

## Prologue

Her pearlescent blue eyes looked down at the pool's clear water. The flower petals rippled in the gentle waves dissipating from the earlier struggle.

A sense of peace and satisfaction settled over her.

The body of Tommy Hemmings was face down, half-floating at the surface. He would soon sink to the bottom as the air from his lungs was displaced by the chlorinated water; settling under his liquid blanket.

She knew what the coroner would find: asphyxiation by drowning. Her blue wild flowers, aconite, had done their job effectively. The residual neurotoxins would never be found in the typical autopsy of a drowning.

It was her mother's birthday, April third. It was hard for her to believe her mother had been gone for twenty-six years. She had waited far too long to assuage her pain, her loss. But 2014 was a good year to begin the healing.

*What a nice present for mother.*

She regretted she couldn't linger and watch Tommy sink to the depths of his pool, but she needed to move on. Mrs. Hemmings might happen onto the scene or some unsuspecting neighbor out for an early morning run could stop in for a coffee.

She approached the flowerbed at the edge of the pool's landscaping. Picking a few petals from the red carnations, white roses and blue violets, she then returned to the pool's edge. These little beauties provided just what she was looking for. She scattered them among the aconite already there; just enough to appear a gust had transported the flowers' remains to the pool. Not so much to garner suspicion. The petals floated to the water below.

Satisfied with the random appearance of the potpourri near Tommy's body, she exited across the concrete patio to a side-entry gate. Unlatching it, she stepped onto the path leading to the street and her waiting car parked around the corner.

About a half block away, she heard a distant scream coming from where she'd been.

The edges of her mouth turned up in a cold half smile. "There, there Mrs. Hemmings. He really wasn't much of a prize."

# Part I

“...how does your garden grow?”

## Chapter One

Mark burst through the garage door into the foyer out of breath. “Wow. Great run,” he huffed.

His wife, Daly, sat at the kitchen counter. Her cup of coffee in hand, newspaper on the counter, she was intently scrutinizing a crossword puzzle. Taking in Daly’s dark brown hair and delicate facial features over full lips always surprised Mark a bit. She’d done nothing as far as make-up or primping, yet looked put together in every way. Only five foot four, she was proportioned nicely with an athletic build. Her form-fitting sweats indicated her anticipation of a work out a bit later. Mark’s eyes lingered on her curvaceous parts with an impish smile. Leaning on their kitchen island, he continued to pant.

“That’s nice,” she said looking up briefly at his red face and sweat-soaked t-shirt. “Are you going to make it?” she asked returning her attention to the puzzle.

Mark’s T-shirt was soaked in a large V down the front of his six foot two frame. His sweat pants were equally wet with a V leading to his butt crack. Short brown hair lay in dripping ringlets on his forehead. Above his red face, a dimpled chin and hazel eyes made for a handsome man. Not male model worthy, just manly and out of breath.

“Maybe. At least I’ll die with a healthy glow,” he replied moving to her side of the island. Looking over her shoulder, he asked “Anything I can help you with while I’m a little nasty? You know, there are many forms of exercise we could do together if the spirit moved us.” As his hands made their way around her waist with hopes of higher ground, the phone rang.

“Great,” he said disappointedly, abandoning his amorous notions to see who felt compelled to interrupt the great morning he was having.

“Hello, Ford residence,” he answered using a mock receptionist’s voice as he mugged stupid faces at Daly. She watched him out of the corner of her eye in mild amusement.

His face turned serious as he listened. “What?...No...How long ago?” He began to pace with his brow furrowed, listening intently to the caller. “All right. I’ll be over as quick as I can,” he said as he hung up the phone and turned to Daly.

He met her questioning eyes, “That was Mike. He said he just got a call from Tommy’s wife, Pat. She found Tommy in their pool just a few hours ago. Looks like he drowned. She’s out of her mind.”

“Oh my god, that’s awful!” Daly blurted as she rose from her chair, “How could that happen? Tommy swims all the time.” A cloud came over Daly’s face, “It wasn’t...it wasn’t on purpose...was it?”

“I don’t know. The police are still there. I guess the coroner arrived, so maybe they’ll know more by the time I get there,” he said over his shoulder. “I’m going to shower and head to Pat’s. I’ll call you when I can.” He disappeared down the hall.

Mark got to Tommy and Pat’s house around ten o’clock.

The pandemonium was in full swing with Life Squad, Fire Department and police cruisers filling the driveway and spilling into the street. Mark parked down the street and briskly walked up the sidewalk to the front door, which was standing open.

Inside a police sergeant was sitting with Tommy's wife in their living room trying to console her. She was crying. By the look of her puffy eyes and stained cheeks, she'd been doing it for a while.

Mark entered the room.

Pat met his eyes and let out a sorrowful sob, "Mark. Tommy's gone. I can't believe it. What am I going to do?" Her voice cracked and she stood up.

He hugged her tightly for a moment. All he could come up with was, "Pat. I'm so sorry," and the words seemed useless. He'd wished he'd said nothing at all.

Other friends and local family members were making their way into the room. Given the distraction, he gently broke away from her embrace.

Trying to catch the sergeant's attention Mark stepped forward touching his shoulder, "Sergeant, can I have a moment with you."

"Sure," he said rising from the couch, "Let's talk in the yard."

The sergeant had a distinct Irish accent. He wore a tweed jacket and a matching Irish wool driving cap. The cap had a small stiff brim in front, completing the appearance he'd just come from the golf courses of the UK or from the end of some rainbow where he guarded the pot of gold. He was of average build, maybe five foot ten inches, and had bright green eyes that probably twinkled under more pleasant circumstances.

They made their way to the pool area.

The coroner was working over Tommy's body, now lying beside the pool and rolled onto his back. Tommy's jet-black hair was wet and ringed his pale, blue face. His lips were purple and his mouth was gaping: the sleep of the dead in Technicolor.

Mark didn't notice any blood or marks from a struggle that might indicate Tommy's drowning was anything but an accident. The sight was too much to handle but Mark pressed on.

“Sergeant, I'm Mark Ford, a good friend of Tommy and Pat.”

“Master Ford, I be sergeant McClarey and I'll be handlin this case for now.”

Mark went on, “I can't believe Tommy could just drown like that without something happening. He swam every day, and usually for an hour or more.”

“Well, the coroner should 'ave a cause o' death once he completes the medicals back at the morgue,” the Sergeant offered. “Dat should confirm if anything here other than a might unfortunate drownin.”

“Like what?”

“Oh, I've seen it'all, but it usually is what it looks like.”

Mark asked a few more questions. Nothing really shed any light on what had caused Tommy's demise. No signs of struggle in or around the pool. No bruising or cuts on the body. No suicide note, or any indication from Pat that Tommy was anything but happy and well adjusted.

No reason why Mark had just lost one of his best friends, and Pat her mate of over twenty years.

What a shitty day this had become, and it wasn't even lunchtime.