To Kill A Lawyer
The law offices of Siegal, Hackett & Ross were plush and regal. Entering through majestic glass doors, visitors came upon a sleek reception console and a waiting veranda filled with snake plants and ferns. A false skylight gave the impression of sunlight dappling the black leather couches. The double doors leading to the main office were solid oak, but the brass handles were misleading. The doors could only be opened electronically by the receptionist.

Inside, pine wainscoting gave the impression of antiquity, even though the building was new. The light came from crystal sconces that seemed to hover over the deep green wallpaper. The desks and chairs were all hand-oiled wood, and coffee came from a silver server set on a linen cloth. No metal file cabinets, no water cooler, no paper cups. This was money made real; power as a form of interior decoration. Imposing and immutable.

If only the murder hadn’t messed up the exquisite Oriental carpet.

The lawyers of Siegal, Hackett & Ross were lined up like suspects as they watched Detective Sam Peterson leave the dead man’s office. They got a quick glance of the body on the floor as he closed the door behind him. It was disturbing. Crime had suddenly taken on a new dimension, no longer flat as a brief.

Peterson seemed to be taking a long time to address them. But they knew this was a ploy. After all, they were the hotshot lawyers; they made five times the salary he did as a cop. They knew this was his big chance to turn the tables and enjoy his authority.

“You were right about two things,” Peterson finally said. “First of all, Attorney Ross is dead.”

He waited to see the reaction. But no one stirred. Not a hint of surprise. Like performers, these experienced attorneys knew that every nuance had an effect. Murderers knew that too.

“And secondly,” he continued, “it appears that he was murdered.”

This time Peterson looked more carefully. He was searching for some tiny clue — a twitch, a grin, a cough. Something to indicate which of them might be happy that Barry Ross was dead.

But he didn’t have to wait very long, or look too carefully. Because at the mention of the word “murder”, everyone smiled and started to clap.

Barry Ross — the dead man — wasn’t just disliked by those who knew him. He was detested. It was an achievement of sorts. Contrary, argumentative, egotistic — he gave a bad name to divorce law, which didn’t actually need the help. As a star attorney he was always in the news, associated with the nastiest of the public divorces. And his compulsive seduction of all his rich female clients didn’t help his reputation either. Or hurt it, depending upon which side of the court you were on.

He had found a home at Siegal, Hackett & Ross, a notorious firm that attracted infamous clients. Like the headline-grabbing Victoria Erland custody case, lost in the media but won in court. Or the Tonio Galante tax fraud case, lost in both venues, but which
brought in over $2 million in fees. That was the beauty of the adversary system; win or lose, the firm got richer.

Now one cup of coffee threatened to change all that. If it hadn’t been laced with poison, Barry Ross’s untimely death would have been just another case of cardiac arrest from overwork. But there had been a strange almond-smelling powder near the coffee maker, and none of the sugar packets was opened or discarded. The dead man had knocked over his cup, convulsed, and collapsed gasping — the position of the body proved that. And there was the bluish color in the face, all symptoms of cyanide poisoning.

It was the wrong kind of notoriety.

They figured that Ross had been in his office early that morning, going over his cases. He had nonchalantly picked up the cup, maybe even spilled it as he read and sipped at the same time. Maybe he was talking to someone. Ross had made some notes, sipped a bit more. Some minutes later, he dropped the cup, spilled the coffee, and dropped dead. And that was that.

They knew all this even before the police showed up. One of the new associates had been a public defender, and represented a murderer with similar tastes. But they said nothing, figuring it was better to let the detective come to his own conclusions.

Especially about the motive. Barry Ross made his reputation in the courtroom — and the bedroom! Which one was the motive for murder? That’s what Peterson was struggling with. Sure everyone hated Ross, he thought, but it took a special kind of emotion to go to all this trouble. Homicide was messy, after all, and lawyers were tidy. That might eliminate the nerdy law clerk with the lisp who thought Ross was sleazy. The associate with the broken leg who thought he was too pushy. And the timid secretary who came in late and didn’t like having to fend off his advances.

By midday, Peterson had narrowed his choices down from everyone who ever met the man, to three suspects. The ones most likely to have committed the murder. The ones who wanted it bad enough and had the opportunity because they were in the office that morning. The ones he had to talk to next.

A glass wall separated the conference room from the rest of the suite. It was through this the lawyers watched Peterson, like a specimen, as he sat down at one of the ornately carved chairs surrounding the immense rosewood conference table. Their table. When he moved over to position himself directly in front of the law books, they knew he was trying to look more prestigious. They had done it themselves many times.

Peterson opened his notebook and studied it like a judgment day ledger. There had been a few clues at the murder scene — including one very pointed clue — but this too was really more for show. To make them think he knew more than he did. He remembered from his own divorce that a prepared lawyer was the most cautious person on earth. To solve this crime, he had to catch them off guard, ask his questions carefully. When he was ready, he signaled to Officer Benning to send in the suspects.

Barton Hackett was in his fifties, tall and proud. He walked in stiffly, like an arthritic crane, and stood behind the chair defiantly. He was one of the senior partners in the firm.
Siegal died five years ago, but he had been the grand old man of litigation, so his name stayed on the door. Ross’s name, on the other hand, would now have to be removed. Hackett could barely contain his joy over the fact.

“Tell me about your relationship with Ross. You two don’t seem to have been the best of friends,” Peterson observed.

“He was a senior partner in this firm,” Hackett said. “That was my relationship. Until I found out that he was also an embezzler.”

“He was stealing money from the firm?”

“I suspected that he was padding his billable hours. When I looked into it I found other inconsistencies in the financial records. I called in specialists to pursue the matter. Their audit turned up a shortfall of almost half a million dollars, carefully buried in false expenses.”

“Buried by Barry Ross?”

“I should say so. Buried and resurrected. This was his modus operandi. It seems that my esteemed fiducial partner was quite a bit richer than he had a right to be.”

“How did you find out about this?”

“I had investigators do some probing into Mr. Ross’s private finances. Besides, Mr. Peterson, I’m a tax specialist. I know my way around ledgers, and I know when things don’t add up.”

“That’s right,” Peterson said, consulting his notes, “you defended all those crooks during the private banking scandal a few years ago.”

“I served as one of their legal consultants. Now while it’s true that the judge held for the plaintiff, that case is on appeal at the moment and our argument that . . .”

“You were in the office this morning, weren’t you Mr. Hackett?”

“In the office? Of course I was. When do you mean?”

“About the time of the murder. Around 9:00.”

“What is the significance of 9:00?”

“Just answer the question please.”

“I am here every morning at 7:30.”

“And your office is next to Ross’s?”

“Was. I’ll be knocking down the wall to make mine bigger.” Not if you move to the state prison, Peterson thought.

“Please, Mr. Peterson, stop examining me like a criminal. Do you truly think that I poisoned Barry Ross to get a bigger office?”

“How did you know he was poisoned? I didn’t say that.”

“Come, come, Detective. It’s all over the office. Now why do you suppose I would put myself and my career in jeopardy by murdering someone?”

“Rage, Mr. Hackett. It has a way of befuddling the mind. Your trusted partner robbed you. That gives you a pretty good motive to kill him, wouldn’t you say?”

“No, I wouldn’t say.”

“And why is that?”
“Like what exactly?”
“Like proving it . . . exactly.”

Hackett took a briefcase from one of the chairs and set it down on the table. He unlocked it, pulled out a thick file, and flipped it towards Peterson.
“It’s all in there, if you care to study it. I was building up an airtight lawsuit against him and I was quite prepared to go to court. In point of fact, I was going to contact the District Attorney later this week. Then Noreen Wheeler showed up.”
“Oh yes, Mrs. Wheeler. She was one of Ross’s clients.”
“She was much more than that, Mr. Peterson. I think you know what I mean, do you not?”

“Not. Why don’t you tell me?”

“Barry Ross was having an affair with Mrs. Wheeler. At the same time, I might point out, that he was handling her divorce. That was a complete breach of ethics, of course. But then again, Barry didn’t have any.”
“He told you about this affair?”
“No. As I told you before, I was having him investigated.”

“There’s a photo of him and Mrs. Wheeler in a file on his desk,” Peterson said, checking his notes. “Does that have something to do with your investigation of him?”

Hackett winced at the mention of the photo. It caught him off guard, as Peterson hoped it would. But he quickly regained his composure.

“Yes it does. You see, I went into his office this morning to disclose the information to him. I had a series of somewhat incriminating photos showing the two of them leaving the Pontillac. It’s a rather fancy hotel downtown.”

“I know what the Pontillac is, Mr. Hackett,” Peterson said. “But why did you show the photos to Ross?”

“To get his cooperation. To influence him in the embezzlement matter.”
“To blackmail him, in other words.”

“I would be very careful with my choice of words, if I were you, Mr. Peterson. I am a very busy attorney and I didn’t relish having to spend years in court suing Barry Ross. I don’t mind a decent libel case though.”

“You didn’t show these photos to Mrs. Wheeler?” Peterson said, ignoring Hackett’s vague threat.

“No. Her divorce is not my concern. In point of fact, if it wasn’t for her, Barry Ross would be facing a grand jury right now instead of his maker.”

“And why is that?”

“Because she killed him, of course.”

Peterson leaned back. “Why would she do that?”

“Because he broke off their liaison, afraid her husband might find out. Mr. Wheeler, as you may know, is a very powerful man. But from what I hear, Mrs. Wheeler is an equally possessive woman. She was furious at Ross that he would end their affair . . . so she killed him.”

“You’re sure of that.”
“I am sure of two things. That Barry Ross was still alive when I saw him this morning, and that Mrs. Wheeler went into his office next. I think you understand the implications of this, do you not? Arrest her, Mr. Peterson. You’ll save everyone a lot of time and aggravation. You’ve got the corpus delicti.”

“You mean the body?”

“I mean the facts... a dead man and poison. Now all you need is a confession.”

Hackett was ending the interview by heading for the door when Peterson, consulting his notes again, stopped him with one last question.

“Oh, just one more thing, Mr. Hackett.”

“What is it? I have an oral argument to prepare for and I must be in court at one. This is a very important case that is probably going to set a precedent for...”

“Have you ever been to the Cayman Islands?”

“The Cayman Islands?”

“Isn’t that the place where they have all those tax havens?”

“There are tax havens throughout the Caribbean. The Caymans included. But I have nothing to do with all that.”

“Then why was there a letter from you to Ross on his desk this morning?”

“We are lawyers, Peterson. We deal in documentation. I send letters all the time.”

“Even to your own partner?”

“Even to my own partner. It’s quite normal in the course of conducting business.”

“But this one is from the Cayman Islands.”

“Impossible. I’ve never been to the Caymans and therefore could never have sent a letter from there. Ipso facto.”

“Huh?”

“A common enough Latinism. It loosely translates, in this case, to... buzz off.”

Noreen Ewston Wheeler — the former Miss Midwest Farm States — was still a ravishing beauty at forty. She looked every bit as good as her photos in the tabloids. Her notorious divorce from her rich husband, Zachary Wheeler, had been front page news for months. She entered the room with a combination of soapy purity and sultry elegance. And as she sat down, she pushed her chair away from the table so that her perfect legs were on display for all to see, including her husband on the far side of the glass wall. Peterson had never been so close to anyone that gorgeous, and it took a special kind of effort to treat her like just another potential killer.

“I don’t know why you’re interviewing me, Detective,” she said, tossing her dark hair dramatically. “You certainly don’t think I murdered him, do you?”

“Didn’t you, Mrs. Wheeler?”

“Please, call me Miss Ewston. I’m trying to get used to it. And no, I did not murder Barry Ross.”

“But you were having an affair with him, weren’t you?”

“I was lonely and vulnerable when I decided to divorce my husband. Barry was very kind to me, at a time when I desperately needed support. Are you married, Detective?”
Terminally, Peterson thought, but he said nothing.

"But the affair was over?" he asked.

"I ended it weeks ago. You see, my husband found out about it and I knew he would use it against me in the divorce. It could ruin my settlement. So I told Barry we had to stop until the divorce was finalized. He was devastated, of course, but he understood. Like everyone else, he was afraid of Zachary."

She glared through the glass wall at her husband who was pacing the room, staring her down from the other side.

"When did you arrive at his office this morning?" Peterson asked.

"Let's see... I'm not sure... not until... after 10:00..."

"8:46. The receptionist keeps a record. Ross died at around 9:00."

"Oh stop measuring me for a cell," she said. She switched her long legs; the move sent tingles up Peterson's spine. "I wasn't in there long enough to shoot him."

"Was he shot?"

"Strangled, shot, stabbed. Whatever it was, I didn't do it."

"There's lipstick on a second coffee cup in his office, Mrs. Wheeler. It seems to match the color you're wearing."

"So I had a cup of coffee. Is that a crime? I took one sip and left. I didn't stay long."

"Why did you leave so quickly?"

"Because I saw Zachary arrive. He was here because Barton Hackett is general counsel to his company. I didn't want to run into him, so I took the file and went to an empty office to wait until he was gone."

"Took what file, Mrs. Wheeler?"

"This file. It's the reason I came in this morning."

From a large shoulder bag — the kind models use to carry their beauty supplies — she pulled out a bulging envelope and slammed it on the table. It hit with the weight of a dead animal.

"What is this?" Peterson asked, flicking it for signs of life.

"It's information. On my husband. Once I decided to file for divorce, I knew Zachary would use anything he could against me, to cheat me out of my fair share of property. So I started gathering my own information about him and his activities."

"What kind of activities?"

"Criminal for the most part. Details about his business dealings with organized crime, for example. With this information, Detective, you could put Zachary Wheeler behind bars for a long time."

"I'm in the homicide division, Mrs. Wheeler, not the racket squad."

"You could charge him on both counts."

She smiled like a shark and winked at the thick file. Noreen suddenly didn't seem quite so pure and lovely any more.

"Isn't this a little out of your league?"

"I studied law, Detective, before I became a rich man's wife. I know what I'm doing. I was convinced that my husband was hiding assets, so I hired someone to find out. He found
more than I bargained for. It seems that Mr. Wheeler has been laundering money for the East Coast gambling cartel for years. He’s hidden billions in a private bank in the Cayman Islands. Top secret, of course. It took a lot of digging.”

Suddenly the file seemed more interesting. Peterson opened the envelope and perused the contents. But it was all gibberish to him: legal documents, notes, photographs, investigation reports.

“I suppose this all means something to someone.”

“Barry thought so. Especially that one,” she said, pointing to one of the documents. “He was studying a more recent one just like it this morning.”

The document was a computer printout with columns of numbers. It looked as intriguing as the stock listings in the Wall Street Journal which, to Peterson, meant nothing at all.

“What is it?”

“A fax transmission from a bank in the Cayman Islands. My husband got a new one every Monday. Barry said that each one contained a secret code name. They changed it every week. By using that name, anyone could gain access to the money in the bank. Like a password.”

“No wonder he was so interested,” Peterson said, examining the numbers but failing to break the code.

“I think Barry did figure it out. And that’s why Zachary murdered him.”

“You’re sure about that?”

“Of course, Detective. It’s obvious. Barry figured out the code and with it he could take money from the account. When my husband found out, he killed him. He doesn’t like losing. If I were you, I’d be very careful.”

Zachary Wheeler was consumed with self-confidence as he strode into the room. He was in his forties, handsome in a boyish way, and wearing a $2000 custom-made silk suit. When he sat down, he seemed to spread out, as though he were chairing a meeting on the topic of his own ego.

“Let’s get down to business,” he said with a broad smile. “You think I killed Barry Ross because he was having an affair with my wife. Is that correct?”

“No, it isn’t.”

“Then you assume I killed him because he was helping her with her divorce? Is that accurate?”

“No at all.”

“Then a very simple question, Peterson. Why are you wasting my time with this interrogation?”

“Sounds like you’re the one doing the interrogating.”

“I am a very busy man, Peterson. I don’t have time for this cat-and-mouse game. Now I don’t want to do your work for you, but you’ll save a lot of energy if you just arrest Barton Hackett. He killed Barry Ross.”

“Really? You’re sure about this?”

“I would have assumed you came to the same conclusion.”
“Because Ross was embezzling money from him?”

“Perhaps I overestimated your intelligence, Peterson. You probably wouldn’t know this, but money isn’t worth murdering someone for. It’s much too easy to obtain. I hope you have an alternative presumption.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“Ross was having an affair with Barton Hackett’s wife, Susan. I was the one who found out about it and when I told Barton, he was enraged.”

“How did you find out? Don’t tell me ... you were having Hackett investigated.”

“Hackett? Don’t underestimate me. I was having all of them investigated.”

“All of them?” Peterson repeated, wondering when it was that investigations took the place of relationships.

“Are you that naive, Peterson? This is a tough world; you’ve got to be very careful. Take me for example. I knew that Ross was sleeping with Noreen while also handling the divorce for her. That’s a dangerous combination, considering how much money I’m worth.”

“And what about Hackett?”

“I’m suing him for breach of contract. The affair between his wife and Ross was just a little addendum.”

Wheeler turned to face his own reflection in the glass, and adjusted a solid gold tie tack in the shape of a shark. He seemed eerily calm, distant from any feelings about the matter.

“What else do you and Hackett have in common, besides unfaithful wives?” Peterson asked.

“Just some business dealings.”

“Tropical?”

“I don’t follow.”

“The Cayman Islands.”

“Never been there.”

“But I understand you use a bank there as a tax haven. And Mr. Hackett is, after all, a tax expert.”

“I’m a corporate attorney for some of the top businesses in the state. In other words, I make rich people richer. Hackett was my tax consultant until I found out he was selling privileged information to my competitors. That’s why we’re going to court. I came in this morning to give a deposition to his lawyer.”

“But you also went into Ross’s office.”

“As a matter of fact, I did. I was going to confront him about his affair with Noreen. But I never got the chance.”

“Why not?”

“Because he was dead when I got there.”

Wheeler got up from the chair slowly, like a pasha awaiting his attendants. He had obviously decided that the interview was over. Perhaps because of his arrogance, Peterson decided to reveal his most pointed clue — definitely pointed.

“Do you own a monogrammed pin, Mr. Wheeler?”

“What kind of pin?”
“A small one. Perhaps a tie tack, or a lapel pin. The initials on it are ZW.”
It gave Peterson some satisfaction to see Wheeler blink for the first time.
“No,” he said brusquely. “I don’t own such a pin.”
“One had been found in the dead man’s desk drawer. Can you tell me why a pin bearing your initials would be there?”
“That’s ridiculous, since I don’t own a pin like that. You’re fishing, Peterson.”
“I wish I was, Mr. Wheeler. On a nice lake somewhere.”
“You’re better off casting your bait around Barton Hackett, believe me,” he said, walking to the far end of the conference table on his way out.
“What about the fax?” Peterson said.
“What about what fax?”
“The fax to you from the Cayman Islands bank?”
Wheeler seemed to stumble for an instant. He looked at the parquet floor to see what had snagged his shoe. But there was nothing there. He quickly put his hands on the table to stabilize himself.
“And just what are you implying?”
“It’s some sort of accounting printout. I saw it on his desk. Looks like he was studying it before he died.”
“I didn’t see any fax on his desk!”
“Did you look?”
“No... I mean... I would have noticed it.”
Rage flashed across Wheeler’s face for a microsecond, before it was masked by practiced self-control.
“You listen to me, Peterson,” Wheeler said, looming over the detective. “That fax is private property. It belongs to me. It was obviously stolen by my estranged wife. She and Ross were part of a conspiracy to destroy me.”
“Sounds like a good enough reason for murder.”
Suddenly sensing that he was leaning in too far for his own good, Wheeler straightened up, calmed down, and smiled again.
“That fax won’t make any sense to anyone but me, Peterson. I want it back. I can have you in court tomorrow morning to show cause. That’s a personal record.”
“Not any more, Mr. Wheeler. Now, it’s evidence.”

From their side of the glass wall, the attorneys of Siegal, Hackett & Ross studied Peterson as he left the conference room and walked down the hall to Barry Ross’s office. He spoke to no one, in spite of the questions they hurled at him. Inside, he closed the door and studied the room.

There were two doors. The one he entered through, from the hallway leading to the main part of the office suite. And a door on the right, leading to Hackett’s office. Any of them — the jilted lover, the jealous rival, or the cheated partner — could have slipped in and out of the room without any problem.

On the carpet, the late Barry Ross was lying on his side, covered with a sheet. Peterson
lifted the covering. The poison gave him a sad look, as though he were pleading with Peterson to find his killer. He was just a dead divorce lawyer, Peterson thought without much remorse, not to mention an embezzler and adulterer. But though he was wary of lawyers, Peterson did believe in the law. There had been no due process for the dead man, and that was wrong.

At the desk, Peterson studied the still life he had created by accumulating items found in Ross’s office that morning and looked for an answer. It was there somewhere, he was sure of it. He studied each item, thought back to the interviews, and tried to put it all together. After a few minutes, he had what he was looking for.

“I’ve got it,” he muttered to the dead man. “I know who killed you. And I know why.”

Do YOU know? Assemble the puzzle and see if you can figure out which of the three suspects murdered the shady attorney.
SOLUTION PART 1

Before continuing the suspects Peterson had our five explanation on the dead man

any of them could have killed you," they began, "since they each had a reason and an
opportunity. I thought it was Barton Hackett at first. The squad suggested that he had some
connection to the original stamp. Property of W. Hackett, pharmacies, and a found gun. Hackett
was found to take advantage of the situation to make a connection between Hackett and
the Cretum Islands scheme."

"That's right. And the ZW pin pointing to W. Hackett. But the letters on the pin could just
as well be NE if you turn it slightly. NE for Newton, Eton. Your middle name. You're probably
the only one who knows your name. So much for And.

The wrong side caution. The last on the deck is to replicate Wheeler in your name.
"Now," continued, "if I can crack the code, I can print in Cyphax Wheeler too.

And with luck, Wheeler will replicate Hancock."

Carefully, with no thought of success, Peterson looked at the box once more. And then
recalled to Peterson that if we were anyone else, it was Peter and not the last one.

What is the secret name hidden in the text?

SOLUTION PART 2

Following a hunch, Peterson held the printout upside down and stepped back from it.
From this distance the card clearly see the face of President Lincoln hidden in the columns.
If we simply change the order of President Lincoln's name, we will find access to the account.

There was on even greater reward in reaching them all their rights.