

*Sábado*. Vasco was a no-show. Just as well, I didn't need the distraction. I dove back into the novel, wanting to keep up the momentum.

The dedication page well underway, I knew I had to start thinking through my acknowledgments; didn't want that to get away from me. I was hitting a wall when the *Mission Impossible* ringtone broke my steely concentration. It was Matt, the laundry repair guy. Not a moment too soon. The tenants had been on me like hyenas and vultures about the downed dryer.

I'd never had a particular interest in industrial laundry equipment, but Matt changed all that. He was powerful and weathered, like Robert Shaw's shark hunter in *Jaws*. I could tell this guy had seen some things that I never would.

"Tell me about the dryer," Matt asked in the basement.

"The machine started up ... then, when I came back downstairs ..."

"At the end of the cycle?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"The clothes were damp."

"Damp like they'd been warmed? Or damp like the dryer never went on?"

"Warmed."

"What did do you then?"

Suddenly, it felt like I was being interrogated during the "Law" phase of the original *Law & Order*, not to be confused with *Special Victims Unit* or *Criminal Intent*.

"I put another five quarters in, and waited to see what would happen."

"What did happen?"

“About ten minutes into the drying cycle, the machine stopped.”

“Did you open and close the dryer door and try to restart the machine?”

“I did.”

“Did the cycle continue?”

“It did not.”

Matt stood back, considering the possibilities, much as Shaw’s Quint in *Jaws* did before his fateful, final shark-hunting voyage. Matt’s eyes squinted. He breathed in deeply, filling his lungs. His eyes closed. I could feel his intensity grow, if that was even possible. I felt small.

“Now this is very important.”

“I’m totally focused.”

“After putting in the additional five quarters, did you stay with the clothes?”

“No. I headed back upstairs.”

“So it is possible the machine could have turned back on.”

“Possible, but not likely.”

“Why do you say that?”

“The dampness of the clothes after the first and second failed attempts.”

“Then it’s the heating coil.”

“Can you fix it?”

Matt gave me a look. Had I just offended him? You don’t question Quint. However, if memory served, Quint did wind up getting eaten by the shark. Roy Scheider’s sheriff had to save the day. And I was kind of a younger, better-looking

version of Roy Scheider. I was ready and willing to attack the dryer, should Matt fall victim to this maintenance appointment.

He responded with a stoic confidence. “This is what I do.”

My skills would not be needed this time around.

Back from his truck with a new heating coil, Matt took apart the lower panel of dryer #1. The repair well underway, Matt had the emotional space to mentor me.

“You know, Maytag invented the permanent press cycle in 1969.”

“I didn’t know that.” Hat Guy probably knew it. I should have prepped better for this appointment.

“There’s four minutes of no heat in the cycle, so the clothes can cool down ... like metal that’s been bent and sets if it doesn’t cool down. This way, wrinkles won’t set when they’re placed in the dryer.”

“Ah, so the last four minutes is a preventive measure, keeping the clothes wrinkle-free ... eliminating the need for tiresome ironing and leaving more time for individual happiness.”

“Exactly.”

Matt patted my shoulder, a sparkle in his eye, as we headed up from the basement. I had done well. We were now bonded in what the Buddhists called the mentor–disciple relationship.

On the ground floor, repair done, Matt shared an interesting episode in the annals of washers and dryers: that Albert Einstein had actually tried to build a washing machine back in the ’20s, but it kept catching fire or blowing up. I guess we all had to know our limits. But Einstein ultimately found his path.