MURDER IN THE WIND

A Mystery Jigsaw Thriller with a Secret Puzzle Image

Story by Susan Kenney
It was a bright and sunny August morning off the rocky coast of Maine. My husband Dan and I had been cruising for several days on our twenty-six foot sloop the Tailwind, weaving our way leisurely in and out among the many islands in the upper bay. As usual, we had risen early and enjoyed a hearty breakfast in the cockpit, relishing the peace and quiet and spectacular view. Then we upped anchor and set out for our next destination, a good day’s sail downeast. We decided to take a shortcut between two islands and were heading across the bay in their direction when we spotted a windjammer moving out from behind one of them. Her topsails were set, her flags were flying, and her distinctive tanbark sails were so faded they looked the color of dusty rose. As we watched, she came about in the deceptively stately way schooners have, and headed off down the bay at a surprisingly good clip.

It took us a good while tacking across the wind to reach the islands, and as we started through the passage, we could see a handsome yacht about forty feet in length tied up to a big fluorescent orange mooring ball about fifty yards from shore. It was then that I spotted the young woman waving frantically at us.

“Looks like trouble, Dan. We’d better head in and see if we can help.”

“Aye, aye,” Dan replied, putting the tiller over. In no time at all we were within a few feet of the Hinckley Sou’wester, close enough for me to notice the name Match This with New York, New York as port of call across the transom. Obviously not a yacht belonging to the owner of the island then, even though she was on a permanent mooring close to the beach. A defector from the annual New York Yacht Club cruise, perhaps? But this was no time for speculation — the young woman had tossed the orange rag she was waving at us to one side and was alternately wringing her hands and beckoning wildly.

As Dan carefully brought the Tailwind alongside, I looped a couple of fenders over the side and was just about to throw the young woman a line when I noticed her right arm was wrapped from wrist to elbow in some kind of splint. I quickly reached up and grabbed the toe-rail of the larger boat, holding us steady while Dan ran forward with a docking line and made fast. Meanwhile the young woman had sunk down on the deck and was sobbing uncontrollably, whether in relief or distress I couldn’t tell. “Thank God you’re here,” she finally choked out. “I thought no one would ever come! I’m . . . I’m Jill Jones, and it’s . . . it’s my husband, Jerry! He’s . . . there.” Breaking into fresh sobs, she covered her eyes with her right hand, and pointed toward the beach.

Dan and I turned to look. Sure enough, there was a man lying on the beach next to a small double-ended dinghy. The tide was just beginning to go out, and the man and the dinghy were both a foot or so above the high water mark. He was sprawled face down with his head turned to one side — a big man, tall and muscular. He looked as though he might have been sleeping, but I didn’t really think so. The beach was long, crescent-shaped and quite narrow, mostly hard shingle, littered with rocks of varying sizes ranging from pebbles to small boulders. Not a very comfortable place for napping.

“He took the dinghy out late last night,” Jill continued in a slightly less distraught tone. “I fell asleep waiting for him, and I woke up just a little while ago. That’s when I realized he hadn’t come back. I looked all over, and then I saw him lying on the beach. I called and called to him, but . . . but he doesn’t answer.” Her voice started to quaver again. “There was no way I could get to him, and I’m . . . I’m afraid he’s badly hurt. Oh, please, please help me!” With that she dissolved once more into sobs, sinking into a small disheveled heap on the deck of the Hinckley.
“Take it easy, Jill,” I said. “Of course we’ll help you.” I turned to my husband. “Dan, why don’t the two of you take our dinghy into the beach and see what you can do? I’ll put out a Mayday.” Dan nodded, and went to untie our dinghy. Jill did not move from her collapsed position on the deck. I nodded to Dan to go on in without her.

“Permission to come aboard?” I said, observing the usual ship’s etiquette even in what was obviously a dire emergency.

“Permission granted,” Jill said distractedly in a small voice, and continued weeping, her hands over her face.

I hoisted myself onto the other boat and put my arm around her shoulders. “Hi. I’m Dot van Dine,” I said in a soothing tone. “I’m sure everything will be fine. Dan will see to your husband. Let’s go below and radio for help.”

Jill stood up, her eyes averted from the beach, and led me down the companionway into the interior of the yacht. I tried not to gasp; I’d never before seen such a lavish interior on anything that floated. The whole inside was paneled in mahogany and varnished to a satiny glow, with brass fittings and seats upholstered in a velvety material, bookcases and cupboards with louvered doors, a dropleaf table abaft the mast. There was a full galley with a gimbeled stove and a real refrigerator to my right, and to my left, a navigation station complete with so many instruments and screens — depth-sounder, Loran, SatNav and more — that it looked more like the control panel of a space shuttle.

Jill flung herself down on one of the sofa-like berths. “Jill?” I queried. “Do you want to send out the Mayday?” I was perfectly capable of doing so myself, but after all, this wasn’t my boat.

“I . . . I . . . don’t know how,” Jill said in a small voice. “We haven’t been married very long, and this was our first time out together. Jerry was going to teach me, but . . .” She broke into fresh sobs and flopped over, burying her face in the soft upholstery. Well, that explained why she hadn’t radioed for help over the universal distress channel that’s always available. I picked up the receiver, turned to Channel 16, and sent out the Mayday. In less that a minute I heard the reassuring voice of the Marine Patrol telling me they were on their way.

Meanwhile, where was Dan, and what was taking him so long? I went up on deck and saw him pacing the beach near the tree line. I called to him, and he looked up, then slowly shook his head. I watched as he walked to where he’d left our dinghy — the tide was streaming out quickly now. He pushed off and rowed the few dozen yards back to the boats. His face was grim. “He’s been dead for some time, several hours at least,” he said softly as he tied the dinghy up to a cleat. “Looks like a skull fracture; the whole side of his head is bashed in. We’ll have to break the news to Jill.” We looked at each other for a moment, then I went down below.

“How could this have happened, it must have been some sort of terrible accident! Oh, no! Jerry! Oh, no!” Jill screamed when I told her. Then she rushed into the forward cabin and slammed the door. After a few moments, I knocked on the door and asked her if she wanted anything, coffee, tea, brandy — there was full stock of liquor on board — and was answered by a faint “No, thank you.”

I went back into the main cabin. Dan had followed me down below. “Phew, some ship’s quarters,” he commented, then added grimly, “For all the good it did him. He certainly won’t be enjoying it now.” Dan sighed, sat down heavily on the starboard quarter berth, and began thumbing through some of the books. “I guess I’ll take some of that coffee, if you’re making it.”
“So what took you so long on the beach?” I asked when we had taken our cups of coffee up on deck. “You were pacing around for quite a while after you checked the body.”

“I didn’t want to say anything in front of Jill, but I’m almost positive it wasn’t an accident. Oh, there’s a rock with some blood on it next to him all right, but I don’t believe he fell and hit his head. All the other rocks of that size above the high water mark are pretty well embedded in the clay, and this one’s just lying there loose. If you ask me, someone did him in.”

“But who . . . ?” I looked from Dan to the beach. For the first time I noted a hand-lettered sign. STAY OUT! ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING! THIS MEANS YOU! it read in big black letters. Behind it I could just make out a mown path leading to a sprawling, slightly run-down looking white farmhouse not too far from the beach. There were similar signs tacked up on trees at intervals going off to the right of the beach. The only other dwelling visible on the island was some distance off to the left of the farmhouse, a ramshackle place with a collapsed barn behind it, sitting on a small rise in what appeared to be an overgrown pasture running down to the beach on that side.

“Hmm, not very hospitable,” I said. But I could also see the remains of a good-sized bonfire on the beach, with some charred sticks of wood and other debris so close to the sign that it looked like the heat had curled it and the smoke had smudged it gray. Several piles of clam and mussel shells with red lobster fragments mixed in were in the process of being washed away by the tide, and there was one lone beer bottle bobbing along the shore.

“But it looks as though the Joneses — and quite a few of theirs — must not have paid too much attention.”

Dan nodded. “There’s more. I also found these.” From his shirt pocket he pulled several scraps of paper. “I probably shouldn’t have touched anything,” he said, “but they were blowing away, and I think they may be important.” There were eight wrinkled fragments, obviously from a single sheet that had been torn straight across several times and then crumpled. Across one torn piece I could make out the word “TEMPO . . .”

“What is this?” I asked. “Song lyrics?”

Dan picked up another scrap, trying to piece them together. “No, look at this: ‘By order of the Court . . .’ It’s a legal document of some kind.” Just then we heard the roar of engines. A khaki-colored motorboat with twin outboards and a big canvas dodger roared into the cove, its huge antenna whipping in the breeze. The Marine Patrol had arrived.

It didn’t take the two Marine Patrol officers very long to realize they were out of their depth. They had run their boat up one the beach, taken one look, and radioed the State Police, the Medical Examiner’s office, and just for good measure, the County Sheriff’s department. Jill had seemed a bit more composed when I last checked on her, so Dan and I rowed in to meet the officers. They had covered the body with a tarp, and were standing nearby, talking to one another while they waited for reinforcements.

“Wonder what old McGrouche will think of this,” said the older of the two, nodding his head knowingly back toward the farmhouse behind us.

“We’ll soon find out,” said the other, who was facing inland. “Here he comes now, and it looks like he’s loaded for bear, as usual.”

Sure enough, hustling down the mown path with an apoplectic look on his face was an old man in dark green work pants and a heavy wool sweater, wearing a black fisherman’s cap. He was gesticulating wildly, and you didn’t have to read lips to recognize he was mouthing some pretty strong imprecations.
“His real name’s McGrath,” the first officer said under his breath to Dan and me. “But he’s got such a reputation around here that everyone calls him McGrouch. His family used to own the whole island, did some salt-water farming, lobstering, clamming, got by all right the way most of those old-timers did. He’s the only one left now, and he’s gotten more and more reclusive. He’s practically a hermit, far as that goes. Hates to see anyone set foot on ‘his’ island.”

“Crazy as a loon,” interjected the younger officer, shaking his head. “Been known to wave an old flintlock at folks who try to come onto the island.” He chuckled. “For all the good that’d do him — darned thing won’t shoot. Best he could do is club ’em to death if he had a mind.”

“Can’t do a thing about this stretch of beach here, though, at least not legally,” continued the first officer, “because he doesn’t own the property. That adjoining piece of land with the old abandoned farmhouse there belonged to another branch of the family, and got bought a while back by some rich guy from out of state, I hear.”

By now McGrouch — or rather McGrath — was close enough for us to hear what he was yelling. “What the blazes is going on here! What kind of collywobblie is this! What are all you people doing here? Can’t anybody read? First I get the skinboat crowd riling half the night, fit to set the whole island afire, and then that daggoned pireete …” He stopped abruptly, both in his tracks and his tirade, and stared at the tarpaulin-covered body. “What the dickens is that doing there?” he snarled, as though it were just one more incursion into his territory. His seeming lack of any real concern made his initial shock far from convincing.

“Okay, just take it easy, Nate,” the older officer said sternly. “We’d better have a talk, you and me. Let’s just go along up to the house …” With a nod to his colleague, he turned the old man right around and marched him back up the path.

“He’ll get the story out of him,” the remaining officer said, “and keep him out of our hair until the rest of them get here.”

Which turned out to be momentarily, as with a roar of several more engines, a big motorboat and a good-sized seaplane pulled into the cove. In no time at all the beach was crawling with various law enforcement officials, who quickly came to the same conclusion Dan had, that however Jerry Jones had met his death, someone else was certainly responsible. The area was quickly cordoned off with yellow plastic banners reading POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS.

“About all I can tell you is that death occurred due to a sharp blow to the head with a blunt object,” the deputy medical examiner declared after she’d finished her preliminary examination. “Judging by the temperature of the body and absence of rigor mortis, I’d put the time of death at about four to six hours ago, or roughly between three and five a.m.” She pulled off her gloves and walked away. Dan and I watched as the officers bundled the body into one of those zippered black plastic bags — that ugly, antiseptic modern version of a canvas shroud — and removed it for autopsy in the seaplane.

The two detectives from the State Police took charge. We all sat down together in the lounge of a surprisingly spacious — and luxurious — double-decker fishing launch, which one of the detectives explained had been confiscated during a drug bust and turned into a floating State Police barracks. After taking down our names and a brief statement from both of us, they turned their attention to Jill Jones.

“We’d been back from our honeymoon for a while,” Jill began, “and were getting bored with Manhattan, so we decided to sail up here to see the land Jerry’d bought on this island last
winter. Jerry had had a mooring put in, and we were going to stay a night or two so that Jerry could look the place over. It's the piece of land running up from the beach, the pasture and the old rundown farmhouse, about one hundred acres all told. Jerry had big plans for it; he was going to put in a helicopter pad, and build a house, a real showplace, and then develop the shore property — there's over a thousand feet of shore frontage — as a very exclusive vacation resort. He thought he might have some trouble with the neighbor — apparently the old man's family has been around here a long time and we were told he has some pretty old-fashioned ideas. In fact, he's been a little troublesome, not to say downright rude and recalcitrant, threatening this and threatening that. Anyway, Jerry was going to try to talk some sense into him while we were here."

"And did he?"

"I . . . I don't think so. Mr. McGrath just seemed to get more and more unreasonable, but Jerry was never one to run from a fight." Jill paused briefly, then looked around at us with wide, brimming eyes. "I guess he didn't, did he?"

Sergeant LaRue's expression was noncommittal. "All we know at this point, Mrs. Jones, is that whoever killed your husband had to be either on the island already, or have a way to get on it and then back off again. Can you think of anyone other than you and Mr. McGrath — ?"

"Why, Sergeant!" Jill gasped. "Surely you don't think I had anything to do with Jerry's death! Why, I . . . I loved my husband!"

"I'm sure you did, Mrs. Jones," LaRue said not unkindly. "I'm merely asking if there is anyone else who might have seen or heard anything that might help us learn how your husband was killed. For instance, were there any other boats in the area during this time?"

Jill sat back, crinkling her brow. "There were boats going through here all afternoon, little ones, big ones, even a few of those huge windjammers that seem to be all over the place around here."

"Did any of them stop?"

"Yes, one the windjammers — why only one I don't know; maybe they draw lots or something — anyway, they anchored farther out in the cove late yesterday and immediately started having a party. Some of the group rowed over and invited us to join them."

"And did you?"

"For a while. But then my arm started to hurt, so Jerry brought me back to our boat. I had sprained it badly earlier that day — that's when we put the splint on — and it wasn't bothering me that much at first, but in the course of the evening it started getting really painful." She winced, and cradled her injured right arm in her lap. "Now I'm afraid it may even be broken."

"So your husband brought you back to your boat?" Jill nodded. "And then what happened?"

"Jerry helped me on board, but the pain kept getting worse; I was in tears. Jerry offered to stay with me, but the windjammer crowd was heading into the island for a clambake and bonfire on the beach, and I knew Jerry wanted to join the party, so I told him to go ahead. I took some painkillers and went to sleep."

"And when did you discover your husband hadn't come back?"

"When I woke up this morning," Jill replied, her voice starting to tremble, "I slept really late because of the painkillers, and when I finally got up he wasn't there, and then I realized he hadn't been back at all. I ran up on deck and looked all around, and that's when I saw him lying there on the beach. But without the dinghy there was no way I could get to him. With this" — she held up
her injured forearm — “I couldn’t even swim to him!” Jill lowered her head, and began to rock back and forth. I reached over and patted her hand; the mere thought of plunging into these cold Maine waters, splint or no splint, made me shudder.

Meanwhile, LaRue conferred briefly with his associate. “Do you happen to remember the name of the windjammer, ma’am? Or what it looked like?”

“No,” Jill answered weakly. “They all look alike to me. I was just a big schooner. I never noticed the name last night; it was dark. And they were gone when I woke up this morning.”

“Hmm, not much to go on, Mrs. Jones,” said Sergeant LaRue, shaking his head. “There must be two dozen windjammers plying their trade in this area. But it’s possible they could corroborate at least part of your story.”

Jill starred back at him in disbelief, as if to say, “Why should my story need corroborating?”

Dan and I exchanged a look. “I wonder if it was the one with the faded tanbark sails we saw heading across the bay this morning?” I ventured. “There can’t be too make of those around. The name was odd, too . . .” I searched my memory. “Something sweet. Sugarplum? No! Lollipop! That’s it!”

Jill gave me a startled glance, then smiled wanly, in what I took to be a weak but valiant expression of gratitude.

LaRue chuckled. “Well that figures; it’s the biggest party barge in the fleet. Get on the horn, Vern,” LaRue ordered, “and radio Camden Marine. I want the good ship Lollipop back here as soon as possible, with everybody on it.” He turned to Jill. “Thank you, Mrs. Jones, that’s all for now.”

Officer Vern stepped forward. “Would you like to rest a bit, ma’am? There’s a stateroom up front if you’d like to be alone.” Jill nodded feebly.

LaRue concurred. “Mrs. van Dine, would you mind . . . ?”

I went forward with Jill and got her settled in what turned out to be the boat’s former master suite. I wrung out a wet washcloth in the adjoining bath — one could hardly call it a head, since it had a bathtub with a shower, and a separate jacuzzi — and put it over her eyes. After murmuring a few words of sympathy and encouragement, I joined the others in the main lounge.

“They say the spouse is always the prime suspect, but her story sounds pretty good to me, Sarge,” Vern was saying.

“I don’t know, Vern. She was here, and alone on the boat all night. That adds up to no alibi.”

“But how could she get in there, Sarge, with no dinghy, and her arm so bad? That water’s wicked cold, even to swim fifty yards or so, and she’s no bigger’n a minute. Besides, what’s her motive? She’d just married into big bucks — that Hinckley alone must be worth a cool half-mil — why rock the boat? And the guy wasn’t bad-looking, either.”

“Oh, skip it,” LaRue replied impatiently. “We’ll sort her out later. Let’s just hope the windjammer folks will have something to add when they get here. Meanwhile, I’m going to see what old man McGrath has to say for himself.”

“You might want to take a look at this first, Sergeant,” Dan said, unfolding the paper he had found and pieced together with clear tape. “I found this torn up and scattered on the beach.”

“Well, well.” LaRue glanced over the paper, nodded thoughtfully, then carefully folded it and put it inside his notebook. He stood up and shook our hands. “Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. van Dine. You’ve been very helpful. I hope you don’t mind staying here with officer Vern until we’ve finished our investigation. Sorry for the inconvenience.”

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With that he strode out onto the deck of the launch, notebook in hand. The next thing we heard was the roar of his inflatable dinghy heading into shore. “So what was that all about?” I asked Dan.

“That document I found was a temporary restraining order issued against Mr. Jerry Jones, ordering him to cease and desist from creating a public nuisance in the form of a helicopter pad within a mile of the property of Mr. Nathaniel McGrath.”

“But the island can’t be more than a mile square!”

“Exactly. And scrawled across the bottom were the words, ‘This is just for starters, you upstart — ’ ” Dan hesitated. “Er . . . expletive deleted. But I’m sure you catch the drift.”

“Yeah,” Officer Vern commented. “I’d say things aren’t looking too good for old McGrouch!”

The atmosphere grew quiet on board the launch as Dan and I sat back in a pair of comfortable lounge chairs and Officer Vern turned his attention to some paperwork. Jill remained in the front cabin without a sound. But it wasn’t long before the rose-colored sails of the Lollipop came into view, accompanied by a helicopter and another Marine Patrol boat. The helicopter hovered for a few seconds and then flew on, while the motor boat and schooner anchored in the cove. Just then we heard LaRue returning from his interview with Mr. McGrath.

“Well, McGrath denies everything,” LaRue announced. “He claims that he and Jones did have a ‘discussion’ on the beach, during which he served his paper, although he swears that Jones did not tear it up in his presence, which I frankly find a bit hard to swallow, given both the provocation and Jones’ customary reaction not to run from a fight, at least according to his wife’s account. McGrath is still pretty hot under the collar about things in general, not the least of which is the rowdyism and lack of respect in the current generation of young whippersnappers.’ But he claims that he never laid a hand on Mr. Jones. He said, and I quote, ‘Why don’t you ask some of them yahoos that was sporting around the campfire last night with yon late Mr. Jones, for instance that pretty young blond girl that Jones fella was romancing every time he got the chance? She didn’t seem to mind much, ’fact she seemed to like it, even. But I can tell you her young man didn’t take too kindly to it. Wouldn’t surprise me a bit if they come to hard blows one way or another after I went back up to the house.’ ”

LaRue shook his head, signed, and flipped over a new page of his notebook. “Okay, let’s get those young lovers in here, Vern.”

Vern radioed over to the Marine Patrol boat, and within a few minutes we saw the windjammer’s rowing tender with a Marine Patrol officer and two passengers, a very pretty young woman and a young man of roughly the same age. “We’ve got them coming aboard right now, sir,” said Vern.

The young couple came into the main lounge, looking around at all of us in apparent confusion, until LaRue directed them to sit down so that he could ask them some questions about the death of Jerry Jones. They were both attractive, in their mid-twenties, tanned from the sun, strong and very fit-looking. In the course of the introductions, it was revealed that they were not in fact passengers of the boat, but crew — she the second mate and he the ship’s cook. They had known each other before signing on the Lollipop, and were “about to be engaged.” Or not, I concluded, since almost as soon as LaRue started questioning them, they began to bicker and disagree about what had happened on the beach.
“Sure I got a little perturbed,” said the young man somewhat belligerently. “I mean, there he was hitting on Amy here like there was no tomorrow —”

“Oh, come on, Tom.” Amy turned to LaRue, waving her hand dismissively. “My boyfriend is overreacting, sir. Jerry — I mean Mr. Jones — had had a lot to drink and he was just being a little over-friendly —”

“Friendly, my foot!” said Tom. “He had his hands all over you! Not that you were exactly discouraging him! Why, when you two went off down the beach together —” Tom’s face had gone pale under the sunburn, making the ruddy patches burn in his cheeks. His fists were clenched at his sides.

“Oh, Tom, will you grow up?” Amy snorted. “You’re acting like a jealous schoolboy, just the way you did —” Amy suddenly slapped her hand over her mouth, looking from Tom to LaRue and back at Tom in wide-eyed alarm. Then she dropped both hands into her lap and shut her eyes, blinking rapidly.

“Would you please finish that sentence for us, miss?” LaRue said gently. Amy stared down at her hands, then said something in a barely audible voice.

“‘Last night.’” LaRue repeated. “And where exactly would this behavior have occurred, Amy? While you were on the beach, or afterward?”

“Amy!” Now it was Tom’s turn to look alarmed.

“On . . . on the beach.” Amy continued in a small voice. “We were all gathered around the bonfire. Jerry — Mr. Jones — and I were just having a good time. I mean Tom and I have been together on the Lollipop for practically the whole summer, and I didn’t think it would hurt to have a little fun with someone else. Tom knows it doesn’t mean anything . . . well, you should know, anyway!” she flared at the young man in response to his hoot of derision.

“Oh, sure! And what about all the yelling and screaming I heard? Or was that a ‘no’ that didn’t really mean ‘no’? And where were you when the rest of us took the auxiliary back to the schooner?”

“Okay, hold it right there!” LaRue shouted over the din. “You mean you two didn’t go back to the Lollipop together in one boat with the rest of the party?”

“We’d taken both the auxiliary and the tender in,” Tom explained. “When Amy didn’t show up, the rest of us piled in the auxiliary — it’s plenty big enough — and left the tender behind in case she needed it.”

LaRue turned to Amy. “Does this mean you stayed behind with Jones on the beach?”

“Only . . . only for a little while,” Amy said. “Then Jerry really did get out of hand, and . . . I told him if he didn’t let go of me I’d scream bloody murder. I even picked up a rock in case I had to defend myself. Then I just got in the tender and rowed back to the schooner as fast as I could.”

“When you got back to the schooner, did you see or say anything to Tom here?”

In spite of a warning look from the young man, Amy continued. “He was waiting for me on deck. He’d heard everything. He was furious. He jumped in the tender and rowed back into the beach — he said he wanted to teach Jerry a lesson. Tom, I’m sorry.” She gave Tom one last despairing look and buried her face in her hands.

Tom jumped up and began to pace back and forth. “All right, all right. It was just like she said. But I swear I never hit the guy. In fact when I got closer to the beach it was so dark, I couldn’t see or hear him at all. By then I had cooled down and didn’t want any more trouble. After all, we’d
be out of there first thing in the morning. I decided to just let it go, so I turned around and rowed back to the schooner. Who knows?” he added. “Maybe he was already dead!”

I couldn’t help gasping. The two young people stared at each other in horror, realizing too late that they had by now managed thoroughly to implicate each other.

“What did you do with the rock you picked up, Amy?” LaRue asked softly.

“I just threw it overboard! I . . . I never hit him with it!” the girl cried. “I swear I didn’t. He was fine when I left him! Tom, tell them!”

The young man grabbed for Amy’s hand, and the two young people looked beseechingly at LaRue, at us, at each other. “That’s right, she did,” Tom said emphatically. “I saw her do it. No, NO! I mean . . . I saw her throw the rock overboard. And the rock was clean.” Tom stood with his back to us, alternately running his hands through his hair and shoving them into his pockets. Finally he turned and faced LaRue. “Officer, I know it looks bad, but you’ve got to believe me. Neither of us had anything to do with Jones’ death. Why don’t you ask that old guy who lives on the island? Maybe he heard Jones assaulting Amy, and that just put him over the top, so he came down and popped him one after Amy got away!”

Amy nodded vigorously in agreement.

“Can any of your shipmates verify the time that each of you finally returned to the schooner, after which you did not leave the boat for the rest of the night?” LaRue asked.

The pair looked at each other in panic. “No,” Amy answered in a tremulous voice. “Everyone else was asleep. It was quite late. About two or three in the morning, I’d say.”

LaRue fixed his gaze on the young couple, contemplating them for a long moment. They began to fidget nervously; I could see beads of perspiration on the young man’s brow. The young woman looked pale and sick. “The Marine Patrol officer will take you back to the schooner now, but I must warn you not to leave the area until further notice.”

After the young couple had gone, LaRue and Vern conferred briefly. They seemed to have forgotten that Dan and I were there, or else they didn’t care. At least, I thought gratefully, that seemed to indicate we weren’t suspects. Not that there weren’t plenty of those already.

“Who do you think did it, Sergeant?” Dan asked finally.

“Well,” LaRue said thoughtfully. “What we have here is an embarrassment of riches, in more ways than one,” he said, glancing over at the Hinckley moored between us and the beach. “Tom or Amy, Tom and Amy, old man McGrath, Jill Jones — not one of them has an alibi. And all of them, except Mrs. Jones apparently, had motive, means and opportunity. For McGrath it was the threat to his property, for Tom, jealousy, for Amy, self-defense.”

Officer Vern shook his head. “I don’t know, Sarge. This is a real head scratcher, if you ask me. One of ’em did it, but I’m danged if I know which one.”

Dan rose from his seat by the window overlooking the Hinckley. “I think Dot and I can tell you who really killed Jerry Jones.” He looked over at me. I nodded. I knew we had been thinking along the same lines. “All you have to do is look closely at the scene.” He gestured toward the bow of the Hinckley and the beach just beyond it, all clearly visible from where we stood.
The Solution

I know there's going to be something up there from the minute I heard it."

"When I went to point the Nightingale, I saw something near the edge of the water. It looked..."

"The best part about the solution is..." I've been waiting for a lot of seconds, looking for the best place to strike..."

"Ah, that was all."

"So I decided."

"And with that, I'll leave..."

"And now, my let's..."

"The best part about the solution is..."

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MURDER IN THE WIND

I see her sitting there, her feet up on the table. Her eyes are closed, her body relaxed. She's wearing a black suit, and she's holding a glass of wine in her hand. I can see her reflection in the mirror, and her face is calm and peaceful.

But then she opens her eyes, and I know she's awake. She sits up straight, and she looks at me with a look of surprise.

"You're alive?" she asks.

I nod, and she smiles. "I know you were killed, but I never believed it. You were always so strong."

I smile back, and she says, "I was sure you'd be back."

I nod again, and she looks at me for a moment, then she stands up.

"Let's go," she says.

And with that, she walks out of the room, and I follow her without question.