

# **Blind Overlook**

(Book 3 of the Jay Leicester Mysteries Series)

by [JC Simmons](#)

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# Blind Overlook

(Book 3 of the Jay Leicester Mysteries Series)  
by JC Simmons

## PROLOGUE

The two people stood at the edge of the water looking across the bay from Port Clyde, Maine, toward the Atlantic Ocean and Africa. The cloudless sky was moonless, the wind calm, the night quiet. It was near midnight and stars sparkled like tiny diamonds. A fish rolled violently fifty feet from shore, its prey now sustenance for life.

The man felt the barrel of the gun against the back of his head a fraction of a second before his world ceased to exist. His limp body fell into the cold, salty water at the end of the pier. The shooter turned and calmly walked back up the hill to the parking lot where the other man waited in the front seat of the rental car.

"Well, did you two come to a decision, or are we going to spend the whole night in this godforsaken place?" It was his last words. The .9 millimeter slug exploded through his skull and scrambled his brain.

The shooter exited the rental car, leaving the limp, lifeless body as it lay, slumped across the front seat, and entered a dark-colored van parked nearby. The van, loaded with a half-million dollars worth of oil paintings, and the lone driver, pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward the Rockland, Maine, airport, where a chartered jet waited. Quickly loading the forty-eight bulky canvases aboard the airplane, the shooter, breathing rapidly, sat down in a passenger seat and stared intently at the paintings. They had just been stolen from one of the most powerful Mafia figures in the United States.

A few minutes later the sleek, German-made airplane climbed swiftly into the clear night sky like some evil, dark angel. The lone passenger unscrewed the silencer from the barrel of the small automatic pistol, examined it with a satisfied grin, put both pieces into the black leather case, zipped it up, and settled back into the plush seat of the jet. It would be a long flight back to Houston.

## CHAPTER ONE

I hate Saturdays. They always bring something I don't want to deal with. It's usually a hangover. Or someone walks into my office unannounced while I'm trying to catch up on paperwork I've neglected all week. This Saturday proved to be no exception. A friend to whom I couldn't say no asked me to try to talk some sense into his teenage son, who was making the wrong decision to live a short life of extremes rather than a long one of moderation.

The kid was late, and I had a hangover. I made coffee. I can always tell the degree of the hangover by the way that the coffee smells while it's brewing. This morning it smelled like my old bird dog, wet and lathered from a hard workout with the quail on a hot day.

Going into the small bathroom, I washed my face in cold water. The weathered reflection in the mirror stared back at me. Not too bad, Leicester, I said aloud, studying the image. A few more wrinkles, a gray hair here and there, but passable. The wrinkles help hide the scars. Scars acquired over the last ten years learning a business where I'd made every mistake that could be made. But I'd survived, was smarter, more careful, and much wiser. At six feet two and two hundred forty pounds I always thought my size could carry the day. It didn't take long to learn that in the private investigation business size doesn't matter. Sneaking a last glance in the mirror, I said, No, not too bad. At least my old bird dog still thinks I'm handsome.

Dabbling at some paperwork, I didn't want to get too involved before the kid showed. Tires squealed in the parking lot. It sounded like a teenager. Getting up, I walked to the outer door. Jeff, Jr. was climbing out of a red '57 Chevy convertible daddy gave him for getting through high school. If I were his daddy, I'd start by taking away the car.

He was a big kid with long blond hair, sharp, high cheekbones, and sculptured nose. He had deep bottomless blue eyes, and perfect pearl-white teeth, which accented a mischievous grin on a clean-shaven face. He was as tall as I am, with wide shoulders, and powerful arms. He had slim wrists, big hands, and long delicate fingers. Hands a surgeon or concert pianist would envy. He headed for my office with the vulgar swagger of youth.

Sitting back down at the desk, I waited for him to enter. He did, without knocking.

"Mr. Jay. How you doing?" He said, with a grin that had melted many a young girl's heart. "Boy, the coffee smells good. Can I have some? Late night." Another telling grin. "I didn't get up in time to have any at home."

Pointing to the coffeepot, I watched his lithe, athletic movements with jealousy.

"What's cooking?" He asked, pouring the coffee. "Dad said you wanted to see me. Need some help solving a case? Boy, I'd like that."

Pouring myself a cup, I slopped in a big dollop of Tupelo honey. Jeff, Jr. made a face at the honey.

"Yeah, Jeff," I said, stirring the coffee. "I've got a case needs some help. You see, I've received this report of a red Chevy convertible riding around passing out marijuana and cocaine to young girls, one who ended up at the emergency room when her parents couldn't wake her from a drug induced sleep. The parents asked me to look into it. If I can get enough on this guy in the Chevy I'll turn the information over to the Mississippi State Narcotics agents. They can push for ten to twenty-five on Parchman farm. If he's selling, they may get a longer sentence. Want to help me with this case, Jeff?"

Carefully watching his expressions and body movements, I saw the ears turn red first, then the neck and cheeks. He shifted position three times in ten seconds, played a drumbeat on the coffee cup with enough force to cause whitecaps on the steaming liquid. One didn't need a polygraph machine to tell this kid was guilty. Jeff, Jr. wasn't selling dope, but I knew he was messing around with it. Someone needed to get his attention.

"Ah, Mr. Jay. I never sold any dope. Listen I..."

"No! You listen, Jeff. Being a football hero with a red convertible doesn't mean shirking responsibility. You can pick just as much cotton from a hot, scorched Parchman penitentiary field as any other dope dealer, robber, or murderer."

"You're getting on me pretty strong, Mr. Jay," he said, with a bit of youthful defiance.

"By God, I'm entitled. I was at the hospital the day you were born. I've seen you almost every day of your life; attended the first football game you ever played, haven't missed many others."

More shifting position, more whitecaps on the coffee.

Continuing, I said, "Your dad and I played pro ball together, took our first flying lessons together. Your mom and I lived next door to each other from the time we were born until the day she married your dad. So I've got a right. You'd better believe I do. I'll not sit by and let you throw away a good life because you're thinking like some big city pimp and passing out grams of Snowpowder. I won't do it."

His face was getting redder, his feet were shuffling.

"Think about your football scholarship. If you get caught with drugs just once, it's over. And the young girls, I know they flock around you, I've seen it. But you've got to take the responsibility for your actions." I threw the spoon I'd used to stir the coffee onto the desk, staining a client's bill. "You've been very lucky, Jeff. Now is the time to straighten up and fly right."

Jeff sat still, staring into the coffee cup. "Why can't my dad say this to me?" He asked, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "Why does he have to get you to do it for him?"

His intuitive question surprised me. "If it came from him, it would only alienate you. You're too headstrong, and he knows it. You know I won't bullshit you. You know private investigators have inside connections the police don't." Splaying both hands on top of the scattered paperwork, I said, "Jeff, I even know where you're getting your stuff, how much you're using, and what you pay for it."

There was no way I could know any of this. It was a bluff, but it worked. He started the guilt thing again.

"Mr. Jay, I don't..."

"Well, you are getting on him pretty strong." A voice suddenly said from the front door.

"Who are you?" I asked, irritated, raising both hands in a questioning gesture. I had not heard her come in. She was standing there leaning against the doorframe, relaxed, a smile on her beautiful face. There was no way to know how long she'd been in the office.

"You Leicester, the P.I.?"

"Yes, I'm Jay Leicester, private investigator. This is a personal conversation. If you have business, call the office Monday, make an appointment."

This didn't faze her, she kept leaning on the door smiling at Jeff, Jr., who was becoming very uneasy. He used the intrusion as an excuse to leave.

"Mr. Jay, I gotta go," he said, jumping from his chair, spilling coffee. "I'll straighten up, I promise. Look, I'm late for a tennis match, okay?"

The pleading in his eyes made me relent. I hoped I'd had some effect. He was a good kid who was getting a little too big for his britches and dealing in some things he didn't truly understand. His future was bright. I'd keep my fingers crossed that he wouldn't screw it up.

The woman quickly sat down in the chair Jeff, Jr. vacated. I looked at her with an expression I hoped conveyed my irritation.

It must have been effective.

"What I need can't wait," she said, quickly. "I apologize for barging in. We tried to call last night but couldn't reach you. I took a chance, drove up this morning, hoping to catch you."

Leaning back in my chair, I took a long look at this lady. She was close to six feet in height, wore no jewelry or rings. There was nothing gaudy about her appearance though she gave off an aura of flashy vulgarity. Her hair was ash-blond, shoulder length and curled at the ends. The forehead was broad and high with wide, dark eyebrows covering greenish eyes. Yet there seemed to be harshness deep down waiting to surface. Her mouth had a permanent grin, a smile that seemed to say I can love you or I can kill you. The nose, sharp, perfect, teeth straight and white as a fresh spring snow.

She wore a black, one-piece dress. It was tight fitting, open at the top, and held up by thin straps, which revealed wide, strong shoulders. The dress was more appropriate for a Friday evening dinner than for ten-thirty on Saturday morning.

I could not judge the age, thirty-ish, five years either way. It would depend on what she'd been through. In a nutshell, she looked like a young Lauren Bacall. I expected Bogie to come walking up behind her at any moment growling a line from *To Have and Have Not*.

Making a decision, I said, "So what's on your mind?"

"Thank you. You're very kind," she said with an arrogance which let me know she'd won the game up to this point.

I offered coffee. She declined.

She now sat stiff and erect in the chair. The relaxed, sultry pose she'd had leaning against the doorframe had dissipated. It was a complete change.

I looked for the flaws. Seeing flaws in people is something I work on. Not because I've become languid towards humans, even though I've seen every aspect of our noble race from rotten bodies to deadly, evil



people. But because when they come to me there's always a problem. Something is wrong with everyone to some degree.

She stared straight at me, unflinching. The cognac from last night had my nerves on edge, and her intrusion was irritating.

Finally I could stand it no longer. "Look, lady, it's Saturday, I've got paper work to do, then I have to be somewhere. What's on your mind?"

"I need some help." Her body was tense and bent. Her arms folded in front of her as if she were trying to protect her chest and belly.

I had seen people change from a facade of bravery to one of cowardice, but I'd never seen a person change so dramatically, and so fast. It caught me by surprise. I was still admiring her beauty, looking for flaws.

Giving her a moment to settle down, I asked her name. Head bowed, she didn't respond. She started a nutational movement in the chair, which would have been sexy and alluring had it been under different circumstances. Moving around the desk, I approached her to offer comfort.

"Don't you touch me! Don't you put your hands on me." She leapt up, turned to face me, and clinched her fists. There was hatred in her eyes, and a deadly seriousness.

She'd startled me. Jumping back, I felt guilty, wondering what made her react so violently. Then her eyes focused and the tears started flowing. She came into my arms and I held her until she stopped crying. Her body was hard and firm like an athlete.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, pulling away, sitting back down. "I'm not a crybaby. It's just been a rough couple of days. It all just came out. Please..."

"I have some cognac," I said gently. "Would you like a drink?"

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes. "That would be wonderful."

Pouring two ounces of cognac in a coffee cup, I fought the urge to join her. Instead, I had another cup of coffee. She drank the cognac down in one swallow, made a bitter face, shook her head, set the cup on my desk. The tears were still there.

"Thank you, Mr. Leicester," she said, attempting a smile. "That helped. May I call you Jay?"

"Feel free," I said. "You haven't told me yours."

"Sandy. Sandy Rinaldi," she said, wiping more tears.

"Well, Sandy Rinaldi, what can I do for you? How did you know about me?"

"I have a business associate in Gulfport, Guy Robbins. I believe he's a friend of yours. I'd driven over to the Mississippi Gulf Coast for some business, and was with him and his wife when I received word about my brother. Guy said to get in touch with you. You were the only person he'd recommend. He said you were honest."

"I'll have to thank Mr. Robbins for the kind remarks," I said, sipping the bitter coffee and wondering why Guy hadn't called. Maybe he had, she'd said they'd tried. I was out late last night. "What about your brother?"

"They say he's missing. His rental car was found in the parking lot of the Ferry Company. He didn't take the ferry. The car was unlocked; the police say his bag was still inside. That's how they knew to call me, I was listed on his driver's license as the one to contact in an emergency. I'm really worried about him. I have a feeling something bad has happened."

"Sandy," I said, beginning my usual spiel. "The police are working on it. How could I do anything they aren't already doing? Why don't you just let them do their job? He'll probably turn up. Maybe he met a lady in one of our new Mississippi Gulf Coast casinos, lost track of time. Is he married?"

"No, he's not married, and he didn't meet a woman." She stood, clasped both hands together as if starting a prayer, circled the chair then sat back down, still holding her hands together. "The police say they have a body fitting the description of my brother. Please, Jay, I need someone to go with me. I'm not sure I can do this alone."

"Why didn't you get Guy to go with you? The ferry to Ship Island is only two blocks from his office. You could have looked at the car, then went to the morgue and viewed the body. Why drive all the way up to Jackson for my help?"

"It's not the ferry to Ship Island," she said with a desperate expression. "It's the ferry to Monhegan Island."

"Monhegan Island? Where's Monhegan Island?"

"It's off the coast of Maine."

God, I hate Saturdays, I said to myself. And I think I hate Guy Robbins, too!

## CHAPTER TWO

Sandy Rinaldi told me she'd been in Biloxi last night having dinner with Guy Robbins and his wife at a restaurant called the French Connection. She was to make a bid on an art collection from an estate Guy was handling. Sandy and her brother, Renato, owned a small gallery in New Orleans. She'd checked her answering service from the restaurant and was informed about her brother.

Guy took her back to his house where they called the police detective in Rockland, Maine, for the details. Guy listened in and asked pertinent questions. He and Mildred insisted Sandy spend the night with them. She drove up this morning in hopes she could find me. They'd tried last night, but my answer service told them what they'd been instructed: I was in town, but would not be available until Monday morning.

I wanted to talk with Guy Robbins about Sandy Rinaldi before making a decision whether to take the case. Maine was a long way from Jackson, Mississippi. It would be good to know if her pocketbook was deep enough to handle my fee. Surely she was okay, or Guy wouldn't have recommended her. It never hurts to check, though.

"I'll tell you what, Sandy," I said, stalling until I could think it through. "There is some cold pasta salad in my refrigerator at home. Let's go there, have lunch. We can talk over the details. You can fill me in on why your brother was in Maine. I can finish with some work, then decide what the best course of action will be."

"Course of action," she said, looking at me incredulously. "It seems pretty simple, I want you to go with me to Maine and find out what's happened to my brother. We can leave on the next airplane. If you're worried about getting paid, I'll make out a check. Just name your price."

There was the hardness again. The lady could change emotions. Too fast, I thought.

"I would need to go by my place and pack," I said calmly, looking into her eyes. "There are appointments I have Monday which must be re-scheduled, and things I must finish now."

"Oh," she said, holding my stare, rolling over the reasoning of my comment.

"But I am going to call Guy Robbins," I said, dialing his home phone number from memory.

Sandy gave what I took to be an approving nod.

"Robbins' residence." A voice bellowed into the receiver.

"Hello, Guy," I said, laughing at his formal voice. "How's my boat doing?"

"Leicester, I was hoping Sandy would find you. The answer to all your questions is yes. She and her brother are worth more money than you or I will ever hope to see. Is she there?"

"Yes," I answered, looking up at Sandy. "Sitting right across from me."

"Jay," Guy said with a serious inflection. "It's a long story, but I'll make it brief. She and Nat acquire expensive artwork, mostly oil paintings. They sell to the ultra rich and to wise guys, mostly New Orleans mob types, who don't care what the cost, or how the artwork was acquired. I don't think Sandy and Nat are dirty, but they do play around the fringes, and they make a lot of money. Just keep on your toes."

"Thanks, I'll do that. Tell Mildred hello for me. You taking care of Picaroon?" It was the name of Guy's sailboat. "She still afloat?"

"She's in great shape. We are still counting on the sail to Key West in June. Mildred says if you screw this trip up she won't love you any more."

"I'll be there," I said, meaning it.

We said our good-byes.

"Well, Sandy," I said, hanging up the phone. "Guy says you're okay. The offer for the cold pasta at my place still stands. We can talk."

"Does this mean you're going to help me?"

"It means I'm still thinking about it," I answered without any sarcasm.

She followed me to my house. It's not often that I bring a client to my home, but today was Saturday and this lady seemed as if she'd fit in any surroundings. Also, living in Jackson, I knew that the best lunch to be had was in my kitchen, and there were several excellent vintages in my wine cellar.

Deciding to help her had been easy. The art world has always fascinated me. Sadly, I knew little about it. Maybe I could learn something. There was also the hint of involvement with the Big Easy wise guys; that could always become eventful. Then there was this enigmatic beauty.

Driving slowly along Lakeland Drive so Sandy could follow, I was enjoying the weather. This was spring in the South and, when no fronts are working their way through, it is the most pleasant time of the year, except for the early fall when there are no hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico. Way

up, among the fragile tendrils of cirrus clouds, a lone eagle worked its way toward Alaska.

Watching Sandy in the rear view mirror, I thought, high stake players in the art world. Who would have imagined such things existed? It stood to reason, though. A foreign billionaire just paid forty-eight million for a painting of a vase of sunflowers. I had followed cases of paintings stolen from private collectors or museums that were valued at a million or so, but forty-eight million for a single piece of canvas? Shows what I know about the art world.

\* \* \*

Sandy entered my house and immediately went to the few 'objets d'art' hanging on the small living room walls. There wasn't much; a tiny watercolor of a woman walking away in a cold fog with bare trees and faded sky, given to me by an old friend. There was a rendition of Ahab standing on the deck of Pequod, a storm raging around him, donated by another friend, and a drawing of my favorite writer I'd picked up in Key West. A photograph of Robert Frost, and three signed Ansel Adams posters put out by the New York Graphics Society years ago completed the collection. She made no comment about any of them and ignored my books, of which I'm proud.

Throwing a cold pasta and shrimp salad together, I opened a bottle of 1985 Hanzell Vineyards Pinot Noir. Sandy sat at the kitchen table silently watching every move I made. The pinot went well with the pasta. She surprised me with her knowledge of wine.

"In the style of a true Burgundy," she said, holding the glass up to the light. "Reminds me of a Clos Vougeot. I love the earthy pinot flavors. Nice."

"Why was your brother in Maine, Sandy?" I asked as we finished the salad.

She thought for a moment, looking at me. "He was to meet a man who wanted to sell a complete collection of art work by an artist named Rockwell Kent." She paused, as if to ponder how much to tell me. "The man is from Chicago, but the collection was supposed to be on Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine. Renato was to go over the collection and, if all was as represented, buy it. The man had insisted on being paid in cash. No checks, no bank drafts no money orders. Cash."

"Isn't that unusual?" I asked, pouring us both more of the Hanzell pinot. "Does the art world deal in cash?"

"We conduct some transactions in cash," she said, twirling the wine in her glass. "People have an aversion to paying taxes on works of art, and I don't blame them. There are also paintings for sale where one doesn't ask too many questions about their origin."

"And not too many questions asked by the people to whom you sell," I said, more sarcastic than I intended.

"Don't judge me, Leicester," she said, setting her wineglass down hard on the table, splashing the red liquid on the outside of the glass, anger flaring. "You've no right." She wiped the wine off the stem, licked her finger.

"I'm not making a judgment, Sandy. I'm only trying to understand what I'm getting into." Changing directions, I said, "Was your brother supposed to let you know if he bought the collection?"

"No," she answered, wiping the wine stain from her fingers. "I was to see him on Monday at the Gallery. I had planned on being with Guy Robbins all weekend. He was to show me the art collection up for bid."

"What do you know about the seller from Chicago?" I prodded.

"Nothing. Renato handled the whole thing. I don't know anything about it except that we'd never done business with the man before."

"Why your brother?" I asked, shoving my plate to the side. "Why not you? Or both of you?"

"Because Renato knew a lot about Rockwell Kent. I know almost nothing." She ran manicured fingers through blond hair, sat back in the chair, and seemed to relax a little. "Oh, I know he did some murals which are still on the walls of Government buildings in Washington. He was some sort of socialist who visited Russia back when they were our enemies. Idiot McCarthy brought him up before his committee once. So, it was Renato's deal. Besides, I had the meeting with Guy Robbins to make the bid on the Moran collection."

"How did the seller get in touch with Renato?" I asked, watching a tufted titmouse scatter seed from the feeder at the kitchen window.

"I'm not sure," she said, thinking back. "Renato will tell us."

Yes, I said to myself. Renato will tell us, if he isn't the stiff lying on the slab in Rockland, Maine. "How much cash was he traveling with?"

"Four hundred and fifty thousand," she said nonchalantly, fingering her wineglass.

I sat back in my chair, scaring the titmouse. "Jesus. What if his plane had crashed? Or what..."

"Sometimes," she interrupted. "One must take chances in life if one is to live. Don't you ever take chances?"

"Maybe with my life," I said, smiling. "But not with a half a million in cold cash. Did the police detective say anything about finding the money?"

"I didn't ask." She sipped the last of her wine as if that huge amount of money meant nothing to her.

There was nothing I could think of to say.

Finally she said, "I'm concerned about my brother, not the money. I just want Renato to be okay." She sat upright, defiant. "The body they have is not Renato. I know it."

There were no tears. Her defiance was directed not at me, but the world. A strange half smile etched its way across her face like a breaking wave. A smile which could possess you, or break your heart.

"Give me the name and number of the police detective in Rockland. I'll call him, find out if they've learned any more, and tell him an approximate time of our arrival."

"Then you've decided to help me?" She asked, stretching both arms out beside her in triumph.

"Yes, I've decided to help you."

Getting up and going into the bedroom I'd converted into a small office, I brought back my standard form. "You need to read and sign this, then write me a check for a two thousand dollar advance. My fee is five hundred a day plus expenses. I'll bill you when the job is finished."

She signed the form without reading it and made out a check for the two thousand.

"Do you need to go back to New Orleans for clothes or anything before we figure out how to get to Rockland, Maine?" I asked, taking the form and check from her.

"No, I'll buy whatever I need here." She looked around at the house. "Do you mind if I take a shower? I didn't take time for one this morning."

"Sure," I said, amused. "Let me make some phone calls, then we'll go to a clothing store. There's one just around the corner. You can shower when we return."

"That'll be fine. Let me help with the dishes."

## CHAPTER THREE

Sandy gave me the detective's name and phone number in Rockland, Maine. Calling the airline first, I made reservations for a flight leaving at six a.m. tomorrow morning, arriving Boston at ten thirty a.m. There was a connecting flight on a small commuter airline to Augusta, Maine, but from the map spread across my desk, it looked like no more than a three or four hour road trip from Boston's Logan airport. Deciding to drive, I figured we would arrive in Rockland by five o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Sunday.

Placing a call to the police department in Rockland, Maine, I asked to speak to Detective J. L. Chamberlain.

"I'm sorry, sir," the Desk Sergeant who answered the phone said. "Detective Chamberlain isn't working this weekend. Maybe someone else could help you?"

"Then I'll speak to the detective in charge this weekend," I said, throwing my pen on the desk, expecting the usual bureaucratic runaround.

"Well, sir," the Desk Sergeant said. "Detective Chamberlain is the only detective we've got. He won't be back until Monday, that is unless we have some kind of emergency. Then the Chief would have me call Detective Chamberlain. We don't have a large force."

"Put the Chief on the line, Sergeant," I said, picking my pen back up. "I'll talk to him."

"Ah, I'm sorry, sir, but the Chief isn't working this weekend, either. Of course, unless there's an emergency."

"Then put whoever the hell is in charge on the phone, Sergeant." I was growing tired of the game. "I'll talk to anyone."

"Well, sir," he said, rather proudly. "I'm the one in charge. What can I do for you?"

"Sergeant," I said slowly, calmly, clenching both fists together until the knuckles were white. "I want you to get in touch with Detective Chamberlain, tell him Sandy Rinaldi will be arriving tomorrow around six p.m. We'll meet him in his office."

"Ah, sir," the Sergeant said officiously. "Just who are you?"

"My name is Leicester, Jay Leicester. I'll be accompanying Miss Rinaldi to Rockland. We're traveling over a thousand miles to see Detective Chamberlain. We expect to see his smiling face. Understand, Sergeant?"



"Yes, sir," he said. "But Detective Chamberlain isn't going to like this."

"Good-bye, Sergeant," I said, quickly hanging up the phone, then holding my head in both hands in disgust.

\* \* \*

"There's a flight leaving at six in the morning," I explained to Sandy on the way to the clothing store. "Puts us in Boston by eleven. We can drive up to Rockland from there. Detective Chamberlain will meet us at his office around six o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Sound okay to you?"

"Sounds fine." She ran manicured fingers through her silky hair. "You couldn't get us out tonight?"

"Not without an overnight layover in Atlanta," I answered, searching for a parking space in the busy shopping center. "We might as well stay here as in Atlanta."

"Will you arrange a room for me, a hotel somewhere close by?"

"Certainly, but you're welcome to stay at my house." I maneuvered the car into a narrow parking space. "There's a spare bedroom with a lock on the door."

"Awful hospitable of you, Mr. Leicester," she said with that strange half-smile. "I accept."

\* \* \*

The flight to Boston was uneventful. Getting the rent-a-car and driving out of the city was, to say the least, interesting. It took us an hour to get through the tollbooth at the airport perimeter. Sandy, navigating with the road map, helped. But the traffic was bumper to bumper, stop and go, until we were ten miles north. And this was Sunday.

Once outside of Boston traffic on the turnpike thinned. It was foggy when we landed at Logan, but by the time we'd settled in for the drive the fog had burned off, revealing a deep blue early spring sky. The air still had a chilly brace and the trees were just beginning to leaf out.

We went through the State of New Hampshire in the blink of an eye and, except for the tollbooths at each state line, we would not have known we'd been through it.

We stopped in Kennebunkport for a break and something to eat. Another toll to get back on the turnpike, and we headed up along the coast. Taking the exit at Bath, we followed Highway One through some of the

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