

*Please enjoy a sample of the new upcoming novel
by Garth Jeffries*

THE WINTER RESIDENTS

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PROLOGUE

It was a perfect evening to bury a body.

The moon, viewed through wisps of fog, was just a slight sliver in the western sky, a waning crescent she would have told him, had she been alive, and shedding very little light as it prepared to set. High overcast thinned the stars. The evening was chilly and damp, the moisture clinging to the scrub brush, sedge and heather on the edges of Coskata Pond near the northeast tip of the island. Despite the calendar, it did not feel like summer. More like late fall. She would have loved this weather, he thought. And chuckled.

The Boston meteorologist had called for a Nor'easter to strike late tomorrow with strong winds and heavy rain. The timing could not have been any better. The storm would erase any traces of his presence here. All evidence of her grave would disappear from the world. Only he would know where she was buried. The thought brought a wry smile.

Beads of water trickled down his face, some of his own making and some a gift to him from the evening. A shock of his gray hair dropped over his blue eyes as he leaned over again and plunged the

shovel back into the sandy soil. The blade, scraping a shell, sounded out in agony as the steel violated the earth. He turned and emptied his effort onto the small pile of tailings he had created. The swish of soil over metal.

Plunge. Scrape. Swish. The hole grew.

He stopped and rested on the handle. He was not a young man anymore and despite his daily walks he simply did not have the stamina for hard, manual labor. Fortunately, he had never had to do any hard, manual labor in his life courtesy of wealthy parents and a substantial trust fund. The most challenging work he faced was writing checks to the landscapers, maids, and maintenance teams that tended to him in his large home on the island. It was a good life and he intended to keep it that way.

This will work, he told himself. As long as his story was clear and consistent for when he would talk to the police. Given the circumstances around the First, he would be better prepared. Much better.

The First had gone for a swim after having a few cocktails. They had been at the beach to watch the sunset and had definitely had one too many. It was a warm evening and she had wanted to take a quick dip to cool off. Despite her intoxication and the heavy rip tide, they had questioned him intensely on why he had not tried to stop her. Why would he let her swim in that situation? Why didn't you go after her? They did everything but accuse him of pushing her in on purpose.

Which of course, he had.

She had slipped into the water easily, helped along by the valium he had mixed into her drinks. He was pretty sure that she was still breathing when the currents carried her out to sea where

he thought nature would take its course. And it did to some extent. But she eventually washed up on the south shore of the island and was discovered by a young couple walking the beach. There wasn't enough of her left to determine a precise cause of death. The certificate he had submitted to claim her life insurance had stated accidental drowning.

He had been devastated.

As he rested on his shovel, the damp breeze blowing the flaps of his yellow rain slicker, he thought about his upcoming discussion with the police. Yes, they had had a fight and she said she was done. Leaving for good. He said fine and grabbed his fishing gear to find some peace and do some thinking. He was known as an avid fisherman by his friends and neighbors and was often seen setting out late in the evening to catch the right tides at Great Point. Yes, it was late. No, there wasn't anyone at the guard house when I drove by. Mostly blues but also hoping to potentially land a striper or even a bonito. Yes, it was a couple of hours, but didn't have much more than a few strikes. And no, he hadn't seen any other fishermen. He was trying a new spot off Coatue and was alone in the surf the entire time. He returned before daybreak and discovered she was gone when he got home. He was devastated.

He was quite good at being devastated.

But this would require more effort. She couldn't be found this time. With all of the lingering suspicion from the First, a Second would prove to be too much. If not outright jail time, at a minimum it would cast a dark shadow on his life which would have harsh negative impacts both professionally and socially. The First had generated wary sympathy. Although they never told him to his face, many of his friends no doubt wondered why he had let her

swim. What would they think of a Second? He shuddered at the thought. He would probably need to leave the island. She could not be found.

Plunge. Scrape. Swish.

Making her disappear physically was one thing but how to make her disappear from the electronic world? That had proved easier than he thought. He had purchased a ferry ticket off the island in her name and had given that ticket along with her phone, credit cards and several thousand in cash to a transient he had met while partying at the 'Box. She was a beautiful, wealthy college drop out that claimed she wanted to see the world. He saw it more like seeking revenge on poor parenting. But it didn't matter to him, she had turned out to be great fun in bed and they enjoyed several evenings together. But like many travelers, she was anxious to move on, itching to make her way to the west coast. All he asked was that she use the phone and the credit cards along the way and dump them when she arrived. And, oh yeah, please spend money like a pissed off ex-wife out for revenge.

The final step would be to establish her as unstable with the police.

Yes, detective, she has had a history of mental illness although she never sought treatment despite my pleading with her. Before we were married she would go on alcohol fueled manic binges that would last days if not weeks. Yes, I tried to get her treatment but she refused. I think our marriage helped immensely though. The stability and comfort really helped her mental state. Yes, very concerned that this fight and separation might have triggered another episode. God knows what she might do. No, not sure

where she would go. She grew up in California so maybe? What can I do to help?

It was a pretty thin story but the digital traces would lead them away from him and Nantucket. Not the perfect solution - with murder, what is - but enough for plausible deniability. Yes, he would still get suspicious stares from his neighbors and his friends would likely keep a quiet distance for a while. But it would pass. Bad news always does. And he would help it along, nurturing it with carefully curated snippets of news. He had made sure she had only superficial relationships with those on the island so interest would wane quickly. And with her parents dead and no kids, there really wasn't anyone to continue to drive the investigation or even care about her disappearance. Eventually it would just slip away like a low tide.

The cry of a seagull in the distance startled him from his thoughts and he looked around guardedly. The breeze rustled the low bushes of the moors as they swayed in cadence in the dim light. There were no signs of people or cars. The sound of the surf, just a few hundred feet away, soothed his nerves. With the closest person at least a mile distant and the terrain accessible only by an off-road vehicle, he knew he would see someone coming from a long way away. He relaxed and turned his attention back to the job at hand.

Glancing down he saw he was nearly there, the depression a couple of feet deep. Thankful for the loose sand, he dug his shovel in again and his pile grew, now almost waist high.

He had killed her in a fit of rage. She could be such a bitch sometimes and just didn't know when to back off. Didn't know when to know her place and just shut the fuck up. He certainly

hadn't planned it, not like the First. He knew eventually it was going to happen. He was slowly losing control and having a harder time managing her. He wasn't sure what triggered it but she was fighting back more and more. And it was unacceptable. When she threatened to leave and expose his abuse, he of course had to take decisive action. He was a well known and respected member of Nantucket society. He was a generous philanthropist and served on a number of boards and foundations across the island. He was the man. Exposing him would risk it all.

His attack had caught her off guard but she was fit and had fought back, trying to claw his eyes and gouge his face. He deftly fended off the attack and leveraged his size and bulk to overpower her. Within minutes of that threatening comment she was gone. It had given him a strange sense of satisfaction, much more so than the last time. It was good. Total control.

Satisfied that the grave was sufficient, he retreated back to his aging Land Rover and opened the rear hatch. He had been careful to turn off the interior lights before he left the garage and could just make out her shape. He grabbed her body and pulled her out, dropping her onto the sand, still partially frozen from the time in the freezer. Grasping her ankles, he dragged her off the main path and into the scrub. Her long, light brown hair trailed behind her leaving faint tracks in the sand much like the seagrass when it blows in the wind. The tracks followed her into the hole.

Breathing heavily from the exertion, he paused and looked down at what he had done. She looked as if she were sleeping, the damage to her throat not visible in the low light. He would miss her. She had been a decent cook and the sex had been satisfactory and convenient. She had also looked good on his arm at all of the island's high end social events and fundraisers. He sighed. He

knew he would struggle a bit until he could find the Third. He was fairly attractive and very wealthy so finding another would not be a problem. He just wasn't sure what he wanted. A blond? Brunette? Maybe even a redhead? He had several prospects in mind and knew that once the dust settled, and an adequate mourning time passed, he would be back in a relationship and back in power.

Patience he told himself. Patience.

He plunged the shovel into the pile, turned and dropped it in the hole.

Plunge. Scrape. Swish.

The last of the sand filled the hole leaving a slight rise in the terrain. He casually brushed out the edges and his mass of footprints around the hole knowing that the coming storm would do the real work.

He slowly backed his way out of the scrub, smoothing the evidence as he went. Making his way to his car, he closed the hatch, got behind the wheel and started the engine. He lowered the window and took in a deep breath of the salt tinged air. He dropped the car into gear, put some Coltrane on the stereo and accelerated slowly across the sand towards home. Life was good.

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