

**NO
STONE
UNTURNED**

ALSO BY JAMES W. ZISKIN

Styx & Stone

james w. ziskin

NO STONE UNTURNED

An
**ELLIE STONE
MYSTERY**



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To Lakshmi

CHAPTER ONE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1960

The story I heard was that Fast Jack Donovan was chasing a rabbit through the woods when he tripped in the wet leaves. As he fell on his shotgun, the muzzle peeked out from under him and blasted a volley of lead and powder past his right ear. He twisted on the ground for a while, kicking and swearing until the ringing in his ear had faded. Then he picked himself up, scraped a layer of muck off his brand-new hunting jacket, and saw the crop of blonde hair half-buried in the mud.



It was just turning dark. I was driving myself home from a date: a Saturday matinee of *Butterfield 8* with an eager young bank clerk of my acquaintance. For weeks, we'd been flirting through the teller's window as he scribbled entries into my passbook and dealt me my withdrawals with the panache of a seasoned croupier. He seemed fun, and I thought he might have potential. But I never imagined that an innocent movie (well, not so innocent) would lead to his pinning me on the sofa for a count of three. The wrestling was a disappointment, at least for me. As I buttoned my blouse, I swore to myself there would be no rematch. And of course I would have to change banks.

I turned north and started to climb Market Hill, just as one of those Mitch Miller sing-alongs came on the radio. I nearly broke the knob switching it off and turned up the police scanner instead. A dispatch was in progress: a body had been found in Wentworth's Woods, near Route 40, north of Wilkens Corners Road.

In all my time in New Holland—nearly three years—the most exciting event I had covered for the *Republic* was a mysterious trash-can fire in front of Tesoro's Pharmacy on East Main Street. The boredom had just about worn me down, and not even the odd afternoon of heavy breathing with bank clerks, lawyers, or junior editors made any of it seem worthwhile. My life was grinding by like a glacier inching down a mountainside. I was ready to leave the bars, bowling alleys, and empty knitting mills behind. Abandon this forsaken backwater like an unwanted child and go back to New York to prove my late father right once and for all—that I was wasting my time writing filler and shooting photographs for a small, upstate daily that didn't appreciate me.

My father's death in January was a recent wound, made all the more tragic by our long, unresolved estrangement, now fossilized and permanent. Abraham Stone, celebrated Dante scholar and professor of comparative literature, had challenged me to show him one significant piece I'd written for the paper, and when I couldn't, we essentially stopped speaking. We'd had little to share anyway, especially with my mother and brother gone. Elijah was killed on his motorcycle in June of 1957, and my mother succumbed to cancer three months later. My father and I were left alone, two survivors uncertain and unsympathetic of each other, thrown together without the option. And now he, too, was dead.

Furthermore, my position at the paper was going nowhere fast. Artie Short, publisher of the *New Holland Republic*, didn't like the idea of a girl reporter and hated the sight of me to boot. Yet, somehow, I hadn't found the words to tell Charlie Reese, my editor, that I couldn't stand one more day in New Holland. It was five thirty on a cold Saturday afternoon, two days after Thanksgiving, and I was getting the feeling I'd be sticking around just a bit longer.



The woods were crawling with cops: New Holland police, state troopers, and county deputies. Even Big Frank Olney, sheriff of Montgomery County, had managed to pry himself out of his swivel chair to

investigate the biggest crime of his tenure. When I pushed through the cordon, Doc Peruso, the county coroner, was pulling a sheet over the naked body.

“Hey, Eleonora,” called Olney. “Our guy’s in Schenectady. Can you take the pictures?”

“Sure, Frank,” I said, unsnapping my Leica, knowing he called me that just to gall me. Everyone knew I went by Ellie. “What happened here?”

“Murder,” said Peruso. “Not sure how long she’s been dead; maybe twenty-four hours. I’ll know later if she’s been raped. And here’s your headline, young lady: that’s Judge Shaw’s girl under the sheet.”

“Judge Shaw?” I gulped. “As in the Shaw Knitting Mills Shaws?”

“That’s off the record,” said Olney. “We don’t have any positive ID.”

“I’ve been their family physician for twenty-five years,” said Peruso. “That’s Jordan Shaw, all right.”

“Off the record, please, Ellie,” repeated the sheriff, nicer than he’d ever been in a nonelection year. “We haven’t raised Judge Shaw yet.”

“I’ll hold off on the ID,” I said, plugging a flashbulb into the reflector. “Can you move these guys back while I take the pictures? No need to put on a show.”

Olney ordered the cordon to retreat twenty yards, and Fred Peruso turned back the sheet. I’d seen a few dead bodies before, but none so fresh or so young. I’d never met or even seen Jordan Shaw before, which I’m sure made photographing her corpse a little easier. They don’t teach you this stuff at the Columbia School of Journalism.

“Pretty girl,” I said to Peruso. That was an understatement, even with the mud smeared over her bare, white skin. “How old was she?”

“Twenty-one. Just back from school in Boston for the holiday.”

“You said her name was Jordan?” I asked. “Kind of an unusual name for a girl, isn’t it?”

“Family name,” said Peruso, puffing on his pipe. “The judge’s grandmother was one of the Saratoga Springs Jordans.”

“Any idea of the cause of death?”

“Look at her,” he said. “I’ll give you three guesses, and the first two don’t count.”

Her neck was indeed twisted into a difficult and, apparently, fatal angle. I knelt down next to the body and snapped a tight shot of her colorless face.

“Can I touch her?” I asked. Peruso nodded, relighting his pipe in the cool breeze. Frank Olney had no objections. My boldness surprised me. “Doctor, what’s this mark on her pelvis?”

Peruso joined me to examine her lower abdomen. “What the . . . ?” he said, brushing some dirt away and exposing a two-inch, horizontal gash in her skin on the left side, about an inch above the line of her pubic hair. Frank Olney joined us, peered over Doc Peruso’s shoulder, and swore to himself.

I backed off to shoot the torso, pelvis, and legs.

“Is this how you found her?” I asked the sheriff, ejecting another spent bulb onto the wet earth, where it hissed for a brief moment before going cold and silent.

“No. Her face was in the mud, body twisted clear around. Buttocks almost flat against the ground.”

“Not a comfortable position,” I said, rewinding the first roll of film.

“You’re gonna clean up them bulbs when you’re done, ain’t you, Ellie?” asked the sheriff to needle me.

I nodded yes. “I suppose she was already dead when she hit the ground?”

“Dead before she got here,” clarified the doctor.

“What’s the nearest road? Forty?”

“Route Forty’s about two hundred yards back that way,” said the sheriff, throwing a thumb over his shoulder. Then pointing past me, “There’s a service road to the water tower about fifty yards over there.”

“Paved?”

“Just mud.” He squinted at the moon then nudged the wet ground with his toe.

“Are your boys checking for tracks over there?” I asked, loading the second roll.

He glared at me. “You want this job, Eleonora?”

“Take it easy, Frank,” I said. “It’s for my story.”

Olney stared me down for a moment, hands on wide hips. It must have made him feel tough to push a girl around. A girl just trying to do her job. Then he lit a cigarette and took a deep draw.

“Halvey and Pulaski are over there now, looking for tracks,” he said. “Why don’t you see if there’s anything worth shooting when you’re done here?”

“Almost finished. I just want to get some tight shots of her neck.”

“She ain’t in no rush,” he mumbled. “But remember, the paper doesn’t use any of these. They’re for my investigation. And black and white. I ain’t paying for Kodachrome.”

“I’ll bill you for film and processing,” I said, returning to the body. “And bulbs . . .”

Jordan Shaw’s hair was matted with mud and wet leaves, making it impossible to tell if she’d been clubbed on the head. Peruso would know better in the morning. Her face showed no contusions or abrasions. The neck appeared to have been snapped neatly, with no sign of trauma anywhere on the skin, if you didn’t count the gash in her pelvis. But that hadn’t killed her. I finished off the second roll with some wide shots of the crime scene, picked up my exploded flashbulbs, then set off in search of Halvey and Pulaski.

I tramped through the woods toward the service road, wondering if I was following the murderer’s route. The ground was saturated from the previous night’s rainstorm, and the soggy earth tried to suck the shoes right off my feet. I wished I’d worn boots; my heels were ruined. If anyone had left Wentworth’s Woods on foot the night before, there would surely be tracks left behind.



“Jesus, Ellie!” cried Halvey. “You scared the hell out of me. Make some noise when you sneak up on a guy!” He put a hand on his heart and took a seat on a dead log.

I snapped a picture of the distressed deputy, blinding him for

about ten seconds with the flash. "Check the bulletin board at the jail on Monday," I said.

Once he'd regained his sight, he leapt from his log and snatched the camera from my hands.

"I'm confiscating this film," he grinned.

"I've got shots of the body on that roll, you big bully," I lied. "Olney'll have your head."

Halvey frowned and gave me back the camera. "What are you doing over here anyway?"

"Frank sent me to take some pictures of tracks. Found any?"

"Just this mess here," he said, pointing to the deep ruts that cut through the middle of the road. "And those have been there for years."

"Where's Stan?"

"I don't know. The Polack's poking around somewhere. You go look for him; I'm beat."

I walked about a hundred yards in each direction, searching the ground with the flashlight Halvey had given me. I passed Stan Pulaski going and coming as he knelt in the mud to examine the ground. He said he was looking for tire tracks. The ruts seemed as old as the water tower itself, and I could find no evidence of footprints.

"Where does Judge Shaw live?" I asked Pat Halvey once I'd returned to the log.

"Market Hill," he said. "Big old mansion in the nice part of town."

"Any houses around here?"

"Nope. The Mohawk Motel's about a mile up Route Forty, and the Dew Drop Inn's just over there." He pointed through the woods.

"What do you make of all this, Pat?" I asked.

The deputy's eyes narrowed. "Something dirty, Ellie," he said. "Nice, pretty girl like that turns up dead, bare naked. I think she was raped and killed by a sexual pervert."

I murmured agreement as I snapped a few shots of the mud. Pat Halvey was the kind of fellow who would notice a puddle on the ground in the morning and deduce that it had rained the night before.

"Jordan Shaw was a nice girl?" I asked.

“Sure,” he said. “Homecoming Queen her junior year.”

“You knew her?”

“No, but you know how it is. Everyone kind of knows everyone else around here. At least by name.”



Sheriff Olney and Doc Peruso were huddled over two cups of coffee from a thermos bottle, their hot breath puffing billows into the wet air. The body had been wrapped into a big, old Packard Henney ambulance and carted away to New Holland City Hospital on Franklin Avenue, where Peruso would spend a busy Sunday morning on the postmortem. Police officers were now combing the area, scanning the muddy landscape with bowed heads and long, black flashlights.

“Find anything?” Olney asked when he saw me approach.

“Nope. Scared the life out of Halvey, though.”

The sheriff muttered something under his breath and took a sip of cooling coffee.

“So what do you think, Frank?” I asked. “What happened here?”

“Goddamn it, Ellie,” he said, pitching the dregs of his coffee onto the muddy ground. “I got here an hour ago, and you expect an arrest?”

“I’m just asking where the investigation stands. I’ve got my job to do, too.”

“I’m waiting for the coroner’s report,” he said, tossing his head in Peruso’s direction. “Then I’ll consider the physical evidence and go from there.”

“Is there any physical evidence?” I asked. “Besides the body, I mean.”

Olney glowered at his feet. “No. No tracks; nothing.”

I nodded and made a mental note for my story. The sheriff took notice, and his face fell flat.

“What are you planning to write anyway, Ellie?”

“You haven’t told me anything,” I said. “Our next edition won’t be out until Monday noon. I’m hoping you’ll get something more by tomorrow night.”

"I'll get the bastard who did this," he said, glaring at me. "You can put that in your damn story."

Olney trudged off to confer with the troopers and his deputies, leaving me and Doc Peruso behind.

"Would you mind giving me some information tomorrow once you've examined the body?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "I should be finished around eleven."

"In the meantime, how about I buy you a coffee in a proper cup?"



Whitey's Luncheonette on East Main was crowded as usual for a Saturday night. The richer kids were home from college for the holiday, and the poorer kids were always around. Whitey's was a renowned late-night hangout for young and old, and it was busy even on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Whitey Louis kicked some dawdling teenagers out of a booth and ushered us over personally. I thought this singular behavior, since the proprietor was a royal prick who rarely budged from his seat at the cash register, and even then only to call his bookie.

"Why the first-class treatment, Whitey?" asked Doc Peruso. "You need some free medical advice?"

Whitey laughed, took a seat with us—another first—and summoned Carmella, a slim waitress of a certain age, whose jet-black beehive belied the years she'd clocked on her odometer. Peruso eschewed his pipe and lit a green cigar instead. We ordered coffee. Whitey told Carmella to bring a large order of fries and gravy, and Peruso and I shrugged at each other. Tony Di Gregorio, the fruit wholesaler on West Main, once told me Whitey Louis was cheaper than a Scottish Jew living in Genoa. Italian humor, I gathered, my feelings none too hurt.

"I hear something happened up on Route Forty," Whitey said. Peruso and I exchanged glances.

"Maybe," I said, toying with one of the spoons on the table; Fred Peruso had to be more diplomatic than I did.

"Come on," said Whitey, lowering his voice as I lit a cigarette. "I

hear someone was murdered. Ten minutes later, the coroner and Lois Lane stroll into my diner arm in arm. You two were out there, right? So what's the story?"

"Read the papers, Whitey," I said, payback for the Lois Lane crack.

"Come on, girlie. There ain't no paper tomorrow. Just give me a hint. I won't breathe a word to nobody."

"To tell you the truth, Frank Olney asked us to keep quiet until tomorrow."

"Screw him, the fat slob. I know something happened out there, so why don't you just tell me?"

Carmella returned with the coffee.

"Sorry, Whitey," I said, feeling a sudden chill from our host.

"Thanks loads," he said, rising from the booth. "Don't take too long; I got paying customers who want to sit down."

Whitey returned to his register, pausing at the kitchen window on the way to cancel our fries and gravy.

"I was wondering, Doctor, does Judge Shaw have any enemies?" I asked Peruso once we were alone.

"Call me Fred, will you?" he said. "You make me feel like an old man."

"Freddy sounds even younger," I smiled. Flirting is a habit of mine that I can't quite control.

"Fred is young enough, thanks. And, by the way, Eleonora doesn't exactly scream youth."

"Okay," I said. "I'll call you Fred if you'll call me Ellie."

"Deal. Now, what was the question again?"

"Do you think the judge has enemies?"

Peruso shrugged and sipped his coffee.

"That wasn't the judge under that sheet," he said.

"You think a twenty-one-year-old girl has that kind of enemies?"

"I think a pretty girl like Jordan gave fellows ideas. Maybe one of them didn't want to take no for an answer."

I stubbed out my cigarette in the tin ashtray.



I left Whitey's parking lot at the wheel of my company car: a two-toned, white-and-canary-yellow Plymouth Belvedere of a none-too-memorable recent vintage. The roads were slick from the persistent drizzle that had followed the downpour of the previous night. I was late for my usual evening appointment with a tumbler of whiskey and ice, but I wanted to drop in at the Dew Drop Inn and make some inquiries.

I had visited the Dew Drop only once, about a year and a half earlier. It was too dingy and sad to make a regular haunt of mine. At ten forty-five on a Saturday night, the regulars had all turned out for the merriment and were holding down their usual barstools in the dim, smoky light. The clientele consisted of old-timers, some of whom still worked in the last of the shops on the East End, at the bottom of Polack Hill. The others had been put out to pasture and were biding their time until the quitting whistle blew for the last time.

When I entered, the five gray men at the bar twisted as one on their stools. I gave a short wave and said hello. Their stony faces, creased and stubbly with white whiskers, showed little sign of cognition. They just stared at me blankly, their eyes barely visible in the low light, their rough hands flat on the bar as if they'd been ordered to place them there and not to move. From four tin ashtrays before them, smoldering cigarettes hissed a thick pall into the close air, like incense in some polluted sacrament for the dead. I thought they should change the sign outside to "Don't Drop Inn." After a moment, the men turned slowly back to the bar and bowed their heads in bleak silence over their Genesee drafts.

"What'll you have?" asked the bartender. He sounded like Lawrence Welk.

"Draft, please," I said, removing my gloves and taking a seat at the bar. I was sure there was no whiskey worth drinking. "How's business?"

He shrugged and pushed a glass under my nose. "Ten cents. And the gents would probably not appreciate any music you might want to hear on the jukebox."

"Thanks, friend, but I didn't come here for the ambiance. I wanted to know if you saw anything funny last night. Any strangers drop in?"

"Like you, you mean? Who are you, anyways?"

“Eleonora Stone, reporter,” I said, offering my hand. “Ellie.” He thought about it a moment, wiped his on his apron, then took my hand.

“Stosh Barczak, proprietor. How come I ain’t seen you here in over a year? How do you think I make a living? Giving out tips to reporters?”

“Sorry about that,” I said. “Quite a memory you’ve got there, Stosh.”

“Yeah, well, it ain’t often we see someone new in here. And it ain’t often she’s a girl, neither. I got a good memory for faces that don’t look like a catcher’s mitt,” and he gave the subtlest tip of his head to his left and the five men at the bar.

“What about last night?” I asked. “Anyone worth remembering?”

He drew another beer for the man to my right. The guy hadn’t moved so much as a finger, but Stosh knew his customers. Another of the regulars pushed off his stool silently, dropped four dimes on the bar one after the other, and shuffled toward the door.

“Drive slowly,” called the bartender after him. “Don’t slip on the ice.”

“There was one fellow,” he said, returning to me. “Never seen anyone like that around here before. Big and dark, with a turban and a funny way of talking. Some kind of foreigner. Kept shaking his head a funny way, too. Like one of those cat figurines with a wobbly head.”

“Really? What was he doing here?”

“He didn’t say. Just asked for a *pint*. I thought he wanted milk and I nearly threw him out. Then I figured out he wanted a beer, so I gave it to him. The membership committee here wasn’t crazy about the idea, but I got to make a living, don’t I? He turned out to be kind of friendly. A smiley kind of guy.”

“What time was that?” I asked.

Stosh squinted at the bare bulb hanging from the ceiling over the pool table. “It was late. Close to midnight.”

“Any idea where he was going or where he was from?”

Stosh pursed his lips and shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“What kind of car?”

“Looked like a light-blue sedan. Maybe a Chevy, but I couldn’t be sure of the make in the dark.”

“Did he have mud on his shoes?” I asked. “Or on the tires?”

“No, he was wearing city shoes, and they were clean. I don’t know about the tires. The rain started later anyway. There wasn’t any mud at that hour.”

Once I’d finished a second glass of beer a while later, I slipped back into my coat, thanked Stosh for his help, and wished him and the regulars goodnight.

“Don’t be a stranger,” said the bartender as I turned the knob on the door. Then he smiled at me, “Drive slowly. Don’t slip on the ice.”



Finally heading home around midnight, I thought about the weather and Wentworth’s Woods. No footprints in the mud; no tire tracks on the service road. Jordan Shaw’s murderer had either dragged her to the shallow grave from Route 40 or lugged her corpse more than a quarter mile up the unpaved service road. What was certain was that he’d dumped her body before the rain started.

Once home, I switched on the light in my parlor, poured myself a drink, and fell into my armchair. I picked up the phone and dialed Charlie Reese, waking him from a sound sleep, and he growled his displeasure.

“I’ve got a big story, Charlie.” I said, waiting for some kind of reaction.

“What? Did Mrs. Navona win the meatball-rolling contest down at the K of C?”

“Judge Shaw’s daughter’s been murdered,” I announced with a glee reserved for bearers of bad news.

I could tell he’d sat up in bed. “Don’t joke about things like that, Ellie.” I’d broken the news of the Communist victory in Cuba to him nearly two years before, and he didn’t believe me then either.

“It’s no joke. Someone tripped over her body in Wentworth’s Woods about four thirty this afternoon. I got there about an hour after she’d been found.”

“Why didn’t you call me right away?”

“Sorry, I had to get my story. And Frank Olney offered me the chance to take pictures at the scene.”

“Pictures of the body?”

“Forget it. The sheriff won’t let us use them. They’re too grisly anyway.”

I gave Charlie all the information on the murder I had, answering his questions for almost an hour.

“I’ve got to call Artie Short,” he said before hanging up. “Be careful how you write it, and I’ll try to convince Artie to let you have the story.”

“Please, Charlie!” I said. “This is my story. You can’t give it to George Walsh.”

“I’ll do what I can,” he said. “But you’re going to have to outwrite George at every turn, and even then I can’t promise Artie will allow it.”

“Go to the mat for me this one time, Charlie,” I said. “You won’t regret it, I promise.”

There was silence down the line.

“I’ll give you copy and pictures tomorrow night,” I said. “I’ve got a lot to do before then.”



The Shaw Knitting Mills had been the town’s first and most important carpet manufacturer. Judge Shaw’s grandfather, Sanford Shaw, built the first knitting mill on the banks of the Great Cayunda Creek in the late 1870s. By 1910, Shaw Knitting Mills had carpeted half of the Eastern Seaboard, and New Holland counted thirty-five thousand souls. With the boom that followed World War I, glove and button factories sprang up, and New Holland grew to a prosperous population of forty-two thousand, one-third of whom wove rugs for the Shaws. When Sanford Shaw died in 1925, his elder son, Joshua, assumed control of the mills and spent three-quarters of the family’s fortune breeding racehorses, marrying then divorcing gold diggers, and building empty mansions in Florida. World War II might well have ruined the mills, as the nation

mobilized to defeat the enemy, buying war bonds instead of carpets. But after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Joshua Shaw was replaced by his younger brother, Nathan, the judge's father, who put the idle looms back into service, producing blankets and canvas for the war effort. The mill flourished. After the Japanese surrender, as the town shifted back to carpet production, costs rose and profits fell. Nathan Shaw took Draconian steps to save the company and the family fortune. The most noteworthy of his measures was the migration of Shaw Knitting Mills to Georgia, where labor was nonunion and cheap. In 1954, the last looms were dismantled, destroyed, or shipped south. New Holland atrophied rapidly, losing a quarter of its population to old age and labor exodus in just five years.

Unwilling to abandon the town his family had built and then orphaned, Judge Harrison Shaw stayed behind after his father and brothers had left for greener pastures in New York and Atlanta. New Holland loved and respected him for having stayed and elected him to the municipal-court bench four times before he was appointed Appellate Division judge by Governor Harriman in 1955.

The story of Jordan Shaw's murder was daunting, but I knew it represented the biggest opportunity of my career. Hard work aside, this murder would demand great care and sensitivity, given the girl's name. I felt up to the challenge, eager to carve out some kind of mark for the last of the Stones and, at the same time, sweep away the lingering disapproval of my late father.



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1960

Around four thirty in the morning, I awoke in the same armchair, my last drink still sitting untouched on the table next to me. The ice had melted and the watery Scotch was wasted.

I trudged to the bedroom, stripped out of my rumpled clothes, and

showered. Twenty minutes later, I buttoned my blouse, stepped into a skirt, and tightened the belt, feeling thin and empty inside. I hadn't eaten since noon the day before. Popcorn.

The sun would come up soon, and I wanted to return to the murder scene before the crowds of gawkers had trampled any evidence missed by Frank Olney's bloodhounds. I pulled to a stop on the graveled shoulder of Route 40, just about the time the car's heater had finally kicked in. I was surprised to find Olney hadn't secured the crime scene. No use searching for clues along the road; the three-ring circus of the night before had certainly erased any footprints or tire tracks that may have been there. Remembering my ruined shoes from the night before, I had thought ahead. I slipped out of my heels and into a pair of rubber boots, popped the door open, and climbed out.

The sun rose slowly, throwing a gray, dishwater daybreak over the land. I left my car beside the road and entered the woods, camera loaded and strung over my shoulder.

The police had marched long and hard over the area adjacent to Route 40, leaving it cratered like a moonscape. I made my way to the crime scene where Jordan Shaw's shallow grave cut into the mud. It was little wonder Fast Jack had tripped over the body; the hole where she'd been buried was barely two and a half feet deep. Someone had been in a hurry to cover the girl and blow.

What kind of instrument had dug the pitiful excuse for a grave? As a girl in New York, I had watched my brother, Elijah, hack better holes using the worn heels of a pair of PF Flyers, and all he'd wanted to bury was the nose of a football to kick off a sandlot game. Jordan Shaw's grave wasn't much deeper.

I crouched down to touch the soggy ground, careful not to muddy my stockings in the process. The gash sliced into the earth cleanly, but at a weak angle. The hole deepened gradually as it grew longer, as if opened by one stroke of a large spade. Lengthwise, it was no more than five feet, and its width extended to about thirty inches where the fissure was deepest. The grave wouldn't have held a large dog.

Reaching into the hole, I ran a hand along the length of the wall,

exploring the grainy mud and clammy leaves with my fingers. I dug a little deeper, raking the ground with my nails, until I unearthed a small, metallic object: a bottle cap. Strange place for garbage, I thought, wiping the bent cap with my thumbs, then on a lens cloth. It was maroon and white: “the friendly Pepper-Upper,” Dr Pepper, 10, 2, and 4. It looked new.

I shot ten frames of the gravesite by day, then moved on to the service road. Only Deputies Halvey and Pulaski had examined the scene, so, unlike the gravesite, there had been no stampede of cops and there were few footprints left behind. The ancient ruts carved in the dirt had swallowed any recent tire tracks that might have been laid; it was possible someone had come up the road recently but unlikely that any evidence remained.

By daylight, the road took on a different mien. The mounds, curves, and depressions had shrugged off the night and now stood out prominently, painted in various shades of gray and brown. I retraced my steps of the night before, hunched over like a contemplative monk, examining the ground for anything out of the ordinary: footprints, tire tracks, a stray bottle of Dr Pepper minus its cap . . .

After stooping several times to examine small artifacts in the mud, I began to distinguish the old from the new. A spent shotgun shell—possibly one of Fast Jack’s—was clearly a recent arrival, though not germane to my search. In the ditch beside the road, I found a nest of rusting Schaefer cans, relics of some furtive caucus of teenagers. There was a broken milk bottle from Stadler’s Dairy; a battered hot water tank, buckled by what appeared to be a sharp kick to the groin; soggy, yellowed newspapers; and a muddy garbage can, crushed flat, a few yards into the woods. Fodder for future archeologists.

I marched up and down the service road twice, searching for enlightenment. Plopping myself onto the same log Pat Halvey had held down the night before, I surveyed the high trees, craning my neck to see the water tower fifty yards behind me. A cold breeze had been blowing since before dawn, whistling through the bare trees and drying the muddy road. A tawny color was spreading over the crests of the ruts

in the road, except for one curious spot about ten feet in front of me. From my seat on the log, it looked like a blackish blotch, as if it was still wet. But on closer inspection, I saw the mark was actually three circles about an inch in diameter each, forming an isosceles triangle. A touch of my finger confirmed my first impression; it was motor oil. I shot a few frames of the oil then trudged back through the woods to my car. It wasn't yet eight: plenty of time before my meeting with Fred Peruso at City Hospital to make some prints of the film I'd shot the previous night.

I was renting the upstairs flat of a homey duplex on Lincoln Avenue, across the street from Fiorello's Home of the Hot Fudge. It was a friendly, middle-class neighborhood, quiet and respectable, at least until Friday night when the youngsters descended upon Fiorello's and Lincoln Avenue to hang out and cause trouble. Confrontations between residents and the teens boiled over every few years or so. The locals would enlist the police to arrest loiterers, and the youths practiced a guerilla war of retaliatory mischief and late-night noise. Kids' stuff. Lincoln Avenue always found its way back to serenity, usually when a troublesome group of teenagers outgrew its taste for malteds at Fiorello's and moved up to beer in any of New Holland's legion of taverns. Things had been relatively quiet on Lincoln Avenue since I'd arrived nearly three years earlier.

For want of space, I had set up my enlarger, smelly chemical baths, and clothesline in my bathroom, the only room besides the kitchen with running water. I was no expert developer, but sometimes I needed a quicker turnaround than the photo lab at the paper could provide. I ran three rolls of film through the processor and made two sets of prints of the murder scene, hanging them to dry in my darkened bathroom.

Over coffee and a slice of dry toast, I dropped the sheriff's prints and negatives into an envelope. Then I selected a five-by-eight shot of Jordan Shaw's lifeless face and slipped it into my purse—the sheriff didn't need to know—and I headed for City Hospital.

Fred Peruso was in the doctors' lounge, dressed in his usual blue scrubs, writing a report amid thick cigar smoke. He looked up from his

paper and announced without preamble that there were no lesions in the vaginal wall, no sign of struggle or forced penetration.

“Good morning to you, too,” I said. “So no rape? At least her honor was intact.”

Peruso frowned. “Not quite. She may not have been raped, but there was semen in her vagina.”

I took a seat next to Peruso, tossing the envelope of Olney’s prints onto the table in front of him.

“No rape and no prophylactic?” (I congratulated myself for having resisted the temptation to say “rubber.”) “She wasn’t worried about birth control?”

Peruso shook his head. “Do you know what this is?” He placed a small, metallic coil on the table for my inspection.

I picked it up, turning it over again and again. “No idea,” I said, tapping it on the tabletop.

Peruso peered over his reading glasses at the small coil in my hand. “It’s an intrauterine device. IUD. It’s one of the most effective contraceptives available.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of those,” I said. “Not very common, are they?”

“These copper ones are new. There’s been some testing here and there, in Europe and in the Third World.”

“How does it work?”

“It’s implanted in the uterus and prevents a fertilized egg from attaching itself. Effective, worry-free birth control. No chemical manipulation like with those new pills.”

“So, a girl doesn’t get one of these on a lark. Jordan Shaw must have been getting regular action.”

Peruso glared at me. A curtain of blue smoke hung in the air, surrounding his head and closely cropped white hair like an aura or a corona. “You didn’t know Jordan, Ellie, so I can’t expect you to feel too sorry for her. But she was a heck of a girl. I don’t know what she was doing in Boston, but I don’t like to judge people for what they do behind closed doors. I’d assume a girl like you would agree.”

He was right. I was certainly in no position to cast stones. I apolo-

gized, conscious for the first time of my cavalier attitude toward the life and death of a twenty-one-year-old girl.

“Let’s see if I can be more clinical,” I said, placing the coil on the tabletop with delicate fingers. “The IUD prevents pregnancy without the use of other methods of contraception?”

Peruso nodded, picked up the coil, and dropped it into a pocket-sized envelope.

“Is it your professional judgment, then, that the presence of an IUD would indicate regular sexual relations?” I felt like a district attorney questioning an expert witness.

“Yes, but I intend to deny I ever found an IUD. And I know I can count on your discretion.” His eyes stared me down, dead serious.

“Of course,” I said after a moment. Then, wanting to rid myself of his eyes, I asked about the exact cause of death.

“Broken neck. Severe damage to the spinal cord between the second and third cervical vertebrae.” He produced an x-ray from another, larger envelope, held it up to the light, and showed me the anatomy of Jordan Shaw’s death. “Quick and painless. Some gorilla snapped her neck like cracking his knuckles. I’ve fixed the time of death between ten p.m. Friday and nine a.m. Saturday.”

“I’d guess before one a.m.,” I said.

“Why’s that?”

“The rain. It started about one thirty, I think. That would explain the absence of tracks in the woods.”

“I hadn’t thought about tracks,” said Peruso, picking up the envelope with my photographs inside. He chewed on his cigar, flipping through the entire set.

“How does one break a neck like that?” I asked. “From behind?”

“Most likely. Doesn’t look like there was much of a struggle.”

“What about the gash in her pelvis?”

Peruso shrugged his shoulders, eyes fixed on one of the photographs. “Certainly not fatal, but it would’ve hurt like all get-out . . . had she been alive at the time.”

“So you think she was already dead?” I asked.

“I know she was,” he said, tapping the ash from the end of his cigar into a paper coffee cup. “Not enough blood to indicate a pumping heart.”

“What kind of a monster snaps a girl’s neck and slices out a piece of skin for sport?”

“That’s the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question,” said Peruso, laying the photograph face down on the table.

“Some kind of deviant?”

“Maybe. Or a clumsy killer.”

I picked up the pile of photos and shuffled through the tight shots of the victim’s pelvis, focusing on the gruesome details of the wound.

“Why, indeed?”

I tried without success to imagine a plausible explanation.

“You said sport, Ellie. You think whoever did this did it for some kind of sadistic thrill?”

“I can’t see any other reason,” I mumbled, peering into the muddied space where two inches of Jordan Shaw’s smooth, white skin had once been. “What kind of weapon do you think did this?”

“Just a knife, I guess. A large one. Maybe a hunting knife. There doesn’t appear to be any serration in the blade.”

We sat quietly for a moment, digesting the photograph together, then I asked if Jordan had had any marks there.

“A scar? Birthmark? Old hernia operation? Appendix?”

“The appendix is on the other side,” he grumbled. “And I examined her about three months ago before she went back to school. There was nothing there then and nothing there this morning in the autopsy. No hernia, no C-section, if that’s what you’re driving at. I examined her uterus very carefully; there was no scarring anywhere.”

“Oh,” I said, disappointed that my theory had been sunk. “But her killer took the time to carve out a piece of her flesh; I’d like to know what was there before. Maybe it was some imperfection he wanted to remove, as if he was obsessed by her beauty.”

Peruso grunted, still chewing on his cigar, but offered nothing.

The lounge door swung open, and Frank Olney stepped inside.

“What are you doing here?” he asked me, none too friendly. I didn’t answer. “Those mine?” he asked, motioning to the photographs.

I nudged the set of prints across the table. He examined them closely, groaning with each eight-by-ten. Finally, he put them down and took a seat.

“I just spent the longest hour of my life over to Judge Shaw’s,” he said, removing his cap to rub his balding scalp. “Broke his heart. It was torture, I tell you. You ever have to stand there and tell a man his child is dead?”

Peruso sneered. “A few times; yes.”

“Oh, sorry, Doc. Of course.” He shook his head. “His only child. He took it hard. Real hard.”

“Is he all right?” asked Peruso.

“He’s just crushed, like I kicked him in the stomach telling him. We had to call Doc Terrell from next door to tranquilize Mrs. Shaw. She went ape.”

“Does he have any idea who might have done this?”

“No. No clue anything was wrong. Said Jordan was like always when she got home from Boston Wednesday night. Had a nice Thanksgiving dinner Thursday, then the judge and the Mrs. were out of town Friday. Got back Saturday afternoon and just assumed Jordan took the car and went out that day.”

“Where’s the car now?” I asked, butting in.

“He doesn’t know. I figure it was stolen by the shit who did this to her. State police are looking for it now.”

“What’s the make and model?”

Frank looked at me funny at first, then figured I needed it for my story. “Dark-gray, four-door Continental Mark Five. Brand new. Same car as Elvis Presley got. The judge just bought it two weeks ago.”

Probably not leaking oil, I thought.

“Have you checked to see if it’s been towed?” I asked, sure the question would rile him.

It did. But he kept the lid on his stew, ignoring me and turning to Doc Peruso instead for the results of the autopsy. Frank Olney was

under the gun; he had to catch a killer and catch him fast. I had the feeling that even if he solved the case quickly, he would never be the same again, as if it were somehow his fault that such a tragedy had taken place on his watch.

“Do you have any statements for the press, Frank?” I asked, once he and Doc Peruso had finished. He didn’t.



I left City Hospital, intent on finding Judge Shaw’s Lincoln. My car had been towed out of a snowbank the previous winter, and I had claimed it at Phil’s Garage on the West End. Phil Leone was the proud holder of the lucrative towing contract with the City of New Holland and Montgomery County. If the judge’s Lincoln had been towed, it would be on Phil’s back lot.