they were standing, Kado squeezed George's hand and slipped out of the crowd and walked to the parking lot to her car. There she closed her eyes and said her own private goodbye to Julie.

## **Chapter 33**

Before Kado left the Concert Hall parking lot, she programmed Josh's address into her little GPS. She had fallen in love

with this technology, and, although it wasn't a fancy built-in like her daughter's van had, it did its job very well and saved her a lot of time from either researching MapQuest or asking someone every other block for directions.

Driving towards the right address, Kado had the impression that the McClure's had invited everyone at the memorial service over for coffee. Cars lined both sides of the streets. Finally, some distance away, Kado found a place to park and started walking towards the house.

At the door she was greeted by Mrs. McClure, whose face seemed familiar.

"Welcome, Mrs. Dolan. You probably don't remember me, but my older son Daniel had you for English about ten years ago. I'm Cynthia McClure."

Now the familiar face fit into the right compartment of her brain. It was sometimes difficult for her to remember a name when she saw someone in a place other than the usual one. She had seen Mrs. McClure at the library often and, of course, among the parents at a long ago back-to-school night.

"Hi, Cynthia. Please call me Kado. You were so kind to ask me to your home."

"Well, Josh and Connie were both so anxious to talk with you they just insisted that you be included. I am also glad to meet you in a more relaxed setting. I was actually at your retirement dinner because a close friend of mine retired the same year and she invited me to the festivities. Perhaps you remember her? Her name was Vicky Chang; she taught math."

"Of course I know Vicky. We shared a duty once. How is she enjoying her retirement?"

"Not much, I'm afraid. Her husband is quite ill."

"I am sorry to hear that. Please give her my best when you next talk to her."

"I certainly will."

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of another guest. Left to her own devices, Kado made her way to a coffee urn sitting on the dining room table. She wasn't alone long. Both Josh and Connie popped up at her side.

"I'm so glad you could come, Mrs. Dolan," said Josh. "Let me go find Daniel. I know he'll want to see you."

"Isn't he the sweetest boy?" an obviously smitten Connie asked.



"Yes, he certainly seems to be. You know, I retired before he took Sophomore Honors English, so he was never my student, but he was very happy to have Ms. Dalton, as were all of her students. She was an excellent teacher."

"Oh, I know. He talks on and on about her. It was her example that decided his future. You do know he wants to become an English teacher?"

"Yes, I believe you told me, and you do too, right?"

"That's right. I had always enjoyed English in my own high school, but I had never even thought about teaching it until Josh convinced me that teaching would be the most rewarding career I could choose."

"Without question. Sometimes the rewards aren't immediate. Sometimes they show up when you least expect it, such as when I run into an old student who thanks me for all I taught him way back when. Although a well-written essay at the end of a year from a student who didn't know what a paragraph was at the beginning of the year is a more immediate reward."

"Wow. That sounds great. I think I'll like teaching. You know that Josh and I have

a couple of classes together. I always look forward to them the most. When the television reported Ms. Dalton's murder, he called me right away; he was almost incoherent."

"I guess that wasn't one of the days you had class together."

"As a matter of fact, it was. That was why he called me. He wanted me to bring along the notes from our Tuesday afternoon seminar so that he could copy them. He had already gone home to help his mom with some things around the house. Besides, he wanted to make his stay at home for Homecoming as long as he could. His mom always loves it when her sons are home together. They always have a big family dinner with all the relatives who live in or around Berry. I met them all Friday night. What a big clan!"

"I'm sure that was fun, Connie. It was a pleasure to meet you, and I wish you good luck in your future teaching career."

"Yeah. Josh and I have talked about the future, and we think it would be really neat if we teach at the same high school. Wouldn't that be something?"

"Well, it has happened before at Berry,

so who knows?"

Suddenly, a call came from across the room, "Mrs. Dolan!"

Daniel McClure was soon at her side.

"Remember me?"

"I sure do, Daniel. Plus, your mother mentioned your name when I got here, so that helped my memory just a bit, too. How are you and what are you doing?"

"I'm fine and I live right here in Berry, over on Chestnut Street. I am currently attending the police academy, so I hope to be one of Berry's Finest in the near future. Since I didn't know Ms. Dalton like Josh did, this murder isn't personal. I am just fascinated with the details of the murder, trying to figure it out, but the Chief and the detectives are pretty secretive, so I don't have many clues."

"Well, as I'm sure they are teaching you at the academy, they must not tip off the murderer as to how close they are to catching him."

"Oh, I know. I know. I haven't even figured out why they took Josh in for questioning. It must be because he was such a close friend of Ms. Dalton that they thought he could give them some leads."

"That must be it. Do keep me informed. Let me know when you graduate. I know you will make a big contribution to the force. Do you know Kevin O'Donnell? I think he was in school when you were. He's become a fine officer."

"Yes, I sure do know Kevin. Actually, he was the one who convinced me that I would be good in police work."

"If you follow in his footsteps, I know you will be a big asset, and Chief Clews will be a wonderful boss."

"You bet. Well, I guess I'd better circulate. Thanks for coming."

About a half hour later, Kado excused herself and said her goodbyes. "I think I'll try to call George today. No, I'd better make it sometime this evening. I know he was planning to go to the service in Millburg just to keep an eye on the people who attended Julie's service over there."

## Chapter 34

After Kado got home, she kicked off her shoes and took off her suit jacket. She was considering a short nap when the telephone rang.

"Mrs. Dolan?"

"Yes. This is she."

"Hi, this is Midge Collins."

"Oh, hello, Midge. How are you doing today?"

"Not very well. That's why I'm calling. If you have a few minutes this afternoon, I'd like to come over to talk to you."

"Bye, bye, nap," Kado said to herself. Out loud she said, "Sure Midge. Why don't you come over right now? I have some grading to do, but I haven't started it yet, and I wouldn't mind putting it off at all."

"Thank you. I got your address when I looked up your phone number, so I know exactly where your house is. It will take me about 10 minutes."

"I'll be waiting for you."

Sure enough, at exactly ten minutes after her call, Midge was knocking at the front door. Even though she was wearing huge dark sunglasses, Kado could tell that

Midge was quite upset. When she took them off, she was sure of it; the red eyes told the story.

"Come in, Midge."

"Thank you. I'm so sorry to disturb your Sunday afternoon, especially since you had the memorial service to go to this morning."

"Yes, it was painful, but it was a lovely tribute."

"I didn't go because I really didn't know Julie at all. I just knew what Jon had told me. I am beginning to question Jon's honesty, so I came over to tell you something important about her murder. I know you were close friends and also that you know Chief Clews pretty well."

"That's right on both counts."

"Jon told me that he came over here when he was so angry that the police had questioned him."

"Yes, he did."

"He also told you and Chief Clews that he was with me from 4:00 on. That's what I told the two detectives who questioned me also. But it's not true. I was lying."

"Oh, dear, that's quite an admission. Are you sure that you want to tell me this?"

"Yes, I've made up my mind."

"Midge, may I stop you for a moment. My daughter was at the dance last night at a table next to yours. She told me that you and Jon were fighting, probably because he was flirting with your friend. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"I just want to make sure that what you are going to tell me is the truth, and not something you want to use to get Jon in trouble because you are angry with him."

"I can understand why you would think that, but I really want to tell you the truth."

"Okay, go ahead with what you started to say."

"I was with Jon the Tuesday of the murder, and he did pick me up at work at 4:00 when my shift was over. We took a nice long walk, which included the park, so some people might have seen us there. Around 5:00 or so, we stopped at Ye Olde English Pub for a couple of drinks and then went back to my apartment. An hour later Jon said he was hungry, so I got out the menu I have for The Imperial Garden so that we could phone in an order. Jon insisted that he would rather "stretch his legs" and pick up the food

himself. He also insisted that I stay home and relax after a long day at work. I did have some laundry to do, so I easily agreed. He was gone for two and a half hours."

"How far is your apartment from The Imperial Garden?"

"About 10 minutes."

"I see."

"When he got back, he told me he had run into an old friend and that they had chatted over a few beers. I was a bit miffed and told him he could have called me. He didn't answer me; he just gave me a look that told me I'd better not say anything else. So I didn't. He doesn't like me to question anything he does."

"So, you're telling me that you lied to the police and that Jon was not with you from about 6:00 to 8:30?"

"Yes. That's the truth. He asked me to lie because he was sure he would be the first suspect since their long relationship last year had a really bad ending."

"Oh, Midge, why did you lie about something so important?"

"Mrs. Dolan, you remember what I was like in high school. I was always in trouble, always hung out with the wrong



crowd. They all liked me because I would do anything they wanted. Some of the boys called me "No-Fridge Midge." That was their way of saying I was easy. I was. I had no self-confidence, so I would do anything to be included, no matter what the "gang" asked me to do."

"No, I don't remember most of that, but I believe you."

"Then in August I met Jon. He was so good-looking and so smart. I couldn't believe it when he asked me out. Before long we were a couple. I had never had a steady boyfriend before, let alone one so much better than I was, so I did everything I could to keep him happy and...with me. I guess that's why I was so angry at his flirting last night. The girl was such a threat to me."

"I can understand your feelings."

"On the way home last night, Jon wouldn't even speak to me. When we pulled up at my apartment building, he didn't even open the door. He just sat behind the wheel staring out the front window, waiting for me to get out. I begged him to come in with me so we could talk about what happened. He told me it didn't matter because he wasn't going to see me again anyway. He had

already made a date with my old friend when they were dancing. I dissolved. My happy world had only lasted less than three months, and I was certain I would never be happy again. I was so desperate that I threatened to tell the police the truth. He gave me a long, cold stare and said, 'I wouldn't do that if I were you. Things happen to people who betray me.' I was terrified and jumped out of the car and raced to my apartment. An hour later he was pounding on my door. He begged to let him come in. When he did, he apologized again and again, kissing me and comforting me. He told me he would break that silly date. We were going to be together for a long, long time. Yet, when I awoke this morning, he had gone back to his apartment to get ready to go to the memorial service without me. All at once, I could see clearly. He was using me just like all those boys in high school had. He would dump me as soon as he no longer needed me as an alibi. I didn't want that to be the pattern of my life; I've decided I'm better than that. As a result, by the time he got back from the memorial service, I had gone to my mother's house and left a note on the door telling him that my mother wasn't feeling well and needed me at

her home all day. Then I called you. Please help me, Mrs. Dolan. What should I do?"

"You're a brave girl, and you are right; you are better than the likes of Jon Atkins. Believe me. Go back to your mother's house, and I'll call you later. I plan on speaking with Chief Clews later today, so I will ask him what he thinks is the best thing for you to do. Maybe, if you have some vacation time coming, you might think about going away for a few days. I'll call you tonight to pass along Chief Clews' advice. You should give me your cell phone number so I can reach you."

## **Chapter 35**

Not long after Midge left, Kado settled herself on the couch and began grading the in-class *Julius Caesar* essays on a quote from Act I and the character description homework she had given her juniors for *The*

*House on Mango Street.*

She smiled as she read Jody's explanation of Cassius' line, "He hath the falling sickness." "He hath it not; but you, and I, And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness." Jody thought that surely a great plague like the one in Thebes or the one during the middle ages was making all Romans sick, except Caesar, because he got up and was fine and proved to the crowd that he was a strong leader.. "Well, there's one thing I didn't explain very clearly, or Miss Jody didn't read," thought Kado.

She was impressed with Len's character description of Esperanza: "She's a skinny girl who has hope, like her name. She is determined to have a house of her own. Someday. I will too."

"You're right," Kado wrote in the margin.

Then she made her daily plans for the week. The juniors will finish *Mango* tomorrow, take a test on Tuesday, write an essay in-class on Wednesday, have a grammar review on Thursday, and start the next vocabulary lesson on Friday.

The sophomores would be getting to Act III with the assassination and the great

speeches by Brutus and Marc Antony on Wednesday. She took some photos out of her file, pictures from various productions of *Caesar*. The kids always asked why the guys were wearing sheets, and there was always some kid fascinated by the number of guys stabbing Caesar. He would ask how many times he was stabbed. She would answer that the number given was usually 23.

Jolted out of her musing, she looked at her notes carefully. That little nagging thought came rushing to the front of her brain. Twenty-three times!

Kado reached for her phone and punched in George Clews' cell phone number, hoping he was back from Millburg.

"Hello."

"Hi, George, this is Kado. I'm sorry to bother you on a Sunday night, especially since you've been to two memorial services today plus what you've been through this week, but I've got to ask you something."

"Sure. What is it?"

"How many times was Julie stabbed?"

"The medical examiner found twenty-three wounds."

"Dear Lord," Kado cried. "The murderer was reenacting the assassination of

Julius Caesar."

"What? I really don't understand what you mean."

"Caesar was stabbed twenty-three times. You said she was nude and that her clothes were in a locker."

"Yeah."

"I think he made her wear a sheet so it would look like a Roman toga. That would explain the white cotton threads in some of the wounds. She was stabbed through a sheet."

"That's really a bizarre idea."

"Yes, I know, but it really does make sense. Julie taught that play for several years, and everyone knew that she loved it. Whoever killed her knew that and also knew the play well enough to know how many times he was stabbed."

"Okay. I'll ask the investigating team to do some comparison tests on sheets. Now, how does that narrow our suspect list down?"

"Well, let's see, Josh would definitely have to still be on it. Julie probably talked to Jon about the play; they were dating this time last year. I suppose she might have talked to her sister, too, but they didn't have a very close association the last couple of years. Of

course, all of her students over the last three years would fit the category. No, make that six years; she taught *Julius Caesar* in her 'A' tracks before she took over the Honors classes. I guess, of course, the entire faculty and staff could have known. I sure haven't helped much!"

"No, you've given us a good lead. We just have to work harder finding a motive. But I think we can definitely rule out any maniac who happened to be in town that day."

"Yes, I believe so. That's a big relief. How much can we tell the public to calm their fears?"

"Don't say anything to anybody yet. I'll have to figure out how to handle this."

"I won't. Good luck, George. I'll let you know if I get any other weird ideas."

"No, that is really a good idea. We were sure baffled about the cotton threads and the nudity...she wasn't sexually assaulted. Your theory definitely fits."

"I have a couple of other things I wanted to mention if it's not too late."

"No, as a matter of fact, there is something I want to share with you, too. You first."

"Okay, after the service, Mrs. McClure invited some people to her house for coffee."

"Yes, I know. She asked Lois and me, but I wanted to get on over to Millburg, well before the service started there."

"Well, why I was there, I had a long talk with Connie Hall, Josh's girl friend from Haskins. She told me that Josh wasn't on campus Tuesday afternoon."

"What? Then he doesn't have an alibi."

"That's right. She didn't say it to contradict him; she was just commenting on the fact that Josh asked her to bring her notes from a Tuesday afternoon seminar they both were taking when she came down for Homecoming. He had told her that his mother wanted him home early for some family dinners and such."

"Well, I'll be. We'll have to check on him further."

"Wait, there's more."

"Do I want to hear it?"

"It won't shorten your suspect list."

"I'm ready."

"Midge Collins was here to see me late this afternoon. She admitted to me that she had lied. Jon was not with her the entire



evening on Tuesday. He was missing from 6:00 to 8:30."

"Good God. Why did she do it?"

"She thought she would lose him if she didn't. He was really important to her."

"Does he know she came to see you?"

"No, not yet. She asked me to find out what you want her to do. She's staying with her mother right now."

"I think she should do nothing. That would be the safest thing to do. If he is the murderer, he might go after her if he finds out she isn't going to alibi for him. Tell her to tell nobody anything. Not even my men or her mother. We should keep this just among the three of us. If she or we say something, she could be in great danger. Also, ask her to go to work tomorrow and pretend everything is just the same. If Jon calls, she should tell him that her mother still isn't well and that she needs to take care of her Monday night as well. Then I'll get back to her if things change. Do you have her cell phone number?"

"Yes, she gave it to me today. Do you want me to call her or do you want to?"

"I think you should for now because she obviously trusts you, but tell her I will

call her directly if I have a change of orders. Okay?"

"Will do. I'll call her the minute I get off the phone. Now, what's your news?"

"You're not going to believe this; we have one more suspect."

"Who in the world...?"

"A guy showed up at the memorial service in Millburg. He was a wreck. He almost broke down in tears when Lisa was talking about how Julie loved nature. Lisa and Patsy read the same Biblical passages they had read here. Well, this guy was really distressed by them, especially Lisa's reading. I asked Lisa after the service who he was. She told me that Julie had dated him all through high school. They had actually been engaged-to-be-engaged until her junior year in college. She wasn't sure why they broke up. They were a really neat couple. He's a forest ranger now; apparently he pictured Julie as she had been on their many hikes together. Now, here's the scary part."

"Goodness gracious, George. What are you talking about?"

"His name is Jerry O'Malley...another 'JO!'"

## Chapter 36

Monday dawned bright and still fairly warm. Kado packed up her school work and headed for the door. Then the phone rang.

"Mom, hi, it's me."

"It is I."

"No, it's me, not you. Face it, Mom. I'm the shoemaker's kid. I just wanted to see how things were going. Are you going to be teaching all week?"

"Yes, and probably for a couple more. John Sullivan hasn't had time to do any interviewing yet. The first name on his list had already gotten a job, so he's going to make a few more calls today."

"Mom, do you think anyone would want to teach at Berry enough to murder to get it?"

"Stranger things have happened, Mary, but I don't think there is a suspect there. The murder was too violent not to be personal. I do have a weird theory though."

"I knew you would. Can you share?"

"I think it's probably best to wait until George checks out a few things."

"Sure. Good luck today. Give me a call later. Maybe you can join us for dinner tonight."

"I'd love that."

"Good. I've got to talk to you about my parenting."

"What? You're a great mother."

"I suppose, but I hope my overprotection doesn't turn into obsession."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"The other day, when I went to pick up Little Me at Kinder Kare, I saw another kid go over to where she was playing and take her toy. I was so upset I almost went in to spank that mean little kid."

"Ah, but you didn't. Believe me; parents are often a bit goofy when it comes to their kids. I have seen, more than once, a parent yelling at a coach because the coach didn't play his kid enough."

"Really?"

"Yes. And then there was the time I was proctoring the SAT's. I was standing at the door of the classroom checking ID's when I saw a father following his daughter

down the hall to the room with a camcorder."

"No, you didn't."

"Yep, and he was upset with me that I wouldn't let him in the room. He wanted to record her sitting at her desk with the test in front of her, smiling."

"You are making that one up, aren't you?"

"I swear it's the truth. Who could make **that** up? Sometimes parents love their kids so much that the line between protecting them and running interference for them gets pretty blurred. They do have to learn some lessons in life on their own. See you tonight."

Kado found a spot to park in the faculty section of the parking lot, which held far fewer fancy cars than the student lot, and walked briskly into the school. After a stop to sign-in and check Julie's mailbox, she made her way to homeroom. She actually had the computer attendance taking down pat now. In a few minutes, a student's voice came over the intercom, "Please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance." After some scraping of chairs, the class stood with their hands over their hearts as the words came over the PA. Kado noticed that she was one of the

few who actually said the Pledge out loud. "Oh, well," she thought. "Things do have a way of changing and changing back again. I hope more kids will join us as the days pass. They may just want others to take the lead."

After everyone was seated again, the daily announcements came cheerily into each room to remind students of meetings or to report sports' scores. Then Kado noticed that a few kids near the windows were beginning to get up and stare out the windows. They in turn motioned to other kids, who joined them. They began to talk quickly and loudly. Wondering what the attraction was, Kado too looked out the window. Several police cars were in front of the school.

"Oh, don't worry, kids. It's probably just something to do with the investigation in the field house."

"Maybe," said a girl who had been among the first to stand, "but I've seen them put four handcuffed boys into the cars."

"Yeah," said another witness, "and I saw Joe Greco too, but he wasn't handcuffed. He was walking with the police."

Suddenly a breathless girl burst into the room, sobbing and shouting, "They arrested Gary!"

"What happened?" said the chorus of listeners.

Kado finally recognized the girl as one she had often seen hanging on Gary's arm in the hall. She put her arm around her and held one of her hands.

"Please, calm down. Do you want someone to go with you to the Nurse?"

"No, I want to tell everyone what those dirty pigs did. At the start of homeroom, the police took Gary and three other boys to their lockers. They had a warrant or something and made them open the locks. Inside they found drugs, not many, really. That's when they arrested them. And do you know who was telling the police which boys to pick up? It was Joe Greco. We all thought he was such a neat guy. He's only been in this school since we started in September; he said he had moved here from Wisconsin, for God's sake. But he really is a cop! Yeah, that's right. He's been undercover here, just pumping kids for information. I hate him; I hate him. We'll pay him back. He'll be sorry."

"Now, dear, how do you know all this? I certainly had no idea that the school was under investigation."

"When I heard the noise at the lockers,

I looked out in the hall. When I saw they had Gary, I ran out of my homeroom and threw my arms around him. Before they were able to separate us, he told me as much as he could. I know it's all true. My Gary. I don't know what to do next."

"Perhaps you should go to the office and call your parents to come get you. I think you're much too upset to stay in school today. I'll write you a pass."

Waiting for a pass was not in Gary's girl's plans. She left the room on the run, screaming to some other kids down the hall.

## **Chapter 37**

A few of the first period juniors came straggling in late, wrinkled passes from the office in their hands and yawns on their faces. The other students flocked around them and told them what they had missed. Kado gave them a few minutes to get all the news out and then tried to get them somewhat settled from the excitement of the drug arrests. However, every once and a



while, a kid would lean over to another kid asking for more details. Hoping to gain their attention, Kado returned the graded character descriptions to them, reading a few to them that she thought were particularly well done. She then asked them for questions they might have about the test tomorrow. After that, she asked them to take a few minutes to decide which were their favorite chapters.

Terry raised his hand to announce that he didn't like any of them and waited for the anticipated laugh. Kado asked him why, and he again planned an answer he thought would gain a favorable response from his audience.

"Look, man..."

"That's Ma'm."

"Yea, sure, whatever. As I was saying, "This broad hates men. There ain't a good one in the whole book. They're all useless bums."

"Do you think you can prove that with quotes from the book?"

"Easy."

"Great, then you have already selected a topic for your essay. The rest of you are to select your favorite chapter or chapters...or least favorite...and explain your choices to me in a two-page essay which will include

quotes from the book."

"That's not fair. We have to study for a test tonight."

"Yes, of course, I want you to study. I just want you to be thinking about the essay assignment. You will be writing it in class on Wednesday, and you will be able to use your books for the quotes. Okay? See you tomorrow.

## **Chapter 38**

Very early Monday morning, two Berry policemen not assigned to the drug bust, Detectives Ted Avery and Bill Sampson, the officers who had searched Julie's apartment, met at the Berry Brunch Diner.

"Did you order me a gallon of coffee yet?" asked Ted.

"Just got here myself. I had some breakfast at home, but I could always go for more coffee."

Ted ordered breakfast, and they were both served coffee immediately.

"Thanks, Rosie."

Rosie smiled at the two policemen; she had waited on them before

"Yes, gentlemen, any time."

Rosie hoped that they had not noticed her hand trembling as she put down their coffee cups. She walked quickly back to the kitchen and leaned against the door as it closed behind her. Small beads of perspiration formed on her upper lip.

"Anything wrong?" asked Max, the owner of the Berry Brunch Diner.

"No, no, I'm perfectly fine. I thought at five months I wouldn't be having morning sickness, but every once in a while, I still do get nauseous."

"Drink a little ginger ale and eat a saltine cracker and get back to work! This place is going to be crowded soon, and you have to take care of everybody. Polly's out sick today."

Rosie laughed, "What a guy! Your concern is overwhelming. Polly can be out

sick for a whole day, but I'm not allowed five minutes to try to feel better."

Max only grumbled at her and tossed her a cracker packet.

Rosie, although she was five months pregnant, did not have morning sickness; she had fear. Rosie, whose real name was Rosita, was always afraid of any authority figure. Rosie was an illegal. She lived in constant fear, but she had to stay here at least as long as she could; she wanted the baby to be an American citizen. Oh, Rosie had papers all right. Max would never have hired her if she didn't. The forged documents had been expensive. She worked at many jobs, mostly cleaning houses, in order to get the money to pay for them. Then, her fake papers clutched in her hand, she went straight to the diner. She loved to cook and believed that, like an understudy, an emergency would arise which would require her to go onstage and take over the cooking. A grateful boss would then take her on as a partner. That was just a silly dream; she knew that, but it was fun to think about. Her main dream, of course, was to avoid being caught before she gave birth to her precious baby in four months time.

"If they catch me after that, I will go

back quietly, but my baby can stay here and have a real future."

She had never felt good about her choice to come to this country the way she had. Furthermore, it had been very dangerous. She could never believe her luck at not being caught. Yes, she lived in constant fear but preferred that to constant poverty.

The detectives had been totally unaware of Rosie's trembling; they were too busy concentrating on their own agenda.

"Okay, let's run over our schedule for today."

"Right. First, we're supposed to go up to Haskins College to see if we can find anybody who can verify Josh McClure's statement. He said he left for Berry at about 5 o'clock Tuesday, right after his last class. He drove without stopping for two hours and then went directly to his mother's house. She said that he did arrive there at 7:30. If he didn't leave until 5:30, then he probably wouldn't have been in Berry at the time of the murder."

Bill took out his notebook. "He told us his professor's name was Herbert Stein, so we'll find him first. Then we'll double check with some of the students in the class."

Ted glanced at his notes too. "I guess if everything seems to confirm his story, we're supposed to head back here and go to the tax office to see Midge Collins in order to check Jon Atkins' story."

"Sounds right to me. As soon as I finish this Danish, we'll be on our way."

The two detectives drove in Ted's car and had no difficulty in finding Haskins College or its Administration Building. After asking a few people for information, they finally found the lady who had all of the professors' schedules and other information. They showed Ms. Mayer their badges and asked her to tell them where they might find Professor Herbert Stein at this time. She cheerfully obliged their request, giving them both his office number and his cell phone number.

"Try his office first. He doesn't have a class now, so he's probably there."

The professor did indeed answer his office phone after one ring. When he heard what they wanted, he gave them directions to the office. Tipping their hats politely to Ms. Mayer, they left to stroll around the old, traditional school they had heard about for years.

"The atmosphere here sure beats the city college I went to. Not only did we not have trees and ivy-covered walls, we didn't see a tree on the entire block."

"Yeah, well I can play 'I had it worse than you did' too. Our walls didn't have ivy either, they had graffiti."

They found the office with no problems. They then told Professor Stein in detail why they were there.

"My, my, Josh is certainly not a murderer; he's a wonderful student and such a polite young man. However, I'm afraid I cannot help you. That particular class is a huge seminar class in a lecture hall with about 200 students. I don't take attendance, of course, so I have no way of knowing for certain that he was there that day. I do have an idea though. He usually sits near either two of his friends or his girlfriend when he's in class. Let me give you their names."

Thanking Professor Stein, the detectives set out again. Chief Clews had told them the girlfriend was still in Berry yesterday, so they headed out looking for the two other names.

The went back to the Administration Building and asked the friendly Ms. Mayer

where they could get student schedules. She told them that they were in a different department but offered to take them there. She soon had a young girl searching the computer for student schedules. The detectives thanked her as she printed them out, and Ted kissed Ms. Mayer on the cheek.

"Thank you so much for your help. You're a doll."

Holding campus maps in their hands, they headed out to various buildings and asked many kids for help. They finally found Sal Caruso, who told them that he had not attended class that day and hadn't seen Josh at all on that Tuesday. Luckily, saving them another long search, he knew exactly where Jeff Goldman was and took them there. He was at the gym.

Working their way through the busy, perspiring bodies, they got to a weight bench. They introduced themselves to the prone body of Jeff. Jeff sat up and started to shake their hands until he realized his sweaty condition. He nodded and said, "Hi" to both of them. They asked him if he had seen Josh last Tuesday.

"Sure. We had breakfast together. He was all excited that he was leaving to go



home for his high school's Homecoming game and such."

"What time did you leave him, Jeff?"

"Oh, I guess we finished about 10:00. He said, 'See you in Stein's class,' and I said, 'Save me a seat if I'm late.'"

"Did he?"

"Did he what?"

"Save you a seat."

"Oh, man, I don't know. It was really crowded when I got there. I looked around for him, but then I thought I'd better sit down where I was and take notes. I'd missed 10 or 15 minutes of Stein's lecture as it was."

"Okay, Jeff. Thank you very much. Oh, just to make sure I got the facts right, you did not see him after 10:00 AM that Tuesday morning."

"That's right. Hope I helped you guys."

As Ted and Bill left the gym, Bill said, "Yeah, but he sure didn't help his friend."

They called the number that Josh had given them for Connie Hill, the girl who had come down for homecoming. There was no answer, so she must still be in Berry.

"In any event, she probably couldn't help us much; she wasn't with Josh when he

came home. She didn't come to Berry until Friday," observed Bill.

When they got back home, they stopped at the Berry Brunch Diner again for some lunch. A very overworked Rosie finally got to their table and took their orders.

"Do you every get the feeling that Rosie doesn't like us. She always seems to be in a hurry and doesn't stop to chat like other waitresses."

"I can't understand it. We are certainly the most handsome men here."

As soon as they finished eating, they went straight to the tax office, one of the many offices in the Municipal Building that also housed the police department. They asked for Midge Collins.

"I think Midge is on her break; try the cafeteria."

At the cafeteria, they again asked for Midge. The cashier pointed her out, so they walked over to her table,

"Not a bad looking woman," said Ted.

"Let's keep our objectivity, friend."

"Hi, Midge, may we have a few minutes?" they asked as they showed her their badges.

The other two girls at the table

gathered their stuff together quickly and asked the officers to please sit down. It was no problem; they were all finished anyway.

"Midge, we're here to check on Jon Atkins' alibi for last Tuesday."

"For Pete's sake, I've only told you guys a hundred times or so. Jon met me as I left work at 4:00, and we were together the rest of the day..."she lowered her eyelids shyly..."and night." She sounded cocky, but her eyes were wary.

"Can you tell us where you went? Maybe some people saw you and can back your story up."

"For Pete's sake, are you allowed to get so personal?"

"I'm sorry, Midge, but this is a murder investigation."

"Oh, all right, we went on a walk, stopped at Ye Olde English Pub, and then to my apartment. We didn't leave all night."

"Did you cook dinner?"

"No, we ordered in."

"Thank you, Ms. Collins, you've been very patient with us."

The two men started to leave, but Bill suddenly turned around to ask her one more question. "Where did you order your dinner

from?"

"The Imperial Garden. Their food is great."

"Thanks for the tip," replied Bill. Ted smiled at his friend's response.

"As long as we're here, I guess we can take the elevator to our office and get busy writing our report. Maybe the Chief is still here. We can report directly to him...not that I'm delaying doing the paperwork or anything."

"Of course not. Sounds like a plan. It's better to write the report while everything is fresh in my mind. There are days I can't read my own writing, so I'd rather transcribe my notes now before I forget."

As Bill pushed the up button, he turned to Ted and asked, "Who do you think did it? Have any guesses?"

"Funny you should ask; I was going to ask you. I have the strange feeling that we're not on the right track."

The elevator doors opened, and out stepped Chief Clews. They all sat on some chairs in the huge entrance hall where no one else was sitting. The men filled the Chief in on their day and also expressed their doubts.

"Don't worry, guys. It will all come

together. It always does. Just a matter of time...and your hard work, naturally."

## Chapter 39

Second period, the sophomores arrived full of energy, talking and teasing until the bell rang. Then they promptly took their seats and took out their literature notebooks and a copy of *Julius Caesar*.

"Okay, let's take a look at Act II, which I'm sure you remember was your homework for today. We're going to do something a bit different with this one. I've assigned groups for each scene and given each member of the group a part. Now, instead of acting out each scene, I want you to pantomime it." Several hands shot up. "Please wait until I've finished explaining what you are going to do before you start your questions. You will act out your scene with the rest of the group; you should move and gesture as if the scene were actually being presented, but you won't be saying anything. With one exception. Once you have learned who you are, you will decide which lines your character says in

your scene that you like and then memorize them. Your choice should be of some significance and of several lines long. For instance, 'What, Lucius, ho!' would not be a good choice for the person playing Brutus in Scene 1. You will have to let your team know which line you plan to say so that they know where they are to be at the time you say it. At the end of each group presentation tomorrow, the members will sum up the importance of their scene so that the rest of the class can take notes. They should also mention any other important quotes from the scene that had not been a part of their presentation. Does everyone understand?"

There were no raised hands, so Kado assigned them their scenes and parts. The groups then went to various corners of the room, cleared away a few desks, and began to walk around with their books in front of them. A few minutes later, she heard some arguing coming from Group 1.

"What's the matter?"

"It's Alex. He wants to say Brutus' entire soliloquy starting with 'It must be by his death.' We'll just be sitting in the hall waiting to come in."

"I see. You have a point; however, that

is an important soliloquy. Alex, why don't you stand musing just a bit and then speak the last five lines out loud? You will have a chance to explain the significance of the soliloquy during your wrap up at the end of your presentation. Okay, everyone?"

They nodded and went back to planning the movement and other lines.

Kado went on to another group but kept thinking about the first line of that soliloquy, "It must be by his death." She cringed when she heard another group deciding to bring in sheets tomorrow "so we can look like we're wearing Roman togas."

As the class was putting desks back and packing up just before the bell rang, Kado had a chance to remark to Alex that he was really showing dedication by offering to memorize the entire soliloquy.

He replied, "Oh, I already have the whole thing memorized. In fact, my mother had me memorize every important quote in Act II this weekend. She seemed to think you might give us a pop quiz."

"Sorry to disappoint you."

He smiled, the first time she had seen him smile, and said, "Oh, believe me. This is much better. I probably would have

forgotten the soliloquy in the middle and embarrassed myself anyway. That would not have made my parents happy. They don't like it if other people think..."

The bell rang, and Alex excused himself and ran out of the door and kept in a very quick walk towards his next class.

"...that you're not brilliant," thought Kado.

At lunch, the teachers were still buzzing about the arrests. None of them had known anything about the undercover policeman. Those who had him in class were particularly astonished. While he didn't seem to be as mean as his friends, he was doing poorly in most of his classes. No wonder! He was busy learning about the drug suppliers, not D-Day or formulas. He was certainly no angel. He rarely did homework and was heading towards failing marks in history and math. They all made guesses as to who would have known...surely John Sullivan and Abe Cohen must have approved the plan. They wondered also if this had anything to do with Julie's murder. Would she have been in on the plan? Why? It just didn't make any sense.

That evening, while waiting to eat



dinner, Mary, Rob, and Kado all watched the local news. The television vans had been all around the school most of the day. A reporter with a young girl was telling her that supposedly drug buys of as much as \$400 had been going on at the school. He asked her eagerly, "Where would kids get that kind of money?" With a clueless face, she shrugged her shoulders and replied, "They ask their parents for it."

Kado shook her head slowly side to side in disbelief. "Many years will pass before Berry regains its fine reputation."

## **Chapter 40**

By Tuesday, Kado was beginning to feel like a real teacher again. As soon as the first period kids had taken off their backpacks and settled into their desks, Kado stood up in the front of her desk with a packet of tests in her arms.

"Does anyone have any last minute questions?"

"Yes," said a girl in the last row, "Was the book set in New York City or Chicago?"

"The setting is the Latino section of Chicago. Any other questions?"

A boy towards the front raised his hand.

"Yes?"

"My question is," he grinned, "do I have to take this test.?"

"I know you asked that to amuse your classmates, but you'll be surprised to hear me say, 'No, you don't have to take this test, or any tests in your other subjects.' You have the choice, as do you all, but if you talk to some adults, I'll bet you'll find that those who didn't get a high school diplomas regret it. The more educated you are, the more qualified you are for the better jobs. You're not kids anymore. Soon you'll be responsible for yourself and maybe a family. Think about

it. Make the right choice."

"You sound just like my father."

"Your father must be a smart man."

"Nah, he's just tired of doing grunt jobs, so he's going for his GED."

"Good for him! Now I'm sure your personal experience of watching him study to pass the GED will motivate you to do well in school and get that diploma next year. A year isn't really a long time, is it?"

"No, ma'm, I'll ace this test; I was only foolin' around."

"That's the spirit. Let me see what you know."

Kado gave the right number of tests to the student in the first desk of each row and asked them to pass them back to the unhappy waiting faces.

"Good luck."

Their faces were frowning and squinting and yawning for the rest of the period. Those who did finish earlier turned their tests in and started looking through the book to decide what to write tomorrow. As she walked around the room, she realized that she even knew a few names by now.

## Chapter 41

Earlier Tuesday morning, George Clews sent for Bill and Ted, the detectives who had been working on the Dalton murder.

"I got your written reports. Thank you. I think you had covered all the important information when I saw you yesterday. Good job."

"Thanks, Chief."

"I need for you to investigate a little deeper into Jon Atkins' and Josh McClure's alibis."

"Sure, Chief. Anything in particular?"

"Any and all information will be welcome, but I do have a couple of specific things I want you to check. First of all, go to The Imperial Garden and try to find out the exact time that Jon picked up Chinese food on Tuesday evening."

"Picked it up? I thought their story was that they sent out for it."

"It was, or is, I should say, but I want

to make sure about it."

"Right."

"Also, see if we have any concrete evidence concerning Josh's arrival home from Haskins. He may have left campus earlier than he said. Maybe there's a toll booth or gas receipt or something. Maybe you can even catch his mother off guard; she may not know what time he told you he got home. Could be that some neighbors saw his car earlier. I don't know. Just see what you can find out. Okay? Then I want you to go to Millburg. See what you can find out about Jerry O'Malley. He and Julie were a couple for a long time; there was even talk of marriage. You may have to go to the woods to find him. He's a forest ranger."

"You bet, Chief. We've left already."

Bill and Ted went to Josh's house first. They thought that way they might hit The Imperial Garden around lunch time. They knocked on the front door, but there was no answer. They walked next door, also no answer, but on the other side, and elderly woman cautiously opened the door.

"Yes?"

Bill and Ted both showed her their badges, and she opened the door a little

more.

"Yes, Detectives, what can I do for you?"

"We were wondering if you happened to be at home last Tuesday afternoon/"

"That's a silly question," she replied. "I'm always home except when my daughter drives over from Madison to take me to the grocery store. She comes every Friday afternoon like clockwork. I don't know how long she'll be able to keep that up though. She's getting on, you know."

The detectives suppressed their smiles and encouraged her to keep talking by nodding their heads in agreement. "Did you happen to notice what time Josh McClure came home from college? Do you know what his car looks like?"

"I surely do. It's a small Honda Civic painted an ugly yellow. It's a real eyesore! Let me think. I hadn't watched *Oprah* yet when I saw him come into the driveway at their house, so it must have been before 4:00. That's when her show comes on. I never miss it you know. Even on Fridays, my daughter has to get me home from the grocery store in time to watch it. She usually stays and watches it with me. Yes, I'm

certain. He drove in about 3:45, no later than that, because I was fixing my tea in the kitchen. I always watch the show with a nice cup of tea. Say, where are my manners? Would you gentlemen like a cup of tea? I've got a couple of special blends."

"You're so kind to offer, but we really have to get on with our work. I'm afraid I didn't get your name Mrs.---?"

"It's Mrs. Trump, and no, I'm not related to The Donald, but I sure wish I were. I could use a bit of money to fix up some things around the house."

"Thank you so much for your time Mrs. Trump. We'll be in touch if we need anything else. Have a good day."

Ted said to Bill as they walked back to their car, "I think that is what people would say was a 'spunky' old lady."

"She is cute, isn't she, and I'll bet my paycheck that her time is absolutely correct."

A short time later, the detectives walked into the darkened dining room of The Imperial Garden.

"Are you serving lunch yet?"

"Just about. Please follow me. I'll put you at a table near the window so you can watch the passing parade on Main Street."

"I thought we were on Berry Boulevard."

"We are, but Main Street sounds so much more busy and home town, doesn't it?"

The middle-aged woman, who didn't look at all Chinese, took them to a table and handed them menus.

"You let me know when you're ready to order."

It didn't take them long. As she took their order, they asked her which days and nights she worked there.

"Work every day, every hour. My husband is the cook and owner; this is a real Mom and Pop business."

After they had finished eating, they went to the cash register to pay the bill.

"Say, a friend of ours recommended this place. Who was it again, Bill?"

"I think it was either Jon Atkins or his girlfriend Midge."

"They're very nice people. They eat our food all the time."

"Do you happen to remember if they were in here Tuesday last week?"

"No, they weren't here that night."

"Did they order food sent over?"

"No."



"Okay, I must have the wrong night."

"Well, what I meant to say was they didn't do exactly either. Jon did call at about 7:45 to order food, and then he stopped by for it between 8:15 and 8:20 and then took it home."

"Was that unusual?"

"As a matter of fact it was. Usually they either come here to eat or order food delivered. I don't remember his picking up an order ever before."

"Thank you. The meal was fantastic. We'll be back again."

"Please come. Bring your families next time, okay?"

"Okay."

Back in the car, Ted called Chief Clews.

"Well, your hunch was right. Josh McClure was home from Haskins at 3:45, and Jon Atkins did not order food to be delivered. He picked it up at 8:15 that night. Something he has never done before. We're heading over to Millburg now."

## Chapter 42

Second period did not go smoothly. Since Alex's group was Act II, Scene 1, they began their presentation first. He said the lines from the soliloquy, and then the boy playing Lucius entered, did some pantomiming, and said, "No, sir, Their hats are plucked about their ears/ And half their faces buried in their cloaks,/ That by no means I may discover them/By any mark or favor." The boy stayed where he was until Alex whispered rather too loudly that he was supposed to go back into the hall. The boy did so.

The conspirators began to enter, and once again Alex was telling them that they were in the wrong places or that they were not saying the lines in the right order. When they finished, the rest of the group sat down and left Alex to dictate the summary of the scene's significance to the class.

During the presentation by the Scene 2

group, members of Alex's group made sarcastic comments to Alex, such as "Are **they** doing it right?"

Kado held her finger to her lips and looked at one boy; she shook her head "No" to another. She was trying to stop the misbehavior, but she didn't want to stop Scene 2's presentation; their concentration shouldn't be broken.

The other two presentations went smoothly. The last group hadn't finished their summary when the bell rang. Kado told them they would finish first thing tomorrow.

Alex lingered at his desk, taking a long time to put his stuff in his book bag. Before, he had always been on the run to his next class. Kado guessed that he wanted to wait until the rest of his classmates were well on their way to their own third-period classes.

"Alex, do you have a free period today? I'd like to talk to you."

"No, I don't even have a lunch period. My music teacher doesn't mind if I eat my lunch quickly at the beginning of the period."

"I see. That's a long day for you. Could you possibly stay after school just a few minutes?"

"Sure, I'll be here at 2:35."

"Thank you. I promise not to keep you long."

During study hall, Kado noticed that a group of about five girls were talking in the back of the room, talking loudly. She walked down the aisle towards the group. They were so busy chatting and interrupting each other that they didn't even notice her arrival at their desks.

"What seems to be the problem, girls?"

"Nothin', we're just deciding who murdered Ms. Dalton."

"I see, and who have you decided is the villain?"

"We all think it was Joe Greco."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

The girls all jumped in with the facts to support their theory.

"We think that Ms. Dalton found out who he was, and he had to silence her."

"I think that there is really no evidence for your theory."

"Look at it this way. He must be a brand new cop, 'cause he's so young looking."

"Yeah, this was probably his first assignment out of the academy."

"Then one day in her class he said

something that sounded familiar to Ms. Dalton. She finally recognized him from some singles bar or something and knew he wasn't really a teenager."

"Right. Since it was his first assignment, he was really anxious to make good, and he was afraid Ms. Dalton would expose him."

"That's why he had to get rid of her. She was standing between him and his commendation."

"I see, girls. You are seniors, I think."

They all shook their heads "Yes."

"Last year did you read Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*?"

Again the girls shook their heads "Yes."

"One of the lessons you should learn from your reading of great literature is universality. What is true of mankind is always true regardless of time or place. Those girls in *The Crucible* caused many innocent people's deaths because of their wild imaginations and accusations. Do you understand the connection I am trying to make?"

"To be honest, no, I don't."

"Compare your gossip here today with

the rumors those girls spread about witches. You already have Mr. Greco under a huge stone like Giles Corey's without one shred of evidence. Speculation is fine; many problems wouldn't be solved without it; however, you have to be careful about spreading your wild speculations when they could cause someone serious damage. Think about it. Mr. Greco gave up two months of his life to pretend to be a student here so that your school would be safer for you. Do you really think that person could be a killer?"

The girls looked a bit crestfallen, but not angry. They knew Mrs. Dolan was right.

"Okay, so how about using the rest of your study hall to study? Now there's a different idea!"

The girls opened their book bags and found some homework to do, but it was really boring after their great crime solving episode.

## **Chapter 42**

The eighth period bell rang, ending the school day. Kado had her third sophomore honors class that period; she stood at the door praising them for their performances. The presentations were well planned and went smoothly. They had finished all four scenes and given the rest of the class notes on each one.

"Remember, you don't have to read Act III tonight. We'll do that together in class tomorrow."

Alex stood at the door at 2:35. He didn't come in. He just stood there, looking as if he were about to cry.

"Thanks for coming, Alex. Please pull up a chair and sit next to me. Alex, I couldn't help but notice both your behavior and that of your classmates today. We don't want anything like that to happen again, do we? How can we make things better?"

"I don't know," he whimpered.

"Did something happen in the hall before you came in?"

"No."

"Then why were you so unhappy with their performance? You criticized them several times during the presentation. I think that is why they were angry with you. What

do you think?"

"I don't know."

"Please, Alex, I want to help you. How can we make the situation in class better?"

"They all hate me. They always have. I just wanted them to be perfect so that we would get a good grade."

"What do you mean by 'they always have'? Has this kind of thing happened before...in other classes?"

"I guess so. They make fun of me because I always want to be perfect. That's why I don't like group work. Other kids drag down my grade."

"All right. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do well in school; however, you might also remember that learning how to cooperate is an important skill too. Many, many careers require one to work with others towards a goal."

"Yes, I guess so. But if I don't get all 'A's,' my parents will be angry with me. They said I need a perfect school record to get into Princeton."

"Oh, is that where you've decided to go?"

"It was decided for me...before I was



born, I think."

"I see. Well, it is a very good school."

At that point, Alex burst into tears.

"Mommy was infuriated when I didn't have an 'A' in English on my interim. She told me to go to my room and do every exercise in the next vocabulary lesson and then memorize everything in every exercise. I didn't finish until 10:00. She came to my room to quiz me. Then about 11:30, she told me to get out my notes for the Greek literature unit. We were working on the essay until at least 2:00. Even then it wasn't perfect, so she wrote..."

Realizing what he had said, Alex cried even more, but put his hands in front of his face and turned away from Kado.

She handed him a Kleenex and very gently asked, "Does your mother write all your papers?"

"Y...yes."

"How do you feel about that?"

"I just feel dumb because I can't write as well as she can no matter how hard I try. Sometimes I even have to ask her what something means before I turn the paper in."

"What about your other classes?"

"Well, Dad helps me with math and

science, but Mom helps with English and history and...the rest of my courses. They want me to be perfect, and they, well, Mom gets very angry if anyone else says that I'm not as smart as they think I am. In sixth grade a mother of someone in my class told my mom that although I was good in English, I was not as smart as her kid in math. Her kid **always** got a point or two higher on tests. When we left the school, my mom looked around to see if anyone else was in the parking lot; then she deliberately rammed into a fender on the other mother's car. When she made sure no one had seen her, we drove off fast. She said to me, "Don't you ever believe that you aren't the best kid in any class. You're perfect. Remember when I taught you how to spell words when you were only two? You've always been ahead of any other kid."

"Besides denting that fender, has your mother ever done anything else to people who don't think you're perfect?"

"I don't know. She gets very angry sometimes. Sometimes Dad has to take her into their bathroom and give her some medicine. She might even hit me if she learns what I said to you. Please don't tell her."

"I won't tell her, but I think someone who can help you should know what we've talked about. We've got a lot of things to work out, but for now, go home and have a snack and try to feel better. Tomorrow just say 'Hi' to everyone and pretend that nothing happened today. If they still insist on accusing you, just say you're sorry and walk away. Okay?"

## **Chapter 43**

Driving off the Interstate at an Exit sign marked Millburg, Ted asked Bill to check the map.

"Are we supposed to go right or left at the end of the ramp?"

"Beats me. The road takes you to

Millburg either way according to this map."

"Well, I see more tall buildings to the right, so maybe that's downtown Millburg. We can get some directions at a gas station there."

"Gas stations don't do that anymore."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm serious. None of the old-timers work at the stations these days, and the teenage kids only know how to get to their own house or the 7-11."

They pulled in a gas station anyway and used the phone book hanging on a pole holding the phone to look up O'Malley. There was one listing "O'Malley, J." on Greenway Street, so they thought they'd try that. Sure enough, the boy pumping gas had no idea where Greenway Street was. Luckily, his customer did. Within a few minutes, they were in front of the house, a small rancher with impeccable landscaping.

"Well, that yard could belong to a guy who cares about the flora and fauna."

They rang the bell and waited, but no one answered. They decided to stroll around to the back of the house and found an extremely large backyard, also very well kept. Way in the back of the lot, an elderly

man was pruning bushes.

"Sir?" Bill called.

He didn't answer, so they walked a little closer.

"Oh, Sir?" Bill tried a little louder.

They finally decided that the old fellow must be a bit hard of hearing, so they walked around to his side so that he could see them.

"Well, hello, did you guys want me? Sorry I didn't hear you fellas."

"That's all right. We just need to talk to you a minute," Ted shouted.

"We're police detectives from Berry," yelled Bill.

"Sure thing. Just let me take my iPod earphones out. There, that's better."

The detectives felt properly embarrassed at their assumption and lowered their voices to a normal tone.

"Sir, we're looking for a man named Jerry O'Malley. Can you help us out?"

"Depends."

"Depends on what, sir?"

"Depends on if you want Jerry I, Jerry II, or Jerry III. If you're looking for Jerry I, you've found him. If you're looking for Jerry II, he's dead. If you're looking for Jerry III,

he'll be home in about an hour."

"I see. How old is Jerry III?"

"Going on 30 years."

"I think that's the one we want. Do you mind if we wait for him?"

"Suit yourself. If you want a beer or a soda, just walk in that back door, and you'll be in the kitchen. Refrigerator isn't hard to find. Big, y'know. I'll be joining you in just a few more snips."

Before too long, they were all sitting on porch chairs and sipping soda.

"Why do you need to see Jerry III?" Jerry I asked.

"We'd like to talk to him about his relationship with Julie Dalton."

"Don't think they have one anymore. She's dead, you know. Terrible thing. She was murdered last week. Entire town was very sad. She was a pretty young thing and smart too. Went to college on scholarships and became a teacher. Who would have thought teaching was a hazardous job? I think I hear Jerry III coming in the front now. I'll tell him you're waiting to talk to him."

After he had left the back porch, Ted leaned over to Bill and whispered, "I think we ought to introduce this gentleman to Mrs.

No-relation-to-the-Donald Trump. They're a perfect match. They could watch 'Oprah' together, and her daughter wouldn't have to take her shopping."

Jerry III appeared at the back door, his hand outstretched. After he introduced himself and sat down on the chair vacated by his grandfather, he asked, "How can I help you gentlemen?"

"We want to ask you about Julie Dalton. Did you still have a relationship with her?"

"Gentlemen, most people still have a relationship with the first person they ever loved, even if they never see them again. But the answer is 'No' in the way that you mean. Very rarely when something happened on the job – I'm a forest ranger – I would email Julie. She loved the outdoors as much as I did. I think that was our real bond all those years. She enjoyed my stories. My job doesn't pay much, but it's a heck of a lot of fun."

"Exactly what do you do on the job, Jerry?"

"I'm actually an employee of the National Park Service, and my main responsibility is to protect the animals, the

forests, and the people."

"How does your job involve the people?"

"Oh, in quite a few ways. We take folks on nature walks, give them camping tips, and rescue them when a bear has them up a tree."

"Do you have set hours?"

"Not really. We have days and times when we're supposed to be on duty, but we don't have to punch a time clock."

"So you have no way of proving where you were last Tuesday night?"

"I see, so that's what this is all about. No, I don't, and yes, I do own a knife, but you guys are really up the wrong tree," he smiled at his own awful pun, "on this one. I adored Julie and would never have hurt her. I rarely even swat insects."

"You're sure you weren't angry because she broke off with you?"

"Gentlemen, I know you're going to find this hard to believe, but I was the one who broke off with Julie. She had her heart set on teaching in a town or city, and I had my heart set on living as close to the woods as I could. Besides, when I was studying Forestry, I met....well, let me show you



myself. Honey?"

A sweet looking woman poked her head out the back door.

"Yes?"

"Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet my wife, Forest Ranger Suzanne O'Malley."

"Pleasure to meet you, Mrs. O'Malley," both detectives said almost simultaneously.

"We're sorry to have bothered you, Mr. O'Malley, but Chief Clews reported that you were a real mess at the Memorial Service here."

"I sure was. As I said, she was my first love. Besides, she was a kind person, and she met such a terrible end. I fell apart, didn't I, Honey."

Mrs. Jerry O'Malley III just sympathetically shook her head up and down.

## Chapter 44

As soon as she got home, Kado went straight to the phone to call George Clews.

"Hello."

"Hi, George. I hope you don't mind my calling you during the day, but I have a terrible feeling about what one of my student's told me. His name is Alex Jordan. I don't think he would be able to kill anyone, but I'm not sure. I think that you should investigate him and his parents. Find out where they were during Julie's murder. From what Alex told me, it is possible that he or one of his parents could have been angry enough to kill Julie."

"What? Are you talking about Elizabeth and Henry Jordan? He's one of the best lawyers in the county, probably the state. Elizabeth is also a lawyer, but since their son...I guess that would be Alex...was born, she really hasn't practiced much. She's very devoted to the boy and spends all of her time

doing things for him. She always says she's too busy with raising her son right to join any of the women's clubs. They are both handsome, intelligent people. I can't imagine either of them would be that insane... to murder someone so savagely."

"I may be very wrong on this, but could you check them out for me? I would feel better. I also plan to talk to the child psychologist at school tomorrow."

"Why don't you do that. I'll get back to you later if I find out anything that is helpful."

"Thanks."

"I just had a call from my detectives who went to Millburg this afternoon to interview Jerry O'Malley. They are convinced that he had nothing to do with the murder. The idea that he was a jilted suitor doesn't seem likely. He said that he was the one who broke off with Julie, and he has been happily married to a fellow forest ranger for several years now.

Bill and Ted also checked out the alibis for both Josh and Jon. They confirmed what we already knew. Both Jon and Josh could have been at Berry High in a time frame to kill Julie.

## Chapter 45

Kado got to school early on Wednesday. After checking in, she made her way to Guidance. She found Sue Ellen Paulsen in her office.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here. Will you please arrange a meeting for you, me, and Dr. Hill for fifth period?"

"Sure, I know he's here today, so I'll make the arrangements. I can rearrange any appointments I have. May I ask what you want to see us for?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to be so cryptic. I want to talk over some concerns I have for Alex Jordan."

"By all means. We'll have our files ready."

"Thanks, Sue."

At the end of second period, Tiffany, a lovely young lady with a saucy attitude and a great head of curls, approached Kado's desk.

"Mrs. Dolan, may I ask you a

question?"

"Of course, Tiffany, what is it?"

"Ms. Dalton explained to us a few weeks ago that we should brush up on our grammar and usage because most of the points in the Writing Section of the S.A.T. Were based on our knowledge of that stuff."

Kado laughed, "She was absolutely right, Tiffany. We'll be doing practice S.A.T. essays, but we will definitely go over that "stuff" as well."

Tiffany laughed too, "That's good because I'm pretty weak on my dangling participles and split infinitives.

"The very fact that you even know those terms is very encouraging. I did see that Ms. Dalton planned to give you a review quiz next week. If she didn't have one made up yet, I'll ask you to help me by telling me what you have covered, and I'll make up a quiz for you. Okay?"

"That's great, Mrs. Dolan. Would you like my class notes now? I have them in a separate section of my English notebook, so it's no trouble to give them to you."

"Absolutely."

With quick movements, Tiffany opened her notebook to the green divider,

opened the rings, and removed the entire section.

"Thank you. You are a big help. When I was teaching, I often did Grammar Groups every Monday."

"What were they, Mrs. Dolan?"

"Let's use an example of one of the writing problems you just mentioned. I would start the period explaining what a participle is. Then in a small group of 3 or 4, the students would do a worksheet together. The first section of the worksheet would have sentences containing participle and participial phrases. The second section of the worksheet would have sentences that misused participles, such as the example you gave, some sentences would have dangling participles, which you would correct together, or have participial phrases that were fragments, which you would underline. The entire activity wouldn't take more than 20 minutes. The next Monday we would tackle a different problem. In that way, students who 'hate' grammar would be getting lessons in small doses. We'd change the membership of the groups each week so that no body felt that the other groups had all the 'smart' kids."

"I'd like for us to try that, and I'll bet

the other kids would too."

I'll be happy to prepare the worksheets and give it a try. Tiffany, may I ask you for another favor?"

"Sure, Mrs. Dolan, anything."

"You seem like a mature young lady who is quite sure of where she stands with people."

Tiffany looked puzzled. The bell rang, and the rest of the class headed out the door.

"What I mean, dear, is that you don't worry whether or not what you do is 'popular' with the other kids."

Tiffany smiled at the compliment, "Within reason, I guess you're right. What exactly do you want me to do that is 'unpopular'?"

Kado was again amazed at her quick understanding and willingness to help.

"Tiffany, I'm sure you are well aware of how the kids feel about Alex."

Tiffany let a small frown crease her forehead.

"Oh, don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to go out with him or anything drastic! I was just hoping you could be a friendly face for him to look for when he enters the classroom. If you would just greet him by

name, he would feel better about himself. He would feel more connected to his classmates."

"Sure, I'd be happy to do that. I'd bet that Tanya would to. I'll talk to her, but don't worry, we won't make it obvious. We'll be very casual and greet him as we would any other kid, okay? I just thought of something. Mrs. Dolan, are you going to have us work with a partner when we study for the grammar review quiz?"

"Oh, I really hadn't thought about that yet."

"Well, if you do plan to have people work together, I would be happy to volunteer to have Alex as my partner. Also, if we do the Grammar Groups, I will be glad to be in his first group."

"Tiffany, your parents must be very proud of you."

"Because of my grades?"

"No, because you are such a nice person. That's more important than anything."

Feeling good about Mrs. Dolan's compliment, Tiffany hurried off to her next class. Kado smiled and thought to herself "What a nice girl.". Thinking in particular



about her unruly seventh period and the drug arrests, she said to herself, "I must always try to remember that there are more good kids out there than bad, but they just don't demand as much attention."

## **Chapter 46**

Dr. Clarence Hill, the district's psychologist, Sue Ellen, and Kado all crowded into the guidance counselor's small office. Kado explained that she had promised Alex not to tell his mother anything, so, even though she wasn't telling his mother, she felt that she was betraying a confidence. However, the story Alex had told her had really scared her. She was afraid that he would probably crack under the pressure, and she wanted their opinions on how to help him. So she told his story.

Dr. Hill said he would call Alex's mother and try to learn more about the situation. Perhaps Alex was exaggerating a bit. Kado didn't want him to call her. Alex would know who the doctor had talked to and never trust her again.

"I'll be very careful, Kado. I'll just say that some of the teachers thought he was nervous lately. 'Had he been getting enough

sleep?' 'Did he have a personal problem his teachers should know about?' That sort of thing. If I see an opening, I'll try to find out more. But I promise that she will not know any information came from you...because I won't mention any of your specific information. Okay?"

"All right, but I still don't feel good about telling you what he said to me, yet we do need to help him."

## **Chapter 47**

After school, Kado went to John Sullivan's office. Luckily he was in, but he

had a parent conference. His secretary asked her if she wanted to wait.

"Sure. It'll be good to just sit for a while."

As John walked the parents out of his office, he saw Kado and asked, "Are you waiting to see me?"

"No, my teacher sent me to the principal."

"Lucky for me. Come on in."

After holding leather chair in front of the desk for Kado, John walked around to his swivel chair behind the desk. "I've been meaning to check on how the classes were going, but the days just seem to get by me."

"I know, I know. Me, too. I should have given you an update sooner."

"What's up?"

"Well, the classes are going very well; I really seem to know what I'm doing each day."

"Great."

"I am concerned about one of my students, but I had a conference with Sue Ellen and Dr. Hill earlier today. He is going to look into the situation...call the parents."

"Good. I'll call him later to find out how it went. What is the kid's name?"

"Alex Jordan."

"Oh, yes," he said, while making a note, "I know his mother quite well; she's on a number of committees here at school."

"I've also been talking to Chief Clews quite a bit. Two of his suspects paid me visits."

"Were there any problems?" A concerned look furrowed his brows.

"No, not really. May I tell you who they were in confidence? I would like your input, but I don't know how many people know what."

"Of course, you have my word."

"The first is Josh McClure, a former student of Julie's, who seems to have had a crush on her."

"I remember him. He was a studious kid, but he seemed to have a large group of friends. Isn't he in college now?"

"Yes, a sophomore. Julie had him when he was a sophomore here. I think the police are thinking that he might not have gotten over his crush and that he was rejected by her."

"Oh, dear, I hope that they are wrong on that."

"The second is the one I really want to

talk to you about. He is one of our teachers, Jon Atkins. What can you tell me about him? He was very angry when he came to see me. I should have told you about the visit then."

"First, how much do you know about him?"

"I know the real story, if that's what you mean."

"I see, well, I guess I've got some explaining to do to you."

## **Chapter 48**

John Sullivan sat back in his swivel chair and crossed his hands on his chest. For a minute, he turned to look outside. Then he swung back facing Kado and put his forearms on his desk, leaning towards her.

"Julie learned his real story, too, in May last year. Apparently she had been visiting some college friends in Creighton; that's the town where Jon taught. Of course, they got around to the subject of boy friends.

When they got to Julie, she told them that she had been seeing a really cute math teacher since September; he was new to her school. When they pressed her for his name, she told them. Two of the girls in the group, the two that lived in Creighton and were hosting the get-together, looked pale and exchanged quick glances. Julie noticed their reaction and asked them what was wrong.

Reluctantly, they told her the rumors that had accompanied Jon's departure from Creighton High School. At first, Julie insisted that they must just be unfounded rumors, but when the girls told her that they were pretty sure the gossip was true and explained why they did, she began sobbing. They spent the rest of the night trying to comfort her, but they did tell her that it was better she knew now. Julie had told them she planned to take a trip with Jon, so they were certain the relationship was quite serious. In a couple of days, Julie called them to tell them she had broken off with Jon."

"The next day, Julie came to see me after school. At first she was angry, blaming me for hiring a man who had done such a thing. When she quieted down, she told me everything, most of which I had not known.

I assured her that the principal at Creighton had given me a good recommendation. She finally said she understood, and we talked about what action we should take, if any. By the time we finished talking, it was almost 5:30, so I asked Julie if she could use a drink. She smiled tentatively and agreed that one would be welcome. We went out."

"Well, I'm sure that was very hard on you, John, learning the kind of man you hired, that is."

"Yes, and, by the way, I did call the principal at Creighton the next day. He verified the story and asked me to forgive him. Jon was a good teacher, and he had hoped he would never cross the line again. I explained that he hadn't, but that one of our teachers was very hurt by the truth. He apologized again, saying 'Oh, I'm so sorry...so sorry.'"

"I called Julie down to tell her about my conversation, and we talked some more. We still didn't know what to do about Jon, so we made plans to talk it over at dinner."

"John, please don't tell me any more if this is leading where I think it is."

"Please listen, Kado. I need you to know. I need you to help me understand."

Please let me explain." His sad eyes pleaded.

Kado sighed and shook her head yes.

"Sarah and I were separated at the time; only a very few people knew about it. By the time I started seeing Julie, Sarah and I had been apart for over four months, and we didn't seem to be making any progress towards a reconciliation."

"Oh, John, I'm so sorry, but are you sure you want..."

"I know I can trust you, and really there's not much else to tell, Kado. We saw each other all of June and throughout the summer whenever Julie was around. Just before school started, Sarah called me and begged me to go to a marriage counselor with her. Of course, after 20 years of marriage, it seemed the right thing to do. After two sessions, I realized that I couldn't see Julie and honestly be working on saving my marriage. So we broke it off."

"Completely?"

"Well, there were one or two slips. I really was crazy about Julie."

"John, I am not one who will judge you. I do understand now why the announcement at the game was so difficult for you. I hope that you work everything



through with Sarah; she's a lovely person."

"I know, Kado, I know." His chin began to crumple.

Drained by her day, Kado put on her jacket and headed for her car. As she sank into the driver's seat with an exhausted slump, her cell phone rang.

"Hello."

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan, this is George Clews. We're still looking into the matter we discussed yesterday. I did want to let you know that Mrs. Jordan signed in at the front visitors' desk at school last Tuesday but never signed out."

## **Chapter 49**

After dinner, Kado just sat on the sofa, curled up in a cotton throw her sister had given her. It vividly presented the four seasons; she folded it so that the colorful fall season was on top. She didn't feel as

cheerful as the wrap around her; she just felt sad about all she had learned. "Julie, dear Julie, I want so much to help find your murderer, and I know Chief Clews does too. I think we're getting close, but I'm so afraid that our answer will be a very unhappy one."

"Whoever killed you did so in such a rage. He...or she...can only be insane. It is always difficult to punish someone who cannot even comprehend the cruelty he has inflicted. But the horrendous cruelty to you and to so many people who loved you cannot be ignored. I guess we can only remember that such an unbalanced mind could murder again, and we must protect future victims."

Telling herself that she must do something productive, Kado graded the *Mango Street* tests. After recording the grades, she decided to look at Act III of *Julius Caesar* to refresh herself for tomorrow's classes. When she came to the section of Antony's speech when he says, "You have forgot the will I told you of," Kado thought, "Hey, I forgot the will the historical society mentioned. I think I'll take some time off from teaching and learn something myself." She went to her computer and opened the Berry Historical

Society's website, scrolled down to where she had left off, and read about the will.

"In 1895, an Irish immigrant named Patrick Berry, who was a Civil War veteran, passed away. His will left the many acres he owned to a freed slave Isaiah. Berry had been a Confederate soldier. After Appomattox, he began to make his way north to find land that he could farm.

*While walking through a wooded area in Virginia, I came across a colored man hiding in some bushes. He was barely clothed and very thin; I thought perhaps he had not eaten lately. I offered him a piece of the loaf of bread I carried, and he gratefully took it and eagerly ate it. The man pleaded with me not to tell anyone that I had seen him. I clapped my hand in his and said, 'You must have been hiding a long time. Lincoln first signed an Emancipation Proclamation to free the slaves in September of 1862.' He replied 'I heerd 'bout that whisp'uhd on my plantation, but de overseer jest told us it was a lie and that we be shot if we tried to escape. Afta' a couple of years passed, the Union soldiers passed by us and told us we was free, so I took off and been runin' evah since. I be hiding jes' in case the Yankee*

*boys lied to me.' The black man told me his name was Isaiah and that he had been surviving on rabbits and berries. Upon hearing that, I laughed and threw my arm around his shoulder. I told him that my last name was Berry. I said that if he promised not to eat me that we could travel north together. We walked for many days, living as we could off the land. One night at our fire, I took out my Bible, which I had carried with me over the ocean and through the war. I read from Isaiah 19:2, "everyone will fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor." I told him that Thanks be to God, the Civil War is over and that we will be good brothers. I have learned your heart, and I want you to always be my friend. We will be good brothers for you will be my own "God of Salvation."*

*Soon we were working the land I was able to buy with my soldier's pay and odd jobs in towns on our journey. We have lived and worked together for almost 30 years now, and he has truly brought prosperity to my land as much as I did. When he needed to take a formal last name, he chose Berry, so he is really my brother. Therefore, being of sound mind and body, I, Patrick Berry,*

*hereby bequeath all of my land and its buildings, furnishings and tools to Isaiah Berry, my brother.*

When Kado finished reading the will, tears were rolling down her cheeks. "I cannot believe I didn't know this." She read on.

"When Patrick and Isaiah stopped their journey, They were at a small settlement with just a few hundred people. The families in that area had been there a long time. Their parents had even built a schoolhouse and a small church many years before their arrival. Sunday was visiting day because after the church service, the folks all stayed on the church grounds to eat picnic lunches and talk with old friends. At the time Patrick bought his huge farm, no one yet lived on the land. As more people came looking for farm land, Patrick leased some small parcels of land to them and took a very small portion of their crops for rent. If times were bad, he would just shrug his shoulders and tell them they could pay whenever they were able to. If that "whenever" never came, he would again just shrug his shoulders and compliment them and their families as hardworking people who were important to the

community. Patrick Berry lived for about two more years after he wrote the will; Isaiah passed away five years after that. In his own will, Isaiah wrote,

*God has been my salvation. He guided our paths so that Patrick Berry and I would meet. Because of him, my life has had purpose. Every man should have purpose in his life and friends who help him fulfill it. .Our dear neighbors, whom Patrick had welcomed and leased parcels of land gratis, treated me with kindness and took me into their community as an equal. In a small way, I wish to thank them by leaving all of the Berry land to our friends and neighbors who now live and farm within its boundaries.*

"Wow," exclaimed Kado. "This is fascinating history. I'm going to talk to the social studies department chair to see if this is taught in our schools. Maybe we could even have an Isaiah Berry day to celebrate his generosity. Oh, I should also mention it to Rosa; I'm sure she's still in charge of Berry's African-American Studies."

Suddenly, Kado remembered Lisa's reading at the Memorial Service. It had been from "Isaiah." The circle of coincidence is a fascinating thing.

## Chapter 50

"I think an anniversary toast is in order. How about a martini?"

"Sounds great." the shadow answered itself.

Walking over the liquor cabinet to get the vodka and vermouth, the shadow clicked on the television. A perfectly made-up face with a perfectly combed hair-do was cheerfully informing her eager audience that a man in Hartfield had gone berserk in a local plumbing store and killed his wife with a plunger.

"How in the world could he do that? I guess he must have hit her with the handle," mused the shadow. "He really was stupid to kill her in front of a whole store of witnesses. Maybe I'll write a book telling people how to commit the perfect murder. My gracious, that man will definitely spend the rest of his life in jail, at the least."

The vivacious anchor went on to the

next story. Still more politicians in New Jersey and Illinois had been linked to corruption and vote fraud. "Well, that's hardly news anymore," the shadow said to the anchor.

Finally, with drink in hand, the shadow sat down in a comfortable chair to watch the rest of the news of the day.

The anchor continued, "...and in Berry Township, the brutal murder of the high school English teacher still remains unsolved. In fact, although persons-of-interest have been brought to the police station and subsequently released, the police do not seem to have come any closer to solving the case. Until that murderer is arrested, the citizens of Berry Township are living in a constant state of fear."

The shadow was almost laughing out loud at some of the silly man-on-the-street interviews of the upstanding citizens of Berry. "I think I may expect those burning torches to be at my door...about 20 years from now!"

"What a grand anniversary this is! People running scared like ninnys while I'm sitting here peacefully enjoying my cocktail."

Once the murder news was over, the



shadow got bored with the news and turned off the television. "I do wonder a bit though if my problems have been solved. I suppose, just to make sure, I should do a little investigating tomorrow."

With that thought, the shadow stealthily crept down to the basement and retrieved the large carry-all from its hiding place. "Yes, that's what I'll do. I'll bring my equipment with me and do some investigating. After all, murder should be easier the second time. Only if it's needed, of course. But then, who knows when I might need..."

From upstairs, the shadow heard a door slam and footsteps in the kitchen. Hastily, the carry-all was put back. "I'll come back for this later."

"Honey, I'm home!"

## **Chapter 51**

As Kado was logging off her computer, she heard a knocking at her front

door. She walked to a window next to the door, lifted the drape, and looked out at the doorstep. At first she wasn't sure who it was; a scarf covered the face. As the face turned to look around, Kado recognized Sarah Sullivan, so she opened the door.

"Why, Sarah, what a surprise. I certainly hadn't expected you tonight. Come in."

The tall, handsome woman was frowning but hesitantly entered the front hall. Kado offered to hang up her elegant London Fog raincoat, but Sarah, still shielding her face with a richly patterned maroon scarf, refused. Kado indicated a chair to her visitor as she asked, "Would you like some tea? Or maybe decaf coffee? Either one is very easy to fix."

"Oh, thanks, Kado," Sarah answered as she finally slid her scarf off her head to drape it around her shoulders, "but I don't plan to stay but a minute."

"All right, if you're sure. What brings you out this evening? You know I'm always glad to see you, but I certainly wasn't expecting you."

"Yes, I know. Sorry I didn't call first." She nervously fingered the purse she

clutched on her lap. "I didn't really know I would end up here myself. I just had to get out of the house to think and somehow I ended up here. Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Of course not." The face across from her lifted up and showed a sadness that made Kado's own heart ache."

"You see, when John got home from school today, he told me that he had told you everything. At first I was angry for discussing our private troubles, and I stormed out of the house. But as I walked, I became calmer and calmer. I realized that Julie's death hadn't solved anything."

"I'm not sure I follow you, Sarah," Kado responded, feeling a little nervous.

"Yes, I'm sure you can't, but I'll try to explain. You see, I learned about John's affair with Julie last summer quite by accident. It was a lovely day, so I decided to walk to the library and enjoy the flowers in the park. Then, I felt as if a huge board had slammed into my stomach. I saw John and Julie sitting on a bench that was almost surrounded by high bushes. They were just talking. Then they seemed to have finished their conversation, and he...leaned over to

kiss her as he got up. I had always thought a broken heart was just a metaphor, but mine truly was. I was sure I would not live to take another step. I just sat on the nearest park bench and sobbed and sobbed. A woman came over to ask me if I were all right. I made up some excuse...a migraine or something...so she went away. I think an hour or maybe two had passed before I even tried to stand up. Somehow I made my way home on wobbly legs. John was supposed to come over that night to discuss a formal separation agreement, but I didn't think I could face John that night, so I left him a note saying I had gone to visit my mother. John doesn't get along with my family, so I knew he would never call there. I told him I had my cell with me if anything important came up. I actually took a cotton blanket and went back to the bench where John and Julie had been sitting. I slept there and didn't go home until it started to get light. I didn't want to face any prying strangers or, worse, concerned friends."

Not knowing what to say and guessing that Sarah didn't really expect her to say anything, Kado listened and nodded sympathetically.

"I didn't really have a right to react that way. After all, I was the one who had asked him to leave the house...to have a trial separation, but I did. And I also realized how much I loved him. When I finally got home, I searched frantically through the yellow pages. The yellow pages! I was facing the biggest crisis of my life, and I'm looking in the yellow pages! I had never told family or friends that we were even separated; how could I ask them for a recommendation for a counselor? I found a name and number and set up an appointment. After talking with the doctor for two weeks, I asked John to come, too, so that we could try to save our marriage. I was so happy when he agreed."

"I did know that he still saw her once and a while, so that hurt continued to pick on my soul. However, I just told myself that the sessions were going well and that we would make it through. Then Julie was murdered. God forgive me, Kado, but I was relieved that she was dead! My only thoughts were selfish ones; my competition was gone for good."

"Sarah, don't be too hard on yourself. I'm sure that was only a fleeting thought and that once the reality that she had been

murdered sank in...well, I'm sure you weren't really happy that she was dead."

"Yes, yes, of course. But my rational side still hasn't forgiven my emotional side."

"It will. I am very fond of both you and John, and I just know that you will work this through together. Not one of us has gone through this tragedy without some kind of scarring."

"Thank you, Kado. I'm sorry to have spoiled your quiet evening at home."

"Absolutely no problem, Sarah. You need people to talk to. Reach out to your family; I believe that they will help you heal."

"Yes, I have started doing that, but more importantly, John and I are talking very honestly with each other. I believe we are beginning to see where we had taken wrong turns in our marriage."

"That's great news." She made a mental note to call Sarah in a few weeks to go out to lunch---after John had found a new teacher, of course.

As she was leaving, Sarah turned around in the doorway, tears in her eyes. "I guess the reason I came here...well, it was important to me that you know."

"Know what, Sarah?"

"I didn't kill her."

## Chapter 52

Sarah Sullivan walked out into the night, her scarf once again wound securely, wrapped around her face to hide it. Kado stood there drained; she had learned too much about too many people, and she was so unhappy for their pain. The ring of the phone startled her.

"Hello."

"Hi, Mrs. Dolan, this is George Clews. Do you have a minute? I wanted to go over some of the things you've told me. In fact, if it's not too late, I'd like to stop by."

"Certainly, George. As a matter of fact, I was just thinking about calling you."

"How 'bout that. I'll be there in a jiff."

In a few minutes, Chief Clews pulled up out front. Looking out the window, Kado saw that he was not driving a police car, probably his family car. He sort of jogged up the walk. Before he could knock, Kado opened the door and led him in. They sat

down across from each other, as she and Jon Atkins had done the night he stormed into her house.

"George, what I am about to tell you is very confidential, and, unless you are certain that one of them had something to do with the murder after I tell you their secret, please forget I ever told you and never mention it to anyone."

"You know you can rely on me, Mrs. Dolan."

"George, for goodness sake, call me Kado; I haven't been your teacher for years, and you are not only a grown man, but one of the township's most important citizens."

A silence followed her request.

"Please don't think I can't call you 'Kado' just because you are an older lady..."

"Why that's really nice of you to say."

They both laughed, and George continued, "I guess it's because you were 'Mrs. Dolan,' my English teacher when I met you, and Mrs. Dolan you will always be to me. Okay? Did I dig my way out of the hole yet?"

"Yes, and I believe there were a few people in my life that I was simply unable to address by their first names, so I understand.



Now, here's the confidential information. Sarah Sullivan just left here. She was very, very upset. This afternoon John told me that he had had an affair with Julie this past summer; then he told Sarah that he had told me. She came over here to...well, to unburden her worries, I think. The last thing that she said to me was that she didn't murder Julie even though the affair had caused her great pain. I believe her. I also can't imagine that John would have hurt Julie. Although he had put their relationship behind him, he was still very fond of Julie and certainly wouldn't want her dead."

"All right, I won't put their names on the big board at the station, but I will make a mental note in the event something does lead us to them. I surely hope nothing does; I like them both; they're good people. I came over tonight to run some things by you. I thought if we checked the facts together, we might be able to see something neither one of us has seen alone."

Kado whipped out her ever-present notebook and found a pencil in her book bag. "Shall we begin with a list of the possible suspects?"

"Yeah, that'll be helpful," George

answered as he got his own notebook out. "Now, if the letters "JO" were a clue that Julie was trying to give us, they may have something to do with the culprit's name. That's what we've been assuming anyway. The possibilities there would be Jon Atkins, Josh McClure, and now, I'm afraid we'd have to put John Sullivan down...just for our own list. Now, if Julie were trying to write the last name, Elizabeth Jordan should be on the list, or even Alex. If my detectives are right, Jerry O'Malley isn't likely, but we should be down his name just in case."

"I just thought of someone else. I don't think there's a chance in the world that a youngster could do this crime...which is why I don't think Alex could be the murderer...but there was another student who came to see me the day after the murder. I felt her reason for coming was just a bit unusual, but I didn't think of her as a suspect until we started making our 'JO' list. Her name is Josie Van Doren; she was one of Julie's cheerleaders. Remember that your daughter Stacy said that Julie had not put her on the team, so that could be a motive...for a very mixed up little girl."

"Oh, I've heard plenty about Josie.

When my daughter was a new girl on the squad last year, Josie was quite nasty to her and the other new girls. Remember that Stacy also told us that Saturday's game was the first one she had cheered at all year. She had some strange reason for not cheering before and another one for coming back now. Something definitely needs to be looked into there."

"Yes. However, since we think the murderer tied Julie up to the pipes with a rope, I don't know if Josie or Alex would have the strength to do that."

"Unless they were not alone."

"Did you find any evidence of a second person?"

"Nope, we didn't even find any evidence of a first person. There were no tracks or fingerprints. I suppose he could have worn latex gloves and those surgical-type booties."

"And all of the blood was Julie's?"

"Yes. We took a level to the floor; it slanted towards the door. That's how Chuck was able to see the stream before he even came in. The murderer was very careful not to step in it or any place else that might have left a print."

"Wow, this almost sounds like a professional."

"Well, a pro probably wouldn't have left the body there. I've seen motivated amateurs commit some very intricate crimes."

"Now where are you as far as the evidence goes?"

"Just where we were before--the body, the rope fragments, the time and place of death, and the blood spatter patterns that told us she was upright while being stabbed. Oh, one more important thing I forgot to tell you. Those cotton threads did turn out to be from a sheet; however, the sheet is a very common brand. We checked with the local linen store, and they told us they see thousands of them each year. The particular sheet that matched content and thread count was one they had a special on during their last White Sale. They sold 500 sheets that week alone."

"My gracious. One could almost believe that the killer knew the sheets he was using would be impossible to trace. Can you believe that? You have to admit he's smart. I guess we could have known he is intelligent enough to think of tying her up so he could repeat the actions of all the assassins of

Caesar. What about the emails from Josh and the clippings from the newspapers from Creighton?"

"Again, nothing seems to point to any one person, and, as you know, we disproved the alibis of Josh and Jon. I came over here to see if you had learned anything new. You have, but all you did for me tonight was to add three more suspects to my list. Thanks a lot."

"Sorry, George. I really do want to help. Something will break for you; I know it will."

"Well, as a matter of fact; that's why I'm really here."

"What do you mean, George?"

"Do you mind being bait for one of our suspects? I would make sure you were very safe. If the suspect doesn't bite, we can at least eliminate one person."

"Of course, I will. Just make sure you keep that 'very safe' promise! What do you want me to do?"

## Chapter 53

The next day the school operator paged Kado after second period. She picked up the phone in the room and said, "Hi Cindy, what's up?"

"Hi, Kado, a Mrs. Jordan said she was returning your call and wanted to know if you'd be here after school. She said she needs to see you. Do you have her number?"

"Yep, I sure do. Thanks, Cindy, I'll call her back."

The kids were already coming in for third period, so Kado decided she would have to call Mrs. Jordan later. She did, and she made an appointment for 2:45. Precisely at 2:45, a light tap came from the door frame.

"Oh, come in, Mrs. Jordan. I'll be right with you; I just have to finish this one assignment I'm typing. I also have to make a short phone call."

Mrs. Jordan came in and took a seat at a desk next to the windows and stared out as

Kado finished her typing and made her call.

"Hi, Georgeanne, I'll have to come a little bit later. Mrs. Jordan is here for a parent conference."

*"Oh, come in, Mrs. Jordan. I'll be right with you. I just have to finish this one assignment I'm typing."*

*"Oh, please, call me Elizabeth; all of Alex's teachers do"*

*She came in and took a seat at a desk next to the windows and stared out.*

*"All right, Elizabeth. I'm finished. What can I do for you today?"*

*"Is Alex doing all right in your class? I know he got an 'A' on his mythology essay. Why was his interim grade a 'B'?"*

*"Yes. I'll get his folder to show you." Julie went to her filing cabinet and opened the drawer labeled 'Period Two' and took out Alex's folder. She then sat at a desk next to Mrs. Jordan and began to take out Alex's work since the beginning of school in September.*

*"As you can see, his marks have been very inconsistent. He does well on vocabulary quizzes..."*

*"Oh, yes, we spend quite a bit of time at home drilling him on every item of*

*information in the lesson. We take a great deal of time helping him in all of his classes. We want him to succeed. You know, both my husband and I graduated from Princeton, so we value education very much."*

*"Yes, I can see that. However, look at his grammar and literature quizzes. He doesn't seem to have a grasp of the more advanced grammar concepts."*

*"Okay, that's an area with which I can help him."*

*"And look at his essays on the literature test. He doesn't seem to be able to interpret themes well, and he fails to recognize most of the quotes or explain their significance very well."*

*"All right, I will go over each work with him with a fine tooth comb to make sure he understands it better. You do know that we hired a tutor to help him with his writing, don't you?"*

*"Yes, I do. May I ask who it is?"*

*"Oh, no one you would know, a college girl who needs extra money."*

*"If you would like me to talk to her, I will."*

*"Whatever for?"*

*"It would be my guess that she needs a*



*better understanding of where the tutoring ends and the student's own writing begins."*

*"That's very insulting, Ms. Dalton."*

*"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be. I only thought that as a young student strong in writing, she might unconsciously be giving Alex too much help."*

*"Well, I'm sure she just brings out the best in him. Perhaps you are not able to do that with so many students to be worried about."*

*Julie thought without changing her expression, "Now who is being insulting, Mrs. Jordan?"*

*"Mrs. Jordan, Alex seems so anxious and nervous all the time. He doesn't have fun in class and, as a result, doesn't relate well with his classmates. I think we should arrange a conference with his guidance counselor. Perhaps he is just not able to handle so many difficult courses this year. It might be better for him to drop down a level in a couple of his courses."*

*"Ms. Dalton, are you suggesting that Alex doesn't belong in Honors English?" Mrs. Jordan demanded. Her lips were set in an unconvincing smile and her eyes were glacial.*

*"No, I did not say that, but I think we should arrange a conference with his other teachers and his guidance counselor. He is only a sophomore. Maybe he is just not ready for some of the demands of his schedule"*

*"You are the only one who didn't give him an 'A,' so maybe it is your course that is too demanding. Did you every consider that, Ms. Dalton?"*

*"I haven't changed the curriculum since I took over these classes from Mrs. Dolan three years ago."*

*"Well, some teachers are better at reaching their students than others."*

*Beginning to feel unwelcome anger creeping into her, Julie answered as calmly as she could, "Please, Mrs. Jordan, I really don't think that we should discuss this further until we have a conference with everyone. I'm sure that Mr. Sullivan would be happy to join us to give us all a clear perspective."*

*"Of course, that way you'll have everyone on **your** side. You want to shame my boy in front of the whole faculty. I've worked so hard for Alex. I've given him every help possible. His father was furious that he didn't have all 'A's' so that he could*

*continue bragging to the other lawyers that Alex didn't even know what a 'B' looked like." Her voice became higher and more hysterical with each sentence. "You are the one who has done this to our family. You are the one who forced my husband to ignore us. It is you!"*

*After inhaling a sob, Elizabeth Jordan stood up, picking up a large carry-all at her side. She reached inside, pulling out a pair of crisp white gloves. Julie watched her with a puzzled expression thinking, "She looks as my mother used to look getting ready for church." With a toneless voice, Mrs. Jordan told Julie that they were going for a walk.*

*"You'll need your sweater, dear. It's gotten chilly this afternoon."*

*Julie was frightened by Mrs. Jordan's dead tone of voice and her orders, but she thought she must be imagining things. As she got her sweater from the wardrobe, she reached over behind the open door to write "JO" in the chalk dust on the board. She was about to start an 'R,' but Mrs. Jordan came storming up. "What's taking you so long? Oh, dear, I almost forgot. You have to open up your grade book and the computer. Please be so kind as to put an 'A' for Alex's*

*paper in both places. Good. Now, be so kind as to give me his paper. Thank you. Now, let's see. Where shall we go? Oh, I know. We'll wait in the cafeteria. It's empty now. We can wait there."*

*"Wait for what?" asked Julie.*

*"Why for football practice to be over, dear. I think the field house would be a perfect place for our performance. You see, I've been so involved in student activities that I've managed to get copies of just about every key in the school."*

*Confused and scared, Julie didn't know what to do. Mrs. Jordan took hold of her upper arm and held something against her back and led her out the door.*

*As they walked out and down the hallway towards the stairs, Mrs. Jordan spoke in a very pleasant voice, "I looked at your eboard this morning, and I see that you're about to start Julius Caesar. That was one of the very first Shakespearean plays I read. It made such an impression on me!"*

*They sat at the long, empty table in the student cafeteria; no one else was around.*

*"Please tell me why you are so angry with me," pleaded Julie.*

*"Of course, my dear. I just couldn't*

*get you to understand how important it is that Alex gets all A's in his course, and those courses must be in the highest track only... for his GPA naturally. He must get into Princeton. All of our friends from our days there will be waiting to see how our child is doing. We can't disappoint them."*

*"I see," murmured Julie. "But even if his grades are excellent here at Berry, he won't be able to stay at Princeton if he hasn't earned the grades on his own merit. Perhaps Alex is feeling that pressure from you and is concentrating on grades instead of learning."*

*"Oh, don't be so naive, my dear. Many students who attend the Ivy League schools have gotten lots of extra tutoring and other extra **help** along the way."*

*"Do you mean by cheating? Aren't you worried about his character? How can he become the good, honest man everyone wants his child to become?"*

*Mrs. Jordan's smiled sarcastically and almost snorted out a laugh.*

*"My dear, you have no idea how much cheating goes on and how often those people have become very successful. I've known that since I was in high school myself. I*

*remember one girl who was always absent on the day of a major test. That night she would then phone everyone in the class and subtly finding out what had been on the test. Oh, she wasn't blatant about it. She would say to a friend, 'Oh, such-and-such wasn't on the test, was it?' By the time she finished her phone calls, she knew every question on the test. She could identify every quote, expound on the short answer questions, and write a fact-filled, smoothly written essay."*

*"What happened if the teacher gave her a different test?"*

*"That wasn't a problem either. She would simply tell the teacher that her illness from the day before was still bothering her. Could she take it tomorrow? Knowing that the teacher probably would not create a third test, she came prepared for the first test and the second...having seen the questions on it before she had her recurrent illness. It was quite an elaborate scheme. Today though, cheating is a breeze. Kids become experts on various test material and then text each other answers."*

*"Oh, I don't believe that. I'm sure some kids find ways to cheat, but I think it's only a few. The teacher would notice something*

going on."

*"Those teachers who diligently watch their students while they are taking the tests may, but there are quite a few who can easily be distracted or think they can get some other work done while the kids are busy."*

*"I still can't believe that a lot of students do that."*

*"To tell you the truth, I've been learning how to text myself. It's a perfect solution. If Alex doesn't know an answer, he can text me. I'll find the answer if I don't know it myself, and I'll text him back. The only drawback I have at the moment is convincing Alex that it's all right for him to do it. He takes those honor codes you teachers make them sign on tests quite seriously. Do you think the rest of the kids care? Of course not. They just have to get the good grades to get into the best schools. Look at the examples they see in the world around them. Men in very high places are found guilty of tax evasion or of spying on other companies for new products or of any matter of crimes...cheating to succeed Does a day go by that you don't see a story about a corrupt elected official...on every level? No. You really are naïve!"*

*"I still don't believe that my students are doing anything of the sort. We always pay attention to the lessons taught us by the great writers of the past."*

*Mrs. Jordan only shrugged her shoulders and continued, "If I hadn't cheated, I probably wouldn't have married my husband. He was having difficulty with a course that I was also taking, so he asked me if I wanted to study with him. I stole some old tests from the professor's office, looked up all the answers, and pretended that I was just very bright when we studied together. Eventually we became a couple. He was really the 'catch' of the campus, so handsome and so bright. Everyone envied me. I loved that. And I want them to envy me for having such an accomplished child as well. Well, enough of this reminiscing, we must go to the field house now.*

*For the first time, Julie was really afraid of this strange woman. She asked, "Why are we going there?"*

*"Because it's time for us to perform."*

*Kado finished typing her last sentence and turned to face Mrs. Jordan.*

*"Now, then, how can I help you, Mrs. Jordan?"*



"Oh, please, call me Elizabeth; all of Alex's teachers do."

## Chapter 54

"All right, Elizabeth. How can I help you today?"

As she was saying this, Kado got up from her desk and walked back to a desk near Mrs. Jordan, adjusting a window shade or two as she went and opening another window.

"It was nice to meet you on Sunday, Mrs. Dolan. I certainly am glad that Alex has such an experienced teacher now."

"Well, I can only try to do as good a job as Julie was doing, but maybe I have a little less energy these days."

"Nonsense. Alex enjoys your class so much."

"That's good to hear. What brings you here today?"

"Alex told me you made him stay after school yesterday. Was he misbehaving?"

"Not really, but I did want to talk to him about some unhappy things that

happened during the class."

"I see, and I guess you pumped him for information about our family."

"No, I did not. However, he did tell me some things that were bothering him."

"Did you know that Dr. Hill called me today? He said that some teachers say that Alex is acting nervous these days. Have you noticed anything? Were you one of the teachers? You must have been since you had all the dirt on our family,"

"Yes, I did say something to Dr. Hill. Alex is very uptight in my class. He also has difficulty relating to the other students. I would be happy to have a meeting with you and Dr. Hill and any other teachers. Maybe we can help Alex in some way."

"I am sure that my husband and I will be quite capable of helping our son. I think we know our son better than any teacher does. So you did talk to Dr. Hill. I see. I don't appreciate my son's difficulties being discussed openly by people who are practically strangers."

Her voice was strained, but she put her head down a minute and looked back up. She spoke in a gentle, refined manner now.

"I know that the marking period ends

very soon, and I wondered if Alex had managed to bring his 'B' up to an 'A.'"

Kado shook her head slowly, "I'm afraid not, Mrs. Jordan. In fact, we've been doing more in-class work this week, and I'm sorry to say that his participation is almost non-existent and that he has failed all of his pop quizzes. I believe he has dropped to a 'C' for the marking period."

Mrs. Jordan's jaw literally dropped and tears formed in her eyes.

"Surely, you are mistaken. He cannot be getting a 'C'; I've done...he's done all of his homework perfectly. Don't you give a homework grade?"

"Of course, I do, but all of his work put together gives him only a 76."

"You must have made a mistake. Your math is off."

"No, that's not it. My computer grade book keeps a running average for all the students."

"Then, there is something wrong with the program!"

"No, I asked one of the math teachers to double check Alex's average for me."

"You've let others know about Alex's 'C'?"

"Sure, I wanted to be very sure it was accurate."

Mrs. Jordan stood up, reaching for her large carry-all. "You are worse than she was! You have brought me such shame, and Alex, and my husband. Please get up, Mrs. Dolan. We're going for a walk."

"Where to, Mrs. Jordan? The police are still guarding the field house."

"Wh...what are you talking about?"

"I mean that you can't take me to the field house like you did Julie."

Mrs. Jordan smiled, a tight, cold smile. Then she laughed. "My husband is the best defense attorney in the county, in the state. Your precious Julie deserved to die for the way she hurt my son...destroyed our family. Do you think my husband won't be able to get me off? And he'll get me off for killing you, too."

"No, he won't, Elizabeth. I can't represent you; you should know that." A handsome well-dressed man was standing in the door, holding his arms out to his wife.

Beside him stood Chief George Clews, holding a gun trained at Elizabeth Jordan. Officer Kevin O'Donnell was at the open window also aiming a gun at her. She didn't

pay any attention to them; her eyes, filled with tears, were staring into her husband's as she rushed into his arms. "I wanted you to be proud of me...and Alex."

"Sure, honey, I know."

After two officers had handcuffed her, her husband put his arm around her and walked with them to the patrol car. Chief Clews put on latex gloves and reached into the carry-all. First he withdrew a wrinkled, stained sheet and then a ten-inch chef's knife.

He came to Kado's side and put his arm around her. "Are you okay? That was some performance. We were listening in the hall. I called Henry Jordan this morning and told him about our suspicions. He came to my office and asked about the evidence against Elizabeth. At first, he was defensive, telling me I didn't have enough to charge her. Then I told him that we had set a plan in motion that would either clear her or prove her guilty. He asked if he might come along. I agreed, but before I got your call, he called his mother to ask her to take Alex for awhile, so I guess he was pretty convinced we were right. Alex will stay with her for a while in South Carolina until everything gets worked out. This is most probably an insanity plea

case. Well, as they say on TV, that's a wrap. Thanks for your help, Mrs. Dolan."

"Thank you for all your fine work, George. I'm proud of you."

"One more thing, Mrs. Dolan."

"Yes, Chief Clews?"

"Don't you ever tell anyone you called me 'Georgeanne' on the phone."

"Promise."

Kado watched the patrol car pull off and looked at the beautiful foliage.

Then the multihued trees reminded her of something. She went to the computer and googled "Indian summer."

"One possible etymology of 'Indian Summer' is that it was derived from the raids the Indians made on the European colonies. They would generally stop in the fall. However, if the warm weather came back, so would the Indians."

Kado sighed that such a lovely expression should have such an unhappy beginning. For this year, Kado was glad the weather predictions were for colder weather... starting tonight.

## Chapter 55

Three weeks later Kado, Jill, Ann and Beth were sitting around a table at a favorite local restaurant having a "Retirement II" drink for Kado, who had taught her last class today. John had found an excellent young teacher; they had all met him and liked him instantly. Sam Dillon, the owner and manager, came over to greet them.

"Welcome, ladies. It must not be a school night if you four are here. Ah, yes, it's Friday. You can sleep in tomorrow."

"Spoken like a man," laughed Anne. "He obviously doesn't have laundry to wash, errands to run, rooms to clean, or kids to drive to soccer games."

"Surely, you can sleep late on Sundays?" Sam retorted.

"Now there's a man who has never been an English teacher," answered Beth. "We have a few hundred papers to grade every weekend; I've even been known to take

my papers along to soccer games; however, they're not as good as baseball games for grading...much more time at those to take your eyes off the field and look at the papers."

Sam laughed, "I give up. So it's twice as nice that you're here when you have so little free time. Your drinks are on me...as a community service." He walked away signaling to the waiter and the bartender.

"So, Kado, how does it feel to have your second 'last day of teaching' over with?"

"Great. But I really did enjoy it, especially after we were able to find Julie's murderer. Mrs. Jordan will likely be given a sentence in a mental facility. I heard that she has really lost touch with reality now. I hope I didn't push her over the edge, but we had to set up the circumstances to find out the truth. Alex wasn't really going to get a "C," but we thought telling her that might be upsetting enough for her to react, if indeed she was the killer. And she did and she was."

"How did her husband know to arrive there with the police?" asked Ann.

"When George and I were pretty sure Mrs. Jordan might be the one, he told me he was going to visit Henry Jordan in his office



that morning. He had known Henry pretty well around the court house. Actually, Henry came to George's office. I think he might have been thinking something was wrong because he didn't seem surprised by George's suspicions, just deeply saddened.

Apparently, he had been worrying about Elizabeth for several months. He asked if he could come with George for the arrest. He hoped that his presence would be a comfort to his wife."

"What about Alex?"

"Oh, his grandmother, Henry's mother, lives in South Carolina, so Alex has enrolled in a school down there and is apparently healing. He writes his mother every day...then asks his grandmother to check his spelling...so the anxiety may last a while."

"Now, Kado, tell us what your plans are? Are you back to being a comfortable retired lady?"

"You bet...although John did ask me if I would be willing to take any more long-term subbing jobs if he needed me. I said that I would definitely consider it."

"Good," said Beth, "I think I'll plan another baby."

A collective "What?" came from

everyone's mouths, followed by laughter.

Ann said, "Hey, everybody, look over there. See the tall blond guy talking to Sam?"

"Yes."

"His name is Patrick Berry; he claims to be a descendant of the original Berry who owned this township. He just came over from Ireland a few weeks ago."

Kado turned to see him and tried to remember the faded sepia picture on the Historical Society's website. "That's odd," she thought to herself. "The article said Patrick Berry was a bachelor, which is why he left the land to his friend Isaiah. Very odd indeed."

Kado reached in her purse and took out her notepad.

## The Author

After a 27 year career as a high school English & Speech teacher, I retired...sort of. I continue to tutor both bedside and private students and also have substitute taught and acted in TV commercials. For fun, I play bridge, write, and enjoy my 6 grandchildren.

I was born in Western Springs IL, and there are few ,if any, who can make that claim. You see Western Springs does not have a hospital; I was born at home on Prospect Avenue, next door to the house where my father was born. My mother had had her first 2 babies in the hospital and was so pleased with home 331delivery that she wrote an article published in *The American Family*,

My first national radio and television appearances were at the age of 9 on a long-ago, well-known show called *The Quiz Kids*. My sister Virginia Rhoads Kingland and my brother Gurrie Clark Rhoads were also on the

show. Besides Virginia and Gurrie, I have 3 other siblings: Paul Kelly Rhoads, a prominent Chicago lawyer; Cheryl Felicia Rhoads, actress, comedian, director, producer, and owner of a renowned acting school in Falls Church VA; and Mark Quentin Rhoads, author of the recently published *Land of Lincoln*, a clever compilation of tales from Illinois history.

I have been blessed with 3 children and 6 grandchildren: George Clews Carpenter (USAF Colonel, ret., husband of JoAnne, father of Trey, Sean, & Ashley); Gregg Rhoads Carpenter (musician—sings, plays lead guitar—solo, duo, or often with band called *Fuzzy Paradise*, father of Dylan & Zach; and Mary Ginanne Carpenter D'Anastasio (works with autistic children), wife of Robert, mother of Gia).