

DEATH AT SHIBBOLETH HILLS

A Wally Dopple Mystery

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“Golf combines two favorite American pastimes: taking long walks and hitting things with a stick.”

P.J. O'Rourke

Our foursome is traipsing across the fifteenth green when we first hear the sirens: there's Milt Harvey, a retired sawbones from up here in the town of Cottonwood who got himself elected to the post of Gunflint County Coroner; Earl Guffey, the sheriff; Bernie Perelman, my colleague from the Second District station in Milwaukee; and me, Walter Dopple, detective first grade, MPD. Perelman has been assigned to partner with me after Krystal Findley transferred to the Chief's office downtown in the wake of my shenanigans on the Weizsaker case, which got me an official commendation but brought down the wrath of the boys at the Safety Building for my unconventional tactics. The boss, Lt. Armand, has kept me on a short leash ever since, claiming that I am a millstone around his neck.

On the tenth hole I squeezed my cheeks on my drive, only to feel a twinge in my right shoulder that told me the old bursitis was acting up again, and that I'd be popping ibuprophen tablets for the next week or so. The shoulder problem has been chronic ever since I found myself pinned under the three hundred pound shoplifter who

terrorized the merchants in the Southridge mall, and who nearly got away after throwing her massive frame onto my right side before reinforcements came to my rescue. To add insult to injury, Potts and Migraine referred to me as Pancake Man in the squad room for months thereafter. The life of a city detective is not an easy one, especially when his powers of recovery are diminished by age.

As I size up an impossibly quick downhill putt the high whine of a siren reaches our green, coming from way off in the distance like a hound dog catching a whiff of possum. The sound gets louder as Doc Harvey lines up his five-footer for the third time. Doc Harvey is the only one of our foursome who would pass a body fat test, having practiced what he preaches and kept his seventy-year-old body in trim through years of medical conventions and complimentary steak dinners from drug salesmen. All that fitness has not helped his golf game, however – he is victim of a herky-jerky swing from tee to green. Concentrating on saving a double bogey on the hole, he takes two very smooth practice strokes, then stands over the ball, takes careful aim, and stabs at it as if it is a piece of meat on his plate, pulling the shot to the left of the hole.

Doc chuffs a disgusted laugh: “How can a guy miss a putt like that?” he asks.

“Pick it up,” Perelman says, rolling his eyes and stepping up to his own dicey three-footer without troubling himself about the fact that I am away. Perelman has little patience with the doc’s antics. My partner from Milwaukee is on a self-invited visit to my place on

Lake Elysium for three days of R and R. I am halfway through my vacation in the central Wisconsin wilderness, an annual ritual I have practiced since I was a boy. From where we stand on the green I can look across the lake to the far shore, nearly five miles away, and almost spot the roof of the Doppie Hilton. The lake shimmers in the late morning sun, surrounded by the greenery of a summer that has been blessed with plenty of rain and seasonable temperatures. Lake Elysium was formed almost eighty years ago when the WPA put in a dam on the Necedah River and created a twenty-two square mile recreation area, now dotted with cottages, access ramps and commercial watering holes. It would be a perfect getaway from the hurly-burly of the Milwaukee crime squad if not for the presence of the windy Bernie Perelman.

Back in the day, Shibboleth Hills Golf Club was a place where youngsters learned the game. Claude Gordon himself was the pro, a man with an interest in golf that went beyond collecting a fee for a half hour lesson. Since Deuce Froedert took over management of the course, youth play has been discouraged. No money in it, Froedert complains. Let the public courses train the nippers. He'll take over when the little savages have learned the rules and have cash in their pockets to rent electric carts.

Three years back, Froedert talked his board of directors into renting billboard space at the mile 48 exit to the Interstate, thinking that would siphon off players on their way north and west, and turn the course into a gold mine. The billboard still stands, but the results

it reaps are negligible, most vacationers tearing past at eighty miles an hour and in a hurry to reach either the Twin Cities or some mosquito-infested lake farther north.

I find it curious that I am on the course with three other lawmen this morning, seeing as how my reason for heading this direction was to get away from the cop shop in Milwaukee where I have been a detective for the past eighteen years, and not likely to move up the food chain before retirement. The Weizsaker case took care of that. The powers that be put me on administrative leave after I thumbed my nose at department regs and put my partner's life in danger. Not on purpose, certainly, for I wouldn't dream of doing anything that might harm a hair on Findley's lovely head. The fact that in the end we caught the demented psychologist Aiden Weizsaker cut little slack with the department higher-ups, who are more interested in procedure than in results. Only the reluctant testimony of Lt. Armand concerning my duty record got me a small dose of mercy from the top. That, and the fact that I was celebrated as a hero in stories about the case in the *Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel*.

"Look at this," Doc Harvey says, pulling a tee from his pocket and repairing a divot on the green. "People these days have no sense of etiquette. Here's another one. It's those lamebrains from the insurance company. They transfer here from the Chicago office and leave the rules behind." Under his breath he adds: "Damned flatlanders."

Sheriff Guffey is not paying attention to Doc Harvey's display of putting ineptitude, or to his outrage at the divot marks on the green. Guffey's substantial body is turned in the direction of the clubhouse, where the noise of the siren has ground to a halt. On his head is perched the freakish tam his son brought back with him from St. Andrews, a garish scotch plaid model with a large woolen tassel on top and the St. Andrews medallion sewn onto the front. Guffey contends that the cap is his good luck charm, a claim belied by his consistent three-figure scores. Any day now I expect the sheriff to complement the cap with a pair of matching knickers. That's the day I plan to drop out of his foursome.

"Hey Guffey," Doc calls. "It's your day off. And you're up." It's true, this is Earl's day off, but as County Sheriff he can't be blamed for his preoccupation with whatever is causing the ruckus at the clubhouse.

"When you're the captain of the ship, it's always your watch," Guffey says, as much to himself as to anyone.

After the Weizsaker case, Findley moved on to take the community relations job in the Chief's office, and Perelman and I were put back in harness together. That was late last year. Lt. Armand and the powers that be would like me to put in my retirement papers immediately if not sooner, a sentiment I share wholeheartedly. The one question that keeps me from taking the leap is: what would I do if I weren't chasing ne'er-do-wells around the streets of the South Side? Protect and serve is the only business I

know, and I don't want to end up as one of those sag-assed geezers who spend the afternoon on bar stools at the Lucky Seven and go home at six o'clock to sleep it off. Mrs. Kramer, my landlady and unofficial keeper, would have my hide.

I miss Findley, but I haven't been in touch with her since shortly after she moved on to the Kremlin downtown. Hell, it might look like I'm some kind of rejected boyfriend who can't get over her. I wouldn't want the mooks in the squad room to get that idea. Findley's assignment downtown was billed as temporary, subject to whims of the chief's personality and funding from the city fathers, and when she left the Second District she kissed me on the cheek and promised to keep in touch. But I'm convinced that I've seen the last of her, and that my final days of service to the people of Milwaukee will be at the side of goofballs like Dick Potts and Bruce Albrecht. And of course, Bernie Perelman.

We move to the sixteenth tee. Perelman slices his drive into the woods. Perelman is marginally slimmer than the sheriff and myself, but exudes an air of dishevelment that adds pounds to his overall appearance. The tail of his Hawaiian shirt has long since come out of his pants, and his Harley Davidson cap looks like it was retrieved from the sale bin at the Salvation Army store. I am no slave to fashion myself, but my partner makes me look like the man in the Hathaway shirt by comparison.

Guffey puts his drive in the middle of the fairway, about a hundred and twenty yards out. Doc Harvey lines up facing the

fourteenth fairway, then lets rip a high, arcing shot that cuts across our fairway and joins Perelman's ball in the right rough. My own drive goes left, and lands in the sand trap that divides our fairway from the fourteenth. Damn sand. This is my fourth bunker today. I've been keeping track.

Perelman gives me a smirk. "What's on your mind, Bernie?" I challenge.

He shakes his head. "Nothing, Dopple. It's just your face. It looks different since you started growing that wedge of hair on your chin."

"It's a Van Dyke, for your information. At my age, a man's got a right to look distinguished."

"Can't wait to hear what Lt. Armand is going to say about it. Distinguished is not the first word that comes to mind." I stroke my chin, feeling the bristly growth of nine days beard and wondering myself what the boss's reaction will be.

As we climb into our riding carts, here comes one of the John Deere maintenance vehicles over the swell of the seventeenth fairway, going like a bat out of hell. Todd Pritchart, the young assistant pro, is at the wheel. As he approaches I see that he is wearing the wide-eyed expression of a deer caught in the headlights of Mack truck. He screeches to a stop just inches behind our carts and begins waving his hands as he struggles for words.

“What is it, boy?” Earl Guffey rolls his bulk out of the cart and walks back to where Todd is gesturing. “What’s going on up there?”

“Lieutenant Sperkle,” Todd blurts out. He gives a quick nod and turns back toward the clubhouse. “He told me to come get you.”

“Needs my help, does he?” Guffey sticks his thumbs into his belt, apparently pleased that his Number Two is calling for assistance.

Todd shakes his head and points to Doc Harvey. “Not you, sheriff. Him.”

“Wha—“

“It’s Mr. Froedert,” Todd says, on the verge of hyperventilating. “I think he’s dead. Lt. Sperkle said to come out and get Doctor Harvey to look at the body.”

As we careen at breakneck speed toward the clubhouse, Perelman complains: "I left a perfectly good Nike ball out there. We should've picked up before heading in."

I shoot him a look I normally reserve for street toughs: "Didn't you hear what Todd said? A man may be dead up here. You figure your golf ball is more important than that?"

"Hey Wally, if he's dead he's gonna be dead for a long time. What difference would a few minutes make?"

A few minutes. Perelman would dig around in the rough for an hour and a half looking for a scuffed-up Top Flite. You'd think his golf ball was the Hope Diamond. He keeps one of those telescopic ball retrievers in his bag and has been known to spend more time ball-hawking at the banks of ponds and streams than in playing the game. And while he's impatient with delays caused by his playing partners or the foursome ahead of him, he has no problem with his own slowdowns. Bernie is the kind of person who drives everyone on the course crazy.

The clubhouse at Shibboleth Hills was built during the Great Depression, presumably by out-of-work stockbrokers with no background in carpentry. The cedar-sided building, set among a grove of overarching oak trees, appears to list to the west, as though it is following the setting sun in its journey toward the horizon. A

patina of moss covers the roof shingles, and the casement windows are fogged with a layer of grit. Once the pride of the Gunflint County golf community, the building has fallen on hard times, and the minimal membership and greens fees are not enough to support a major renovation.

As we approach the clubhouse, we find the building surrounded by police cars winking red and blue lights, looking like nothing so much as an undeclared holiday gathering. Uniformed deputies are just now stringing crime scene tape around the perimeter and talking to one another on their radios. On our side of the line, a gaggle of golfers strains to see what's happening, leaning on their carts and talking among themselves as though they're watching the Fourth of July parade on Cottonwood's Main Street.

Our golf cart screeches to a stop at the yellow barrier and Guffey jumps out to raise the tape so we can proceed.

"Hold on there dude" a voice calls from the porch. "That's a police line you're crossing. No admittance."

Guffey turns toward the porch. Now the officer recognizes him. "Oh, it's you Sheriff. Sorry, didn't see it was you at first."

Guffey gives a short growl. On the heels of the embarrassed deputy comes Lt. Merle Sperkle, Guffey's second-in-command, stepping through the doorway of the clubhouse with a Smoky Bear trooper's hat placed squarely on his head so that the brim nearly covers his line of sight. A Sam Browne belt cuts a diagonal across his chest, and his lieutenant's brass is polished to a high gloss.

Sperkle gives the offending deputy a withering look, then strides across the wide porch and down the stairs to meet us.

“Textbook case Sheriff,” he reports. “I’ll brief you inside.”

Guffey shakes his head. “How about giving us the main points before we go in?” he suggests.

Sperkle, all spit and polish, gives Harry and me a dismissive glance. “Sir, this is police business. Civilians...”

Guffey rolls his eyes. “These guys are not civilians, for goodness sake.” He nods to Perelman and me. “These two are Milwaukee PD. Whatever you got to tell me they can hear.”

Sperkle assumes a stance of parade rest. “Nevertheless sir, the manual clearly states that information is to be shared strictly on a need to know basis.”

“What manual is that, Merle?” Guffey’s neck has bloomed to a rosy red, and his jaw is set in the forward position.

“Why, the Model Policy and Procedure Manual from the National Criminal Justice Institute, of course. You’ve read it, I’m sure.”

Guffey gestures to Doc Harvey, Perelman and myself to follow along with him as he stalks past his lieutenant. “Start talking, Merle. We’re wasting time here.”

Sperkle hesitates. From our limited past encounters I have concluded that he considers himself the brains of the Gunflint County Sheriff’s Department, the resident public safety expert. It is Merle Sperkle who graduated from the vochie-tech criminal justice

course in LaCrosse, while Guffey rose through the ranks with a high school diploma and a ready handshake, then captured the voter's approval in two successive elections. It is rumored in these parts that Sperkle has the itch, and may run against his boss the next time around.

"Well sir," Sperkle says, pulling a small, leather-bound notebook from his breast pocket and flipping it open with a flourish, "the deceased is the club professional. A member found him in the men's locker room, head bashed in. It's a real mess down there." Sperkle brushes the sleeve of his shirt as if to dust off any contamination it may have picked up during his investigation.

"You're sure he's dead?" Guffey asks.

Sperkle gives a wry smile. "Oh he's dead all right. Recently. Rigor hasn't set in yet."

"Suspects?"

"None so far." Sperkle considers his response for a moment, then extends thumb and forefinger in a pistol position and says: "Could have been any number of people. The locker room is open to anyone using the course, and according to the assistant pro there were close to a hundred players out on the course this morning. Ladies league early, then a small outing from the Mordant Insurance Company."

I put in my two cents worth: "You a golfer yourself, Lt. Sperkle?"

He shakes his head. “No sir. Never could understand the attraction. Chasing a little white ball around a cow pasture seems like a waste of time.” Guffey gives him an incredulous look, and Sperkle’s face reddens. “Oh I’m sure it’s fine for some people. Just not for me.”

“Who called it in?”

“Member, on his cell phone.” He consults his notebook. “Guy named Tubbs, if that means anything. He’s still down there, waiting. Pretty shaken if I’m any judge.”

“I think we can turn off the squad lights now,” Guffey says. “We’ve attracted enough attention among the locals.”

Sperkle calls to one of the deputies and orders him to kill the lights. “I had the substation in Cottonwood send reinforcements. Until we know what we’re dealing with here. Principle of overwhelming force.”

Cottonwood is the closest town to my cottage on Lake Elysium, a flyspeck of a village that hunkers up to the junction of Interstate highways 90 and 94 on the wrong side of the Gunflint County tracks. It’s situated on a small, pie-shaped piece of land north and east of the I roads, while a much larger part of the county is north and west of that divide. The sheriff’s headquarters is maybe thirty miles from here, but a small substation is maintained in Cottonwood. It’s a one hundred and seventy mile drive to Milwaukee and a shorter distance on I-94 to St. Paul. Take the I-90

fork west and you pass through LaCrosse and on to Sioux Falls and Rapid City. The junction is a sort of a gateway to the west.

Across the I-roads from Cottonwood are the larger towns of Tomah and Sparta. To the north lie Wisconsin Rapids and Marshfield, where a famous clinic has set up shop. Cross over the Mississippi on I-90 you'll find Rochester and the even more famous Mayo Clinic.

I catch Guffey giving a quick roll of his eyes. "Merle, how many lawmen does it take to check out one dead body, do you figure?"

Sperkles pulls the brim of his trooper's hat even lower over his forehead. "Criminal justice 101, Sheriff. Marshall the resources to deal with the worst case scenario." Sperkles places his hands on his hips as if to indicate that his quote from the Model Policy and Procedure Manual settles the issue once and for all.

I give a pull on my sprouting chin whiskers. It appears that crime takes no holiday, even when a person is on vacation.

We pass through the small, dimly lit dining room, past the door that leads to the closet-sized pro shop, then down the stairs into the basement locker room, where a deputy stands guard. A pack of wide-eyed onlookers is arrayed along the cinder-block wall, gazing stupidly at a body turned face-up on the indoor-outdoor carpeting. One look at the deceased and I turn away, realizing why the spectators are dumbstruck. The head of the nearly-naked corpse is bathed in blood, still coagulating into a sticky ooze. The face is especially mutilated, the nose flattened against the cheeks and the area around the eyes a bluish green. On the shoulder, a large red-and-blue tattoo mocks the violence with which Deuce Froedert ended his life. The body is twisted so that the legs appear to be running from something at the same time the head is fending off an attacker.

Not a word is spoken as the sheriff leads his retinue into the room. An air of expectation follows Guffey as he approaches the body, trailed by Doc Harvey.

“Looks like he was pounded to a pulp with one of those meat tenderizers,” Guffey says.

Doc Harvey takes out his rimless eyeglasses and carefully adjusts the earpieces before kneeling over the body. He takes out a

stubby scoring pencil and pokes around at the victim's head and hands. He surveys the surrounding area, then scratches his head.

"The body has been moved," he pronounces.

At that, a chubby man with thinning red hair combed over his forehead steps forward. "We didn't know if he was dead or just unconscious. We were trying to help." I recognize the speaker from his commercials on the local TV. It is Max Tubbs, Cottonwood's pre-eminent Lincoln-Mercury salesman, and a member of the Shibboleth Hills board of directors.

Doc Harvey shakes his head. "You find a body in this condition and don't know if it's living or dead? What would it take to be sure?"

Another shake of the head.

"Where exactly did you find him?" Doc asks.

"Over there," Tubbs says, pointing to the space between the lockers and the shower room. "I was having a shower when I heard a noise. Didn't take it to mean much though, guys are always slamming their locker doors after a bad round. But coming out of the shower I almost tripped over him."

Guffey steps forward: "You were in the shower when it happened?"

Tubbs gestures to the doorway. "Yeah. I guess so. In there."

"And you were alone?"

Tubbs does a double take. “What do you mean, was I alone? Of course I was alone. You take me for some kind of limp-wristed nancyboy, Sheriff?”

Doc Harvey again: “What position was he in when you found him? Was he face up or face down?”

“He was sort of laying on his side, like a baby. His hands were up near his head and his knees were bent, like this.” Tubbs tries to demonstrate from a standing position.

Guffey turns to the others in the room. “Who else was here before Max moved the body?”

A long pause.

Then: “I was.” Maurice LaCaskey steps forward. LaCaskey is the owner of the local Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. “I was having a beer with Buxbaum and Vertrance up in the clubhouse, and realized I’d left my car keys in my locker. When I came in I saw Max there bending over Froedert with a towel pulled around himself. Uh, Max was the one with the towel, not Froedert.”

“Hey Maury,” Tubbs snarls, apparently embarrassed by the image of himself with a towel wrapped around his fleshy midsection. “What I was wearing is neither here nor there.”

LaCaskey raises his hands in feigned defense.

“And another thing,” Tubbs says. “I’m no stranger to emergencies. I graduated from the Red Cross CPR class. And a couple of years ago at the Red Rooster one of them tourist women

got a piece of steak caught in her throat. I gave her the Heimlich Maneuver and saved her life.”

“You told it around that you copped a cheap feel in the process, too.” LaCaskey’s revenge.

“What are we,” Guffey snorts, “telling our life stories? Let’s get back to the situation at hand. So you find a body covered in blood, laying at the door to the shower room, and you decide to move it, and thereby contaminate a crime scene.”

Tubbs’ chin rests on his chest like a boy caught writing dirty words on the school chalkboard. “I thought...I guess I wasn’t thinking, Sheriff.”

“Did you see anybody coming in or going out of the locker room?”

“I did,” a new voice says. It is Karla Hess, who stands at the door to the men’s locker room, poking her head in like a curious turkey. Karla is well known in these parts for her perennial club women’s championships, and for producing a son that nearly made it up from the Nike tour and onto the PGA. “A tall man in khaki pants,” she says. “I got a glimpse of him before he disappeared up the back stairs.”

The sheriff crooks a finger at Karla, beckoning to her to come in. She declines with a shake of the head, and points to the sign on the door: *men’s locker room*.

“You were in the hallway then, Mrs. Hess?”

“Across the hall, in the ladies locker room. I opened the door and saw somebody going up the stairs. Like I said, I only got a glimpse. Khaki pants and running shoes.”

Guffey turns to LaCaskey. “You see this mystery man, Maury?”

LaCaskey shakes his head. “Not with these eyes, sheriff. Only person I saw was Max in his towel.”

Tubbs gives LaCaskey a look that would melt a cast iron frying pan. “I was the one who called 911 on my cell phone,” Tubbs reports. “Soon’s I got my clothes out of my locker.”

Guffey takes another look around. “First thing we’re going to do,” he orders, “is to clear this place out. Everybody except law enforcement get yourselves upstairs and wait in the clubhouse until we call you. I intend to talk to every mother’s son who was on the premises when whatever happened here happened here.”

“I’ll say a novena for Mr. Froedert’s soul,” Karla Hess says. Karla is a devout member of Our Lady of the Lake church, where my own mother was once a parishioner during our summer holidays. Karla was converted to Catholicism as a young woman and has been as devoted as any natural born Child of Rome ever since. She goes to Mass every day, and word is she has a prayer kneeler in the bedroom of her big house on the hill. Her deceased husband was a district vice president at Mordant Insurance, and left her in a secure financial position before he keeled over one morning on the seventh hole and played the rest of his round at the big course

in the sky. Karla has reported receiving signs from the Lord that show her the way, and says her prayers are answered more times than can be accounted for by mere coincidence.

“You do that, Karla,” Guffey responds. “I’m sure Deuce Froedert’s soul can use all the help it can get. And while you’re at it, say one of those prayers of yours for me as well. I’m the one who’s gotta sort out this mess.”

As the others reluctantly back away from the scene of the crime, Tubbs reaches into his locker. “I think I found the murder weapon,” he says, pulling out a brown-and-white saddle shoe. “Look at this.” He turns the shoe over and reveals a sole and heel festooned with old-fashioned metal cleats, and covered in blood.

Guffey stands dumbfounded for a moment, then steps forward and wrenches the shoe from Tubbs’ grasp. “What the hell, Max? What are you doing with this in your locker?”

“Trying to keep it safe, so nobody would make off with it, Earl.”

“It’s evidence, you halfwit. Now you’ve messed with it, we’ll be lucky to get fingerprints off it, much less use it at trial.”

At the door, LaCaskey turns and says: “It’ll have Max’s fingerprints on it, that’s for sure.”

“This could be the most thoroughly messed up crime scene I’ve run across in all my thirty years of law enforcement,” Doc Harvey says. He scratches his head and takes another look around.

“I’m going to have to take the body in to the morgue and do a complete autopsy to determine cause of death.”

“Is there any doubt?” Merle Sperkle puts in. “His head is mush, and that shoe must have half his brains on it. Seems pretty clear we’ve got the murder weapon right here, along with the cause of death.”

“Pretty clear is a long way from proof positive,” Guffey says.

Doc Harvey shakes his head and removes his rimless spectacles. “Lieutenant Sperkle, you may be right and you may be wrong, but I myself am required to go by the science of an autopsy. The sooner I get the body down to the shop, the sooner we’ll know the truth of the matter.”

“Let’s take one thing at a time,” Guffey says. “Max and Maury, you get out of here, go have a cup of coffee. Merle, you keep an eye on the folks upstairs, make sure nobody leaves the premises. I can’t believe the Model Policy and Procedure Manual doesn’t say something about protecting the integrity of the scene. Sheesh.”

Sperkle’s chin raises up. “Sheriff, these people are witnesses.”

“Witnesses they may be,” Guffey says, “but they need to be somewhere where they can’t contaminate the evidence any further. Take them upstairs to the dining room. Buy them a doughnut if you need to. But don’t let any of them leave the premises. Me and Doc Harvey got some figuring to do.”

At this point, I take Perelman by the elbow and steer him toward the door.

“Wait a minute Wally,” Guffey calls to us. “You two could give us a hand with this thing here. Help interview the witnesses.”

I shake my head. “I don’t think so, Earl. I’m already in hot water with the brass in my own department. This is your territory. You give it your best shot.”

“Give me a break, Wally. You big city types got more experience with this kind of situation than a country sheriff. My world is road accidents and cottage break-ins. Give me a hand.”

“Sorry, but I don’t need the complications. One thing that does have me scratching my privates, though: metal spikes have been outlawed on golf courses for years. What was this shoe doing in the club locker room?”

As Bernie Perelman and I head down the hallway, he pulls a scorecard out of his hip pocket. “What’d you have on number fifteen, Wally?”

“What’d I have on number fifteen? We’ve got a dead body here, Perelman, and you want to know what I had on number fifteen?”

“Like I said,” Bernie repeats. “He’s gonna be dead a long time. But with a six on that last hole I just broke a hundred.”

“Yeah,” I remind him, “but we only played fifteen holes.”

“Nobody needs to know that except you and me,” Perelman says with a wink.

I close my eyes in an attempt to block Perelman's machinations from my mind. Two things bother me about the crime scene. The first is the spiked shoe. The second is the tattoo on Froedert's shoulder. It's a rendering of a rose. What's a jock like Froedert doing with a tattoo of a rose on his shoulder, I wonder.

Upstairs in the clubhouse, deputies are stationed at the doors to keep the crush of potential witnesses from taking a powder. Lt. Sperkle paces back and forth across the hardwood floor, checking his notebook and muttering an occasional comment to himself. A knot of hackers is clustered around the coffee machine, pumping Tubbs and LaCaskey for first hand observations of the carnage below. Tubbs regales the golfers with a retelling of his Heimlich maneuver heroics, and LaCaskey follows up with the part about the secret grope that followed.

Harry Perelman and I sit down at a table at the opposite end of the room. “Maybe I ought to hang around for a few days,” my partner says. “I got some theories about what may have happened down there in the locker room. I could be a big help to the sheriff.”

I blanch. “Harry, this is Gunflint County, not the south side of Milwaukee. Leave it to Guffey and his people. Don’t get yourself worked up over something that’s none of your business.” What I am thinking in fact is that I would like to get Perelman out of my hair as soon as possible. Truth be told, he invited himself up to the cottage this weekend for a round of golf and a prime rib at the Red Rooster Roadhouse. It had nothing to do with an invitation from me. When I

drive the I Road up to Lake Elysium, it's to get away from the guys in the squad, not to have them show up on my doorstep.

There's another reason I prefer to be on my own at the present moment: Sheila Mackey. Sheila Mackey is the owner of Sheila's Pies and Coffee on Main Street in Cottonwood, and the current object of my affections. I first noticed Sheila's store a couple of years ago when I got a whiff of the aroma of genuine Crisco piecrust wafting through the front screen door. My nose led me inside, to where an odor of strong coffee was added to the mix. A little bit of heaven, I thought to myself.

Then I saw Sheila working behind the counter, dressed in one of those poofy peasant blouses and a flowered apron, and my vision of heaven got a little more specific. I was smitten by Sheila's strawberry blonde hair, emerald green eyes and peaches-and-cream complexion. I put her age at some years less than my own, but a difference in age that is minor compared to the chasm between Findley and me. In the time since I first discovered the pie shop, I have learned that Sheila has a quick tongue, a winning smile and a body kept trim by long shifts in the store. Most important, my expert detecting skills have helped me to learn that she is single, and has been for almost ten years. Like me she is the victim of a failed marriage, so I'm sure she has seen enough of life to be what Music Man Harold Hill referred to as the sadder-but-wiser-girl. *"The sadder-but-wiser girl's the girl for me."* I couldn't have put it better myself.

For some time now I have been planning to ask Sheila Mackey out, to a movie in Tomah maybe, or to one of those recitals the local arts people put on in the local churches and high school auditoriums. On my way up to the lake this year I promised myself that this was the time to make my move, a move I have put off the past two summers. There have been the occasional conversational sparring matches with Sheila in the store, but breaking the dating ice with a woman is not something I do well, and the longer I wait to approach a woman, the harder it becomes.

Just when I was about to make my move, Perelman showed up on my doorstep. “Got my golf clubs and my fishing box in the trunk,” he announced. “And my traveling companion is a big bottle of Jack Daniels. It’s the weekend, Walter. Let’s have some fun.”

My own definition of fun is considerably different than Perelman’s, but I opened the door and welcomed him into the cottage. Manfred, my police dog, got the hair on his back up and sniffed the detective up and down before granting his approval. Perelman settled in within minutes, suggesting a game of gin rummy as he foraged through my freezer in search of ice cubes for his Jack-on-the-rocks. He has been presiding over our activities ever since, like a social director on a cruise boat. I am determined to send him back to his apartment in the city this afternoon, come hell or high water.

I get up from our table in the clubhouse dining room and gesture to my partner. “Come on Harry, they don’t need us here.

You'll want to be on your way back home." He hesitates. Then with a sigh of resignation he rises. As Perelman and I make for the exit, a wiry scarecrow of a man bursts through the door. The deputy on guard puts an arm out to stop him, then recants with a look of recognition.

"Oh, it's you Art," he acknowledges.

The new arrival removes his Green Bay Packers cap to reveal a bald pate ringed by a halo of short dark hair. Breathless, he twists the cap in his hands: "They said Froedert was – that he's dead. Is it true?"

The deputy nods. "It's true, all right. Murdered. The sheriff is down there now." He nods toward the door to the locker room. "Doc Harvey is with him, going over the scene."

"My God, how did it happen? How do they know it was murder?"

The deputy huffs. "I ain't seen the body myself, but they tell me his face looks like it was put through a meat grinder. Not much doubt about this one, Art."

I recognize the new arrival as Art Anthem, head groundskeeper here at Shibboleth Hills. He is visibly distraught by the news of his colleague's death, and finds the nearest chair to sit down. "I can't believe it. Deuce Froedert. Who would want to..."

He checks himself, as though the answer to his question is self-evident. The fact of the matter is that Deuce Froedert was one of those people who, the better you knew him, the more you

struggled to find something to like about him. With prospective customers he was a fawning chamber of commerce poster boy, offering a ready handshake and a slap on the back. But with those he had daily business with he could be mean as a badger taking over a groundhog hole.

All of this is pure conjecture on my part, based on local gossip picked up at Sheila's and at various watering holes in the area. In any case, the man who was the public face of Shibboleth Hills for the past ten years has come to a bad end, but by whose hand is not yet known.

Art Anthem himself would appear to have motive to do away with the club pro. For years Anthem has been under Froedert's thumb. Anthem's long-held dream is to make SHGC some kind of signature course, like the upscale layouts in Wisconsin Dells. But as general manager as well as club pro, Froedert had a habit of withholding funds for maintenance and development. Talk around the clubhouse was that Deuce was putting those funds into his own pocket, but it was a charge that neither the accountants nor the club's board of directors could prove. Meanwhile, Anthem and his crew of undocumented immigrants did the best they could to keep things up to par, as they say in golf circles, with a collection of outdated equipment and inadequate help.

Now Art Anthem gets up from his chair and walks across the room like a man in a trance. "Who opened the trophy case?" he asks of nobody in particular.

I follow his line of sight, and see what he is talking about. At the far side of the room, the glass door to the club trophy case is ajar. At first glance, it appears that the collection of statuettes and loving cups is intact. But upon closer inspection, it dawns on me that one exhibit is only half there.

Anthem approaches the case and reaches out. He grasps a golf shoe and turns to Perelman and me, holding it out like a Golden Retriever offering a tennis ball to his master.

“Where’s the other one?” Anthem asks.

“Yeah,” Perelman echoes. “Where’s the other one?”

I step forward. “I think we both know the answer to that one, Bernie.”

In the trophy case, a small plaque explains the significance of the shoe. *Shoes worn by Deuce Froedert, 1989, Sealtest Invitational, Shibboleth Hills GC*, the legend reads. That was the year Froedert set the course record. No wonder the shoe Tubbs found in the locker room has metal cleats. It’s almost twenty years old.

But who opened the case and removed the right shoe, the weapon that presumably put an end to Deuce Froedert’s unmourned-for life?

Lt. Sperkle recovers from whatever lofty daydream has been occupying his mind, steps forward and takes charge. He reaches out and takes the shoe from Anthem. "I'll handle things from here," he says, holding the shoe up to the light as if it is a rare gem. I halfway expect him to stick his nose inside, as my canine partner Manfred would do. Instead, Sperkle curls the shoe into the crook of his arm and says: "More evidence that the crime was perpetrated by an insider. Yes," he confirms his own diagnosis, "an insider." He looks around the room, a latter-day Sam Spade about to unravel the details of the crime.

"You're damn right, lieutenant," Perelman says, taking a closer look at the trophy case. "This door wasn't forced. Somebody either had a key, or hocked one from Froedert's office."

Sperkle elbows Perelman aside and takes a closer look for himself. "Like I said, an inside job." He wheels around to face the onlookers. "Maybe even somebody in this room." In unison, the onlookers take half a step backward, as though struck in the shins by a three wood.

"I expect I'll be wrapping up things in short order," Sperkle declares.

He beats a hasty retreat to the locker room stairs. Another two minutes and the county cops come rushing back up, Sperkle in the lead. Guffey lags behind, huffing and hauling his ample ass as he reaches the top of the stairs.

“All right people,” Sperkle announces. “Listen up. We’re going to interview each and every person in this room, and I’d advise you not to hold anything back. This is a murder investigation, and there will be serious consequences for anyone who plays fast and loose with the truth.” He puffs out his chest and hooks his thumbs into his Sam Browne belt.

Earl Guffey comes up alongside Sperkle and lays a hand on his shoulder. “Merle, let’s cool our jets for a minute,” he cautions. “I’m thinking we could use the state people to take a look at the scene. They may want to be part of the interviews.”

The lieutenant raises his eyebrows and curls the corner of his mouth. “Staties? What do we need with the Staties? We have the resources, we have the training. Bring those glory hounds onto the scene and they’ll push us right out of the picture.”

“Merle,” Guffey says, “I’m not so much concerned about who gets the credit as I am about finding out what happened down there in the locker room. The state people have the gizmos, and they handle a whole lot more of these cases than we do. Let’s get all the help we can.” Guffey shoots an accusatory glance in my direction.

“Help?” Sperkle pouts. “More like interference. Keep in mind Sheriff, I’m a college-trained investigator. With me heading up the

team we'll have the perpetrator in custody in short order. The shoe is a dead giveaway. All we need to do is figure out whether the murderer was wearing it at the time of the assault, or simply using it as a club."

Perelman motions to me to follow him to the far corner of the room. "It's either Tubbs or Anthem," he whispers with the certainty of a Perry Mason.

"Why's that, Bernie?"

Perelman wrinkles his forehead. "Come on, Dopple. It's always either the person who finds the body or the one who had a professional relationship with the victim. That's Investigation 101."

I'd say Bernie Perelman and Merle Sperkle went to the same criminal investigations college if I didn't know that my partner is a graduate of the school of hard knocks, like me.

"Take a look, Dopple." Bernie jabs me in the ribs with an elbow. "Who's the most nervous person in the room?" He gives an ill-disguised nod in the direction of Art Anthem the groundskeeper, now busily wringing his Green Bay Packers cap in his hands. Anthem stands apart from the rest of the onlookers, visibly shaken.

"Bernie, you've been at enough crime scenes to know that one person reacts differently than another in similar circumstances. Just because he's upset doesn't mean he did the deed. Besides, he wasn't even in the building when the murder happened."

"That's for him to prove. He could have been the person that woman, what's-her-name, saw going up the back steps. It would be

a simple matter for him to circle around and show up at the front door looking innocent as a spring lamb.”

“The testimony of the Hess woman is uncorroborated,” I remind Perelman. “She’s half a bubble off plumb herself, so I wouldn’t put too much stock in her powers of observation. Seems to me she herself was in the general vicinity of the crime scene.”

“A woman? No way, Wally. Women use poison to do their victims in. A spiked golf shoe’s gotta be a man’s weapon. Besides, did you hear what Anthem asked the deputy when he came in?”

I cock my head, waiting for the punch line.

“He asked how they know it’s murder. How the hell did he know they were calling it murder before he even stepped through the doorway? He tripped himself up there, Wally. He’s a prime suspect.”

I see my chances of getting rid of Perelman getting slimmer by the minute. It is typical for him to jump the gun and make wild accusations before the facts are in. It was a relief for me to partner with Findley for the past year and a half. She relied purely on evidence to guide her decisions. Now I’m back to spending more effort keeping Bernie on a short leash than investigating the facts of our cases.

Meanwhile, Sperkle has moved to the corner of the room and is writing furiously in his notebook. From time to time he looks up at Earl Guffey with a withering look, then goes back to scribbling. I doubt that he is writing reminders to himself to call in the State

Patrol. More likely, he's jotting down accusations to use against Earl in the spring election campaign if things don't pan out here. I hope Earl knows that he's clutching a reptile to his midsection, and that at the very least he's keeping a dose of snakebite antidote in his kit.

Guffey orders the pro shop evacuated and sends two deputies out to the parking lot to turn away tee time holders. He sets up a small table in the pro shop where he and the lieutenant will conduct their interviews, and instructs the witnesses to hang around in the dining room until he calls them.

A revived Sperkle moves to the boss's side. "We certainly don't need those two," he says, nodding in the direction of Perelman and myself. "That's one kind of interference we can do without."

Guffey rolls his eyes and turns to me. "Wally, if you're not of a mind to take a hand, I guess you and Perelman can go."

Perelman is about to object, until I give him a quick elbow to the ribs. "Thanks, Sheriff," I say, and start for the door.

On the wide front porch of the clubhouse, two of Anthem's Latino groundskeepers are engaging in a poorly-disguised attempt to be working, nosing around in an obvious attempt to pick up on what's going on inside. One is listlessly sweeping the floor while the other polishes the windows with what appears to be an oily rag. The two men could be brothers, both short and thin with broad, Hispanic faces and jet black hair. The sweeper has a bandana tied

around his forehead, while the window wiper wears a slouch-brim hat from out of a nineteen forties gangster movie.

It's no secret what these two are doing here, since their job is out on the course. It takes a certain degree of boldness for groundskeepers to come up to the clubhouse, what with their status in the minds of many members of second-class citizenship. I signal to Perelman to hold up for a minute, and approach the workers. "Hey fellas, did you see anybody coming out of the back door of the clubhouse awhile back?" I ask.

They look up from their sham duties as though distracted from a deep concentration, and give me a quizzical look. There is an awkward silence.

"Well, did you? See anyone?"

Perelman steps forward. "They don't understand you, Wally. They don't speak English."

"And I don't speak Spanish," I admit.

Perelman gives me one of his superior smiles and walks over to the men. "Lucky for you I do," he says over his shoulder. Then he addresses the workers. "*Hola.*"

"*Hola,*" they reply.

"*Como esta usted?*" Perelman says."

"*A bien,*" they reply. There is a pause as Perelman scratches his head. Then he turns and comes back to where I am waiting.

"What's the story?" I ask.

“That’s all the Spanish I know,” Perelman says. A moment later he adds: “Except, of course, for “*Dos cervezas, por favor.*”

“I don’t think that’ll do us much good,” I remind him.

Across the porch, the Mexicans are apparently sharing a joke. “*Quienes son los hombres?*” one asks the other.

“*Me parece policia,*” his partner responds.

“*Donde estan los vestidos? No son uniformes.*”

“*Como los federales de Mexico.*”

“*Son muy godos los norteamericanos.*”

“*De verdad. Por eso creo que los dos son policia.*”

All of which is Greek to me. “Come on,” I tell Perelman, frustrated and ready to get away from here. “Manfred is waiting for us.”

“Just a minute,” Perelman says. He stalks to within inches of the hat-wearing Mexican and towers over the smaller man. “What’re you two doing here? Spying? Come on *amigo*, let’s have it.”

The groundskeeper shrinks under Perelman’s glare. “*Nada,*” he says. “*No somos parte del camion, somos parte de aqui.*”

Perelman screws up his face in a frown and slaps his hands against his thighs. “This is ridiculous,” he says.

“Satisfied?” I ask. “Come on now.”

I lead my partner down the clubhouse stairs and out to the cart corral where we pick up our clubs. We head for the parking lot where my 1998 Buick Park Avenue is parked in the shade of a

massive oak tree. Inside the vehicle, Manfred wakes up and stretches his implausibly long frame. I open the door and the dog jumps out, his body wiggling like a bucket of night crawlers, and sniffs Bernie from hip to toe.

“I don’t know what it is about you that makes you so interesting,” I say. “He never sniffs at me like that.”

“Animals know who their friends are,” Bernie says. Perelman claims he has a natural affinity with animals, that he once had a cat that he taught to walk on its front legs. “It’s a natural talent,” he says, “like those whaddyacallits.”

“Idiot savants?”

“Yeah, just like that.”

Sure, Bernie. You and Dustin Hoffman.

For his part, Manfred is quite content to sack out in the car. The Buick is his personal kennel, just the right size for him to stretch out and take a nap. He especially likes to go for rides, but is also quite comfortable to park himself in the back seat while I take care of whatever business is at hand. I make sure the windows are open and there is water on the floor when I leave him alone, and that I am parked where there will be plenty of shade. It is a most comfortable arrangement for both of us.

Perelman and I load our clubs into the trunk and start back to Lake Elysium. “I don’t get why you think you need to stick your nose into every case that comes along,” I tell Perelman. “If I had my way, I’d never get the call to investigate another homicide. I’d move

up here for the summer and spend my time sitting on my porch watching the sun set over the lake.” In my mind I see Sheila Mackey sitting beside me on the porch glider, a glass of lemonade in her hand and a twinkle in her eye. As we get to know each other, I put my arm around her and she lays her head on my shoulder.

Perelman interrupts my daydream with a huff. “What kind of life would it be, Wally? Stuck in hicksville with no cable TV, looking out at the lake all day? Without the Department, guys like you and me are nothing. Without the Department, we’re just a couple of broken down geezers spending too much time at Dungy’s Dugout and pulling our peckers when the lights go out. With the Department, we get respect. We carry firearms. We drive cars with light bars and sirens. Without the Department, we’d be driving Dodge Neons and getting the sign of the ram from young punks on the street. Is that what you want? Is that how you see the rest of your life?”

“Wouldn’t bother me one bit.” I was hoping for an early retirement window last year, but the county board never opened that porthole. Even so, it’s getting so I can count my remaining time on the force in terms of months.

With a look of irritation, Perelman changes the subject back to the golf course killing. “Maybe I ought to stick around for awhile. Take some vacation days. We could be a big help to Guffey.”

“Whoa,” I caution. “I don’t think that would be such a good idea. Not to be an inconsiderate host, but we’re not getting involved

in this mess. Didn't you hear what I told Guffey? I'm already in deep doodoo with the Department back home. I'm here on vacation, Bernie."

I feel Perelman giving me the eye, sizing me up from the passenger seat. "I think I know the trouble, Wally. I think you're getting old. Hell, you used to be the first one to want to sink your teeth into a case. Remember how we cracked the Kinnickinnic Avenue theater murders case? You were a pit bull on that one." He shoots a quick look at the back seat, where Manfred has resumed his dozing.

Manfred is a dog of uncertain ancestry, a pound puppy whose rescuers at the Humane Society reported him as a cross between a Boxer and a Great Pyrenees. The vet I've been taking him to since he took up residence in my flat sees traces of both Mastiff and St. Bernard in his droopy jowls. He is the Fruehauf Trailer of dogs, long and tall and built to carry heavy loads. If Manfred were a person, he'd be a swarthy-faced and whiskey-voiced Eastern European of some sort. There are also times when I see a distinct likeness to the actor Sidney Greenstreet.

"Remember the time we went up to Minnesota to bring back Eely Dan Doherty?" Perelman blathers on. "On our way back with the little geek in tow we stopped at the Norske Nook for a piece of lemon pie. Eely Dan claimed he had to take a pee, and escaped through a window in the men's room. We spent all night looking for him, and finally found him hiding in the trunk of our squad."

Perelman laughs at the retelling of the botched extradition, and slides down in his seat to savor the memory.

On my side of the Buick's bench seat, I am focused on helping my partner pack his things for the return trip to Milwaukee and the Second District Station. In one small corner of my mind, I am also turning over the words of the brown-skinned groundskeeper. "*No somos parte del camion,*" he said. "*Somos parte de aqui.*" Seemed awfully nervous about something. I stroke the emerging growth on my chin as if it will provide answers. All I get is a twinge of pain from my newly-injured shoulder.

I'm bumping down the gravel road to the Dopple family cottage in the Buick with Perelman riding shotgun and Manfred leaning out the rear window, picking up an array of smells I can't even imagine, when my cell phone rings. It's Guffey, sounding like he's finished last in a one-hundred-yard dash.

"The state dicks are here," he reports, "and they want to talk to you."

"Me?" I reply. "What for? It's no business of mine."

"Search me," he says. "They sent a full posse out from the district station. Guys in suits. Techies with blood kits. The whole schmear. When they found out two Milwaukee detectives had been at the scene, they told me to get you back here pronto."

"How'd they find out we were there, Earl?"

There's a pause on the other end of the line. "Sperkle, I think. Yeah, it must have been Merle who told them."

Given his earlier opinion of us, I can picture what Sperkle must have laid on the Staties. Jay-zuss. Bad enough I am saddled with Perelman, now I'm about to get myself into a knot with the whiskey state boys.

“Sounds to me like they just want to pull my honker,” I say.
“A game of professional knob jockeying.”

“Still,” Guffey says. “I was the one who asked them up here.
Seems like I ought to do what I can to cooperate.”

“All right then. We’ll be there in a few.” I flip the phone shut
and slide into a U-Turn in front of the cottage, thinking how I was
oh-so-close to putting Perelman on the I-road back to the city.

“What’s going on?” my partner asks, as if he doesn’t already
know.

“The folks from the state want to talk to us.”

“Ahh.” A sly smile creases his mouth. “I knew it. We’re back
on the case.”

Back at the golf course, we find a couple of black Ford SUVs
parked on the lawn in front of the clubhouse. Far be it for the state
crime hotshots to use the parking lot like everybody else. Guffey
introduces us to the two spooks in charge, mid-thirties types in
black suits. In this heat I’m betting those stylish dark pants are hot
enough to make their shorts stick to their butts. But not a drop of
sweat is visible on their foreheads.

Lieutenants Stevens and O’Connor do not do us the courtesy
of a handshake, merely nodding dismissively behind their dark
eyeglasses as we are introduced. Pretty much what I expected.
Along with them are a couple of technicians and a gangly young
man in a ponytail hairdo who Sperkle points out is a profiler.

The situation is getting out of hand. Now that the big shots from state are on the scene, Merle Sperkle follows them around like a puppy dog, trying to impress them with his expertise. It appears that his reluctance to call them in the first place has faded like a coat of paint during an Arizona summer, and all he wants now is to earn a few crumbs of respect. In return, the crime lab boys ignore him, trying their best to get him off their pant cuffs with meaningless errands.

After letting us cool our heels for half an hour, Stevens and O'Connor invite Perelman and me into the clubhouse to speak our piece on what we saw. Stevens takes me into the pro shop while O'Connor steers Perelman to the dining room. As we part company, I'm hoping my partner doesn't say anything that will get our tits in a wringer. Best he keep his ideas on Criminal Investigation 101 to himself.

"So," Stevens begins. "Word is you're the guy who mucked up the Weizsaker case back in the city." He sucks on his eyetooth and gives a twitchy shake of the head.

"Got a commendation for my work in that case," I respond, wondering how the hell he got background on me so fast. "Mayor's Award, Chief's Medal, the whole shootin' match. Coverage by all the local TV stations."

He nods. "Going out on a high note, are you? Grapevine says you're ready to pull the plug and spend the rest of your days at the senior center."

“This some kind of employment interview?” I ask, knowing that it’s Steven’s way of putting himself in the catbird seat. “I don’t recall putting in a job application.”

He smiles and opens his Dell laptop. “Let’s get started, then. You were where when the body was found?”

“The sixteenth tee, as I recall. With the coroner and the sheriff himself.”

For the next forty-five minutes we dance around my belated part in the discovery of Deuce Froedert’s body. Like a good student of the National Criminal Justice Institute’s Model Policy and Procedure Manual, Stevens asks each question from half a dozen different angles, presumably to check out my reliability and candor. His manner is distant and officious, never once cracking a smile at my attempts at humor, recording every word on his computer. When at last he is satisfied that I have no remarkable information to offer, he closes out the program and clicks the machine shut.

“Leave a number where you can be reached with Sheriff Guffey,” he says as a kiss off. “We may need your – expertise – as we move forward.” On his lips, the word *expertise* sounds like a dead possum being dragged through the mud.

I find Perelman waiting for me on the porch, rocking back and forth in a cane-back chair. “Geez Wally, what’d you do? Give him the story of your life? They only had me in there for ten minutes.”

“Sure Harry. You probably gave them all they need to put a quick wrap on the case. Me, I tend to have more trouble expressing myself.”

“Like I told that O’Connor fella,” he says with a wave of his hand. “It’s Investigation 101. The perpetrator is either the one who finds the body or the one who has a business relationship with the vic. Hell, there’s clues everywhere. A spiked golf shoe. An unlocked trophy case. A man in the shower while the murder is going down. Wouldn’t have needed the state guys for a case as simple as this. It’s a slam dunk. ”

A slam dunk. Sure. And Perelman is in line to become a professor at the police academy. And I have a date to spend the weekend with Michelle Pfeiffer.

As we pass the starter’s shed, Manfred tumbles out of the Buick and comes to greet us, his body waving like August wheat. I give him a chuck under the chin and he falls in at my side, heading back toward the parking lot. “If all your slam dunks came true, Perelman, you’d be an inspector by now.” I turn my head for a reaction, and realize that Perelman is gone. One minute he was by my side, the next I spy him getting into a vacant golf cart, turning the ignition key, and giving it the gas.

“Come on Wally,” he calls. “Let’s take a look at the grounds buildings.” He steers in a wide turn and pulls up beside me.

“Bernie, you’re insane. It’s not our job to unravel what happened here. Leave it to Guffey and the state boys.”

“I’m going, Walter. You coming or not?”

I hesitate for a moment, then hurry around to the passenger side of the cart and jump in. Better to know what Perelman is up to than to be left in the dark. We take off down the eighteenth fairway, toward a small wooded area that conceals the buildings where the club’s maintenance equipment is stored. Manfred lopes easily by our side, happy to get the exercise.

We pull up amid a group of three small pole barns, each carrying a Cleary Buildings logo over the door. As we approach the first of the sheds, Manfred sniffs at rakes and hoes left out front, and follows us inside. “Hallo” Perelman calls, and we wait for a reply. With none forthcoming, we take a look around. Two large Toro mowers dominate the space, with a collection of smaller hand mowers and roto-rooters scattered about. In the corner is a small office space, featuring a desk with an overhead lamp and two metal file cabinets, circa World War II. Perelman checks out the papers on the desk and begins flipping through the files in the cabinets, without finding anything of interest. Manfred continues a listless inspection of the floor, while I wait impatiently for the charade to end.

We move on to the second building, in which several dozen golf carts are neatly stored, lined up in ranks and ready for the club’s next big event. The space is pristine, so much so that even Manfred gives it only a cursory examination before following Perelman on to the third building.

What greets us here surprises me, not for the presence of any revealing evidence but for the lack of same. The building is empty. Not a rake, not a mower, not a golf cart in sight. Perelman and I stand inside the front door and look at each other in bafflement. “Nothing,” I finally say. “Not a scrap of paper on the floor.”

Perelman shakes his head. “What do you make of it, Wally?”

“Dunno, Bernie. Maybe it’s brand new and they haven’t gotten to filling it with junk yet.”

“Naw. It’s at least a few years old. Weeds all around the place.”

If we are puzzled by this empty space, Manfred is entranced. He nuzzles the floor along each of the walls, his tail twirling like the blade of a helicopter and his throat grinding out low moans.

“It’s a marijuana bin,” Perelman says. “They moved the stash the minute they realized the cops were on their way.”

“It’s a stretch to go from an empty building to a marijuana bin, Bernie. The place could have been used for anything. Or for nothing. Maybe just planning for the future.”

Perelman gives me a snide lip. “The future. Hell Dopple, doesn’t look to me like this place has much of a future. Did you see the shape the greens are in?”

“Come on, we’re getting out of here. Whatever the case may be, it’s none of our concern. Let Guffey and the state boys take care of it.” I take him by the elbow and guide him back to the golf cart.

We pile into the Buick and lurch back to the cottage, Perelman yakking all the way about his alternative theories of the crime, even though he is nothing more than a bystander. Next comes another call on my cell phone. “Hello,” I say in my curt policeman’s voice, annoyed by the interruption.

“Dopple? That you?” It’s Lt. Armand, major domo of our Second District Police Station. Shit.

“Yeah boss. It’s me.”

The boss launches into a snit, using his disgusted lieutenant’s voice. “What the hell you doing up there Dopple?” he fumes. “Can’t you keep your nose clean even when you’re on vacation?”

“Me? My nose is totally clean, boss. Golf during the day, sitting on my porch in the evening. Couldn’t be more sanitary.”

“Then why the hell am I getting calls from the State Patrol to request professional courtesy? Why would those mooks ask that you be detached and assigned to the Gunflint County Sheriff’s office in a homicide case? What the devil is going on up there?” He sputters into the phone and I back my ear away from the cell to avoid his ire. Since the Weizsaker case, the Louie claims that if he goes to the big police station in the sky before his time, it will be all my doing.

He puts it this way: “Dopple, if I live through your sunset years in the Department I’ll put a plaque on my office wall congratulating myself on surviving the ordeal.”

Lt. Armand has become something of a drama queen around the squad room in recent months. That may have to do with his

literary aspirations. Last fall, Potts and Perelman dug around in his wastepaper basket and discovered that the Louie is writing cop novels in his spare time, with a lieutenant resembling himself as the hero.

“Like I said boss,” I reply to his inquiry about my present situation, “I was on the golf course this morning when something happened to the pro here at Shibboleth Hills. Nothing to do with me you understand, but Sheriff Guffey was in my foursome...”

“I give a rat’s ass about your golf game, Dopple. “We’ve got our own little crime wave here in the city. I don’t appreciate having one of my detectives yanked away to the boonies when we’re up to our ears in our own work.”

“I understand completely, boss. What can I do to make it better?”

“Don’t crack wise with me, Dopple. I’ve got a caseload on my desk that would sink the Queen Mary, and I’m in no mood for funny business. Professional courtesy among departments, the Chief says. If it were up to me I’d tell them to stick their professional courtesy up their butt holes.”

“The state cops say anything about Perelman?”

“Perelman? Who the hell would want that doofus on a murder case? No, they didn’t say anything about Perelman. Tell him to get his raggedy ass back here as fast as his wheels will carry him. We’re short-handed now, thanks to you, and we’ll need every hand we can get. Even Perelman.”

“You want to have a word with Bernie?”

There’s a click on the other end of the line. Guess the answer was no.

I see myself spending the rest of the summer being bounced between Stevens and O’Connor like a ping-pong ball, with occasional side trips to the likes of Merle Sperkle. The prospect is not pleasing. On the other hand, the prospect of sitting on the porch at the cottage and watching the loons dive for minnows among the cattails is not altogether disagreeable. And then there’s Sheila’s pie shop in downtown Cottonwood. Professional courtesy among departments has its compensations.

I sit in blissful contentment at my customary table near the front window of Sheila's Pies & Coffee. The sun shines full through the plate glass, casting a light the color of melted butter over the serving area where the owner works diligently on her creations. Under the table at my feet, Manfred sniffs first at the air and then the floor tiles, his nose fully engaged in the myriad scents that permeate the room. Soon a thick strand of drool hangs from his jowls. I pull out a handkerchief and wipe my partner's chin. He sighs and returns to his olfactory examination of the freshly baked strawberry-rhubarb pie.

Three hours ago I sent Perelman packing down the I-road under the categorical orders of the boss, and I am now working up the courage to ask Sheila to join me on a road trip to Wisconsin Rapids for the weekly band concert. I believe she would enjoy a music event, because she sings in the choir at the Cottonwood United Church of Christ. Sheila's participation at Sunday services brings me out whenever I'm up at the lake cottage. My church attendance has been limited to weddings and funerals ever since

teenage, when I left the spiritual care of my mother's church on Lincoln Avenue.

As I finish off a generous portion of peach cobbler, Earl Guffey enters the shop. He hitches up his gun belt and takes a seat across from me.

"So you talked to the Staties and they got to my bosses in the city," I say. "And now I'm under your keeping for the duration. That about sum it up?" I am barely able to disguise the sense of treachery I feel has been done to me by my longtime friend.

Guffey shrugs. "You make it sound like I did something underhanded, Dopple. I got a homicide on my hands. We don't get all that many homicides around here. You want a sheriff with experience in murder cases, go next door to Adams County."

I lay my fork on my plate and sigh. "Don't know why you need me, Earl. You got Sperkle. You got the state. They've got it all over me when it comes to making a case. The crime lab geeks will scavenge every speck of evidence, relevant or not."

Guffey shakes his head. "The state boys will be here only as long as they get their names in the newspapers. Soon's the publicity wears off they'll move on to something sexier. I've dealt with them before. They're great with the science, but they don't have a whole lot of stamina."

I myself noticed a mobile unit from one of the Eau Claire TV stations humping down the road toward Shibboleth Hills as I beat a

retreat to the cottage. “Stamina? Hell, the media people have about as much stamina as a firecracker on the Fourth of July.”

“That’s exactly my point, Doppie. They come in and stir folks up, and as soon as they’ve got a hornet’s nest going they take off. People *believe* what they see on TV and read in the papers. Some of these stories, I wonder if the reporter was at the same event I was at.”

“It’s what you signed up for when you filed your papers to run for office, Sheriff. You’re an elected official, which means you’re fair game for reporters.”

Guffey removes his billed cap with his right hand and swipes his left hand across his balding pate with a red-and-white handkerchief. He shakes his head. “Doppie, you don’t know the half of it. I got more trouble than a hooker at a Baptist deacon’s convention.” He falls to silence, his gaze fixed on the remains of my peach cobbler.

“What is it partner?” I ask, aware for the first time that my friend is right and truly upset.

“It’s not just the Froedert thing. The district attorney’s got me running in circles. My jail is full and my men are overworked, thanks to the DA and his pals at Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Those jokers have filled the Gunflint County Jail to overloaded with illegal immigrants. My lockup has become a Mexican Hilton.”

Guffey explains that it's a stepped-up federal crackdown on incarcerated illegals that has swamped his jail facilities, not to mention the county's court system. The local DA decided some months ago to report all illegals in the system to the ICE people, who then have the option to hold the perps for deportation proceedings.

"That got the whole Latino community in an uproar," Guffey reports. "They're worried that they could be sent back to their home countries for offenses like drunk driving or disorderly conduct." The response to the DA's policy has been for illegals to demand jury trials for the smallest offense, resulting in the system being clogged with cases that ordinarily would be pleaded out.

"Up until the DA and ICE got together only a few of those cases ever went to court," Guffey says. "Now public defenders are dropping out of the program because they can't handle the case load, and my deputies are putting in so much overtime that it's affecting their home lives." He shakes his head again. "And the holds lead to even more complications."

Like a drunk pouring out his soul at an AA meeting, Guffey goes on to explain that because deportation is more likely as the feds crack down, crimes like domestic abuse are less likely to be reported. Victims are not reporting crimes to the police for fear family members will be sent home. "There are victims sitting in their houses wondering if they should call us, and afraid that if they do they'll lose a wage-earner."

“What’s in the DA’s head, to take over the job of the federal government?” I ask. “Keeping small-time offenders in jail must cost a bundle.”

“Oh, the feds reimburse us the room and board cost for the prisoners we hold for them,” Guffey says. “But the money sure isn’t worth the trouble. Hell, some people have even got the idea that the Sheriff’s Department is part of a plan to round up illegals. Gus Rodriguez from the Hispanic Center in Sparta is up here three times a week, checking to make sure we’re not overstepping our bounds.”

He sighs. “Now, on top of all that, I got my first murder case in four years. It’s a bucket of worms, Dopple. A real bucket of worms.”

All of a sudden I feel guilty. “I guess I’ve been a bit hard on you, Earl. I didn’t realize. What can I do to help?”

“Right now I need somebody I can trust. Somebody I can talk to. Considering that we started out with a messed up crime scene, the lab people have come up with a fair amount of evidence, but physical evidence alone doesn’t solve cases. What I need is a plausible theory of the crime.”

“I’ll be glad to hold your hand, but I’d feel a lot more comfortable if I knew more about the players.”

He holds a ham hand up to his chest, fingers splayed apart. “The suspect list is as long as my arm. Given Froedert’s reputation, you could say that nobody within a forty-mile radius of the golf course is above suspicion. My first thought was that this could be

one of those cases like *Murder on the Orient Express*, where everybody takes a swipe at our late lamented golf pro with that old spiked shoe, so that we'll never be able to tell for certain which blow killed him."

"Interesting notion. The man had a truckload of enemies, and they all snuck down into the locker room and took a whack at his head. You may want to rethink that particular theory, Earl."

"I said that was my first thought. Then Doc Harvey's report came back. Turns out it wasn't the bloody mess around Froedert's face that killed him."

"What, then?"

"When Doc got the body onto the examining table he found a major fracture at the base of the skull. It wasn't the golf shoe that killed Deuce Froedert. It was blunt force trauma. The face bashing was administered post mortem, as though the attacker wanted to do more than just kill Froedert. He wanted to obliterate him."

My thoughts turn back to a particular case on Milwaukee's South Side some years ago, in which practically every bone in the victim's body was broken. He was found in an alley on South 16th Street, and we assumed he'd been hit by a garbage truck or some similar type of vehicle. Turned out he was run down by his own wife in the family SUV. The wife found him fooling around with a waitress at Conejitos restaurant. Under interrogation she admitted that she enjoyed rolling over her unfaithful husband so much the

first time that she steam-rolled him several more times for the pure pleasure of it.

“Let me run a few things by you Wally,” Guffey says.

I slump back in the booth. “Earl, we been pals for how long? Thirty years? I value your friendship. But whatever happens, I got to keep my nose clean up here. I’m this close to pension, and I can’t screw up.” The heat I took in the wake of the Weizsaker case was enough to singe the hair in my nostrils, and I suspect my lieutenant has had just about enough of my independent methods. Lieutenant Armand is a big believer in regulations, which is how he got to be the boss of the Second District Detective Squad.

Even so, I’m obliged to listen to what Guffey has to say. I give Mona Rickert, the wiry post-teenage waitress, the high sign to bring another cup of coffee for the sheriff, and ask Earl if he’d like a slice of this very nice peach cobbler that I have on my plate. Would a squirrel like to live in a hickory tree, he asks.

Guffey lays out the case background to date. “First of all, Froedert was not what you’d call a humanitarian. His wife checked into the local clinic on three separate occasions with bruising on her face and back, and once with a broken arm. She told the medics that the injuries were the result of accidents, but everyone in town knows that Froedert had a violent streak.”

We had just such a case in the Second District not two years ago. Long-suffering wife finally had enough of her husband’s drunken rages and bonked the old man with a ball peen hammer

while he was sleeping it off. Jury took half an hour to find her innocent.

I daub up the last crumbs of the peach cobbler from my plate. “On my way over here I passed Max Tubbs’ Lincoln/Mercury dealership,” I say. “And that got me to thinking: wasn’t it Tubbs who led the move last year to take Shibboleth Hills private? Wasn’t he butting heads with Froedert over the future of the club? That’d give him a motive, along with means and opportunity.”

“Sure would,” Guffey says. “On the other hand, we had a call to Screamin’ Steve’s Roadhouse last week involving the late golf pro. A couple of the lowlifes who hang out there said Froedert beat them up with a pool cue. Steve Gunderson and Deuce Froedert have been at it ever since the deceased announced that the golf course was expanding its nineteenth hole entertainment to include waitress service and bands on weekends. Gunderson sees that as an intrusion on his livelihood.”

Mona Rickert delivers Guffey’s peach cobbler. He gives it a long, lewd look before digging in. “This latest fight between these two local bad boys was smoothed over in the end without a call to our office,” he continues, “due to the fact that everyone involved appeared to have had too much to drink. But it shows that our corpse was a man of many enemies. Hell, it could even have been his wife who did the deed.”

“I wouldn’t put too much money on that horse,” I caution. “Ann Froedert isn’t the kind of person to resort to violence.” Then I

remind myself that both the wife with the SUV and the one with the ball peen hammer were rather shy and retiring types.

“The point is,” Guffey says, “we got a list as long as my arm. Screamin’ Steve, Max Tubbs, Maury LaCaskey, even Art Anthem. Deuce Froedert was the kind of guy who was born to hang. Been up to no good since he was ten years old.”

“One thing that seems out of place,” I say. “Froedert had that big red rose tattooed on his shoulder. Seems out of character for a dude like him.”

Guffey laughs. “Rose Malek. She was Froedert’s main flame in high school. He went to Minnesota to mutilate his body with the tattoo, in a show of everlasting love. Everlasting turned out to be the second semester of their senior year, after which she took up with a halfback from the university football team down in Madison. Ann came along afterward, and pleaded with Deuce to have the damned tattoo removed for half a dozen years. I got the idea he kept it just to piss her off.”

I suck on my tooth and stir a teaspoon of sugar into my coffee. “You got another problem here Earl,” I offer as Mona stops by to refresh our coffees.

“What problem is that, partner?” Guffey asks.

“Your right hand man. Sperkle. He’s a piece of work, in case you haven’t noticed.”

Guffey nods. “Oh I’ve noticed all right. Got a right high opinion of himself and not afraid to share it.”

“Going so far as to object to bringing the state boys into the investigation. That’s hubris, my friend.”

Guffey forks up a generous helping of cobbler and balances it on his fork. “I know what people are saying, Wally. Merle’s the one who runs the show in the department. Some folks think I should come down on him, show him who’s boss. But frankly, I kind of like things the way they are. Merle takes care of the detail work, which leaves me to go golfing with guys like you, and do parades and ribbon cuttings around the county. Let Sperkle do the grunt work. I’ll take care of kissing babies on the cheek and having their mothers give me their votes at the ballot box.”

“You’re playing Russian roulette, Earl. That man is out to upstage you.”

“I’m well aware of that. On the other hand, Merle is a first class police officer and I find it useful to take advantage of his skills while I do the necessary politicking around the county. Come election time, Sperkle will find out that people vote for a person they like. That’s me. Proper procedure isn’t nearly as important as sensibility.”

Silence descends over our table while Guffey enjoys his coffee and peach cobbler. The sun has traveled low in the sky, and Sheila Mackey is singing a few bars of a song from a Broadway musical with which I am only vaguely familiar. In his special place under the table, Manfred has begun snoring. It is a peaceful hour, and except for Earl Guffey’s presence across from me, I could sit here

for the rest of the day and breathe in the aroma of fresh baked goods.

As if on cue, my cell phone rings.

“Wally. How’re things going out there?” It’s Perelman. “The state cops confirm my diagnosis?” Before he left, my partner made it perfectly clear that his candidate for the man Karla Hess saw beating a retreat up the back stairs of the clubhouse was Art Anthem. Perelman’s evidence for this shaky theory is that when Anthem came into the dining room later he was wearing khaki pants. I reminded Perelman that he and I were also wearing khakis. ‘But we were with the sheriff and the coroner,’ he said, missing the point entirely.

“Harry, I can’t talk right now. Real busy here.”

“Have they talked to the greens keeper? Have they grilled him?”

“You left here what? Three hours ago? And you think a murder investigation can come up with answers by simply grilling a greens keeper like a salmon steak, and putting an end to the whole mystery? Harry, go down to Dungy’s and have a beer.”

“I am down at Dungy’s having a beer. Potts and Maigraine are here too. They want to know how you finagled an extra week in the Northwoods.”

“Tell them I’ve got a thing going with the Chief’s wife. Gotta go now.”

I flip the phone shut, and Perelman disappears. Across the table, Guffey is grimacing. "I might as well have stayed on the course and finished our round for all the information I picked up in the interviews," he says. "Nobody saw nothing. Nobody heard nothing. Nobody's saying anything. Like those three monkeys in the picture. Just like you, Dopple. Nobody wants to get involved."

Seeing Guffey in this condition wears away at my indignation over having been dropped in the middle of the Froedert mishmash. "Hell Earl, what do you need from me?"

"Moral support. That's what I'm asking for. Like you said, I'm not going to get it from Sperkle. For starters, I'd like you to go through the transcripts of our interviews with the yahoos at the scene. Turns out they're a kind of who's who of the Shibboleth Hills membership. See if anything in those transcripts jumps out at you. What I'm looking for here is motive strong enough to kill for."

At my feet, Manfred heaves a major sigh. I am inclined to join him. Instead, I turn my hands palms up. "Okay then Earl. Count me in."

Guffey slides out of the booth and gives me a pat on the back. "Thanks, pal. I'll get the papers over to you at the cottage tonight. Anything at all trips your trigger, be sure to let me know."

He hitches up his pants and walks out of the store, leaving me to take care of the bill for two peach cobbles.

The moment Earl Guffey clears the doorway, I call Mona Rickert over to my booth. “Let me ask you something,” I say, fiddling with the packaged sugar envelops in the small bowl on the table. “What does Sheila think of me?”

Mona lets off chewing the wad of gum that’s lodged permanently in her left cheek. “What does she think of you? Don’t know that she has any particular opinion of you, Wally. You’re a customer.”

I rephrase the question. “What I mean is, do you think she’d consider going out with me? Do I measure up?”

Mona forces a high giggle. “Are you kidding? In a town this size, how many eligible men do you think there are running around loose?” She pats her expanding stomach. “That no good Brock Palmer, for example. He plants this little fellow in my belly and then takes a job with a long haul trucking company. Haven’t seen hide nor hair of him since.”

Mona has aspirations of becoming an astrophysicist. For the moment, however, that plan is on hold, since she got herself pregnant by one of the Palmer boys. She is currently working out

the details of how she can get enrolled in the University at LaCrosse with a baby on her hip.

“Sorry for your loss,” I say. “But getting back to Sheila: think she’d consider me acceptable company for an evening out?” In the back of my mind I’m thinking of the humiliation if Sheila were to turn me down. I’d never be able to show my face in the pie store again, and that would be a terrible loss.

“Only one way to find out,” Mona advises. “Why not give it a whirl?”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

As Mona makes off with an armload of dishes and silverware, I hike myself up, slip out of the booth, and amble up to the counter. Sheila is at work creating a piecrust with her rolling pin, her hair done up under a chignon and her arms covered in a fine layer of flour to the elbows. She is wearing a red-and-white-striped apron tied in back over a cotton dress that exposes the backs of her knees, a feature I find to be most attractive. I clear my throat to get her attention, but she is concentrating on rolling a piecrust to her exacting measurements. I squeeze out a louder harrumph, and she turns. A wisp of hair falls over her forehead as she recognizes me, and she comes over to the counter, smiling. My palms are becoming moist as I force my own smile and give a dumbass wave.

“Hi Sheila,” I say, my mind having gone on vacation for the moment.

“Hello Walter,” she replies. “How have you been?”

I nod. "I been pretty good. I was just talking with Sheriff Guffey, and he said today's peach cobbler was the best he's ever had."

"You'll have to thank the sheriff for me."

"Of course, I agreed with him." I try to look directly in those emerald green eyes, but I can hold her gaze for only a moment. "You and I, we've known each other for awhile now," I finally mutter.

She nods. "Yes, we have."

"Must be three, four years now. I was passing by one day when I got a whiff of the aroma of piecrust floating out your open front door. I remember my nose led me inside." I do not mention the fact that when I saw Sheila behind the counter my vision of heaven broadened.

"It's a little trick we play on unsuspecting passers-by," Sheila says. "An open door draws customers in like bears to honey."

Clever girl, I think. "We've been in touch ever since, haven't we?"

"Yes we have."

"I've been coming out to the UCC church, to hear you sing in the choir."

"You come to church on my account?" I detect the hint of a blush on her cheeks.

"I can pick out your voice." Sheila's alto tones are the most beautiful sounds I've heard since I first witnessed Manfred's bays of

distress in the storage room of the Second District Station where Sergeant Wray had locked him up. Sheila has a winning smile and a body kept trim by long hours hustling pies and coffee in the shop.

Sheila looks at me as if searching for the point of this conversation. It's now or never. I summon up two hundred thirty pounds of courage and take the leap. "You ever go to the band concerts up in the Rapids?"

She tilts her head to one side. "I've been known to."

"I was wondering if you'd like to – you know, go with me sometime. They do a respectable job for a bunch of small town musicians. We could stop for a bite to eat and make an evening of it."

She brings the back of her hand up to brush the thread of hair from her forehead and leaves a smudge of white behind. "Why Walter, you're asking me out," she says in a high, almost giddy tone. In this instant, I cannot determine whether she is pleased, or whether she is merely having some fun with me.

"I guess I am at that," I reply, checking out a flake of piecrust on the counter.

She places a warm hand over my own and says: "I would love to go to a band concert with you. Sounds like fun."

Now the smile on my face is genuine: "Really? You'd go out with an old policeman like me?"

"Walter, we're practically the same age, you and I. You're not so old that you can't entertain a small town baker lady for an

evening.” In fact, Sheila must be almost ten years my junior, and bright as a sunrise on an April day.

I laugh. Manfred lifts his head from the floor beneath the booth that I have lately vacated, as though he has never heard a Dopple chuckle before. And maybe that’s a fact. Seems I haven’t been all so jolly of late, up until this moment facing the pie lady across her counter, entranced by the blot of flour cosmetic on her forehead and looking forward to an actual date with a woman for the first time since my sordid affair with Sally Wray of the MPD Second District. The evening I spent with Krystal Findley at the Performing Arts Center some nine months ago doesn’t count as a date, since that was part of an assignment.

“Would this Thursday suit you?” I ask.

“Thursday.” She touches her index finger to the corner of her mouth and looks up at the ceiling. Then she frowns. “Oh dear. This coming Thursday I have the rally for immigration rights on the square,” she says.

My hopes sink. I nod and am about to bolt for the door when Sheila says: “Could I persuade you to join us for the demonstration? We’re going to stand up for the poor and oppressed.”

The poor and oppressed? Is this something I want to get involved in, I ask myself? Seems I’m getting roped into situations that are way beyond the scope of a vacation at the Dopple family retreat. Then I look into Sheila’s expectant eyes and the argument

turns heads-to-tails. “The poor and oppressed,” I repeat. Sounds like a noble cause.”

“Oh it is, you can be sure of that.”

“You wouldn’t happen to be Latino yourself,” I ask, still confused on the point of how the object of my affections has taken up with this demonstration as her business.

She gives me a gentle slap on the forearm. “Of course not, Walter. I’m Norwegian through and through.”

“Then what’s your particular interest in immigration rights? What do you have in common with these folks?”

She looks at me as though I’ve stepped over an invisible line. “We’re all in this together, don’t you see? We’re all part of humanity, and we ought to be treating each other better than the government is treating our brown brothers and sisters. That’s what we have in common.”

In my own line of work the mission is to pick up on the differences in people, separate the good from the bad, the virtuous from the evil. This idea of everybody being in the same boat is new to me, and I take a moment to digest it. Failing at that effort, I return to the original subject. “And maybe we could go up to the Rapids for the band concert next week?”

She laughs. “Next week would be perfect.”

Meanwhile, I’m on the hook for an immigration rights rally. Doesn’t sound like a very good opportunity for romance. Still, it would get me one step closer to knowing Sheila better. “I could pick

you up and we could go together.” I try to keep the disappointment from my voice.

“Shall we say five o’clock? You can help me with the placards.” She raises a flour-covered index finger and points to my chin. “The beard is very attractive, Walter. Very distinguished.”

“It’s called a Van Dyke.” I feel the blood rushing to my face. Beneath the booth across the room, Manfred snurfs at the floor, his quivering black nose seeking out errant flecks of baked goods, his brain a million miles from my conquest of Sheila Mackey.

As I am leaving the shop, attorney Al Buxbaum is just coming in, and corners me in the doorway. “What’s happening with the Froedert mess?” he asks. “Have you got the son of a bitch who did it?”

I screw my face up and try to move past the town’s most notorious gossip and only personal injury lawyer. It’s clear that the case has brought out the local rumor mongers. “I wouldn’t know anything about that, Al. I’m not involved. I’m seasonal around here, just up for a little R&R.”

“Come on Dopple, give it up. You’re tight with Guffey and you were down in the locker room when they found the body. You can trust me.”

Buxbaum is among those I would least trust with a secret, but I keep that to myself. Instead, I sidle past the attorney without comment. Manfred gives a growl and raises his hackles for emphasis, and we extricate ourselves from the counselor’s grasp.

Ten minutes later I am on my way back to the cottage with the big dog lounging in the back seat. I crane my neck around and get Manfred's attention. "She said she'd go out with me, partner. I can't believe she said she'd go out with me. Not once but twice. This week to the immigration rights rally, and next week to the band concert." Manfred raises his head momentarily, but when he realizes there's no dog biscuit in the offing plops it back down on the seat. I wipe my brow and stretch my right arm out across the bench seat. "Sure glad that's over."

But what next? What sort of conversation would interest Sheila?

Does she follow sports, I wonder?

Should I bring myself up to date on what to expect at this immigration rally?

And what should I wear? Long pants for sure.

How about my bowling shirt? Would that be too much?

Should I pick up a few posies for her?

So many questions, so many decisions.

The following Wednesday evening I join Guffey for a meeting of the Shibboleth Hills Golf Club board of directors, a group now charged with sorting out the issue of course management in the wake of Deuce Froedert's death. Guffey has insinuated himself into the meeting by suggesting that the proceedings are material to his investigation. In actual fact, he confides to me, he is hoping to see or hear something that will reveal a motive for murder. At this stage of the proceedings, no one is exempt from suspicion, least of all those close to the club's governance.

Guffey is decked out in full uniform for the event: gabardine trousers with a broad black stripe along the leg seams and a matching shirt festooned with epaulets and a star on each shoulder. His gun belt is weighed down by a Glock 9 mm., a crackling radio, and a backup magazine of ammo. His big-toed Mickey Mouse shoes are polished to a high sheen, and as we enter the board room my temporary boss removes his brimmed Smokey-the-Bear hat. It's the first time in years that I've seen Guffey dressed so officially, and I must say he makes an authoritative impression for the benefit of the Shibboleth Hills ruling body.

In the center of the SHGC board room stands a large cherrywood table surrounded by a careworn collection of mismatched chairs, only five of which are occupied for tonight's

emergency meeting. In addition to chair Gordy Gordon, son of the original developer and owner of the land that is leased to the club, the board consists of Ford dealer Max Tubbs; fast food purveyor Maury LaCaskey; construction magnate Vern Petty; and attorney Al Buxbaum.

Guffey and I settle into two of a row of hard-backed plastic chairs on the far side of the room. Manfred slumps into a heap at my feet, drawing the attention of Tubbs and Petty, who exchange skeptical looks at the presence of a canine in their midst. I assume these seats are reserved for club members who wish to observe board proceedings, although the sheriff and I are the only outsiders present for this unannounced gathering.

There has never been a woman or a minority on the Shibboleth Hills board, and I would be willing to bet that that's the way this bunch is determined to keep it. But emergency situations breed emergency measures, and shortly after the meeting is called to order, LaCaskey suggests that the course manager's job be handed over to Karla Hess on an interim basis. "She's been the club women's champion seven times. She's president of the ladies league. And her family goes way back in these parts," LaCaskey offers.

The proposal is met with a stunned silence. The second hand on the clock makes nearly a full revolution before Tubbs speaks. "A woman pro? You got to be pulling our honkers, Maury. I sure hope that's what you're doing."

“Not at all Max,” LaCaskey says. “I’m looking for a sensible way out of this pickle. Karla Hess is the most qualified person to take over for Froedert. She’s helped out in the pro shop on and off for years, she’s a longtime member, and she doesn’t have a day job to tie her down. I think she’d be a perfect choice until we can get a permanent replacement.”

“I got to agree with Max,” Vern Petty chimes in. “Put the club in the hands of a female and God knows what’s next. I can already see her changing the color of the tee markers to pink and blue, and installing an espresso machine in the clubhouse.”

“Don’t put that in the minutes Gordy,” LaCaskey says. It could be interpreted as a sexist remark. Good thing we don’t have a recording secretary for these meetings.” At the chair, Gordon is busily scribbling notes on a pad of paper. I surmise that he doubles as an unofficial record-keeper for board meetings.

Petty nods and leans back in his chair. “Your point being?” he asks.

“I’m inclined to agree with Maury,” Buxbaum weighs in. “We got a bad situation here, and it sure would make sense to put somebody in charge who knows the membership and the way we do things around here.”

At the back of the room, Guffey and I sit silently, each of us drawing our own conclusions on the opinions expressed by board members. I am surprised that LaCaskey would be the one to propose a woman as club manager, since in my limited experience with him

I had him pegged as a devout student of the ‘keep ‘em barefoot and pregnant’ school. I give Guffey a quick glance, and see only a poker-faced sheriff, not about to give his thoughts away to me or to the men at the big table.

“I can’t believe I’m hearing what I’m hearing,” Vern Petty says. “Karla Hess? Not just a woman, but a religious kook to boot. She talks to God, you know.”

“Lots of people pray,” LaCaskey counters.

“Yeah, but to hear Karla tell it, God answers her. She claims she won the state women’s tournament back in ninety-six when He told her to use a seven wood on the last hole, a hundred-and-eighty yard approach shot. She put it three feet from the pin, and birdied the hole for the title. And it was God who kept her head down and her swing steady through the shot. At least that’s the way Karla tells the story.”

“Club women’s champion seven years running,” LaCaskey repeats. “And knows her way around the pro shop. Besides all that, her son Chad spent three years on the Nationwide tour. It’s a golf family.”

“I don’t think you want to bring Chad Hess into the conversation,” Buxbaum says. “Sore subject with dear old mom.”

“Some say it was Deuce Froedert who introduced young Chad to the wonders of pharmaceuticals.”

“And let’s not forget the law of the sea,” Vern Petty says. “Women are banned from the decks of ships. Bad luck.”

“Christ, that was a hundred years ago Vern. Believe it or not, now they even got women piloting airplanes. Come on up and join us in the twenty-first century.”

Ever the conciliator, Gordon raps his gavel and turns to Guffey. “Maybe we could table this discussion for the time being and ask the sheriff to give us a report on the progress of his investigation into Deuce Froedert’s death.”

Guffey rises, adjusts his belt, sucks on his tooth and begins. “Well fellas, there’s really not a lot to report,” he says. “Dopple here is giving me a hand with running down what few leads we have. I’m all jacked up at the jail and I’ve been short deputies to go out and investigate. But that doesn’t mean we’re stymied. There are certain details I’m not at liberty to share, but I can say that it’s still early, and you can count on us to give you the results you’re looking for. Meanwhile, the state boys have gathered the physical evidence and, as you know, interviewed the witnesses. They’ve taken all that back to Madison and they’re collating the results. We should hear from them in the next week.”

“The next week?” Petty exclaims. “We got a murderer on the loose here. It could be a random act. No telling who might be next.”

“That’s true,” Gordon says. “People are awfully jumpy. Walking around with nine irons in hand and ready to smack anyone who looks cross-eyed at them. Maybe we should consider closing the course for awhile.”

“That would only make matters worse,” LaCaskey puts in. We’d be admitting we’re scared. I don’t know about you boys, but I’m ready for him, whoever he is.” At this point he pulls a gun from his inside coat pocket.

Guffey jumps up, startled. “Jay-sus,” he moans. “What the hell you doing walking around with that thing in your pocket?”

LaCaskey gives Earl a bewildered look, and shrugs. “Hey Earl. It’s licensed. What’s the problem?”

“The problem is that we can’t have citizens walking around town packing heat. I want you to take that damn thing home right after the meeting and lock it up.”

“It’s from my restaurant. Got the license to carry after our third robbery.”

“Then put it back in a safe place behind the chicken tenders,” Guffey advises. “And that goes for the rest of you, too. Let law enforcement take care of the criminals, and tend to your own businesses.”

Petty leans over toward Gordon, sitting beside him, and says under his breath: “That kind of attitude won’t get Earl a whole lot of votes.”

“I heard that,” Guffey says. “And right at this moment I don’t give a rat’s ass for votes. It’s public safety I’m concerned about.”

LaCaskey leans back in his chair. “One thing you can count on,” he says.

What’s that?”

“There were drugs involved.”

Petty blinks. “Why the hell would you say that, Maury? You got information the rest of us show know about?”

LaCaskey blinks. “No, but I got common sense. What would be a better place to operate a drug ring than a golf course? Lots of people coming and going, plenty of money changing hands, all kinds of space to stash weed and whatever else back there in the maintenance sheds.”

“And none of us the wiser,” Petty says.

“That’s right. None of us the wiser. When’s the last time you took a look in those pole barns, Vern? The only people who go in there are Art Anthem’s wetbacks. Froedert and Anthem could have half a railroad carload of marijuana in there for all we know. And we all know that Froedert was capable.”

Buxbaum puts his oar into the water. “Wasn’t Deuce in the slammer for dealing a few years ago? I seem to remember he had trouble with drugs in the past.”

“Not in the slammer,” Tubbs says. “Just charged. Got off for lack of evidence.”

“Can we please get back to the business at hand?” Gordon says in what amounts to a whine.

“All right then, how about turning the manager’s job over to Art Anthem?” Al Buxbaum proposes. “Art knows the course better than anybody, and he’s been our greens keeper for what – fifteen years?”

There follows a long silence as each of the directors considers this proposal. Then Tubbs says: “Bob, now you’ve gone LaCaskey one better. Art Anthem couldn’t manage his dick in a circle jerk. He’s a gardener. What he knows about business you could put in a beer can.”

“But he knows the course. The members would trust him more than they ever trusted Froedert.”

“He’s a gardener. He might be able to cut it at a course in Juarez, but this ain’t Mexico.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“His crew. One hundred percent Mexican, in case you hadn’t noticed. They trust him, but as for the membership I don’t think you’ve got it right.”

“Just a minute there Jocko,” LaCaskey interrupts. “The guys who rake your traps and mow your fairways may be brown-skinned, but saying they’re one hundred percent Mexican is all wrong. We got Hondurans, we got Salvadorans, we got Nicaraguans living among us. I know, because I’ve got a bunch of them working at the restaurant, and the one thing they do have in common is that they’re damn good workers. Which is more than I can say for those who sit around at a car lot on their fat asses all day.”

Max Tubbs rises halfway out of his chair. “Keep it up, Maury. You’ll go home with a fat lip.”

“Anyway,” Buxbaum persists. “I’m nominating Art Anthem for the position of general manager on an interim basis.” He slouches back in his chair, waiting.

“Can I have a second?” Gordon asks.

Dead silence. The only sound is the shuffling of feet beneath the board table, and then a yawn from Manfred, just awakening from dreams of ribeye steaks and liver sausage. The tension rises as each of the directors studies the table in front of them with curious intensity.

“Can I have a second?” Gordon repeats. Then: “Hearing none, the nomination is lost.”

LaCaskey raises his hand as if he is a student in school. “Okay then, now that we’ve got that foolishness behind us, let’s get serious. I nominate Karla Hess for the position of general manager on an interim basis.”

“Oh all right,” Buxbaum says, pouting. “I’ll second that.”

“All in favor,” Gordon asks.

LaCaskey and Buxbaum raise their hands.

“Opposed?”

Tubbs and Petty wave their hands.

“It’s up to you Gordy,” LaCaskey informs the chair. “Yea or nay?” All eyes are on Gordon. He squirms in his seat, then votes aye. Karla Hess will be asked to serve as club manager.

It occurs to me that Gordy Gordon ought to carry more weight on the board than simply an instrument to break tie votes, his father

having been the gent who graded what once was farmland into a passable venue for the game of golf. That's particularly true since Gordy retains ownership rights to the land. The property is in the hands of the club on a lease, providing certain conditions are met. One of which is that the club continues to demonstrate financial vitality. Gordy ought to be a major domo on this panel as his father once was, but he lacks the strength of character to capture the minds and hearts of his fellow members, and now sits at the head of the table merely as an arbiter of Roberts' Rules.

"One small question," Tubbs says, his body slumped in defeat. The other members wait expectantly. "Has anybody asked Karla Hess if she'll take the job?"

Inquiring glances around the table say no. "Well then," Tubbs suggests, "somebody ought to take care of that little detail." He shakes his head in disbelief.

LaCaskey volunteers his services, and the energy of the meeting quickly ebbs. Gordon entertains a motion to adjourn, quickly made and seconded, and the meeting breaks up with a certain amount of grumbling from Tubbs and Petty. LaCaskey suggests they retire to the bar for a drink, but his adversaries decline.

As Guffey and I cross the parking lot to his cruiser, he turns to me: "What did you see in there, Dopple?"

"Me?" I give the question a moment's thought. "The only thing that surprised me was hearing LaCaskey promote a woman for

the manager's job. Other than that, all I saw was a bunch of middle-aged white guys bickering about an issue that should have taken thirty seconds to resolve."

"That's not all I saw," Guffey says. "I saw Vern Petty pulling on his earlobe thirteen times. That's a sign that he's nervous. But what's he got to be nervous about? And I saw Gordy Gordon squirming around in his seat. Not all that unusual certainly, but I get the feeling he's holding something back. Got to wonder what that might be. And like you, I saw LaCaskey come out for Karla Hess. That's pretty unusual too, given that they've been butting heads for twenty years around the clubhouse."

"Does any of that give us new leads?" I ask.

Guffey sucks on his tooth. "Hard to say, my friend. But it's good information to have. Even with the trouble at the jail, I think this was time well spent."

We get into the squad and fasten our seat belts. "One more thing," I ask the sheriff. "What particular details were you not at liberty to share with the board?"

"Well Dopple, the most important detail is that I was damn glad for an opportunity to stand up and talk for awhile. My hemorrhoids were killing me."

As we pull out of the parking lot into the final light of a midsummer dusk, I make a mental note to look into the background of the new manager of Shibboleth Hills.

The Dopple family cottage is situated at the end of a gravel lane on Stumpy Bay Road, near the south end of Lake Elysium. Once upon a time the bay was a swampy, low-lying bulge in the Nekoosa River, home to stands of alder trees and marsh plants. When the WPA came in and built a dam at the south end of the river to form Lake Elysium, the trees were cut to within three feet of the ground and the area was subsequently flooded. Many of those stumps remain today, submerged and protected against deterioration by the cold water.

As for the Dopple Hilton, it was built by Great-Grandpa Dopple and has served as vacation headquarters for four generations of the family. I am likely to be the last of the Dopples to spend summers here, since my own son moved to the artist colony in New Mexico a dozen years ago and has shown no signs of producing heirs of his own.

By any standard, the cottage is small but cozy. There's a kitchen, a living room with a fireplace, and two bedrooms. But the space where my guests and I spend most of our time is on the screen porch that overlooks the bay and the lake beyond. The porch is

twenty-two feet long by twelve feet deep, and boasts a rocking chair, a swing and a small drop-leaf table that can be put to use for breakfast or, as it is presently being utilized, to house a stack of crime scene interview transcripts.

Nineteen rough-hewn steps from the footings of the porch takes you down to the lakeshore. A small grove of river birch trees blocks the harsh midday sun, and a patch of high grass near the shoreline allows for a good look at the water lilies that bloom almost continuously in the muddy bottom from June through September.

As the hands of my kitchen clock pass six o'clock, I truck on down to the pier, spinning rod in hand, and climb aboard the sixteen foot aluminum runabout that has been a fixture at the cottage for more than forty years. An earlier generation of the family dubbed the boat *The Dopple Yacht*, a name that has stuck over time. For my present purposes, the lake is a perfect place to review the elements of the Froedert murder, and to consider what my next move might be. Years ago, I found that when a case posed a particularly knotty problem, an hour in one of the rental dinghies on the Kosciuszko Park lagoon was the ideal place to come up with an elegant solution. The slow rolling of a boat on water is a perfect meditation, allowing the mind to roam freely among the many possibilities of a problem.

My love affair with water goes back to my earliest days, when Grandpa Dopple taught me the art of fishing with cane pole and worms. At first light, the old man would come to my bedside, rouse

me, and lead me silently down to the boat. Casting off on black water, we would row off onto Lake Elysium in search of the wily bluegill. Those were the days before my father bought the twelve horsepower Evinrude motor and made our forays on the lake far less labor-intensive, but also far more noisy.

Following in my footsteps, Manfred steps gingerly onto the pier, as though he has at long last made up his mind to join me for a ride across the water. But as I step into the boat his resolution fades, and he bows down in abject surrender to the fear of putting his fate in the hands of such an obviously unstable craft. Manfred is partial to wading chest-deep at the shore and letting the waves from passing speedboats tickle his underside, but he insists on keeping his paws firmly planted on the sand bottom of our little beach. I have no doubt that if it became necessary he could dogpaddle his way out of deep water, but he has no intention of tempting fate.

Deep water, thunderstorms and the big brown truck of the UPS man are three adversaries that inspire awe in every ounce of his hundred pound frame. At the first hint of a thunderstorm, my canine partner cowers under the kitchen table or in the basement furnace room.

With the big dog standing guard at the end of the pier, I rev up the motor and head to the sand bar three hundred yards out at the mouth of the bay, where walleyes often gather in the deeper water even this late in the season. As I cut the motor and glide into position to drift with the wind along the length of the bar, my

thoughts turn to the two Hispanic gents Perelman and I met on the porch of the Shibboleth Hills clubhouse the day Deuce Froedert met his untimely end. I can't help but wonder what it must be like to be living in a country where the language, the customs, and the laws are foreign and disorienting. What possesses a man to leave his native land and head north, at no small risk of danger, into the unknown? Having not had the advantage of visiting countries south of the border, I can only imagine how difficult living conditions at home must be to prod newcomers to leave their friends and family, and strike out for a new life in the US of A.

And once they arrive here, they're beset by all manner of obstacles. Always in fear of being sent back, they hide out among their countrymen in hopes of evading the long arm of the immigration cops. I have little sympathy for the thieves, arsonists and murderers it has been my pleasure to put behind the bars of the Milwaukee County Jail, but I can't help feeling a measure of compassion for a man who takes a minimum wage job raking sand traps at a second-rate golf course just to be able to send a few dollars home to his family.

All of which takes my thoughts back to Sheila Mackey, who apparently has taken up the cause of the local immigrant population. She said I could help her with placards for the demonstration on the Cottonwood town square. Will this be one of those sign-waving, insult-shouting events I remember from the anti-war rallies of the sixties? Will I find myself on the wrong side of the law,

contributing to one more headache for Earl Guffey as his deputies haul a rag-tag collection of rabble-rousers off to his already overcrowded jail? And if it comes to that, which side will I choose? The law, or the alluring Sheila?

My daydream is interrupted by the sound of reggae music issuing from the shore north of Stumpy Bay, where *Screamin' Steve's Bar & Grill* cranks up the volume every evening at about this time. The first five minutes of the stuff is not unpleasant, Gunderson often choosing to begin the musical festivities with tuneful calypso or steel band selections. But for a man hoping to find solitude on the lake with rod and reel, the sounds of Bob Marley are an annoyance. Steve Gunderson has become marginally famous for his Caribbean themes, from music to drinks to games. As the crow flies, the bar is maybe half a mile from the Dopple Hilton, but an intervening stand of mixed pine and hardwoods muffles the sound coming from its outdoor speakers sufficiently to maintain my peace and quiet on the big front porch.

At the same time, sound carries across the lake itself like a rumor across the Second District squad room, and there's nothing to be done about it until Gunderson, like half a dozen of his predecessors, runs out of money and boards up the rangy clapboard building to await its next incarnation.

What is now a raucous retreat for hard-living blue collar types was a very polished and genteel dancehall in the days of my youth, a temple to the sounds of big bands and top-twenty tunes played on

a Wurlitzer organ. In those days, dusk was illuminated by ribbons of colored water reflecting the signage of *Lacy's on the Lake*. Many were the nights my brother Phillip and I rowed out to the point to watch cars arrive in the parking lot and listen to the sounds of female laughter as partygoers entered the hall.

By the time I was grown the building had been turned over to an all-you-can eat buffet, and lost much of its magic. That was the time when I was married to Alice, who eventually left me for the Social Security man from Minneapolis; the time when I learned Phillip had been killed in the jungles of southeast Asia; the time when my own son broke the line of succession and moved to New Mexico to become some kind of dimensional artist. The memories are sometimes painful, always bittersweet.

The boat rocks gently on the waves, and my thoughts turn yet again to how different – yet how alike – this part of the state is when I compare it to my home port in Milwaukee. Cottonwood and environs are rural and sparsely populated, while Milwaukee is a dense metropolitan center. Cottonwood depends on recreation for its livelihood, while manufactured goods dominate the economy of the city. Yet the two communities are very much alike. A city, my intuition tells me, is not much more than a collection of small towns. In the most important respects, neighborhoods are independent communities, bound by the mutual interests of their families. Residents of Bay View, the Third Ward, and Layton Park identify themselves with their particular neighborhood more than

they do with the larger city. Politically, socially, and economically, neighborhoods are the glue that binds people together.

As I sit here in the boat, chucking a deep-running Rapalla lure into the silvery water in slim hopes of attracting a finny dinner, I conclude that home is wherever a person happens to be at a particular moment. At this moment I am obliged to count Screamin' Steve Gunderson as among my neighbors.

As my thoughts drift aimlessly, the sun moves lower in the sky and I find peace with myself. My reverie is interrupted by a call from the shore, a gravelly voice I recognize as belonging to Earl Guffey. I look over to my bay and see the sheriff standing on my pier, waving to me. He cups his hands around his mouth and calls: "Dopple!" Then he waves for me to come join him on shore, hands on hips.

As the boat glides up to the tire bumpers hung on the pier, Guffey reaches out to grab the tie-up rope. "Dopple," he says. "What the hell you doing out fishing at a time like this?"

I stand up in the boat and lunge for the stability of the pier. "I'm on vacation," I remind him. "Fishing is what a man does on vacation."

"You may be on vacation, but my butt is on the griddle. How could you forget? You and me were going to talk about the testimony we gathered at the golf course. Seven o'clock. Remember?"

I nod, appropriately chastened by my memory lapse. “Come on in Earl, I’ll make us some supper.”

Inside, I gather up the ingredients for a quick dinner of corned beef hash. I arrange the potatoes on the counter next to the stove and get a tin of Libby’s Corned Beef out of the fridge. Manfred sticks his nose up against the cabinetry to get a good whiff of the meat, then slinks off to his rug in the corner to wait. I mix G&Ts in two tumblers for Guffey and myself, adding plenty of ice against the late afternoon heat, and take them out to the porch where the stack of transcripts is piled helter-skelter on the table.

As I hold a Turvis Tumbler out to Guffey, he checks his watch. “Off duty as of now,” he says. As if he would have refused my offer if I’d made it five minutes earlier.

Earl makes himself comfortable in the rocking chair and I take a place at the table. I riffle through the papers and begin: “From this testimony there’s no lack of suspects.”

Deuce Froedert had a colorful history in these parts, having bullied his way through high school by making his teachers’ lives so miserable they were each eager to pass him along to his next victim. The boy made a career out of beating up on the smaller kids in his class. He was a terror on the hockey rink and the football field, but his athletic skills were most evident in the game of golf. His impossibly long drives compensated for a pedestrian short game. He captained the high school golf squad and earned a scholarship to a state college with easygoing academic standards. There he was

reputed to have made contacts with a number of shady characters who gave him an education on the subject of money and how it could be gotten working the underside of the law. He served two terms in the county lockup for dealing weed before straightening himself out and getting the job as pro at SHGC.

“Lets start with the people we know were on the scene,” I suggest.

Guffey nods. “Max Tubbs was the closest, as you know. He gave the state boys a DNA sample, and they’re running it through the lab. Being in the locker room, that’s opportunity. But Max messed things up so completely that I doubt he’s our master criminal. His specialty is putting unsuspecting victims behind the wheel of Lincoln Navigators, not bludgeoning golf pros to death.”

I take the testimony of Max Tubbs in hand and scan the four pages of comments the automobile dealer made to Sperkle in the hour following the crime. “That’s true, Earl. Tubbs strikes me as a pretty sly operator. I can’t believe he’d be dumb enough to let himself be found at the scene in the altogether by another member of the club. He claims that he was all shook up about finding the body, and as I recall he did seem shaky in the locker room. An eight year old could come up with a better plan than to be found undressed with the corpse.”

“Then there’s our fried chicken king, Maury LaCaskey,” Guffey says. “LaCaskey was also in the vicinity at the time of the murder. By his own testimony, Maury has been feuding with

Froedert the past couple of years over the issue of taking the club private. Froedert was dead set against it. He saw his revenue from pro shop sales and lessons cut in half if the course was closed to everybody but members.”

“LaCaskey is the one who came upon Tubbs in the locker room. Didn’t seem to be too much love lost between those two, either.”

“Tubbs lives in the Highlands north of town,” Guffey informs me. “LaCaskey travels in more modest social circles. In their world, dollars are the measure of a man’s importance. Tubbs has it all over LaCaskey in that department.”

Manfred slinks out onto the porch and leans up against my chair, reminding me that the dinner fixings are waiting on the kitchen counter. I give him a chuck behind the ear. “In a few minutes, boy.” I return to the transcripts. “Al Buxbaum and Miles Vertrance were in the clubhouse as well,” I say. “A lawyer and a banker.”

“Wouldn’t trust either one of them any further than I could throw them,” Guffey says. “Buxbaum is on the board of Shibboleth Hills along with LaCaskey, and the club’s attorney of record. Vertrance I don’t know all that much about, except that he moved up here from Chicago half a dozen years ago and bought a major interest in the Cottonwood State Bank. Been lots of that going on in recent years, folks tired of big city life, thinking the living is easy in these parts. They stick around for five, ten years, and eventually

come to the conclusion that the grind is the grind wherever you happen to live. Most of them go back where they came from when they figure that out. Vertrance is the exception.”

I stroke my incipient beard and take the groundskeeper’s file in hand. “On the other hand, we have individuals like Art Anthem. Local boy. Family farm out on County YY. Says here he was in one of the maintenance buildings when he heard about the killing. Says Todd Pritchart came out there to give him the news.”

“I talked with Art myself,” Guffey says. “He was in a real stew. May have been the trauma, but I don’t know. Seemed there was more to it. Art’s not the kind of guy to get all upset about anything, but he was as jumpy as a bullfrog in a mill pond that morning. Kept saying he had to get back to work, that there was plenty to do now that Froedert was dead. Didn’t seem all that appropriate under the circumstances.”

“What do you think about Al Buxbaum’s comment at the board meeting? That there’s gotta be drugs involved? He’s right that there are plenty of places to stash contraband on a golf course.”

Guffey shakes his head. “I looked in those maintenance buildings out back. One’s filled with bigass lawn mowers, cultivators, suchlike. The other’s empty. Not a sign of weed or any other kind of drug. I suppose it’s possible, but there’s no physical evidence.”

Manfred pads back onto the porch and slumps onto the floor with an exaggerated sigh. I drop the files onto the table and lean

back in my chair. “About time for supper, Earl. How’s about we take a break and come back to this after? Looks like you could use a refresher for your drink as well.”

Being a widower, Earl Guffey has learned to use the clock to his advantage. He generally shows up at mealtime with the expectation that he’ll be invited to stay. I am not disappointed in that expectation when he takes me up on my offer. We move into the kitchen, where we continue our conversation.

“Let’s not forget the mysterious man in the khaki pants,” I say as I stir the corned beef, potatoes and onions in a cast iron frying pan. “The Hess woman says she saw a man climbing the rear stairs of the clubhouse just as she came out of the women’s locker room. I don’t suppose even the state boys will be able to help us figure out who that might have been.”

Guffey takes a long sip on his drink. “Got to take Karla Hess with a grain of salt. Been half a bubble off plumb since her son got his brain fried on crystal meth and ended up working at the Goodwill store in Sparta. Only child. He lives in a group home now, but Karla will tell anyone who listens that he’ll be coming home any day.”

We move on to consider certain individuals whose presence was not confirmed the day of the murder, but who have had axes to grind with Froedert. There’s Steve Gunderson, my neighbor with the loud island music, for example. Gunderson and Froedert have been rivals since their days at Gunflint County Consolidated High

School. Gunderson wasn't seen at Shibboleth Hills at the time of the crime, but he certainly had a motive.

So, in fact, did Ann Froedert, Deuce's long-suffering wife. As we speak she is making arrangements for her husband's funeral. "From what I hear she's been acting more like a lottery winner than a grieving widow," Guffey says. "Folks say there's a spring in her step and a smile on her face that they haven't seen in years. They're saying she plans to go back to her job as a cosmetologist, that she's already spoken to Fritz Behnke at the Cut and Perm Shoppe. It's like a load has been lifted from her shoulders."

"Yeah," I say. "A two hundred pound load of Deuce."

Guffey takes the pile of transcripts in both hands and plops it back on the table. He scratches his head and heaves a sheriff-sized sigh. "I dunno Dopple. More times than not we're looking high and low for a motive in a murder case. In this one, we've got too damn many motives. Makes me think twice about hiring a print shop to make up yard signs and bumper stickers for the next election."

I agree that we have a bumper crop of suspects, and it could have been any one of them that did the deed. Gunderson and the wife weren't seen at the course, but it's a public place with easy access. They might have snuck in and out, worn a disguise, hired somebody to do the job for them. And then there's the most scary option of all: it might have been none of the above.

Something is going on here that neither Guffey nor I have spotted. There's a gremlin running around in my brain, telling me

I've missed a turn that a real detective would be onto by now. The little demon challenges me to find it, the clue that will unravel the conundrum, and he plans to stay with me until I do. I resolve to make his visit shorter than check-in at an hourly-rate motel.

For my date with the divine Ms. Mackey I don my blue golf shirt with the alligator logo; a freshly washed pair of khakis I picked up at sale prices at the Kohl's department store in Milwaukee; and a pair of Reebok running shoes. The shoes are for my own comfort, given that the immigration demonstration may keep me on my feet for some time. My only concession to vanity is a black baseball cap with a gold imprimatur of the MPD's Second District on it. Before leaving the Doppie Hilton I check myself out in the mirror behind the bedroom door and give the image conditional approval. Manfred follows close behind as I leave the cottage, his big tail raised in alert at the promise of a road adventure.

We cross the bridge that spans the Nekoosa River at the lower end of Lake Elysium and drive a scant two miles up Feddersdorf Road to where Sheila's house sits atop a small hill overlooking the lake to the west and a field of six-foot-high cornstalks to the east. Late afternoon is one of my favorite times of day in the North Country, a time when the hurly-burly of midday seems to slow to a manageable pace and a man can sit back and reflect on his place in

the scheme of things. Manfred appears to share my view, his big ears flopping in the wind and his open mouth producing a long stream of drool that is carried off at intervals by shakes of the head.

I pull into Sheila's driveway and clutch the small bunch of daisies and black-eyed Susans I plucked from the stand of wildflowers in my backyard in my fist, hoping that Ms. Mackey will not write me off as a cheapskate for not having stopped by the flower shop in town for a professional arrangement.

"They're beautiful," she croons as she accepts the buds and ushers me into her living room. "I'll put them in water, and we can be on our way." She's wearing a red tank top and mid-length shorts that call attention to the shapely curve of her legs, along with striped canvas sandals that reveal brightly painted toenails. For my money, she looks as delicious as one of her famous blueberry pies.

As Sheila moves into the kitchen, I take note of the furnishings in the room. Soft, fabric-covered chairs and sofa, impressionist prints on the walls, earth-toned drapes on the windows. Not at all what I expected. I'd formed a mental picture of daintiness surrounding Sheila, here as in the bakery. To the contrary, there is an air of substance in this room that invites a person to sit down and stay awhile, and maybe talk about the state of the world. It's bourbon whiskey as opposed to white wine, Beethoven rather than Nelson Eddy.

A moment later Sheila returns, all business. "Follow me," she says. I do as instructed, and a moment later find myself in her

bedroom. A flush rises to my face as she busies herself with a stack of pamphlets on her dresser. I've been in the house less than five minutes and already we're in her boudoir. I am not normally such a fast worker.

"If you'll take those placards," she orders, pointing to a batch of signs behind the door, "I'll carry the handouts. Hope you've got a big trunk in that cruiser of yours."

The signs bear hand-lettered slogans including *Justice Now* and *All Americans Equal*. A five-foot slat is attached to each poster by heavy-duty staples, creating an awkward load for me to carry out to the car. Once there, I need to jostle the signs into the trunk of the Buick, since Manfred has reserved the entire back seat for himself. Luckily, I keep three bungee cords on hand, which I now employ to hold the lid down.

Sheila locks her front door, joins me on the front seat, and we're off to Cottonwood. Passing the ramshackle Walzvig farm on county highway YY, Sheila spots a dozen cows grazing by the side of the road, heads down, looking lean and angular. She pulls a note pad from her purse and says something about calling the SPCA to look into the situation. "Mistreatment of animals ought to be a capital crime," she mutters to herself.

"What makes you think they're mistreated?" I ask.

"Look at their udders," she says. "They're distended. And every one of those animals is downright bony. Why, they can't even keep their heads up."

I turn her comments over in my brain, thinking that it's no business of mine. As if she can read my mind, Sheila says: "They can't speak for themselves. Somebody needs to speak for them."

We pass the next few miles discussing less weighty subjects: the weather, the upcoming mid-summer Musk Melon Festival in Sparta, the prospects for the local Northwoods League baseball team. "Last night I dreamed the Spartans won the pennant," Sheila says. "I was at the last game of the season, but I got separated from my friends and couldn't find my way back to my seat."

"You dream a lot?"

"Every night," she reports. "Usually my dreams are pleasant. I'll be flying over Cottonwood at sunset, or swimming in Lake Elysium on a warm summer day, or having my cat, Jeremy, jump up on the bed and knead my stomach with his paws. Most times, that turns out to be more than a dream."

"Jeremy, huh?"

"He's a senior citizen now, very personable. I found him in the field behind my house eight years ago. One saucer of milk was all it took for him to decide that he would adopt me."

I thank my luck for having left Manfred in the car when I went to Sheila's door. Manfred looks upon creatures of the feline persuasion as toys, objects to be chased. He is not likely to have made a positive impression on Sheila's cat.

"What do you dream about, Wally?" Sheila asks.

“Me?” I search my memory. “Guess I don’t dream at all. Can’t remember the last time I had a dream.”

“Really? I believe everybody dreams. We may not remember our dreams, but they’re there nevertheless.”

I can’t see the difference between not remembering dreams and not having them at all. So I change the subject, and ask about the purpose of the gathering in the town square.

“The county is in cahoots with the immigration authorities,” she says. “That’s not right. They hold immigrants in the county jail until ICE gets around to deportation hearings.”

I let on that Guffey has filled me in on his perspective of the problem. “Sounds like he’d as soon wash his hands of the whole idea.”

“I wasn’t talking about Sheriff Guffey,” Sheila says. “It’s the district attorney and the county board, and it’s all about money. Immigration pays the county for every prisoner in the lockup. At the end of the year, that adds up to a couple of million.”

“On the other hand,” I say, “we’re talking about people who have broken the law. They’re here illegally.”

“But they’re not criminals,” she maintains. “They’re family men supporting wives and families – not to mention the money they send to relatives back home. Their offenses are minor – mostly traffic stops. Holding them in jail so the feds can start deportation proceedings is not right.” The color in Sheila’s pretty neck rises

when she talks about the subject, and I work hard to subdue an appreciative smile as I listen and watch.

She tells me that the jail's holding policy is just the tip of the iceberg. Hitting on all cylinders now, she says that living in the USA without papers is a civil matter, not a criminal act. "They use the most insignificant excuse to round up immigrants and hold them in jail. A traffic ticket, for goodness sake. Do you think they would hold you or me in jail for a traffic offense?"

By the time we arrive at the Cottonwood town square Sheila has worked herself into a lather. She opens the car door and slips out before I have a chance to come around and help her, and motions to me to get the placards out of the trunk and follow her. In the gazebo at the center of the park a loudspeaker system is being checked out. Sheila calls to a young Latino man to give me a hand with the signs, and strides off purposefully toward the speaker's platform. I am grateful for any help I can get with the signs, since the shoulder I pulled back on the golf course is still giving me a good deal of trouble. I hand the placards off and flex the offending muscles, drawing my arm around in a three-sixty circle to get the blood flow going.

Meanwhile, Sheila engages in animated conversation with a fellow I recognize as Gus Rodriguez, executive director of the Sparta Hispanic Center. Rodriguez bears an uncanny resemblance to the newsreel footage I've seen of Cesar Chavez, if memory serves. I let Manfred out of the Buick and close the trunk, then wander over

to a bench at the corner of the square to watch the show while my partner sniffs at every third blade of grass on the lawn, seeking out edible treasures.

“You’re the detective from Milwaukee,” a female voice calls from over my right shoulder. I swing around and face the new manager of Shibboleth Hills Golf Club.

I give a polite nod. “That’s right, Mrs. Hess. Congratulations on your new position. Hope you’ll find it a rewarding experience.”

Karla Hess comes around to the front of my bench and points to a small garden abutting the walkway to the gazebo at the center of the park. “Oh I have every confidence that it will be quite an excellent experience. You see that?”

I see nothing unusual in the area she is indicating with her gesture.

“The rose, detective. Right there before your eyes.”

Ah, now I see what she is referring to. It’s a small pink bud on a bush about twenty feet from our vantage point, closing its petals as the sun finds its way toward the western horizon. “Nice,” I say for want of a more substantial comment.

“It’s a sign,” Karla Hess says in thinly veiled frustration with my ignorance. “It’s an answer to my novena.” The seven-time Shibboleth Hills women’s champion takes a seat next to me on the bench and explains that she said a novena rose prayer to St. Therese in the matter of the club managerial post. “I rely on St. Therese for

all things,” she says. “One pope called her the greatest saint of modern times.”

In the next five minutes of my life I discover that Karla Hess has studied a wide range of appeals that St. Therese has answered through novena rose prayers. Brother John Raymond reported the case of a friend whose daughter brought her a rose from the garden shortly after she had said the novena, a sign that her request would be granted. Another supplicant had rose petals fall out of nowhere in her car while she was driving. She could go on, my instructor assures me, but she has many plans to put into play for the new Shibboleth Hills, and can’t waste time sitting on a park bench. She rises, shakes my hand, and is gone like a vapor in a windstorm.

Slowly the crowd around the gazebo builds: dark-skinned farm workers along with cooks and maids from motels along the Interstate, arriving by the carload in vehicles that make my own automobile look like it’s fresh from the showroom floor. As the crowd gathers and the first speaker takes the mike in hand to welcome the crowd with a *bienvenidos, amigos*, I feel another presence at my side. Looking up, I see my own face reflected in the mirrored sunglasses of Lt. Merle Sperkle, second in command of the Gunflint County Sheriff’s Department.

“Dopple,” he says with a barely discernable nod, the tassels on his Smoky Bear hat jiggling ever so slightly. “Wouldn’t expect to see you coming out for this kind of rabble-rousing event.”

Beyond the Lieutenant and across the street, three additional deputies are arranged, each leaning on his squad car, each dressed in the same trooper's hat and black riding boots as their boss. Although they appear to be trying to look dangerous, their mid-life paunches suggest a high fat, high carbohydrate diet more than they do menace.

"Lots of times I show up where I'm not expected," I reply, turning away from Sperkle and focusing on the speaker up front. "Just part of being a big city detective."

Sperkle grunts. "You with these people, then? Foreigners coming in and making demands on the American taxpayer?"

I hadn't considered whether I am for or against whatever the crowd is here to campaign for, but the tone of Sperkle's voice helps me make a snap decision. "That's right Merle. Whatever they're for, I'm for that too."

"Huh. As far as I'm concerned, they're no more than a motley mob of wetbacks here to ride the gravy train. Come into the country and expect the streets to be paved with gold. Never even bother to learn our language. Expect us to say how high when they say jump. Guess you big city detectives see it different."

"This particular big city detective for one, Merle." I punch the sound of his name to let him know what I think of his moniker.

"One thing you ought to know, Doppie. Me and my deputies? We're here to keep the peace."

“And doing a mighty fine job of it too,” I point to a group of three small boys kicking a soccer ball around on the grass and add: “Might want to keep an eye on those desperados, though.”

“Have your little joke. But if anybody starts trouble, they’ll find themselves up against the full force of the Gunflint County law.” He ambles off to join his junior partners at the side of their cruisers.

On the stage, Gus Rodriguez is addressing the crowd in Spanish. Although I can understand only a word now and then, it’s apparent that he’s mighty upset about what’s been happening to his comrades in the bean fields and motel offices. He gives a stem-winder of a speech, exhorting the crowd to follow his lead. They respond in kind. Lots of cheering and clapping, and shouted responses of *viva* and *vitor*. The placards Sheila and I brought over from her place wave wildly over the heads of the demonstrators, and the crowd surges toward the gazebo to be closer to their leader.

Gus Rodriguez holds his hands up, palms out, to calm his listeners. “Now,” he says in English, “it is my pleasure to introduce a friend to all Latinos in Gunflint County. A man who understands our problems and has worked to give us the financial tools we need to succeed in America. Amigos and amigas, I give you Senor Robert Wood, manager of the Cottonwood Credit Union.”

With that, Rodriguez turns the microphone over to a large, square-shouldered man in an open-necked shirt. Judging by their reaction, Robert Wood is also a crowd favorite. When the cheering

dies, he scans the crowd and says: “Mi amigos.” A pause while he studies his shoes. “Sorry, my friends, my Spanish is not nearly as good as your English. I’m here to assure you that the Cottonwood Credit Union stands by you. We’re here to help you build your savings and – when the time is right – grant loans so that you can have the things you need to succeed in the United States of America.”

It is well known around town that the credit union recently began offering savings accounts to immigrants regardless of their legal standing. The accounts give the undocumented a place to keep their money without having to worry about walking the streets with large amounts of cash in their pockets. Robbery is a serious problem for the immigrant population, and savings accounts are one way to protect their money. The accounts pay no interest, so the credit union doesn’t have to report earnings to the IRS. When a person gets legal status the money is moved to an interest-bearing savings account with a Taxpayer Identification Number. In America, the definition of a full-fledged citizen is someone who pays taxes.

The community is divided about the credit union offering special accounts to immigrants. Some say they’re a good idea, while others think they encourage more undocumented folks to cross our borders without benefit of an okay from ICE. Me, I figure it’s none of my business. I got my hands full dealing with robbers and murderers on the south side, and passing my annual physical exam with my nemesis, MPD Medical Director Sam Harper.

As Robert Wood explains the details of his savings plan, Sheila joins me on the park bench and wipes her brow with a paper napkin bearing the logo of the pie shop. “Sorry to leave you on your own like that,” she says.

I smile, and brush a last bead of moisture from her forehead with my finger. “Not a problem. I enjoyed watching you take charge of the situation.” We settle in to listen to the end of Robert Wood’s speech. Much as I would like to, I resist the temptation to put my arm around Sheila’s bare shoulder.

I am interrupted in my pursuit of that thought by a new presence at the far side of the bench. Miles Vertrance, president of the Cottonwood State Bank, has sidled up and planted his skinny butt on the edge of the bench next to Sheila. “Greetings, Miss Mackey, he says in an alto voice. “Is there anything I can do to help with the arrangements?” He waves an arm as though he has the power to move heaven and earth at a single word from her.

Sheila shifts half an inch closer to me and shakes her head. “Not a thing, Mr. Vertrance. I think we’re just about covered.”

Vertrance fills the space Sheila has just vacated, and leans in toward her. “You know that I’m here to help. All you need to do is ask.” Vertrance is an oily little prick of a fellow with an Adolph Hitler mustache and a comb-over that does not mask premature baldness. Word on the street is that he put together a group of investors and bought the local bank about eight years ago, then installed himself as top banana. Up from Chicago, where his past is

cloaked in mystery, some saying he was in real estate, while others insisting he served as a hatchet man for the local Democratic machine.

“I’m having a few people over later this evening,” Vertrance says, artfully addressing Sheila while pretending I have been whisked away to another planet. “I’d love to have you join us for drinks and dinner.”

Sheila keeps her attention focused on the speaker’s podium. “I don’t think so, Mr. Vertrance.”

The banker gets up and faces Sheila, his bowed legs just inches from her knees. “You might find it advantageous,” he croons.

Still declining to look Vertrance in the eye, Sheila says: “You might benefit from listening to Mr. Wood’s ideas,” she says, nodding toward the speaker’s platform. “Reaching out to the community with SAFE accounts and the like.”

Vertrance turns around and waves a hand idly at the speaker. “Him? All he’s doing is providing shelter to illegals. SAFE accounts are as outrageous as the matricula consular cards the Mexican government hands out to all comers. My bank customers are Americans, and they don’t appreciate end runs around the law.”

“I’m one of your bank customers,” Sheila reminds him. “And that’s not the way I feel. As a matter of fact, next weekend I’ll be driving some of these folks to Sparta to apply for matricula consular cards.”

“Hmm. Guess that puts us on opposite sides of the fence,” Vertrance says. “Me for law and order, you for illegals.”

At this point I have heard enough. I raise up my considerable bulk and step to within inches of banker Vertrance’s face. “You get the feeling that this conversation is about finished?” I ask of nobody in particular. “Maybe Mr. Law and Order here ought to join his pals across the street. I gesture to the deputies still leaning against their squads on the far side of the square.

“It’s all right Walter,” Sheila says, placing a hand on my forearm. “Mr. Vertrance and I are acquainted. I have a business loan from the Cottonwood State Bank. Regrettably.”

I can swear that at this point Vertrance’s little toothbrush mustache wiggles back and forth beneath his nose. He pulls the shoulders of his business suit back and stalks off, leaving an aroma of Old Spice in his wake. When he is out of earshot, I turn to Sheila.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t mean to make a scene.” A picture pops into my brain. Two stags fighting over the same doe. “You’re not going to that man’s house for dinner, are you?”

She laughs. “Of course not. I’m having dinner with you, aren’t I?”

The Red Rooster is one of Gunflint County's premier dining establishments. It has been owned by the Walgenbach family for three generations, and is currently presided over by Ernestine Walgenbach, a matronly woman with a hairdo so severe that it pulls the corners of her eyes back to give her a sly oriental look. Tonight Ernestine is dressed in a floor-length black hostess gown that's slit up one side, and patent leather pumps that echo like gunshots as she strides across the marble floor of the foyer. Greeting Sheila and me with a snooty nod and a half smile, she drags two oversized menus from the pile at her maitre'd stand. The entry hall is decorated in varying shades of red, and an oversized statue of a bantam rooster adds an exclamation point to the establishment's name. Overhead, strings of small white Christmas tree lights bathe the room in diffuse light.

Before entering the restaurant, I made my apologies to Manfred, who is accustomed to joining me at the various neighborhood eating establishments we frequent in Milwaukee. At this particular roadhouse, however, he would be summarily

dismissed. I could not subject my partner to that kind of indignity. Instead, I rolled the Buick's windows down and gave him a big Milk Bone from the stash I keep in the glove compartment, assuring him that I would return before he had a chance to catch up on his dog dreams.

Ernestine Walgenbach ushers us to a nice table on the far side of the dining room where we can look out the window onto a floodlit bend in the Nekoosa River. Remembering the manners my mother taught me as a boy, I wait to take my seat until our hostess has slipped Sheila's chair beneath her very fetching derriere. If it were Friday night, this room would be jammed to overflowing for the seafood buffet, served at double the price the low-end downtown taverns charge for fish fries. Tourists seem to be determined to discover establishments that promise to part them with the biggest part of the money they've been saving all year long for their vacation, and the Red Rooster delivers on that pledge.

Tonight being Thursday, the place is only half full, giving Sheila and I plenty of privacy. As we pore over our menus, I take note of a young man clearing one of the tables at the center of the room. A moment later it dawns on me that he bears an uncanny resemblance to one of the groundskeepers Perelman and I ran into on the porch of Shibboleth Hills clubhouse the day Deuce Froedert met his maker. This bus person has got to be the man who wore a red bandana on his head that morning.

“That fellow,” I say, nodding to the man. “He’s a double for one of the Latinos I saw out at the golf course.”

Sheila looks up from her menu. “He probably *is* the Latino you saw at the golf course. Most of the local new arrivals hold down more than one job.”

“I know about the work ethic of Mexicans, but I don’t think I could rake sand traps all day and then bus tables all night. Not on my best day.”

“I know that gentleman,” Sheila says. “He’s Julio Martinez. On weekends he works at the car wash.”

“What else do you know about him?”

“For one thing, I know that Julio isn’t Mexican. He’s Salvadoran. Lots of Salvadorans in this part of the state, along with some Nicaraguans.”

“I’m pretty sure that in my neck of the woods they’re all Mexicans. That would be on the south side of Milwaukee.”

Sheila brings me up to date on the fact that there are as many different varieties of Hispanics arriving in the US of A as there were Europeans back in the day. A Cuban immigrant in Miami has vastly different cultural ties than a Mexican immigrant in El Paso, she says, or a Puerto Rican in New York. It’s the same as what happened when immigrants from Italy and Germany and Ireland came to this country generations ago, each with a particular national background.

I give that some thought. Seeing as how my main goal tonight is to raise myself up in Sheila's estimation, I do not mention the difference between arriving at Ellis Island legally and wading across the Rio Grande in the dark of night. Anyway, my focus is on Julio and his presence on the clubhouse porch on the morning of Deuce Froedert's involuntary exit. "Wish I could talk to him. I'd like to know what he and his pal saw the morning Deuce Froedert got his head bashed in. The two of them were peeking in the windows of the clubhouse, and I'd like to know why. Problem is, they don't speak English and I don't speak Spanish."

"Walter," Sheila says. "I'm surprised. You work on the south side of Milwaukee. I would think you'd be dealing with Spanish speakers all the time."

"That's different. My conversations with the locals on the south side are pretty short and to the point. We manage with hand signals, and there's always somebody around who speaks English. When I was growing up, the neighborhoods were Polish and German, with a smattering of Serbs and Croats. We didn't learn their language, either. They were expected to learn English."

"Wouldn't it serve you well to learn some conversational Spanish?"

"I do manage with a little bit of Spanglish," I say in my own defense. "But I'm a pretty old dog to be learning new tricks."

Sheila raises an eyebrow. "You keep saying how old you are. You're only as old as you feel, and I believe you've got a good

many miles left on you. Now let's get back to the question at hand: how can you investigate crime in a part of the city with all those Spanish speakers without knowing their language?"

"I just tell them, '*Speak English please.*' It works with folks who've been in the city for awhile. They prefer Spanish, but they know enough English to fill me in."

Our waitress delivers drinks, a glass of Chardonnay for Sheila and a brandy old-fashioned for me.

"Up here," I continue, "it's a different story. These folks got to be real new to the country. I've had no end of trouble getting through to them." I am referring, of course, to Julio and his compadre from the golf clubhouse.

"Let me call Julio over. I'll see what he has to say." Sheila gestures to the man, who has just now returned to the dining room carrying an empty tray. He puts a finger to his chest. It's a '*who, me?*' gesture. Sheila nods, and the man approaches our table, tray in hand, looking like he'd rather be back at the golf course riding one of those big John Deeres.

A dialogue ensues between my date and the bus boy, Sheila smiling graciously and Julio fidgeting like a boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar. After a couple of back-and-forths, Sheila turns to me. "What was it you wanted to ask him?"

"Did he see anything unusual at the golf course the morning Deuce Froedert was killed? Any strangers hanging around?"

Sheila puts the question to Julio, who answers emphatically: “*No. Nada. Nadie.*”

“What was he looking for on the clubhouse porch?” I ask.

This time the answer is longer, punctuated by references to Senor Anthem.

Sheila turns to me. “He says he and his friend Jorge saw Mr. Anthem running toward the clubhouse, and knew something was wrong. He says they’d never seen Mr. Anthem move so fast.”

“What does he think of Mr. Anthem?” I ask. “Is he an honorable man?”

When Sheila poses the question, Julio’s face brightens. It is apparent from his demeanor that the answer is positive. “*El Senor Anthem nos cuida, no, segura, sin peligroso cuando venga el camion.*”

“He says Mr. Anthem is a great man,” Sheila reports. “He says he and his compadres would do anything for the boss, that Mr. Anthem not only gave them jobs in America, but has taken good care of them both on the job and off.”

I nod, at the same time wondering whether telling lies on behalf of Art Anthem is among the things Julio and his friends would do for their boss. I realize that Sheila is waiting for me to ask my next question. “I guess that’s all I have for now.” I turn to the bus boy. “Nice to meet you, Julio. *Muy gracias.*”

As Julio beats a hasty retreat, Sheila smiles. “Then you do know at least some Spanish. *Es verdad?*” She asks.

“Sorry. That’s a little too advanced for me.”

The waitress arrives with my steak and Sheila’s wild salmon. We make the customary appreciative comments and turn our attention to the food. For a moment silence rules at our table, as Sheila balances small chunks of fish on her fork and I tie into my steak with an oversized serrated knife.

“Guess I didn’t do myself any favors getting into it with the banker,” I finally say.

Sheila touches her napkin to the corners of her mouth. “Miles Vertrance? Why would you worry about offending him? You don’t need a loan, do you?”

“Oh no, nothing like that. The thing is, the way Earl Guffey left it, I was to interview a couple of what we call ‘persons of interest’ in the Froedert murder. One is Screamin’ Steve Gunderson. The other is banker Vertrance. I don’t suppose tonight’s run in with him will make him a particularly cooperative witness.”

“My lord. Does the sheriff think that Miles Vertrance could be involved in Deuce Froedert’s death?”

“I doubt it. The interview is more of a way to collect information. To eliminate him as a suspect, as the TV cops say.”

In my own mind I am thinking just the opposite. Vertrance, the little weasel, is capable of just about anything in my humble opinion. I can’t see him doing the deed himself, but I can see him putting somebody else in a position to do his bidding. Money is power in the world of Miles Vertrance, and he’s the man with the

combination to the bank vault. Then again, maybe my assessment of Vertrance's character is all tied up with the moves he put on Sheila at the park. Could I be letting my personal opinion intrude on my police judgment? I decide to put that particular question out of my mind until some later time, and enjoy this unexpected time with Ms. Mackey.

"He's no friend to the poor," Sheila says. "He's made it clear that the bank will not offer services like SAFE savings accounts as long as he's in charge. He's in the camp that would like to keep immigrants in a state of servitude. His clients are the big farmers and the motel owners who get cheap labor from an underclass. That's why he's against giving new arrivals a leg up."

"I don't doubt that he's in the corner of whoever has the bucks," I say.

"Immigrants keep their money in their pockets and purses, and hide it under their mattresses. Makes them easy prey to robbers."

I am reminded of Earl Guffey's comments on the state of his jail. Filled with illegals, he's running out of room for violent criminals. Seems nobody is particularly happy with what's going on in Gunflint County these days.

"They are here illegally though," I say, more to keep up my end of the conversation than to make a point.

"But they're not criminals in the usual sense of the word. You heard Gus Rodriguez, didn't you? Living in this country without permission is a civil matter, not a criminal one. These are not wild-

eyed terrorists. They're families coming to a place where they hope to find a better life. The federal government is spending millions of dollars on programs like Social Security match letters to employers."

"Say again?"

"Social security match letters," Sheila says, taking a sip of her white wine. "They send letters to employers to trap people who may be in this country without Social Security numbers. It's a sleazy and underhanded practice that shows how mean spirited our present administration can be."

It's time for dessert, but Sheila holds her hands up to indicate that she can eat no more. "I'd just as soon go back to the pie shop," I say in a naked attempt to curry favor. "Can't beat those lemon meringues you serve up as a finishing touch on a good meal."

"Flatterer."

I nod.

Shortly thereafter, in the parking lot of the Red Rooster, I retrieve a small package from my pocket. As we approach the car, I reveal a piece of steak wrapped in a bar napkin and hold it out for Manfred, who has already begun to drool in anticipation. "Good boy," I say, giving him a rub on the top of his head. "Sorry we had to leave you on your own. It's not your kind of place." His tail slaps against the back seat in appreciation, and he gives Sheila a big lick on the hand as she gets into the car.

We pull into the driveway of Sheila's house and wrestle the placards from the trunk of the Buick. I carry the signs to the front door. Sheila gets her key out and opens the door. I deposit the signs in a corner of the living room.

"Would you like a drink?" she asks.

I check my watch. "Maybe I ought to get going. Manfred needs an outing, and it's already past my bedtime. Just think of me as your Uncle Wally."

She bats her eyelashes. "I could never think of you as my uncle, Walt."

The moment passes, and Sheila adds. "Next Tuesday we're going to be picketing the Kentucky Fried Chicken store in Cottonwood. Think you'd like to join us?"

"The KFC store? Why would you picket the KFC store?"

"Do you have any idea of how they treat their chickens? Keep them penned up in cages the size of breadboxes and force-feed them. It's a cruel, punishing life for the poor things. PETA is organizing a protest."

Oh boy. Wait until Maurice LaCaskey finds out the PETA people are after his throat. LaCaskey missed the state university extension course in public relations. He's likely to go ballistic when the pickets show up.

I say my goodbyes. There's an awkward moment during which I wonder if it is proper to give Sheila a squeeze and a kiss in parting. I decide to play it safe.

Driving home with Manfred in the back seat, I ruminate on that one comment Sheila made. Said she could never think of me as her uncle. Wonder what she meant by that. I smile again. This is getting to be a habit.

I spend the following day sorting through a fifty-year collection of beach toys and fishing equipment left at the cottage by generations of Dopple children, and beating myself up for losing sight of the target Earl Guffey has instructed me to pursue. My assignment was to gather information from key players on how the Deuce Froedert murder might have gone down, and instead I've been spending my time and attention chasing after a woman. As I consider that transgression, the corners of my mouth curl upward at the memory of my dinner with Sheila Mackey. Earl Guffey has his priorities, I conclude, and I have mine.

Nevertheless, I am duty-bound to follow up on orders, and at five o'clock in the afternoon I hit the shower and change into my traveling clothes for a visit to Screamin' Steve Gunderson's roadhouse. I leave Manfred wagging his bullwhip of a tail on the pier and board the Dopple yacht on tippy-toes to avoid the half-inch of water that has collected on the floor due to a small leak in the bung at the rear of the vessel.

Seven minutes later I pull into the Screamin' Steve's marina and tie up. The island music has already begun, tonight's early

program featuring a selection of steel drum instrumentals. Walking around to the entrance to the building, I see a collection of Dodge Ram pickups along with half a dozen Harley's in the parking lot.

Inside the building, a cavernous hall is divided into two parts. To the left of the door is a rectangular bar festooned with neon beer signs; a dance floor; and in the corner, a bandstand where local wannabes are booked for an occasional Saturday night gig. To the right is a large dining room, already filled to near capacity with a motley collection of seniors taking advantage of the ten percent early diner's price break on the Friday night fish fry and, presumably, to be out of here by the time Steve Gunderson starts his Screamin'.

I take some time to accustom myself to the strange ambience of the hall, on one end the seniors picking at their fish and on the other end the beginning of the evening's hard-drinking festivities. Then I find myself a seat at the far end of the bar, order a Leinenkugel's Red, and inquire after the health of the operation from the bartender. He advises that business has never been better, due to the unusually hot summer and an improving economy that pulls Chicagoans northward like a magnet. Given the reputation of bartenders in general, I wonder if his comment refers to his own skimmming activities or to the net Steve Gunderson realizes after expenses.

Up on the bandstand Gunderson, recently back from a foray to the Florida Keys and hopped up on whatever brand of mind-altering

chemicals he picked up there, is in the process of organizing a limbo contest. Sporting one of those all-rayon Hawaiian shirts and a blousy pair of Havana Jack trousers, Gunderson is playing the role of a cruise ship recreation director, coaxing the biker mamas at ringside to wiggle their way under the limbo stick and give the construction workers and fishing guides at the bar their jollies. Steve challenges husbands and boyfriends to pony up a fiver to show him up, or to show off the supple body of their squeeze.

The deal is this: anyone can enter the contest just by putting a fin in the big pickle jar on the bandstand. There's free beer for contestants. And the prize for beating Steve at his own game is a bottle of Haig & Haig Pinch Bottle, presently sitting atop a Bose column speaker to the right of the bandstand.

The fly in the ointment is that Steve Gunderson makes all the rules for these contests, and as a result wins virtually every round. It's a low-grade game of three-card monte. Only a fool would take up the challenge, as I have learned from bitter experience. I choose not to elaborate on that particular subject.

As I alternate my attention between the proceedings on the stage and the bubbles rising in my glass of beer, I notice a group of three gents seated on the opposite side of the enclosed bar, one of whom is none other than Miles Vertrance, my nemesis from the immigration demonstration. I recognize one of the other suits – the only ones in business dress in the entire building – as a developer from Camp Douglas. These three are urging a couple of heifers

seated at a table near the bandstand to take Steve up on his challenge to best him at the limbo pole. They offer to put up the five-dollar ante if one or both of the girls will shake their booties under the pole.

Although banker Vertrance is on my list of interviewees, I decide that this is neither the time or the place to go a couple of rounds with him. Better to take him on alone, *mano a mano*, even if it is on his own turf. Having his pals listening in on our conversation would only muddy the waters.

As if to confirm my decision, my cell phone rings again.

“Dopple here.”

“Dopple, what’s going on up there? Did you nab the groundskeeper?” Perelman.

“I can’t talk right now, Bernie. I’m in the middle of an interview.”

“Where’s this interview taking place?” he asks, obviously picking up on the music in the background. “Screamin’ Steve’s?” He follows up with a guffaw.

“Matter of fact it is. Steve Gunderson is one of the people on my list.”

“Listen,” Perelman says, “I thought you’d want to know that we’re chasing a major drug operation here. The I-ties in the Ward have been cooking meth in the back room of one of those so-called art studios on Water Street. We’re going in with the county’s drug task force. You’ll want to be in on this. Potts and Knowles are

salivating, want a piece of the glory. Get back here and give me a hand, Dopples. I can't do it all by myself. Wrap up your small town crime wave and get back to where the action is."

I can imagine the action to which Perelman refers. It involves him sitting on a bar stool much like the one my own butt is planted on, shooting the shit with the boys at Duncy's Tap, and getting ready to take his turn at the dart board. If past experience is any guide, the reason he wants me back in town is that he's run out of ready cash and is looking for somebody to buy a round of drinks.

Up on the bandstand there's a pause in the action, Gunderson having bested a lissome but aging blonde woman in the limbo. With my free hand I beckon to our host to join me at the bar, and make my regrets to Perelman: "Bernie, I got to go. Business awaits."

"Really milking this one aren't you? Perelman says.

"What can I say? There's magic in the Northwoods." Before Perelman can answer, I sign off.

Steve Gunderson, all one hundred and thirty-five pounds of him, takes a seat next to me at the bar. "You're one of those Dopples from over in Stumpy Bay, aren't you?" he says. A statement, not a question.

"The last of the Dopples, I am sad to say."

Gunderson considers the information. "You ever decide to sell that property in Stumpy Bay, ring me up. I'd give you more than a fair price."

There are many things I might consider doing with the Dopple Hilton if the day ever comes. Selling out to Steve Gunderson is not one of them. I move to change the subject. “You and Deuce Froedert go back a ways, I understand.”

Gunderson flicks a finger at the bartender, who opens the cooler and pulls out a bottle of tonic water. “All the way back to before high school,” he says. “He was a big shot jock and I was a small time dweeb. Now he’s a dead big time jock and I’m an entrepreneur.”

“You’re not one of the mourners then?”

He takes a sip of tonic and snorts. “In grade school Froedert used to chase me around the school yard at recess. When he caught me, he’d set my butt on the water fountain and I’d spend the rest of the day looking like I’d peed in my pants. Then in junior high he stole my bike. Rode it for three days, then dumped it in the river. In high school he stole my girlfriend and ended up marrying her.”

“Ann Froedert? You and Ann were a couple?”

He nods. “Hard to believe, isn’t it? But yeah, we went together for two years before Deuce decided that whatever I had, he wanted. She didn’t see it coming, the bumps and bruises she tried to cover up with makeup, and the skirt chasing he did at the golf course.” He bows his head as if thinking what might have been. “Now Ann’s on her own. Probably for the best.”

“You and Froedert have problems with each other recently?”

“Nothing that’d make me want to kill him, if that’s what you’re getting at. He was planning to bring in bands from LaCrosse to play in the clubhouse on weekends. That would have cut into my business, but it wasn’t enough to get me all atwitter. You may have noticed, we serve a different mix of clientele.”

I point to the dining room where the AARP crowd is gathered. “Mix is one way to put it. Something of a Mad Hatter’s tea party, wouldn’t you say?”

“Hey, it’s the best deal on a fish fry in town. Two hours from now that bunch will be back home watching I Love Lucy reruns on the TV, and the bikers will let their hair down.”

Returning to the subject at hand, I ask: “And last Tuesday morning, you were where?”

Gunderson makes a face like a dog taking a dump, and takes another sip of his tonic. “Tuesday? Tuesdays I’m in the back room, working on the books. And no, there’s nobody else around that early in the day. Charlie Nutter comes in about one, and the rest of the crew isn’t due until late afternoon. Probably a couple of the marina boys down at the lake, but they couldn’t vouch for me. Does that make me a suspect?”

He doesn’t seem the least bit interested whether it does or doesn’t, so I ignore the question and gesture to Vertrance and company, who are still pressing a couple of rather portly women to take a chance on the limbo contest. “You see him in here on a regular basis?” I ask, indicating the banker.

“Miles Vertrance? Hell, I put a new roof on the place last year with the bucks he left on the bar. One of my best customers. He should own a piece of the joint.” Gunderson thinks that one over for a minute, then adds: “Come to think of it, he *does* own a piece of the joint. His bank holds the mortgage on the place.”

“Your hired hand behind the bar tells me business is good.”

“He should know. He’s my partner. Yeah, things are looking up.”

“No danger of foreclosure?”

Gunderson laughs. “You kidding? In the bar business, foreclosure is always a cool summer or a snowless winter away. But we’re doing okay for now. Better, at least, than Deuce Froedert and his la-de-dah golf course.”

I take a look at the stage, where it looks like Gunderson just picked up a challenger for the limbo contest: Vertrance has pulled out his wallet and now mounts the stage to deposit a five dollar bill in the pickle jar. He is followed by one of the women he and his friends have been prodding, a thirty-something in short shorts who giggles self-consciously as she mounts the stage. Without so much as a by your leave, Gunderson slaps the bar and takes off. “Back in a few,” he says over his shoulder as he moves to join the fray.

My phone rings again. This time I check caller ID to make sure it’s not Perelman. The number is local. “Dopple here.”

“Guffey here.”

“I’m on the job Earl,” I blurt out, eager to let the boss know that I haven’t been shirking. “Just finished talking to Steve Gunderson about the case. Put him on the list. He can’t account for his whereabouts on the day of the crime.”

“Never mind about that,” Guffey says, his voice heaving like a steam engine. “We got a problem out at the golf course.”

“Where you calling from, chief?”

“The fourth hole. Greenside bunker. They found Art Anthem buried a foot deep in sand.”

“Is he dead?”

There’s a pause. “Of course he’s dead. You think he dug himself a foot deep in sand? I need you over here Doppie, on the double.”

At this moment, my mind plays a trick on me, taking me back to the certainty Perelman expressed that Anthem was Froedert’s killer. What would Bernie say now that the supposed murderer himself has apparently suffered the same fate? Some Sherlock my partner turned out to be.

“You still there, Doppie?”

“I’m here, sheriff. But it’ll be a little while before I can get out there. I took the boat over to Screamin’ Steve’s, so I’ll have to...”

“Stay where you are,” Guffey orders. “Sperkle is coming by there on his way from headquarters. I’ll have him pick you up.” Before he hangs up, the sheriff adds: “And bring that mutt of yours with you. He may be able to do some good out here.”

Sperkle? Here we go. Another go-around with that needle dick.

The wail of Sperkle's siren screeches through the woods, becoming ever-more-grating as he approaches the parking lot of Screamin' Steve's. I suspect that running the lights and siren is among the things Sperkle likes best about being a police officer. It is even possible that he gets his rocks off by tearing down country roads with no possibility of anything getting in his way except a stray cow or a farm wife out to retrieve the mail from her rural box. I suspect that Sperkle sees himself as Wisconsin's answer to Lucas Davenport in the John Sandford Prey stories.

The cruiser pulls up beside me. As I open the passenger door, the lieutenant waves impatiently for me to get my butt in gear. He is distressed to hear that we need to stop by the cottage to pick up Manfred, on Guffey's orders. We take off onto the lake road, the siren announcing our every turn. The lieutenant mutters about not needing a mutt at the scene of the crime. Five minutes later we pull into my driveway.

The high whine of the siren fades and Manfred's howl takes over the job of disturbing the peace. In a moment the big dog is standing stiff-legged near the back door, his hackles standing at

attention and his nose in the air, letting all and sundry know that they'd better keep clear of his territory or risk being torn limb from limb. Manfred is a barker by both genetics and choice. One minute he'll be laying on his pad sleeping, and the next minute he'll jump up and start barking and pacing to every corner of the house. His lines go back to several guard dog breeds, evincing the characteristics of the boxer, the Great Pyrenees, the Mastiff and the St. Bernard. Although his barking often drives me to distraction, I can't blame my partner for being the animal he was born to be.

When I call out his name, Manfred recognizes that it's me getting out of this strange new vehicle, and starts wagging his whole body as he approaches. I open the back door and the dog jumps onto the seat of the car without further encouragement. Sperkle peels out of the driveway, heading for Shibboleth Hills and our new case.

"Where'd you ever hook up with that ugly mutt?" Sperkle asks blandly, as if he's discussing the weather instead of offering up a personal insult.

I restrain myself and explain how Manfred washed out of police dog service a couple years back. "He doesn't take orders except on his own terms, scares the bejeesus out of people when he charges them as if he is going to attack, and suffers from a chronic case of flatulence." On the other hand, I go on, he possesses a famously sensitive nose, which is what got him into police work in the first place. *Untrainable* is the word Sergeant Sheila Wray used in writing up his dismissal papers.

“I see him differently,” I say. “He carries the elegance of the Pyrenees and the even temper of the Boxer.” I do not reveal to Sperkle that Manfred often tells me what’s on his mind by a subtle cast of his eyes and a wrinkling in the folds of skin. Crazy? What’s closer to an animal’s brain than his eyes? If sailors can communicate across ocean waters with semaphores and NASA can communicate with space ships, why not Manfred and me with our eyes?

As if to confirm my description of Manfred’s proclivities, the interior of the squad is suddenly filled with the toxic aroma of dog gas. “Jesus Christ!” Sperkle proclaims, rolling down his window. “That dog could break up a riot quicker than a canister of tear gas. I hope you got some other way to get back home, Detective. I’m not risking suicide by dog fart.”

The cruiser’s radio is alive with chatter about the goings on at the golf course, punctuated by lots of static. I reach over to turn down the volume, but Sperkle turns it right back up, claiming he needs to be in constant communication with his far-flung deputies. He also instructs me that only authorized personnel are allowed to touch the instruments on the dashboard. I remind him that I am a Milwaukee police detective. “Doesn’t that make me an authorized person?”

Sperkle huffs and says: “Only Gunflint County deputies are authorized persons.” That’s enough to throw a wet blanket on the conversation, and we lapse into silence.

By the time we get to Shibboleth Hills, shadows have begun to creep over the course. Sperkle drives right past the parking lot and onto the first fairway without slowing down – a serious infraction, I believe, of club rules. We pass the number two and number three tees, and drive on to the fourth green, where we find three sheriff's squads and a State Patrol car gathered. Guffey approaches our car and orders Sperkle to cut the siren and lights. "Balls Merle," he says with a sigh. "This isn't a traffic stop."

When I release Manfred from the back seat he hits the ground with his nose furrowing through the grass, his tail tucked between his legs, and his head moving from side to side like a metal detector in the hands of a beachcomber. I head for the greenside sand trap, where a body lays supine, mouth partway open as if the cadaver is merely sleeping, the left leg crooked over the right and Art Anthem's signature Green Bay Packers cap placed squarely on his chest. Although the body has been largely exhumed, it is still covered by a fine layer of sand, as though children covered Anthem over with sand during a day at the beach.

Guffey calls me over to the far side of the bunker and points out a spot where the turf has been broken at the lip of the hazard. "We're figuring Art must have been killed somewhere else," he says, "and dragged over here."

"Any guesses as to how long he's been in here?" I ask.

Guffey looks up toward the clubhouse. "Hold on," he says. "We should know in a few minutes."

On cue, a golf cart appears on the ridge driven by the newly installed course manager, Karla Hess, and carrying coroner Doc Harvey. We exchange greetings all around, and Doc Harvey sets immediately to work. He makes a complete circle of the body, then bends down to continue his examination. "Light's no damn good," he complains. "Going to have to take him to the morgue to get any real answers."

"I was just asking Earl," I say, "any idea of when he was killed?"

Doc Harvey adjusts the bifocals on the end of his nose and gives me a look. "Of course I've got an idea, Dopple. I'm the coroner."

I wait. He lets the suspense build before continuing. "I'd say sometime beyond twelve hours and less than eighteen hours, based on the progress of rigor."

Guffey and I do some quick calculating. The doc's estimate puts the time of death between midnight last night and early this morning. A killer would have a tough time dragging the body out here in the full light of day with hackers working their way around the course, so the obvious time of the crime is probably in the dead of night.

"One more thing," the doc says. He goes back into the sand trap and gently brushes detritus from the side of Anthem's head. "See here? This is a gunshot wound, right at the base of the skull. The cause of death was lead poisoning."

The random nature of violent crime and its wake continues to amaze me. Here we have the course superintendent lying dead in one of his own bunkers all day long, while linksters pitched and putted without knowing what was interred just beneath their feet. How many foursomes, I wonder, passed this way over the preceding twelve hours, and what would have happened if one of them had plugged a ball in the soft sand of the greenside trap? Imagine taking a sand wedge to play a difficult shot and finding the belt buckle of the head groundskeeper beneath your club.

“And not one single person happened to notice,” I say to myself.

Karla Hess sidles up beside me. “It happens,” she says. “Hasn’t been a whole lot of play since the Froedert thing, and this bunker is on the long side of the green. Mostly men out here today, and it’s been my experience that men think they can hit a ball farther than they actually can. They generally come up short of the green.”

“Maybe the killer knew that,” I say. “Maybe he figured the body would stay buried beneath the sand all winter long.”

“Not likely,” Hess says. “These traps are raked every day. You’d have to bury a body pretty deep.”

Guffey joins the discussion. “That’s how he was found,” Earl says. He points to two men sitting on their heels next to one of the course’s big Gravely riding mowers. It’s hard to make them out in the half-light, but I can see by their headgear that it’s my old pals

Jorge and Julio. They're the ones who found the body. "They pulled up one of Art's shoes while they were raking the trap," Guffey explains. "They seem to be pretty shook up about it."

Huddled up by the mower, the two Salvadorans look like children hoping their proximity to their equipment will save them from whatever evil is to befall them next.

"You don't suspect them, do you?" I ask.

"Naw," Guffey says. "They're scared shitless. They just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Doing their jobs. I suppose finding a body is enough to scare the wits out of a civilian."

Merle Sperkle is not so sure. "Keep in mind sheriff: down in Mexico human life isn't worth a roll of pennies. People are killed for their boots, for their T-shirts."

Guffey turns on his lieutenant. "Now why would you say that, Merle? You an expert on life south of the border?"

"And those two are Salvadoran," I say, putting my newly acquired knowledge of Julio's background to good use.

"Same thing," Sperkle responds. "As for you Dopple, you seem to be cropping up wherever and whenever there's a dead body to be found. Maybe you have more to do with this than you're letting on."

"What the hell's that supposed to mean? I reply. "I'm a Milwaukee cop, for Christ sake. I'm here under orders. And you're the one who drove me out here."

Guffey puts his substantial frame between us. “Okay boys, let’s cool down. We got a dead body on our hands. This is no time for bickering.” He removes his cap and swipes his forehead with his hand. “Regular goddamn crime wave,” he says.

Doc Harvey clicks his teeth with his tongue. “Another one,” he mutters. “I’ll have to build an addition on my little shop if this keeps up.”

Guffey points to the two Latinos, and I can almost see them cringe as he does. “I need to talk to those two gents,” he says.

“You’ll need to take a lightning course from Berlitz before you do,” I say. “They know as much English as I know Spanish.”

“Maybe I can help,” Karla Hess says. “My high school Spanish is rusty, but I remember enough to get by.”

We leave Doc Harvey at the scene, calling for the boys with the county meat wagon to come pick up Art Anthem’s remains. Some twenty minutes later the rest of our company reassembles in the dining room of the clubhouse: Guffey, Sperkle, Hess and me, along with our two reluctant groundskeepers. Karla offers coffee and apologizes for there being nothing to eat. “Business has been so bad since the Froedert thing that we shut down the grill.”

What follows is a painful exercise in miscommunication, with Guffey asking questions, Hess translating, and the two Salvadorans answering in single syllables. They were going about their regular rounds, it appears, after most of the day’s play had been completed.

The trap at the fourth green hadn't been raked for a couple of days, and was due for grooming. They figured something was out of whack with their first look: the sand was damp, a sure sign that it had been recently disturbed. After two days it ought to have been bone dry, but it wasn't.

Jorge poked around with his rake, and it wasn't long before he uncovered the tip of Anthem's work boot. They recognized the boot right away, and talked about what they should do next.

"Was there any doubt?" Guffey asks pointedly.

Hess turns back to the Salvadorans. "They were afraid they'd be blamed for whatever had happened," she reports. "They didn't want to be involved. But in the end, they decided that it would be worse for them if the police found out they'd been at the scene and hadn't reported it."

"Tell them to give their addresses to Lt. Sperkle here," Guffey says, "and not to make any travel plans. I'd ask them to surrender their passports, but I'm sure that would be nothing more than comic relief."

Sperkle raises his hand like a schoolboy in class. "Sheriff. You're not letting them go, are you? They could have done the crime. They're flight risks."

Guffey gives his lieutenant one of his incredulous grimaces. "Merle, think about it. They kill their boss in the dead of night, haul his body to the fourth hole, and bury it. Then, twelve or so hours

later they come back and dig it up? Don't sound like much of a plan to me."

Julio and Jorge apparently have picked up on Sperkle's idea that they might be held in the slammer. They launch into an animated discussion with Karla Hess, who for her part seems to be having trouble keeping up with their high-speed Spanish. For my part, only a few isolated words are distinguishable. Among them is *camion*. Again, the reference to a truck.

In the days that follow the discovery of Art Anthem's body on the fourth hole at Shibboleth Hills, I feel like Bill Murray, the TV weatherman in *Groundhog Day*. If dead bodies keep showing up at the course, I'm likely to be trapped up here in the northwoods until the snow flies, living the same scenes from my life over and over again. More to the point, there doesn't seem to be a whole lot I can do to affect the outcome, being a relative stranger in these parts and having been plopped down like a frycake into a bucket of oil to help Guffey unravel the snarl.

The Anthem murder has brought out the usual players: the Staties, the media, and the idly curious citizenry. The crime lab fellows are back out at the course with reporters from LaCrosse, Eau Claire, even Madison trailing in their wake. They have not yet released findings from their investigation of the Froedert killing, and here they are scooping up microscopic bits of dandruff and blood drippings from a new murder. As I get breakfast for Manfred and myself, my thoughts turn to irony as I imagine the next emergency meeting of the SH board of directors. Now they're going

to have to find a new head groundskeeper. Will the controversy this time involve race, just as the argument last time centered on gender?

Of one thing I'm sure. The Martinez cousins, Julio and Jorge, know a lot more than I do about the circumstances in which these crimes took place, and I'd sure like to pick their brains. Whether it's simply a matter of language, or they're scared to death of deportation, I can't figure. One way or another, they've been avoiding me. In either case, my best bet to construct a theory of the crimes is through the local Latino community.

I don't know enough Spanish to get the whole story, but I know somebody who does. That notion lands me at Sheila's Pies & Coffee as the clock inches past nine o'clock in the morning, with Manfred trailing in my wake. Just inside the door, my stomach rumbles in response to the odor of fresh baked goods despite having downed a big bowl of Cheerios back at the Dopple Hilton. I take a seat at what has become my usual booth and give a wave to the proprietress, who is engaged with a stout local housewife whom, I suspect, is purchasing some of Sheila's fine work to pass it off as her own at tonight's dinner table. More power to her, I say.

Five minutes later, Sheila slides onto the bench on the other side of the booth and places her hand on mine. My day has already brightened.

"How are you this morning, Detective Dopple?" she asks.

"Just fine, Miss Mackey. And yourself?"

“Likewise. Can I get you a piece of warm rhubarb and strawberry pie?”

“I love it when you talk dirty.”

She returns a moment later with a larger-than-life slice of pie with the flakiest crust ever to pass my lips. “I suppose you’ve heard about what happened out on the golf course last night,” I say.

“Mr. Anthem. Yes, it’s all over town. Terrible thing. I can’t understand what’s going on out there. These kinds of things just don’t happen in Cottonwood.”

“They do now. And Earl Guffey is going to have a stroke if we don’t make some progress on delivering the goods.” I go on to explain my problem with interviewing the Salvadoran groundskeepers. “Sure would appreciate having somebody with me who could talk to those boys. Somebody I could trust.”

Sheila’s face brightens. “You’re asking me to become part of a murder investigation. How exciting.”

“Nothing that would be very dangerous though. Wouldn’t want to put that pretty face in the line of fire.” I feel the heat rising through my neck at the boldness of the comment.

She laughs, and gets up to check out a satisfied customer at the register. “Come pick me up at five,” she says. “We’ll go out to the Thirties and see if we can find somebody to talk to.”

The immigrant population hereabouts lives in a place called The Thirties, a kind of twenty-first century ghetto along the Nekoosa River north of Cottonwood. The place is so named because

it was built during the Depression to board WPA and CCC workers. The buildings were later sold off to private investors who hold the properties to this day, collecting unseemly rents for structures that now house three and four families apiece. It is widely known that many of the inhabitants of this quarter of the town are undocumented, but the renters' status being a federal issue, they are left alone so long as they obey local ordinances and state statutes. Guffey has enough on his hands with real criminals to leave the mild-mannered illegals to their own devices.

Having hours of time on my hands, I decide to mosey over to the state bank and take a shot at Mr. Miles Vertrance. The bank was built some eighty years ago, and retains the architectural feel of a Greek temple, sporting Doric pillars outside and marble counters inside. The president's office is in the rear, extensively remodeled since it was first installed, with a large glass window – presumably bulletproof – overlooking the lobby, and a matching glass-topped table in lieu of a desk.

I pass by both the information desk and the secretary's checkpoint, heading directly for the door to Miles Vertrance's office. The secretary jumps from her work station as if on springs and warns me not to enter the hallowed ground without an appointment. I ignore her.

Vertrance's back is turned to me. He is working at a computer on his credenza, his back hunched and the top of his balding head reflecting light from the overhead fluorescents. Coatless, he sports

wide red suspenders over a striped white shirt. When he senses he is not alone in the office, he wheels around in a shamelessly oversized leather executive chair and rises to his full five-foot seven inches.

“I warned that man,” the secretary says by way of apology. “He marched right by my desk.” I get the impression that she is more upset by the fact that I disregarded her gatekeeping instructions than by the fact that her boss’s privacy has been compromised.

Having reassured himself that this is not some kind of stickup, Vertrance waves her off. “It’s all right Millie. I’ll handle it.” She skulks off, giving me a look that would melt a cast iron skillet, and closes the door firmly behind her.

“Pardon the interruption,” I say by way of introduction. “Policemen have a habit of calling without an appointment. Hope that doesn’t wear out my welcome.”

Vertrance remains standing, his way of telling me I am not invited to take a seat. “You can’t bring a dog in here,” he says, gesturing to Manfred, who has followed me in like a shadow. “This is a place of business.”

I look down at my partner, then back to the banker. “He’s a police dog. He’s allowed.” That seems to mollify the man, but he continues to regard Manfred with a jaundiced eye, as though the mutt might have it in his walnut brain to attack. In return, Manfred keeps a wary eye on Vertrance, alerted now to the possibility of trouble brewing.

“You’re the one who was with Sheila Mackey over at the immigration rally the other day,” Vertrance says. “Dopper?”

“It’s Doppie. Detective Doppie. Yeah, I’m that one. I got the impression you are not a fan of immigration rights.”

He blanches. “Immigration rights? Oh, I’m a fan of immigration rights. What I’m not a fan of is amnesty for brown-skins who haven’t taken their place in line. I’m a fan of high fences and strict enforcement, including deportation.”

“The folks I’ve met seem to be gentle souls. Got no quarrel with them.”

“They’re here illegally. And their government protects them every way it can.

“Their government?”

“The Mexican government. Things like matricula consular cards. The consulate is bringing a mobile unit to Sparta next week to issue ID cards. No checks, no verification, no vetting. Just pass out cards willy-nilly, and expect us to honor them.”

“Not good for business?”

“Oh,” Vertrance says, adjusting his bow tie in a gesture of superiority, “business is just fine at this institution.” He raps a knuckle on his glass desk. As he does, I take note of the fact that the desk, credenza and chair are all sitting on a two-inch raised platform that elevates the president of the Cottonwood State Bank above the position of seekers after money. Neat trick to make a smallish man with a thin mustache appear larger.

“Yes,” he continues. “Business is *real* good. This is farm country, and farmers always need credit. Now is a great time to be a farmer. Commodity prices are sky high. It has to do with ethanol.”

“The stuff they add to gas at the pump.”

He nods. “And the ethanol boom, in turn, is a natural result of the high price of oil. As long as OPEC holds back production my customers will be expanding their corn crops, because high prices at the pump mean higher corn prices at the grain elevator. It’s all a matter of economics. We live in a global economy, Dopple.”

“Dopple,” I correct. “And thanks for the economics lesson. But I didn’t come here to talk corn or oil. Sheriff Guffey asked me to have a word with you about the Deuce Froedert murder.”

That stops the money man in his undersized tracks. He sits down on his ersatz throne and motions to me to take a seat. “What would I have to do with the Froedert thing?” he asks. “I figured the State Patrol guys were taking care of that.”

I reach forward and pluck one of the bank’s courtesy pens from a cup on the desk. “Unfortunately, the state boys haven’t come up with all that much evidence. And you were there at Shibboleth Hills the morning they found Froedert’s body.”

Vertrance wiggles his butt on the chair and waves an effete hand as if to deflect my comment. “So were half a hundred others. And I was never in the locker room when they say Froedert got his comeuppance. Hell, I was an innocent bystander.”

“Maybe. But you do hold mortgages on both the Froedert house and the clubhouse. And you were one of those campaigning to take the club private. So you had a financial interest in our Mr. Deuce Froedert.”

“Along with a good many other mooks in this town. The bank holds mortgages on property from here to Eau Claire. It’s our business. If I killed everyone who has a real estate loan with the bank, there’d be nobody left in town to make payments.”

“I understand. At the same time, Maurice LaCaskey said at the time – “I pull out my log book and check an entry – “he said he was having a beer with you and Al Buxbaum upstairs just before he went downstairs and found Max Tubbs and the body. At the same time, your name doesn’t appear on the pro shop tee times for that day.”

Vertrance leans back. “So that’s it,” he says. “No, my name was not on the list of tee times, because I wasn’t there to golf on that particular day. I was meeting with Al Buxbaum about a business deal. It’s one of the perks of membership. Gives you a place to meet and discuss business. And it would be much better if we took the club private.”

“Give you a place to get away from the hoi polloi, huh?”

He smirks. “Something like that. And if you’re looking for a suspect, *Detective* Dopper, you might leave off wasting your time with me and take a closer look at Max Tubbs. He’s the one who found the body.”

“Yes he is.”

“And isn’t that a good indication that he did the deed? It’s my understanding that the person who finds the body is more times than not the one who committed the crime.”

“Not always, though. And we need to cover all bases. Sometimes the culprit merely tries to throw suspicion on the person who found the body.”

“You’re barking up the wrong tree, detective. I’d have no motive to kill a lout like Froedert.”

“And if you did,” I say, “you’d probably have it done for you. Why get your own hands dirty in such a messy business.”

Vertrance leans back in his chair. “You spin quite a tale, Doppie. But you don’t have squat by way of evidence.”

“There’s also the matter of Art Anthem’s death. I’ll bet you can account for your whereabouts during the early morning hours the day the course superintendent was killed.”

He nods. “Sure can. I was over in Necedah, working out a crop loan with Harlan Wood. Had a little too much of his hospitality, and stayed overnight.”

“We’ll give Mr. Wood a call to confirm that. Maybe send a couple of deputies out to sweat him a little to make sure he’s telling the truth.”

Now Vertrance is on his feet again, the color rising in his face. “I’ve said all I’ve got to say, and I’m a very busy man. If there’s nothing else?”

I fold up my log book and return it to my pocket. “That about does it, Banker *Valance*. Thanks for your time.” I get up and head for the door.

As I reach for the doorknob, Vertrance asks: “You getting it on with Sheila Mackey? She the lay of the land these days?”

I stop in my tracks, and turn back to the banker. “What did you just say, partner?”

He smirks. “I’ll bet she could throw a man a fuck like a fifteen round championship fight.”

It’s a good thing that I carry a gun only in special circumstances. If I had my .38 police special with me at this moment, I might just turn and answer the banker’s question with lead. Instead, I take a running start and leap across the raised glass table in a vault I didn’t think I had in these old bones. I come down on the banker like a load of concrete. The big executive chair tips backwards, and the two of us tumble to the floor, rolling over twice before we become wedged in the corner of the office. I land two good right hand blows to Vertrance’s midsection before the bank security guard and the secretary rush into the room and dislodge me from my prey.

Vertrance sits half-upright in the corner, looking like a crumpled cardboard box. “You saw what happened here,” he whines, looking for support from his minions. “That man attacked me.” He is as much surprised as injured. “Unprovoked battery is

what it was. Police brutality.” His tone brings a deep growl from Manfred’s throat, and a raise of the hackles on his back.

I make a mental note of the fact that the aides remain silent, neither confirming nor refuting their boss’s charge. A person would almost get the impression that they enjoy seeing the president of the organization on his behind, neck crinkled into the corner of the oversized office.

Vertrance turns to me. “You dug yourself a deep hole here,” he says. “You have no idea who you’re dealing with.”

I shake my head in disgust and arrange my clothes. Guys like Vertrance; they carry their brains in their johnsons.

“Put in a good word for me with Sheila Mackey,” he calls after me. “I’ll still be around after you go back to the city, and that woman has a yen for the old one-eyed trouser snake if I’m any judge.”

The secretary gasps. I give Manfred the sign that we are leaving, and close the door firmly behind me.

As I get into the car I give Manfred a chuck under his chin and offer him a biscuit. “It was a stupid thing to do,” I admit. “But I do feel better.”

“She says my johnson reminds her of your face.”

That’s what I should have said. What I should have told Vertrance is that the ladies go for something a little more substantial than his limp worm. I should have said that it doesn’t matter how long he sticks around, he’s got as much chance with Sheila Mackey as I do of being named Pope in Rome.

Instead, I walked out of the banker’s office with nothing more than the echo of a slamming door, and let him have the last word. The story of my life. Always thinking up some wiseass comeback after the fact, waking up the next morning with what would have been a devastating put-down, but never coming up with the witty remark on the spot.

I cross the street to the park, Manfred trailing along with his head down as though he shares my humiliation. I take a seat on one of the wrought-iron benches facing the bank and bring an elbow into my ribs. Must have bruised them when I came down on Vertrance’s desk. When I inhale, a sharp pain shoots across the center of my chest and I am forced to lean forward to ease the distress. The shoulder pull suffered in my recent golf game is still

bothering me as well, making a stop at the Hometown Pharmacy a priority item on my list of things to do. Advil Nation.

My hand goes to Manfred's neck and scratches at the folds of loose skin and fur that offer comfort to a man in distress. Back when I was married to Alice, we had a Sheltie dog, sweet and obedient. By comparison, Manfred is a big oaf of a fellow, descended from a whole different line of canine ancestors. Sweet he is not, but with all his slobbering and flatulence he is a true friend. People passing our bench comment on his powerful build, and my parental pride helps overcome the gloom of the Vertrance interview.

There being plenty of time until my five o'clock appointment with Sheila, I decide to make another stop on behalf of the Gunflint County Sheriff's Department. Manfred and I take a short drive out of town to Max Tubbs Motors, *Home of the Sweet Deal on a new Ford, Lincoln or Mercury*. That's the way Max's ads in the Cottonwood Star put it. Much as I hate to admit it, the banker was right about one thing: Max Tubbs is the person who discovered Froedert's body, and that often turns out to be the person who did the crime.

Seconds after disembarking from the Buick, I am set upon by a young man with a spiky haircut and an energy in his step that I would give my left nut to possess. "Great day to put some new wheels under your backside," he says in a voice so cheery that I feel a toothache coming on. He glances at the Buick, then back to me, as

commission dollars dance before his eyes. “Ready to retire the old rust bucket, are we?”

I turn and take a long look at the Buick. Doesn’t look so terribly bad to me. Not a ding or dent on the body, and no more than a thin layer of road dust from the cottage driveway. “Not today Chief,” I reply. “Don’t make ‘em like that anymore.”

When I show him my badge and ask for Max Tubbs the salesman’s demeanor sours, and he points me in the direction of the showroom. “Build ‘em a lot better,” he says in defense of his product as I leave him, wallowing in disappointment, on the lot.

Despite his exalted position in the organization, Max Tubbs’ office is a cracker box affair, barely ten feet by ten feet, with a small metal desk and a couple of molded chairs facing. The major feature of the room is a wall of plaques from the Ford Motor Company recognizing the dealership for a couple decades worth of sales leadership. The door is open, and Max is seated behind the desk reading his own ad from the Sunday newspaper.

“Detective Doppie!” he calls in response to my polite knock on the door frame. “Come on in. Nobody’s a stranger at Max Tubbs Motors. Good to see you.”

I am impressed that he remembers my name, we two having met only once in the Shibboleth Hills men’s locker room, and that under very stressful circumstances. But then, I remind myself, the DNA of automobile dealers is hard-wired to remember the names of

potential customers, a list that includes every solitary soul on the planet.

“Got a minute?” I ask, sliding into one of the uncomfortably small chairs across the desk from him.

“Got all the time in the world,” he says. “I don’t suppose you’re here to take a look at the new line, are you?”

I gesture to the land cruisers on the other side of the glass. “All shiny and ready to go,” I say. “And big.”

“Americans like to driving big cars. Say all you want about gas prices, the American motorist wants size. And that’s what Ford and Lincoln and Mercury are delivering.” He gets up and goes to his wall of plaques. “See this one?” he says, pointing to a certificate bolted onto an oversized chunk of cherrywood. “Number One in Lincoln truck sales in the Midwest Region. Know what that means? It means Navigators. Big stuff. The execs from the insurance company down in Sparta can’t get enough of them. It’s sort of a contest – biggest vehicle, biggest dick. Haven’t sold one of those puppies without a trailer hitch in over a year.”

I am forced to admit that the thumpers on the showroom floor make my Buick look like a kiddy car by comparison. But I am not here to talk cars. “You got a pretty good memory about what happened the day Deuce Froedert bought the farm?” I ask.

“That again?” He leans back in his chair. “I sure ought to. Seems I been telling that story to every lawman in the state. Over and over, like a record. First it was Guffey, then it was the state

guys. They came back a second time. Then that twerp Sperkle showed up and asked me the same questions. Now you.”

“Sorry for your trouble. Just trying to cover the bases.”

“Fire away,” he says, apparently unperturbed. “I got nothing to hide. What happened is what happened. It was just my luck to be in the wrong locker room at the wrong time. Say, you want a cup of coffee? A Coke? Might be some doughnuts left in the break room.”

I wave off the suggestion. “No thanks. What I’m wondering about is whether anything new comes to mind when you remember that morning. Sometimes we blank out the details in the aftermath of a trauma, but they come back to us later, maybe as we fall asleep at night, or in the shower. Anything at all might be helpful.”

“Like I told those other cops, I sleep like a baby. Not a thing on my conscience. I give a good deal on reliable wheels. That’s why I get so much repeat business.”

“You served two terms on the Shibboleth Hills board of directors, I understand.”

“That’s correct. Put in the new sprinkler system under my watch as chair. Spruced up the menu in the snack bar as well.”

“As board chair, you’d have a key to the trophy case, wouldn’t you?”

Tubbs gives me a squinty-eyed stare. “I see where you’re going with that, Detective Doppie. Looking for the person who beat Froedert’s face to a bloody pulp with that spiked shoe. Well, it

wasn't me. I turned in my key the day after my term as board chair expired."

"And who did you turn the key in to?"

He takes a breath, then catches himself. A shake of the head. "To the club pro, naturally. To Deuce Froedert."

"A handoff that is, unfortunately, impossible to confirm."

Tubbs squirms in his chair, as though he suddenly has ants in his pants. "Look, we can sit here and bat the birdie over the net at each other all day, but the fact of the matter is that I had no reason to kill the man. If I were you, I'd be looking in greener pastures. Take our esteemed local banker, for example. I suspect he had plenty of reasons to go after Froedert."

Now Tubbs has my interest. "Miles Vertrance? What about him?"

"He spent way too much time hanging around the clubhouse. Far as I know, he never broke a hundred on the course, but he wore out the padding on the bar stools in the club. He and Froedert were always having their little tête-à-têtes, and if you interrupted their conversation they'd quick change the subject so as not to be overheard. I believe the two of them were in bed together."

"In bed together?"

Max Tubbs' face opens like a full moon. "Yeah. Some kind of plot. Ever been up to that house Froedert bought on Chambless Hill? Now, you tell me he latched onto that place on the salary of a club pro and I'll tell you you're dreaming. Bank holds the mortgage

on the place, and I'd be willing to bet there's some creative accounting going on to make the payments."

"Where do you think the money's been coming from?" I ask.

Tubbs hesitates. "Drugs." He blurts the word out like a baby spitting up formula. "I think Froedert was running some kind of drug operation out there at the course, and Vertrance was in it up to his neck. Otherwise why would the bank set Froedert up in that bigass house on the hill? You can't tell me he could afford the payments on a club pro's income."

"Drugs, huh? You think the two of them might have been in it together, and had a falling out?"

"Here's another one: Steve Gunderson. He and Froedert have been at each others' throats for damn near their whole lives."

I remember what Guffey told me about the two young Turks. That possibility seems far-fetched. Kill a man because he stole your girl in high school? Not hardly.

As I sit across the desk from him, ruminating on the possibilities, Tubbs brightens: "While you're thinking about it," he says, "I could put you into one of those beauties out there on the floor. And for less than you might imagine."

"Better yet," I say, "let's talk about your comings and goings the day before yesterday. That would have been Tuesday."

"Tuesday? It's my day off. Not a whole lot of sales made on Tuesday. I leave the showroom floor to my boys and head over to the Ho-Chunk casino in the Dells."

“Take anybody along with you?”

“Naw, the wife can’t stand the smoke and noise. Besides, it gives me a chance to make friends with the female bartenders.” In the course of a few seconds, the big man’s expression changes. As if tapped on the forehead with a ball peen hammer, Tubbs pulls his chair close up to the desk. “Say, now it dawns on me. You’re asking where I was when Art Anthem got whacked. Hey, I had nothing to do with that. Like I say, I was at the casino most of that day.”

“By yourself. Make any bartender friends that can vouch for your whereabouts?”

He gives that some thought. “Why sure, there was Jillian. Big redhead. Said I reminded her of her dad. Gave her my card and invited her to come up and get a Sweet Deal on an Explorer. She promised she would.”

I pry my butt out of the chair and stand up, my ribs complaining like cleaning lady’s knees. “I’ll take one of those cards myself, Mr. Tubbs. In case I need to get in touch with you again.”

He hands me a business card. “You know,” he says with a turn of his head, “there was one thing. Back there in the locker room, the day Deuce got trumped.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s been in the back of my mind ever since. There was a kind of funny smell. It didn’t register at the time, but the more I thought about it, the more it stuck in my mind.” He sniffs the air as if to demonstrate his reaction back at the scene. “I didn’t mention it

when Earl questioned me, and later when the state guys came around, because I wasn't sure. Still not sure, truth be told."

"What was it?" I ask. "What kind of smell?"

"Kind of sweet. Not honey, and not that awful cologne LaCaskey slathers all over his body after a shower. No, this was something I hadn't smelled in the locker room before."

"Perfume?"

"Could be. Can't be sure, though. Just unusual."

"Smelled anything like it since?"

"Not that I recall. Comes back to my nose in the middle of the night, when the missus wakes me up with her snoring."

I pull myself out of the customer chair and turn to the door. "I'd appreciate a call if you think of anything else. Thanks for your time."

Tubbs is after me like a dung beetle after a water buffalo. "While you're here," he pleads, "why not take a quick look at our new models? Got some special deals tailor-made for a rising Milwaukee detective."

The gleaming black behemoths on the showroom floor beckon to me like sirens calling after sailors too long at sea. A person could set up housekeeping in some of these vehicles, with room to spare. I make the mistake of stopping for a moment to look one of them over, and find Tubbs close by my side.

"Over here," he says with a boyish enthusiasm that cannot be faked. "Take a look at this Navigator. This one would be perfect for

you.” He takes me by the elbow and guides me over to a shiny stone-green machine that towers over both of us. Tires big as the rubber on the deuce-and-a-half trucks I remember from my army days. I take a peek inside: GPS system, iPod dock, satellite radio, THX sound, all ensconced in what looks to be a hardwood dashboard. All leather interior. Lovely.

“You could drive it away today,” Tubbs assures me, letting the vehicle speak for itself. “We wouldn’t even have to do a credit check for one of Milwaukee’s finest.”

I look at the window sticker. My eye scans the many features and comes to rest on the price. I stumble backward and almost collide with Tubbs. “Whoa. Maybe you’d better do that credit check after all. This Milwaukee detective doesn’t have that kind of cash.”

“No problem,” Tubbs says. “Easy terms. Small down payment and you could be driving this beauty back to the big city. Impress your friends. Imagine the look on the faces of your partners when you drive up in this Sweet Deal.”

I take a look down at Manfred, who is sniffing around the wheels of the Navigator. He looks up at me with what appears to be a nod of approval. I suspect he sees himself stretched out in the back of this battle cruiser like a middle-eastern pasha. But then, he wouldn’t be the one responsible for making the payments.

Tubbs moves in close again: “What it would take to put you behind the wheel of this Navigator today, Detective Dopple?

I consider my answer. “A doubling of my salary,” I reply. “Or a second career moving illegal pharmaceuticals across state lines.”

Tubbs laughs, and slaps me on the back. “Let’s not go overboard, my friend. You’ll find our terms at Max Tubbs Motors easy as silk on the skin.”

“Nice vehicle,” I say. “But way over my head.”

Tubbs turns his hands palms up. “Well then, you go out and catch the guy who’s been putting our good citizens into their graves. It’s bad for business. Pretty soon people will be regarding Cottonwood as the new Adams-Friendship.”

As my sanity returns, I bid goodbye to Tubbs and move outside for some fresh air. I leave Max Tubbs Motors absolutely certain of one thing: that Max Tubbs has never known what most of us refer to as a bad day. Not in his whole entire life. He is a man to be envied.

Back at the ranch, I settle in for a quick afternoon snooze in the lounge chair on the screen porch. But sleep does not come easily, my brain being harassed by thoughts of banker Vertrance's snide comments about Sheila. A three-fall mental wrestling match ensues between my pride and my curiosity, and I am finally forced to give up on the nap and go to the telephone. It is not a call I relish making, but I owe it to Earl Guffey to explore every possible avenue that might unravel the mystery of the golf course murders. I pull out my logbook to look up the number, this being the first time I have called it since parting ways with my former partner.

"Hey there kiddo," I say by way of introduction. "How're things going at the Kremlin?"

"Dopple! It's you." My heart does a little flip at the mere sound of Kristal Findley's voice.

"Like a bad penny, I keep showing up. You got a minute?"

"For you Wally, anytime. I miss you. Life's pretty dull without you around to spice things up."

It's been six months since Findley went on to bigger and better things as public relations liaison for the chief's office downtown. We did pretty well together in the year-and-a-little-bit we worked

together, and it is only because I feel we established a certain bond during that time that I am emboldened to make this call.

“I expect you’ve got a tiger by the tail down there at headquarters. Must be pretty exciting compared to working with a worn out old gumshoe like me.”

“You stop talking like that Dopple,” she says, the lilt in her voice as charming as ever. “You’ve got miles to go before you sleep.”

“And miles to go before I sleep.” At the very least, she remembers my affection for Robert Frost.

After a pause, Findley’s tone becomes more serious. “I’ve been meaning to call you, Wally. Really I have. But it’s been such a damn zoo around here. I go home and collapse at the end of my watch. How’ve you been?”

“Just fine,” I say. “Babysitting Bernie Perelman these days. A full time job in itself. The boys in the squad miss your smiling face.”

“You lie, Dopple. It must be a relief to them to be able to have their farting band concerts in the squad room without having to worry about a woman’s sensibilities.”

“Yeah, well. Some things never change. But the welcome mat is always out at the Second District station for a former colleague. You ought to stop by.”

“I promise. You calling from there?”

It's time for me to confess the purpose of my call. "Not exactly." I fill Findley in on where I am and what I'm doing up here in Cottonwood, give her the details of the two homicides at Shibboleth Hills, and offer up some background on the situation with the immigrant population. I leave out any mention of my budding relationship with Sheila Mackey. "So what I'm calling about," I say, finally getting to the point, "is a certain character who took up residence here some years ago and whose background I would like to look into. You know how I am with computers, and I was wondering if you'd do me a small favor."

The silence that follows is pregnant with meaning. "You're at it again, aren't you Wally? Doing an end run on the rules." Findley knows from personal experience my tendency to short-circuit certain regulations in the pursuit of justice. "You want me to go on a fishing expedition with you."

"Findley, you'd have to actually meet this joker to understand why I'm hot on his trail. Little shit owns the local bank up here and struts around like a bantam rooster in the hen house. Nasty little guy with a mean streak half a yard wide down the middle of his back."

"Sounds personal, Wally." Findley has a way of seeing through me, even at long distance.

"In a way it is," I admit. "But this Miles Vertrance – that's the subject's name, Miles Vertrance – was also on the scene at the time Deuce Froedert met his unfortunate demise. You know me Findley,

I'm inclined to trust my gut when it comes to sizing people up, and Vertrice has a peculiar odor about him."

"Speaking of your gut," she asks, "how's it doing? Made any progress on the old belt size?"

"I'm working on it. But there's this pie store up here in Cottonwood, best peach cobbler you've ever tasted..."

"Uh-oh. Sounds like you're in for another rough go with Doc Sam at physical exam time." My former partner's voice has lost its lilt, now bordering on a scold. "You need to take your weight more seriously, Wally. In Chicago, the new police superintendent issued a whole new set of rules for cops to get into shape. It's only a matter of time before the trend hits Milwaukee."

"What've you heard? Is there something coming down the pike? Has Doc Sam got the Chief's ear?"

"No, nothing like that. But you need to be more careful. It's your health that's at stake, Wally. It's not about Doc Sam, it's about you and your heart."

"Okay Findley, I promise. Now, can we get back to this Vertrice character I was talking about?"

"Tell you what: I'll help you out with this person if you get on a program to lose twenty pounds. Starting today."

"Here's the thing: I want to know what the guy was up to before he moved to Cottonwood. Came from Chicago, but nobody seems to know for sure what he did there, and how he managed to dig up the cash necessary to take control of the local bank. Lots of

rumors, but no solid facts. I thought maybe you could meander around the databases downtown to give me a heads up on the guy.”

We both know that snooping around in the department databases is strictly forbidden except in connection with an active case. A murder in Gunflint County does not rise to that standard.

“You’re incorrigible Wally,” Findley says with a sigh. “Have you ever even glanced at the Department’s policies and procedures handbook?”

I look out over my little corner of Lake Elysium and consider my reply. “Is there such a thing? I don’t believe I’ve been introduced.”

“You know damn well there is. And you choose to ignore it. I don’t know how you’ve managed to survive all these years turning a blind eye to the rules. In a way I feel sorry for Lieutenant Armand, having to put up with your shenanigans.”

I let Findley go on like this, venting her frustration, knowing that in the end she will cave and put her own neck on the line for me. All on the basis of my gut feeling. I feel badly about asking, there being a certain degree of risk to Findley’s professional standing in helping me out. I am merely trying to balance that risk with my duty toward Guffey.

On the other hand, I can’t think of another way to get at the shadowy past of Miles Vertrance. My first inclination was to have Guffey’s people do the search, but that would ultimately bring Merle Sperkle into the picture, and I do not trust Merle any further

than I could fling Manfred in a shot put contest. My own computer skills were arrested sometime in the mid-eighties, so I could not begin to do the job myself. That leaves Findley as my last resort.

“Give me your number up there,” Findley says. “I’ll get back to you within the hour.”

“Better call back on my cell. I may be on the road somewhere.” My temperature rises as I think about my upcoming date with Sheila, an appointment I am at pains to hide from Findley.

While waiting for Findley to get back to me, I review what we know about the Froedert and Anthem killings. Both met their maker at Shibboleth Hills, both were employed by the club. Both were possibly involved in some sort of activity beyond the regular business of golf. Consensus seems to be that drugs are involved, but there is no evidence to support that supposition. Another anomaly is that Deuce Froedert was bludgeoned to death while Anthem was put down neatly with a gunshot to the base of the skull. Plenty of suspects to take a look at in the first crime, but an absence of same in the second. There are as many differences as there are similarities in the two incidents.

What I ought to be doing, I remind myself, is going over to Screamin’ Steve’s to retrieve the Doppie yacht, which is still gathering barnacles at the marina. It has been moored there since Sperkle whisked me off to the site of the Anthem killing. If I don’t

retrieve the boat pretty quick, I'm likely to get a docking bill from Steve.

The Anthem murder is another conundrum: it happened early in the morning, by Doc Harvey's estimate, presumably somewhere in the vicinity of the sand trap where the body was found. There must be considerable money involved, since money is one of the big three reasons for this kind of crime. Sex, money, and revenge. In the case of Art Anthem, I'm betting on there being a load of cash somewhere in the background.

And so it goes. Time I should be spending on the lake with a fishing line in the water is divided between my detached crime fighting duties and my wooing of Sheila Mackey, leaving precious little time to give the old rod and reel a workout.

Before I can rouse myself to action, the phone buzzes. Findley is nothing if not efficient. "I got the dope on your Miles Vertrance character," she reports, her voice a notch higher than it was when last we spoke. "Quite a story, if I may say so."

"Tell me he's wanted in six states for unspeakable crimes against women and children," I say, hoping for the worst. "Tell me he's an axe murderer."

She laughs. "Not that bad Wally, but there are some questions in his folder." I hear the click-click of keystrokes in the background as Findley scrolls through Vertrance's record. "He was a low level trader on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. But he got caught up in some questionable activities at the Merc and was bounced out on his

ear. There's evidence connecting him to the Balistreri family, which is into lots of interesting business ventures including prostitution, drugs, gambling and even murder for hire. He may have been standing in for the Balistreris at the Merc, which may in turn be why they tossed him out on his ear. All very sketchy though."

"The Italians could have paid him off and told him to get out of town. That may account for the bankroll he used to buy into the Cottonwood State Bank."

"Could be. But like I said, it's a matter of conjecture."

"Shades of Al Capone in the Windy City. And now up here in the Northwoods."

"Didn't the Chicago gangs spend their leisure time up in your neck of the woods back in their heyday?" Findley asks.

"Darn right they did."

"Does that help, Wally?"

"Helps more than you know, partner. Anytime I can return the favor, you know where to get in touch."

"Oh yeah."

"And don't be a stranger around the squad room when you have a few minutes. I'll buy you a bowl of dill pickle soup over at Crocus restaurant."

"That seals the deal, Wally."

We hang up, and an image of Findley dressed in her evening clothes persists in my addled brain. The night we went to see Swan Lake at the Performing Arts Center she wore a slinky black dress

that clung to every curve of her body, and her hair was piled on top of her head in a very glamorous do. The effect was made more dramatic by unaccustomed makeup, never a part of her daytime dress as a detective. In my mind's eye I picture her moving with a grace I had not noticed during our rounds on duty, and when she smiled I felt my knees knocking against my pant legs.

That was the night I spotted Amanda Marquez and Shirley Richards keeping each other's company at the ballet, which helped me put together a few of the pieces in the murder of deputy mayor Morris Richards and ultimately led me to Aiden Weizsaker as the killer. After nearly botching the case, I managed to pull my chestnuts out of the fire and got the commendation from HQ despite everything. Thanks in no small part to the quick action of Manfred, and the bravery of Kristal Findley.

Now I call to the canine half of the Dopple household, and he comes loping onto the porch, tail wagging and ears back, ready to do my bidding. "It occurs to me," I tell him, "that we're up to our old tricks, lad: handing off the heavy lifting to women. Findley runs a background check on Vertrance for me, and Sheila Mackey volunteers to be the go-between when we head out to The Thirties to talk to Martinez about the murders. We're a couple of sly old foxes, aren't we partner? If only I could get one of those lovely ladies to take my place on Doc Harper's scale for my next department physical, life would be perfect. But I wouldn't want that old leatherneck to poke around either of my special women. Better

let things stay as they are.” I go to the reefer, pull out a can of PBR for myself, and treat Manfred to a piece of four-day-old roast chicken.

Spring rains bring predictable flooding to the low-lying Thirties area each year, but that does not deter the new arrivals from setting up housekeeping along the river. In April the Nekoosa overflows its banks, and by May the mud and sludge has been squeegeed out and life returns to what passes as normal. Language being a strong bond, incoming residents find solace in the community of native speakers.

Language is also the reason I find myself sitting beside Sheila Mackey in the Buick this early evening, cruising down Sycamore Street amid the ramshackle buildings, searching for the residence of one Julio Martinez, my new acquaintance from Shibboleth Hills and the Red Rooster Inn. Taking advantage of her contacts in the immigrant community, Sheila has tracked down his address and is now helping me to navigate through the shantytown that is The Thirties. Although we see plenty of evidence of children on the small, well-tended lots, there is precious little life on the street at this hour. The place seems nearly deserted, the hot afternoon sun baking the rooftops mercilessly and the scream of locusts calling intermittently from cottonwood trees along the riverbank.

We pull into the driveway of a house with a single car garage and Sheila checks the address against the scribbling on a small piece of paper she holds in her hand. “This is it,” she says. “Seventeen-fifteen Sycamore.”

The house is in as good shape as might be expected of a seventy year old property with an absentee landlord. Colorful curtains grace the windows, and large clay planters are placed on each side of the entryway. A child’s trike and scooter are in the front yard, lying in newly mowed grass. The front door is open, and through the screen door lively polka music can be heard.

I get out of the car and go to the door. There being no doorbell, I give a sharp rap on the screen door and wait. Nothing. “Hallo in there,” I call, hoping to be heard above the music. A moment later a small, heavysset woman appears on the other side of the screen, wiping her hands on a dishtowel.

“Si senor,” she says.

“Buenos dias,” I say. “I’m looking for Julio Martinez. Does he live here?”

She hesitates. I can’t tell whether it is out of reluctance to share the requested information with a stranger, or whether she doesn’t understand the question. Behind her on the wall a picture of Jesus with a bleeding heart stares back at me, his expression enigmatic. Now a young girl of about twelve appears at the woman’s side, and casually drapes her arm around the older woman’s waist.

“She does not speak English very well,” the girl says.

“Maybe you can help me,” I say. “I’m looking for a gentleman by the name of Julio Martinez. We talked earlier, and I’m hoping to ask him a couple more questions.”

The older woman turns to the girl and spouts something in Spanish.

“She wants to know who you are. And why you want to talk to Senor Martinez.”

Of course she does. Probably thinks I’m with the ICE people. I shake my head. “I’m Detective Walter Dopple, with the Milwaukee PD. Helping Sheriff Guffey look into the matter of...

With the mention of the sheriff’s name the older woman steps back and closes the door. I hear a latch being turned, and the chain of a security lock being attached. Turning to the car where Sheila is waiting, I hunch my shoulders in embarrassment, realizing my mistake. I could have told the woman I was with the power and light company. Or the Catholic Church. Anything but Sheriff Guffey. Deserved or not, Earl has a reputation among these folks as the man in charge of the jail where many of their compadres are awaiting deportation hearings.

“I blew it,” I admit as I get back in the car.

“What did you say to her?” Sheila asks.

I turn the key in the ignition and confess my error. “Might as well have told her I was Michael Chertoff.”

As I'm about to pull out of the driveway, my cell phone buzzes. "Hey partner, how're things going in mosquito land?"

Perelman. "Don't have a lot of time for chit-chat, Bernie." Should have checked the caller ID before answering, I chide myself. Should have let the damn thing ring.

"We're down at Dungy's," Perelman says, "Potts and Watson, Maigraine and me. Watson's buying. Won the small pot in the lottery."

"A tip of the Hatlo Hat to Watson," I say. "Maybe he can stand for the minutes you're charging on my phone to bring the good news."

A chuckle on the other end, and a quick exchange of banter between Perelman and his fellow revelers. Now a new voice comes across the airwaves. It's Dick Potts. "We're wondering if you're ever coming back to work, Dopple. You haven't gone native up there in the swamps, have you?"

"Just checked my watch, Potts. It being past five o'clock, I expect you're off the doughnuts and on the draft beer."

"You got that right, Captain. Summer in the city, and the living is easy. Still, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes when you get back and face up to the Looie."

"Give the phone back to Perelman, Potts."

A raucous laugh, and my lame-brained partner is back on the line. "Seriously Wally," he says, "what's going on up there? You and that country sheriff should have that groundskeeper – what's his

name – nailed by now. You were a lot better on the Kinnickinnic theater murders. Got half a mind to come back up there and do the job myself.”

I roll my eyes, imagining the trouble Perelman would generate among the law enforcement community of Gunflint County. “You stay put,” emphasizing the last word. “The last thing we need up here is your Criminal Investigation 101. Now, what was Potts talking about? What did the Looie say about me?”

A moment of silence. Then: “Aw, you know how the Looie is, Wally. Gets all worked up about things. Says we’re way behind in our caseload, and blames it on short handedness. That would be you, partner.”

“Okay, Bernie. I get the drift. But I gotta go now. Business calls.” I punch the end button and return my attention to the problem at hand.

Sheila and I pull out of the driveway and head around the block. As we make a large circle through The Thirties we pass a soccer field where three pre-teen boys are kicking a worn leather ball around. On the sideline is a man I recognize – not by his features but by his headgear. He is wearing the fedora I previously eyeballed on the porch of the Shibboleth Hills clubhouse and again at the fourth hole where Art Anthem’s body was found. Can’t be more than one such topper in a town as small as Cottonwood.

I pull over to the side of the road and watch as the man shouts instructions to the boys, gesturing this way and that for them to

execute moves on the field. Being engrossed in his tutorial, he does not see me approaching from the street, and I am close by his side before he realizes he has company. Startled, he jumps back involuntarily. Before he can turn and run, I take hold of his arm as gently as possible, reassuring him that I mean him no harm.

Sheila is quick to join me, smiling the smile that could melt chocolate at twenty yards, and speaking to him in his native language. Within minutes she learns that he is Jorge Ruiz, cousin to Julio Martinez and also from the city of San Miguel in Salvador. Jorge pulls away from my grasp and rearranges the hat on his head in a theatrical expression of regaining his composure, while the three boys continue their pickup game on the field, oblivious of our sideline conference.

“Ask him what goes on in the empty maintenance shed at Shibboleth Hills,” I tell Sheila. “What did Froedert and Anthem keep in that shed?”

Sheila and Jorge converse in Spanish. I do not need a translator to figure out that Jorge is evading the question. He shakes his head, hunches his shoulders, mumbles something almost inaudible, never once making eye contact with Sheila or me.

“Tell him that unless he answers my questions now, I’ll have to send Sheriff Guffey and his men out to interview him.” At the mention of Guffey’s name, Jorge cringes and turns to go. I take hold of his arm again to forestall a bolting, knowing he could easily outrun me if he took it in his mind to make a break for it. His arm is

thin, reedy, like the arm of a young boy. Jorge must be at least thirty years old, but he has the build of a teenager.

“Is the maintenance shed a drug stash?” I ask. “Is it where they store ganga?”

Sheila passes the question along, and now Jorge becomes agitated. “Oh no, no,” he insists. “No ganga. Never ganga.”

“What, then? What did they move out of that shed the morning Deuce Froedert was done in?”

Sheila puts the question to Jorge. He hesitates. A three-way conversation ensues, in which Sheila and Jorge exchange questions and answers in Spanish, and she relays his comments to me. Throughout, it appears to me that Sheila is reassuring the Salvadoran that he has nothing to fear from us. With painful hesitation, Jorge brings us up to date.

“The maintenance shed is where the truck comes,” my interpreter reports.

The truck again. “And what is in the truck?” I ask.

“El camion es para los Mexicanos, condducirlos,” Jorge says.

“Where does the truck come from?”

He shrugs. “*Creo que Chicago.*” He does not know.

“A coyote operation?”

“Si. Coyotes.”

“When does the truck come?”

Sheila and Jorge exchange comments. “At night,” she reports to me. “Jorge doesn’t know anything more than that it comes at night.”

“And what happened the morning Deuce Froedert was killed?”

Jorge doesn’t have the answer to that one, either. All he does know is that Senor Anthem was very upset. Jeff Pritchard came to the maintenance building and told Anthem about what had happened to Froedert in the locker room. Anthem ran from the place and had his straw boss, Manuel, drive three illegals who were living in the shed to Sparta in the golf course van. Then he ordered Julio and Jorge to clean the shed.

“So Anthem was in on the coyote operation,” I say to nobody in particular. “And Froedert must have known about it too.” I turn my attention back to Jorge. “Has the truck come since Senor Froedert and Senor Anthem were killed?”

Jorge shakes his head. No, not since then. The men who work at the course don’t know when it will come. They are all very afraid of what will happen next. The police from ICE are sure to come to The Thirties and send them back home.

I ruminate over my next question. “Did the truck bring you? Did it bring Julio?”

“Oh no,” Jorge says. Sheila relays his insistence that he and Julio came on work visas, eight years ago. They did not have the dollars to pay a coyote. They have applied for citizenship.

“How many people come in by truck? And what happens to them once they get here?”

An exchange between Sheila and Jorge reveals that once they arrive at the golf course, the immigrants are sorted out and disbursed to a variety of locations. The men, by and large, go to the farms to become field hands. The women generally go to work in what is referred to as the hospitality industry, to change the sheets and clean the bathrooms in the motels strung out between here and the Cities. Others of the newcomers go on to Minneapolis and beyond, finding work at jobs paying less than minimum wage, while employers hold their legal status over their heads like the sword of Damocles.

At the conclusion of this back and forth, Jorge asks a question of his own. “He wants to know if the policeman going to arrest him,” Sheila reports. Her expression tells me that the question has occurred to her as well. There’s a sadness in her face that cries out for reassurance.

“No,” I say. “Like I said at the outset, I’m just asking questions. Trying to get to the bottom of what happened to Deuce Froedert and Art Anthem. I’m not with the immigration people, and I’m not here to arrest anybody.”

When Sheila relays my answer to Jorge, he takes his hat from his head with one hand and wipes his forehead with the other. “Gracias,” he says with a small bow. “Muchos gracias, señor.”

“Muchos gracias to you, señor Jorge. Sorry to interrupt your game.” On the field, the boys continue to kick the ball around without pause. As Sheila and I walk back to the car, Jorge calls them over to himself and gives them each a big hug.

“That answers one question,” I tell Sheila as we rejoin Manfred in the Buick. “What we’ve got here is a smuggling operation. But it’s not drugs, like everybody thinks. And this raises a few more questions. Who’s at the bottom of it all? And how did the coyote operation figure in to the murders – which it undoubtedly did. And, now that Froedert and Anthem are out of the picture, is the ring still in operation?”

We drive in silence for several minutes, heading back to town. I turn to Sheila. “You knew, didn’t you?”

She nods. “Yes, I knew. Not the specifics, but there were lots of rumors. You see new faces around town and it’s impossible to ignore what’s going on. But I have the advantage of not being an officer of the law. Like you say Wally, it was none of my business.”

“Coyotes don’t have a real strong track record of providing for the needs of the folks they run up here from the border. Lots of horror stories about newcomers being penned up without food or water. To say nothing of the fact that it’s illegal.”

“And if we’d all behave humanely in the first place, there would be no coyote trade,” she counters. “This is what happens when we ignore the human needs of people on both sides of the border.”

Seeing where this is going, I choose to take a new direction.
“How about a bite to eat? It’s just about dinnertime. My treat.”

Sheila puts a hand on my arm. “I’ve got a pork tenderloin in the slow cooker at home,” she says. “Come on over. I guarantee it’ll beat anything you can get at a restaurant.”

When we arrive at the house on Feddersdorf Road, Sheila opens the door and an aroma of slow cooking pork tenderloin greets our entry. She motions for me to park myself in a big overstuffed chair near the window and brings out a bottle of Leinenkugel's to amuse myself with while she sets to work in the kitchen. Manfred slumps down beside the chair and heaves a big sigh, whether out of boredom or impatience to sample the victuals on the stove I cannot tell. Soon the place steams and simmers and hums almost as though it is alive. Sheila parades her culinary skills before me like the director of the Minneapolis Orchestra.

"Anthem had his groundskeepers clean out the storage shed because he knew the cops would be on their way," I call from the living room. "Wiped it from top to bottom. Which is why Perelman and I found it in such spic and span condition when we went out there to take a look. Art didn't want the state boys to find evidence of skullduggery when they came down to inspect his territory."

I take a pull on the long neck bottle and consider various ways in which I might arrange to kick myself in the butt. Now the answer is obvious. Deuce Froedert and Art Anthem were key figures in a

smuggling ring that brought low-wage labor to the entrepreneurs of Gunflint County. A golf course is a perfect place to run such an operation: plenty of traffic coming in and going out; lots of supplies and equipment needed to maintain the fairways and greens; and three pole barns where human cargo can be stored until it is ready to move on to its final destination. Furthermore, Cottonwood is situated in an ideal location for the illegals to hide out before they move on to farms, packing plants and hotel kitchens in Minnesota and the Dakotas.

As I ponder these facts, I am set upon by a twenty pound bundle of orange fur that lands on my lap like a Japanese kamikaze pilot. Jeremy the cat wastes no time on formalities, but proceeds to curl up in a ball on my lap and begins to lick his paws with a seriousness that only cats can summon. Manfred lifts his head momentarily, gives an insincere growl, and goes back to his ruminations over the potential for scraps being dropped from the dinner table. I take a chance at running my hand down the cat's back, and he revs up his internal engine, purring like a forty-year-old Chris Craft speedboat.

"We're ready," Sheila calls from the kitchen. She comes to the doorway, wiping her hands on a dishtowel, looking lovely as a picture. "Well, I'll be," she says. "Look at that. Jeremy likes you. That's very special. Jeremy is very picky about choosing his friends."

“My pleasure, I’m sure.” I pluck my newfound pal from my lap and deposit him on the floor. Then I heave myself out of my most comfortable position and join her in a small room decorated in Prairie Style furniture and accent pieces that look like they came straight from the Pottery Barn catalog. The table is set with bold-colored plates and flanked by two ladderback chairs. In the center of the table is a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers, presumably from Sheila’s backyard garden. A small salad of mixed greens graces each place. In that moment I realize that I am famished, having had only a bowl of soup at the cottage for lunch.

We dig in with relish. Following the salad course, Sheila brings out the mustard-rubbed pork tenderloin from her slow cooker, accompanied by boiled red potatoes and fresh mixed vegetables. The combination of food, a nice Gewurtztraminer wine and the company of a pretty woman vanquishes all thoughts of moderation, and I give in without a struggle when Sheila encourages me to have seconds. The wine continues to flow as we finish one bottle and begin work on a second, toasting the success of Sheila’s many social causes in turn: immigration rights, animal rights, women’s rights, and an end to global warming, among others.

For dessert, there’s – what else? A lovely blueberry pie baked fresh this morning, along with generous servings of cognac in large snifters Sheila keeps in the cabinet over the sink. I take special note

of the backs of her shapely legs as she reaches for the glasses, unashamed of my tendency to voyeurism.

We move to the back porch and take a seat on a soft fabric glider that looks out over fields of alfalfa. As the light fades in the western sky, I sigh the sigh of a contented man.

“I had a dream last night,” I confess as the alcohol and the aroma of Sheila’s lilac perfume addles my brain.

“You had a dream? You told me you didn’t have dreams.”

“The shrink Doc Harper sent me to after the Weizsaker case told me to concentrate on dreams. Said it might help me deal with the way Weizsaker died, dragged for two blocks underneath a car on Kilbourn Avenue. I didn’t put much stock in dreams, but after we talked about your dreams last week I thought what the heck, no harm in giving it a shot. Sure enough, when I put my mind to it I started remembering them.”

“Like I said,” Sheila reminds me, “everybody dreams.”

“This one was the craziest ever. Manfred and I were in some kind of hotel room. And he talked to me. We talked about our past cases, about the mooks back at the district station, even about my mom and dad back in the old neighborhood. It was as though Manfred was an actual person.”

I do not dare mention the other thing that Manfred and I talked about in my dream. Krystal Findley. In the dream, Manfred sat at the window looking down on the traffic of a city and talked in the soft, basso profundo voice of a hound. “Findley has her own life to

live,” he said. “She likes you, but she is young enough to be your daughter. Even younger.”

“What will I do now?” I asked, chiding myself for asking advice from a dog. One part of me was in the hotel room of the dream, while another part remained outside, conscious of the absurdity of talking to dogs.

“You will move on,” the answer came, Manfred’s jowls quivering. “You will find new joys and new sorrows, make new friends and lose old ones.”

When I woke up, Manfred was at the side of the bed and I was sitting upright with my back propped up against pillow. The dog sidled close, so that I could pat him on his bowling ball of a head.

“Good dog,” I said. “Good dog.”

I rouse myself from the memory and turn to Sheila. “Do you believe in reincarnation?”

“I believe in making the most of this incarnation,” she says. “I believe in the here and now.”

“If we meet each other in the hereafter, I sure hope we’ll recognize each other. Otherwise, what would be the point?”

“During the big drought four summers ago,” Sheila says, “I had a magnolia tree in my yard. By the end of the summer it hadn’t a single leaf on it. I thought for sure it was done for. So I cut it down to the ground. Next spring, it popped up from its own stump, green as a frog’s back, growing faster than any plant in the yard. Since then, I believe that anything is possible for living things, and

that the best we can do is hope. I believe in living in the here and now.”

“Me too, Sheila.” Fortified by the cognac and the wine, I ease to my left until my thigh makes contact with hers, pressing close as a kiss. My arm slips around her neck, my hand comes to rest on her bare shoulder and pulls her toward me. I feel only token resistance. From that moment on the world turns topsy-turvy, as Sheila first holds me back, suggesting I might want to leave now and think this over, then acquiescing, then getting up from the couch, taking my hand, leading me into the dark, sequestered bedroom, lighting a candle, turning the sheets down while I hop awkwardly on the rag rug, wrestling to get my shoes off without sitting down, remembering the hole in my sock that I’d meant to darn last week, yet driven by animal lust to immerse myself in Sheila’s chest. I see her undo her bra strap, see her full, round breasts tumble from the cream-white cups, feel them draw me to them like two of those huge electromagnets in the Afram Brothers’ Salvage Yard. And finally, as we tumble into the big brass bed, I declare in a stage whisper: “God Sheila, if we were married we could do this every night. What if we were married?”

Next thing I know I’m waking up in that same bed and it’s the middle of the night. Alert with alcohol-induced insomnia, I sit bolt upright, sweating. I can’t remember Sheila’s reply to my comment about marriage, or how we they left things a few hours earlier. My mind is blank beyond the words I never really believed myself

capable of uttering: “What if we were married?” I am not even sure which came first: my lunge for Sheila’s breasts, beckoning me from across the bed, or my plea for marriage.

I try to slip out from under the covers, but my big butt is trapped underneath the sheet. Beneath the shift in my substantial weight, the metal bed frame squeaks like a windmill on a stormy night. As I struggle with the bedding, Sheila turns over and without a sound lays the palm of her hand on my bare chest. “What’s the matter?” she asks. “Do you walk in your sleep?”

“Uh, I was thinking that maybe I ought to go. Wouldn’t want Manfred to do anything to damage your house. He hasn’t been doing real well holding it.”

“Walter, it’s four o’clock in the morning. Wait until morning. I’ll make us some eggs and biscuits.”

“I’d sure like to Sheila, but I’ve got work to do. All those transcripts...”

She begins stroking my chest with her hand, rubbing in circles that might well hypnotize a person. “Breakfast,” she repeats. “When it gets light outside.” She has propped herself up on one elbow, as though her next move will be to throw the blanket back and expose the glory of her body.

I slump back onto the pillow, my willpower dissolved in the ocean of her touch. She slips closer and drapes a long, warm leg over my hips. There seems to be nothing more to say. I am a willing captive to Sheila Mackey’s feminine wiles. As I fall, I try to piece

together what Sheila said after my reference to marriage. But all I can remember is the words: “What if we were married?” Words that say everything.

I force myself to leave the question of marriage behind, and concentrate on the movement of Sheila’s hands. Gone are all thoughts of the work that remains undone – the murders on the golf course, the trafficking in illegal aliens, the plight of the immigrants waiting for deportation hearings in the county jail. As Sheila wraps her hands around my midsection and climbs atop my capacious body, the immigrants being trucked in to the Shibboleth Hills golf course fade from consciousness, as do the deaths of Deuce Froedert and Art Anthem. Earl Guffey’s bid for re-election becomes nothing as compared to the smooth workings of Sheila’s hands arousing my nether parts. My business stops at the edges of this very bed, at the limits of Sheila’s tasty mouth and silky ears. Now there is only the mask of night, a darkness that strips away awareness of the outside world, and conscience goes begging for anything beyond primordial lust.

In the next quarter hour, conversation is carried on in grunts and squeaks, and words of thanks to God. As the flood subsides, Sheila runs a hand down the center of my back, softly along my spine. “Now, wasn’t that a whole lot nicer than your old transcripts?” she says.

I fall into a deep sleep, sans dreams, and wake with the morning sun streaming through the bedroom window. Shelia is

already in the kitchen, frying up eggs and stirring biscuit batter in a large bowl. As I enter the room in Jockey shorts and rumpled shirt, she gives me a sly smile, as though to confirm activities that in my mind could have been just the dementia of an aging policeman. I smile back, hoping she understands my gratitude. She motions to me to be seated at the table, and serves up steaming hot coffee to cut through the cobwebs left behind by the alcohol of last night. We eat in silence, each replaying the acrobatics we've engaged in with the help of the other. Smiles pass across the table frequently, and then it is time for me to take my leave.

I drive the Buick much faster than a responsible adult ought to do down the snaky folds of county highway GG, as though by speeding I can get my arms around all that has happened over the past twelve hours. I try once again to remember what Sheila said after my comment on marriage, but cannot summon up an answer, sensing only the soft folds of her flesh and my own passion, lost within them. A dull pain rises from my shoulders, through my neck and up into the back of my head, foretelling the possibility of an excruciating headache.

I turn to Manfred, laying in the back seat with one eye open: "Where the hell did the idea of marriage come from?" I ask the dog. "What got into me?" Manfred shifts his weight and raises his head so that his jowls hang loosely from his snoot, as if to reply that the answer is a horse on him. "One thing I do know," I continue. "I said it. And I guess I meant it. Short courtships are all the thing these

days, and if she agrees then I'm prepared to through with it." I try to imagine what life might be like with Sheila and her pies and her marches for social causes. It doesn't seem a bad proposition.

Back home, I feed Manfred and fall into my own bed, weary with concern for the tempest I find myself caught up in. I sleep fitfully, dreaming that I am taking a shower under a waterfall, and wake up to Manfred's tongue licking my face from ear to ear. Seven inches of purple tongue cover a wide swath with each pass, and I am hard pressed to curb his enthusiasm with the day. Easy for him to be up and at 'em. He hasn't partaken of the wine and brandy of the previous evening. He hasn't proposed a long-term relationship with a woman he is wildly attracted to, but barely knows.

As the sun drops low in the sky, Earl Guffey and I sit in his unmarked cruiser at the rear of the Shibboleth Hills maintenance buildings like two motorcycle cops waiting behind a billboard for speeders to pass by. When I reported my interview with Jorge Martinez to the sheriff, he received the news with his customary detachment. I didn't expect him to jump for joy, but I did expect a little credit for having unraveled a key element of the case. Instead, Guffey folded his arms across his ample chest and groaned.

"I suppose the next thing you're going to tell me is that we need round-the clock surveillance on those outbuildings at the golf course," he said. "A twenty-four hour stakeout to wait for the next delivery and catch the smugglers in the act."

"That would make sense," I told my reluctant and temporary boss. "Unless you don't put a lot of credibility in what I'm telling you."

He shook his head. "It's not that I doubt your word, Wally. More like my deputies are stretched to the limit. With the jail crowded to bursting and the tourist season at a peak, I can't afford to put men on an assignment that may or may not pay off. It's too much."

After much back and forth, Earl agreed to a limited surveillance operation involving me and whoever else might have a few hours to spend out at the golf course. All of which accounts for the two of us being here on a late Friday afternoon, twiddling our thumbs and hoping for something productive to happen. So far, all we've seen is half a dozen brown-skinned groundskeepers coming in from their work assignments on the links, giving us the evil eye and scurrying away as soon as they've dropped off the tools of their trade, eager to avoid contact with the long arm of the law.

Now a red golf cart arrives on the scene, bearing interim club pro Karla Hess. The cart pulls up alongside the squad, and I spy a plate of cookies wrapped in Saran Wrap sitting by her side on the seat. I give her a wave through the open window, and she offers the plate of goodies up. "Thought you boys might like a little nourishment while you're camped out here," she says. "Baked ten dozen of these this morning, and they've sold like hotcakes. They're my special peanut butter chocolate chip."

Earl's face brightens. "Couldn't be more welcome, Mrs. Hess. Always happy to have citizens support their local sheriff." He laughs at his own joke.

I take the plate from Karla Hess and put it on my lap, Earl's notebook computer and shotgun rack having taken up all the room on the seat between us. "I'll have to take custody of these," I say. "Material evidence."

“What’re you two doing out here at this time of day?” Karla asks Guffey. “Bet you’re hot on the trail of a suspect.”

Guffey gives a shake of the head. “Can’t really discuss the progress of the investigation,” he says, as if we have any real evidence of what’s going on here. As if an arrest is just around the corner.

“You’re a sly one sheriff,” Karla Hess says. “I’ll bet you know a lot more than you’re letting on. You got to have suspects. In my opinion, it was that Max Tubbs who did the deed. He’s the one who found Froedert’s body.”

Guffey shrugs. “Max swears he found Froedert on the floor of the locker room when he came out of the shower.”

Karla Hess huffs. “And who would trust a car salesman? Take my word for it, sheriff. Max Tubbs is your man.”

Guffey nods, says nothing.

“You’re out here waiting for the drug runners to show up,” Karla Hess continues. “That’s it, isn’t it?”

“Who said anything about drug runners, Mrs. Hess? Detective Dopple and I are merely following up on certain leads. I thank you for the cookies, but we’ve got work to do.”

Karla Hess smiles, as though in on a secret. “I think you’ve answered my question, sheriff. Enjoy the cookies.”

“How’s business otherwise?” Earl asks, changing the subject.

Karla Hess gets out of the cart, walks up to the driver’s side window, and leans her elbows on the door. “Golf business?” she

asks. “Golf business has gone to the dogs. We made more money selling cookies today than we did selling greens fees. It was bad enough after Deuce Froedert bought the farm. When Art Anthem got the same treatment, folks started thinking the place is cursed. Not that I blame them. Don’t know if I’d be here myself if I didn’t have to be. Young Todd Pritchard walks around the property with his neck screwed on backward, to make sure nobody is sneaking up on him. And the Mexicans are leaving in droves, for fear the ICE people will nail them. Meanwhile, the rough gets rougher and the greens go unmowed.”

Guffey nods agreement. “Wish I could confirm that,” he says. “Most years, I’d be out there hacking away with my five iron. Since all this folderol started, I haven’t had time to enjoy even the putting green.”

“I’ll say a prayer for you,” Karla says, not entirely in jest. “God is watching. When the bad men show up, they’re in for a big surprise.” She gives Guffey a wink.

“*If* the bad men show up,” Guffey corrects her.

As the conversation continues, I help myself to the chocolate chip cookies. One bite tells me why they’re selling out. The chewy treats are excellent.

“I’ll get back to the clubhouse,” Karla Hess says. “Don’t want to get caught up in any gun battles.”

“There aren’t going to be any gun battles, Mrs. Hess.”

As she climbs into the golf cart, Karla Hess repeats: “I’ll pray for you. And for your friend from Milwaukee, too.”

As she drives off, Guffey shakes his head yet again. “Pray for me,” he mutters under his breath. “Pray for me on election day would be more to the point.”

We settle in to a protracted silence, each of us lost in our thoughts. The evening sky turns from pink to red, and then to ochre. “Don’t believe that old red sky at night, sailor’s delight business,” I finally say. “It’ll be blacker than three midnights in a beer can tonight. There’s a low-pressure front coming in from Minnesota. We’re in for some weather.”

As if on cue, we hear the rumble of a truck engine coming down the gravel path from the parking lot. The service road is a spur marked for use by maintenance vehicles only, and as Karla Hess just told us, maintenance on the course has ground to a halt. Although it is dusk, the white truck sporting the name of a fruit and vegetable vendor comes down the lane with its lights out, moving very slowly toward our stakeout. It stops in front of the building. Headlights flash twice. Naturally, there is no response from inside the pole barn, the presumed main characters in the drama having recently taken up residence in the Cottonwood Municipal Cemetery.

Guffey picks up his radio and calls to all available squads for backup. He pulls the shotgun from its mount between the front seats, and we ease out of the car and approach the truck from the rear. We edge along the side of the box as the diesel engine

continues to idle. Guffey nods to me, and I jerk the driver's door open while Guffey plants himself squarely in the line of fire with the driver.

"Hands on the wheel," Guffey orders. "Keep your paws where I can see them."

The driver, a forty-something man with a three-day growth of beard, nods assent, his eyes wide and the brim of his green John Deere cap quivering.

"Turn off the engine," Guffey orders. "One hand only."

The driver obeys.

"Now get down out of there and let's see what's going on here."

I am impressed by Guffey's authoritative attitude. It dawns on me that Earl is more than a politician. When he has to be, he can be an honest-to-god lawman.

"Hands up against the box," Guffey tells the driver, a potbellied fellow whose jeans, work shirt and suspenders mark him as part of the fraternity of long-haul truckers. "Up against the box," Guffey repeats, and the man complies.

Now a boy I judge to be about fifteen years old sidles over on the truck seat and cranes his neck to see what's going on. I step forward and take him by the arm, guiding him down to the ground while at the same time keeping a sharp eye out for any unexpected moves.

“A kid?” Guffey asks the driver. “What the hell’s going on here?”

“He’s with me,” the driver says. “My son.”

Guffey orders the boy to join his dad by the side of the truck. “And just who might you be?” he asks. “Wally, step up here and check his ID.”

I do as ordered, removing a wallet connected to the man’s belt by a chain. Opening the billfold, I find an Illinois driver’s license. “Gerald Politano,” I tell Guffey. “Villa Park, Illinois. Organ donor.”

“Okay Gerald Politano,” Guffey says. “You can put your hands down and start talking. What in the name of Jesus made you bring a boy along on a gig like this?”

The driver appears confused. “Whaddya mean, a gig like this? It’s a job like any job. Drive the truck up to a place called Cottonwood, drop it off at this Shibboleth Hills golf course place, get paid, take the Greyhound back to the city. A little out of the ordinary, maybe, but I’ve had weirder jobs.”

Guffey scratches the side of his head with his free hand. “You were to leave the truck here? And just take off?”

“There was supposed to be somebody here to meet us. Take us down to Sparta to catch the bus. And pay us what’s owed.”

“And who might that be?”

“Dunno. No names mentioned. Just drop the truck off and don’t ask questions.”

Guffey steps forward. “Tell you what. I’m going to have Detective Dopple here handcuff you. We won’t handcuff the boy, but if you start any shenanigans all bets are off.”

I step forward, noting the panic in the man’s expression. He is seriously scared. He tries to reassure the boy with a weak smile, but the son is just as frightened as his old man.

“Okay Gerald Politano,” Guffey asks, “what brings you to Gunflint County, and what kind of load have you got back there?” He swings the barrel around to indicate the back door of the truck.

Gerald Politano shakes his head. “Search me,” he says in an uneven voice. “Picked up the load at the dock and got half my pay. The other half is supposed to be waiting for me here.”

“And who gave you these instructions?”

“Vinny Balistreri. Vinny the Bee. Big in the produce business in the city. Hell, I’m just a guy trying to make a buck in hard times. The pay was real good.”

“How good is that?”

Gerald Politano quotes a number, and Guffey whistles. “That didn’t give you a clue that what you were doing might be a tad outside the law?”

“The money was good. My family’s been living on hot dogs and tomato soup for the past three months. I can’t afford to be fussy about where the cash comes from.”

Guffey moves to his right three half-steps to get a better look at the signage on the side of the truck. *Balistreri Brothers, Fine*

Produce, it says, emblazoned on an oversized picture of tomatoes, carrots and assorted greens.

“Okay, let’s see what kind of produce you’ve got in the back of this rig.”

Waving the shotgun at Politano and son to move to the back of the rig, Guffey leads our little procession to the rear of the truck like an instructor in an aerobics class. I step up and note that there is no numbered lock tag or bill of lading on the doors. I pull on the lock-lever and swing the doors open. Huddled in a far corner of the box, amid a scattering of lettuce leaves and rotting apples, are more than a dozen men, women and children, dark-skinned and barefoot, motionless as rabbits hiding from the hounds. Mothers hold their children tight to their chests. The cluster of itinerants regards Guffey and his gun with undisguised terror, as if waiting for him to raise the shotgun to his shoulder and fire into the truck.

“Aw for chrissake,” Guffey says in a whine, lowering the gun and turning to Politano. “I suppose you didn’t know this was going on right behind your cab. Is that what you expect me to believe?”

Politano’s shoulders slump. “I didn’t. I didn’t want to know. Been out of regular work for going on a year now. I can’t afford to be choosy in the work I get.”

As Guffey escorts the two Politano males to the squad, I hoist myself into the truck and approach the fugitives. I count five men, seven women and six kids, all wide-eyed and tense as a bunch of nuns in a bordello. I reach out a hand to help one of the women up.

The others follow suit. I motion to the door, and they follow silently.

Just then, the screech of a siren becomes audible in the distance. The Mexicans draw back, as though the open air at the rear of the truck is on fire. I can't remember ever having been so frightened, even during my tour in Nam.

"Come on Dopple," Guffey says. "Let's get these folks inside."

As the sound of the siren bears down on us, Guffey escorts Politano and the boy to the squad, and locks them in the back seat. He returns the shotgun to its holster in the front seat and slides onto the driver's seat to radio to his troops. "Cancel that last transmission," he says, "and return to regular patrol."

The change in orders is too late to avoid the appearance, no more than two minutes later, of Lieutenant Merle Sperkle's squad car, lights flashing and siren screaming. Sperkle jumps from his squad, sidearm in hand. "What's up sheriff?" he asks, stalking toward the produce truck. "We nail the drug mules?"

Guffey approaches his assistant, hands held out in a gesture of caution: "Easy there Merle," he says. "Let's put up the hardware. No need for gunplay."

The expression on Sperkle's face changes from elation to disappointment. He walks around the truck, commenting "Balistreri Fine Produce, Villa Park, Illinois." When he gets to the rear of the truck he turns to Guffey. "It's empty," he says incredulously.

"You're a day late and a dollar short," Guffey tells his lieutenant. "Dopple and me moved the load into the shed while you

were running your lights and siren down Route 16. Take a look if you like.” He gestures toward the pole barn.

While Sperkle gives Guffey the third degree, I punch in Sheila Mackey’s number on my cell phone and explain what’s going on. “What we got here is a collection of dazed and confused refugees who don’t know where the hell they’ve landed, and can’t tell us what they expected to find at the end of their journey. We need to find a place to house them, at least temporarily.”

“The poor souls,” Sheila says. “Locked up in the back of a truck all the way from god knows where. We’ve got to help them.”

“They can’t stay here. The county jail is already full. And Merle Sperkle showed up a few minutes ago. Guffey says it’s only a matter of time before the lieutenant gets on the radio and calls ICE. You know what’ll happen then.”

“They’ll be locked up in one of those dreadful detention centers.”

“No habeas corpus there.”

“Don’t let them call the feds,” Sheila pleads, “whatever you do. I’ll make some calls and get back to you.”

“Better make it fast,” I warn. “Sperkle is chomping at the bit to make a name for himself. Getting in thick with the Staties and the hotshots from ICE would go a long way in putting his career on the map.”

I return to Guffey’s cruiser to have a word with Gerald Politano. He continues to insist that he knew nothing about his

cargo. “Why would I put the kid in the cab with me if I knew there were a bunch of wetbacks in the box? I did what I was told: make the trip and drop the load, truck and all, here in no-man’s land. Then I was to go to the bank in Cottonwood to get my pay. My biggest worry along the way was that I was way late, and the bank was sure to be closed by the time I got there. That meant the boy and me would have to stay overnight in these godforsaken mosquito barrens.”

I hold up a hand in Politano’s direction. “Hold on there, my friend. Let’s rewind just a second. Did I hear right? Did you say you were to go to the bank in Cottonwood to get your pay?”

“Yeah. See a guy named Vertrance. Supposed to be some kind of big shot there.”

“Wait a minute.” I get out of the squad and fetch Guffey from the shed. “Come on out to the car Earl,” I tell him, my voice half an octave higher than usual. “Something weird just came out of the truck driver’s mouth.”

At the squad, I instruct Politano to repeat to Guffey what he just told me. “They gave me a ticket to show to this guy at the bank to prove I’d delivered the load,” he concludes. “It’s in my back pocket, in my wallet.”

He turns to his right to allow Guffey to extract the wallet from his hip pocket. Guffey pulls a five hundred-peso note from the wallet and holds it up between us. On its face is written the word *Zombie*, in Sharpie marking pen. “Vinny Balistreri gave it to me

when I left the dock in Chicago,” Politano reports. “Said the guy at the bank would redeem it for the rest of my pay.”

“What’s this *Zombie* mean?” Guffey asks.

“It’s a code. The guy at the bank is supposed to recognize it as a signal to give me my pay.”

This is not just another piece of the puzzle. This is likely the key that unlocks the whole schmear. “You’re right about the bank being closed,” I tell the driver. “But I have a pretty good hunch about where we can find your paymaster at this hour of the day.” I turn to Guffey. “Let’s jump on it, Earl.”

Eager as I am to climb onto my horse and ride Vertrace down, Guffey is a model of patience. “Not so fast,” he cautions. “We got a bit of unfinished business right over there in the shed. What’re we going to do with the Mexicans?”

I let that sink in for a spell, then favor the sheriff with a slice of my newfound knowledge concerning immigrants. “I tell you what Earl. We don’t even know they’re Mexicans. Lots of folks living in The Thirties are from Salvador, Honduras, even Guatemala.”

“I give two hoots where they’re from,” Guffey snorts. “What I want to know is what the hell we’re going to do with them. We can’t leave them here and go riding off like some kind of Wild West posse.”

“Help is on the way,” I say, not at all sure that I am speaking the truth. The situation is now in the hands of Sheila Mackey and

her contacts in the Latino community. They're the ones who need to find a way to place the occupants of the Balistreri Produce truck before I can take off in pursuit of Miles Vertrance. "Meanwhile, let Sperkle keep an eye on our visitors. Ought to be right up Merle's alley, babysitting a bunch of scared foundlings."

Guffey motions to me to follow him into the shed. There we find the immigrants huddled together, while Sperkle stands at parade rest before them, trying his damndest to bark out orders in English. It is abundantly clear that they understand not one word of his instructions.

"See what I mean?" Guffey whispers to me. "Leave Merle in charge and this will go on until he gives in to the itch and calls up the ICE people."

I bring Earl up to date on my call to Sheila. "Give her time to come up with a plan and get back to us," I say. "The Sheila Mackey I know is daring and resourceful as the Lone Ranger himself."

Guffey calls for the attention of the refugees and asks if anybody speaks Inglais. A boy perhaps a couple of years younger than Politano's son steps forward. He reports that the group started out in Chiapas and has been traveling for a week. Their families paid thousands to the coyotes to get them to America. They're here to earn money and send it back home.

He is interrupted in his narrative by an older man who fills in additional details in Spanish. After a brief back and forth the boy

points to the man and advises Guffey: “He says we’re here to be Americans. We’re here to succeed.”

As expected, it is not long before Merle Sperkle sidles up to Guffey’s side and bothers him about the delay. “We’re duty bound to call in the federal authorities and turn these illegals over to them. They’re breaking the law. American law.”

Guffey nods. “When you’re sheriff, Merle, you can do things your way. As long as I’m in charge, we’ll do them my way. Already got a jail full of these people. I’m not looking to add to their misery, or to my own.”

Sperkle continues to press his case, at one point even stalking over to his cruiser in a bluff threat to radio the immigration people. In the end, however, he backs down, apparently realizing that insubordination might put the kibosh on his career.

As the debate gathers steam, a convoy of four pickup trucks comes rolling down the gravel track from the entrance to the club. The lead vehicle is driven by Gus Rodriguez of the Sparta Hispanic Center. Sheila Mackey is beside him in the passenger seat.

“That was fast,” I tell my new lady friend as she hops out of the truck.

“Gus has dealt with this kind of situation before,” she says. “The Hispanic Center takes care of its own.”

Rodriguez and his crew hurry directly to the shed, where they engage in an animated conversation with the immigrants. Rodriguez then approaches Guffey. “Sheriff. We can take these people off your

hands. They are victims, not criminals. They have done nothing to deserve jail. We can take care of them.”

Guffey gives the okay, and Rodriguez goes back inside the building to help the immigrants out to the waiting pickups. The work goes quietly and efficiently, and in less than five minutes the trucks are ready to leave.

“Where are you taking them?” I ask Sheila as she gets back into the cab of a Ford 150 with Rodriguez.

“We’re in touch with the Red Cross. For now, we’ll set up facilities in the gym of the old high school in Sparta. Then we’ll interview them to find more suitable accommodations.”

“Thanks Sheila. You’re a wonder.”

She smiles. “I know.” She gives me a pat on the back of my hand.

With that, the caravan begins to move, leaving only Gunflint County sheriff’s squads in the area. I turn to Guffey. “Now,” I say, “let’s get after our good banker friend and throw his skinny ass in jail.”

“Sheila Mackey just saved you sixteen places in the county lockup,” I point out as Guffey pulls out of the Shibboleth Hills parking lot and onto County Highway WW. “I hope that leaves at least one spot in the jail for our good friend Miles Vertrance.” To my way of thinking, Gerald Politano’s confession seals the deal on the local banker.

Guffey is more circumspect. “We still don’t know exactly how Vertrance is connected to the smugglers,” he says. “Things are not always as they appear to be. Keep that in mind, Dopple.”

I am quite aware of my personal interest in seeing Vertrance behind bars. His rude comments about Sheila during my visit to his office confirmed my belief that he has his sights set on having his way with the pie lady. Nothing would please me more than to watch him shuffle into arraignment court dressed in an orange jumpsuit and chained at the waist and wrists. But personal feelings aside, Gerald Politano also proves that beneath Miles Vertrance’s slick, pomaded exterior there lurks a nasty piece of humanity, even if it is done up in thousand dollar suits and hundred dollar silk ties.

“Look at the facts of the case,” I remind Guffey. “Vertrance was like *this* with Deuce Froedert. They cooked the coyote scheme up during their rendezvous at the golf course clubhouse.”

“Froedert would have been a perfect mark for some easy money,” Guffey admits. “I’ll give you that much. But would Vertrance have the balls to part young Froedert’s hair with a seven iron in the locker room? Stretches the imagination.”

“I’m not saying that’s what happened to Froedert, Earl. What I am saying is that Vertrance is the front man for the Chicago mob in this smuggling operation. And of course Art Anthem had to be part of the cabal as well, being the person who watched over things at the site. Vertrance had the Chicago connections and Froedert had an ideal transfer point for moving cargo to its final destination. For all its isolation, Cottonwood is a strategic point on the map, along a major highway from Chicago to Minneapolis. A golf course is secluded, but not so secluded that people might begin to wonder what a truck from Balistreri Fine Produce was doing there. Lots of people coming and going at a golf course, so nobody was likely to become suspicious when a few unfamiliar Mexicans showed up. Anthem already had a brown-skinned crew on the premises, so if anybody happened to spot a few new faces before they got moved on, it raised no red flags.”

Guffey pounds the steering wheel with the heel of his hand. “And it was all happening right underneath my nose. Damn.” He gives a shake of his head. “Hard to believe though, that our local

banker is some kind of gangland kingpin. Always impressed me as more milquetoast than mafia. Put him in a lineup and he'd be invisible."

"That's exactly the way he's been playing it," I say. "But remember: he was a trader on the floor of the Chicago Merc before he showed up here. He had connections with commodities people in the city. And he had the scruples of a water moccasin. Got himself tossed off the trading floor on his ear. I kept asking myself how this lightweight came up with the capital to buy a majority stake in the Cottonwood State Bank. And of course, the fact of the matter is that he didn't. His sponsors in the Windy City bankrolled him. They set him up in business, he made contact with a mercenary and vulnerable partner, and the pipeline began to flow."

I think about the image of a pipeline for a minute, then add: "Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if the Mexican operation was just the first gambit in a game they planned to use for the transportation of all sorts of contraband – drugs, prostitutes, even firearms. It's the perfect setup for a gang of flatlanders."

It's not even too big a leap to see the golf course pole barn being converted to use as a meth lab. Froedert and his pals would love to go into the business of cooking up flavored meth for distribution to school children in the Cities. Chocolate and strawberry flavors, sold with a promise that it's as not as dangerous as the bitter tasting regular stuff.

We hurtle down WW at high speed, Guffey and I, but without the siren and lights that I suspect give Merle Sperkle a tingle in his undershorts. Guffey is too far along in life to be aroused by such adolescent urges. At the Old Mill Crossing we turn west onto South Shore Road, heading for Screamin' Steve's roadhouse.

"Those fellows from the Hispanic Center showed up quick as you can say Jack Robinson," Guffey observes. "Almost as though they knew what was going on at the golf course." He glances in my direction, as though I'm in on some sort of conspiracy.

"Wouldn't surprise me one bit," I say. "Lucky for them, knowing what's going on is not necessarily a crime. And lucky for you they took a whole load of potential jail residents off your hands."

Guffey growls and changes the subject. "Not to stick my nose in, Doppie, but exactly what is going on between you and Sheila Mackey?"

"What's going on? Earl, I've only gone out with the woman a couple of times. I wouldn't say that qualifies as something going on." All of a sudden I feel the need to cover up the fact that I spent the night in Sheila's company. I don't want Guffey or anybody else reading more into that frolic than it warrants. Hell, I myself don't know what to make of it. About all I know for sure is that I've spent more time thinking about Sheila over the past several days than I have thinking about the case we are presently working on.

“Yeah, well.” The corners of Guffey’s mouth turn up in a wry smile. “Word is getting around town, if you know what I mean. Be careful, my friend. You could be playing with fire.”

I turn to face the sheriff, the hairs on the back of my neck standing up. “Playing with fire? Now what the hell’s that suppose to mean? Geez, the lady and me are both grownup adults. Whose business is it, anyway?”

“Nobody’s but yours,” Guffey admits. There’s a pause in the conversation as we weave our way down South Shore Road. “Sheila Mackey’s been married you know,” he continues.

“Of course I know she’s been married. So have I. It’s one of the things we have in common.” Is Guffey about to give me advice about using precautions, and warn me about the consequences of unprotected sex? Has he appointed himself my father? What kind of a doofus does he think I am?

“Three times,” Guffey says. “The most recent time she was married to a big shot from the Target department store chain in the Cities. The money for the pie and coffee shop came in the divorce settlement.”

Now there’s something I *didn’t* know. Sheila and I have kept our respective pasts pretty much to ourselves, concentrating on having a good time in the here and now. But Target big shot or not, it doesn’t make a bit of difference. What does the past have to do with anything, I ask myself as I remember the feel of Sheila’s bare haunch as she rolled over in bed, the curve of her ample breast

against the aubergine sheet, the aroma of lilacs in her hair. She has her past and I have mine. What's important is where we go from here.

"She's what some folks call an enthusiast," Guffey continues. "Gets all worked up about some wildass cause for a certain length of time, but doesn't seem to have the stamina to stick with it. Right now it's Mexicans. Last year it was dogs rescued from the hurricanes down south. Before that it was wind power."

"All of which seem to me to be noble causes."

"I'm just saying." Guffey gives a frustrated wave of the hand. "She's out to save the planet, and if you're not on that bandwagon the whole thing could go sour. Aw hell, Wally. Forget I ever brought it up. I'm no Ann Landers."

"You got that right, boss."

Looking to the west, a bank of black clouds has begun covering over the last vestiges of the late summer sunset, rolling toward us like a wave coming up on the shore. The weather report on the radio appears to be right on the money – low pressure front coming through out of the Dakotas and the Prairie provinces, bringing with it up to an inch of rain.

The parking lot of Screamin' Steve's is packed tight, so that Guffey needs to pull up behind three nearly identical Ford 150 pickup trucks, thereby blocking their way out. He flicks on the rooftop light bar to let anybody who wants to know that this is

official police business, and we make our way into the confusion of the Friday night fish fry, Manfred tagging along at our heels.

Inside, the place is a welter of noise, old folks to the right of the entryway seated family-style at tables of eight, calling to each other to pass the tartar sauce and nagging harried waitresses for a refill of their brandy old-fashions. One whiff of the aroma of fryer grease and my stomach begins to rumble, complaining that it has not been attended to since noon. The mouth-watering look of trays of breaded deep-fried cod speaks to my salivary glands like the sirens of myth calling to sailors on the high seas. In my wake, Manfred gives out an involuntary whine, and I note that bubbles of drool have begun to form on his sagging jowls.

To the left of the entrance, the bar is packed with beer drinkers three deep: construction workers replaying the week's work on road projects and municipal buildings; farmers comparing commodity prices with the cost of fertilizer; and townies discussing their plans for the weekend. Amid the chaos, at the far end of the bar sits Miles Vertrance himself, a tumbler of ice and clear liquid sitting on the bar in front of him as he bends the ear of Vern Petty, chief executive of Petty Construction.

As Guffey and I elbow our way through the crowd toward our mark, I notice that an industrial sized grill has been fired up on the lawn outside, and conclude that this is one picnic that's not likely to get off the ground. The weather front is approaching like a freight train from the west. Now the sound system blares out the voice of a

disc jockey sitting up on the stage, announcing that it's reggae night at Screamin' Steve's, and to open the show we're about to hear Bob Marley and the Wailers with "*I Shot the Sheriff*." The significance of the song title is lost on Guffey, who stalks the unwary Vertrance like a cat homing in on a canary. Guffey closes in from the left while I move in to the space between Vertrance and Petty on the right.

"The shipment's in," Guffey announces to the banker.

Vertrance hikes backward in his seat, visibly shaken at the sight of the uniformed Guffey. He places his drink on the bar with an unsteady hand, then wipes both palms on his pant legs. "Sheriff Guffey?" he says in a voice that's barely audible in the din. "You talking to me?"

"How about this," Guffey continues. "The Balistreri Produce truck is sitting out at Shibboleth Hills. Only now it's empty. We relieved you of your cargo, and your friend Gerald Politano would like to get paid." He holds up the five hundred-peso note while Bob Marley sings *but I didn't shoot the deputy*.

Vertrance swirls the liquid in his glass, looks up at the ceiling. "Don't know what you're talking about, sheriff. Don't know a Gerald Politano, and the Cottonwood State Bank doesn't deal in foreign exchange."

Now Vertrance glances over his shoulder, apparently having sensed my presence on his right. "Nice to see you again," I say into his ear. "Under circumstance much more to my liking."

Vertrance turns back to Guffey. “This gumshoe been telling stories on me?” he asks. “Whatever he says, it’s a load of bull crap.” He tries to talk around me, addressing Vern Petty. “You’re my witness, Vern. I’m being harassed here.”

“Quite a lucrative sideline you found,” I say. “Hauling illegals up from Chicago, placing them in the farm fields and motel operations of your best bank customers. Makes sense that you’d rather keep the folks living out on the river dumb as doorknobs about financial matters, so that they’ll spend their lives living in hock to the big shots around the county.”

Guffey reaches for his ASP tactical handcuffs. “Miles Vertrance,” he says in his official voice, “I’m placing you under arrest for transportation of illegal goods, and for suspicion of the murders of Deuce Froedert and Arthur Anthem. Now step over here and let Dopple pat you down.”

Vertrance slides from the bar stool. Then, as Guffey begins to Mirandize him, he sets his heel and bolts past me, heading through the crowd toward the back door. Before I know what’s going on, the wiry little guy has put two hard hats and a biker mama between us, and is skittering like a grass snake through the crowd. Guffey snorts, Manfred barks, and I bolt after our prey. I make it no more than six feet before stumbling over an errant bar stool and fall to my knees. The last thing I see before going down is the back of Vertrance’s head at the door.

Next thing I know, I'm struggling to get my breath back while Manfred slaps my cheek with six inches of purple tongue. He licks my face furiously – his method of addressing all manner of injury. On hands and knees, I take a quick timeout until a meaty hand is extended from above to help me to my feet. I grab hold and right myself, while Vertrance disappears out the back door and down the lawn, headed for the marina. I take off after him as fast as my throbbing knees and bruised ego will allow, thinking all the while that maybe I should have paid more attention to the advice of Doc Harper, the MPD's health Nazi, and slimmed down to a weight more appropriate for chasing criminals across crowded bar rooms.

As I burst through the doorway I get a quick glimpse of Vertrance rounding the corner of the marina building, and give chase. By the time I reach the complex of floating piers that extends out into a small bay on Lake Elysium, the banker has jumped into his antique mahogany Chris Craft and revved up the three-hundred horsepower Chrysler engine. There's nothing I can do to stop him as he backs the boat out of its slip, then swings the bow around one-

hundred-and-eighty degrees and sends a cloud of exhaust fumes spraying out onto the water in his wake.

Then it comes to me: the Dopple family yacht has been moored in Screamin' Steve's marina ever since the day Art Anthem bought the farm and Guffey had Sperkle pick me up from my interview with Steve Gunderson and take me out to the scene of the crime. I turn on my heel and make a beeline for the opposite side of the marina, passing more than a dozen pontoon party boats and half as many ski boats. The floating pier rocks and rolls beneath my substantial weight, and I spread my arms to each side like a boy replicating the flight of an airplane as I run at top speed along the aluminum slats. I am only vaguely aware of the crowd that has gathered on the porch of the roadhouse to watch this improbable chase. They are lined up cheek-to-jowl as though watching a thoroughbred horse race with a fistful of pari-mutuel tickets in their hands.

I jump into the twenty year old AlumaCraft and skitter to the stern, praying that the old Evinrude outboard will not fail me. I yank on the starter cord once, and again. Prime the line one time, and try again. The old soldier coughs and sputters, then roars to life. As I throw the bow line off, I am rocked back nearly off balance as ninety-five pounds of dog flesh joins me in the craft, feet scratching and scrambling to get a hold on the slippery metal hull.

Manfred? I ask myself in bewilderment as I throw the motor into reverse and back away from the mooring. *What the hell are you*

doing here? As we swing out into open water, the Vertrance speedboat has opened a big lead and is growling across the lake with a ferocity that my humble vessel cannot hope to match. As the Doppie yacht follows in its wake, I wonder what the folks on the porch are thinking: are they laughing at such a fruitless chase? And what about Guffey? Is he alerting his deputies to surround the five thousand acres of water that make up Lake Elysium? There are literally hundreds of piers around the lake where Vertrance could make landfall. It would be impossible to cover them all.

“I guess it’s up to us,” I announce to Manfred, who has now taken up a position at the front of the boat, his front feet planted firmly on the bow, his snoot raised to the wind, his ears flapping like semaphore flags. In this moment of crisis, it seems, Manfred’s police instincts have overcome his fear, and he has opted to join me in the chase rather than assuming his accustomed spiritless posture on the pier. I can’t repress a small smile as I realize that the old boy still has the gonads of a cop: nothing is more important to him than tracking down felons, up to and including his own terrible fears.

Now a new danger threatens my intrepid pup. A bolt of lightning streaks across the sky, followed by the ominous roll of thunder. An oversize drop of rain smacks me on the forehead as more lightning bolts flash across the sky. Unbeknown to me, three twisters have touched down in the Cities, and a severe weather warning has been issued for all of Gunflint County. Out here on the lake, weather is a more elemental fact of life than it is amid the

piners and aspens of the shore, there being only air and water separating man and nature. The sky is closing down in varying shades of black, and I am losing the race with a wall of rain. Clouds take on the shape of dragons and gargoyles, their ozone breath filling the air with a cloying dampness. For a moment I find myself back in Nam, motoring up the Mekong River, the jungle closing in on both sides and soldiers ducking their helmeted heads into their shoulders turtle-like against the threat of small arms fire.

There's no question about the possibility of turning back. Vertrance is heading directly north across the lake, his destination now apparent. He's making for the scene of earlier crimes, the Shibboleth Hills Golf Club. As we forge into increasingly heavy seas, Manfred keeps his nose pointed like a beacon in the direction of the powerful Chris Craft, as though he understands the depth of the banker's black-hearted deeds. The prow of our boat slaps the waves with a thump, evoking a guttural ooof! From deep in Manfred's chest.

We are a good three hundred yards offshore when Vertrance's launch reaches the shore. He pulls up close to the beach and wades to dry land, then staggers up the path leading to the seventh fairway. Manfred complains about our speed with a loud, long bay, which causes Vertrance to pause momentarily in his journey up the hill, turn, then resume his climb faster than ever.

As we rush full speed toward the shore I cut the motor and swing the outboard's lower unit up out of the water. We hit bottom

like a swift boat coming ashore on a Mekong beachhead, and Manfred is propelled off the bow like a torpedo. He stumbles once, regains his feet, and takes off after the fleeing banker with enough noise to scare the socks off a battalion of green berets. A moment later I'm after my canine partner, sloshing through the surf and onto the shore feeling more than ever like a beached whale. I struggle up the path toward the seventh fairway knowing full well that my quarry is in much better shape than I am, and everything else being equal he could be on his way to Ecuador by now.

But everything else is not equal. My secret weapon has stopped barking, a sign that he has either given up on the chase or treed our varmint. I scramble through the woods and onto the seventh fairway. Suddenly my left hamstring gives out, and I go down on the wet grass with a thud. I pull myself up, holding the complaining muscle, and forge ahead, my face screwed up in a knot. Except for the flash of lightning, all illumination has gone out of the sky. In the glare of one such strobe, I see two figures at the side of a bunker twenty yards from the green. I follow the verbal compass of snarls and groans until I nearly trip over Vertrance, curled up in a fetal position while Manfred looms over him, the fur on the dog's back standing on end and an eight-inch string of spittle hanging from the corner of his sagging jowl.

"Call him off!" Vertrance pleads as I right myself and struggle to regain my breath. "Call him off before he kills me!"

I can't help taking a moment to enjoy the reversal of fortune that fate has delivered into my hands. I stand over the banker, hands on hips, still chuffing like a steam engine. Manfred takes his eye off his prey long enough to look up at me, asking for further instructions. *Want me to take a chunk out of the little scoundrel's leg boss?* he seems to be asking. *Maybe shake him by the nape of the neck?*

"Enough, partner," I finally say, laying a hand on the dog's back. Slowly he lowers his tail as the growling eases to a mild huff, and Manfred takes half a step to his right and leans up against my leg. I take hold of the back of Vertrance's shirt and pull him onto his knees, then to his feet. Here in the great outdoors he seems even smaller than I pictured him in my mind, and certainly smaller than he appeared to be sitting behind his desk in the bank president's office.

"Keep that animal away from me," the little weasel pleads, his voice breaking and his head quivering on his neck like a bobblehead doll. The rain has increased in intensity, so there's no way of knowing whether Manfred's attack has caused the banker to lose control of his bladder, or whether it's merely a rainwater spot in the crotch of those elegant worsted trousers. If I were a betting man, I'd give eight to five odds on the former.

"This dog is going to be your constant companion until we can get ourselves up to the clubhouse and out of this downpour," I tell Vertrance. Lacking both handcuffs and my trusty thirty-eight caliber

police special, Manfred is the only means of restraint at my disposal at the moment. No problem. One rumble from the dog's chest cavity is likely to cause Vertrance to melt entirely away like the wicked witch in *The Wizard of Oz*.

I give the banker a prod with the tips of my fingers and he stumbles forward, leading our small party through the downpour toward the distant lights of the Shibboleth Hills clubhouse. "This isn't over," he says as we pass the seventh tee and head for the cart path leading to the number one green. "You have no idea what you're getting yourself into, Dopple. I have friends. I'm connected. I know people with pull." Seems as though my charge is recovering some of his lost confidence.

"The only pull you're going to feel is the pull of your hands wrapped around a cell door, Bud. We've got your mule Politano in tow, and you'd be surprised how fast people start talking when they see their own future surrounded by the walls of a federal prison. From here on out, your ass is grass, my friend."

"What the hell is a Milwaukee cop doing hanging around this burg anyway?" Vertrance whines. "Cottonwood is the last place you go before you drop off the end of the earth. We had it figured. Nobody to bother us, a sleepy little town with a golf pro who'd nail his own mother's ass to the wall for a few bucks. It was a perfect setup. Didn't you have enough to keep you busy in your own backyard?"

I signal to Manfred, and the dog bounds forward, barking and snarling. He circles Vertrance, teeth gleaming yellow in the eerie shadow-light, and the banker stops dead in his tracks. “Appears that Manfred doesn’t particularly care for your line of conversation,” I say. “Better just keep it buttoned up so as not to get him all worked up.” I take hold of my prisoner’s belt and steer him toward our goal. From here on out, our walk to the safety and security of the clubhouse proceeds in silence. My hamstring joins the shoulder I injured on the golf course and the bruised ribs I slammed against the edge of Vertrance’s desk in setting up a chorus of agony.

As our trio of sodden water bugs approaches the clubhouse porch, Guffey's police cruiser pulls up and the sheriff lurches out of the car, nicely encased in his trooper's raincoat and hat. Good to know that one of the county's top elected officials has protected himself against the downpour while chasing down a suspected felon. Meanwhile, the visiting cop from the city has gotten himself sopping wet.

"Come on," Guffey says. "Let's get in out of this deluge and get you dried off."

"How'd you know where to find us?" I ask. "There are a hundred places our financial shark here could have gone to ground."

He looks at me as though I am slow. "I've lived all my life in this county," he says. "Been chasing runaways for thirty-three years. It's like tracking rabbits. You get wise to their tendencies. A boat heading due north across the lake generally means it's heading for the golf course."

Guffey takes charge of the prisoner and escorts him into the dining room, where two tables of the Ladies Friday Afternoon Nine-Hole League are enjoying a game of bridge. Mouths hang agape at the sight of the sheriff, his posse, and his prisoner as we stand

dripping onto the indoor-outdoor carpet. Karla Hess gets up from the nearer table and comes over to greet us.

“You scared the devil out of us,” she says. “We sure weren’t expecting visitors in this weather.” As if to confirm the statement, a kettledrum solo of thunder rolls across the sky overhead, causing Manfred to pull his head into his shoulders and find refuge beneath a dining table. Hands of bridge are laid down and the players turn their attention to our group, buzzing among themselves about the disheveled appearance of their hometown banker.

“What’s he done?” Verna Plumb asks.

“Those two look like drowned rats,” Pat Remagen adds, indicating Vertrance and me. “Gives good testimony to the old saying.”

“What saying is that?” Plumb inquires.

“Haven’t got the sense to come in out of the rain.” Remagen smirks like a Cheshire cat.

“Got us a prize catch here,” Guffey announces, sitting Vertrance down in a chair and pulling out his handcuffs. “Turns out Banker Vertrance is the man behind the crime wave that’s put folks hereabouts on edge.” He turns to Vertrance: “We found a twenty-two caliber revolver in your briefcase, my friend. Odd piece of equipment for a banker to be carrying around.” Guffey pulls Vertrance’s hands around to his back and clamps the handcuffs on his wrists.

Outside, the sound of a siren mixes with the thunder, announcing the arrival of Lieutenant Merle Sperkle. Presumably to be followed by a corps of his lackeys. As Guffey picks up where he left off reading Vertrance his rights at Screamin' Steve's, Sperkle bursts through the door, followed by one of his deputies.

"Looks like we got you dead to rights," Sperkle tells Vertrance. He turns to Guffey: "I had a hunch this little rat was in it up to his neck," he says. "Something underhanded about him. Something snaky."

"Takes one to know one," I say under my breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant. Not a thing."

Our prisoner is not taking all this lying down. "You backwoods hicks got nothing on me," he says. "Before this is over, I'll have your badges. First thing I want is a lawyer. Until I get one, I'm not saying another word."

Guffey makes a quick move toward Vertrance, who cringes as though he expects to be struck with a nightstick. "We'll get you a lawyer all right," Guffey says. "Right after we work you over with our rubber hoses." He winks at me, enjoying his own joke.

Karla Hess turns to her card-playing friends. "Ladies, perhaps we should take our leave of the sheriff and his prisoner." She looks at Guffey, expecting to be confirmed in her opinion.

I step forward. "No need to leave, ladies. There's no danger here. Not anymore. This won't take but a few minutes. We'll be out

of your hair in no time.” The ladies reverse direction, sit back down and focus on Vertrice, a pillar of the community now cuffed with hands behind his back and head tucked into his chest in submission.

“You see ladies,” I explain, “Miles Vertrice is not merely the president of the Cottonwood State Bank. He’s also a trafficker in human cargo. The men who rake the sand traps for you out there on the course, and mow the fairways, and plant those pretty pansies and petunias in the flower beds – odds are about fifty-fifty that they arrived in Cottonwood in the back of a produce truck, courtesy of Miles Vertrice and his Chicago cronies. The groundskeepers here at Shibboleth Hills, and the maids in the Sleep Well motel on I-94, and the dishwashers in the kitchens of the restaurants in Sparta paid thousands of dollars for the privilege of taking the jobs you would turn up your noses at. They live in rental housing on the Nekoosa River in the slim hope that someday they too will be sitting in the clubhouse playing bridge or at the bar making deals. They heard about something called the American Dream, never realizing that those who have already snagged their share of that dream are not so willing to make it available to others, and especially not to those whose skin may be a few shades darker than their own.

“You would think that a person like Miles Vertrice would be one of the crowd opposed to immigration from the south, but you’d be wrong. Miles Vertrice and the folks at Balistreri Fine Produce saw a business opportunity. They became what’s known as coyotes, transporters of undocumented individuals from the Mexican border

to points north and east. What better place to dump their loads of human cargo than an out-of-the-way golf course where traffic goes unquestioned and most folks figure its none of their business?

“They had a nice little operation going, until they ran into a bit of bad luck. Their local connection, our own Deuce Froedert, got himself murdered in the basement of this very building, and put a spotlight on the operation. Froedert, who kept a lid on things while the immigrants were funneled to their final work stations. In hindsight, we now have a pretty good idea how a club pro was able to afford that house in Pheasant Ridge. It certainly wasn’t on the pay your board of directors voted him.”

I pause to take a sip of hot coffee. My body has begun to shudder despite the warm weather. My wet clothes cling to my torso like sheets of Saran Wrap. “The death of Deuce Froedert brought in the sheriff and the States,” I resume. “Could the federal immigration people be far behind? With all that attention, Vertrance and his local people tried to put a brake on the smuggling operation, but apparently the word did not get through to the mooks on the other end of the line.

“To make matters worse, Art Anthem showed up dead in that sand trap beside the fourth green. My best guess is that Anthem was a reluctant party in the trafficking scheme. Probably got cold feet when Froedert went down, and threatened to go to the authorities to save his own skin. Vertrance couldn’t let that happen. He set up an alibi that he was out at the Harlan Woods farm, and then made his

way out here one dark night and popped the groundskeeper in the back of the head. He buried Anthem, thinking the body wouldn't be found for some time. But he was hasty. Shallow graves make risky hiding places, and sure enough, our good friends Jorge Ruiz and Julio Martinez uncovered the unlucky fellow the following afternoon."

"And so we come to today's events," Guffey says. "The Balistreri Produce truck rolled onto the property bearing a load of poor souls looking for a better life, and ran right into our stakeout. One Gerald Politano has been talking his head off ever since, giving us chapter and verse on his contacts in Chicago. And," Guffey adds as he pulls out the five hundred-peso note once more and dangles it in front of Vertrance's face, "he gave us the name and number of the rattlesnake who was to pay him on this end of the line. By the way," Guffey says, turning to Vertrance. "We checked your alibi for the night Art Anthem was killed. Farmer Wood over in Necedah says when he got up the next morning you were nowhere in sight. It would have been no trick at all to get your raggedy ass back here, dispose of Anthem, and have nobody the wiser. The district attorney should have no trouble tying up the loose ends."

"I want to see my lawyer," Vertrance says. "That's all I have to say. Somebody call Al Buxbaum. I know my rights."

"You have the right to a fair and speedy trial," Guffey says.

"First we'll try him," Sperkle says. "Then we'll hang him."

“The first killing – Froedert – went so well that you decided to solve all your problems by anther murder,” Guffey says.

I step forward, shaking my head. “That’s not exactly true, Earl. We have two murders, but there are also two murderers, not one.”

Guffey wrinkles up his forehead and drops his jaw. “Two murderers? What’re you talking about, Doppie? We got Vertrance cold on the smuggling operation. He had the motive, keeping his secret. He had the opportunity, being placed at the scene of both crimes. And he had the means, a seven iron in the case of Froedert and the twenty-two handgun we found in his briefcase, which I’m sure will match the slug Doc Harvey took out of Art Anthem’s brain. That makes three for three.”

“That would make a nice, neat package,” I tell the sheriff. “The trouble is, Anthem was killed to keep him quiet, but Froedert was killed for revenge. You see, our enterprising club pro had more than one iron in the fire. He was working with Vertrance and his pals on the immigrant smuggling operation, but he also dabbled in moving pharmaceuticals through a separate pipeline. And one of his best customers back in the day was one Chad Hess, former state junior golf champ and son of Karla Hess. If we were to run Vertrance to ground for both murders, we would overlook the real killer of Deuce Froedert. Wouldn’t we, Mrs. Hess?”

I turn to the newly installed club manger, who cranes her neck in my direction as her bridge partners gasp in disbelief. “The day

Froedert was killed you told the sheriff you saw a man in khakis running up the back stairs from the men's locker room. But that wasn't the case at all, was it? Because you were the one who applied the seven iron to the back of the club pro's head. You were the only one with motive, means and opportunity."

Guffey looks toward me as though examining me for a bump on the head. "Dopple, you can't be serious. Karla Hess? A killer? The only way Karla would be capable of killing somebody would be to pray them to death."

I wave Guffey off. "Was that what happened, Mrs. Hess? Did you get a message from God that it would be all right to part Froedert's hair with a golf club?"

"Who are you to question me?" Karla Hess asks, giving her best interpretation of an outraged woman. "I'm not some tame little girl you can intimidate with your high-handed methods. I am a person of means in this community."

"Near as I can figure it," I say, "Deuce Froedert sold young Chad Hess a bill of goods on the performance benefits of certain drug products. Told him that was what it takes to go from the Nike Tour to the big time. Chad was a willing student, so willing that he took it on himself to supplement the stuff Froedert was supplying. Fried his brain. When Mama Hess found out who was responsible for putting her son in the whack shack, she put on her avenger's armor and went after the man she saw as the devil who ruined

Chad's life. What really happened in that locker room the day Deuce Froedert bought the farm, Mrs. Hess?"

Karla Hess slumps in the chair at the bridge table. She picks up her hand of cards and shuffles through it absently while her friends look on in disbelief. "I saw a rose. It was God's answer to my novena."

"You saw a rose?" Guffey appears to be thoroughly confused.

"The rose on Deuce Froedert's shoulder," I remind him. "The rose that told Mrs. Hess she had permission to take her revenge."

Karla Hess sighs. "The door to the locker room was ajar. As I passed I heard the sound of water running in the shower room, and saw Deuce Froedert sitting on the dressing bench. His back was to me. He was in shorts and not much more. I saw the rose tattoo on his shoulder. That's when I knew. It was a sign from on high. I went into the ladies locker room and picked up the first club that came to hand, then went back to the men's locker room. Froedert was bent over, putting on his socks. I raised the club and hit him as hard as I could. I don't know where I got the strength. It only took one blow. He crumbled, folded like a cardboard box."

I turn my attention to Guffey. "That seven iron," I explain. "It was a woman's club. It was too short to be a man's seven iron. What was a woman's seven iron doing in the men's locker room? That's what I couldn't figure out. Unless, of course, the killer was a woman."

“But she’s – Guffey hesitates, nods to the suspect. “She’s so *small*. Where’d she get the strength to dispatch a hulk like Froedert with one swing?”

“She’s also women’s club champion all these years running. Consider the velocity and heft a steel golf club head generates in an arc of eight feet. Not to mention the adrenalin involved in a mother’s revenge for her son. No, I think Mrs. Hess had more than enough power to do the deed. What I can’t figure out is how the cleat marks came to disfigure the body.”

“The shoe was right there beside him,” Karla Hess says. “He must have taken it from the trophy case himself. I have an idea that it was one of his hiding places for the drugs he sold. After he fell, the rage overwhelmed me, and I took the shoe and hit him and hit him until I heard the water in the shower room stop. It was only then that I came to my senses and realized that somebody was right around the corner, about to discover what I’d done. I dropped the shoe and hurried back to the ladies locker room. My hands were shaking. I sat down to gather my thoughts. It was only then that I realized what I had done.”

Karla Hess folds her hand of cards, taps it on the table, and looks up at me. “Don’t you see? I was instructed to do it. God sent me the sign. He revealed the face of evil to me, and said that I was to be the instrument of His wrath, His avenging angel. What was done was done in His name. Two days after the evil of Deuce Froedert was removed from this place the rose bushes in the garden

out front set new buds. How can that be anything but a sign that I performed my duty to God's satisfaction?"

Guffey motions to Sperkle to get handcuffs onto our newly confessed killer, having already used his own to shackle Vertrance. It's a twofer for the sheriff of Gunflint County. Maybe even a threefer, if you count cracking the immigrant trafficking ring. But Guffey looks more worn out than pleased. I speculate that like me, Earl may be coming to the end of his career in law enforcement. Not entirely a bad thing, I want to tell him. The only downside of a Guffey retirement might be the elevation of Merle Sperkle to the office of sheriff. I shudder, whether from the chill of my wet clothing or the thought of Sperkle as chief county law enforcement officer I cannot say.

As a hazy August sun rises over Lake Elysium and casts shadows onto the porch of the Dopple Hilton, I punch in the numbers for the Second District Station on my cell phone. “Hey Ginny,” I greet the dispatcher. “How’s my favorite female copper?”

“Dopple?” she replies “That you?”

“It’s me, my sugar dumpling. Put me through to the boss, will you?”

“What the hell you been up to, Dopple? The Looie says you’re on detached duty in the boonies up north.”

“Would the boss lie?” I tease.

“Detached duty? Never heard of such a thing. Meanwhile, Perelman is shambling around the station as if he were an inmate of the county jail, getting on everybody’s nerves with his dumbass jokes. We need relief, Dopple.”

“And that’s just what I’m about to report to the boss, my little sugar plum. I’m on my way back to the city. *Mission accomplished*, as Dubya would say.”

A moment later Lieutenant Armand picks up the phone. “Dopple, this better be about getting your sorry ass back on the job.”

“And so it is, boss. I am happy to report that the case – I should say the multiple cases – up here in Cottonwood have been wrapped up, and I’ll be ready for assignment first thing tomorrow morning.”

“About effin’ time, too.”

“I figured you’d be pleased.”

I can tell by the pitch of his voice that the Looie is under stress. I suspect that may be because he has been without his top detective these past many days, but I do not bring this obvious fact to his attention.

“Look at this mess on my desk,” the boss says, as if we are speaking on video phones. “I’m up to my ass in alligators, Dopple.”

“And relief is on its way. Turns out there were two murders and two murderers up here, if you can believe that. And the culprits were two of the most improbable people you’d ever suspect of violent crime.”

“Dopple, you have me confused with somebody who gives a shit. What I need to know is when you’re going to start pulling your share of the load in this squad.”

Sensing that the Looie is not interested in spending more time on formalities, I wish him a good day and hit the end button.

I turn my attention to Manfred, who has joined me for the day's first cup of coffee. "You're my pride and joy," I tell him as he vacuums the floor with his nose, seeking out bits and pieces of edible material. "You proved your mettle when it mattered most." Although I was the one who got the credit, I realize full well that it was my canine partner who brought banker Vertrance to ground and placed him under arrest there on the seventh fairway. Even more heroic was his decision to jump into the boat as we pulled away from Screamin' Steve's, putting his fears behind him and doing what needed to be done in the teeth of an oncoming gale. For his bravery in overcoming his deep-seated fears he will get a nice piece of beef liver for supper.

As if to acknowledge my approval, Manfred leans into my leg and huffs once. *You're welcome boss*, he's saying.

The state cops showed up at the county jail just as Guffey and I had things pretty much wrapped up, bringing their media circus in tow. Reporters wanted to know how a folksy lawman like Guffey had managed to break up an interstate smuggling ring and bring two murderers to justice in one fell swoop. Guffey showed why he has won two countywide elections in the past seven years. He handled himself like a pro before the TV cameras, showing just the right balance of humility and wisdom. Gave credit to the D.A., to his able deputies, even to the visiting detective from Milwaukee and his canine partner, while at the same time making it clear to everyone in

the room that it was the canny Gunflint County sheriff who had masterminded the operation. When he credited Sperkle by name, Guffey was not yet aware that even now, Merle was laying plans to oppose his boss in the spring election, running on the Libertarian party ticket.

Guffey didn't let me off the hook about taking off after Vertrance on my own. In a private moment, he read me the riot act for what he called *acting like a cowboy*. "You could have got yourself into a real hodgepuckle out there on the lake. You had no idea what you were getting yourself into, and no backup to save your saggy ass if things went south. You been a cop long enough to know better, Dopple."

One sideways glance at Manfred was all I needed to counter Guffey's argument about not having backup. He let the subject drop, and returned to the celebration of his recent accomplishments.

Guffey's jailhouse was a beehive of activity in those hours after the arrest of Vertrance and Hess. Seemed like the entire membership of the local chamber of commerce was present, including Maury LaCaskey, who whined: "Who the hell are we going to get to manage Shibboleth Hills for the rest of the season? Club championship is coming up, so's the yearend banquet." LaCaskey took Guffey aside and put his arm around the sheriff as though they were fishing buddies: "Don't suppose you could put off taking Karla Hess in until the middle of October, huh? That'd give us time to find a club manager."

Guffey gave him the evil eye for his trouble. It turned out that Gordy Gordon was about to make a deal with Vern Petty to sell the entire Shibboleth Hills property for residential development, and Petty had engaged the services of Pete Dye to transform the course into a high end private club, meaning the majority of current members will be locked out. Gordy kept his plans secret because he was afraid of how the current board and membership would do if they learned he was bailing out.

All that is in the future, and no business of mine. At this particular moment on the porch of the Doppie Hilton, Manfred slumps onto the floor and tucks his big black nose under his paw, snuffing the indoor-outdoor carpet. "I'm on my own again," I report, baring my soul to the only person in the world who gives a rat's ass. "The pie lady cut me loose."

It's the truth. Later in the evening, after getting into some dry clothes, I stopped by Sheila Mackey's pie shop to see how the refugees had fared after Gus Rodriguez whisked them away from the golf course. She assured me that everything was under control, that the Sparta Hispanic Center has a kind of underground railroad system to help them find suitable lodgings and work. And she thanked me for calling her instead of the immigration people when Guffey and I found out what was going on. Thanked me with a wet kiss, as a matter of fact.

One thing led to another, and it wasn't long before I found myself confessing that I needed to get back to Milwaukee pronto now that the case was a wrap. That brought up the subject of us, a subject I was ill prepared to address. She, on the other hand, was quite self-assured.

"It was a delightful summer love," she said. "A fling that made us both happy while it lasted. Think of it as a gem to put away in the jewel box of our memory."

The jewel box of our memory? I thought we had more than a memory. I thought we might have a future as well.

That's not how Sheila saw it. "I've been married before," she told me. "I'm not interested in going that route again. Can't take a chance on becoming a loser one more time."

"I'd make sure that doesn't happen," was all I could manage to say.

But she explained that she likes being on her own. "No reason we can't be friends," she said. "Call me on the phone. E-mail me. Let me know what you're up to. I like you Walter, but I'm too far along on the road of life to tie myself down with a man. I have my shop, and my part in the church choir, and there's a rally to save the river otters next week."

I pack up my things, put the Dopple yacht into dry dock, and lock the door of the Dopple Hilton. It's time to head back to Milwaukee and some real crime. Wait a minute, I correct myself:

seems there's not a thimble's worth of difference between rural and urban felonies. It would be hard to find an outlaw more devious than banker Vertrance, or one more violent than Karla Hess. Murder by golf club and spiked shoe, no less. Up here in what local residents call God's Country, I had the ill fortune to stumble over a veritable hornet's nest of devil's work.

First thing on my list when I get back to the flat on 31st Street is to check in with Mrs. Kramer, my landlady and upstairs neighbor. I expect she will bring me up to date on every detail of local happenings while I've been on vacation. Next thing is to check into the squad room and get Perelman off his fat ass and out onto the street where we can do some good. And then – then maybe I'll give Krystal Findley a call down at the Safety Building, and make a date for lunch. Old Town Serbian Gourmet House. Or Crocus, the city's last ethnic Polish diner on south 13th Street.

I stroke the maturing growth on my chin and turn to Manfred. "Lunch with Findley," I say. "Not a bad way to celebrate my return to the Second District Station."

THE END