

## 54. Murder Not (Part 1)

Numbers don't lie, so they say (that is politicians and scientists who are counting COVID deaths). There's no doubt about it, though, the scientists and their statisticians (who for the most part serve their bureaucrat masters) own numbers, totally. And look at what they have achieved with them. The wonders of modern civilization. But just to forewarn you, I have a foot in both camps. And currently, that foot is in the philosophy camp (which once owned the elements of criminal justice) where the truth of numbers is not at all self-evident. Just to give you a small but well known example. Numbers were around, I think, before the discovery of zero, which I am told is not exactly a number because it does not attach itself to anything (because it's zero or nothing of course). Furthermore, zero was not "discovered" rather it was invented by a human somewhere around the fourth century AD or before (OK, CE if you insist). It is a fiction just like any other, including the case that I am writing up right now. I should add that I have never been able to understand what I was taught in high school, or maybe primary school that two negatives equal a plus. Further, how is it possible to buy, say, negative 2 apples? The only solution I can figure out is to pay the grocer for two apples and not take them. But they would say that I automatically have a credit of two apples, if I do not return to pick up the apples before they go rotten. And the so-called "credit" goes away with them. And if I paid say, \$1, for the apples then I have a credit with the grocer for \$1 next time I come back to purchase something, assuming they sold the two apples to someone else. But wait. Is the dollar real? I mean who said that it is worth two apples, or two something else? And what's this I heard that "the government" actually "prints" its own money? Rather than go into debt? Only recently did the west give up its attachment to the concrete, touchable basis of money which, before President Nixon got rid of it by fiat, was the gold standard. We end up in times of inflation and market fluctuations having to put up with the worrying fact that one dollar may not be worth one at all, but maybe only a fraction of one, say, 50 cents! You

see what I mean? Even when a number looks real, it can be divided into an infinite number of parts. It is no wonder that numbers can be manipulated, when in actual fact, we philosophers understand—as do advanced mathematics professors, who are after all a type of philosopher—that numbers are malleable and reformable and manipulatable. I could go on, but I know I should stop or my lack of mathematical training and understanding will be starkly exposed.

What I am trying to say is that there is a point where one is forced to accept certain abstractions that appear as concrete facts of everyday life. One must have faith in knowledge. Doubts are for dreamers. Faith is for doers. Too much faith is dangerous. Too little faith is self-destructive.

I admit that all of this is banter, a typical gambit, for me at least, to begin the telling of this case, probably the most painful case that I was exposed to as Colmes's assistant and colleague. But numbers, especially rare numbers, are not all that irrelevant to this case as I will now try to demonstrate.

The statistical composition of a run-of-the-mill university like Schumaker university in New York State is of about 12,000 students, and about 1,000 faculty of which maybe ten percent of the latter would be full professors, so probably over 50. This is truly a startling statistics if one thinks about it. I have harped on this in other cases, how the composition of youth and genders make for a preoccupation with the unavoidable force of the hormonal behaviors of university students.

But the statistics also tell another story. In a university the young greatly outnumber the old, so that when someone dies it is more likely to be a professor, but since there are so few of them, and many retire before they die (though many try to hang on as long as they can for understandable reasons), deaths if they occur on campus are indeed newsworthy. Especially if that death is of a young and vibrant student. And as a final piece of unnecessary detail, we know from the criminal justice statistics collected in the United States and pretty much everywhere, (excluding war-torn places) murder is an extremely rare event. Statistically, that is. Of course, mass shootings which are currently the rage, are amplified extensively by the media. They do not generally, report the number of deaths resulting from car accidents, which are, as you would probably guess, equivalent to fighting a war in

Vietnam every year.

Indeed, I digress, or seemingly so. But the start of this case is one in which the gradual fading of faith appears in the enthusiasm of universal worship, as shown by a fading number of students, including myself.

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The vivacious, lovely, happy Ruth was a bright star in my life from the very day I met her in those days of the sit-ins. I was so taken with her that I admit I became a sort of stalker, though not the kind that is obnoxious or dangerous. I became very active in the student association just so I could be in the same room as her. I cannot recollect any occasion in which she was not smiling and happy. I never saw even the slightest hint of a frown on her face. I occasionally managed to accompany her to the cafeteria so I could sit and chat with her, but she was most elusive, would not allow me to buy her a cup of coffee, and anyway, she was so popular and social, that it was impossible to be alone with her. She seemed to know everyone on campus, and everyone seemed to know her. I did manage once to show off my old mini-minor that sat rusting away in the student car park. The park was adjacent to the cafeteria, so I was able to point it out. "We must go for a drive one day," I imagined myself saying.

When I was in my late teens, an old uncle of mine had once advised me, in response to my sordid question of how to get, well, you know what I mean, advised me thus:

"It's simple. Just get control of her time."

Well I found that in many cases, this seemed to work, but in Ruth's case, it was an impossibility. She was never on her own, or at least she was never in a space where she was not surrounded by other people. Yet, as I observed closely, while she was so ebullient, so happy, so outgoing, smiling and laughing and chatting, she was in fact, not talking seriously or closely to any one person. She related to many people at once. She did not, would not, or maybe could not, relate to any single person and have a chat one-on-one. So it seemed. And perhaps through my admittedly hormonal gaze, I could not find a way in, through the wall of sociability.

I remained frustrated for some time. And I admit it. I was obsessed with her. And surely she must have realized this. I showed up everywhere she was that seemed "natural." It was a

period in my life when I became an incredibly social being, a persona that I had always denied. Since working with Colmes, I had always thought of myself as being a little like him, introverted and frankly antisocial. This is what a wonderful girl like Ruth had done to me. And that's right, I thought of her as a girl, not a woman. She would always be a happy girl. That I was sure of. Oh how she would brighten up my life!

On the rare occasions on which I spent a non-working social time with Colmes, I was tempted to ask him for his advice, or at least just confide my feelings and longings to him. But I managed not to do so, for it was clear to me, so I thought, that he had no idea of social relationships anyway. I could not imagine him loving anyone.

Then as life would have it, I found myself in a place where Ruth appeared, one place that I had never imagined I would find her, indeed, was not even looking for her, or at least, I was looking for something else, solace, perhaps, being a student of philosophy, looking for meaning somewhere other than in myself. I had found the university's place of universal worship. A church that was not a church, a squat building, still with the university signature vertical slits of windows embedded in concrete, nestling among the few natural trees that had been left over from the old golf course upon which the modern university had been built.

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As I approached the building, a dull day, I would like to remember it as spring, but I think it may have been the early days of the Fall. I heard the sound, unmistakable sound, of chanting. A low, monotonal hum, a sound I had never heard before. In fact, I was used to the sound of rousing hymns coming from a church, that I had foolishly assumed this place of worship was.

I peeked in the door and there before me were rows, neatly formed, of students and maybe others as well, sitting cross-legged on the hard concrete floor, all in a kind of what I was told later was the lotus position. I could see only the backs, except for one individual dressed in bright yellow robes of a Tibetan, maybe, monk. I really had no idea. But this monk walked up and down the rows, every now and again prodding someone if it looked as though they were going to sleep—or at least, that is what I presumed.

The door closed behind me and I stared, then suddenly found myself trying to sit in the lotus position, but with great difficulty. The monk came up behind me and pinched my hair at the short at my neck. It hurt. I looked up angrily, and the monk tapped the back of my head, signaling to me to look straight ahead, eyes closed, as were all the others. But before I closed my eyes I saw ahead of me, I am absolutely sure, the back of Ruth, in whom even from her back, I could be sure she was happily smiling (forbidden).

The pain of cramping became unbearable. I squeezed my eyes closed as if to relieve the pain. I yearned for the chanting to stop. But I was not going to stand up and leave, not until I affirmed that it was Ruth who was right in front of me.

I was in a trancelike state, I admit it. Brought on by the combination of the excruciating pain of cramping, and my crazy vision of Ruth and me walking together hand in hand through a beautiful Japanese garden, everything clipped finely, everything in its place. Until I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder, someone saying, "William!! William! Are you there?" Cramped, and unused to sitting in such a position, I fell backwards, sprawled on the floor, opened my eyes and there looking down at me was that unbelievable vision, the happy vivacious face of my dreams, Ruth. I stretched out my hand, kind of expecting her to reach down and help pull me up. And I am sure she would have done so, except that the yellow robed monk stepped in and pulled me up.

"Welcome to our small group of Zen," he said, with an immediately recognizable fake Russian accent.

I struggled up and kind of shook myself like a dog after it has rolled in the grass. "And you are?" I ask, not at all friendly.

"This is our Zen leader," answered Ruth, all smiles. "We're not really Zen, are we?" she said, almost with a giggle, looking up at the Zen leader.

"And I'm not really a Buddhist monk," said the monk. "This is a universal place of worship. We just try out every means of worship each week. This week it is Zen. Next week it is Old Russian orthodox. And Ruth here will play the leader."

Now, admittedly, given what I have already told you of my desires on Ruth, when the monk looked at her, I was immediately seized with a horrible urge to push him away (actually to be

honest, punch him on the nose). “Oh, is that right?” I said with an approving smile.

“Yes, I’ll be leading the group in worship as an old Balkan nun,” chirped Ruth.

“I’ll definitely be here for that,” I said with too big a grin. The monk stared at me and I sensed hatred. It was mutual.

“Oh, do come. I’ll be all dressed for the part, gowns, prayer rope, the works. And why not invite your boss’s friend Rose? She’s Russian, right? She probably knows lots about Orthodox.”

“I will definitely invite them both,” I lied.

The monk grunted, then took Ruth’s hand which she (I thought) reluctantly gave to him. “Come on Ruth, I will show you the paraphernalia we have for the Russian Orthodox. A lot has accumulated over the years.”

He tugged at her a little and I could not help but think that she was reluctant. Yet her smile stayed bright. I grabbed the monk’s yellow robe and said, “I don’t think she wants to go.” He looked at me with what had to be a snarl, his nostrils expanding with each breath.

“I don’t think it’s any of your business,” he said, feigning a smile.

“Hey guys,” chirped Ruth, “let’s just all go over to the cafeteria. I’m famished after all that chanting.

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I spent the rest of the week reading up on the Russian Orthodox church. It was fascinating, though obviously, a sign of mental illness on my part. My obsession with Ruth was becoming overwhelming. I was unable to do much else but think of her day and night. I even went next door and asked Colmes’s advice. Imagine that. Getting advice from an old Victorian gentleman, who had even less ability to approach women than did I. Or so I thought.

But I found Colmes most understanding, even comforting. I sat on my wicker chair and told him of my obsession. He had met Ruth once at the sit-in and remembered her well. Who would not? Colmes smiled, yes, really a smile, as he looked up from his crossword puzzle. I also asked him about Russian Orthodox and would he mention it to Rose? He looked at me with a slight frown, and asked, “Of course, I will do so, but why don’t you ask her yourself?”

Colmes got up from his chair and I thought that he did so with a slight wobble, it was an effort. I wondered whether he had been drinking. But this early in the morning? I knew he liked his booze, but had not seen him under the weather, so he kept it well hidden, if he was really on the bottle.

“Are you OK Colmes?” I asked.

Colmes did not answer. Instead he called out to Rose, “tea and scones for two, Rose my dear. And you are welcome to join us!”

It was on this day that I began to worry about him, and would not find out the reason for his slow but steady deterioration. We had an enjoyable repast of tea and scones and a most stimulating discussion with Rose and her knitting, all about Russian Orthodox beliefs and practices, and its very long history. Most of the time, though, I spent imagining Ruth dressed up as a Balkan nun, looking down on us as if from heaven.

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We finished our tea and scones and I helped Rose gather up the dishes. Carrying my cup and saucer, I followed her through door two to the kitchen where I intended to continue our conversation about Russian Orthodoxy and to invite her to attend the next worship at the University Inter Faith center. We had almost reached the kitchen when I heard Colmes’s phone ring, and almost immediately, Colmes was calling for me. There was a quiver in his usually strong and penetrating voice. I knew then that there must be something very wrong.

“Coming Colmes,” I called.

I left Rose with the dishes and ran back to the office.

“It seems that there has been a very bad car accident in which one of our students was killed.”

Now you would think that since this occurred off campus that it was not within the University’s jurisdiction to get involved. But this was a death, an extremely rare event, as I have already told you, so when something like this happened, on or off campus, the university was most certainly involved, and apparently there was some kind of reciprocal agreement between the campus police and local police to keep each other informed.

“Do we know who it was?” I asked.

“Not yet,” answered Colmes. “But the whole thing sounds most strange. Apparently the driver crashed his or her car into the

front of the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception.”

There was a knock at the door, which was already open. The campus police chief waddled in, all 250 pounds of him. A former pro football player turned cop, he approached us with a mixture of urgency and excitement. Nothing like this ever happened on campus.

Colmes rose from his chair and shook hands. “Hobson,” he said looking at me, “meet Chief Irving Masterson, the best cop on campus.”

The chief nodded my way, then helped himself to the overstuffed chair in the corner.

“It’s very bad. A sweet young thing she was. All banged up. Didn’t make it. Died at the scene,” puffed he chief.

“One of ours?” asked Colmes.

“Yeh. Lovely little thing. Don’t know what she was doing. Must have been on something. You know these students. They’ll try anything.”

“You mean she drove that car up those steps into the cathedral?” I asked in disbelief.

“Just about. But looked like she hit her head on the steering wheel or something like that. Those little cars, you know. They shouldn’t be allowed,” said the Chief.

Colmes was getting down to business. “You said she died at the scene? Was anyone with her?”

“You mean when she died? Yeh. Some neighbor. It was around one in the morning, so they say. Woke up the neighbor who ran across the street and tried to get her out of the car, but she was out to it.”

“They called 911, of course,” observed Colmes.

“Yeh. They were there in minutes, so the neighbor said. But it was too late. She had died at the scene.”

“Well, thank you for letting me know. Is there anything more I can do to help?” asked Colmes.

“Not much right now. But you could save me a bit of time, I suppose. The car. Its campus parking sticker is registered in the name of one of our students. It’s actually the reason I came straight to you. William Hobson is the name.”

The chief gave me a devilish look, then looked back at Colmes. I stood up from my wicker chair so quickly that it capsized behind me. “Wha-at?!” I stammered.



Colmes sat forward on his chair. "I take it you know nothing about his?" he asked me calmly.

"Nothing, I answered. You know yourself I rarely use it, in fact have been considering selling it."

"You better get yourself in order," advised the chief trying to be helpful. "Won't be long until the local police show up. Leaving the scene of an accident, maybe? I take it you were driving it?"

I cannot express how deeply disturbed I became. I picked up my wicker chair and sat down on it, trying to come to my senses. I mumbled something about being on campus all night. And the worst part was that I wondered who would be handy enough to steal my car, start it without the keys?"

Colmes coughed a little to get the chief's attention. "Irving," he said in his more formal voice. "You have not told us the name of the student who was killed. I assume that's the real reason you are here?"

"Oh yeh. Forgot. A sweet looking kid, as I said. Her driving license said she was Ruth Cardigan. She was one of our students all right. You want me to tell President O'Brien, or will you? I know the president likes you to handle messy things, and I'm guessing by the looks of things..." the chief looked at me intently "...this is a messy thing."

He struggled to get up from the overstuffed chair when there was a loud bang on the office door, which was already open, and a uniformed police officer barged in holding handcuffs in one hand, followed by a shabbily dressed man in his mid-forties, a crumpled ill-fitting dark gray suit, off-white shirt collar unbuttoned, tie tied in an ugly loose knot. It was detective Conrad Summers of whom I was to see quite a lot over the next few weeks.

Chief Masterson fell back in his chair, trying not to show his amusement. Detective Summers, his long and wavy blonde hair partly covering one of his eyes as he looked this way and that, first to Chief Masterson, then to Colmes.

"It seems that the rarity of numbers has caught up with us," mumbled Colmes to me, such that the others did not hear.

I shrugged and looked down. I had an awful feeling, an empty feeling, indeed, as though I were on the edge of a precipice.

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Now, before I continue to explain what happened to yours truly I should pause once again and explain to you something more of the rarity of numbers as they relate to campus life. Although it is not so much numbers, but of boundaries, perimeters if you like. This case, more than any other demonstrates why Colmes was essential to the university. As I have described already, the campus is a relatively small space into which are tucked away around twelve thousand young people and a proportionately small number of adults.

There are some 30,000 deaths on road accidents every year in the United States. The chances of one being a university student are miniscule. But when it occurs, even if not on campus as it appeared that this one was not, the regents of the university and others of high standing, in this case President O'Brien, become very anxious and must take rapid steps to prevent the news of this travelling too far, and certainly must take steps to control what news leaks beyond the campus boundary. There are several matters that are best contained within the campus community. But the most important is that of crime or untoward death for which the university might be blamed.

Why is this such a serious matter? You guessed it! Money and reputation. Parents do not want their children to attend an unsafe university. Thus, any bad news that reaches beyond the campus perimeter concerning any of its students is assumed to be potentially very bad, and it is the role of Colmes to control such events and make sure that their repercussions are kept to a minimum. In sum, should a crime occur on, or even off the campus, in which students are involved, it is Colmes's job to take care of them. This is why, for many years, until 1990 when the Clery Act of Congress required it, universities routinely never reported any campus crime incidents to police or anywhere else.

Colmes has always resisted the suggestion that he was a private detective on campus. He insists that he is more of a crisis manager. Whatever he was, he certainly was not a campus cop. There is no way he could work the way he does within the confines of a police department with its many rules of procedures and forms to fill in. And of course, as no doubt you have already concluded, Colmes is his own boss. He could never be beholden to anyone, even his close friend, President O'Brien.

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Detective Summers knew everyone in the room, except for me. He looked directly at me, and I knew that I was in for it. “And who are you?” he asked rudely.

I answered, foolishly, but I wasn’t thinking straight, indeed unable to think at all, “what’s it to you?”

Colmes stared at me, and then said calmly, “Detective, this is William Hobson my very valuable assistant.”

“You’re harboring a fugitive,” snarled Summers. “Officer, cuff this killer.”

“Wait a minute now!” Colmes said firmly. I can attest for this young man’s whereabouts last night.”

Summers ignored Colmes and almost spat at his officer who had stopped in his tracks when Colmes had intervened. “Well, go on then, cuff him, I told you,” commanded Summers.

“Right you are sir,” answered the officer who was obviously eager to do it all along. He reached out to me, the cuffs jingling as he ordered, “put out your hands.” Dizziness took over, I had no control over my thoughts or actions, felt my knees sagging, then found myself staggering behind Colmes’s desk, and fell down on my knees. The officer leaned down. “Come on, your hands! Or I’ll do more than cuff you,” he threatened. I stretched out my hands, helpless, feeling such despair, I didn’t care what would happen to me. My whole body shook with uncontrollable sobbing.

Colmes stood up. “Officer, I can attest to this young man’s whereabouts. He has not been off campus for weeks, let alone last night. He worked for me until very late last night as we wrote up a case report. Or should I say that he wrote it up. Then I accompanied him back to his dormitory. It is surely obvious that someone else stole the car.”

“You mean the young lady found dead in the car?” retorted Summers. “That she stole it? And how would she start it without the keys? Unless, of course the owner had left the keys in the car, or even loaned her the car?”

Colmes looked down at me. I winced as the officer roughly handcuffed me and pulled me up so that I was standing once more. Not thinking, I tried to put my hand in my pocket, but of course, the cuffs prevented me from doing so. “My pocket,” I mumbled in between sobs, “the keys are in my pocket.”

The officer roughly felt in my pocket, and withdrew the keys. “Looks like that’s settled it then,” he said to his boss and went to un-cuff me.

“Not so fast,” ordered Summers. “There might be two sets of keys.”

“Or, Hobson here drove the car up the steps with the young lady in it, then somehow got back here without the car,” said Colmes.

“But you just said he was with you until late at night,” said Summers, impatiently.

“I did. Which means that there is someone else out there who stole the car,” observed Colmes calmly.

Then Chief Masterson stirred in his comfortable chair and said quietly, “pardon just a poor campus cop, but isn’t it a bit sexist to assume that because she is a she, she would not know how to start an old car without the keys?”

By this time I felt so weak, I sagged once again and sat on the floor. No one seemed to care, including Colmes. Instead, he began a line of questioning of the detective.

“Who was first at the scene?” asked Colmes.

“The neighbor who called it in,” answered Summers.

“And did you interview her or whoever?”

“We did. She said that the noise of the crash woke her up. About two a.m., she said. She immediately called 911, then ran over to the crash. She saw the young lady moaning. The driver side door had popped open and she tried to grab her and pull her out of the car. But could not. Her foot was stuck under the brake pedal.”

“And the young lady was dead or at least not conscious?” probed Colmes.

“It seems that she was alive, barely. Mumbled something about ‘not-murder-not.’”

Colmes looked down at me, then back up to the detective. “Say that again, detective. Are you sure that is what the dying girl said?”

“I’m only repeating what the neighbor told me. ‘Not murder not’ is what the poor young girl mumbled. I pressed the neighbor on it a number of times. But she was certain that was what the poor little thing said.”

Colmes shifted to a different line of inquiry. “The girl? Was

she badly smashed up? Blood? “

“She had a bad laceration to her forehead where we suppose she must have banged it when the car hit the steps and stopped abruptly. You know, these little cars. They’re dangerous,” answered Summers, trying to be helpful.

“And no other marks that you could see?” Colmes pressed.

“There appeared to be some scratches or blotches, don’t know what, around parts of her neck. But we will not know what they had to do with it, if anything, until we get the coroner’s report,” replied Summers.

“Indeed. Indeed,” said Colmes. “I would like to examine the body, if you can arrange it? Were any photographs taken of the scene, by the way?”

“No photos. Didn’t look like a crime scene to us. Just assumed that someone had a bit too much to drink and ran the car up the steps. And that’s probably what happened. These students, you know. They can’t hold their liquor.”

“She had been drinking?” pressed Colmes.

“Of course. You could smell it.”

“And the car?” asked Colmes.

“Towed to the junk yard. It’s a write-off.”

Colmes looked a little startled. “You didn’t impound it?” he asked.

“As I said, it looked like an ordinary accident caused by someone having too much to drink. We get these cases often, close to one a week.”

“Then I take it you are not going to arrest my esteemed colleague here?” Colmes asked as he looked down on my pathetic self.

“You may not take it. We still do not know how the car got there. If she drove it, as seems likely, someone gave her the keys, or maybe accompanied her then ran off as soon as the accident occurred.” Detective Summers looked Colmes squarely in his long drawn face.

”But I have vouched for his whereabouts,” complained Colmes.

“He could have loaned her the car. Most people have two sets of keys.” Summers turned to me. “I don’t suppose you keep one set of keys hidden somewhere in the car?” he asked.

But I did not answer. I was still sobbing and whimpering

over the loss of the only girl I had ever loved, or would ever love.

The fact was that Colmes knew full well the modus operandi of these detectives. They routinely cited the Miranda rule, their rights and so on, and then proceeded to do what they liked. Their tricks, authoritarian manner, intrusive and abusive interrogation techniques would, he well knew, force me to say something incriminating, and would distort the facts of what actually happened, and so make it even more difficult than it already was, to get at what really happened. Worse, from the university's point of view, "facts" would leak out to the media, and do damage to the university's ever fragile reputation.

"Tell you what," said Colmes. I will retain Hobson here with me, in my own lock-up, until you get the coroner's report, and you can come here to interrogate him further should the report deem that necessary."

Chief Masterson stirred a little. It was clear that he was uncomfortable with this arrangement. If it got out that the university had its own jail, and that's what it was, the media would have a field day with it. Besides, it was not Colmes's lock-up, it was the campus police lock-up.

"You mean the university has its own jail on its campus?" asked Summers in disbelief.

"No, no, of course not," said Colmes with a devilish frown, "though it would be appropriate given that our President was formerly a prison warden as I'm sure you know."

"Then what do you mean, professor?" demanded Summers not hiding his resentment and perhaps with a little hostility.

"I mean that I, and Chief Masterson here, will watch over Hobson who in any case works in his office right next door to me, and there is, if I am not mistaken even a bed in it that he uses when he does an all-nighter. That right Hobson?" Colmes gave me a slight wink and even a bit of a smirky smile.

"Yes, sir, Professor," I whimpered in between sobs. "I'm not going anywhere."

Summers took a deep breath and his old gray suit seemed to sag more when he breathed out. "I shouldn't do his," he said. "But in the interests of our close relationship with the campus community, I'll allow it. But he must not leave his office, you understand me?"

"Or my office," added Colmes, since his office and

apartment had a toilet. He raised an eyebrow as if to translate the meaning of his comment to Summers, who immediately understood.

“Un-cuff him,” ordered Summers, and the officer leaned down and unlocked my wrists. I took this as a sign to stand and get a hold of myself. Which I did.

Colmes stood also, which was a sign to all the cops present to take their leave. Which they did. Without another word. Except that Colmes called to Masterson.

“Chief, a word before you go?” he asked.

“Yes professor?”

“I would like to speak with the neighbor. Those last words. We must get to the bottom of them. They must surely be a clue.”

“And you want me to take you there?” smiled the Chief. “That’s all we cops on campus are these days. Glorified taxi drivers.”

Colmes ignored the complaint. “I have a few matters to attend to here, then I will come to your office. Oh as well, I want to examine the car, what’s left of it. Do you know what they did with it? Summers said they had not impounded it.”

“It will be in one of the two junk yards in town. We can check them out after we look over the body. I take it you still want to do that, right?” said the Chief.

The Chief struggled out of the overstuffed chair and waddled to the door.

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Rose had been listening to all of this, pottering around in the kitchen and of course attending to her knitting. She had, in fact, been hanging around just behind door one. I caught a quick glimpse of her when I dropped to my knees. What I did not know was that Rose had met with Ruth just a couple of days before the car accident.

Colmes had also noticed her. “Rose?” he called. “Do you have something you want to say?”

“Ruth? She is gone to Heaven, then?” asked Rose in a shaky voice, clasping her knitting close to her breast.

“I’m very sorry to say, that it is so,” said Colmes in a low voice.

“Not sorry,” muttered Rose, “is Heaven. Ruth talk about that.”

“You mean Ruth knew something was going to happen?” asked Colmes quickly, surprised.

“No, no. Just talked about Russian orthodox beliefs. She ask many questions.”

Now it was my turn. “Yes, Colmes. She was going to host a session on Russian Orthodox at the Universal Church on campus. I was there a couple of weeks ago when they did one on Zen.” The memory of that disturbed me. I looked down, sick in my stomach. Colmes noticed. He notices everything.

“You had better go lie down,” he said.

“Those puzzling last words,” I groaned. “I must accompany you to interview the neighbor.”

Colmes looked down at me. “You are in no state to go anywhere. In any case, you are in my charge, as we agreed with Summers. Rose will take care of you.”

I struggled across to the overstuffed chair and collapsed into it.

“You all right, mister William?” I heard Rose faintly.

I was under house arrest.

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What I will recount now is second hand, you understand. Since I could not accompany Colmes, what I write now is based on my conversations with Colmes soon after he returned. By that time, I had more or less come to my senses, though of course, I did not relish hearing the details of Colmes’s examination of the body.

The campus police office was a tiny precinct buried in the basement at the other end of the central campus building. Colmes followed the Chief along the winding tunnels, large in themselves, but filled with the huge pipes that were plastered with insulation, carrying whatever necessities, hot air and water, to their many destinations. Colmes, of course, knew his way there quite well, not only because he liked to keep up to date with all events that came to the attention of Masterson and his two subordinates, but also it was right next to the campus hairdresser to whom Colmes paid a visit every couple of weeks. This also to keep abreast of any rumors or scandals that might be circulating.

They soon came in sight of the police car, an inconspicuous dark gray souped up Chev Malibu, a small crest painted on each side, depicting a police shield on which was inscribed PROTECT



AND SERVE. Because of the contours of the campus, a previous golf course as I have described elsewhere, there were slight hills and dips in the location into which the huge concrete structure of the campus was embedded. So the end at which the campus police precinct was built, opened out directly to the surface, whereas my office and that of Colmes at the other end was sunk two levels underground.

The hairdresser, everyone called him Harry, a short and stout fellow with a large round chin, came to the door. "Everything all right?" he called loudly, his voice absorbed by the insulation of the enormous pipes. Of course, bad news travels fast, and no doubt the hairdresser had heard much of what had happened.

"We're on it," answered the Chief, also a regular customer.

Colmes nodded to Harry, and continued on, his head down, deep in thought no doubt. Ruth's last words would not let go of him. "Not murder." It made no sense.

Chief Masterson squeezed into the aging Malibu, its age signaling the level of importance it held on the ladder of university expenditures. Colmes remained silent as they drove down Madison Avenue, across Washington Park and eventually pulled up outside the great cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. There was not much to see at the crash site, a few scuffs and scratches on the stone steps, but little else. Masterson led the way across the street to a small row house. "This one," he mumbled, "let's hope she's home."

In contrast to his soft mumble, he thumped loudly on the door, which was quickly opened by a tiny, shriveled lady, her small face lined like a squashed paper bag, her nose hardly apparent, but her bright active eyes conveying a person of sharp intellect. "I thought it might be you," she said, wringing her hands together.

"Thank you, Mrs...?"

"Johnson," she quickly replied, "my husband passed away two years ago."

"I am Chief Masterson and this is my colleague from the university, Professor Colmes. May we have a few words with you?"

"There's not much to say. I told the other officers everything. How I called 911 and..."

“Yes, Mrs. Johnson, thank you we do already know about that,” interrupted the ever impatient Colmes. “We are however interested in what you think you heard the poor girl gasp in her last words to you.”

“I don’t *think* I heard,” answered Mrs. Johnson abruptly, “I *know* what I heard. She said ‘not,’ gasped for breath and rubbed her neck and then said ‘murder’ and possibly ‘not’ again.”

“Her neck, you say, “she grabbed at her neck?” pressed Colmes.

“I’ll say she did, and I could see it was all red and splotchy, like.”

“And did you notice anything else? Did she try to say anything else?” asked Colmes.

“No, nothing,” answered Mrs. Johnson. “Mind you I think from her gasps she was trying to say something else, but she just could not get it out, and she gave a big kind of sigh, and then she died, I’d say.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Johnson, you are being most helpful. Did you see any sign of another person who might have been in the car, or at the scene of the accident?” probed Colmes.

“No, it was such a big noise so late at night. I looked out the window and saw the car on the steps and ran back to the kitchen to call 911 immediately,” replied Mrs. Johnson.

“One last question, Mrs. Johnson. Did she have her seat belt on?” asked Colmes.

“No. She didn’t. I was surprised at that. But I suppose that someone who would drive a little car like that up those big steps in front of a big church wouldn’t bother much with seat belts,” said Mrs. Johnson with a grim smile.

“Indeed. Indeed, Mrs. Johnson. I am most appreciative of your help.” Colmes stepped back and left, calling out over his shoulder, “you are a marvel Mrs. Johnson!”

Chief Masterson nodded his head in agreement, then struggled to catch up with Colmes. “Where next?” he called in between puffs.

“The car, Masterson. The car.”

**TO BE CONTINUED.....**

