

## 55. Murder Not (Part 2)

A phone call to detective Summers at the Albany PD was necessary in order to locate the car, which had been towed to a random junk yard. When Colmes told me this, I expressed my surprise, as I could not see how a car could be deemed a write-off when it was run up some stone steps. There might be some damage underneath, but the rest of the car would not be at all dented or smashed, was I not right?

Colmes replied that I was mostly right, although being a tiny car, a Mini-Minor he reminded me, the front end of the car was bent where the low fender hit the stone steps as it bounced up. In any case, the inside of the car appeared to be undamaged, reported Colmes. However, Colmes had come to the conclusion that Ruth was not driving the car and that there must, therefore, have been another occupant. Furthermore, there were no dents or signs of blood inside the car, especially on the dashboard where you would expect someone to have banged themselves when the car stopped and shuddered as it bounced up the steps. Mind you, of course, the age of the car was before airbags existed. It was the positioning of the seat belts that attracted Colmes's attention. It seemed as though they had been either straightened after the smash or not used at all.

Colmes turned to Chief Masterson. "We must return to Mrs. Johnson," he said.

The Chief knew Colmes well and did not bother to ask why. He simply performed his role as Colmes's driver and returned him to Mrs. Johnson's doorstep. And when she answered, Colmes gave her his best Victorian smile.

"Mrs. Johnson, one more question, if I may?" he asked.

"Oh it's so nice to see you again already. Won't you come in for a cup of coffee?"

"Thank you, my dear, but I cannot. The caffeine is too much for me. May I ask, could you describe to me in as much detail as you can, the position of the girl's body when you spoke to her? I take it that the door window was down, or the door itself was open? Otherwise you would not have heard her speak."

“You are quite right Mr. Colmes. The door was open and her hand was stuck in the handle, so she could not push the door any more. It was open just enough so I could stick my head in and I reached out to take her hand. Although, Mr. Colmes I was a bit worried about pulling her out of the car, because I thought I might make what injuries she might have even worse.”

“Indeed. Mrs. Johnson. You did well. Where was the rest of her body? Was she sitting in the driver’s seat, her feet on or near the peddles, or ...”

“You’re right, Mr. Colmes. She was kind of slumped sideways. One of her legs was stuck on the passenger side of the car. But she was all slumped, you know what I mean? Kind of like someone is when they were drunk.”

“Are you suggesting that she was drunk?” asked Colmes with a frown.

“Oh No. I don’t think so. I would have smelled it, especially when I got real close to her mouth when she was trying to speak.”

Colmes smiled again. “Mrs. Johnson, you have been most helpful. Oh and by the way, were the seat belts jumbled around at all? Or were they in their unused position?”

“I’d say, never used, Mr. Colmes. These young people, they think they are invulnerable,” announced Mrs. Johnson wisely.

“Indeed. Indeed,” Mrs. Johnson. Thank you again.

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I awakened from my dizzy unconsciousness—I would not call it sleep—to find Rose leaning over me.

“I have made you a nice cup of tea. Is young man here to see you. Russian Orthodox Priest.”

“What?” I asked rudely.

“Priest, says he Russian Orthodox. But he is not. Just dressed like one. Though he has his *chotki*.”

I took the cup of tea, and tried to look past Rose’s round silhouetted figure, her bunched up hair and knitting getting in the way. I rubbed my eyes, but everything seemed blurred. Perhaps I was not awake at all.

“Tell him to go,” I said and fell back into the chair, Rose grabbing my hand with the cup of tea just in time.

Rose, as only she could, told the visitor to go, and he promptly complied.

I managed to sip a little of the tea, and slowly came to my

senses, such as they were.

“Rose,” I called in a pathetic, feeble voice.

“You like more tea? Special Russian tea. Good, strong,” answered Rose.

“What did you and Ruth talk about?” I asked.

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The body lay waiting for Colmes and the Chief in the St. Peters Hospital morgue. Detective Summers awaited them and showed the way, past security down to the morgue. The body was laid out awaiting the coroner’s assistant to begin the autopsy. As soon as Colmes saw it, the once happy face no more, Colmes was overtaken by a sense of relief and grief, relieved that I was not there to see that awful sight, sad because this was a beautiful young girl who once had such a bright and happy future.

Summers and Masterson stood back as Colmes stepped up, a magnifying glass in hand, to examine the body. He would start at the head and work down. There was a slight cut and bruising on her forehead where, Colmes assumed, she must have come in contact with the car’s dashboard. But his attention was quickly drawn to the contusions around her neck. There were red marks that were, he was convinced, caused by something rough, maybe rope or cord, that had been tied around her neck. There were pronounced red blotches all around, suggesting something that had beads on it, or a rope that was twisted in some way. He continued his examination all the way down to her feet, and there saw the only other mark on her body, a bloody contusion around her ankle and other cuts on her left foot, suggesting that it had been caught on something, maybe the underneath of the car seat.

He turned to the lab assistant. “Do you have the clothes that she wore?” he asked.

The attendant checked the number that was on the tag tied to Ruth’s left big toe, went to a bank of lockers and withdrew a plastic bag in which were all of Ruth’s clothes and meagre belongings. Colmes directed that they be laid out on a table. The left shoe was missing.

He turned to Detective Summers, who had been watching Colmes with some amusement. He considered him to be, of course, an amateur.

“Was the left shoe found in the car?” Colmes asked.

“Probably. But quite frankly, the car was bare. Nothing in

it,” said Summers impatiently, “except a yellow robe of some kind. Looked like someone had been sleeping in it.”

Colmes turned to the lab assistant. “Thank you. We are done here.” Then he turned to Summers and to Masterson who held back, not enjoying this visit to the morgue. “In my opinion Ruth was not driving the car. She was strangled either in the car or before, placed in the passenger seat, then driven by the killer to the church and up the steps. He then pulled her out of the passenger seat and on to the driver’s seat to make it look like she was the driver. If you look closely in her hair, you will see contusions where the killer grabbed her head and banged it as many times as he could, against the steering wheel of the dashboard of the car. Her left shoe will be under the passenger seat.

Summers stepped forward and looked closely at the marks on Ruth’s head. “But the contusions are not serious enough to kill her, are they?” He turned to the lab assistant for corroboration.

The lab assistant shrugged. “You’d have to ask the boss. I’m still an apprentice. But I’d agree with you if I had to give an opinion.”

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I was still snoozing on the overstuffed chair when Colmes returned. Rose had taken to playing nurse to me, and sat in Colmes’s chair knitting away. Colmes stood in front of me, his hands on his hips, a sign that he was impatient, and eager to solve this case. I stirred a little, and squinted up at him.

“Colmes?” I asked.

Colmes did not respond. Instead he turned to Rose and asked, “how is our patient?”

Rose stood up and gathered her knitting from his desk. “We had a nice talk. Russian orthodox church,” answered Rose, no sign of a smile or anything else.

I managed to lean forward and rubbed my eyes. “Yes, we had a good talk. Some strange character showed up in your office saying he was a Greek orthodox priest and wanted to talk to Rose.”

“Bad person. Mad person,” said Rose as she made way for Colmes to take back his chair.

“So he was not a genuine Russian Orthodox Priest?” asked Colmes. “And if not, why was he dressed like one? And what did

he want?"

I had now recovered fully my senses, and thought only of Ruth. "Ruth, did you see Ruth?" I asked plaintively.

Colmes ignored me and continued with Rose. "My dear Rose, please tell me more about this strange person. Did you not suspect that there was perhaps something wrong? That he might be a mad killer? The mad killer of Ruth?"

"You mean it was not an accident?" asked Rose crossly. "Why not tell before?"

"Yes," I cried, "why didn't you tell us?"

"I am telling you now," answered Colmes calmly. "Although before I saw the body I had my suspicions, but once I saw it, I was convinced it was no an accident."

"Do tell," I said not even trying to hide my resentment.

"She was strangled," announced Colmes. "Probably in your car, then the killer drove the car up the church steps, pulled her into the driver's seat, and fled."

"But she wasn't dead when the killer left?" I asked.

"That's right. Dear Ruth managed to say her last words to the nice old lady who called 911," replied Colmes with satisfaction.

I hesitated, then asked in a thin voice, "how was she killed, then?"

"Strangled, probably with a rope, or something like a rope, rough, as though it had knots tied all along it," said Colmes.

Rose stopped her knitting, even dropped a knitting needle. "The *chotki*," she exclaimed.

"What?" asked Colmes, "*chotki*? Don't tell me..."

"Yes, it is a Russian Orthodox prayer rope tied in 100 knots. The killer! He was here!" cried Rose.

And with excitement I added, "and when Ruth said 'not murder' she meant the knots in the prayer rope."

"Would you recognize this madman, Rose?" asked Comes.

"Well, not. He dressed up in robes and big long gray beard," answered Rose, picking up her knitting again. And then she added as if an afterthought, "but I think she knew him."

"That is a good start, Rose. Most murders are by people who already knew the victim."

I stirred from my slumbered state and jumped up from the overstuffed chair. "I know who it is! Well, I don't know exactly

who it is, but I have met him, I am sure.”

“Universal Church club,” said Rose. “Ruth told me all about and how you hated that Buddhist priest ...”

“I wouldn’t say it quite like that, but now I certainly hate him. Bet it was him. He couldn’t take his eyes off Ruth, and I got really annoyed. A sneaky, greasy character.” I wanted to stamp my feet and yell “let’s get him!”

“And your car?” asked Colmes. “How did the killer know it was your car? And how was he able to steal it?”

I looked away. Guilty. My face went red, much against my wishes. “I gave Ruth the keys,” I mumbled, looking down as though I was about to be admonished by my teacher.

“Do tell,” said Colmes.

“She wanted to buy some things for our next Universal Church meeting. The last meeting was Zen Buddhism, and the next meeting was to be Russian Orthodox. We, well not we, they, I only attended one meeting which was the Zen meeting, play the parts, dress up as priests, worshippers and so on.” I looked down, embarrassed.

How that crazy guy dressed as a Zen priest managed to con Ruth into taking him in the car, I could not imagine. Actually I did not want to imagine because I would have hoped that she would ask me to take her. Once we caught the bastard I would find out. Or maybe it would be best not to know.

“When is the next Universal Church club meeting?” asked Colmes.

I shrugged. Frankly, I did not want to know. But Rose spoke up. She had joined us with morning tea. Colmes actually carried a kitchen chair to his office so that the three of us could sit together. By now, I had realized that Colmes had a soft spot for Rose, indeed, as he would say. And Rose in her gruff manner, returned the favor. We were about to sip our tea, perfectly drawn and poured, when Colmes got up abruptly and hurried down to the kitchen and we heard him coughing. He quickly returned and we resumed our tea. Rose had leaned over to me and touched my upper arm. “Has some little asthma,” she said. “It has only just come on but insists he had it since was boy.”

I had noticed his wheezing for some time, and had urged him to quit smoking. That was some years ago now, and he eventually did, along with many others on campus when president O’Brien

banned all smoking on campus. At first inside, but eventually outside no matter where.

Colmes placed his empty cup back on its saucer, then sat back and said in his typically determined voice that told me he had a plan. “You will attend the next Universal Church club meeting tonight. Rose has put together some typical Russian Orthodox clothing and other things, prayer ropes, beads and so on. I will rely on Rose and you, Hobson to identify the killer. Presumably, he will be dressed as he was when he paid that strange visit to our office, the long beard, the Russian Orthodox priest. You will both have to agree that it is our killer. And if you do, we will act accordingly.

“Not come to meeting?” asked Rose.

“I have other important things to do with this case, which requires that Chief Masterson and I pay a visit to detective Summers and again to the morgue, depending on what Summers tells us.”

“But what if Rose and I do not agree who it is?” I asked.

“Then we will have to take the suspect into custody and I will interrogate him,” answered Colmes. “Once I am satisfied that we have our man, I will take the appropriate action.”

“And what might that be?” I asked in my usual combative way.

“Hobson, it is in your best interest not to know,” ordered Colmes. “However, for her own safety, once the killer has been identified, I want you, Rose, to leave. I do not want you to risk your life. You already have done a great deal for us. We could not manage without you. Besides, you have your growing daughter to attend to.”

“She is not need my help. Is in grad school now,” replied Rose, showing a rare smile.

“You mean here, this campus?” exclaimed Colmes, very much surprised. “And don’t tell me. She’s doing a Ph.D., let me see, in philosophy.”

Rose started knitting furiously. “Is not doctorate in philosophy program any more. Now it’s changed name to Human Culture program.”

“My goodness!” cried Colmes. “You mean she will get a Ph.D. in Human Culture?”

Rose sighed. “Yes. Different words, but same thing.”

What happened next, I can only affirm in general terms. Colmes forbade me to write notes on this case for my rapidly growing file of cases, so I have had to rely on my memory, many of the details of which are most likely exaggerated, and as you know, that is one of my disabilities, or more honestly, defects. The fact is, we three were certain that it was that Buddha — the one that ordered me about at the last club meeting, I did not even know his name—that strangled our Ruth in my car, or possibly somewhere else then put her in the car. There appeared to have been no alcohol involved, though the coroners had yet to confirm that assumption, so we guessed, well, Colmes deduced that the killer had strangled the victim inside the car, late at night, where no noise would be heard and little would be seen. There were plenty of places where the car could have been driven, either on campus or somewhere else, although the campus was the ideal place away from the local cops. With just a couple of security guys, not that well trained, patrolling the campus, it would be easy to avoid them. In fact, Masterson had reported to Colmes that his men had seen nothing untoward.

I have mentioned to you that this university was built on a golf course and that the architects retained a little of its contours. This included a large pond that, amazingly, the planners and builders left largely untouched. It was, and still is the happy home of a large flock of Canadian geese, tortoises, turtles, gophers and lots of fish (though I would not be inclined to eat them, given the effluent that flows out of the university pipes and gutters and probably eventually ends up in the pond). And while there are signs up forbidding entry of motor vehicles on to the walking paths, many do, and it is not policed. Security turns a blind eye. They know that young people like to hang out in such places. And my mini minor could easily find its way among the trees and narrow paths. More likely, though, is my conjecture that the Buddha drove my car with Ruth down to the edge of the trees surrounding the pond, convinced her or dragged her into the trees, raped her and strangled her then carried her back to the car and drove off. I'm only guessing here. There was no evidence reported of rape, but then that is because the incident was classified by the cops as an accident, so the coroner or their assistant would not go looking for anything like that. I suggested that to Colmes, but he shrugged it off. I surmised that he did not



want this incident to be turned into a big media event, and if evidence of rape were found, it certainly would become one. From Colmes's point of view, a big media event highlighting the murder and rape of one of the university's students would be a disaster. His very job, in fact, was to cover up this tragedy and any others that might affect the University's good standing in the community. I am not altogether proud of my position on this "duty" of Colmes to cover up the facts of certain crimes. Over the years I have come to accept it as a kind of occupational hazard, and certainly it could be a serious hazard. And as I describe next what Colmes did, you will begin to understand the complicated shenanigans that lie just beneath the surface of university life. In fact I often think it a great irony, and maybe Colmes intended it this way, that his office is located beneath the university in its tunnels. The tunnels are its bowels, without them operating efficiently, the university would grind to a stop. Nothing would work. And without someone like Colmes, to make sure the university is protected from outside interference, that all inside runs smoothly, there would be bedlam and the university would collapse in on itself.

You may think I am exaggerating. But at this university with its president, a former prison warden it is perfectly understood. The very first thing President O'Brien did when he was appointed President was to name Colmes as the Distinguished Multi-disciplinary Professor. The two of them had been great friends for some years, ever since Colmes helped him avoid a very serious prison riot. O'Brien saw his primary role as warden of the prison, first, to protect those inside from each other, and second, to avoid any interference from the outside, that justice reigned inside where all wrongs were made right. He viewed the university in the same way, as did Colmes.

You may think that once again I am putting off what I must tell you. But I have expended this energy in explaining to you Colmes's mindset so that you will more easily understand what happened next.

Colmes left Rose and me to wash the dishes and then to put together a costume that would give us the look of a Russian Orthodox worshipper. For Rose it was rather easy. She tied one of her knitted scarves over her head, squashing her usually high bundle of hair underneath. For me, there was not much I could

do. Rose rummaged around in Colmes's closet. I was just a little surprised that she knew his closet so well. Then again I had suspected for some time that maybe, just maybe they were a couple. And maybe, just maybe, Rose's daughter was a product of their relationship. If that were the case, Colmes had feigned ignorance of Rose the younger's attendance at grad school. Unless they had had a tryst and that was all. I could see Colmes doing that. He was an incredibly independent, withdrawn individual. An island unto himself, one might say. Anyway, I ended up wearing an old pair of dark gray pants, baggy, and a long sleeved shirt also too big for me. But I looked the part. A shabbily dressed Russian worshipper.

That evening, as expected, the small group of worshippers, mostly males, showed up at the Universal Church. Rose and I had timed it so that we would get there just at the beginning of the service, and we were most surprised to see leading the service a tall, gaunt man with sparkling eyes, leading the service. An actual Russian Orthodox priest! The service, such as it was, began with continuous chanting, the priest starting out, reciting in Russian. Then after a couple of verses, switched to English. I could tell that Rose was already quite perturbed, and then understood why when I heard the chant, from somewhere in Psalms. I am not what one would call a bible reader. Had enough of that in Sunday School:

*He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages  
In the secret places doth he murder the innocent  
His eyes are privily set against the poor.  
His eyes watch in secret for his victims  
He preys on the innocent.*

I looked at Rose, but she had joined in the chanting, as though in some kind of trance. Being Russian, perhaps she had lapsed into some kind of reverie, seeing her past life come before her. I stared at the priest trying to convince myself that he was the killer. Otherwise why choose this particular psalm? The few verses that seemed to be God's approval of murder and mayhem?

But then the answer quickly came to me. It was all Colmes's doing. He wanted to spice up the meeting, make sure that our suspect knew he was a suspect, tempt him into some kind of uncontrolled error, to reveal himself.

I searched the congregation, even quietly walked around the

worshippers, only some twenty of them I guessed, looking for our quarry. Rose stood, looking down, her knitting tucked under her arm. I returned to my place beside her, but found that it was taken by a Russian Orthodox priest with a very large beard. He had come between us.

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Colmes walked down to the far end of the tunnels on his way to the campus police precinct. He dropped by the hairdresser to say hello.

The hairdresser was reading the student newspaper, *The Flotsam*. "Hello Professor. Need a clip?" he asked as he looked up from the paper. "Awful that poor student getting killed in a car accident," he said.

"Yes, terrible, and no clip today, thanks Harry," answered Colmes.

The hairdresser also specialized in theatrical make-up and often worked with the university's performing arts center.

"Did a student come by and get made up as a Russian Orthodox priest, by any chance?" asked Colmes.

"Yes, yesterday. Insisted on a big gray beard. Weird guy." Harry grimaced.

"Don't suppose you gave him a coke or something like you often do for your customers?" queried Colmes.

"Well, not a Coke, though I offered it to him. He said he was very thirsty and could he have a glass of water."

Colmes had been standing at the door, and now walked in right up to the chair. "Don't suppose you still have the glass?"

"Gees, professor. I apologize. Been busy and never got around to washing it. It's right there." Harry pointed to the ledge where he kept all his hairdressing tools and paraphernalia.

"May I borrow it?" asked Colmes, much pleased.

"Here," said Harry, "I'll get it for you and clean it up."

Colmes hurried to the glass. "No! No! Harry, I need it just as it is. Don't touch it. Don't suppose you have a plastic bag? I'd like to borrow the glass for a few days."

He bagged the glass, said his good-bye along with a nice tip, and proceeded to Chief Masterson who impatiently awaited him.

"What have you there?" demanded the Chief.

"I'm hoping that you are still a qualified finger printing expert," said Colmes.

“Of course! I’m the best, though in this job I don’t get a lot of work. I mainly do any extra stuff the local PD needs doing.”

Colmes showed him the glass. “I want you to lift the prints off this glass and compare them to the prints I hope you can take off the steering wheel of Hobson’s car. His of course, will be on them, and maybe Ruth’s. But there should be another set of prints that match this glass.”

“So you’re going ahead with this?” asked the Chief, showing considerable doubt.

“It’s a complicated case and I need your expert help and as usual understanding,” said Colmes.

“I thought you were going to bury it and leave it as an accident,” said Masterson as he took the plastic bag that held the glass and locked it inside a small safe in his office.

“I do want to bury it, but Summers went and insisted that Hobson caused it. As you know he’s under house arrest in my office,” said Colmes. “We need to get Summers off our backs.”

“Understood,” replied Masterson.

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They arrived at the wreckers and Masterson lifted several sets of prints from the car steering wheel and a few other places. While Masterson did his work, Colmes looked over the rest of the car once again. He did find Ruth’s left shoe under the passenger seat. But nothing else of importance. The shoe suggested to Colmes that his theory was correct. That Ruth had been drugged or otherwise made unconscious, through strangling, most likely. This occurred either inside the car, or outside and she was carried to the car. Either way. This was no accident. Nor was it Hobson’s doing, he certainly hoped. Besides Hobson had an alibi. He was with him all the time the car was taken. If the real suspect’s finger prints showed up on the steering wheel, it would confirm his theory beyond reasonable doubt. I say “reasonable doubt” because that is how Colmes talked, purposely parroting the legal terminology of a trial. And there wasn’t going to be a trial.

Chief Masterson’s expert analysis of the finger prints did indeed return three sets of prints. He was able to say that one set of prints definitely matched those from the hairdresser’s glass. The other two sets probably belonged to Hobson and Ruth. They could test those later. For now, Colmes was satisfied that he could

go to Summers and convince him to drop the silly accusation against Hobson, and classify the disaster as an unfortunate accident.

Detective Summers was no fool, not by a long way, confided Colmes to Masterson as they drove down to the Albany police precinct. Now Colmes, and by default the Chief, had to go much further than to clear Hobson. They had to convince Summers to treat the whole thing as an accident, and leave them, the campus police and Colmes, to deal with the prime suspect, another university student, it seemed. They were asking Summers, to turn a blind eye. To let the university deal with its own homicide. In other words, bypass the legitimate criminal justice system. Prevent the outside from interfering with the inside.

Perhaps you can now see where this is going? It is why I have been most uncomfortable relating this case. A case in which I was deeply involved, though did not actively take part in what must be called a cover-up. What worried me even more was that Colmes saw no particular difficulty in this arrangement. In fact, he was an ardent defender of avoiding the “corrupt, moribund and biased” criminal justice system, as he saw it. If the case went through the official system many, many people’s lives would be affected and likely ruined; not only the lives of accused and accuser, but of their families and friends, of witnesses and their families, of juries and their families, the list is endless. The problem was that there was way too much obsession with juries, finding of guilt (rarely innocence) and a preoccupation with some kind of abstract notion of “due process.” Colmes loved to quote a saying of an old Italian friend of his who said, of the inquisitorial system of justice: “We do everything we can to ensure that no innocent person is brought to trial.” Colmes essentially operated according to that principle.

“Do we have a name?” asked Masterson as they pulled into the University police department car park.

“Name?” answered Colmes, startled.

“Yeh. You know. The perp. Or these days they say person of interest,” said the Chief.

“Hopefully, Hobson and Rose are working on it. In fact I was hoping Hobson would show up here after their contact with the perp, as you call it,” said Colmes amused.

“How would he get here?” asked Masterson. “He hasn’t got

a car.”

“There’s a university bus that passes right by here. I told him to get it, if he and Rose were successful in nailing the suspect.”

The Chief responded with concern. “Nailing it? What does that mean?”

“Whatever Hobson takes it to mean.”

Colmes never liked to be questioned.

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The Russian Orthodox meeting ended and the priest sauntered down to us, along with our suspect.

“That’s a wonderfully authentic costume you are wearing, Nicholas, if I am not mistaken?” said the priest.

Our suspect did not acknowledge his name. But simply raised his *chotki* in both hands and stretched up to Heaven.

“And a truly authentic 100 knot prayer rope, if I am not mistaken?” continued the priest.

“I am Nicholas,” stated our quarry, still looking up. “God has given me power over life and death. I am his doer of all that is good, I bring sinners to Heaven.”

Nicholas lowered his arms and turned to look at Rose and me. “Take these, and I will show you the way,” commanded Nicholas in a preachily tone.

“And what way is that?” I asked with as much belligerence as I could muster.

Rose took the *chotki* in one hand, and in the other produced her knitting. “One day I make a *chotki* with my knitting,” she said, inspecting the *chotki* closely. “May I borrow it so I can see how I can make it?”

Nicholas went to take the *chotki* back, but the priest took both his hands in his and pulled them to his breast. “May you do God’s work in kindness, to love the poor and spurn the wicked,” he announced as if giving Nicholas an order.

And in an instant, I realized that Rose had left, taking the *chotki* with her. I was left standing, dumbfounded, wanting to run after her, but knowing that I must stay and try to keep our suspect engaged. “Don’t worry,” I said, “I will bring it to you this evening or first thing in the morning. Where’s your dorm?”

Nicholas looked embarrassed. The priest and I looked at each other. “So you live off campus?” I pressed.

“Not exactly..”

“You are a student, right?” I persisted.

The priest felt it his duty to insert good will. “It matters not. You are one of God’s children, one of our students or not.”

“Indeed,” I said. “Father why not let him have your prayer rope? I can see that he is a little nervous, perhaps needs some spiritual support.”

Then Nicholas blurted out, “I’m a freshman and I live in whatever car is left overnight on campus.”

The priest smiled with approval, but I had to hide my consternation. It meant that there was an additional explanation should his finger prints be found in my car. And before I knew what I was saying, I blurted out, “that’s nothing. Why don’t you come stay in my dorm until we get this sorted out. I have a good friend who will work with the university bureaucracy and will have you in your own dorm room in no time. There might even be a spare dorm in my building. Where I’m supervisor.”

“But I have no money!” cried Nicholas.

“Don’t worry about that,” offered the priest, “we will find a way to help you over your crisis.”

Nicholas dropped on a chair and continued to sob. “Come, come!” continued the priest, “is there some other awful thing that has happened to you? Being homeless is no big deal.”

“It’s not that,” cried Nicholas. “I just can’t...”

The priest looked at me in a most severe way, and then looked down at Nicholas, his big beard coming detached from his face. “I think,” he said cautiously, that I had better bring you to the small rooms I keep at the back of this church. Dr. Colmes, who I think is your mentor,” he looked at me earnestly, “arranged for this place just in case of such emergencies. You can stay here over night and I, with God’s help, will watch over you.”

That left me on my own. I was glad to be relieved of our suspect, did not relish the thought of babysitting the murderer of my heart throb. Who knows what I would have done. But it all worked out a bit too smoothly. I began to suspect that Colmes was somehow behind this. In cahoots with the priest. His network of influence was tremendous.

I decided to go back to my office and see what Rose was up to. She had pocketed Nicholas’s prayer rope. It looked well used and fingered. I was guessing that she was going to have it checked for blood. Ruth’s blood. Or Ruth’s saliva. Or maybe DNA. I don’t

know much about such things, even though Colmes was always talking up the promise of science and technology to eradicate crime. Fat chance. I doubt he believed it either.

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I returned to my office to find Colmes's door ajar, and Rose sitting at his desk. She was knitting at full pace.

"Any luck with the knots?" I asked.

"Wait Colmes's friend in environmental studies lab. Has all the latest equipment. But needs something of Ruth's to compare findings. Have anything?"

"Colmes said he retrieved her shoe from the car. But I don't have it. Maybe it's in his desk or something?"

I rummaged around in his desk, but found nothing. And then the phone rang. And to my surprise, Rose reached over and picked it up.

"Doctor Colmes office," she said, then her face brightened. "Oh! Colmes. Yes. He's here. Yes. Albany PD.. Yes. Bus."

"What? Ask him where the shoe is," I mumbled. I had sunk down in the overstuffed chair and was ready for a nap. Rose ignored me and listened while Colmes apparently was issuing instructions. Soon, she hung up and continued with her knitting. I waited expectantly. Until she finally said, not looking up, "you take bus now. He has shoe."

I reached the Schumaker Police Department maybe an hour later. I had to wait for a while for the bus, and I admit, I was in no hurry. I was supposed to be under house arrest. I fully expected to be interrogated and thrown into their lockup.

The bus stopped right at the entrance to the police station and I alighted. Colmes and Masterson stood out front. Colmes looked serious. Masterson amused.

"Summers will be here shortly," he said, I have informed him of our findings."

"What findings, exactly?" I snapped.

"That our suspect drove your car, and crashed it with Ruth inside it, then pulled her across to the driver side to make it look like she drove it."

"And you can place the suspect in the car? By the way his name is Nicholas," I said.

"Yes, I know. Father Sokolov called me. The fellow is apparently in a sorry state and in the father's care at the Universal



Church.”

“I know that too. And Rose managed to get Nicholas’s *chotka*, the prayer rope with 100 knots. She left it with your pal at the environmental studies lab.”

A police car pulled up at the curb and Detective Summers stepped out. “Good afternoon, gentlemen,” he said, his baggy pants and suit jacket blotting out the rest of him. “My apologies for keeping you waiting. I was held up at the morgue. The coroner’s lab assistant has finished her report. Actually, I had thought you were going to meet me there again?”

“We were,” said Masterson, “but then we decided there was no need with you taking care of all those details. We just need the report for our records at the university, then the body can be released to her parents, I take it?”

“What does it say?” asked Colmes, warily.

“Accidental death caused by trauma to the head contacting the dashboard and steering wheel, when the car hit the concrete steps of the church,” said Summers putting on his official sounding voice.

Colmes looked at Summers, and that tiny twitch at the corner of his mouth appeared. Summers returned a frown, his face peeping out from behind his baggy pants and jacket. It was a curious communication and I understood it, having worked for Colmes for some years now. They had a “gentleman’s agreement.” Nothing needed to be said. The cover up had been agreed to.

I shifted uneasily on my feet, then said to Summers, “then I am free to go, no longer under house arrest?” Summers ignored me and walked away briskly to his office. Colmes lightly touched my arm. “Now we can go to the morgue and look more carefully at poor Ruth.”

“What? I’m not going there! You heard Summers. It’s all wrapped up,” I cried shaking at the knees.

“As far as the Albany PD is concerned, that is so,” answered Colmes in a voice that I thought was a little condescending. “It is now a university case, not an Albany PD case.”

I looked at Masterson hoping to get some kind of support, or I don’t know what. But he simply shrugged and said, “the master has spoken,” his face full of detached amusement.

I looked, no I stared, right at Colmes. Turned to him and got

up way too close. He stepped back, upset that I had invaded his space. “Now that’s enough, Hobson. I see I have misjudged you. I had thought you had recovered from the trauma of imagining Ruth in that terrible state. In some ways it’s worse than actually seeing her. Take my advice and come with us. You can always turn around and not venture in.”

I pursed my lips and frowned. I made a huge effort to hold back sobs and tears. And he was right. The imagination can do far more damage than can reality. And he was right again. We did still have a case, call it a university case or whatever. It was a murder we knew that. And the perpetrator had to be punished for it. And if the Albany PD would not do so, then it was up to the university to do it. I could faintly hear Colmes and Masterson chatting away, serious smiles on their faces. They were seasoned university investigators. I was not, at least, not in this case. I trailed along behind them to Masterson’s car and we went to the morgue.

**TO BE CONTINUED....**

