A Ghost of a Chance

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An Intriguing Jigsaw Puzzle Romance. Read the story, assemble the puzzle and find the clues. Can you solve the mystery?
List of Characters

JONATHAN CARLTON – a tall, handsome thirty-six-year-old, is diagnosed with a tragic and incurable illness. A member of a famous American political family, he has abandoned his technical career and has retreated to his ancestral home in Maine. In the solitude of Land’s End, Jonathan finds himself totally involved in a dangerous and ghostly mystery.

MOLLY MacDOUGAL – a beautiful twenty-four-year-old bride who was murdered on her wedding night. Destined to remain at Land’s End until the true identity of her killer is found, Molly’s only means of entertainment are the infrequent visitors at the estate. With Jonathan’s arrival, Molly begins to feel some of her old emotions surfacing, and an interest in Jonathan that only an extraordinary ghost would recognize.

ARTHUR CARLTON I – Molly’s 1890 bridegroom and a wealthy landowner destined for the United States Senate after Molly’s death.

ELIZABETH MacDOUGAL – Molly’s mother and the owner of Land’s End, a gift from her husband, Angus.

ANGUS MacDOUGAL – Molly’s father and builder of Land’s End. Upon the death of his wife Elizabeth, Angus took a second wife, Verona.

VERONA MacDOUGAL – Molly’s stepmother.

XENA MacDOUGAL – Molly’s younger stepsister.

ARTHUR CARLTON IV – Jonathan’s cousin and a direct descendent of Arthur I. He is part owner of the family estate, Land’s End, and a rising star in the upcoming senatorial race.

HENRY CUDGERSEN – a longtime caretaker at Land’s End. This rigid and suspicious man has been employed at the estate for as long as Jonathan can remember.

SIMONE RUTHERFORD TRACTON – a real estate agent and wife of “Big” Bill Tracton. She desperately wants to sell Land’s End to her husband and collect the large commission on the sale.

“BIG” BILL TRACTON – the local shlock developer who wants to purchase the Carlton property for development.
I'd been haunting the house at Land's End for ninety-nine years when I first met Jonathan Carlton. Of course, that changed my — well, you know. But, as usual, I'm getting ahead of myself . . . .

Jonathan Carlton relegated control of his Audi 5000 to his subconscious as he sped northward on U.S. Route 1. He gripped the steering wheel without feeling it beneath his vise-like fingers. He was totally unaware of his own body, even though at the moment that very same body occupied his conscious mind.

I'm going to die. Dammit, I'm going to die soon . . .

That very morning, the specialist, shaking his head, had told Jonathan the diagnosis. "Sometimes we just don't know the cause of a condition like yours. It happens, and when it does —"

Jonathan perked up, expecting to hear about the cure for this unexpected affliction that had first hampered his tennis game, and now threatened to curtail his life.

The words weren't what he wanted to hear — "and when it does, I'm afraid there isn't anything we can do, except make you as comfortable as possible at the end."

The squeal of the Audi's brakes interrupted his thoughts as Jonathan struggled to avoid the van that swerved into the fast lane in front of him. Geez, a guy could get killed like that.

The irony of the thought struck him, and the tension of the day suddenly erupted into bitter laughter.

So he wasn't dead yet. That's why he was going home.

Even if the only person left to greet him was the old caretaker who'd frightened him as a boy, Jonathan was going home. Funny, even after eleven years of canceled rent checks, he didn't think of the apartment two blocks from the university where he taught history as home. His needs were simple, his associate professor's salary more than sufficient. In fact, when his cousin Arthur had stopped by last week, soliciting a contribution for his latest political campaign, Jonathan had written a check for ten thousand dollars without even looking at his bank balance. It wasn't that he supported Arthur's ambitions — indeed, he abhorred his politics — but he was Jonathan's only relative.

Good grief, he hadn't even written a will. Perhaps he should establish a scholarship fund or something while there was still time. He could take care of the details after he settled in at Land's End. He should get there sometime early in the morning.

The little market in town was open early, so Jonathan stopped to pick up some groceries and magazines. It was still quite a ride clear out to the end of the point, but the craggy Maine coastline was refreshing to his tired eyes, and he could hear the welcoming summer surf. He hadn't been here since he was a kid, but he still remembered each curve of the old road.

From the road, Jonathan couldn't see the lighthouse, hidden halfway down the cliff. He glimpsed the main house, its Georgian facade achingly familiar, just as he made the last turn before the gatehouse. He stopped and honked for Henry Cudgerson, the taciturn old caretaker, to open the wrought-iron gates.

When he got out of the car, he looked up at the three stories of windows, their curtained facade bringing back happy memories of long-ago summers. For a moment, he thought he detected a slight
movement high above, but decided it must have been the glint of the morning sun.

Jonathan grabbed his bag from the trunk and opened the still magnificent front door. Gnarled as Henry had become, the old Downeaster had always done a credible job of maintaining the property. The annual check from the family trust had seen to that.

Jonathan’s footsteps echoed on the dark hardwood floor of the hall. He turned to the left, entering the library through double French doors.

He was still examining the familiar book-lined walls when a beam of sunlight burst through the east window. The startling illumination highlighted a painting above the fireplace. Transfixed by the sight, for a moment Jonathan forgot to breathe.

The painter must have been enchanted with his subject to have achieved such a poignant portrait of the young woman. Luxuriant red-gold tresses cascaded from her tilted head. Her lissome neck was encircled by a slender chain and cameo. Her delicately rounded shoulders rose above the décolletage of billowing pale yellow satin. The eyes beneath the wide, intelligent brow were fine, framed by thick auburn lashes. Their green fire was unquenched by the not-quite-demurely lowered lids.

The artist had realistically portrayed a dusting of freckles to dance across the young woman’s upturned nose. And her mouth! Jonathan knew no words to describe the beguiling curves, tinted to reveal the soft moistness that must have been there in real life. His imagination seemed to take hold as Jonathan closed his eyes and felt tender lips brush against his own.

Come on, man, get a grip on yourself! This was no time for flights of fancy, not with ice cream probably melting all over the backseat of his car.

Later, after putting away the groceries, Jonathan found himself in the doorway of the library, his hands thrust in the pockets of his jeans as he contemplated the obviously long-dead young woman with the strawberry-blond hair. The light had changed, but the portrait still radiated its own luminescence. He chuckled, then spoke his thoughts: “I’ll bet she had eleven kids, outlived three husbands, and died a haggle-toothed old crone.”

Surely it was the wind rattling the windows so.

With his hand on the brass doorknob of the front door, Jonathan felt compelled to turn around, to gaze once more on the merrily freckled visage through the glass doors of the library. It must have been a quirk of the changing light, but the illusion of moist lips – lips that seemed to beckon – was vivid.

Jonathan’s long legs gave him a lanky stride that brought him quickly to the high, jagged cliff at the rear of Land’s End, the cliff that had given the property its name.

The wind blew his hair across his forehead as the gulls screeched and swooped at the narrow beach at the foot of the cliff. The years since Jonathan’s last visit had taken their toll on the grassland at the edge of the cliff. At least twenty feet had been lost to the rocky surf below, and when he looked down, he could see the latest chunk of fallen earth, the waves of the incoming tide pounding it into nothing.

Nothing. That was what Jonathan Carlton was going to be before long. As he gazed at the foam-capped waters crashing into the serrated landscape below, the idea took hold.

It was appealing, beating the Grim Reaper at his own game, sparing himself the terrible agony of waiting. He could choose the time of his own death, joining the countless lost sailors who had
gone to the depths before him.

Jonathan took a tentative step forward, keeping his eyes on the terrible rocks that now mesmerized him. Another step, this time more deliberate. Another, and –

_Oomph!_ The breath was literally knocked out of him as he landed on his back in the grass. Jonathan couldn’t breathe yet, but he was safe, away from the edge of the cliff. Managing to get up on his elbows, he shook his head.

That sure had been some gust of wind. He figured it must have come from halfway across the Atlantic to knock him down like that. Thank goodness it hadn’t come from the other direction, or he’d have fallen . . . exactly where he’d planned to jump.

_Well, Carlton, looks like you’re not ready to pack it all in yet after all._ Suddenly, he was ravenous, and very glad he’d thought to buy fudge sauce for the strawberry ice cream he’d stashed in the freezer.

_It’s a good thing I’d kept a keen eye on my visitor – that darn fool nearly walked himself right off the cliff. Why, if I hadn’t been there . . . _

Intent on his ice cream, Jonathan came directly in through the back door. Hot fudge would be just the thing. He lit the stove with a wooden match.

The old kitchen held warm memories of long-ago summers, of cookies snitched from the always filled cookie jar, of Pearl, the family cook, who’d traveled with the Carltons from New York every summer to stay at the shore. Jonathan was glad he’d come back to touch the remnants of his childhood. Peace, quiet, and a huge hot fudge sundae to be eaten totally without guilt – what more could a man ask?

_Crraaash!_

Knowing firsthand how strong the wind was, he figured one of the shutters had fallen. _Better check, just in case . . . _ Reluctantly, he put his dish on the counter.

The sound had come from the front, maybe one of the library windows. Although he checked all around the house, nothing seemed amiss. Giving up the search, he assumed he’d heard the cracking of a large tree branch.

Now, the only thing between Jonathan and his ice cream was a spoon. To his surprise he found a spoon on the counter when he returned to the kitchen – and it had already been used!

Jonathan shook his head. He didn’t even remember tasting the sundae. _Terrific. So now, in addition to everything else, I’m losing my mind._

Taking what was left of his ice cream, he headed toward the library where he was soon settled in a comfortable leather recliner, savoring the combined flavor of fudge and strawberries. Jonathan was suddenly too tired even to read.

Despite his fatigue, he was glad he’d come to Land’s End. Even though it had been only a summer home in his childhood, and unused for nearly the last twenty years, it meant more to him than any other place. It had been in his family since the previous century, and even when he’d been far away, just the thought of Land’s End had been comforting.

He smiled admiringly at the portrait of the young woman in yellow. “I bet you were really something, lady.”
Did he detect a gleam in her emerald eyes, or was that a trick of the artist's brush?

Jonathan realized he'd fallen asleep in his chair when the strange sound awoke him. The noise got louder as he made his way toward the back of the house, and by the time he reached the kitchen, it was outright caterwauling. Probably some fool cat looking for food. Jonathan had never been particularly enthralled with felines, but he was willing to trade a little dinner for some company.

"Here, kitty, kitty."
"Owheee, owheee," came the answering refrain.
He walked toward the utility room off the pantry. "Here kitty, ki —"
It was her legs he saw first, slender above her boots, disappearing into a pair of red hot pants, tight across her gently rounded bottom. He couldn't see her face, but the view from her backside was definitely appealing. She was bent at the waist, the red-gold waves of her hair caught in the antique ironing machine. Flailing with one arm, she vainly tried to reach the lever that would shut off the machine.

"I'll get it," he cried.
She flashed him a peace sign with her other hand.
Even after disengaging the roller, it took him a while to untangle the thick mass of golden red ringlets from the iron.
"There," he said finally, stepping back as she stood. "You're free now."
The look she gave him was grateful, but it wasn't her expression that caused his mouth to drop open.

She shook her hair loose, and the curls tumbled fetchingly across her thinly clad shoulders.
"I'm eternally grateful to you, sir, for coming to my rescue." Her voice was musically soft.
In spite of her casual attire, the young woman's manner seemed formal. The quaintness of her speech gave him pause, and before he could ask, "Who in the world are you, and how did you get here?" she partially explained her presence.

"I have come to pay a visit to my uncle Henry, your caretaker, and I fear I must return to the gatehouse before he worries overmuch."
She was halfway out the door before he was able to call, "Will I see you around the estate?"
Her words echoed back over the squeaking of the screen door. "Fer sure, man."
Fer sure? Jonathan hadn't heard that expression since the last time he'd dated a girl with a smile full of braces.

Later, lying in bed, Jonathan realized he'd temporarily forgotten the illness that had driven him north to Land's End. Hours after his arrival, a certain intriguing young woman had interfered with his resolve to brood in solitude, and he was glad. Drifting off to sleep, he wondered how long she was planning to visit her uncle Henry.

The morning sun interrupted his dreams, and a platterful of bacon and eggs eased the grumbling of his stomach. Leaving his few dishes in the kitchen sink, Jonathan ventured outside. He finally found Henry Cudgerson hard at work painting the great iron fence facing the road. He remembered that the old caretaker wasn't much given to speech, but greeted him anyway.
“Nice morning.”
Henry didn’t even look up. “Aayup.”
Jonathan tried the semi-direct approach. “Charming girl, your niece. Is she around this morning?”
Henry dipped his brush in the paint and wiped the excess on the edge of the can. “Ain’t seen her.”
“Did she go into town already?”
“Don’t reckon so.” The old man adjusted the faded fisherman’s cap on his head. “Never heard I had a niece,” he finally volunteered before turning his attention fully back to his brushwork.
Then who the devil was she, and what had she been doing in his house? Jonathan’s own problems somehow seemed less important this morning than this perplexing girl in hot pants. It was a small mystery, but he was glad for the distraction.
Maybe she was still on the grounds. There was only one way off the estate, and Henry was diligently working by the gates. A narrow pathway from the lighthouse led down the cliff to the beach, but the cove below was a dead end, cut off by the sea on both sides.
Walking back across the fragrant meadow behind the house, Jonathan allowed his imagination to roam. Was his mystery girl a burglar, or just a neighbor whose curiosity about the old house had got the best of her? Why did she tell him she was Henry’s niece?
Maybe she didn’t even know who she was! A victim of amnesia, she could have been seeking clues to her own identity – but in the laundry room? Try again, Carlton.
But he momentarily forgot the mystery girl as he reached the narrow flagstone steps down to the lighthouse perched on the cliffside. His thoughts turned to the long summer days spent in play here with his cousin, Arthur. His aunt had constantly warned, “Now you boys have a good time, but be careful of those steps. One of you is going to break his neck there one of these days.” The youngsters had snickered, but one day Jonathan had slipped on a fog-moistened step. Arthur had grabbed him just in time.
There were over a hundred stone steps winding down and out to the farthest point of land. The long-abandoned lighthouse, poised at the foot of the steps, seemed smaller than he remembered.
What a glorious playhouse it had been for boys with vivid imaginations – a fortress from marauding pirates, the mighty lair of a wicked magician.
The lighthouse door creaked on its hinges, but the sunshine streaking through the windows dispelled any spookiness he might have felt. A yellowing 1971 calendar hung from a nail. Had it really been that long?
“So melancholy on a day as lovely as this?”
The sound of her dancing syllables sent a shiver down his spine. He turned, a smile already forming on his lips.
“Indeed, sir, that is a more pleasurable sight.”
It might have been the boots, but somehow he hadn’t noticed her diminutive stature last night, or the spattering of tiny freckles across her retroussé nose. A paisley scarf was tied Apache-style across her forehead, but the rest of her gleaming hair fell across the shoulders of her white Nehru jacket.
This time he introduced himself. “My name is Jonathan. Jonathan Carlton.”
“And mine is Molly. Molly . . . MacDougal.” Today she seemed the nervous one.
A GHOST OF A CHANCE

Now what? Should he tell her he knew she was an imposter? That “Uncle” Henry had no niece?

Instead, he invited her to accompany him on a picnic on the beach. She helped him pack the old willow basket, and they made their merry way down the steep path below the lighthouse, clear to the sand. The tide was low, and they spent the morning, pant legs rolled to their knees, exploring the pools of water trapped in the rocks. They delighted in each small discovery, and in each other.

Jonathan’s concerns evaporated in the sun that warmed their faces, though the wet sand beneath their bare feet did nothing to cool his fascination with his companion.

Even the normally strident gulls seemed in tune with her musical laughter as Molly discovered a hermit crab in a shell abandoned by its original inhabitant. “Far out,” she enthused.

Jonathan felt as if he’d been transported back to a time of carefree innocence. Together they built an elaborate sand castle.

Molly and Jonathan were children again as they knelt in the sand, cares left on the narrow pathway above them, but when he kissed her, she responded with womanly sensuality.

The wonder continued as they drew apart to gaze in each other’s eyes – hers of green that blazed with golden lights and his of gray shadowing the fate he could not escape.

“Perhaps,” she said finally, her breath seeming to catch in her throat, “we should partake of our fine luncheon.”

The spell was not broken by their ham sandwiches and store-bought cookies, as their pleasure in each other’s company continued, punctuated by their laughter as they frolicked in the surf.

The sun had long since reached its zenith and begun its descent when Jonathan finally gave in to his curiosity. His eyes twinkled as he asked, “Molly, how the devil did you get your hair caught in that old mangler last night?”

Her answer was simple. “Why, I was merely trying to iron it, to make it straight.”

He was confused. “Straight?” He couldn’t believe she’d want to change the glowing waves that framed her face. “But, Molly, it’s so beautiful as it is.”

“You are exceedingly gallant, Jonathan, but this mass of unruly tangles is hopelessly unfashionable.” She sighed. “Having straight hair would be so groovy.”

Jonathan politely refrained from laughing at her outdated slang.

“I realize men are not often interested in changing styles,” Molly continued, adjusting the high collar of her Nehru jacket, “but I can assure you that women pay attention to these things, even when –” She stopped, her emerald eyes widening. “In truth, Jonathan,” she said, the light in her eyes dimming, “I have been deceitful by omission . . . .”

He was dumbfounded. “What do you mean, you’re a ghost?”

“It’s true,” she said, a giant hiccup startling them both. “Oh, Jonathan,” she wailed, “I’m so very sorry.”

It was hard to believe the warm little body he held in the sunshine was an apparition, but he knew she was telling the truth, and held her all the more tightly.

Molly’s words tumbled out, unleashed after so many years of solitude. “My father built Land’s End as a wedding gift for my mother in 1862. You see, I’m very much older than you, dear
Jonathan,” she told him. “I was born here the last year of the War Between the States.” She took no notice of Jonathan’s startled reaction. “MacDougal is my family name, it is true, but I died a Carlton – though barely so.”

A terrible question plagued his mind as he realized the potential significance of her words. “But –” Jonathan hesitated, almost afraid to ask. “– you’re not my great-great-grandmother or anything like that, are you?”

She shook her head. “No, Jonathan, you’re not my kin, at least not directly. I did not leave any descendants.”

Her emerald eyes were demure, their fire banked for the moment. “It was on my wedding night –” her face colored again, and she kept her eyes lowered – “that I died. That day I had wed Mr. Arthur Carlton.”

It took Jonathan a moment to realize Molly’s groom must have been the first Arthur. He calculated quickly, concluding her husband must have been his cousin’s great-grandfather.

Molly spoke determinedly. “That is why I am still here – why I cannot leave Land’s End.”

He looked at her uncomprehendingly.

“My hundred years will be up this week, so I must discover who murdered me right away if I am ever to be free.”

The tide had long since turned, destroying the fragile castle they had constructed, the turrets of sand crumbling into the rising water.

Molly and Jonathan sat in the library in front of the fire. The flickering light illuminated the portrait above the mantel.

“I think the artist must have been in love with you,” he told her.

“No way,” she declared. Her choice of words, as usual, was an oddly charming combination of her own nineteenth-century speech sprinkled with slang from the recent past. “My dear father commissioned the portrait as a betrothal gift, and I only saw the artist once again. He returned to Land’s End to add the cameo to the painting. Papa had given it to me as a wedding present, and insisted it be painted in immediately. I was married the day after the portrait was finished . . .”

Jonathan completed her unspoken thought: “. . . and your life was over before the paint was even dry.”

She shrugged her slender shoulders as if the happenings of the previous century were of no importance. “It has been so long, I had forgotten the picture. I only uncovered it in the attic a few months ago, so I hung it over the fireplace for a change of decor. The same old furnishings eventually do get tiresome.”

“So that’s why I didn’t remember ever seeing it before. I knew I couldn’t have forgotten it.”

Her manner was primly coquettish. “Why thank you, kind sir.”

He kissed her for the second time. Her mouth was tender as it met his, and she tasted of vanilla. Spirit though she might be, he knew he would do anything for her.

They drew apart slowly. Her voice was barely more than a whisper, and the sound sent a delicious shiver down his spine. “I should swoon, as my stepmother always did when my father kissed her, but I shan’t risk missing a moment’s pleasure, dear Jonathan.”

She nestled in his arms in front of the fire. Jonathan had finally found the girl most men only dream of meeting. But he was still puzzled by something she’d said earlier. “Tell me what you
meant about your hundred years being nearly up.”

Molly drew away from him far enough so Jonathan could see the flickering flames reflected in her eyes. He could feel the fire she’d set in him, too . . .

“I merely meant that if I do not deduce the identity of the person responsible for my demise within a century of the crime, I must forever remain at Land’s End.” She sighed, the sound barely audible over the crackling of the fire. “It makes me sad, dear Jonathan, for I love this place, yet . . . I have so wanted to travel beyond those tall gates.”

Jonathan wasn’t sure he understood. “You mean you’ve been here ever since – why, you were here even when I visited as a boy. Why didn’t you make yourself known then?”

Molly bowed her head. “I was fearful that if people knew, they would never come back again. As it is, until you returned, no one had visited since the early nineteen-seventies.”

So that was why her wardrobe and expressions of speech were so dated.

Molly snuggled against his shoulder. “I’m so glad we are able to rap like this, Jonathan.”

He yawned, his eyelids feeling heavy. “I’m going to rest here in front of the fire for a bit. Please don’t leave, Molly.”

Her smile was angelic. “Now where else would I be going, Jonathan?”

It was still night when he awoke, the darkness relieved by the glow of the full moon through the high windows. Jonathan’s first thought was of Molly.

Her portrait smiled down at him, and he heard the peal of her laughter before she entered the library. She had changed into a very short skirt, her slim legs bare despite the coolness.

“There has not been as much change in the fashions over the past two decades as I expected.” Gesturing toward the magazines he had brought, Molly said, “Skirts are still very short, I see.”

“Darling Molly.” He reached over and touched her burnished hair, and as he did, the delicious curves of her lips beckoned as they had in her portrait. No delusion this – Molly was real, and as they held each other in front of the remaining embers, Jonathan vowed to spend the rest of his days with her.

He turned his head to see her image on the wall above. “How lovely you are, both then and now.”

“Would you like to see my gown?” she asked. “I did spend rather a lot of time making it.”

Of course he wanted to see it. He wanted to see her in it, which was why he found himself admiring Molly by the moonlight streaking through the window of the attic. She turned this way and that, modeling the yellow gown she’d last worn in the nineteenth century. She had put up her hair in the fashion of her portrait, and once again her fair shoulders rose delicately above the satin bodice. She was a vision, but one that did not disappear at his touch.

Jonathan wound the old gramophone for the waltz that filled the attic, the musical notes dispensing their own kind of magic. He bowed low before his lovely specter. “May I have the first dance?”

“You, sir,” Molly said, her delighted laughter harmonizing with the strains of Strauss, “may fill every line on my dance card.”

She was light on her feet, not seeming to mind her partner’s jeans and moccasin-clad feet as he twirled her around the floor of the attic until they were both giddy. As he held her tightly, her natural perfume rose to haunt his nostrils with her delicious, feminine scent.
Jonathan was startled momentarily the first time they passed the dusty full length mirror. He saw the reflection of his own eyes, but his outstretched arms were bare, and he appeared to be dancing alone.

"I fear we've danced the night away," Molly murmured as pre-dawn gray replaced the moonlight. Together they looked out the open window, across the edge of the meadow overlooking the calm sea.

Her voice was a whisper. "I'm certain there has never been a more lovely dawn since the beginning of time."
Jonathan agreed.

The banging on the front door had awakened him. Mumbling, Jonathan padded down the wide oak stairs in his bare feet. Streaming midday sunlight momentarily blinded him as he opened the front door.
"Good morning, Mr. Carlton," said an unfamiliar woman's voice, bright as the glare in the open doorway.
"G'morning," he managed, trying to focus on the figure before him. The house had been unoccupied for nearly twenty years - who in the world would be calling at Land's End?
The wide-brimmed straw hat was the first thing he was able to discern. It sported a bird's nest, complete with red-breasted robin, bobbing in time to the wearer's words.
"It is Mr. Carlton, isn't it?"
Jonathan nodded. A business card was thrust into his hand.
"You have that unmistakable Carlton visage, you know," the woman went on, her voice assuming a deliberate charm. "I've seen Arthur Carlton campaigning on television."
He could make out her mouth now, the raucous lipstick highlighting her words.
"Although, I must say -" she paused, pursing her mouth in a way he was sure was meant to be attractive - "you should be the one running for the Senate. May I come in?"
"Of course, Miss . . . uh -" he blinked at the card in his hand. Simone Rutherford, Real Estate Broker - "ah, Rutherford."
"Call me Simone," she purred, marching past Jonathan and into the library. She made herself comfortable on the settee.
Jonathan had no idea why she'd come, but she looked like a woman who'd let a man know exactly what she wanted. "I'm here to make you a lot of money."
The look on his face must have expressed his astonishment as she explained, "You have a very valuable estate here, Mr. Carlton, and I have a buyer willing to pay fair market value. According to the county records, you own the property jointly with Arthur Carlton the fourth. Are there any other heirs?"
"No, we're the last of the Carltons."
She looked relieved. "I have spoken to your cousin this morning, and found him quite amenable to a profitable sale, and so -"
He stopped her right there. "Land's End is not for sale at any price." He stood. "Thank you for stopping by, Miss -"
“Simone,” she corrected, her smile still fixed in place. “If you ever –”
“If I ever decide to sell, I’ll let you know,” he told her, though Jonathan knew he would never change his mind about selling Land’s End. He opened the front door. “Good day.”
Henry Cudgerson was coming up the steps as Jonathan opened the door. He glared at the real estate agent. “What in tarnation are you doing inside the gates? I told you not to bother Mr. Jonathan.”
The old man expended a month’s worth of words on the departing figure. “I told that woman not to trouble you and Mr. Arthur. I must of chased her off a dozen times or so. She’s gotta be up to no good, tryin’ to put a man outa his home like –” He stopped, evidently embarrassed by the rush of words.
Jonathan tried to reassure him. “That’s okay, Henry. No harm done.”
The caretaker went off to check the lock on the gates, still muttering, as Jonathan went to answer the ringing telephone.
The voice on the other end was practiced, as if for a press-conference microphone. Arthur said, “Listen, old man, I’ve been contacted by a realtor up there. She says she can get a lot of money for the old place, and that sure sounds good to me.” He was smoothly persuasive. “I’m sure we could both find uses for the mon –”
Jonathan smiled at Molly, who’d poked her head into the library. He didn’t give Arthur the opportunity to finish. “No way, cousin. There’s not a ghost of a chance I’ll sell, and that’s final.” Jonathan committed a little prudent deception as he changed the subject. “I thought I’d do a little delving into the family history while I’m here, maybe enough research for a book. After all, the Carltons are a pretty well-known family.” He let Arthur have it broadside. “Who knows, with your rising political star, it could even become a bestseller.”
“Of course it would,” Arthur exclaimed, enthusiastically. “That could really heat up the campaign.”
“I thought maybe you could track down some of the old family papers for me. I’m especially interested in anything about your great-grandfather, the first Arthur.”
Arthur sounded wary. “What sort of papers?”
“Oh, nothing special. Just letters, diaries, things that wouldn’t already be in the history books. The old guy cut quite a swath in the Senate in his day. Of course, his record as a hero in the Indian wars helped.”
“Well, he’s your ancestor, too.” Arthur’s truculence wasn’t entirely surprising.
“Not technically,” Jonathan corrected. “Our great-grandfathers were brothers, so I’m not a direct descendant, as you are.” His tone became casual. “Anyway, see what you can dig up for me in the next day or two.”
Replacing the receiver in its cradle, Jonathan looked fondly at the apparition beside him. “How about a walk, Molly? There are some things we need to discuss.”
The gulls were back, circling the lighthouse as they rode the currents of air fresh from the Atlantic. The breeze ruffled Molly’s hair, and the red-gold glints shone brightly against the background of the cloudless sky.
“Something has been bothering me, Jonathan.” Molly was clearly embarrassed. “I must confess to eating some of your ice cream on your first night here. It had been so very long since I’d had any,” she explained, “the last time was before my wedding.”
He squeezed her hand. “Such a small transgression, Molly. There’s plenty left.” He grew serious. “There is something I need to know, though – does everyone become a ghost like you?” The question had spilled out, born of his need to know if there was a future for them.

“Becoming a ghost only happens in . . . special circumstances, Jonathan.”

He wasn’t certain he understood. “You mean you became a ghost only because you were murdered?”

The green pools of her eyes grew sad as she nodded. “And I shall remain forever at Land’s End, for I have failed to solve the mystery of the crime against me.”

He had to know. “So if . . . I die of natural causes –”

Molly nodded again. “You will be lost to me forever.”

_Nice try, Carlton._ There went his last hope. Jonathan watched the whitecaps dancing below.

The only thing left to do was to help Molly if he could. “So if you discover the identity of your murderer in time, you’ll be free to go wherever you want?”

“Yes, Jonathan. Free to roam forever more wherever I wish – even to Paris.” She turned to him, her expression that of a wistful child. “I was going there on my honeymoon. But on the morning after the wedding, on the day I was to depart, I was found” – Molly roughly brushed her hand across her eyes as if angry at the moist drops there – “still in my nightdress. It was a real bummer.”

Jonathan frowned. He’d already started the old research ball rolling with Arthur, but he needed more specific information if he was to help Molly. Time was running out for both of them.

In the kitchen, as the two of them dished huge scoops of ice cream, the subject came up again. Licking her spoon with glee as she leaned back in her chair, Molly reminisced. “The last time I had ice cream before you came was the night of the wedding rehearsal.”

Jonathan wasn’t sure he wanted to hear about Molly’s wedding to another, even if the groom had long since departed. “Tell me about it, Molly,” he nevertheless coaxed.

“Papa had always loved games. We had a scavenger hunt that night. Everything in the ice house was used to make ice cream. We didn’t have electricity in those days, so anything cold was a rare treat in the summer. We’d set up tables behind the house, and everyone ate outside. After dark, the fireflies danced around the tables as Xena teased me mercilessly.” Molly explained, “She was my maid of honor because her mother had married Papa the year before. Xena said I was eating so much ice cream I wouldn’t fit into my wedding gown the next day. Arthur finally had to lean over me to tell her to stop.”

Jonathan encouraged Molly to continue. “It sounds like a festive party.”

“Not entirely, dear Jonathan,” – Molly put down her spoon and pushed her chair away from the kitchen table – “for Papa seemed sad that evening. Not even Verona could console him.”

Jonathan pushed his own chair away from the table. “So your father was sad about losing a daughter to marriage?”

“Oh, no, he wanted me to get married. But I wanted to become a designer of fine fashions. He said no daughter of his should ever work for a living.” Her sigh was resigned.

The ringing of the phone interrupted their conversation.

“Jonathan Carlton?” The voice was deep and blustery, with a trace of the deep South.

“Yes?”

“Bill Travis here. Mah friends call me ‘Big Bill,’ and I’d be honored, suh, if you’d do the same.”
Jonathan was curious, but cautious. "What can I do for you?"

"Mah company is Travis Development Corporation, and I'm interested in your property. Don't you go sayin' no till I have a chance to make you an offer. I guarantee, suh, it will be one you won't be able to refuse."

"I've already refused one offer today, Mr. Travis."

"I know you have — it was mine. I made the mistake of sending the little woman up there, when I shoulda come mahself."

"That was your wife?"

The laughter was self-conscious. "Yessuh, that Simone is one hot ticket, ain't she? Insists on doin' business under her maiden name. Anyway, Mr. Carlton, I'd like to meet with you mahself. Please don't turn me down 'till you hear mah offer — it's a good one. How's tomorrow morning? I can be there a little past nine if you'll have that caretaker of yours unlock the main gates."

"I don't —" Jonathan was ready to put an end to this business, but he was interrupted again.

"I just talked to your cousin, and he's going to meet us there at the lighthouse so I can show you both mah plans for turnin' Land's End into Maine's finest seaside resort."

So Arthur was coming up. Maybe he'd found the records Jonathan had requested. "Alright, Mr. Travis, I'll see you in the morning."

Molly joined him as he hung up the phone. "I guess the rest of my ice cream melted while I was on the phone," he told her.

Her fair cheeks grew pink. "I fear I have been greedy again."

He was enchanted, that was it. This ephemeral creature had put him under a spell and stolen his heart away. "Etiquette is different now, Molly," he assured her. "Besides, I hereby give you permission to eat my ice cream anytime you wish."

Molly turned, running from the room.

Nearly breathless, Jonathan caught up to her at the top of the stairs. "Molly, darling, what's wrong?"

She took the handkerchief he proffered. "I do not mean to trouble you so," she sniffled, "but that is exactly what Mr. Carlton — Arthur — told me on the night before our marriage." She returned his handkerchief. "I ate both Xena's and Arthur's after I gobbled up my own. She was furious at me for eating her ice cream, but Arthur acted very nice about it, just like you. I . . . I just couldn't stand to see it melt, and both dishes on either side of me were just sitting there unattended."

Jonathan wished all their problems could be so easily solved. "Molly, I'm going to town to buy you all the ice cream you can eat."

"Dear, dear Jonathan, please don't leave me." She sniffled one last time. "Perhaps you could send Henry for the ice cream . . . ."

How could he have spent his adult life away from Land's End? If only he had known Molly was here he would have — what? Returned sooner to find a love that was hopeless? Enough. Right now they both needed to concentrate their efforts on setting Molly free — even though he didn't have any idea what they were looking for here in the attic.

Molly tackled a stack of band-boxes, while Jonathan rummaged through a portmanteau he'd
discovered in a corner.

"What have you found, Jonathan?"

"Just some knickknack," he called back across the clutter-strewn floor. "It’s nothing." It was a mirror he held, its oval wood frame designed to rest on a vanity table. The glass had been etched. He carefully wrapped it in a scrap of calico and hid it under a lace-covered pillow.

What was that rolled up in the crocheted baby bonnet? Jonathan held up an old cork-topped bottle. "Didn’t you MacDougals ever throw anything away?" he asked.

"What is that?" she asked, coming over to his side.

"It’s a medicine bottle." He squinted at the faded ink on the label. "Laudanum," he read aloud. "Did your father take this stuff a lot?"

"Never. Papa used to get that for Verona. She always kept some in her nightstand. It must have worked well, for she was never ill."

Jonathan grunted. "I don’t doubt that. She probably felt pretty good all the time if she kept nipping at this bottle – it’s opium, you know."

Molly nodded, then changed the subject. "Tell me truthfully, Jonathan, you suspect my . . . my husband, don’t you?"

He chose his words carefully. "We have to consider everyone a potential suspect. What can you tell me about him?"

"Xena introduced us. He lived next door to Verona before she married Papa. To tell the truth, I didn’t know him very well."

"Then why did you marry him?"

Molly turned away, her face in the shadow. "I know it sounds foolish, but you must understand it seemed the proper thing at the time. Papa was having financial problems. The MacDougals had always been land-rich and cash-poor, and Mr. Carlton was very well off. He had big plans to run for the Senate. And though he never spoke of it, his cavalry record was distinguished. Before he started courting me, Verona said he’d been rather a ladies’ man. I can tell you he was considered quite a catch, and Papa welcomed him, at first, when he asked for my hand."

Jonathan was intrigued in spite of himself. "Then what happened?"

Molly shrugged. "I truly don’t know, Jonathan. The day before our engagement party, Papa received a letter, which he took to the library. A little while later, he told me I must break my engagement, then took off on his horse. When Papa returned, he locked himself in the library all night long. The next morning he told me he’d made a mistake and that the wedding was not to be canceled after all."

Jonathan lost his concentration as he looked at the lovely spirit beside him. He could almost see Molly as the artist had seen her, the cameo around her slender neck. He closed his eyes for a moment, picturing Molly as she’d been nearly a century later as they’d waltzed to the scratchy strains of Strauss the night before. A rare girl this, one who hadn’t changed in ninety-nine years.

Wait a minute – something had been different last night.

". . . as Papa placed the cameo around my neck. ‘Molly, m’girl,’ he said, ‘keep this locket always, for it contains the key to happiness.’" It didn’t contain a real key, of course, but a miniature of my mother. Papa always did like to make me figure things out. I think he meant true love is the path to happiness. What do you think?"

"Where is your cameo locket, Molly?"
Her face clouded. “It disappeared long ago.”
Jonathan’s voice was grim. “I think we’d better find it, Molly. It’s our only clue.”

“Oh, Jonathan, this is hopeless,” cried Molly as she looked beneath the books stacked on the oak desk in the library. “We do not even know with certainty my locket is at Land’s End.”
“You didn’t try the center drawer,” Jonathan reminded her.
“I can’t. Papa was the only one who had the key.”
“I’ll go get some tools.”
“Wait a minute, Jonathan, I’m trying to think of the last time I had my cameo . . . oh, I just can’t remember.”
“Let’s start at the beginning, Molly. Your father gave you the locket the night before the wedding, right?”
She nodded. “And I wore it with my wedding dress as something new. My mother’s gown was something old, the locket was new, my —”
Time was running out. “What about after the wedding?”
Molly’s voice was hesitant. “I don’t remember the reception very well. I . . . I was somewhat nervous, and Papa looked so glum. My glass seemed to be always filled with champagne, and I think I must have gotten a tiny bit tipsy. Xena even had to help me up the stairs. We were to stay in the master bedroom that night.”
“Were you still wearing the locket?”
“I remember the chain caught on the buttons of my nightdress. I was still giddy from the champagne, and there was another glass on the nightstand, so I drank it while waiting for . . . I remember feeling terribly woozy, so I rested my head on the lace pillow . . . I remember nothing after that.”
“Did your husband . . . ?” He couldn’t ask.
“I don’t remember seeing Arthur after I retired.” Her cheeks bloomed pink. “I fear I do not recall anything of my wedding night.” She twirled a single strawberry blonde lock around her finger. “The next thing I knew, I was all laid out in the parlor in my wedding dress.”
“Still wearing your locket?”
Molly frowned, trying to picture her own funeral. “I remember Verona fainting, and my gown and . . . yes, I still had it!” Her hand had gone to her throat with the realization the locket probably had been long since buried. “Wait, I remember Arthur coming up to me. He leaned over, his eyes so sad. He kissed me for the second and last time, but . . . I can’t remember seeing my cameo after that.”
“He removed the locket when he learned over your, er, body?”
“That scoundrel took the locket Papa gave me!” cried Molly.
Jonathan refrained from pointing out the bereaved groom might have wanted a keepsake of his stricken bride. The idea that the first Arthur Carlton was the guilty party had a certain appeal, though he had to acknowledge stepmothers had a reputation for wickedness. If Verona had been nipping at her medicine, the opium certainly could have clouded her judgment. Was jealousy of Angus MacDougal’s darling daughter a motive for murder? Possibly, since Molly’s father was probably still pining for his first wife.

Action was more important than conjecture at this point. Resuming their exploration, the
amateur sleuths found nothing else to shed any light on the purloined locket. They tapped walls, lifted rugs, and poked fireplace bricks clear through till morning,—all to no avail.

Jonathan glanced at his watch. Nearly nine. "I'd better get down to the lighthouse. Our friendly neighborhood real estate developer will be there soon."

"I shall accompany you, Jonathan. The fog is dense, and I know the path well."

Molly held his hand as they walked toward the cliff. The opaque moisture in the air seemed to insulate them from the rest of the world, but it wasn't long before Jonathan heard the sounds of the surf below, crashing against the rocks. Other sounds were less distinct, and he knew the fog was distorting his perception.

Molly tightened her grip on his hand. "Careful, Jonathan."

He looked down, the mist swirling at his feet. He was about to take the first step without seeing it. "We'd better wait here for Travis."

Molly kissed his cheek. "I'll go on down and wait inside the lighthouse." She was obviously still concerned about others seeing her.

"Take care."

Deflected by the mist, her words seemed to come from another place. "My dying is already done, Jonathan. I have no need to fear now."

The air was chill, and he was glad of the sweater he'd worn. He was aware of the angry water hissing unseen between the jagged rocks below. There was a footfall behind him to his left. He turned, expecting to see his visitor emerging from the mist.

Instead, Jonathan felt a blow from behind. He fell to the fog-dampened earth. His arm scraped against a rock, hard, ripping his pullover.

Though still on his knees, his reaction was instinctive as he lunged toward his attacker, toward the dark figure in the thick white world. He missed, grabbing only moist air.

It was the kick that took him down completely. The skin above his eyes had opened, and Jonathan was doubly blinded—first by the fog, and now by the blood that quickly veiled his vision. Tensing his already weary muscles, he called, "Who are you?" into the fog, stalling for time to gather his strength.

Even as he felt the next blow, he grabbed the wool-clad arm that had delivered the punch. He held on to his assailant, digging his fingers into the rough fibers.

Jonathan felt himself sliding as he was relentlessly pushed toward the first of the rocky steps below, the dark figure above pressing his advantage. Another blow lifted him into the fog. Scrambling as he landed, he grasped for a handhold on the slippery rocks even as his body swayed.

He sensed, rather than saw, the figure looming above him. Jonathan shook his head, clearing his eyes, and saw the cameo locket on the rock by his grasping hands, lying, its case open, where it had fallen from his adversary's pocket.

Jonathan swung his legs, desperately seeking a toehold, but the fog had no substance. He thought of Molly, waiting in the lighthouse, unaware the man she loved was losing strength as his fingers slid closer to the edge of the rocks.

He reached for the golden chain. He could see her face now, but only in his mind's eye. He fell, and the cry of Molly's name mingled with the crash of the surf as the swirling waters claimed him.
“My dear sweet Jonathan.” I cradled him in my arms on the beach as the fog lifted around us.

He sat, holding his head. “But I feel fine,” he said, bewildered, looking up toward the cliff where he’d fallen.

“That’s to be expected,” I told him. “After all, I haven’t had a sick day in the past century.” I knew Jonathan would eventually adjust. When he kissed me, I knew our situation could only get better.

“I found your cameo,” he told me a few moments later, his gray eyes smiling, but my hopes of someday being able to leave Land’s End were temporarily dashed when I saw the locket was empty of anything but the tiny picture of my mother.

Jonathan reassured me. “Together we’ve already discovered the clues we need. I think we can solve your murder now, and maybe even my own,” he said as he led me back to the house.
Solution

The library was as we had left it. "You see, Molly?" Jonathan said, pointing to my portrait.

"Not like Pears," I said, "I think it's some sort of painting of the queen. Just behind the cameo were two pass keys. I recognize the names, though I heard them in a hundred voices."

"Passes' geek!" I cried, turning it over towards it.

The look inside reflected the greater part not been opened since the last century. Inside, we'd called barmen, who, with deep breath, told us where our original was. "I know who used it," Molly said, "scanning the sheets.

"We'll take it." Arthur laughed. "And if I knew when I discovered the key was in the drawer, I'd have known when I discovered the key was in the drawer.

"No, Molly." Jonathan said trenchantly. He told me to wait while he fetched something from the desk. He was back in a minute, carrying a calico-wrapped object. "I found this earlier," he said.

"But how do I print the story?" I said. "I had it last time I took it."

If it ever happened that Arthur ever claimed to more than one girl, "Jonathan said bently, "as I exam-"

SO: comes A.M. + X.M.

Of course, Arthur caught and Xena MacDougal. I should have suspected there was something between them when they both disappeared at the same time without finishing their ice cream. What a fool I'd been all those years! But my eyes were singing. It was with regret not tears. "So which one did you choose?"

Jonathan took my hand. "Xena's the one. She knows her partner. Keep that medicine in the medicine chest."

But why would Arthur claim to love me if he was in love with my step-sister?"

"He wanted it all," Jonathan said. "He wanted Xena and I. And I'd End. Not to mention Ill the other variables MacDougal properties.

""He's right," I answered. "I don't understand anything."

"I'm right," he said, "in these events. Jonathan said. "And the End was your's along with half the rest of the county. Your father may have pulled the hose for your mother as a wedding gift, but the land and the responsibilities that went with marriage always MacDougal's gift. Remember, the first polio is assurance. The problem was not a scandalous pair with your father's vision."

"Even before the wedding."

"Then why would Pears let me marry him?"

"Arthur caught and pointed out your father's outstanding debts. And Angus MacDougal contumely. They wasn't happy enough. It was the only way to protect our
"In the interest of your being able to execute the plan without the men knowing of it.

"I still hedge, I understand everything. Why did Papa think the locket would protect me?"

"Your father's least thruster. I know he didn't want to hurt me further. I was left on your father's
to recover it, the one that must have sent him unscrupulous to Canada's. After he told you the

"wheezing was off."

My curiosity shot all these years was nearly overwhelming.

"Just another experiment." "I'm from the commanding officer's desk here to get

be informed immediately for correspondence."

"But Arthur is planning to run for office based on his record as a hero of the Indian wars." I

plugged not understanding it all.

Joanna continued, as if he were back at the university giving one of his lectures on American

history. "You father's equally ridiculous this letter would give your protection if you ever read any

problems with Arthur. In June 1876, the day before the battle at Little Big Horn, I've

signed, General Custer, Custer.

It was obvious my locket wasn't the only thing Arthur Caktion had."

We locked out the window, the moronic sun blazing across the last remnants of the eastier light.

A large man peeled Henry as the two of them led someone to the stairs. Can that bulging in the

groin.

"Poor Mr. Johnston, the old caretaker said his cup in his hand."

"But we couldn't find him, there's no one, said the larger man to the scrawny, musty goodness, he

began in some classes."

The specific grids, I waste any time. "Arthur Caktion the lesson, you're under arrest for the

number of your cousin, Johnston."

So great Curation, Arthur was the one who literally knocked me off. He must have found the evil

get the idea, that's his last stand, with Molly's stool, the locket, when he

went through the family papers as I'd requested. He apparently preserved my story well writing up

the family history. The newspaper was missed, and his brother's caution was in my dustbin.

was another's powder, however.

All things considered. It angered well. Curation, Arthur seriously did everyone a favor. The public

was spread a nonsense, pollution when he went to jail, and I was paying muddled, I got to go

with Molly.

"Where would you like to go on your honeymoon, darling?"

"Well, my first husband promised me Paris."

"But Molly, bro's the one who set you up for number."

"Precisely, braving Jonathan - that's why I never got there. Do you think it's changed much in

the last hundred years?"