

KARMA'S A BITCH: A SHORT STORY

By
Michael Goffinet

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For more information about the author, please visit michaelgoffinet.com

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Bob Sheppard sat at his small mahogany desk reviewing the file of his next client. He closed the file and opened the cabinet door above his desk. He always kept a mirror there to make sure he looked presentable. He always followed the same routine, starting with his tie. An uneven tie can make you appear disheveled and unprofessional. His tie was slightly off, so he adjusted it. His routine ended with his hair. Even at forty-five, he still had a full set of thick auburn hair. He studied his hair. *Perfect*, he thought. He was closing the cabinet door when something in the mirror caught his eye. He moved his face closer to the mirror and looked under his eyes. He was starting to get bags. Then he squinted his eyes. His crow's feet seemed deeper than before. *Not a good sign*. His eyes moved down to his chin and

pinched the surrounding skin. He was starting to get jowls. He really needed to lose some weight. He used to be in such good shape, but he put on an extra twenty pounds over the last fifteen years, mostly around his midsection. He closed the cabinet door in disgust and sat back down at his desk. His secretary's voice came over the intercom. "The Sanders are here to see you Mr. Sheppard."

"Thanks Sarah, I'll come get them." Sarah wasn't actually *his* secretary. He shared her with four other associates. *How the mighty have fallen*. Bob walked down the hallway where Tyler and Barbara Sanders were waiting. "Good to see you two again," said Bob. They exchanged some pleasantries and then the Sanders followed Bob to his office. The Sanders sat down and Bob began his sales pitch. "Well, I reviewed the information you gave me during our last visit and I have created the perfect life insurance policy for you. Remember, here at Rawlings Insurance we are independent brokers, so we aren't married to just one insurance company. We find the company that best fits our client's needs." The Sanders smiled at him. "Let's make sure I have my facts straight. Tyler, you're current salary is \$120,000 a year." Tyler nodded. "And Barbara, you're a stay at home mom with three kids between the ages of one and ten." Barbara nodded. "You definitely have the harder job Barbara." They all chuckled. "We need more moms like you, Barbara; smart women who are dedicated to ensuring that children are nurtured by someone who loves them at all times."

Barbara was just delighted to hear this. "Oh my God, Tyler and I were just talking about that. Women today are so selfish. Nowadays women just drop their kids off at some daycare and let them raise them. That's why we have so many problems in our society."

"You know Barbara, you're exactly right. That's why I insisted on my wife staying home to raise our four kids," said Bob.

"I knew there was something I liked about you Mr. Sheppard. You obviously have good values."

"Thanks Barbara, now getting back to business. Your mortgage is \$400,000 and you have two car loans that total \$60,000. Is there anything else?"

"Unfortunately, that sums it up Bob. I always thought that if I made over a hundred grand a year, I'd be rich, but I feel so poor," said Tyler.

"I hear you. It's not cheap to live here, but you're doing well for thirty-five. Now, according to my notes, you have \$200,000 in life insurance through your company. Is that correct?" The Sanders nodded yes. "Well, according to my analysis, you should have around \$2 million in life insurance."

Tyler eyes widened in surprise and his irritation was obvious. "*What*, that sounds really excessive."

Barbara gently touched Tyler's arm. "Let's hear what Mr. Sheppard has to say, honey."

"I know it sounds like a lot Tyler. Believe me, most people are surprised to realize how underinsured they are. You certainly don't want Barbara to be saddled with all of this debt, do you?"

"Well, um, of course not," answered Tyler defensively.

"Okay, so right off the bat, she's going to have to pay off the mortgage and car loans. That's \$460,000 right there. So let's say you were insured for \$2 million, now poor Barbara is down to \$1.5 million." Barbara was shaking her head in agreement. "Your youngest son is only one. God forbid, but if you died tomorrow, poor Barbara is going to have to make \$1.5 million last at least another seventeen years. That's less than \$90,000 a year. Unfortunately, interest rates aren't even keeping up with inflation anymore, so that \$90,000 a year is only going to be worth \$50,000 a year by then."

Barbara's eyebrows raised in concern. "Wow, I never thought of that."

"And then there's college. You do want your kids to go to college, don't you Tyler?"

His wife looked at him. "Well, of course I do," Tyler answered shifting uncomfortably in his chair.

"So, now you see that \$2 million is really the *minimum* you need to take care of your family."

"Honey, Mr. Sheppard is right. We need at least \$2 million," Barbara said.

"Well, let us think about it Bob," Tyler said.

"Tyler, honey, we need to get this *now*. I don't want to even think about what would happen to me and the kids if something happened to you tomorrow."

"Honey, nothing is going to happen to me," Tyler said in a comforting tone.

Tears formed beneath her eyelids. "Tyler, you don't know that. We need to get this policy right *now*."

Tyler put a hand on his wife's shoulder. "Okay, okay. Honey, please, just stop crying."

Tyler and Barbara walked out with a \$1.8 million Universal Life policy at a premium of \$8,000 a year, of which Bob will make \$5,000 in the first year. *Not a bad day*. It's not what he used to make when he sold those collateralized debt obligations working for Bear Stearns. That was real easy money; at least until the bubble burst and the world came to an end. He used to make a million a year selling those worthless securities, but he still loved the sell. He loved talking people into buying something, especially if they didn't need it. His phone rang. He removed it from his pocket and stared at it. His wife. He took a deep breath and answered. "Hello, Karen."

"Bob, where in the *hell* are you? You were supposed to pick up Jonathan from wrestling a half hour ago."

He rolled his eyes. "Sorry, my appointment ran long."

"You've got responsibilities in this family, *Bob*. Jonathan called me in the middle of a landscaping job. I had to quit right there and pick him up. My client wasn't happy."

"I said I'm sorry, what else do you want from me?"

"I *want* you to be more responsible. I already have one kid, I don't need another one!"

"I...", Bob was about to say something, but then realized she hung up on him. *Bitch!* Life was a lot easier when Karen didn't work. After his life fell apart, she went back to work as a landscaper and that's when their relationship changed. Now, he had chores. Now, he had to help with his son. This was not the life he wanted. One day, he was eating lunch at the diner next to his office and that's when he met Julie. Julie was a new waitress and they hit it off right away. She was a breath of fresh air. She was young and pretty, but most of all she understood him. She treated him like a real man. She didn't make any demands of him. Their relationship was uncomplicated, like a relationship you would have in high school. No responsibilities, just fun and games. He just couldn't take anymore of Karen. She was unrelenting. According to her, he never did anything right. She treated him like a four year old child and they hadn't had sex for over a year. He spent his whole day thinking about Julie. Last night, he was sitting at the dinner table with his family and all he thought about was Julie. He just couldn't take hearing about Karen's stupid day, and his kid was no better. They both constantly whined about everything. His friend once told him that if you think about your wife dying more than you think about having sex with her, you should probably get a divorce. He was certainly at that point, but he just couldn't bring himself to divorce Karen. Even with the crash of the real estate market and closure of his company, he still managed to save over two million dollars and there was no way he was going to give half of it to her. He earned it, while she sat on her ass watching Jonathon. *What to do, what to do?*

Clint Evans just got home from his job at the local hardware store. He was exhausted. He hated the job, but it was the only job he could get. With the bad economy, not too many businesses were hiring ex-felons. *Ex-felon*, he thought. He just couldn't get use to the thought. He'd been out of jail for six months and he still couldn't believe he was an ex-felon. He had been a responsible person his entire life. He was an accountant for Christ sake! He never paid a bill late, never missed an event for his son, and never cheated on his wife. Well, that is, until that fateful night that changed his life forever. It happened two and half years ago, but he remembered that night as if it were yesterday. His best friend,

Scott, was coming into town to give a presentation at a convention. Clint was excited to see him. They hadn't seen each other in fifteen years, ever since Scott moved to Florida. They decided to meet at Joe's Pub, their old stomping grounds. Clint hadn't been out to drink with friends in over five years. He knew the key for any man to stay faithful to his wife, was to stay out of tempting situations. They met at eight o'clock on an empty Thursday night. They had a blast sitting at the bar, drinking and talking about old times. After about two hours, Scott decided he should get some rest before his big presentation the next morning. They said their goodbyes. Clint decided to stay a little longer to sober up before driving home. That was the beginning of his problems. Laura Swanson entered Joe's Pub and sat on the bar stool next to him. Laura was an attractive woman dressed in tight designer jeans and a red three-quarter-sleeve v-neck top showing off her ample breasts. She had beautiful blonde hair that draped over her long neck. Clint's hormones started kicking in. He was quite a lady's man before he met his wife and he missed the game. *What harm could a little flirting hurt? Just to see if I still have it.* He struck up a conversation and bought her a drink. *I still have the old charm.* Laura told him she came to the pub to meet a girlfriend, but her girlfriend called and cancelled right when Laura entered the pub, so she decided to have a drink before she left. "Her loss is my gain," Clint said with his most charming smile. Why he said it he didn't know. He knew he should stop, but it felt too good. One drink led to another and they both became inebriated. She grabbed his hand and led him into the hallway of the bathrooms. They started making out hot and heavy. The head on Clint's shoulders was no longer doing the thinking. She pulled away, leaned in and whispered into his ear. "Have you ever had a quicky in the bathroom?" Clint's eyes went wide in surprise and he swallowed hard. He went silent, but she took his hand and led him into the ladies room. They began kissing wildly. Clint pulled her pants down and then his. He lifted her up on to the sink by her naked ass and entered her. She moaned in delight. A couple minutes later they both orgasmed and held each other tightly. The orgasm sobered Clint up. He immediately started feeling regret. *What have I done?* He said a quick good-bye and ran out the door. He went home, took a long hot shower, got in bed, cuddled up to his wife, Debra, and went to sleep. He promised himself that he would be the best husband in the world. He would make up for his mistake.

Two weeks later, a couple of police arrived at his house and arrested him for rape. *Rape! What the hell were they talking about?* They put on the cuffs right in front of his wife and son. They were both sobbing when they took him away. His head was spinning faster than a top on a coffee table. He couldn't believe this was happening. Later he would find out that Laura had pressed charges against him for rape. She admitted to flirting and even kissing him, but she told the authorities that he pulled her into the ladies room and forced himself on her. To this day, he never found out why she did it. Maybe she was mad that he left abruptly or maybe that was her plan the entire time. Nevertheless, he was found guilty and sentenced to four years in prison. He got out in two years for good behavior, but he will be branded as a sexual predator for the rest of his life. He lost his house and spent his entire life savings on lawyers. His wife had to work two jobs just to support her and their son. His son, Jake, was humiliated. The kids at school were ruthless. He was getting into a fight almost every week. He eventually fell in with the wrong crowd and started smoking pot and drinking. Jake got straight A's the semester before Clint was arrested. Now at sixteen, he was flunking high school. Clint wanted to make it up to his son, but Jake wouldn't even talk to him. It was a high price to pay for a five-second orgasm. Even Tiger Woods got off easier than he did, and he was a serial cheater!

Debra was a trooper. She visited Clint every week for the two years he was in jail. She claimed to still love him and was willing to give him another chance, but it had to be on her terms. They were legally separated but still go on a date every week. The dates have been fun, but she still hasn't allowed him to touch her. He was dying for female attention. He wasn't sure if he could wait much longer. He actually flirted with a woman today for the first time in a couple of years. It felt so good to feel like someone was interested in him. The woman was a regular, so he was sure to see her again. *What was her name? That's right, it was Karen. Karen Sheppard.*

One Month Later

Jane and Kerry just finished locking up the Paris Club at three o'clock in the morning, when they noticed there were three cars in the parking lot. Jane looked at Kerry. "You checked all the bathrooms, right?"

"Yeah, trust me, that place is empty."

"Huh, I wonder whose car that is?"

"Look, I can see someone in the driver's side. Maybe they're waiting for someone," said Kerry.

Jane and Kerry walked over to the Toyota Highlander. They immediately knew something was wrong. A woman was slumped over the steering wheel. "Do you think she is sleeping one off?" Jane asked. Kerry shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, let's find out." Kerry tapped lightly on the window with her knuckles. The woman didn't move. Kerry tapped louder, still no movement. Kerry reached for the door, but Jane grabbed her hand. "*Don't*, I think she may be dead!" Kerry quickly pulled her hand away like she just touched a hot stove. "Um, maybe we should call the police." The police arrived a half hour later. One of the officers pulled the door handle and it opened. He put his fingers up to her neck. *No pulse*. They didn't see any signs of struggle, but they called CSI just in case.

Bob was in his bed making love to his pretty young girlfriend, Julie, when he heard the doorbell. Julie opened her eyes and gave him a strange look. She said, "Dad, the doorbell is ringing."

His eyebrows arched in surprise. "What did you just say?"

"Dad, the doorbell is ringing."

Bob jumped off her in fury. "*Why* did you just call me dad?"

She just stared at him with a crazed look on her face. "Dad, the doorbell is ringing," she said rocking her head back and forth laughing sinisterly. His eyes bolted open. His heart was racing a mile a minute.

"Dad, the doorbell is ringing," his son Jonathan was yelling from the other room.

"Oh, okay, Jonathan, I'll get it." *Wow, what a weird dream*, he thought. He walked to the door and looked through the peephole. *Police*. He opened the door. "What can I do for you officers?"

"Are you Mr. Sheppard?" one of the officers asked.

"Yes, sir, what's the matter?"

"Um..., can we come in a minute?"

"Yes, of course." The officers entered the house. "You're starting to worry me," Bob said with a concerned tone.

"Dad, is everything all right?" Jonathan sleepily asked from the other room.

"Yes, son, please stay in your room." He looked at the officers. "So, what can I do for you officers?"

"Well, we have some bad news about your wife."

Bob's brow lifted. "My *wife*, what about her? Should I go get her?"

The officers looked at each other with surprise and then back at Bob. "Your wife is *here*, Mr. Sheppard?"

"Well, of course she is. Hold on, I'll go get her." The officers stood confused while Bob walked back into his bedroom. He came back a minute later startled. "Oh my god, she's not *there*!"

"You mean, you didn't notice that your wife wasn't here?"

Bob looked down at the floor embarrassed. "Well, um, the doorbell woke me from a deep sleep. I got up so groggy that I didn't even notice she wasn't in the bed. Has something happened to her?"

"Um, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you Mr. Sheppard, but your wife was found deceased earlier this morning."

He felt a lump in his throat and his eyes got misty. "*Dead!* What do you mean dead? How is that possible?"

"I know this is hard on you Mr. Sheppard. Your wife was found deceased in her car, in the parking lot of the Paris Club."

"*Paris Club!*" Bob exclaimed, as his eyebrows lifted quizzically. He sat on the sofa and buried his head in his hands. He looked back up with tears in his eyes. "What was she doing at the Paris Club?"

"We don't know sir. We were hoping you could tell us."

"Um, I'm sorry, I don't know. This is all so confusing. How did she, um, you know, um, die?"

"At this point, we don't know."

"You don't know, how can you not know?"

"There were no signs of a struggle. She could have just died from natural causes. We are going to perform an autopsy, but we need you to come down to the morgue and identify the body."

"Of course, let me go put some clothes on and tell my son. Can you give me a couple of minutes?" Bob entered Jonathan's room and told him what happened. The police officers could hear Jonathan's sobbing from the living room. They felt so bad for the kid. Then they heard something unexpected. Jonathan started yelling at his father. "It's all *your* fault. You *killed* her. *I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.*" The police officers were stunned. They both looked at each other in confusion. Bob came out a couple minutes later dressed and ready to go.

One of the officers cleared his throat. "Is everything alright Mr. Sheppard?"

"Yeah, Jonathan's just really upset. He blames me for my wife's death."

"Why is that?"

"Well, truth be told, my wife and I got in a fight last night and he probably thinks the fight caused her to leave the house."

"Unfortunately, I have given this kind of bad news to many families. The first thing people do is blame someone or something for their loss. Just give him some time and he'll see it wasn't your fault." Bob nodded and they left for the morgue.

A week later, Detective Andy Meola knocked on Bob's door. Bob opened the door. "Can I help you officer?"

"It's actually Detective, Mr. Sheppard. Detective Andy Meola."

"Sorry, Detective. What can I do for you?"

"Do you mind if I come in for a minute?"

"No, not at all." They both strolled into the living room and sat on the sofa.

"Well, Mr. Sheppard, I'm with the homicide unit, and we have officially moved your wife's death into the homicide category."

Bob's eyes widened. "*Homicide!* You think she was murdered?"

"Yes, we do. Based on the coroner's report, she was asphyxiated."

"*What, how?*"

"There were no signs of a struggle, so it appears she was incapacitated and then asphyxiated."

"Do you know how she was incapacitated?"

"We don't know for sure. The only drug we found in her system was Ambien."

Bob interrupted, "She does take Ambien before bed."

"Well, that explains the Ambien. Unfortunately, we may never find out. There are a couple of drugs that can incapacitate someone quickly and won't show up in the system after a couple of hours." Bob nodded and both men were silent for a moment.

"Mr. Sheppard can you tell me where you were that evening?"

"Me? Are you saying I'm a suspect?"

"Everyone's a suspect at this point."

"I see. The first person you look at is the husband."

"Something like that. So, Mr. Sheppard, where were you that evening?"

"Um, I was in bed the whole night. I took an Ambien around ten that night and didn't wake up until the two police officers rang my doorbell."

"You both take Ambien?"

Bob raked his hand through his hair. "Yeah, neither of us sleeps well."

"What time did you last see your wife that night?"

"I guess, around ten. She was still up when I went to bed."

"In the officer's report, they said you had a fight with your wife that night. What was that about?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "Well, um, you know, just your normal married stuff. She was complaining that I wasn't pulling my weight."

"I see. The report also said that your son blamed you for his mother's death."

"Oh, that. That was just teenage hysteria. He thinks the fight was my fault. He believes that if I didn't cause a fight, she wouldn't have left the house that night and would still be alive."

"Did you and your wife fight often?"

"Not really."

"Is it possible your wife was having an affair?"

Bob was taken aback. "Well, I never really worried about that, so I don't think so, but I guess you really never know."

"How about you Mr. Sheppard, are you having an affair?"

Now Bob looked flustered, his cheeks blushed and his brow furrowed. "Of *course* not, Detective. Look, these are very personal questions. Do I need a lawyer?"

Detective Meola lifted his hands. "Look, that's up to you, but I'm just trying to go down the list and eliminate suspects. I certainly don't mean any disrespect."

Bob gave an audible sigh. "I'm sorry, I overreacted. You can imagine the last week has been very difficult for me and my son."

"I understand Mr. Sheppard. I'm just trying to understand what your wife was thinking that night. Why would she leave the house?"

"You know, I've been racking my brain for the last week. It's just not like her to leave the house so late."

"Was she on any other medication?"

"No, just the Ambien."

Detective Meola retrieved a piece of paper from his briefcase. "Mr. Sheppard, here is a print out of the contact list from your wife's iPhone. Can you review the list and circle the contacts that were closest to her?"

"Sure," Bob said as he reached for the list. They sat in silence as Bob went through the list. He finished and handed it back to the detective.

"We are currently going through her phone log to look for any unusual phone calls. We've already reviewed her texts and e-mails on the phone and didn't find anything unusual. Did your wife have a computer?"

"Yeah, she has, I mean had a laptop."

"Well, I would like to take it to the station and have someone review her e-mails for clues."

"Sure, I'll go get it." Bob left and came back a minute later with the laptop. He handed it to Andy. "When will I get everything back?"

"As soon as we're done with them; hopefully we'll be done soon. Do you have any questions Mr. Sheppard?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then. Have a good day." Detective Meola opened the door to leave, but paused. He looked back at Bob. "Oh, one more thing. Does your wife know anyone with red hair?"

Bob's eyebrows narrowed and then shook his head. "No, why?"

"Well, we found a couple of red hairs in your wife's car."

"My God, could they be from the killer?"

"Could be, but they could also be a friend or maybe even one of your son's friends." Bob just nodded in agreement. "Well, if I think of anymore questions, I'll call you." Andy opened the door and looked back. "Oh, and another thing. Does your wife wear a wedding ring?"

"Of course she does. Why do you ask?"

"There was no ring on her finger when she was found."

Bob remained silent for a moment. "Maybe someone stole it. It was worth twenty-thousand dollars."

Andy's brow lifted quizzically. "Well, believe it or not that might help."

"I don't see how."

"I'll put out an alert for the ring. If someone stole it, they will probably try and pawn it at a local pawn shop." Bob nodded in agreement. "Can you provide a description of the ring Mr. Sheppard?"

"Absolutely, we had it appraised a couple of years ago for the insurance policy. I have the appraisal somewhere in my desk. I'll fax it to your office. Oh, can I get a copy of the police report showing it was stolen? I'd like to get that over to the insurance company as soon as possible?"

"Certainly, we want to make sure you get your money back," Andy said sarcastically.

"I'm sorry Detective. I know it sounds callous, but that ring is worth a lot of money."

Andy thought for a moment about this greedy son of bitch. "Did your wife have any life insurance?"

"Well, um, no."

"Okay, thank you for your time Mr. Sheppard." Andy walked out to his car and drove away. While driving to the station, he recalled his conversation with Bob Sheppard. He couldn't pinpoint it, but there was something about him that didn't seem right. He was hiding something. Andy entered the police station and strolled over to his desk. As soon as he sat down, Officer Clara Anderson approached him smiling. "Hi Andy, I got some information from the phone log of Mrs. Sheppard."

"Well? Give it up."

"It would seem that all was not well in the Sheppard household."

"Come on Clara, tell me what you found."

"Well, one of the calls she made was to a divorce attorney."

His eyebrows arched in suspicion. "Wow. That does change things. That definitely gives us a motive. Look, I have a list of Mrs. Sheppard's friends. I'll contact them. Why don't you canvas the neighborhood and find out if anyone noticed anything suspicious at the Sheppard house that night."

Andy met with the first three women and discovered very little, but his meeting with Cindy Sindair was a gold mine. When he first met her, she claimed to be Karen's best friend. He gave very little credence to her claim since that was exactly what the first three women said. However, within the first fifteen minutes he realized she was the real deal. She knew everything. "So you knew about the divorce attorney?" Andy asked.

"Oh, yeah, you don't really think he did it, do you?" she asked.

"Do you think he was capable of such an act?"

She bit her lower lip. "You know, he's kind of creepy, but I don't know. Murder just seems so extreme."

"Do you know why she was thinking of a divorce?"

"Oh, you mean, you don't already know? He was having an affair with that little slut who works at the diner next to his office."

Excitement ran down Andy's spine. *Another motive*, he thought.

She was thoughtful for a moment. "The name of the diner is on the tip of my tongue. Damn, I can't remember. You know the one I'm talking about, don't you?"

"Chelsea's Diner," he said trying to curb his excitement.

"Yes, that's the one. I knew it started with a C. Anyhow, he was having an affair with the waitress there."

"Mrs. Sheppard knew this for a fact?"

"Oh yeah, she went to his office to surprise him for lunch one day. His secretary said he went to lunch at Chelsea's. Karen went over there, and right before she walked in, she noticed the waitress stroking his hair and then touching his shoulder. She stopped dead in her tracks. She turned around, walked back to her car and waited. A couple of minutes later, Bob and this bimbo come strolling out hand-in-hand, like lovers on a romantic walk. It made Karen sick. She got out of the car and followed them. They walked to Bob's car. His car was parked in the underground parking garage, the one right on the corner. You know which one I'm talking about?" Andy nodded. "Well, the car was parked way in the back where it was empty. She walked back there and she could literally see the car rocking. He was *screwing* her right there in the garage! Can you believe the balls on this guy? Karen said a squirt of bile shot up her throat and she almost threw up right there!"

"Wow, what did she do?"

"Well, she was about to approach the little prick right then, but thought twice about it and realized it would be better to blindside the bastard with a divorce."

"Why is that?"

"She didn't trust him. He had money hidden everywhere. She wanted to find out where it all was before she told him."

"What was she worried about."

"She thought he might try to hide it from her. He was very greedy that way." Andy nodded in agreement remembering the incident about the ring.

"Is it possible he found out about the divorce and decided to kill her?"

"Or maybe, he hired someone kill her," she responded.

His eyebrows lifted inquisitively. *Maybe*, he thought. "You have been very helpful Ms. Sinclair. I'll call you if I think of anything else." Andy left Cindy's house and called Clara. "Hi, Clara, it's Andy."

"Oh, Andy, do I have some information for you," Clara said excitedly.

"Wow, I was just about to say the same thing. You first."

"Well, I found out two important things. First, the neighbor next door is a sixty-year old insomniac. Her name is Mrs. Wilson and every night she wakes up about two or three times, goes into her kitchen and drinks warm milk. Her house faces the Sheppard's house. She can see their garage from her kitchen window. She remembers that night because as soon as she turned her kitchen light on, she noticed the Sheppard's garage door opening. She swears there were *two* people in the Toyota Highlander. She couldn't make out who they were, but she claims there were two people in the front seats."

"Oh my God, why didn't she call us sooner?"

"She didn't know that Mrs. Sheppard's death was a homicide."

"Wow, this is huge. You wouldn't believe what I just found out as well." Andy relayed his conversation with Cindy Sindair.

"*Unbelievable!* This guy is starting to sound like a real creep."

"Yeah, I think Mr. Sheppard has some explaining to do. Call Judge Patterson and see if he is willing to sign a search warrant for Mr. Sheppard's house."

"Will do. By the way, the other thing I found out was that Mrs. Sheppard had a \$450,000 life insurance policy."

"*What!* I just point blanked asked that S.O.B. if his wife had life insurance and he said no. Make sure to include that with the information to the judge. I'm going to talk to the Captain, but I think we may have enough to arrest him." They hung up. *Well, Mr. Sheppard, it looks like you've made it to the top of the suspect list.*

That same night, Detective Meola and three officers arrived at Bob's house. Andy rang the doorbell. A shiver went down Bob's spine when he looked through the peephole. Bob ran back into his office and came back a minute later. He threw the door open. "What is the meaning of this Detective? Do I need to call my attorney and report this harassment?"

"What took you so long to open the door Mr. Sheppard?"

"I had to get dressed," he said defensively.

"Uh huh," said Andy not believing Bob's excuse. Andy handed him two pieces of paper. "You know Mr. Sheppard, an attorney may be a good idea."

Bob snatched the papers away from Andy. "What are these?"

"It's a search warrant giving us permission to search your entire house and a warrant for your arrest. Mr. Sheppard you are under arrest for the murder of Karen Sheppard." Andy continued to read him his rights.

"*What?* This is harassment, that's what this is! You come here with three other police officers and embarrass me in front of my neighbors. I'll have your badge for this."

"Yeah, yeah, I've heard that before." Andy looked at the officer to his left. "Put him in the car." Andy and the officers searched the house. Two hours later they had bagged and tagged everything they found, including Bob's laptop and some jewelry. They brought Bob to the station. Andy let him call his lawyer and then booked him. Two hours later Russ Sulter entered the station. Russ was one of the city's top defense attorneys. They all sat at the rectangular wood table in the interrogation room. "Mr. Sheppard, just to let you know, this conversation is being recorded," said Andy.

Andy pushed the record button. "Okay, let's start with the obvious question. Mr. Sheppard did you kill your wife?"

Bob's brow narrowed in anger. "Oh *my* God, of course not! I already told you that."

"Well Bob, it turns out that you have told me a lot of things that have not been true."

Bob stood up from his chair. "This is outrageous. I will not be treated like some hooligan."

"Sit down, Mr. Sheppard," Andy said in a stern voice.

Bob looked at his attorney. Russ gently pulled him back down to his chair. "Let's hear what they have to say Bob." Russ turned to the Detective. "Ask your questions Detective, but please leave the theatrics out of it."

"Fine, let's clarify some, um, inconsistencies. First, you told me you weren't having an affair."

"That's true."

"Do you know a Julie Miller?"

Bob's face drained of color. "Well, um, yes. She's a waitress at Chelsea's Diner."

"We had a little talk with Julie. It took a bit of prodding, but she said you guys *are* having an affair."

"*Had* an affair Detective. Had, as in past tense."

"Well, yesterday you said you didn't have an affair."

"No, I said I wasn't *having* an affair."

Andy gave him a stern stare. "So, when did you break it off with Julie."

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "Um, you know, I don't really recall."

"Okay, let's ballpark it. Was it a year ago, a month ago, or a day ago?" Andy asked with sarcasm.

"I guess it was recent."

"Recent you say. According to Julie, you two are *still* an item."

"Oh, well, she's mistaken."

"Really, I have a witness from the restaurant that said you left with her two days ago."

"Well, we're still friends."

Andy rolled his eyes. "Come on Mr. Sheppard. Do you really expect anyone to believe that?"

Russ interrupted, "Detective my client answered your question, so either move on with another question or my client is done here."

Andy nodded in frustration. "Okay, let's put that aside for now. You also told me that your wife didn't have any life insurance."

"That's true."

"According to our research, she has a \$450,000 life insurance policy."

"She *had* a \$450,000 policy. It was a five-year term policy and it expired three weeks ago."

"Oh brother," Andy said with a heavy sigh. "Another *has* versus *had* issue."

"My English teacher used to always say that tenses are important," said a smug Bob.

Russ interrupted again, "You see Detective. Right there is proof of my client's innocence. Who would kill their wife right *after* her life insurance policy expired?"

"I would agree with you, if in fact, there really is no insurance money to collect."

Russ threw up his hands in frustration. "Well, the policy expired, so of course there is no money to collect."

Andy turned to Bob. "So Mr. Sheppard, are you telling me that you won't get any insurance money?"

"Of course he won't Detective," Russ said, but Andy raised his hand to silence him.

"Can you let Mr. Sheppard answer that question?" Now everybody in the room was staring at Bob.

Bob sunk down in his chair, sweat beading on his forehead. "Well, um, there is a thirty-day grace period in which I *can* re-instate the policy."

"Isn't it true Mr. Sheppard that you have already submitted the claim to the insurance company? In fact, you did it the day *after* your wife's death."

"This *is* outrageous Detective. None of this proves anything. You and my client had a misunderstanding, but he has not *lied* to you. You arrested my client on this flimsy circumstantial evidence. This is ludicrous."

"This isn't all we have counselor."

"Fine, let's hear the rest."

"Mr. Sheppard, would it surprise you to know that your wife visited a divorce attorney?"

Bob looked genuinely surprised. He was speechless for a moment. "I *don't* believe it."

"Well, believe it. She knew about your affair." Bob's eyes widened in shock. "Yes, that's right Mr. Sheppard. A friend of hers said that Karen actually witnessed you and Julie having sex in a car parked in the underground garage." Bob squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. "Very tacky, don't you think Mr. Sheppard?" Bob looked down at the table.

"This still proves nothing Detective. My client already admitted to the affair. How and where he had sex is irrelevant," said Russ.

"True counselor, but the fact that his wife knew about the affair and was in the process of divorce proceedings, certainly impacts motive."

"You said his wife visited a divorce lawyer, do you have any proof that she actually started divorce proceedings?"

Now Andy looked a little uncomfortable. "Well, um, I guess not, but we have subpoenaed her attorney's records."

"Look Detective, it is common for a spouse who just found out their spouse cheated on them to meet with a divorce attorney, but most spouses don't go through with it. I still don't see justification for my client's arrest."

Andy pulled an object out of a plastic bag and placed it on the table. "Do you recognize this Mr. Sheppard?"

Bob took a big breath and then let out an audible sigh. He opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

"Are you okay, Mr. Sheppard?" Andy asked.

Bob regained his composure and cleared his throat. "Yes, I'm fine. That's my wife's ring. That's great, where did you find it?"

"We found it buried deep in one of your dresser drawers."

"Wow, really. She must have taken it off before she left."

"The interesting part was that the drawer had men's shirts in it."

"Well, I really don't know why she chose that drawer."

"Can you think of any reason why she would take off her wedding ring Mr. Sheppard?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, maybe she was having an affair after all."

Andy didn't want to mention the neighbor who witnessed two people leaving that night. He would save that for later. Right now, it was time to kick the apple tree and see what breaks loose. "Uh huh, isn't it just as possible that *you* killed your wife? You drove her to the Paris Club, left her there to be found in order to throw suspicion off yourself, but your greed got the best of you, didn't it Mr. Sheppard? You just couldn't let the ring go, could you? You took it off her finger so it would appear stolen. This way you had the ring and could collect the twenty grand from the insurance company." Bob's face turned bright red, he looked like he was going to burst into flames. He looked over at his lawyer.

"This is *outrageous*," Russ bellowed slamming his hand on the table.

But Andy continued, "Isn't it true Mr. Sheppard, that you have already submitted a claim to the insurance company for your wife's ring."

Russ looked over at Bob. Bob looked frazzled. "Yes, it's true, but only because I forget to do things. I try to do them the minute I remember. So I filed it the minute I got the police report."

"Would it surprise you Mr. Sheppard to know that we have an eyewitness who saw two people, not one, but *two* people in your wife's car that night leaving your garage?"

Bob looked sick. His whole body was sagging and his face looked droopy. Russ quickly stood up. "This meeting is over Detective. I'm advising my client to not say another word."

"Counselor, would your client be willing to submit to a lie detector test?"

Russ chuckled, "*Absolutely* not."

"If he's innocent, what does he have to hide?"

"Come on Detective, we both know they aren't one hundred percent accurate. There's no benefit for my client. If he passes, you're not going to release him, and if he doesn't pass, it will somehow get leaked to the press and they will crucify him."

Russ placed a comforting hand on Bob's shoulder. "Don't worry Bob, I'll have you out on bail by the morning. Just hang in there." Bob didn't say a word. He just stared at the table. Russ was good on his word. Bob was released on bail the following morning. He walked out of the station and right into a horde of reporters. Cameras were clicking and reporters were shouting questions.

"Mr. Sheppard, why did you kill your wife?"

"Mr. Sheppard, how long have you been having an affair?"

"Mr. Sheppard, was your wife having an affair?"

The questions continued until he reached Russ's car. Russ drove him home where more reporters were waited. He dashed into the house and slammed the door behind him. He turned on the television. He was all over the news. The media had already found him guilty. *How could this happen!* He went to the refrigerator and read the note on the door. "Dad, I'm going to stay at a friend's house until this thing gets sorted out. J." Well, that was some good news. He wouldn't have to deal with his ungrateful son. He went into his room and lay on his bed. *Everyone will be sorry when the truth comes out.*

A week later, Senior Computer Technician, Walter Jones, approached Andy at his desk.

"Detective, do you have a minute?"

Andy looked up. "Sure, Walter, what do you need?"

"Well, you aren't going to believe this, but I was able to retrieve some deleted texts from Mrs. Sheppard's iPhone."

Andy's eyes widened quizzically. "Interesting. Do you have the print out?"

Walter placed the print out on his desk and pointed at the first line. "This text was a month before she was murdered."

Unknown caller: *Are we meeting at the Paris Club tonight?*

Karen: *I don't know if I can go through with it.*

Unknown caller: *Please, I really want to see you.*

Karen: *Ok, I'll be there at 11:00. I'll text you if I can't make it.*

"Here's another text the night she was murdered," Walter said.

Unknown caller: *I really need to see you. Can we meet at the Paris Club tonight?*

Karen: *Fine, but this is the last time. I can't do it again.*

Unknown caller: *Great, I'll see you at 11:00.*

Karen: *Ok.*

Andy sighed and buried his face in his hands. He removed his hands and leaned back in his chair. "Well, this doesn't bode well for our case against Mr. Sheppard. Maybe she was having an affair." He thought for a moment. "Something just doesn't seem right. Why would the old lady next door say she saw two people in the car?"

"You know how unreliable witnesses are. She could have completely got it wrong. Maybe she saw a shadow or something," Walter answered.

"Maybe, maybe," Andy whispered as he sat in a trance.

"Let me know if you need anything else Detective."

Andy came out of his trance and noticed Walter walking away, "wait, Walt."

Walter spun around and came back. "Can I get the records of all calls made by the unknown caller?"

"I'm already a step ahead of you. I got them this morning and unfortunately, there were no other calls or texts."

Andy sighed. "So, it sounds like this unknown caller only bought this phone to text Mrs. Sheppard."

Walter shrugged his shoulders. "It appears that way."

"Okay, thanks Walt." *What am I going to do now*, he thought. *The DA isn't going to like this. He is not going to like it one bit. We are going to look like a bunch of idiots.*

The next day, Andy sat his desk. He had just returned back from the DA's office where they were discussing whether or not to drop the charges against Bob Sheppard, when the next wave of case destroying information arrived. Dennis Thomas from CSI approached him. "Detective Meola, do you have a moment?"

"Of course Dennis, what's up?"

"Well, we just got a DNA hit from one of the hairs found in Mrs. Sheppard's SUV."

Andy quickly sat up in chair. "You're kidding? Whose are they?"

"According to the Sex Offender database, the hairs belong to a man name Clint Evans."

"What did he do time for?"

"Rape."

"*Rape!* Wow, maybe he's our guy. Thanks Dennis." He called Clara. "Clara, you're not going to believe this. We just got a hit on the hairs in the Sheppard case. I need you to find out everything there is to know about a guy by the name of Clint Evans."

Clara called back an hour later. "Okay, here's the scoop. Clint Evans was an accountant before he got convicted of raping a woman in the ladies room of a bar."

"*What?* In the ladies room; that's seems pretty gutsy for an accountant."

"Well, according to Clint, it was consensual. She even admits to kissing him, but changed her mind at the last minute."

"And the jury bought her story?"

"They must have, because he was sentenced to four years in jail. He got out six months ago for good behavior."

"Where's he at now?"

"Well, he's still married to his wife."

"Wow, now there's a forgiving woman. My wife would've left me in a heartbeat."

"Yeah, really. My husband wouldn't have to worry about going to jail, because I would shoot his ass right between the eyes."

Andy chuckled. "I bet you would. So he lives with his wife?"

"No, they are legally separated, but according to his parole officer they are trying to work things out. He said that Clint got a job at ABC Hardware about six weeks ago and has been a model parolee."

"Well, I guess that's about to change. Where is he right now?"

"He's at work."

"Where are you?"

"Five minutes from the station."

"Okay, why don't you swing by here and pick me up. We'll give ol' Clint a visit."

Andy and Clara arrived at ABC Hardware with two uniformed officers. Clint Evans was behind the cash register ringing up a customer when he noticed two uniformed officers enter the store. They were followed by a man and a woman. Most likely plain clothed officers. He didn't know why, but his heart started beating rapidly. It felt like a jackhammer was in his chest. He looked down at his hands and they were trembling. "Hey, are you okay buddy?" the customer asked.

"Um, yeah, I'm fine, just having a tough day." *They couldn't be here for me*, he thought. He was watching the officers as he finished with the customer. They walked up to the store manager. They talked for a minute and then the manager pointed at Clint. His face turned ashen and sweat started trickling down his forehead. The memory of jail was penetrating his brain. They started walking towards

him. *I can't go back to jail. I can't go back to jail.* Clint panicked and started running. He ran down aisle twelve, where lumber supplies and wooden doors were displayed. He started pulling doors off the shelves. They clattered to the floor. He was hoping to slow the chasing officers. The first officer who rounded aisle twelve tripped over a door and crashed to the floor. The other officer was able to avoid the fallen doors. Clint turned the corner and was now running down the back of the store. He looked backwards and noticed the officer gaining on him. He made a quick left down aisle three. He was still looking backwards when he collided into a shopping cart. The cart was parked sideways, and his momentum brought him and the cart crashing to the floor. He was dazed, but with adrenaline pumping through his veins, still managed to get to his feet. He started running again, but by then it was too late. The chasing officer dove on him like a linebacker trying to stop the game winning touchdown. Clint went down hard and they crashed into a display of potted flowers. Dozens of flowers came crashing down on and around them. The officer cuffed him. When they got up, they were covered in dirt and flower petals. The officer punched Clint in the kidney for the trouble and read him his rights. Clint was booked at the police station and assigned a public defender. The public defender was Joe Solowhisky. Everyone just called him Whiskey. He was of average height, average build, and had average looks. I guess you could say he was the average Joe. He had wired rimmed glasses and short brown curly hair. He was wearing a blue pin striped suit that day, but still looked under twenty-one, which actually wasn't far from the truth. Joe had just graduated law school and this was his first case. Whiskey led his client into the interrogation room where Andy and Clara were waiting. Andy spoke first. "I just want to inform you that this conversation is being recorded." Whiskey nodded. "First of all, Mr. Evans, why did you run?" Clint stood silent, chewing on his lower lip. "Why did you run Mr. Evans?" Andy repeated.

Clint shrugged his shoulders. "I don't really know. As soon as I saw the police officers coming in my direction, I just panicked."

"But if you didn't do anything wrong why would you run?"

"I didn't do anything wrong the first time, but I still went to jail."

Andy's brow raised. "Raping a woman in the bathroom is doing nothing wrong?"

Clint looked frustrated and scratched his head. "I know no one believes me, but I swear on my son's life, I *didn't* rape that woman."

"That's not what a jury thought."

"That still doesn't make it so. Jury's have made mistakes before and they made a mistake with me as well."

"Okay, Mr. Evans, do you know a woman by the name of Karen Sheppard?"

Clint looked confused. "The woman who was killed a couple of weeks ago?"

"Yes, that one."

"Well, um, yes, she was a customer at ABC. She came in often."

"Did you have a personal relationship with her?"

"Me? No. She was married!"

"That didn't stop you before."

"Look, I *didn't* rape Laura Swanson. I *did* cheat on my wife and for that, I will never forgive myself, but I've learned my lesson. I will never do that again."

"We interviewed some of your co-workers and according to them, you two flirted often."

"Oh, I wouldn't say flirted, but we did talk some."

"So, the two of you never hooked up?"

"*Definitely not!* Is that what this is all about? I spoke with a lady who was killed and since I'm supposedly a sex offender, I must have killed her."

"Well did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Kill her. Did you kill Karen Sheppard?"

"God, no! I could never do something like that."

"Where were you the night of the killing?"

"I do remember that night, because the day after, the entire store was talking about it. I was at my house that night."

"Can anyone verify that?"

"Well, I talked to my wife that night around eight and then I went straight to bed. I had to open the hardware store at six thirty the next morning."

"So, you really have no alibi?"

"I haven't gone to a bar since I've been out of prison. I come home from work, go to bed, get up and do it all over again. Any spare time I have, I try to spend it with my wife."

"Aren't you and your wife legally separated?"

"We are, but we are on the road to recovery. She says she can forgive me, but it takes time."

"Forgive you, for the rape?"

"No, she *knows* I didn't rape anyone. I mean, forgive me for cheating on her."

Whiskey interrupted. "Look Detective, is this all you have? This couldn't have been enough to arrest my client."

"That's true, but bare with me a moment. I'm getting there."

"Why did you text Mrs. Sheppard?"

Clint's eyebrows lifted in confusion. He looked at Whiskey then back to Andy. "What are you talking about? I didn't text anyone. I don't even know how to text. You have my phone; check it and you'll see."

"You're right; your phone doesn't have any texts on it, but how about your other phone?"

"I don't *have* another phone. Why would I need another phone?"

"Please, Mr. Evans, let's stop playing games. You bought a disposable phone for the sole purpose of texting Mrs. Sheppard."

Whiskey threw up his hands in frustration. "*Detective*, that's enough. You are harassing my client. He answered your question. Now please move on."

Andy calmed himself. "Fine, Mr. Evans, one more question. If you answer this to my satisfaction, I'll release you."

Clint sat up in his chair with a bit of optimism. "Can you explain why we found strands of your hair in Mrs. Sheppard SUV?"

Clint looked flabbergasted. "That's *not* possible!"

"Well, DNA doesn't lie. That's how we found you."

Clint sat silent for a moment, staring at Andy, then his entire body went limp like he was a puppet and his strings were cut. His body fell forward, hitting his forehead on the wooden table as he tumbled to the ground, taking the chair with him. Clint came to a couple minutes later. The paramedics arrived and checked him out. Clint checked out fine and an officer took him back to his cell.

"I've never seen anything like that," Andy said to Clara.

"Me neither. He seemed utterly shocked. Is there any way the forensic guys are wrong?"

"I just don't see how, but you 're right, something doesn't seem quite right. Have we gotten anywhere on the phone of the unknown caller who was texting Mrs. Sheppard?"

"We already know it was a disposable phone. I was able to trace the number back to the store it was purchased from. They looked in their records, but the phone was paid for in cash."

"How about security tapes?"

"They have them in the store, but they only keep them for a month and the phone was bought two months ago."

Andy arched his eyebrows. "Two months ago? Didn't you say that Clint has only worked at ABC Hardware for six weeks?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, why would a guy buy a disposable phone to text a woman he hadn't even met yet?"

"Ex-felons always get disposable phones. They can't get a contract with a normal carrier."

"Yeah, but Walt said that there was no other activity on that phone. It appeared that the owner only got the phone for the express purpose of texting Mrs. Sheppard."

Clara had a quizzical look on her face. "Yeah, I see your point. Well, what's next?"

"Right now, all of the evidence points to Clint Evans, but I still think Bob Sheppard is involved in all of this."

"You don't think they are working together, do you?"

"I don't really know what to think at this point. I just wish we could find that phone."

"Yeah, me too. I won't give up. So what's going to happen to Sheppard?"

"I've talked to the DA. He's already called Mr. Sheppard's lawyer and told him we are dropping our case against him."

Bob had a big smile on his face. He just got off the phone with his lawyer and learned that the District Attorney had dropped the case against him. *Finally*, he thought. *All this bad press could now turn in my favor. The poor widow who was disparaged by the media and found guilty in the arena of public opinion, now proved innocent. The sympathy factor will be off the charts!* He heard a ruckus outside. He went to the window and opened the blinds. To his amazement there were three news vans already out there. *Man, these guys work fast!* He went over to the mirror and went through the same routine he performed as a salesman. He adjusted his tie and perfected his hair. He was ready to talk to the media. He opened the door and the frenzy began. Reporters swarmed, bombarding him with questions. Bob held up his hand. "Please, one question at a time." He scanned the group and then pointed at the CNN reporter. "You, please begin."

"Mr. Sheppard, how does it feel to be exonerated for the death of your wife?" the reporter asked.

"It feels great that justice has prevailed. I knew I was innocent. I think the police department knew I was innocent as well, but Detective Andy Meola was determined to find me guilty. I believe the detective would go to any extent to prove I was guilty." He pointed to the Fox News reporter. "You're next."

"Mr. Sheppard, are you saying, you think the police manufactured the case against you?"

"I think it's obvious, but I will let a jury decide that."

"Are going to sue the department?"

"Wouldn't you? My life was devastated. My son's life was devastated." He scanned the crowd of reporters again and then pointed at the ABC reporter. "What's your question?"

"Did you know your wife was having an affair?"

"I believed she was. I was very upset about it. That's the reason for my own brief affair. I'm sorry, but that's all the time I have." Bob stepped back into his house as the reporters continued to shout questions at him through the door.

Debra Evans sat down in the disheveled chair that looked like it was forty-years old. She picked up the phone and began talking to her husband. They were separated by a clear plastic divider. She had tears in her eyes. "Clint," she said in a tearful voice, "what have you done?"

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