

# MURDERING LAWYERS

A NOVEL



**LARRY FINE**

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To my wonderful wife, Laura Winston,  
who for over a quarter of a century has  
consistently and thoroughly supported me  
no matter what crazy things I try to do; plus,  
she's also an all-around sweetie, a person  
with whom I never get tired of hanging out,  
and (I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention)  
she combined genetic material with me and  
birthed two other amazing people, Alicia  
and Jocelyn.

*Law never made men a whit more just.*

—Henry David Thoreau

*The lawyer's profession is essentially unclean. ...There will always be some lawyer who will jiggle with the facts until the moment comes when he will find extenuating circumstances.*

—Adolf Hitler

*Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.*

—Aleister Crowley

## PROLOGUE

**G**erald Thornton, Esq., felt more alive than he had in weeks. His heart beat rapidly and his palm sweated as he signed the Bronx motel register. As always, he signed the name of an old law school classmate who was a partner at a competitive firm. That really amused him.

The young girl hung back a little, as if embarrassed. Thornton doubted that. She was hardly a sacrificial virgin. He had noticed the little strawberry blond when cruising the strip. A couple of times Thornton had just missed his opportunity, watching the kid drive off in another car. Today he had had her in mind when he first set out.

She was barely five feet, with a slight overbite that accentuated her youth. She popped her gum and blew bubbles incessantly. She could be anywhere from twelve to twenty, but Thornton, in his late fifties, didn't care about the truth.

The clerk held up a key. "You'll be in Room 11. You got up to three hours. That's eighty bucks."

Thornton reached into his left pocket and pulled out his pre-counted eighty dollars and shoved it into the clerk's outstretched paw. The man counted the money before handing

over the key.

Thornton checked his watch. Three hours. Perfect. His wife expected him home from his business meeting at about ten.

Inside Room 11, the girl proved less shy. After Thornton placed the cash on the dresser, she took off her tank top and unbuttoned her shorts. Thornton sat on the bed and watched, until the little girl had pulled off her bikini briefs and stood in front of him naked, blowing a bubble.

“You want me to do you?” she asked Thornton.

“You know I do.” They had already agreed on all services and prices in the car. “What’s your name?”

She removed Thornton’s tie as she answered. “Suzy.” After a moment, without real interest, “What’s yours?”

Gerald Thornton didn’t hesitate. “David.”

Suzy unbuttoned “David’s” shirt with one hand while she placed the other in the customer’s lap. It was early in the evening and she was already sore all over.

She blew her biggest bubble yet. Then she spit the gum into a Kleenex from the box on the night table next to the bed.

Thornton was relieved to be finally freed of his suit pants. He played with himself for a moment as he lay naked on the bed. Alarmingly, Suzy was already poised to take him in her mouth. Thornton pulled away, grabbed an unlubricated condom from his pants on the floor and presented it to her. Suzy placed it on Thornton and went to work.

As he watched Suzy’s head travel up and down his length, Thornton started feeling uncharacteristically potent. Seizing the moment, he pulled out of Suzy’s mouth and positioned her invitingly.

Once inside, Thornton built to a rapid rhythm. He was undisturbed by the fact that Suzy barely moved. He was getting close.

He stopped abruptly, heart pumping double-time. “What was that?” he asked the girl. “Did you hear something?”

“No. Go ahead, man. Just come.”

“I thought I heard someone touching the doorknob.”

“No way. Just go ahead.”

Thornton resumed his motion, hesitantly at first. Then the fire began to return. He sped up again. He clutched at the little girl as he pumped faster and deeper. He gasped and squeezed his eyes shut as he finished.

Thornton was smiling when the door opened and the four well-groomed young white men came in. He barely had time to pull out and open his eyes wide with surprise. The gun was shoved deep into his mouth and fired.



The four intruders had a lot of cleanup to do. First they chloroformed Suzy into unconsciousness. Then the men went out to their cars and brought in two empty trunks. Two of the men, one of whom was built like a football tackle, put Suzy into a medium-sized trunk, along with the stained sheets. The big guy sprayed stain remover on the wall and used Kleenex from the night table to wipe away the blood.

Meanwhile, the man with the gun, the one whose right fourth finger ended abruptly at the first knuckle, yanked off Thornton's rubber as the fourth man, a redhead, wiped him from head to toe with a motel towel, soaking up all the bodily fluids. Then both men washed their hands well. “Filthy scumbag,” quipped the gunman, breaking the silence momentarily as they all laughed.

The well-built man and his partner started the difficult task of dressing the lawyer's body. They had to bend parts of his body and gently straighten others. It took almost half an hour. Little was said as they worked. They moved with a speed and efficiency that belied their lack of experience in this particular line of work.

Planning was everything.

After leaving the motel, the two groups split up without a

further word. The football player and his partner brought Suzy to the warehouse on the west side of Manhattan and dumped her out on the cold floor, to be saved for later use. The man with nine fingers and his redheaded associate dropped Thornton off in Central Park, just a few blocks from his penthouse condominium. The gun was placed carefully in his stiff hand, with the suicide note nearby. They inspected their handiwork.

“His will is done.”



PART ONE



## One

**W**hen Marc Wilson arrived at the Manhattan Bar Association hours earlier, he hadn't planned to commit a crime. But now, amazingly, the opportunity was presenting itself and Marc couldn't just walk away. There was no one around to stop him.

*I can't believe I'm doing this,* he thought as he walked up to the administrative office for all of the Bar Association committees. *After a lifetime of obeying even the most arbitrary rules, I could be barred from the practice of law. And locked up.*

Marc laughed mirthlessly at the thought. It wasn't as if he had a lucrative career and the respect of his peers at stake. Or even any freedom to lose.

*I'll just see whether or not the door is locked.*



Nine months earlier, Marc had asked the Bar Association librarian if he could just put the card up on the bulletin board or whether he had to clear it with anyone.

The short bald guy shrugged and touched the screen of his iPad. "Just stick it up there. We don't have anything to do with the board."

The bulletin board outside the library of the Manhattan Bar Association was full. Every inch was wallpapered with index cards listing the names and addresses of pathetic losers and the depths to which they would sink. Marc glanced back at the oblivious librarian before stealing a thumbtack and burying another pathetic loser's index card under his own:

MARC WILSON

Available for long and short-term  
assignments, per diem, court  
appearances, depositions, local counsel.  
Top 25% of law school class, Law Review.  
Reasonable Rates



The door to the Bar Association administrative office wasn't locked. It swung open noiselessly. *Damn*, thought Marc. *What are you trying to do to me?* He locked the door from the inside.

The lack of security didn't really surprise him. There was no cash around. He wasn't aware of anything in the office that anyone would want to steal. Even the computer was a practically worthless antique.

Still, the computer in the center of the little room was his first stop. He hit a random key and was momentarily stymied. Of course, the computer was locked, and a password was required.

Marc momentarily wrestled with frustration. And relief.

Then he saw the Post-it note between the computer and the phone.



Weeks earlier Marc was in small claims court. He shifted and took a deep breath while his client of several minutes glared at him. Vince had been intrigued to learn that defendants, and

only defendants, could have lawyers in small claims court. He had been sold by Marc's pay-me-only-if-you-win guarantee. But he was still wasn't sure he was getting his money's worth.

The judge continued as if teaching a first semester law school course, which was perhaps his ambition. Anything was better than small claims. "It seems clear to me that the plaintiff and defendant never had a meeting of the minds over the terms of a contract to provide entertainment for the plaintiff's bachelor party."

"It wasn't *my* bachelor party, your Honor," said the plaintiff. "I was best man."

"Whatever. You paid the defendant to provide strippers, right?"

"Right. And they only danced for twenty minutes and the blond never took off her G-string. They barely let us touch them."

Between the judge's clenched teeth: "So you've said before. You've already painted an adequate picture for the Court."

*I went to law school for this?* thought Marc. *People's Court would be a step up.*

Marc swallowed hard and jumped in again. "Your honor, my client provided a service. Even if you find that there wasn't a contract, my client earned his payment pursuant to the doctrine of *quantum meruit*."

Vince the Stripper King looked like he might finally be impressed.

The judge wasn't. "This is small claims court. No Latin here." A bang of the gavel. "Judgment for the plaintiff. Return his full payment. Two-hundred seventy-five bucks."

Vince looked at Marc like *he* should pay the judgment.



After successfully entering the password from the Post-it note (is "Guinevere" this administrator's favorite historical/literary

*character, daughter, or cat, or perhaps all of the above?*), Marc located the Ethics Committee directory on the hard drive. He went through the sub-directories, guessing which ones contained proposed revisions to the Code, or memoranda concerning investigations of specific attorneys, or letters of reprimand, cc'd to the State Bar Association. The Manhattan Bar Association didn't have the power to disbar an attorney, but it could and did make damn sure that the State Bar Association took care of things.

The computer files were loaded with the names of the desperate and the greedy. Those who had cut too many corners. Those who had stretched the truth too tightly. Those who showed zeal for false causes ...



Last week: "Tell Marc about your case, Aunt Helen."

This was not the first time that Sylvia Wilson, née Goldberg, had prompted her aunt to tell her son about a lawsuit she was contemplating. Mrs. Wilson often predicted that her son's career would take off as soon as he got the right case. Marc knew his mother was trying to help both of them, and he silently cursed his lowly circumstances.

Two summers earlier, during Marc's second summer of law school, when he had a great job with prestigious Harper, Weiner & Dorn, Marc had barely listened to Great Aunt Helen's lawsuit of the month. He had nodded his head periodically, while thinking how ridiculous it was that this poor old woman expected him to be interested in avenging her latest perceived wrong. He was making over three thousand a week! She couldn't afford him.

Now, a year after his graduation from law school, anyone could afford him. Harper, Weiner & Dorn had decided to optimize profits by downsizing, and so didn't make offers of permanent employment to any summer associates. Meanwhile,

other firms seemed to be hiring *only* the associates who worked for them over the summer. Marc had been turned down by firms that paid half of what he'd been willing to accept. He was shut out.

So, a year after his proud graduation day, Marc was living with his mom in Forest Hills, Queens, New York. Upstairs in his old room, surrounded by the wrestling and track trophies of his glory days. The only things added since high school were the once state-of-the-art gaming computer and the fancy synthesizer which were the trophies of his Harper, Weiner summer money.

Marc made his bed most days—not that his mother made him—he knew that it made her happy and it was easy enough. He insisted on buying the groceries with his meager earnings. His mother couldn't pay for everything on a court file clerk's salary, despite her seniority.

Begging for work in person and on bulletin boards hadn't provided a reliable grocery subsidy, so Marc had been forced to secure a steady income as a night shift word processor for the major Manhattan law firm of Samson & Lake. During the last six months, he had become desensitized to the incorrect word usages and glaring misstatements of the law which he typed into the computers each night. At first he had attached Post-its with helpful notes and comments for the attorneys who had scribbled out the briefs, but some of them had complained. Marc now accepted that no one at the firm cared that he could do better.

Marc had vowed that some day he would do much more than pay for groceries. Many times he had promised his mother that he would buy her a place to retire in Miami Beach, near her cousin Gertie, to which she always responded, "You're a sweet boy, but it's not necessary."

But to Marc it *was* necessary. He knew how hard his mother worked, and how much she hated the cold New York winters. In a perfect world she would have retired already, and Marc's time to invest in Florida real estate was fast running out.

The only ship coming in at the moment was Great Aunt Helen. *Please have a good case, Helen.*

“Those good-for-nothings are going to have to pay me! I’ll shut them down! We’ll see if they find *that* funny!” Aunt Helen was eighty years old and about eighty pounds, running on will-power and spite.

Mrs. Wilson patted Aunt Helen gently on the back. “Don’t upset yourself, Helen. Just tell Marc what happened. He’ll know what you should do.”

Marc braced himself. *Let it be a real case. Mom and I need more than just a new pair of shoes.*

Last year, just out of law school and unemployed, but still hopeful, Marc had endeavored to explain to Aunt Helen why she couldn’t sue a local magazine for renegeing after guaranteeing her a sweepstakes grand prize. The year before that, Marc had begged off on her proposed suit against the people from Smuckers who had stolen her idea of putting peanut butter and jelly in the same jar.

“I could have died,” said Helen. “That applesauce was as slippery as the devil.”

*Applesauce*, Marc considered. *Sounds a little silly at first, but on second thought it has promise. Million dollar lawsuits have been built on more innocuous substances.*

“Would you two like some coffee or tea?”

“Mom, Aunt Helen’s in the middle of her story. She doesn’t want to be interrupted.”

“Maybe a glass of tea,” said Aunt Helen, “with a little cream and sugar.”

“So, Aunt Helen, did you slip on applesauce?”

“I sure did. Went flying. Almost broke my neck.”

*Almost.*

“When was this?”

“Last month.”

“How badly *were* you hurt?” *Let there be some substantial hidden injury.* Helen looked about the same as ever, though. “And

how big were your doctor bills?”

“My hip smarted like the devil. For days. I didn’t see any quack doctor about it, though. Don’t trust any of them.”

*Stay calm.*

Mom chimed in. “Helen was in a *lot* of pain. Isn’t that worth something? Is it too late for her to see a doctor now?”

“Well, it won’t be as persuasive as if she had gone right away,” Marc mused aloud, a hint of cynicism in his voice. “Not that there isn’t a doctor out there somewhere who would swear that the applesauce injured every piece of soft tissue in her body.”

“Oh, of course we don’t want to lie or do anything illegal,” his mother said.

“Those can be two different things,” Marc pointed out. “People hire these types of doctors to testify every day.” He shrugged and added, “But not people like us, I guess.”

“Oh well.” Sylvia sighed. “I guess we’ll never get rich.”

Marc felt bad for his mother. She only wanted the best for her aunt and her son. *She watches too much television. She and Aunt Helen have been promised large cash awards by too many lawsuit salesmen.*

For his mom’s sake, Marc plugged on mechanically. “Do you have any idea how long the applesauce had been on the store floor?”

Aunt Helen looked confused. “Well, I dropped the jar just ten seconds before. The jar was too heavy. I tried to pick it up and it went flying ...”

Sylvia Wilson shot Marc a look to say that she was as surprised as he was by this latest revelation. “Sorry,” she mouthed.

Aunt Helen continued, undaunted. “Wasn’t even chunky style ...”

*Next?*





Fortunately, Marc was pretty sure that he wasn't mentioned in any of the Ethics Committee sub-directories. Yet. But a stunt like this was a sure way to make one of the Ethics Committee's lists, if not jail. If he got caught.

Marc found the file with the Committee membership list. Unfortunately, he wasn't mentioned there either.

He had been trying to get on the Ethics Committee for almost a year. His former friend Paul was on the Committee, and Paul's career had soared from the contacts, while Marc's had taken a nosedive.

During his year of unemployment, Marc had objectively analyzed all available data and concluded that life was one big conspiracy, with certain members of the New York Bar at the center of it all. All the most successful lawyers were bosom buddies with the most powerful judges, legislators and/or politicians, deciding the fate of the rest of the world at the fourteenth hole. Marc desperately wanted in, but he didn't know a thing about golf.

The first two times that Marc applied to join the Committee, he had received a polite form letter from membership director Gerald Thornton, Esq., informing him that there were currently no vacancies on the Committee.

Just a few days ago, Gerald Thornton had *created* a vacancy on the Committee by committing suicide. Marc read about the death of the prominent attorney and humanitarian in the New York Law Journal just last week.

Marc never understood people like Thornton. The man had had everything. Money, fame, power, prestige ... Everything Marc wanted and didn't have. *If I'd been Thornton, I would have been a damn sight happier.*

Marc had been planning on applying again, as soon as he found out the name of the new membership director. But he'd had the sinking feeling that it didn't matter. His application would be rejected yet again. *What would happen*, Marc had wondered, *if I just showed up at a meeting anyway?*

Then, tonight, they'd closed the Bar Association while he was in the bathroom. Maybe it had been the exciting prospect of the long Labor Day weekend that had made them so careless.

As Marc had wandered the darkened hall toward the front door, he had passed the Bar Association administrative office. He had remembered that the Ethics Committee was short a member *and* a membership director. Marc could take advantage of the temporary confusion that Thornton's sudden death must have caused within the Committee. *I can't do something that ... sleazy*, he had thought to himself. *It's wrong*.

But the door to the office had been unlocked. And he hadn't been able to stop himself.

As Marc added his name to the membership list and printed it, he tried to comfort himself with the thought: *It's a victimless crime*. Then he found the files of letters from Thornton to applicants. As he was writing a form letter welcoming himself to the Committee, he heard someone trying to turn the doorknob.



Just a few days before, Berna Gutierrez, Marc's neighbor in nightshift word processing at Samson & Lake, had returned from a week's absence uncharacteristically quiet. When Marc asked if everything was okay, she said she'd talk to him during a break.

Later, in the deserted cafeteria, over vending machine coffee, Mrs. Gutierrez told him emotionally, "It's my son."

"Paul or David?" Marc asked with concern.

"David. He was almost killed and no one cares!"

"What happened? Is he okay?"

"The bullets missed him, but I don't think he'll ever be okay."

Berna Gutierrez calmed down sufficiently to tell Marc how her fourteen-year-old son, David, had been caught in the crossfire between drug dealers and undercover cops. "He was

going to visit a school friend. He didn't know the pushers were using an apartment on the same floor." She shook her head sadly. "For years I've been saving to move to a better neighborhood. I still can't afford it."

"Did the narcs fire in self-defense?" Marc asked. "Did the drug dealers fire first?"

"David says the police fired first. But he didn't even know they were police then."

"Were there other people in that hall at the time?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "I don't think so."

"That's horrible. They should be thrown off the force."

"We filled out a complaint form, but the men in the station treated us like criminals. They kept asking why David was there. And they said 'The boy seems fine. Count your blessings and keep the kid away from crack houses.'"

Marc was too angry to comment. He asked, "Have you considered a civil suit against the police?"

"This afternoon I talked to Mr. Millborne, the partner at Samson & Lake who's in charge of *pro bono* cases. He said the case sounded too hard because the police didn't do anything directly to David. He *also* told me to count my blessings. I *do* thank God that David wasn't shot. I just wish I could take away David's fear. I wish I could give him some reason to respect the law again."

In all of their small talk about the weather, their health and their families, Marc had never mentioned to Mrs. Gutierrez that he was an attorney. He hadn't told any of the word processors.

He decided to break his silence. "I may not have mentioned this before, but *I'm* a lawyer."

"Really? Then what are you doing ...?" Tact pulled her up short.

"Millborne's right. Your son's case will be difficult. You'll have to bring it in federal court, under section 1983 of the Public Welfare Law. You'll have to disprove the officers' stories, prove that they acted recklessly and wantonly. I think the cases

say that their actions must ‘shock the conscience.’“

“You don’t think ...”

“But your story shocks *my* conscience. I think it *is* terrible enough.” He ran down his mental checklist. “You’ll also have to prove psychological damages, and their foreseeability. Even if you win, the monetary judgment might not be that big.”

“I understand that,” she said. “Are you saying that you ...”

“I don’t have much experience. I don’t have an office. I don’t even have stationery. But I have a computer, good research and writing skills, and I could use the practice. I’d like to take your son’s case.” Marc ignored the practical voice in his head that was teasing him: *a difficult case that pays nothing now and not much later ... just what you’ve been looking for.*

“Thank you so much,” Mrs. Gutierrez gushed.

*She actually thinks I can do it. She doesn’t know I’ve never set foot in federal court.*

“Do you have the time to do this?” she asked.

“Don’t worry about that,” he assured her. “Time is something I definitely have.”

*Well, I’ve finally got a case. I still need some paying jobs, but this is exciting. Can I really do this by myself? If I were at a firm, I’d have support staff to churn out the forms. And partners to review my work and make sure I don’t commit malpractice. And I’d have malpractice insurance.*



Again, someone jiggled the doorknob to the Bar Association office. Marc froze and stared at the door. Then he heard footsteps heading away.

Whoever it was might come back in a minute, but he couldn’t stop now. He printed two copies of the letter, then exited the directory and switched off the computer’s power strip. Quickly, he forged Thornton’s signature on the bottom of one copy of the letter, using the bottom of one of his rejection letters

as a model. He opened the appropriate file drawer and filed both the letter and the new membership list.

This time he heard the footsteps as they approached. Marc hid under the desk, feeling scared, guilty and humiliated.

*What am I doing?*

The janitor unlocked the door and flicked on the light, muttering under his breath. He left the garbage pail outside and came in with the vacuum.

As he bent down to plug in the vacuum, his face came within two feet of Marc's. Marc could smell the whiskey the man had been drinking. Marc held his breath as the janitor grunted and stretched for the outlet.

*Mission accomplished.* The janitor stood up and turned on the vacuum. He began to push the machine about in an unpredictable, unsystematic manner. Marc was trapped because the desk had no opening in the back. He crawled in as far as he could go.

The vacuum began to probe for dirt under the desk. Marc got on all fours just in time to allow the machine to pass under his stomach and bang against the desk back. Then it was gone.

As the janitor circled around to the other side of the desk, Marc peeked out and saw that the janitor was looking the other way. Marc crawled out of the room quickly and quietly. As he fled the building, his pants coated with dust, he tried to convince himself that everything would be okay, that he didn't just do something stupid that would ruin his life.

## Two

**A** week later, Marc received a card “reminding” him about a brief procedural meeting of the Ethics Committee the following Tuesday, September 13. *Could the Committee really have been fooled so easily? Things aren’t supposed to work this way.*

He told his mother the shortest version of the story: he was on a committee with lots of powerful, influential people. “That’s great,” she said. “I’m sure you’ll impress them. Maybe they’ll give you a job.” *Yeah, Marc thought, I’m sure I’ll stand out as the smartest one there.*

When he told his mother that it was the same committee that Paul Johnston was on, she asked him, “What ever happened to Paul? You two used to spend so much time together.”

“We kind of drifted apart. After he started making lots of money and I stopped.”

“That’s a shame. He seemed like a nice boy.”

Paul had been nice, though full of self-pity, back when he couldn’t land *any* job during his second summer of law school. Marc had been big about things, paying more than his share of movies and bar tabs. Then, when Paul joined the Ethics Committee right after graduation, Paul’s many new contacts had net-

ted him a top job at a prestigious firm. Marc grew to resent Paul, and Paul became uncomfortable around Marc.

“I think your uncle used to be on that Ethics Committee, years ago,” said Sylvia Wilson.

“I don’t know. He’s not on it now. Thank God.”

“I don’t see why you never got over your grudge against Uncle Charles.”

“I don’t see how you could have gotten over it. Dad was so angry with Uncle Charles. He really hurt Dad.”

“Your father never hated anyone. Especially not his own brother. You don’t even know what they fought about, do you?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“I’m sure they would have made up eventually, if your father was still around.”

Marc remembered that, tough as he could be, his father had always been quick to forgive. But Marc didn’t care that his mother was probably right. Hating his uncle made him feel closer to his lost father.



Marc stopped by Marsha’s place without warning. He told her about the Committee, and predicted that this was a turning point in his life.

“Why are you telling me?” she asked, still standing in the doorway. She stood very straight, a posture that accentuated the healthy buoyancy of her beautifully rounded breasts.

“I want to share my good fortune with you.”

She blocked his path, while keeping her voice modulated. “I meant what I said the other day. I don’t think we have a future together.”

Marc had gotten the message a few days earlier. But he wasn’t ready to give up yet. He had enjoyed many happy times with Marsha over the last two years. Also, he was afraid to be thrust back out into the dating world. Although he had no phys-

ical deformities, Marc knew that his appearance was fundamentally plain. His chief claim to fame and source of pride was having a full, thick head of hair while most of his acquaintances were already missing some on the top or the sides. It would be hard, against-the-odds work to get another woman to acquire a taste for him.

“But things are changing for me,” he pointed out. “How can we give up now on all we have?”

“What did we have? We practically never went out. All you ever wanted to do was watch old movies on video.”

“That’s not all we ever did, and you know it.”

“Well, we *did* have great sex,” Marsha conceded. “But your mother always ruined it for me. I could hear her rattling pans or washing dishes in the kitchen. I’m too old for that.”

“Me too. I’m working on it.” He recalled once again that he had been making three thousand dollars a week when he started dating Marsha. Neither of them could have predicted then that they would still be so close with his mother two years later.

“I need to get out,” she announced.

“Have you found someone better?”

“You don’t really want to know, do you?” She edged him out the door, saying, “Good luck.”



The big day arrived. Marc showed up a few minutes early for the “brief meeting to discuss procedural matters.” He was scared. Scared of being exposed as a fraud. And scared of success. And what such a success would signify about the universe. *Maybe I’ve invested too much in this meeting*, he thought. But it was impossible to calm down about it.

The Ethics Committee filed in, in ones and twos. It didn’t surprise Marc that almost all the members were white, but he was pleasantly surprised that over a third of them were women,



and all age groups were represented. The clearest pattern Marc noticed was that each person was beautifully dressed.

Marc was sitting in the back of the Bar Association meeting room. He had no idea how the Committee members would react to him. *Pay no attention to me*, he thought. *I am not the interloper you're looking for.*

He was excited but nervous at the prospect of seeing his former friend, Paul Johnston. It could be awkward, and Paul might be suspicious. But Marc did miss Paul. They had had some good times together.

A few of the Committee members took seats without noticing Marc, but many nodded or smiled in his direction. A group of four guys approximately his age walked in and sat near the front, turning to look back at him and smile. One of the men was particularly big and muscular, and another had bright red hair. From where he was sitting, Marc couldn't see that the third was missing the fourth finger from his right hand. Marc returned their good-natured stares and smiled nervously. *They seem friendly. There's no reason to assume they won't like me.*

It was 12:30 on a Tuesday afternoon, but surprisingly few of the attorneys gave off the expected air of busy New York lawyers who had barely managed to escape their offices for an hour. *These people really are important.*

On the other end of the spectrum, Marc had strolled down to the meeting room after a routine trip to the Bar Association library upstairs to check on job postings. He'd been more surreptitious than usual this morning, afraid that by some unlucky chance he would be seen by members of the Committee.

A middle-aged woman sat down to Marc's right and greeted him with a smile. She introduced herself as Doris Spender, and Marc thought he recognized the name as one of the only female managing partners at a big New York firm. Marc was alarmed to notice that other Committee members appeared to be watching and listening as he introduced himself.

"Your uncle Charlie's a great man and a brilliant jurist,"

said Doris Spender.

Marc was momentarily thrown. First of all, he so seldom thought about his uncle that he often forgot he existed. Secondly, he almost never talked about his uncle. His brief conversation with his mother a few days ago had been the first time in a year, and he was sure that his uncle never talked about him. Yet, this woman hadn't just guessed, she had *known* that Charles Wilson, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals judge, was his uncle. Had she and/or others on the Committee checked into his background?

“Uh, thanks.”

A heavysset middle-aged man in front of Marc turned to face him and said flatly, “Charlie Wilson was the best Committee Chair we ever had. No offense to Bob and the current regime. But Charlie's been doing a lot of good on the Second Circuit, too. By the way, I'm Don O'Neill.” Marc shook his pudgy hand.

Just then Robert Baylor strolled in and called the meeting to order. Twenty-four members were present out of a total of thirty-two, including Marc. Everyone faced front. Marc was relieved.

Marc was glad that Baylor didn't make a production by officially introducing him to the Committee. Maybe he knew or guessed that an unofficial introduction had already occurred. More importantly, Baylor didn't denounce Marc or eject him from the meeting.

*Did my crazy plan somehow work?*

Baylor announced, “In the wake of Bob Thornton's untimely passing, and by the way thank you to all of you who contributed so generously to the scholarship fund established in his name—Bob cared so much about young people—Doris Spender has taken over as membership director. I'm sure she'll do a terrific job, with His help and guidance.”

Ms. Spender smiled and nodded at the Committee members, ending by fixing a friendly gaze on Marc. After a couple of

seconds, he looked away self-consciously.

At that moment, two men entered the room. Marc instantly recognized the shorter, younger man as Paul Johnston, looking tan, blond and more movie-star-handsome than ever in a Brooks Brothers suit. The other attorney wore an Italian suit that highlighted a lean but muscular form, which denied his sixty-plus years of age. This was a man whose appearance seemed to be the result of total mental and physical discipline.

It struck Marc with a jolt that he had only once before perceived such innate power. Although he had been shorter and stockier than this man when Marc last saw him, Charles Wilson had radiated a similar aura of confidence and influence. *Why does he keep coming up?*

The two men took seats in the middle of the front row, as if the seats had been saved for them. Although Baylor looked vaguely annoyed at their late entrance, neither man had an apologetic word or expression. The older man faced front, while Paul swept the room quickly with a sociable glance. Marc thought Paul saw him, but he wasn't sure.

The meeting proceeded rapidly. As advertised, it was brief, though painstakingly procedural. Several sub-committee chairmen were called upon to report on their sub-committees' progress, self-imposed deadlines, and the times of their next scheduled meetings. No one spoke for more than a minute.

Marc noticed that many of the chairmen followed statements of future intentions or predictions with conditional catch-phrases, such as "if He's willing" or "if all goes according to His plan." *These ethical types are pretty damn religious*, he mused. *Hope I can fit in.*

Marc wondered if he should volunteer to join one of the sub-committees, but he chickened out. He figured he would bide his time a little, insinuating himself gradually.

Baylor asked, "And how are the preparations for the Halloween parties going, Bill?"

Mr. Powerful Italian Suit stood up and addressed the Com-

mittee. "Very well. The party for the shelter kids will be held on Saturday afternoon in the basement of my church. Transportation, candy and costumes are all being donated. And *our* party is set for later that night at the Aladdin Club, which we booked for the whole night." He smiled roguishly. "Should be decadent Halloween fun till dawn." He added, "Be it His will."

As he turned to sit, he concluded, "Paul's been helping me, so there should be something for every age and taste." Paul smiled charmingly.

Minutes later, the meeting was over. The next general meeting, scheduled for the second week in October, was being held at Baylor's suburban house. Marc would have to borrow his mother's car and get directions to Dobbs Ferry, a river town in Westchester County, New York.

As Marc and everyone else stood up to leave, Paul and Bill turned and faced Marc. As the two men walked back toward him, Marc couldn't help feeling nervous. First he met their gazes and smiled, and then he glanced artificially to his right for a moment. He couldn't stop himself as he looked away one more time before they reached him.

Paul reached Marc first, grabbing his right hand and pumping it forcefully. "Marc! It's so good to see you!"

Bill waited quietly for Paul's enthusiastic handshake to slow down. Paul turned to him and introduced him. "This is Bill Eckart. Head of the Environmental Litigation department at Ballen, Warren & Dow. Sort of my mentor."

"Good to meet you," Marc managed, shaking the man's hand.

"This is Marc Wilson," Paul continued. "We were friends and study partners in law school. Took turns beating each other on finals."

*I had a higher average than you, you Brooks Brothers ass.* Marc pumped all the charm he could muster into his handshake and smile.

Bill relinquished the handshake, but immediately placed

his right hand on Marc's shoulder, making Marc feel uncomfortable.

"I could use another one as good as Paul," said Eckart. "The timing couldn't be better."

*What's he talking about?* Marc didn't dare ask.

"Can I persuade you to join us at Ballen Warren?"

*What sort of practical joke?*

"But I haven't ..." Marc stopped himself.

"Don't worry if you haven't had environmental defense experience."

*How'd he know what I was thinking?*

"At least you won't have anything to *unlearn*," said Eckart. "You'll be a clean slate on which I can write the law of the jungle."

Paul chimed in, "Don't let him intimidate you with his bullshit. He talks tough but he's really a sweetheart. The hours aren't that bad and the pay's great."

"Don't listen to *his* bullshit," Eckart broke in, good-naturedly. "I'm a monster. I eat associates for breakfast. But we'll dine *together* as long as I like you."

During the ensuing silence, it became painfully obvious that Marc had not been contributing much to the conversation.

*What the hell can I say?*

"Think about it," Eckart advised, with a final slap on Marc's shoulder. "Call me tomorrow."



Manhattan District Attorney Bob Rosetti shoved most of the hot dog into his mouth as he continued reviewing the file marked "E.C." Practiced as he was at such multiple tasks, he didn't drop a single spicy onion on his shirt. It also helped that he had spent two years in Iraq and had experience eating while contemplating violent death. Few would have considered the text or pictures in the file to be appetizing.

So, the coroner's report had validated Rosetti's hunch that

Bob Thornton was moved to Central Park *after* he died. Thornton had ejaculated shortly before he died, but someone wiped him clean as a whistle. *Why?* Rosetti wondered. *Was sex the motive for the murder, or just part of the method?*

Rosetti thumbed through the rest of his file on the Ethics Committee, trying to make sense of it. First Norm Maxwell, now Bob Thornton. *What's making these bastards kill their own? And how am I going to get to the bottom of it?*