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THE CUTTING

JAMES HAYMAN



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THE CUTTING

PROLOGUE

July 1971

He pressed the terrified creature firmly against his body. He was a sturdy boy, tall for his eight years, with dark hair and a long, thin face. After more than a month of summer sunshine, his normally fair skin had turned quite brown. He could feel the rabbit, just weeks old, shivering, and he felt a sense of rising excitement, anticipating the adventure that lay ahead. The boy resisted an urge to run toward the secret place. He feared tripping over a bit of protruding ledge or a branch buried in last fall's rotting leaves. His prize might fall loose and scamper away. Even as the boy walked, his breathing quickened. He lightly stroked the bunny's soft fur, trying to calm its beating heart and, perhaps, his own as well.

It took him nearly twenty minutes to reach his destination, a kind of natural cave formed by arching tendrils of bittersweet vines as they reached upward to grasp and wind around the young white pine and birch trees that surrounded the place. The boy had filled in the lower walls, layering spruce branches atop the bittersweet. He had also cut away the growth from the interior and brought in armfuls of dead leaves and pine needles to form a kind of floor. The entire space measured about four feet in diameter and at its center was

no more than three feet high. Shafts of sunlight entered from above, projecting a pattern of brightness and shadow on the ground.

The boy crawled into the cave, securing the rabbit with one hand against his chest. Moisture from the ground soaked through the knees of his jeans and felt cold against his skin. Once inside, he laid the animal on the ground, holding it by its ears. Its black button eyes were fixed on the boy, who saw what he sensed was both terror and resignation. It was a feeling that the creature knew—and in its way accepted—what the boy had so carefully planned and prepared for. This seemed to the boy to be as it should be.

With his free hand he withdrew the folding knife from his back pocket. He had sharpened the three-inch blade to razor fineness on his father's stone, and he took care not to cut his finger as he worked it open.

He forced himself to wait a few seconds, enjoying the anticipation. He could feel his heart pounding as he placed the point of the blade just below the creature's neck. He pushed hard and then sliced down toward its stomach, opening the animal up. The creature's screams pierced the air. So like the high-pitched shrieks of pain that came from his infant brother when the boy played with him. He didn't let the sound distract him from his task. He was quite sure no one could hear.

He had no words for the feeling that shook his body as he gazed upon the rabbit's beating heart and held it for an instant in his hand before the beating stopped and the creature died. He only knew it was something he wanted to experience again and again.

ONE

Portland, Maine
September 16, 2005
Friday. 5:30 A.M.

Fog can be a sudden thing on the Maine coast. On even the clearest mornings, swirling gray mists sometimes appear in an instant, covering the earth with an opacity that makes it hard to see even one's own feet on the ground. On this particular September morning it descended at 5:30, about the time Lucinda Cassidy and her companion Fritz, a small dog of indeterminate pedigree, arrived at the cemetery on Vaughan Street to begin their four-mile run along the streets of Portland's West End and the path that borders the city's Western Promenade.

The cemetery was one of Portland's oldest and was surrounded by a chain-link fence, now falling into disrepair. The gates on the Vaughan Street side were locked to keep out neighborhood dog walkers. The earliest gravestones dated back to the late 1700s. On most of these stones, dates and other specifics had faded to near illegibility. Those that could be read bore the names of early Portland's most prominent families, Deering, Dana, Brackett, Reed, Preble. These were old Yankee names, many of which had achieved a measure of immortality, having been bestowed upon the streets and parks of a young and growing city. More recent stones marked

the graves of Irish, Italian, and French-Canadian immigrants who came to Portland to work in the city's thriving shipbuilding trades or on the railroads in the last half of the nineteenth century. Today, however, no more of the dead would be buried here, regardless of ancestry or influence. The place was full, the last remains having been interred and the last markers erected in the years immediately following World War II.

When the fog moved in, Lucy considered canceling her run, but only briefly. At age twenty-eight, she was preparing for her first 10K race. She had more than enough self-discipline not to let anything as transitory as a little morning fog interfere with her training schedule. It was tough enough getting the runs in, given the long hours she worked as the newest account executive at Beckman and Hawes, the city's biggest ad agency. In any case, Lucy knew her route well. The fog wouldn't be a problem as long as she took care not to trip on one of the sidewalk's uneven pavers.

The air was cool on her bare legs as Lucy performed her stretches—calves and quads and hamstrings. She pulled off her oversized Bates College sweatshirt, revealing a white sports bra and blue nylon shorts, and tossed it into her car, an aging Toyota Corolla.

She saw no other joggers or dog walkers and thought she and Fritz might well have the streets to themselves. She slipped off his collar to let him run free. He was well trained and wouldn't go far. She pulled a Portland Sea Dogs cap down over her blond hair, stretching the Veltro band down and under her ponytail. She draped the dog's lead around her shoulders and set off along Vaughan Street at a leisurely pace, with Fritz first racing ahead and then stopping to leave his mark on a tree or lamppost.

Lucy liked the quiet of the early morning hours in this upscale neighborhood. Passing street after street of graceful nineteenth-century homes, she glanced in the windows and imagined herself living in one or another of them. The image pleased her. She saw herself holding elegant dinner parties. The food would be simple but perfectly prepared. The wines rare. The men handsome. The conversation witty. All terribly *Masterpiece Theatre*. Ah well, a pretty picture but not very likely. She was not, she knew, to the manner born. She watched Fritz scamper ahead and then turn and wait for her to follow.

Lucy moved through the damp morning air, bringing her heart

rate up to an aerobic training level. She thought about the day ahead, reviewing, for at least the twentieth time, details of a TV campaign she was presenting to the marketing group at Mid-Coast Bank. She'd worked her tail off to land this new client, but they were turning out to be both difficult and demanding. After work, she planned a quick trip to Circuit City to pick up a birthday present for her soon-to-be twelve-year-old nephew Owen. Her older sister Patti's boy, Owen told her what he "really really wanted" was an iPod, but he wasn't optimistic. "We don't have the money this year," he added in grown-up, serious tones that had Patti's imprint all over them. Well, Owen was in for a big surprise.

After that it was back to the Old Port for dinner with David at Tony's. The prospect of dinner at Tony's pleased her. The prospect of sharing it with her ex-husband didn't. He was pushing to get back together, and yes, she admitted, there were times she was briefly tempted. God knows, no one else even remotely interesting was waiting in the wings. Yet after a couple of dates, she was surer than ever that going back to David wasn't the answer for either of them. She planned to tell him so tonight.

She ran along Vaughan for a mile or so, climbing the gentle rise of Bramhall Hill, before turning west across the old section of the hospital toward the path that lined the western edge of the Prom. The fog was thicker now, and she could see even less, but her body felt good. The training was paying off, and she felt certain she'd be ready for the race, now ten days away.

Suddenly Fritz darted past and disappeared into the mist, barking furiously at what Lucy figured was either an animal or another runner coming up the path in her direction. Then she saw Fritz run out of the fog, turn, and stand his ground, angry barks lifting his small body in an uncharacteristic rage. Instantly alert, Lucy wondered who or what could be getting him so agitated. Usually he just wagged his stub of a tail at strangers.

Seconds later a runner emerged from the fog about fifteen feet in front of her. He was a tall man with a lean, well-muscled body. Had she seen him jogging here before? She didn't think so. He was unusually good-looking with dark, deep-set eyes that would be hard to forget. Late thirties or early forties, she thought. Fritz backed away but kept barking.

“Quiet down,” Lucy commanded. “It’s okay.” She smiled at the man. “He isn’t usually so noisy.”

The tall man stopped and knelt down. He extended his left hand for Fritz to sniff, then scratched him behind the ears. He smiled up at Lucy. “What’s his name?”

Lucy registered the absence of a wedding band. “Fritz,” she said.

“Hey, Fritz, are you a good boy? Sure you are.” He scratched Fritz again. The dog’s stubby tail offered a tentative wag or two. He looked up. “I’ve seen you running here before. I’m sure I have.”

“You may have,” she said, though she was sure she would have noticed him. “I’m here most mornings. I’m training for a 10K.”

“Good for you. Mind if I run along? I’d enjoy the company.”

She hesitated, surprised at the man’s directness. Finally she said, “I guess not. Not as long as you can keep up. I’m Lucy.”

“Harry,” he said, extending a hand. “Harry Potter.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No, I was christened long before the first book came out, and I wasn’t about to change my name.”

They took off, chatting easily, laughing about the name. Fritz, no longer barking, kept pace.

“You live in Portland?” she asked.

“No, I’m here on business. Medical equipment. The hospital’s one of my biggest clients.”

“So you’re here quite often?”

“At least once a month.”

They picked up the pace and turned south down the western edge of the Prom.

“Normally there’s a great view from up here. Can’t see a damned thing today.”

A dark green SUV sat parked at the curb just ahead of them. “Could you excuse me for a minute?” Harry pointed and clicked a key ring. The car’s lights blinked; its doors unlocked. “I need to get something.”

He leaned in, rummaged in a small canvas bag, and then emerged from the car holding a hypodermic and a small bottle. “I’m a diabetic,” he explained. “I have to take my insulin on schedule.” Harry carefully inserted the needle into the bottle and extracted a clear liquid. “Only take a second.” Lucy smiled. Feeling it was rude to watch,

she turned away and looked out toward over the Prom. The fog wasn't dissipating. If anything it seemed to be getting thicker. She performed a few stretches to keep her muscles warm while they waited.

She sensed more than saw the sudden movement behind her. Before she could react, Harry Potter's left arm was around her neck, pulling her sharply back and up in a classic choke hold. Her windpipe constricted in the crook of his elbow. She couldn't move. She wanted to scream but could draw only enough breath to emit a thin, strangled cry.

Frantic and confused, Lucy dug her nails into the man's flesh, wishing she'd let them grow longer and more lethal. She felt a sharp prick. She looked down and saw the man's free hand squeezing whatever was in the hypodermic into her arm. He continued holding her, immobile. She tried to struggle, but he was too strong, his grip too tight. Within seconds wooziness began to overtake her. She felt his hands on the back of her head and her butt, pushing her, headfirst, facedown, into the backseat of the car.

Turning her head, Lucy could still see out through the open door, but everything had taken on a hazy, distant quality, like a slow-motion film growing darker frame by frame and seeming to make no sense. She saw an enraged Fritz growling and digging his teeth into the man's leg. She heard a shout, "Shit!" Two large hands picked the small dog up. She tried to rise but couldn't. The last thing Lucinda Cassidy saw was the good-looking man with the dark eyes. He smiled at her. The slow-motion film faded to black.

TWO

Friday, 7:30 P.M.

The summer crowds in the Old Port had thinned now that Labor Day had come and gone, but the air was warm, and Exchange Street bustled with energy. Shops and restaurants were open late and busy. Packs of teenagers in varying states of grunge—some with piercings and tattoos and some without—spread themselves across the sidewalks, forcing middle-aged tourists out onto the narrow streets.

Detective Sergeant Michael McCabe and Kyra Erikson walked in step, side by side, holding hands. Seeing them absorbed in each other's company, chatting happily, it would have been easy for a passerby to conclude, correctly, that they were lovers.

Tonight they were heading for Arno, the city's latest northern Italian hot spot. As usual, it was Kyra's choice. McCabe's restaurant habits were as predictable as they were unadventurous. He pretty much always ordered the same thing: a rare New York strip steak, preceded by a single malt Scotch—no ice—and accompanied by a couple of bottles of cold Shipyard Ale.

Kyra, on the other hand, was a real foodie. She was looking forward to one of Arno's specialties, "duck-meat ravioli, served," she

recited, practically drooling, “in a light brown sauce with thin slices of rare grilled duck.”

McCabe considered their differing approaches to dining a minor incompatibility. He had no problem indulging her passion for haute cuisine. After dinner they planned to go back to his apartment and watch a movie, John Schlesinger’s *Billy Liar*, with Tom Courtenay and a young, very sexy Julie Christie. An old favorite from McCabe’s former life in film school at NYU. He’d never told Kyra she reminded him of Christie in this role. She had the same curly blond hair, the same liquid eyes, the same full, almost pouty lips, except, thank God, Kyra almost never pouted. The resemblance was one of the things that first attracted him to her. He wondered if she’d appreciate the comparison.

They paused by a young street musician seated on the pavement, his back against the brick wall of a small jewelry shop. He was playing a beautifully polished violin. A hand-lettered cardboard sign, propped against the wall, identified him as a JULLIARD DROPOUT. They listened for twenty or thirty seconds. Then, before walking on, McCabe dropped a couple of dollar bills into the man’s open violin case.

“You’re in a good mood.”

“Why not? It’s a beautiful night. I’m with a beautiful woman. He’s a good player and I like the piece. Mozart. Violin Concerto.” McCabe paused, but only for a second, searching his memory. “Number Three.”

It wasn’t that he knew a lot about classical music. He didn’t. He knew nothing of music theory or the styles of various composers. He only occasionally listened to it. It was just this weird mind of his. Once he had seen or heard something—anything—he almost never forgot it. They walked on, the silken, sensuous notes of the violin fading behind them.

McCabe knew Kyra had found it unsettling when she first discovered he could repeat, verbatim, lengthy passages from a book or an investigation report he read months before. She assumed what he had was a photographic memory. He said not. “There is no such thing,” he told her. “Nobody’s ever been able to prove that a brain can ‘photograph’ an image and then ‘see’ it again.”

“You remember everything?”

“Only if it interests me. I’ve got something called an eidetic memory. My brain is just unusually efficient at organizing stuff and filing it away where it can lay its hands on it.”

They continued up Exchange Street. They passed a black-and-white patrol car pulled into a space marked with A NO PARKING sign. A young, round-faced female cop sat behind the wheel. She smiled as she spotted McCabe with someone so obviously his girlfriend. “Hey, Sergeant, how ya doin’?” she called out.

He smiled back. “Keeping an eye on the delinquents?”

“Yeah, you know, Friday night. Another few hours the drunks’ll start pouring out of the bars.”

Arno, as expected, was crowded and noisy. Two or three groups stood by the door waiting for the hostess to notice them. Since their own reservation wasn’t for another fifteen minutes, McCabe and Kyra wandered into the small bar, where squadrons of young business types, male and female, jockeyed for position. He noticed the distinctive squat shape of a Dalwhinnie among the bottles at the back of the bar. It was one of his favorite malts and not always available. He signaled the bartender and ordered a double, neat, for himself and, without having to ask, a Sancerre for Kyra. Glancing over, he saw she was chatting with one of her art contacts, Gloria Kelwin, a gallery owner he’d met a couple of times before. McCabe brought the drinks over and handed Kyra her wine.

“Why, hello, Michael,” Gloria purred, bending forward to brush McCabe’s cheek with her lips. “Caught any bad guys lately?” She spoke in a mannered way McCabe found consistently irritating. Not waiting for his response, she turned her attention back to Kyra. Kelwin’s gallery, North Space, carried Kyra’s paintings and prints, and Kyra was hoping to schedule a solo show. McCabe watched Kyra’s face, animated and alive, as she described a new series of figure studies she was working on, small oils of young dancers, bodies abstracted in fluid athletic poses. He found her quite irresistible, watching her when she didn’t know he was watching. In the end, he was happy shutting out the words and concentrating instead on the smooth peaty burn of the Scotch as it traced its way down his throat, wondering for

the hundredth time how he'd managed to attract this sensual, sensitive woman.

As he sipped, McCabe felt his cell phone vibrate in his pocket. He pulled it out in time to see the call was from Maggie Savage. While a chance encounter with an overbearing gallery owner couldn't spoil the evening, McCabe knew Maggie's call might. Placing his nearly empty glass on the bar, he excused himself and stepped out onto Exchange Street. The air felt fresh, and he could smell the sea. He leaned against the building and waited a moment before calling her back. Then he punched in her number.

Maggie was the number two detective in McCabe's Crimes Against People unit. Technically, as the unit's leader, McCabe wasn't supposed to have a partner, but he'd stretched the rules, and they'd worked together since his arrival in Portland three years ago. Back then, she hadn't been shy about letting him know she resented the "so-called star" from the NYPD, sweeping in and taking the job she felt she'd earned for herself. In her view, the department passing on her application was nothing more than simple sexism. The fact this was the first time they'd ever brought in a senior detective from outside, regardless of expertise or experience, reinforced her conviction. Nevertheless, McCabe knew that in the process of working together, he'd earned her respect—and she his.

Maggie picked up on the first ring. "Hate to interrupt a night on the town, McCabe, but we've got kind of a mess here."

"What's up?"

"A teenage girl's body was found in that scrap metal yard off Somerset. Looks like it could be the Dubois kid."

Katie Dubois had disappeared more than a week ago. "I gather the body's pretty cut up," she continued. "Maybe a sex thing. I don't know. You're the murder expert."

"Aw, shit." He let the idea sink in. Portland wasn't New York, and murder wasn't all that common. Hell, there'd been only nineteen homicides in the whole state the previous year. Just two in the city of Portland.

"Alright, I'm at Arno. Y'know, the new place on Exchange? Pick me up here. I'll run in and apologize to Kyra."

The noise level in the bar had risen to a din, and McCabe didn't

want to shout to make himself heard. He tapped Kyra's shoulder and led her over to a marginally quieter corner near the coat room. "I have to go," he said.

"Oh, no," she said, disappointment spreading across her face. "It's taken us weeks to get this reservation."

"Someone's been murdered. A teenage girl."

Kyra closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them and nodded. "Okay. You go. I'm sure I can join Gloria." She looked up and kissed him softly on the lips. "Don't worry. It's what I get for falling in love with a cop."

"I'll see you at the apartment?"

She nodded, smiled, and turned to go back into the bar.

Maggie was waiting at the curb in an unmarked Crown Vic when McCabe emerged. He slid into the passenger seat. "Any more background?"

"The body was found by a homeless guy. Drunk. Possibly disturbed. Other than that, nothing. No ID. No wallet. No clothes. Nada. The uniforms on the scene are pretty sure it's Dubois."

They rode in silence for several minutes.

"So how's the food at Arno?" Maggie asked. "As good as everyone says?"

"I dunno."

Maggie peered at him in that owlish way she had. He'd seldom seen a cop who looked less like a cop. "I forgot," she said. "You only eat Scotch and steak."

"The Scotch was great, but I never got to the steak. We never even got to the table. Kyra's probably just sitting down now with a gallery owner we ran into in the bar."

"Well, I am sorry to have dragged you away."

"Not your fault."

It took less than five minutes for McCabe and Savage to reach the scene. There were a couple of black-and-white units, blue lights flashing, blocking access to the area. Maggie pulled in behind one. They got out. McCabe grabbed a Maglite and a pair of latex gloves from the trunk.

The area was a small industrial wasteland slated for eventual development. Maybe two or three acres, no more than that. Most of it was surrounded by a deteriorating chain-link fence. Yellow crime

scene tape stretched across the openings in the fence and back another thirty or so yards. Piles of rusting scrap metal littered the landscape. A few clumps of weeds struggled for life in the stony hardpan. Other than that, just dirt, a lot of trash, and a dead body. Identity would have to be confirmed, but as they moved closer, McCabe became certain it was Katie Dubois.

Even in the empty grayness of death, he could see Katie once had a pretty face. Round with chubby cheeks. Shoulder-length blond hair tied in a ponytail. Eyes open and clouded over, revealing none of the horror one expected in the eyes of someone facing imminent slaughter—and slaughter it was. She'd been sliced practically in half by a deep cut that angled from just below her neck to just above her navel. The flaps of skin were folded neatly back into place. Circular burn marks were visible on her breasts and on her thighs near her genitals. There might be others hidden from view.

The girl was naked. She lay on her back, knees up, legs spread, one arm angled straight back as though she'd been reaching for something overhead. Or maybe doing the backstroke. McCabe was sure she hadn't fallen this way. Someone had arranged the body in this position.

He stood for a couple of minutes, scanning the corpse, remembering the details of the case. Katie Dubois was sixteen years old. She'd gone missing Wednesday before last. A junior at Portland High School and a star soccer player, she hadn't come home from a night out with her friends. She was last seen in the Old Port, hanging out with five other teenagers. Flyers with her photograph were stapled to telephone poles all over town. Tom Tasco and Eddie Fraser were the lead team on the case. They were experienced detectives, and they worked it hard. McCabe read their investigation reports and found them impressively thorough.

None of the other teens had any idea where Katie might have gone. Her boyfriend, Ronnie Sobel, told detectives he was talking to some friends and when he turned back, Katie was gone. One of the girls said that wasn't quite how it happened. She claimed Katie and Sobel were arguing. She thought it had to do with Ronnie hooking up with another girl, but she wasn't sure. Anyway, she said, when Ronnie walked away from her, Katie stormed off. Most of the department as

well as dozens of friends, family, and volunteers had been looking for her ever since. They'd combed the city. The nearby Scarborough marshes. A lot of people thought she might turn up in the harbor. She hadn't. She'd turned up here.

McCabe felt a familiar rage growing within him. Murder in Maine tended to be a family affair, husbands killing wives, friends killing friends. As often as not they called the cops themselves as soon as they realized what they had done—but this was different. This had the randomness, brutal anonymity of the big city, and McCabe allowed himself a moment to mourn a universe where one human being could do this to another, especially to a teenager. Then he put these thoughts away and let the cop side of his brain kick in, inspecting the corpse, inspecting the ground where the girl lay, trying to figure out if there was anything he should be noticing. Anything that would give him a better idea of what happened to Katie Dubois and who was responsible for it. He saw signs of duct tape adhesive across her mouth and ligature marks on her wrists, ankles, and neck. Her clouded eyes revealed no signs of pinpoint hemorrhaging, suggesting that mutilation, not strangulation, was the immediate cause of death.

Standing here in a scrap yard in Portland, Maine, McCabe suddenly had the feeling he was back in New York. It wasn't like he was imagining it. Or remembering it. It was like he was really there. He could hear the rush of the city. He could smell the stink of it. A hundred bloodied corpses paraded before his eyes. His right hand drew comfort from resting on the handle of his gun. Mike McCabe, once again lured to the chase. He knew with an absolute certainty that this was his calling. That it was here, among the killers and the killed, that he belonged. No matter how far he ran, no matter how well he hid, he'd never leave the violence or his fascination with it behind.

McCabe stepped back from Katie's body, careful not to trip over Maggie who was kneeling a few feet behind him, writing her notes. He approached the uniformed officer who'd found the body. He remembered the man's name. Kevin Comisky. "Kevin," he said quietly, "what do we know?"

"Not much. I was on patrol. Quiet night. I just made the turn off Marginal onto Franklin when this drunk comes running out, waving his arms around. He's screaming something about murder, but

he's pretty incoherent, so I put him in the car, which, by the way, he stinks up pretty bad. I ask him to tell me where he saw whatever he saw. He manages to direct me here. I see the body. Call Dispatch. They send Kennerly as backup. Then they call you guys."

McCabe used his cell to call police headquarters at 109 Middle Street. Two evidence techs were currently on duty. He told both he needed them at the scrap yard ASAP. Then he called Deputy ME Terri Mirabito. Portland, with a population a little over sixty-five thousand, wasn't big enough to have its own medical examiner's office. Normally whoever was assigned would have to drive down from the state lab in Augusta, a good hour and some away, but Mirabito lived in town, and if she was home she could get here a lot faster. She answered on the first ring and said she'd be right over.

"Where's the drunk now?" he asked Comisky.

"Still in the unit," said the cop. "It's gonna take more than a paper pine tree and a squirt of Lysol to get the stink out of that baby."

"Either of you guys touch anything or move the body around?" McCabe addressed both uniformed officers.

Both responded negatively. One said, "It's tough enough just looking at her."

"Okay. I'm going to wander around, see what I can see. Then I'll want to talk to your friend in the car, so please make sure he doesn't go anywhere."

He turned to Maggie. "Where are Tasco and Fraser? I thought this was their case." He knew he was sounding irritable, but tough shit. A detective should never lose track of his case.

"Mike, they've been putting in eighteen-hour days for over a week. Anyway, Tom's on his way in. I couldn't find Eddie."

McCabe nodded. "Find him."

He turned away and used his cell to call home. Casey answered. "Hey, Case, how're you doing?"

"Hello, Daddy dearest. I'm fine," McCabe's thirteen-year-old daughter said in a playfully proper tone. "Are you still eating dinner?"

"We never got to dinner. I'm working." He wondered if Casey had known Katie Dubois. They were both soccer players. Probably not, he decided. Casey was still in middle school. Eighth grade. "I'm going to be late. What are you up to?"

"I've got some friends over. Do you want to talk to Jane?"

“Oh, really? Who’s over?”

“Gretchen and Whitney.” They were two of Casey’s best friends and lived nearby on Munjoy Hill. “We’re kind of in the middle of something.” Doing her best to put on an aristocratic British accent, she added, “I don’t want to go into it. I’ll fetch Jane.”

“Okay,” he laughed. “Fetch Jane. As long as you’re not doing something you’re not supposed to.”

“Dad, I’m not a baby, y’know.”

“Okay. Get Jane. I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

McCabe could hear Casey shouting, “Hey, Jane, it’s Dad,” the single syllable drawn out, “Da-aaad!”

Jane Devaney was a sixty-year-old retired nurse and high school sex education teacher McCabe employed on a part-time basis to look after Casey. She also drove a Harley. Casey found that indescribably cool. So did McCabe.

Jane’s voice came on. “Hiya, Mike.”

“Everything good there?”

“Oh yeah, we’re fine. Kids are fooling around. Girl stuff. I’m deep into *Supernanny*. Keeping tabs on the competition. I take it you’re working late?”

“It looks that way.”

“Want me to spend the night?”

“Not necessary. I’m not sure when I’ll be home, but Kyra should be there as soon as she finishes dinner.”

“Well, if you decide you want me to stay, just let me know. It’s not a problem.”

“Thanks, Jane. I appreciate it.”

McCabe closed the phone and returned it to his pocket. He pulled on the surgical gloves he’d brought from the car. Pointing the flashlight at the ground, he started inspecting the area where the girl’s body was lying. Senior evidence tech Bill Jacobi and his partner would arrive soon enough, but McCabe wanted to have a more thorough look around first.

McCabe figured the girl was most likely killed somewhere else and the body dumped here later. If so, he’d find little in the way of evidence. He saw no blood on the ground, and the blood on the body was dried and old. A greenish cast of decomposition was beginning

to show on her abdomen. Katie Dubois had been dead a while. McCabe guessed at least forty-eight hours.

The ground was stone hard, so he doubted he'd find any footprints or tire tracks, but he watched where he walked and looked anyway. Also, he saw nothing to suggest the body had been dragged the thirty or so yards from the street. No bent clusters of weeds. No visible scrapes of dirt around the girl's heels or head or shoulders. He figured the killer carried Katie to where he dumped her. No great feat. She couldn't have weighed more than 110 pounds even before she lost most of her blood. The killer would have gotten some of that blood on his clothes. Possible evidence unless he burned them.

He played his light over the girl's body, inch by inch. The cut down the middle of her chest looked as careful and clean as if it had been made with a razor or possibly a surgeon's scalpel. The burn marks were recent and deliberate. In the lobe of her right ear he found a small gold earring with a dangling heart-shaped charm. He moved the light to the left ear. The lobe was torn, and the mate to the earring, assuming there was a mate, was gone. Accidentally caught on something? Maybe. Roughly pulled out? Possibly. Taken as a trophy? More likely. Her navel was pierced with a silver-colored semicircular bar with tiny metal balls at either end. A blue tattoo that looked like a Chinese or maybe Japanese character adorned the skin above her left hipbone. A twenty-first-century teen.

The crime scene techs arrived and began drawing their diagrams and taking their pictures. McCabe pointed out the remaining earring and asked the senior tech, Bill Jacobi, to make sure to check for both prints and DNA. Jacobi gave him a "So what do you think, I'm stupid?" look in response.

"Looks like somebody started the autopsy without me." McCabe turned at the sound of a woman's voice. Deputy State Medical Examiner Terri Mirabito stood behind him, looking at the body. "I think I resent that," she added, "both on her behalf and mine."

"Good to see you, Terri. Glad you're here." McCabe had worked with her on half a dozen cases over the past three years and valued her skills.

After photographing the body from several angles, Mirabito knelt down for a closer look. "How long do you think she's been dead?" McCabe asked.

“A while. She’s out of rigor. Only slight lividity.” With gloved hands, she gently pulled back the fold of tissue on the left side of the girl’s chest. McCabe could see what appeared to be grains of rice inside the cut. Only the rice was moving. Maggots.

“Judging by the activity in there, I’d say she was killed forty-eight to seventy-two hours ago. Maybe a little longer depending where the body was kept.” Terri pulled the skin back a bit further. “Well, sonofabitch, will you look at that?”

“What? What is it?”

Terri looked up, a grim expression on her face. “Her heart’s gone.”

“What do you mean, gone?”

“Just what I said, McCabe. Gone. As in not there.” Terri was shining a small high-intensity light into the girl’s exposed chest cavity. “Some creep opened her up, cut through her sternum with a saw, and removed her heart. I couldn’t have done it cleaner myself.”

Neither said anything for a moment. “Ritual murder?” he finally asked.

“Beats the hell out of me. Whoever did it, though, knew what he was doing.”

“You’re assuming it was a he?” asked Maggie.

“I am.” Terri rubbed her gloved finger gently along the severed bone. “After he cut the sternum, like any good surgeon, he most likely used a retractor to spread her ribs and get at her heart. I’m not sure how much more the autopsy will tell us, but maybe something. If we can get positive ID by tomorrow morning, I’ll do the procedure in the afternoon. We’ve got nothing else scheduled.” There was an unsettled edge to Terri’s normally cheerful voice. “You and Maggie want to join the party?”

“Just leave word what time you want us there.”

Terri turned back to the body and continued her preliminary examination. McCabe glanced over to the black-and-white Crown Vic with the flashing lights and the Portland PD slogan, PROTECTING A GREAT CITY, emblazoned in gold on its rear fender. Some days, he thought, we keep that promise better than others. A dirty-looking man of indeterminate age was leaning against the back door. A uniformed officer stood nearby. Satisfied he wasn’t going to find anything else useful, McCabe walked over to join them. After a last look back at the body, Maggie followed.

“This is the guy who found the body,” the cop told them. “Says he’d be happy to tell us more about it if maybe we could come up with a little whiskey for him.”

“Oh, really,” said McCabe. “Well, I guess we’ll have to think about that,”

The man steadied himself against the car. He was a skinny little guy. Maybe five feet four. His eyes darted between McCabe and Maggie. Clearly he had no love for cops.

“What’s your name?” McCabe asked.

“Lacey. Dennis Patrick Lacey.”

“Got any ID, Dennis?”

The man handed McCabe a Maine driver’s license. It had expired three years ago. Lacey was fifty-five years old. McCabe would have guessed ten years older. He handed the license back.

“Wrestling fan?”

“Huh?”

McCabe pointed toward Lacey’s T-shirt. A picture of a grimacing wrestler and the letters *WWE* adorned the front.

“Christ, no. They give you this crap at the shelter. It’s stuff nobody else wants.”

Lacey seemed coherent enough. McCabe glanced at Maggie, who flipped open a mini recording device.

“This is Detective Margaret Savage, Portland, Maine, Police Department. The time is 9:54 P.M., September 17, 2005. The following is an interview recorded in a vacant lot off Somerset Street, Portland, Maine, between Detective Sergeant Michael McCabe, also of the Portland PD, and Mr. Dennis Lacey, residing at . . . Mr. Lacey, can you tell us where you live?”

“Wherever I can doss down.”

McCabe began. “Would you tell us what you saw tonight?”

“I didn’t have nothing to do with it.”

“We don’t believe you did,” McCabe said as gently as he could. “We just need to know what you saw to help us find whoever did do it.”

Lacey looked at McCabe as if trying to gauge to what degree he could be trusted. He finally shrugged and began speaking. “Aw, jeez, it was awful.” McCabe could hear traces of a brogue under the man’s slur, its lilting rhythms reminding him of his own Irish grandparents.

“Warm nights like this,” Lacey said, “I sometimes sneak into the scrap yard. Just to sit. Look at the stars. Have a few drinks. Read a few poems. If I can afford it, maybe I bring something to eat.”

“You read poems?” Maggie asked. “What poems would those be?”

Lacey reached into his back pocket and pulled out a dirty, well-worn paperback copy of Yeats. He handed it to Maggie. “I’m a sailor,” he said, slurring his words only a little. “Able seaman . . . or I was. Not so able anymore. I spent lot of nights at sea staring at the stars, did a lot of reading.”

“You read Yeats?” she asked.

“Him and a few of the other Irish poets. I like the sound of the old words,” he said. “These days, I’m all alone, y’know, and words are my only company. Nobody bothers me here or tells me to shut my yap.”

Lacey began to recite, stumbling over only a few of the words.

*“I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade . . .”*

As the words came out, the cops all stared at Lacey. McCabe, too. Maybe McCabe most of all. When the old sailor paused, searching his memory, McCabe waited a moment and then filled in Yeats’s next line.

*“And I shall have some peace there,
for peace comes dropping slow . . .”*

“So you know old William Butler, do ya?” said Lacey. “Unusual for a cop.”

McCabe smiled. “Unusual for a sailor. Now, can you tell me when you first saw the girl?”

“I didn’t see her at first. Didn’t see nothin’. Not till I got up to take a leak, which I did against that pile of scrap over there. I was just zipping up and I noticed something a little ways off. I walked closer and there she is. All cut up. It’s a terrible thing, y’know. A terrible thing.”

“How long were you there before you had to take your leak?” asked McCabe.

“Not long. Twenty minutes.” Lacey shrugged. “Maybe less.”

“So you got here around eight thirty?”

“Aw, jeez, I dunno. I don’t have no watch or nothin’. It was dark.”

“Did you see anything else near the body?”

“Something else? Like what?”

“Like maybe a knife or a razor?”

“Nah. Nothing like that.”

“Or maybe some jewelry?”

“What kind of jewelry?”

“Any kind. Like maybe a gold earring you thought you could get a few bucks for?”

“No. I didn’t see nothing. Or take nothing. I just wished I had something to cover her up with. She was lyin’ there exposed to the whole world.”

“You didn’t touch her?”

“No, I didn’t touch her or nothing else either.” He pulled a pint bottle of whiskey from the sagging pocket of his pants. “D’ya mind if I finish what little’s left here?” There was perhaps an inch of amber liquid in the bottle.

McCabe silently nodded assent. He wouldn’t have minded a little himself. “What kinds of cars were parked nearby?” McCabe gestured to the curb, where the techs were checking for tire tread marks and other evidence.

“Didn’t see no cars. Maybe some driving by, but none that were parked.”

“Any that slowed down? Any you could identify?”

“Just cars going along. You couldn’t see what kind of cars they were.”

“Thank you, Mr. Lacey.” McCabe looked up and noticed a couple of reporters had arrived, including a crew from the local NBC affiliate.

“Hey, McCabe. Remember me? Josie Tenant, News Center 6. We heard the Dubois girl was found murdered here. Can you give us a statement?”

“Not at the moment.” McCabe turned away.

“C’mon, McCabe. Is it Dubois in there or isn’t it?”

Media relations weren't McCabe's strong suit. He turned to face her. "Look, Josie, this is an active crime scene. I'm not entirely sure how you got here so fast, but it would really be helpful if you kept your folks on the other side of Somerset. We're still trying to collect evidence." Tenant and her cameraman reluctantly retreated to their van. The other reporters followed.

McCabe turned to Comisky, the cop who'd found Lacey. "Kevin, would you take Mr. Lacey down to 109? If Detective Sturgis is around, see if he'd be kind enough to take the rest of Mr. Lacey's statement. Otherwise, I'll do it when I get back." To Lacey he added, "Make sure you let us know where we can find you. Here's a card with my number on it. We may have to talk to you again. Do you understand?"

"Aye, aye, Captain." He threw McCabe a shaky salute and staggered toward Comisky's car. "Canadian whiskey's not so bad, y'know," he said, looking sadly at his now empty bottle. "It's not Irish, but it's not bad." The homeless man climbed unsteadily into the back of the car.

Before Comisky could follow, McCabe said softly, "Make sure you check his pockets for a gold earring or anything else he might have picked up here."

The patrol officer nodded, slid behind the wheel, turned the key, and opened all four windows before starting off.

Bill Jacobi and Terri Mirabito were completing their tasks. There didn't seem to be much more McCabe could do. He approached one of the other uniformed patrol officers. "Keep the reporters out until the body's picked up and the area's clear—and don't listen to any of their bullshit."

"Don't worry, Sergeant. I've heard it all before."

McCabe and Maggie Savage got into Maggie's Crown Vic for the short ride back to the office. "Do you want to join Sturgis interviewing Lacey?" McCabe asked.

"No. There's no way he's the killer. I'm sure Carl can get whatever else there is to get. I just hope he doesn't start doing his bullying Carl shit. Lacey's got enough problems already."

"Well, Maggie, that's very thoughtful of you. Maybe, instead of interviewing Lacey, we should just get him a bottle of Jameson's and ask him to read us some more Yeats."

Maggie didn't laugh. "You know, McCabe, I love you dearly, but

sometimes you're really an asshole," she said. "Anyway, I called Katie's mother and stepfather when I saw the news van pull up. I didn't want them hearing about their daughter's death from News Center 6. So I told them, as gently as I could, that I thought we'd found her and that we needed to talk to them again."

"How'd they take it?"

"About what you'd expect. The mother broke down sobbing. Couldn't talk. Just wanted to know if I was sure it was Katie. I told her I was, and she put the stepfather on the phone. He was quieter. They agreed to come downtown and talk to me when I told him how important starting fast could be on cases like this. We'll see if maybe they can remember anything new."

"Okay. Just drop me off. I want to take another look at the missing persons file on Katie. Then I'm going to hit the computer. See if anybody's reported anything similar."

Maggie pulled into the curb in front of 109 Middle Street, the PPD's small headquarters building on the edge of the Old Port.

"You've got the world-famous memory. Anything ring a bell?"

McCabe didn't answer. He just sat staring out the windshield. A few raindrops were splattering against the glass. Why the hell would anybody neatly and precisely cut a girl's heart out of her body? Sexual nutcase? Some kind of anatomical collector filling his trophy case?

"McCabe?"

He looked at her and nodded, almost imperceptibly. "I do remember something," he said.

"D'ya want to share it?" she asked.

"Let me check it out first. I also want to set up appointments with a couple of the cardiac surgeons up at Cumberland Med. Find out what it takes to cut out somebody's heart."

"Think this could be the start of a serial string?" Maggie asked as McCabe exited the car.

McCabe turned back and leaned in the open window. "I don't know. It's sure got the earmarks."

The streets were emptier now. As McCabe walked toward the building, he could feel that the air had become noticeably cooler, the first hint of the coming autumn and the dark winter that lay beyond.