**Excerpt from *Seasons’ End* by Will North**

At first he thought it was a deer…

Colin Ryan squeezed his brake levers hard and slid his touring bike to a stop on the slick pavement at a point where the road leveled out along the north shore of Outer Quartermaster Harbor. In the dim light just pearling the sky in the east, he noticed a Great Blue Heron hunched on an arm of driftwood at the water’s edge, motionless as an undertaker. He unclipped from the pedals, leaned his bike against the guard rail, and crossed the road, his cycling shoes clicking on the pavement like a metronome.

In another half hour, traffic for the morning’s first Tacoma-bound ferry at the south end of the island would pick up and, even though it was Labor Day, the now-deserted road would get busy. Colin knew he’d have to drag the deer to the side of the road so there wouldn’t be another accident. It wasn’t the first time he’d done it. He wondered what had happened to the car that hit the beast. At this hour, it would have been an old beater of a pickup belonging to an island laborer, the kind of fellow least likely to be able to afford repairs, the most economically vulnerable to any accident, whether personal or vehicular. They often had a well-loved old dog who rode with them; Colin, the island’s vet, took care of their animals when they were sick, often for nothing.

As he came closer to the inert carcass on the asphalt, though, he realized, even in the dim pre-dawn light, that there was a problem with this particular deer. Instead of the usual flea-bitten russet coat, this one was wearing a short black cocktail dress. And silver high-heeled sandals. And wasn’t a deer.

The body lay on its back but the head was turned away, the face curtained behind a swirl of sun-streaked ash blonde hair. The slender tanned limbs lay splayed like a child’s pick-up sticks.

He didn’t need to see the face. He recognized the dress. He’d admired it, and the woman who wore it, only hours earlier at the annual beachside party the old summer families always held the night before Labor Day, the day before they all left the island for the winter.

The body belonged to Martha Petersen Strong, known to everyone on the beach as “Pete.”

He’d known her and loved her for more than twenty years.