

A MYSTERY/GHOST STORY...

The Haunting of
*Strathmoor
Heights*

DAVID GATESBURY

THE HAUNTING OF STRATHMOOR HEIGHTS

David Gatesbury



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INTRODUCTION

For those of us who believe in and hold fast to the idea of an afterlife, we can agree that whatever awaits us beyond this present life will be far different than anything we can imagine. Even the strictest atheist will often take an abrupt change in attitude when death is at his or her door.

In our attempt to comprehend what comes after this present existence, we've formed a ceaseless fascination for ghosts. What are they, and if they are a restless spirit, what keeps them bound to our world?

There are many theories to this natural phenomena and what it suggests. Scientists in the field of the paranormal have formed various opinions for these manifestations.

The first theory is that an individual's soul is restless because he or she has left some earthly commitment undone. Until this obligation or particular task is accomplished, the soul must carry on.

An additional theory suggests an abrupt, untimely death may cause one not to understand that his or her time here is done. Not fully realizing he or she is dead, the soul lingers on, bound to a familiar or unfamiliar environment, carrying on what it perceives to be as a normal routine.

Strong evidence suggests a dramatic event—hostile or violent and usually linked to this individual's death, but not necessarily—might bind the spirit of a person to a particular place. When certain circumstances or atmospheric conditions arise or are repeated, this occurrence is replayed and/or reenacted. In the paranormal field, this phenomenon is known as a residual haunting.

All these ideas are based upon theory and conjecture, but are backed by sound reason and logic.

Whatever these images or lost souls are, they remain an unsolved, intricate part of the mystery of life....

CHAPTER 1

A FAMILY LEGACY PASSED DOWN

I remember well that day in the early spring of 1977; one of the first bright, sunny days of the year brought temperatures to a comfortable sixty-seven degrees. I sat poised behind the wheel of a tan, streamlined '74 Jaguar XKE convertible that afternoon with my long brunette hair flipping freely in the wind; the sporty Jag took to the asphalt smoothly, hugging the road as I steered in and out of a long curve.

As I was driving to my mother's estate in Newport, Rhode Island, the world seemed so fresh and reborn; heavy rains the night before helped trees and flowering plants flourish throughout the countryside—the repetition of the seasons beginning once again with rebirth and renewal. New England is one of the most beautiful regions in the country, but instead of taking in the scenery, my thoughts were distant in thinking of how I may soon be the only heiress to the multi-million dollar estate my father built up over his lifetime.

Before his death, my father sold a highly lucrative pharmaceutical company he'd established. He patented several successful drug treatments, which my mother now legally held the rights to, and these achievements alone could serve to provide financial support for a lifetime. Having acquired a master's degree in chemistry, I had designs on one day taking over the company, and it surprised me when I discovered he'd sold the business. I think running such a sizeable company for so many years had taken its toll on him both physically and mentally, and I believe he sold it so that my mother wouldn't have to deal with

the headaches and decision making that came with managing a huge corporation.

Up till four years ago, the East Coast is where I spent my entire life. Somehow, it didn't seem the same since my return; there wasn't that welcoming spirit for a person coming home after a term of travel. After a lengthy cruise to Bermuda and returning home to visit friends in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I'd failed to live up to my position as daughter of Edith MacKenney by not bothering to maintain the requisite mother-daughter communication. A phone message informed me that my mother was gravely ill; and as I started home, I carried with me a guilty, hollow feeling. Thoughts and memories of my mother often served to plunge me into a somber mood.

I'd long since reconciled any ill feelings I harbored about my mother by concluding that she was raised much the same way as she brought me up, and she did the best job she knew how. She molded me into the same type of independent individual she was—a person brimming with self-reliance. I understood that all she had done was for my own good, and I wanted to show her how I'd matured into womanhood; I hoped it wasn't too late to display love and put the past behind me.

I steered off the roadway to follow a snaking tree-lined drive. Up ahead I saw the huge Georgian-style mansion where I'd grown up. My eyes scanned the healthy green lawn and neatly trimmed hedges surrounding it: it all looked much the way as I remembered. As I drove closer, cherished memories replayed in my mind as I envisioned the many times I'd rushed out to greet my father when he'd come home from work or from a business trip; he was full of smiles every time he saw me.

Mom's gray Rolls-Royce sat parked on the circled driveway in front of the house. Her automobile had been around longer than I had. A dark blue Sedan Deville Cadillac conveniently situated at the bottom of the steps that led up to the entrance of the house belonged to George Tallin, an investment broker and financial manager for the family. I parked behind his car then glanced in the rearview mirror to fluff and rearrange my mussed hair. Satisfied, I grabbed my handbag and exited the

car. The burgundy purse hung loosely from my elbow by a thin strap as I buttoned one more button on my white blouse, then straightened the slim-fitting burgundy skirt, leaving my knees exposed.

As I climbed the steps, a persistent sense of guilt about seeing my mother caused me to hesitate. After a moment's pause, I opened the door and entered the palatial entrance hall. Standing motionless for a moment, the area before me seemed somehow smaller than I remembered. Then a uniformed maid I'd never seen before approached me.

I placed my handbag on a nearby table. "Hello, I'm Claire MacKennsey."

"Claire," a man's voice broke from down the hall. It was George Tallin, who looked more distinguished than ever.

George was a handsome man who possessed an admirable continence one could never ignore. Time had given him an even more appealing look: broad shoulders, now-frosted black hair at the temples, and wearing a medium gray pinstriped suit. Turning to give him a gaze, it came to mind that I once cared very deeply for him. Having had a crush on him in my late teens, I hoped that he'd gained weight or lost a leg—anything to help diminish any feelings I might still have for him—because he was one of the few men who'd ever snubbed me. I'd held it strongly against him ever since.

As George neared, the maid turned and exited from the room. The grin on his face grew, and it somehow touched me as if rekindling those old feelings I had for him.

"You've really blossomed into quite a lady," he said, sounding warm and friendly. Ignoring the compliment, I asked, "How's my mother, George?"

His expression grew serious. "She's not in good health, and the prognosis hasn't changed."

"You'd think that with all the advancements they've made in medicine they'd be able to do something for her," I replied.

"Claire, the only way her condition can improve is with a bypass operation, but her heart is in such bad shape that the doctors have said any operation is out of the question."

He stepped to one side. “I think you ought to see her immediately.” He gently touched my arm and led me in the direction of the broad staircase at the far end of the room. “She hasn’t been herself lately, but seeing you will lift her spirits. You know, I’ve met few people as strong willed as your mother. She’s always had what they call spunk or grit, but losing your father was something she never got over. Theirs was true love.”

We ascended the stairs. As I listened to George, I never recalled him talking this way about my mother before. He spoke with genuine feelings towards her, and this was a side I’d never seen of him.

Midway on the staircase, I caught sight of a nurse starting down the stairs. She gave a friendly smile as she passed us, coming down. It suddenly occurred to me that this was probably a caregiver for the terminally ill, and I then realized just how critical my mother’s condition really was.

“I’ve been meaning to phone her for some time,” I said as we climbed the stairs. “I had no idea that she needed me, and then I received a phone message that she was ill. Was she the one who called and left a message?”

“No, I did. She didn’t want you to know. She wanted you to come home of your own accord. It’s important for her to believe that you’ve come home just to see her, Claire, and not to know that I called.”

“I want to thank you for making an effort to reach me.”

“I rummaged around here and found a booklet your mother had that listed your friends’ addresses and phone numbers, so it wasn’t a lot of trouble. You’d have never forgiven me had she passed away without your saying good-bye.”

“I feel so guilty, as though I’d let her down. I guess it’s been a year since I’ve seen her last.”

“I don’t mean to correct you, but she says the last time she saw you was two years ago, at school.”

“She’s got a better memory than I have. I feel terrible, George. I won’t know what to say to her.”

“Don’t let that worry you.” He put his arm around me and escorted me from the crest of the stairs to her bedroom door.

“All that time apart, I’m sure you’ll find plenty to talk about. She’s been grouchy lately, but I imagine her crankiness stems from growing impatience in waiting to hear from you.”

Coming to her bedroom door, I stood there feeling like a coward. George took control of the situation and knocked on her door.

“Who is it?” my mother responded in a voice I knew better than anyone’s.

I looked to George, hoping he’d enter her room with me. He smirked before turning and walking away.

“Who’s there?” she said, her soft voice lacking the authority it once carried. Opening the door, I felt as though I was years younger.

“May I come in?” I entered the room and saw a frail, white-haired woman lying on the bed. The bedspread covered her up to her armpits, and plump pillows against a large padded headboard supported her head. Her face looked narrower than I’d recalled. She’d lost weight, and her body showed signs of deterioration.

Sighting my presence, she perked up and smiled. “Claire, darling, come in.”

Her hand patted the bed, welcoming me to her bedside. She wore a long-sleeved pajama top, and extended her arms outward to greet me.

I bent over, kissed her, and then sat on the edge of the bed next to her. With this close-up view, as she stroked back my hair I noticed fresh lines and wrinkles set in her pale face.

“My, it’s hard to believe how you’ve grown into such a sophisticated young lady. It seems only yesterday that you were my little girl. You always had the prettiest hair.”

She had a serious look. “You were afraid to come in. You should be.” Then she smiled and touched my cheek. “You’re young and lovely and discovering what life is all about.” Her eyebrows rose. “I hope you’re using discretion in the people you’re running around with nowadays. You may think it’s none of my business, but I’m still your mother.”

She took a deep breath and exhaled. “I only hope you can be at my side at the time of my passing.”

“Mother.”

“No, my time is coming, I’m going to die soon, and it’s important that we talk. You’ll never have to worry about money. George is competent at handling finances and he’s arranged for most of our estate to enter into a trust at the time of my death.”

She held my hand tightly, her eyes studying my every expression. “I hoped that when you’d finished school, you’d come home, and somehow, you and George would hit it off.”

My eyes wavered, turning to the base of the lamp standing on her nightstand. “I don’t think George holds any romantic notions about me. Hasn’t he ever married?”

“No, and I’ve often wondered why. He’s certainly a ladies’ man. Over the years, I’ve seen him at many dinner parties with a different girl on his arm every time. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard him play the piano, but his playing is quite elegant. I suppose you never took a liking to him.”

“He’s nice looking, but I think we’re too different.”

“Oh, you don’t know him. Your father and I both knew you were infatuated with him in your high school days; he knew it too. I think he deliberately distanced himself from you to keep from getting embarrassed, but now, regardless of your age difference, you’re a woman and he’s a man.”

With a strange glint in her eye, she added, “He’s approaching forty now. By the time a man reaches that age, he should consider settling down.”

“Seriously, mother, I doubt if he has the slightest interest in me. Besides, I think he’s too old for me.”

“Too old? Look at the age difference between your father and me. Winston was a great companion, and I have no regrets about having married him.”

“I know, mom.”

She looked down at my palm and caressed it gently with her fingertips. “Claire, there’s something we’ve kept from you. For some time now, I’ve felt compelled to reveal something to you about your father’s family.”

Her eyes held a downward gaze as she continued. “Winston was born in Wales, not far from a village named Cardigan. His

mother's name was Angela, and she gave birth to him late in life, as I did with you. She gave birth to another son named Daniel much earlier. There was a vast difference in their ages because Daniel was born in the first year of his parent's marriage, so I've been told. About the time your father entered the world, Daniel was approaching the age of twenty. Within days of giving birth to Winston, Angela went berserk and murdered her husband, Charles, in his sleep. She decapitated him."

I sat there in shock and disbelief but intent on hearing the whole story, telling myself she'd never make up such a story.

"Police never recovered the severed head, and Angela was placed in an institution for the remainder of her life. Your father's Aunt Irene is the one who raised him."

Curiosity caused me to blurt out, "What happened to Daniel, why wasn't I ever told that I had an uncle?"

"Only a few months afterward, shock and grief over his father's death must've driven him to take his own life."

I turned my head away, "My god, what a terrible tragedy."

"How do you think I felt when just two days before we were to be married, Winston told me this ghastly tale? But I loved him so much I wouldn't let it come between us. As far as I know, they never found the cause of his mother's illness. I imagine some rare cases are beyond treatment even today, and it's because of that story that your father and I originally decided not to bear children. Then you came along—a real surprise package. I was thirty-seven when I had you. You were the most beautiful thing your father and I had ever seen. We loved you with all our heart and never knew such happiness until you came into our lives.

"Your father often wanted to go back to Cardigan to revisit the home where his Aunt Irene raised him, but I wouldn't let him go. I was too afraid of the past. He had a few peculiarities, one being that paralyzed left hand of his. He had several specialists look at it, but there was no physical explanation for the paralysis. They all thought it was nerve damage, but from what?"

I recalled the hand he could never use. "I remember him mentioning he couldn't hold open a newspaper and consulting a

number of doctors that were no help to him. I thought he'd had a stroke."

"Another strange thing, he had a nasty, terrible scar on the left side of his body. He must have undergone great pain at the time he received this injury, and yet he had no memory of how it came about."

"I don't remember any scar."

"That's because he never left the horrible mark exposed. As soon as he got out of the shower, he'd throw on a shirt; he didn't swim, and he never even got in the pool unless it was just the two of us. If you think about it, you'd remember that whenever we had guests, he'd mosey around the pool making conversation, carrying a drink in his hand, wearing one of those brightly colored flowered shirts he liked. Once I asked his Aunt Irene, who's long since deceased now, how he acquired this mark and she answered that it resulted from an accident when he was a baby. From the very first time I heard about the murder, I suspected that his mother performed some hideous torture on him. God knows, she must've had an unbalanced, twisted mind.

"The night your father died, he woke up drenched in sweat, his face was pale and off-colored, and I asked him if he'd had a bad dream, but he gave no answer. I thought he was ill, so I offered to dial for help, but he wouldn't let me. We sat up in bed for a while and he told me about a curious dream he'd had. He explained the dream by saying, 'I hear someone calling to me, a voice calling out to me very faint at first, then it's as clear as we're talking now. I can see a door, and I want to open it, but I know there's something behind it I'd rather not face. I'm urged to open the door, and yet I know something terrifying is waiting for me beyond it'."

I couldn't help but grin. "That sounds pretty strange."

"Strange, I got the distinct impression that this was a dream he'd had on numerous occasions before, and I told him that first thing in the morning, I was going to make him an appointment to see a psychiatrist. Of course, he didn't survive to see the morning; he had a severe heart attack. I knew I should've called for an ambulance that night, but he insisted he was okay."

“Why wasn’t I told about his family before?”

“Honey, there were times I wanted to mention it, but you were too young to understand. He was a fine man, and I have only fond memories of your father. I hope this story didn’t lessen the memory you had of him.”

“No, not at all,” I replied.

“I wouldn’t have told you about it now, but you may be thinking of having a family of your own one day, and I felt obligated to let you know.”

She put her hands to my cheeks. “You ought to put this out of your mind now. I don’t think you have anything to worry about, but this information may prove useful to you in the future.”

I got the impression that it gave my mother relief to tell me how my grandfather was killed, as though telling me about it took a great strain off her. It was the first mother-and-daughter talk we’d had in a long time, and I last let her know I’d be staying home for a while. Leaning over to hug her, we kissed, and seeing she was physically tired, I made sure she was comfortable and in a restful position before walking out of her room.

Life had taken on a strange new meaning, the lingering story of murder and decapitation moving me in such a way that I felt uncertainty and doubt about the future. I’d only begun to grasp the implications of this shocking and dreadful story, which made the strong statement that insanity ran in the family. If my grandmother was a crazed murderess, did it mean that I was heir to some inherent gene? Was I predisposed to one day go stark raving mad and kill somebody? The possibility of this prospect stunned me and absorbed my thought processes. I always expected to have a family of my own, but my mother had actually suggested thinking twice about childbearing. The knowledge she gave me implied I could be capable of murdering my spouse. How else was I to interpret it?

This was my family’s legacy, and I didn’t know how to contend with it. Throughout my childhood, I knew all wasn’t right between my mother and me, and consciously or unconsciously, the wedge she’d driven between us caused me to feel like an outsider when growing up. I strived to be in her good graces for

winning her love and attention, but I couldn't melt her heart; her cold, distant, insensitive ways gave me the deep-rooted sense that I was unwanted. Now these fears and flashback feelings found grounds for real concern. Because of this strange and dark story about my family's past, she made me believe she must've thought she'd given birth to a bad seed or an unbalanced child. Whether she loved me or not, she must've always suspected I was touched and possibly deranged, and even if her actions weren't intentional, they had taken me to the brink of an inferiority complex.

One aspect of my childhood fueling these thoughts and ideas was that I'd spent much of my youth acting as my mother's secretary, following her around and keeping track of her constantly changing agenda. It was sort of fun at first, but it seemed she'd prefer I carry on the role even at home, and I'd discourage it; at least at home I preferred not to be treated like an employee. There always seemed to be an undercurrent running between us, making me feel like a misfit, I have no recollection of the love and pampered affection I saw other girls getting from their moms. I knew she was capable of showing affection because I'd seen it when accompanying her to hospitals to visit neglected children who'd fallen under serious illnesses. One could detect compassion in her eyes when she cuddled them in her arms, but I never really felt loved. Perhaps now, I understood why—my mother must've thought she'd mothered an ill-fated child.

My mother couldn't help being the person that she was, always carrying herself so dignified and proper, and I never knew anyone so concerned for what others were thinking. I would've understood her much better if she'd been a conceited person, but she wasn't that way. The truth of the matter was that she was a person easily drawn into a cause. Driven by charitable events she organized and promoted, she showed herself to be a big-hearted woman with a persuasive way of winning people's trust and respect. She was an icon of society, a spokesperson for the poor and grief stricken, and a woman who wielded power by representing wealthy friends and associates of my father's who were looking to generously throw around money.

She had an entourage of jabbering females who, in my eyes, were birds of a feather—each of whom had their own stylish way of flaunting wealth. However, the sincerity in my mother’s voice and the meaningful chosen words she used gave way to such articulate expressions that I never doubted her sensitivity in helping the needy and underprivileged was less than genuine. At the same time, because these social endeavors took priority over her life, I sometimes wondered if they meant more to her than I did. Now I saw things differently in that she may have bestowed so much tireless energy to these charities as a way to occupy her mind. She kept watch over me like a dutiful mother should while at the same time distancing me from her, almost as if making believe that I was merely hired help; and in a way thinking I was her acting secretary, I fit the role well.

Mulling over remembrances while retracing my adolescence, I came to terms with the fact that I grew up faster than most children, for sadly, I can not recall a time when I was naïve and pure of heart. I had few close friends in my childhood, as I didn’t get along well with my peers and I’d broken off several friendships after my mother had taken a shining to those girls. As much as I tried not to let it show, it bothered me when she made a fuss over them or took a caring interest in their lives. I couldn’t help throwing an occasional tantrum, and once, my mother caressed the curly, strawberry blonde hair of a girl I invited over, and within an hour, I chased her out of our house. This type of resentful behavior left me uncomfortable with myself, causing deliberation and wonder, but now I was able to grasp at least some understanding for why I acted that way.

These thoughts drew more memories to the surface. While rehashing them in my mind, I remembered learning at a young age that my parents had arranged for me to go to a prestigious private boarding school for girls. More than ever before, I thought she wanted to be rid of me and desperately begged and pleaded not to be sent away. Both my parents tried reasoning with me by explaining all the educational benefits this school offered, but all I knew was that they were sending me away. I became so depressed, distraught and emotional that my father

finally relented and persuaded my mother, who'd gone to nothing but the finest private schools, not to force me into going. Now I wondered if she really wanted to get rid of me, as though the proposition for sending me off to a private school made for a good excuse to push me out of her life for a time. Maybe I reminded her that my grandmother was an axe murderer and how I could one day develop the same tendencies.

I always felt closer to my father, and the boarding school incident made me realize that, like me, he had experienced loneliness in his life too. I knew even as a child that he'd lost his parents at a young age; I just didn't know what the circumstances were. If I had any cherished memories as a child, it was through him. All this muddled thinking about my family's past made me feel as though I was beginning some strange and unpredictable odyssey with no way of knowing where it would take me. Dwelling on it didn't diminish the problem, but only served to compound an already-complex ordeal. I threw an endless array of questions at myself, causing me to imagine an ever-expanding scope of theories and ideas about my family's past. By doing so, I created my own form of self-persecution.

Seeing how this story of murder invoked wide speculation, at an open hallway junction I took a convenient chair to contemplate the situation. Sitting there, experiencing a rising, unwanted upsurge within me, I stared aimlessly while being drawn deeper and deeper into intense thought. I could already tell that learning about this murky murder was going to leave a lasting impact on me. In considering how a crime of such magnitude can fracture lives for generations, this murder in particular would leave anybody profoundly disturbed and troubled, a maliciously shocking slaying with such bloody overtones by the merciless method of delivering death. What made it especially dramatic for me was the victim and the murderer were both close relations of mine, my grandparents, and I wasn't sure how to cope with it; but I kept connecting it with my own life, partly because my mother had suggested the same. As my thoughts raced wildly, I tried convincing myself that I was taking it all too seriously, but there was no escaping the sobering thought that lying dormant in my

genetic code could be a deadly sickness with the capacity to influence me into committing violent murder.

Meditating on this indelible revelation, I swung my head back to clear my hair from my eyes and viewed a framed photograph of my father within arm's reach on a nearby table. Then, in wondering what could've driven my grandmother to commit such an unspeakable act, I picked up the picture frame to gaze at it. She must've fallen so far out of the realm of reality and became so psychologically unbalanced that she didn't know what she was doing. How many ways can one define madness—psychoneurosis, schizophrenia, and paranoia describe a medley of mental disorders and diseased abnormalities categorizing deranged behavior; but they all were vague and ambiguous to me. Still, I imagined one's wants, needs, and desires turning into extremes and excessive cravings until thoughts created by the mind consumed present reality. Common mood swings getting so far out of proportion as to take one on a high euphoria, then in sweeping seconds thrown uncontrollably into sorrow, despair, and depression, excesses feeding deceptive delusions, evolving while developing a self-imposed, erroneous perception about life.

Without a record of my grandmother's medical history, there was no way to gauge the degree or perplexity of her illness and arrive at whether the condition was treatable, thus leaving the possibilities endless. With no way to learn what her prognosis may have been, I pondered whether the disease took hold by the way she had been raised—a result of environment, primarily by mistreatment or abuse. Did her mother suffer from mental illness? If she had, then I definitely would have something to worry about. But there was no way to know any of this. The whole idea that my grandmother went mad was all so very disturbing to me because I could never hope to learn what was in her mind at the time of the crime.

Gazing at the picture of my father and focusing on his facial features, I saw what I perceived to be an imperfection I never noticed before; then bringing the picture closer for my eyes to give it further examination, on the left side of his face one could

faintly detect what may be a scar which few people could see or be mindful of. It actually appeared that in an effort to close a wound the skin was stretched ever so subtly, causing the left eye to have a slight squint. The scar ran from just above his ear and upwards along the hairline—that's what made it so hard to see.

Scrutinizing that subtle squint, I stared at my father's photo while imagining he must've suffered an injury as a baby under my grandmother's care at or about the time that she'd murdered my grandfather. I couldn't help asking myself how sick an individual my grandmother was, but quickly concluded that only a person with a diseased mind could harm an innocent child. That coincided with the thought that only a person with a deranged mind could decapitate a human being. My mother had described a nasty, terrible scar on the left side of my father's body too, and I thought how I never saw him around our pool unless he had a shirt on; and rarely did I see him in the water.

In the midst of concerning myself with this scar—if it was a scar and I wasn't just imagining things—I thought how it must've always been there and yet, I never gave it a thought. I could no longer look at the photograph and torture myself with these crazed ideas about my grandmother. I placed the photo back on the table, and then shifted its viewable angle so that I no longer had to look at it. I didn't need any more reminders or considerations of the madness that came to possess a grandmother I never knew, and I didn't want to tarnish the memory of my father any further.

My hair kept falling down and getting into my eyes, and I ran my fingers through strands while pushing it back to get it out of my face; then I saw George approaching me as he appeared in the hallway. He carried in each hand a glass of orange juice with crushed ice, and came in my direction with one hand outstretched as though offering me a glass. He said, "I took the liberty of fixing us both a drink spiked with a little vodka, I hope you don't mind."

Assuming George didn't know what my mother and I had spoken about; I looked up at him and asked, "What made you think I could use a drink?"

“You’d just arrived after a long drive, and usually after I’ve made a long journey, I can use a refreshing pick-me-up, did I guess wrong?”

“No,” I replied, reaching my hand out for the cold feel of the glass, and after taking a sip, I leaned back and muttered, “You could’ve made mine a double.”

“Did it go that badly?”

“Not really, but I suppose you’re right. I’m a little fatigued, partly from the trip here and yes, partly from the talk she and I had.”

George lifted his glass and took a long drink, then removed from his suit coat pocket a business card and left it on the table, saying, “I don’t know if I can be much aid to you, but should her condition change, I’d like to know. As long as I’ve assisted the family, I think she considers me a friend, and I hope you do too.”

Resting my head against the back of the chair, I crossed my legs, looked up at him, and smiled, “In case you’re the least bit curious, your name came up in our conversation.”

A boyish grin appeared on his face, “Oh, really?”

“My mother’s quite fond of you.”

He finished his drink and puckered in losing the lasting taste of the juice in his mouth, and responded, “That’s what I’ve always thought, but she wasn’t exactly tickled pink with me a couple of days ago. Just before slamming down a hand of cards that beat her at gin, I had the gall to mention some of her stocks were losing money. You know, I shouldn’t say this, but she’s the type that would prefer to take the money with her.”

“I know.”

George glanced at his watch, “Well, I’ve got to get going.” Then starting down the hallway in making his exit, he stalled while turning and twisting his upper body to look back at me, “I have an answering service so don’t hesitate to give me a ring day or night.”

I felt relief knowing that I had someone to talk with who knew my mother well, but I had no intention of asking him for advice pertaining to the problem I’d just been dealt. To me, the main topic of conversation between my mother and I was

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something personal and private, and I preferred that no one knew about it; however, the story of decapitation had a profound effect on me in that it dominated my thinking throughout the day and evening. I'd become overly conscious of it, and the more I brooded over inhibiting thoughts regarding this awful story, the tighter its hold had over me; and unable to suppress the eerie thoughts created by this wretched story, I only wished there was a way to learn the details of what transpired back then. All I kept doing was going over my mother's revealing description of a part of the family that I never knew existed before, inventing and reinventing scenarios; but without facts, what else was there for me to do but to speculate and surmise what had happened? Would I always be wondering if I'm to follow in the footsteps of my grandmother and harm someone whom I loved dearly?

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