

1 **(MUSIC LEAD IN)**

2 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** There will not be snow this Christmas, at least not for our
3 Christmas. That's the one thing I miss living in Florida.

4 **MIKE:** And that's just fine with me.

5 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** Oh come on Mike, what are you some kind of Grinch?

6 **MIKE:** No, no, don't get me wrong, I really like Christmas. The lights, the music
7 and even how people seem to be a little friendlier. I like presents, eggnog and
8 even finding that *certain someone* under the mistletoe. Yeah, I like everything
9 about Christmas, just not *snow*.

10 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** So to be clear, your beef is with winter precipitation... NOT
11 obese elves in red pajamas or Jewish baby's born in barns?

12 **MIKE:** No, just the snow - but it wasn't always that way. When I was a kid
13 growing up in New York, winter was the best time of the year. And the *snow*,
14 forget about it. I mean what kid doesn't love sledding down a hill, throwing
15 snowballs at people, and of course learning how to write your name in the
16 snow. I guess that is more of a boy thing maybe. True, when you get older
17 snow can be a little bit of pain - you know shoveling it, scrape it off your car
18 windows and driving in it after it turns to slush. But even that was okay, until I
19 worked on *the Yule case*.

20 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** So ah, snow was great and now it's bad because you had a
21 case of yule? What is that, like some kind of an infection?

22 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* Right... maybe I'm not making sense here. Let me give you
23 some background on me and the reason I don't like snow anymore. For 22
24 years I was a private investigator in upstate New York. Me and my partner
25 Thomas O'Connor, we had a great thing going. See, Tommy and I had the only
26 PI office in this beautiful little town about 45 minutes from the City. We had
27 friends in the local government, so when something requiring discretion, a.k.a.
28 “*no cops*”, came up they called us. We took care of things, and we kept it all
29 confidential. Our rates might've been a little high, but since they were always
30 paying with the taxpayers money they didn't mind... and naturally neither did
31 we. The local police were all good guys, and we always tried to stay out of their
32 way, so they left us alone. We took on private clients to of course. I mean,...
33 you can make a full-time living on government corruption in D.C. maybe, but
34 not in middle-class America. But I guess I haven't gotten to the part about the
35 snow yet. That's probably because even now it gives me the willies to talk
36 about it.

37 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** Snow. Snow gives *you* the willies. You look like a tree with a
38 good haircut. And I'm pretty sure that bulge under your shirt isn't a blue-steel
39 cellphone.

40 **MIKE:** Maybe it's best I started the beginning. But I warn you, you'll think I'm
41 crazy. You're going to have to think I'm crazy. Because if I'm not crazy... then
42 maybe you won't like the snow so much anymore either. Anyway, I walk into my
43 office a few days before Christmas...*(Jovial)* *Ho, ho, ho*, Tommy you little Irish
44 elf, Merry Christmas! What's the good word in this most festive of seasons?

45 **TOMMY:** *(With an Irish accent)* Well, I've got a present for you Laddie, I do, I
46 do. *(Drops the accent and goes to his normal voice)* We got a telephone call
47 this morning from a lady over in Yule Township. It seems she's newly married
48 and is already worried about her hubby stepping out on her. She says her
49 blushing bride groom of only nine months has started acting suspicious, and
50 she'd like to know why.

51 **MIKE:** *(Interested, but with a touch of reluctance)* Sex, booze or gambling?

52 **TOMMY:** *(With a mental shrug)* She didn't say, wanted to speak with us in
53 person sometime today. I told her I was busy on another case, but that my big
54 Goomba, Mike Garibaldi, would be glad to meet with her at 11:00 at Flora's
55 coffee shop.

56 **MIKE:** *(Cheery)* Why didn't you have her just come here to the office?

57 **TOMMY:** *(Sarcastically)* Now why didn't I think of that? Wow, Mike all those
58 years of higher education weren't wasted on you. Next thing you know you'll be
59 wanting us to write stuff down and take people's phone numbers.

60 **MIKE:** *(Deadpan)* You know Tommy, I do not think that Santa Claus would
61 appreciate your sarcasm. I foresee a lot of coal in your future.

62 **TOM:** *(Unphased)* I'll leave him a boilermaker and a pastrami on rye this year,
63 he'll get over it. Meanwhile back in the real world, she didn't want to come into
64 the office. She says she's been noticing some really weird stuff and she thinks
65 she's being followed. So, you wait outside Flora's place until she enters and
66 watch for a tale. You go in, set at a table next to her and if anybody looks too
67 interested, you make like you trying to pick her up.

68 **MIKE:** *(Faking surprise)* Is that how that works? Gosh professor, what would I
69 do without you? *(A little chuckle)*

70 **TOMMY:** *(With resignation)* look, I know you're good. Okay better than good,
71 that's why I work with you. But something about this job has got me feeling a
72 little on edge. *(Pause)* Remember, before I moved to the big city...

73 **MIKE:** *(Interjecting with flourish)* Where you went on to become the Irish
74 Batman...

75 **TOMMY:** *(Continuing)*...I grew up around here. When I was a kid people didn't
76 talk about Yule Township, unless it was in whispers and in daylight. You never
77 meet anybody from there, and it seems like no one ever visits more than once.
78 I've never seen a newspaper from there or even a heard of a crime being
79 committed there. I looked it up online this morning after I got off the phone with
80 our *hopefully* new client. There are no community or business websites, or chat
81 boards. The most you get is a dot on a map. The one thing I did find about its'
82 history basically said that whole place is run by one family by the name of
83 Kirkland. And apparently it has been since the 1600s. Don't underestimate this
84 one, keep your eyes open, your gun loaded and your phone charged.

85 **MIKE:** *(Serious now)* Man, Tommy you seem really concerned about this.

86 **TOMMY:** *(Direct, but with a little worry in his voice)* I've known you for a long
87 time, "Goomba". You're as strong as a gorilla, as brave as a lion and as slippery
88 as an eel - and I'm not looking to break in a new partner.

89 **MIKE:** *(Touched)* Geez Tommy, that's the nicest thing you said to me in...
90 *Ever.*

91 **TOMMY:** *(Lightning up)* Well enjoy it, it's you're Christmas present.

92 **MIKE:** *(Amused)* There's is the “*Mc Prick*” sandwich I'm used to! All right, I'm
93 off to meet our mysterious lady client and solve a Christmas mystery. I bet in
94 the end it has to do with infidelity, I'm sure there's a Dancer or a Vixen involved.
95 Of course it be a Donner, times have changed. *(Voice fade as he leaves)* Ha,
96 ha, see what I did there? 'Tis the season for reindeer humor. *(Voice comes*
97 *back strong again)* *What's the clients name by the way?*

98 **TOMMY:** *(Strong)* Janet Kirkland.

99 **(MUSIC)**

100 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* So at 10:23, I parked my nondescript white sedan a block
101 and a half down from Flora's Coffee Shop on Haley Avenue. Just so you know,
102 Flora's place is right in the middle Sixth Street and flanked by Haley Avenue
103 and Rogers Avenue. I walk up Haley toward Sixth Street and turn left on the
104 opposite side of the street from Flora's. Slowly I ramble all the way down to
105 Rogers Avenue looking around to see if anybody was staking out the place.
106 This, by the way, is one of the reasons we like to use Flora's place for
107 meetings. We know the lay of the land, and folks at Flora's know us and how
108 to act. So, after I'm confident nobody beat me there, I take up a position across
109 the street watching the front entrance from behind a bus stop shelter. Sorry if
110 I'm getting a little to, “Law and Order: Special Diets Unit” here, but it's important
111 you understand the level of care and professionalism that we provide our
112 clients.

113 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** No it's fine, I mean, I came for the snow – but I'll stay for the
114 James Bond remake. Go on.

115 **MIKE:** So at 10:40, I texted Tom to give him a situation report: *(Text voice)* I'm
116 at the butcher shop. No special yet.

117 **TOMMY:** *(Text voice)* Look for a nice lamb chop wrapped in good paper. It
118 should be lean, rare and with white pepper.

119 **MIKE:** *(Text voice)* Anything else?

120 **TOMMY:** *(Text voice)* Look for a number 9 can of corn, green beans, black
121 coffee and ripe tomatoes.

122 **MIKE:** *(Text voice)* "Will do". *(Narrates)* As cornball as it sounds, yes we
123 encode our text messages. Look, It's not like it would take the NSA to crack our
124 code or anything, but then that's not the point. The thing here is, deniability. If
125 someone hacks our phones they may, or may not, be able to figure out what
126 were talking. But... in a court of law, well I was just shopping for dinner. So, the
127 decoding goes like this: the 9 in the can of corn is the *high-sign*, the nice lamb
128 chop wrapped in good paper means an attractive woman who is well-dressed.
129 Lean, rare and with white pepper means thin build, Caucasian and blonde.
130 Green beans and black coffee - I'm looking for a green dress and black shoes.
131 The ripe tomatoes... well I'll let you figure that out for yourself.

132 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** Yeah, got it. Your both sexists from the 1950's and you've
133 seen to many *Secret Squirrel Cartoons*. What. About. *The snow?*

134 **MIKE:** Getting there. At about 10:55, the whole smorgasbord opened Fiona's
135 festively decorated front door and stepped in. Before starting across the street I
136 shot Tommy a conformation text. *(Text voice)* I'm going to finish the shopping
137 now, talk later.

138 **TOMMY:** *(Text voice)* Understood. *(Pause)* Look, if anything doesn't smell
139 right, *DON'T* buy it. *(Pause)* We've got plenty of food.

140 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* That was the minute. That was the minute I should've
141 figured something was really wrong. You see, I've known Tommy for decades,
142 and this was not like him. Tommy was a little guy sure, he only stood about five
143 foot four, but he might've been the toughest SOB to ever come out of NYPD. In
144 his ten years on the force, he had been stabbed three times, run over by a
145 crackhead in a 4 x 4, and even shot in the ass once. Don't get me wrong here,
146 Tommy was a sweet guy. He took care of his mother up until the day she died,
147 rescued a couple of dogs from the pound and even went to church when he
148 could make it. For 20 plus years, we had worked together, partied together and
149 been in too many rough scrapes to count. He was a friend and a brother and I
150 thought I knew what made him tick. But this, this weird paranoia, this was
151 definitely something new. Anyway, back to the tomato.

152 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** *(A little sarcastic)* You know between the "Tomato" and you
153 being a "Pig", all I need is lettuce and I'd have a sandwich. Get to the snow!

154 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* I hold my position for the next three minutes looking for a
155 foot tale or to see if any cars drive by more then once. Nothing. I look both
156 ways and cross the street *(Slight Pause-uneasy)* and as I do a lite snow starts
157 to fall. The coffee shop isn't crowded, and I spot my soon-to-be client sitting at
158 a corner table looking out the window. She's not enjoying the city's Christmas
159 decorations though,she's looking for something. As I approach the counter
160 Vicki, the owner, looks at me but doesn't say anything. "Coffee, black please", I
161 say and with that she knows I'm working and what the deal is. Vicki smiles back
162 at me and says.

163 **VICKI:** Yes sir, have a seat and I'll bring it right out. Sugar?

164 **MIKE:** On the side please.

165 **VICKI:** No problem sir.

166 **MIKE:** So now you're probably asking, "what the hell does ordering coffee
167 have to do with PI work?"

168 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** *(Deadpan)* Hey I'm riding this train til it hits snow...so please
169 continue.

170 **MIKE:** You see, Tommy and I invested in the coffee shop at its start-up. Vicki is
171 Tommy's step sister and they named the place after their mother, "Flora". Not
172 that this information has anything to do with the case.

173 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** *(Becoming a little frustrated)* Does it have anything to do
174 with, SNOW.

175 **MIKE:** Yes. See "sugar on the side" means hit the record button. When Tommy
176 and I installed the security cameras at Flora's, we set it up so that with one key
177 stroke all the video from inside and outside would upload to an internet drop-
178 box. That way, we had a record of the meeting and anybody hanging around
179 outside. It payed off more then once in the past, but that's another story.

180 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** *(Struggling)* Is *THAT* story about snow?

181 **MIKE:** I'm coming to that. I sit at a table next to Ms. Kirkland and quietly
182 introduce myself with the standard, "Hello, I'm Mike Garibaldi. I understand that
183 you need some help."

184 **JANET:** *(Voice subdued)* Your the private investigator? Your partner said you
185 would have a number for me.

186 **MIKE:** You first.

187 **JANET:** Oh, that's right...Four.

188 **MIKE:** Five.

189 **JANET:** That's right he said it would equal Nine. Mr. Garibaldi something is
190 very, very wrong with my marriage.

191 **MIKE:** Mrs. Kirkland, we have handled a lot of cases involving wayward
192 husbands. Are you sure you really want to know what he's up too? I mean, if it's
193 a girlfriend...or boyfriend, we don't judge... it tends to work its self out after a
194 couple of months or a pregnancy scare. If it's gambling or a controlled
195 substance, that requires a person to hit bottom. Now we are happy to do
196 whatever we can for you, but I have to warn you, it generally ends poorly and
197 it's not cheap.

198 **JANET:** I don't care about the cost Mr. Garibaldi, I am what is you might call
199 rich, so you can name your price. And it's not JUST my husband that has me
200 troubled. Since my marriage nine months ago my life has steadily declined in to
201 something very near madness. I'm told that you and your partner are the very
202 best... and that you can deal with... *anything*. If that is true, I must have your
203 help, and I'm willing to pay for it. I have \$75,000 in cash in this box, will that get
204 you started?

205 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* She slid one of those fancy wrapped cardboard gift boxes'
206 over to me. I picked it up, opened it and stared for a second at the neat stacks
207 of new one hundred dollar bills. "Madam, you have my complete attention,
208 please tell me about your problem."

209 **Janet:** *(Narrating)* Well, I suppose I should start from the beginning. I met my
210 now husband just over a year ago, at a rather exclusive charity event in the city.
211 He was the most dashing and worldly man I had ever met. Although that's
212 probably not saying very much. You see Mr. Garibaldi, I have not had a lot of
213 experience with men or romance. I'm 24 now, but I've spent most of my time
214 cloistered away at schools. I went away to a private all-girls school in
215 Switzerland when I was 10 years old. After that it was an all-girl college in
216 Canada. I had a boyfriend, Paul when I met Lawrence, that's my husband,
217 however Paul and I thought it wise to avoid... "physical relations", until we were
218 properly engaged. That does still happen in our social circle, even in these
219 modern times. The engagement never happened though, because for lack of a
220 better term, Lawrence swept me off my feet. Lawrence wined me and dined me
221 and was very romantic, but he respected my wish to wait till after we married *to*
222 *ah*, well I'm sure you know. The reason I'm telling you all these intimate details
223 Mr. Garibaldi is...

224 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* At that moment Vicki walked over to us and set a cup of
225 coffee down on my table.

226 **VICKI:** *(Pleasantly)* I'm sorry sir, but there seems to be a problem with your
227 order. Could you please double check it at the register?

228 **MIKE:** Of course. Excuse me a moment Mrs. Kirkland. *(Narrating now)* I
229 walked to register and stepped behind the counter, knowing that if Vicki
230 interrupted me speaking to a client, that something had to be wrong. "What's
231 up?"

232 **VICKI:** Take a peak at this. I don't think that there is anything wrong with the
233 camera, but look at the little guy standing by the fire hydrant.

234 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* Like I said we had cameras set up to watch the street
235 outside. It took a couple of dollars off the coffee shop's insurance, but mostly
236 they were there to see if we or our clients were being tailed. See if you want to
237 follow somebody, you gotta wait and watch for them to come out of wherever
238 they are. Trying to look inconspicuous while just standing on the street is
239 difficult for even a professional to do. But for stalkers, ex-husbands or other
240 amateurs it's almost impossible. And this situation was no different, the funny
241 looking little guy stood out like a sore thumb. He was across the street about 50
242 yards from the coffee shop, staring at the front door. "So, my lovely new client
243 has an admirer, thanks for the heads up. You are a good and helpful little elf, I
244 will mention you to Santa".

245 **VICKI:** Slow down there Frosty, and watch the monitor for a minute. This is just
246 weird.

247 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* I touched the screen and the camera zoomed in on the little
248 man. At first I didn't notice anything, but then I DID. He was a strange looking
249 guy, about 4 1/2 feet tall with very sharp facial features. He looked to be
250 Caucasian, but *not exactly*. He was bundled up in winter clothing with a scarf
251 hiding his chin; he had a knit cap pulled down over his ears, and strange
252 looking round toed boots on his ridiculously large feet. All I could think of while
253 staring at him was, *evil clown*. But his appearance wasn't the thing freaking
254 Vicki out. As I watched him on the screen he would, at times, sort of fade out. It
255 was like one second he was just standing there, and in the next something
256 translucent moved in front of him making him look fuzzy - sorta like when your
257 eyes won't focus when you first wake up. A light snow was falling and that
258 made it even more strange, because when the little man would phase out of
259 focus, the *SNOW* around him became even more sharply defined. All this was
260 weird enough, but then I realized the scariest part. *(Slight Pause)* *(Next Page)*

261 None of the people walking by on the street seemed to noticed him. This guy
262 would've stood out anywhere, in any situation, but no one paid any attention to
263 him. No heads turned, no fingers pointed, no one averted their gaze so as not
264 to see the little troll. It was like they just couldn't see him. Vicki and I looked at
265 each other.

266 **VICKI:** You're seeing this, right Mike? I mean I'm not having some kind of
267 holiday hallucination right? Hideous little creature - dressed like a wino - staring
268 at the front door.

269 **MIKE:** I'm seeing it. I don't know what it is, but I'm seeing it. *(Narrating now)* At
270 that moment I noticed Mrs. Kirkland starting to stand up and look out the
271 window at the spot where the little man was standing. She stood and stared out
272 the window for a few seconds surveying the street, showed no reaction and set
273 back down. Confused by her lack of reaction I looked down at the video screen,
274 and the freakish little man was gone. I walked around the counter quickly and
275 looked out the window to the spot where he'd been standing in the street,
276 nothing. I looked back over to Vicki.

277 **VICKI:** *(Voice Shaky)* Finish up your coffee Mike, we're closing early.

278 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* I nodded to Vicki and walked back to to Mrs. Kirkland. "Is
279 everything all right?", I asked.

280 **MUSIC**

281

Intermission

282 **MUSIC**

283 **MIKE:** Is everything all right?

284 **JANET:** I just had the strangest feeling I was being watched. But that's not a
285 new occurrence for me, it seems like someone is always staring at me but I can
286 never catch them. Looking back, the feeling seems to have started on my
287 wedding night, which brings me back to what I was trying to tell you before. I
288 said before that I don't have much experience with men, what I should have
289 said was that in one very important respect, I have *no* experience with men. (A
290 *bit sheepish*) Not even my husband. Do you understand what I'm saying?

291 **MIKE:** Well, I do and I don't. I completely respect your waiting till you were
292 married to... But are telling me you have been married for nine months and
293 have not yet consummated your *union*?

294 **JANET:** Yes. I mean at first I thought it was a timing thing, as I said I have had
295 no real experience with... how man things work. I thought maybe there was a
296 special time of the month that men got... interested.

297 **MIKE:** Mrs. Kirkland, there's not even a special time of the day for men –
298 We're *interested* even when we're asleep.

299 **JANET:** I realized that after some research. I Googled “Human Sex” - (A slight
300 *pause and with some introspection*) I learned a lot.

301 **MIKE:** (*Becoming a bit uncomfortable*) I'm sure you did.

302 **JANET:** And there were pictures too. A LOT of pictures...

303 **MIKE:** (*Cutting her off*) I'm-I'm sure there where. Then what?

304 **JANET:** Well, then I began to think that it might be me. Maybe I wasn't
305 attractive enough.

306 **MIKE:** Ms. Kirkland, let me assure you that even most dead men would find
307 you attractive. That's definitely not the problem. So in summery, you have been
308 in a sexless marriage since your honeymoon?

309 **JANET:** (*Sheepishly*) Well. We've done. Things. But, not that.

310 **MIKE:** Yes, I-I understand. Mrs. Kirkland is it possible... that your husband,
311 might be gay and using you as a sort of blind to hide his true preference from
312 his family and friends?

313 **JANET:** No, there wouldn't be any reason for him to do anything like that. His
314 family are very open minded. In fact, his sister is openly gay and has a long
315 time partner. His brothers, he has three, all have children so it couldn't be about
316 legacy. But the... Intimacy issue, that's not the only thing troubling me. I tell you
317 Mister Garibaldi, sometimes I think I'm going mad.

318 **MIKE:** Well Ms. Kirkland I'm not a psychiatrist, but I've dealt with a lot of crazy
319 in my life, and you seem quite sane to me. So tell me what else is bothering
320 you. And call me Mike. Sometimes, it's easier to talk about these types of
321 personal issues if you use someone's first name.

322 **JANET:** Thank you... Mike. Well for instance, we live now in my husband's
323 ancestral family home. As does all my husband's siblings and their families. It's
324 a huge old mansion with more rooms than you can imagine. A place like that,
325 you would expect dozens of servants running around cleaning, cooking and
326 doing the gardening. But in the whole place there is only Harrison, the Butler.

327 **MIKE:** But there must be a cook and someone has to do the shopping.

328 **JANET:** That Would Make Sense. I've been around servants all my life, and I
329 can tell you I've never seen anything like this. Breakfasts is served in the great
330 dining room, buffet style each morning. But the dining room doors are locked
331 until 7:30 and when they're opened there are no servants there. Lunch is
332 provided in one of the many sitting rooms and I never know which one until one
333 of the family tells me. And every course at dinner is served by Harrison. I've
334 gone to the kitchen several times during the day and there's never anyone in
335 there. There may be things in the oven or cooking on the stove top - but no one
336 there watching them. Yet somehow, every meal is properly cooked and served
337 without a problem.

338 **MIKE:** And the cleaning? Rich families don't clean up their own mess, so there
339 must be maids or some sort of janitorial staff.

340 **JANET:** I asked about that, because I never saw anyone do any vacuuming or
341 dusting or anything. The house is huge, but it's Immaculately clean. When I
342 asked my husband about it, he said that all the cleaning was done at night
343 while the family slept. He said it was an old tradition so that the family would
344 never be inconvenienced with the noise or with servants in the way. But I've
345 gone downstairs many times at night, because I wanted to see the servants. I
346 could hear voices and the sounds of industry, but when I walked into a room –
347 there's no one there. I tell you I think I'm going out of my mind.

348 **MIKE:** Okay, I have to admit that's pretty weird. This Harrison the Butler, what
349 is he like? Describe him to me. How long has he been with the family, do you
350 know?

351 **JANET:** How long he's been with the family I don't know, but for some reason I
352 think it's been a long time. He seems to know everything about every activity in
353 the house. He seldom speaks unless spoken to. If I had to guess I would say
354 he's originally from Europe, though he really doesn't have a discernible accent.
355 Physically, he is about 4'11" tall and stoutly built. He has very angular features
356 and wears his hair long over his ears. If I had to place his age I would say he's
357 in his late 50s, but very fit. He moves very smoothly and with an odd sort of
358 grace for a man of his proportions.

359 **MIKE:** Tell me about your husbands family. Is there anything that you or other
360 people might find strange? Skeletons in the closet?

361 **JANET:** Well, they are a very close-knit family. They don't really socialize with
362 outsiders very much. All the locals show them a great deal of respect, in fact I
363 don't think I've ever heard a harsh word said against any member of the family.
364 I believe their money comes from investments, though in what I don't know.
365 Their family has lived in the area since their ancestors came over in the early
366 days of the colonies. They own a great deal of land, but very little of it is
367 developed. One thing that might seem odd is that the whole family enjoys
368 hunting.

369 **MIKE:** Hunting, you mean like going on safaris? Shooting deer and elk?

370 **JANET:** No not safaris and not shooting either. In fact, I doubt there's a firearm
371 in the entire house. That is strange isn't it? There are lots of trophies and
372 stuffed animals, at least one in every room practically. I think they hunt with
373 bows and arrows. But lots of people do that right?

374 **MIKE:** It's not unheard of, some people see it as more of a challenge I guess.
375 What are they like physically? Are they tall or short? Light or dark complected?
376 Are the men hairy or bald?

377 **JANET:** Actually they're all quite attractive, the whole family. The men are all
378 tall, lean and athletic, although I've never seen anyone actually exercise. They
379 are all blonde, with a touch of red here and there in their hair and beards.
380 Lawrence's sister and his brothers wives are all attractive women. They all
381 have blonde hair and pale skin. But why are you asking about their physical
382 appearance? What could that have to do with all the strange things I've been
383 experiencing?

384 **MIKE:** It's how the art of detection works. If we were talking about a theft,
385 embezzlement or some sort of con I'd be asking about money. But from what
386 you have told me this doesn't sound like a money thing. I'll check their financial
387 records and see if they really are as rich as they seem, or if they are looking for
388 injection of cash from a nice rich lady named Janet. But I'm betting that's not it.
389 You get past money, you look at revenge. But it doesn't seem like that's the
390 case here, because you've been with the family for nine months and your still
391 breathing. Money and revenge out of the way, that brings us to sex – which is
392 *definitely* not the case here. When you eliminate the big three of money,
393 revenge and sex that leaves you with weird. And for weird you look at people,
394 serial killers, kleptomaniac's, flashers, it's about messed up wiring in the brain.
395 So now I start looking at the people in your life. Meaning your husband's family.

396 **JANET:** What about me? What should I do next? And how do I contact you if I
397 need to?

398 **MIKE:** You go home and act normal, but keep your eyes open for anything
399 odd. If people start treating a different, asking where you been or asking for too
400 many details just play it off like it's nothing. I'm giving you this business card
401 with the coffee shop's name but a special number on it. You can reach me or
402 my partner at this number at any time. If anybody finds the card, or you need
403 an excuse for being here you tell them you're looking for a special roast of
404 coffee. Anybody but you calls this number, I make like I'm a salesman, so
405 you're covered. The fax number on this card is actually for a private line here in
406 the shop. You can use that number to leave a message - the owner and
407 employees know what to do.

408 **JANET:** I must say Mr. Garibaldi, your operation seems very thorough. I think
409 I've found the right people to help me. I feel much better. Thank you.

410 **MIKE:** All part of the service Mrs. Kirkland. Whatever we can do to help you,
411 we will. One more thing, on your way home glance in your rearview mirror and
412 see if you notice anybody following you. Same thing if you're out walking, stop
413 every now and then and look into a shop window to see if you see anyone
414 behind you. If you do, make a note what they look like or what they are driving
415 and and let us know. Even if you just think you saw something or someone.

416 **JANET:** Yes I will, thank you again.

417 **MIKE:** *(Narrating)* I let Ms. Kirkland leave first. She stepped out the door I
418 sipped coffee for thirty seconds and walked back up to the counter to talk to
419 Vicki. "Did you see the funny looking little man or anybody else follow the
420 young lady?"

421 **VICKI:** I didn't see anybody, but the snow has picked up a bit so it's hard to
422 tell. What kind case are you guys working? And who *or what* was that little guy?

423 **MIKE:** At the moment, that's a \$75,000 question. We've got a husband who is
424 not interested in playing house with the wealthy, attractive and well-educated
425 wife. Said wife, is apparently living in a haunted house that cleans itself. And a
426 disappearing dwarf that nobody but us chickens seems to see. Wait till Tommy
427 hears about this.

428 **VICKI:** Well be careful Mike, nobody likes casket shopping at Christmas time.

429 **MIKE:** Ho, ho, ho. Well I'm headed back to update my little Irish elf. How about
430 two cappuccinos to go, please.

431 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** Wait a minute Mike, you've been telling me this story for like,
432 two weeks. And *now* you're stopping for a coffee break? Please, Mike. *Friend*
433 Mike, please tell me *why you don't like snow*. Make something up, I don't care!
434 Just please, bring this epic tome to a conclusion.

435 **MIKE:** Sammy(i) we have arrived at that destination. But I'm telling you, you're
436 not gonna believe it. So, what do you know about camouflage? About
437 distracting the human eye?

438 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** Quite a lot actually, I sold push-up bras for thirty-five years.

439 **MIKE:** Well, here's something you probably don't: Snow, if you know how to
440 use it, is a very efficient means of natural camouflage. The ice crystals, they
441 reflect light, and if you can manipulate that, you become invisible. I found this
442 out as I was walking back to my car that day, cappuccinos in hand. (*Continues*
443 *after FX*)

444 **FX:** *Wind picks up, then lowers.*

445 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* As I walked back to my car I had to pass an alley on my
446 right. Having been in the paranoid business for a lot of years I instinctively
447 moved to my left a little and looked into the alley to make sure there was no
448 surprise. The snow had picked up to a nice steady fall, but visibility was good
449 and there was no slush on the sidewalk. No problem, until my knees ran into
450 something really hard that seem to be moving really fast. In an instant, the
451 coffees were headed towards the basket from the three-point line and I was
452 headed face first onto the cold ground. I managed to get my hands in front of
453 me a little bit to protect my face but the impact knocked the wind out of me. I'd
454 only been on the ground for a second, maybe less, when the distinct feeling of
455 being kicked in the ribs registered in my oxygen starved brain. I automatically
456 did what you do in that situation and rolled up in a ball covering in my head with
457 my arms. In that position I couldn't see what was going on around me, but I
458 could hear a weird sort of laughter. Like the laughter of children, if they smoked
459 three packs a day. The kicking continued for another ten seconds or so and
460 then stopped abruptly. I got up as quickly as I could ready for round two, but
461 there was nobody there. I hobbled back to my car with my shin throbbing and
462 my ribs aching - bewildered, angry, and worst of all without coffee. Of course,
463 when I returned to my office, I got a loving welcome from my ever
464 compassionate partner.

465 **TOMMY:** What happened to you? You look like a fresh turd on a hot rock.

466 **MIKE:** Tommy I love you, *but die*. I just got ambushed and beaten by I know
467 not who.

468 **TOMMY:** Well give me a description, maybe somebody we dealt with before
469 who was looking for some revenge. I got a nine-millimeter cure for that.

470 **MIKE:** I don't have a description, because there was nobody there. I'm walking
471 down an empty street, I pass an empty alley, then I'm on the ground and
472 somebody's playing soccer with my kidneys. Another reason to hate soccer.
473 But gee honey, let me tell you about the rest of my day.

474 **FX:** *Transition sound*

475 **TOMMY:** So do you think your assailant could've been this little guy from
476 outside the coffee shop? Oh and more important, where's the money?

477 **MIKE:** The money, *my dear friend*, is in the safe at the coffee shop. If I was
478 attacked by that weird little Smurf, I don't see how. Did you pull up the footage
479 from the coffee shop cameras and print a hard copy photo of the character?

480 **TOMMY:** Yeah, problem there. I checked the footage in the time frame;
481 nothing. No little guy. Cameras working fine, I can see the people passing by
482 outside clear as day; the fire hydrant, but no one like what you described.

483 **MIKE:** Tommy, you know how I am always saying I want to retire?

484 **TOMMY:** No.

485 **MIKE:** Well, I'm saying it now. I know I'm gonna sound crazy, but I'm tasting
486 thirty-one flavors of weird on this one. Not from any real information we have,
487 but just the story that Janet Kirkland told me. And the fact I got tap danced on
488 by the invisible man.

489 **TOMMY:** You're right, you sound crazy. But but here, let me give you an extra
490 scoop and some sprinkles for your crazy cone. I finished the Johnson case this
491 morning, so I started digging into the Kirkland's of Yule Township. Everything I
492 found is in that empty folder right there. No newspaper articles, their birth
493 certificates have not been digitized into the state system, and all financial
494 dealings are run through a corporation established in 1852. But it gets better,
495 Yule Township itself, has no business franchises or government offices located
496 within the Township. There are no State licensed morticians, contractors or
497 medical professionals listed there, and U.S. census information is recorded as
498 "unavailable".

499 **MIKE:** So, we give Mrs. Kirkland back her money, and we talk about
500 retirement. I'm thinking Dallas, I hear good things. You think Vicki would like
501 Dallas?

502 **TOMMY:** Ha, ha funny guy. First off, you never bailed on a case in your life.
503 Second, Dallas is too dry. And third, my sister is too good for you.

504 **MIKE:** You're right on all counts, my little Celtic crime fighter. So I guess we
505 better head to Yule Township and do some of that fancy detective work we're
506 famous for. Bring your backup gun and some holy water, and let's take your car
507 - its got heated seats and it's supposed to keep snowing.

508 **TOMMY:** I had a feeling about this case from the start. Let's go Goomba, this
509 time of year it will almost be dark by the time we get there.

510 **FX:** *Transitional sound*

511 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* So off we go to Yule Township. At first the trip is not so bad,
512 paved road; lots of streetlights and very little traffic. But as we get closer to our
513 destination the road starts to twist and turn and go in every direction. You gotta
514 realize that this road is so old it started out as an animal trail, that turned into
515 an Indian trail, that turned into a wagon trail, that turned into a state road that
516 nobody cared about. So the closer we get, the heavier the snow fall and the
517 weaker the cell signal, until we reach our actual destination, the one general
518 store on the paved road at the edge of the Township.

519 **FX:** *Car stops*

520 **TOMMY:** All right, you quarterback this one.

521 **MIKE:** Way I see it cell phone service out here stinks, so an old store like that
522 has gotta have a landline. Courageously, I go in and chat up whoever is
523 working and stick a Bluetooth bug near the phone. I make them a little
524 suspicious, then I leave. If we're right and this whole place is one big
525 conspiracy than they pick up the phone and call their boss, and we get the
526 listen in. I give it a few minutes, then go back in like I forgot something and
527 retrieve the bug.

528 **TOMMY:** Meanwhile, I use the cell phone booster to check in with Vicki as I
529 await your return with baited breath. You're not back in fifteen minutes I come in
530 all bullets and blackjacks - sounds like a plan. *(In an Irish accent)* Well, off with
531 you now Laddie.

532 **FX:** *Car door opens and closes.*

533 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* So I walked to the front door of the store, the whole time
534 looking left and right see if there's anybody around; not a creature was stirring
535 not even a mouse. I stopped at the front door. It had old-fashioned glass
536 window panes and I stared inside, taking a couple of extra seconds to get the
537 lay of the land and see if I could make out anybody inside. The place looked
538 empty, but when I tried to door it opened so I went in.

539 **FX:** *Shop door opens and closes – little bell tinkle.*

540 **STORE PERSON:** Can I help you?

541 **MIKE:** *(Jump scare)* Jesus!

542 **STORE PERSON:** Who?

543 **MIKE:** Where did you come from?

544 **STORE PERSON:** Can I help you? Are you lost?

545 **MIKE:** No. I represent a coffee roaster in the city. I was wondering if there
546 were any restaurants or hotels – bed-and-breakfast, that sort of thing in the
547 area. Anybody that might be interested in buying some high-quality coffee.

548 **STORE PERSON:** No, nothing like that around here. Anything else I can help
549 you with? We are getting ready to close.

550 **MIKE:** Yeah, I'm not getting any bars on my cell phone. Do you have a landline
551 I can use.

552 **STORE PERSON:** No phone. Anything else I can help you with? We are
553 getting ready to close.

554 **MIKE:** I had heard the Kirkland family lived nearby. Maybe they'd like to buy
555 some coffee.

556 **STORE PERSON:** Kirkland. No Kirkland around here. We are getting ready to
557 close.

558 **MIKE:** *Okay, well thanks anyway. Have a good night.*

559 **FX:** *Shop door opens and closes – little bell tinkle.*

560 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* So as soon as I step out of the door I feel eyes watching me.
561 I mean the feeling is so intense, I actually let my arm swing in a little tighter to
562 my body as I walk so I can bump the forty-five auto on my hip to make sure it's
563 still there.

564 **FX:** *Car door opens and closes.*

565 **MIKE:** No good, I don't think that place ever had a phone, maybe at telegraph
566 at one time. The little weirdo running the store said no one named Kirkland
567 lives around here. So *my* conspiracy alarm is going off. You got anything?

568 **TOMMY:** Yeah, a couple of things. First off, you see that streetlight over there.

569 **MIKE:** You mean the only streetlight out here, the one standing practically right
570 in front of us, yes I see it, so what?

571 **TOMMY:** So, while you're inside making friends with the natives, I'm sitting
572 here looking out the window waiting for my phone to connect and that light
573 comes on. The instant it does the snow right at the edge of the light starts to
574 sparkle like a disco ball. It stays that way for about three seconds and then
575 disappears. And I swear to you, that the sparkly snow was shaped like a little
576 man, about 4 feet tall.

577 **MIKE:** Okay, weird. The store owner wasn't much over 4 feet tall either. Seems
578 like the Lilliputians are taken over the world, No offense.

579 **TOMMY:** Bite me, Green Giant. We have a voicemail from Vicki, listen to this.

580 **VICKI:** (*Voice message*) Where are you? I've been trying to get a hold of you.
581 That new client of yours, Janet Kirkland, she called here because she said she
582 couldn't get a hold of you. She said something weird is going on, that her
583 husband's whole family is getting ready for something they call the Great Hunt.
584 She said nobody will talk to her and she's really scared. Get back to me as
585 soon as you can, I – I did some research and I gotta tell you something... you're
586 not gonna believe.

587 **MIKE:** Well, there's only one road in, so the Kirkland mansion has gotta be
588 that way. You drive and I'll try to get Vicki on the phone. Hey, do you see
589 something down the road? Like at the edges of the headlights, the snow is
590 shimmering. Do you have the thermal binoculars we use for surveillance in
591 here?

592 **TOMMY:** On the floorboard behind your seat.

593 **MIKE:** Got 'em. Let's take a look. *Holy mother of munchkins!* Drive Tommy,
594 Drive!

595 **FX:** *Car pulling away fast*

596 **TOMMY:** What is it Mike?

597 **MIKE:** I counted eight of these little guys we've been seeing all coming up this
598 road towards us, but I could only make them out by their body heat.

599 **FX:** *A dull thud, a short pause and another dull thud.*

600 **MIKE:** Okay, probably only six now. Keep going, the phone is ringing I think
601 I've got Vicki.

602 **VICKI:** Mike? This is gonna sound wild, but I couldn't get the image of that little
603 guy out of my head. So I went online and started searching for images that
604 matched what we saw. I can't believe I'm saying this, but what we saw was a
605 hobgoblin. Legend has it that they serve pagan priests who worship the snow
606 god *Ullr* or however you pronounce it. Apparently he grants the priests
607 immortality, great riches and gives them the hobgoblins as their personal
608 servants. But every ten years, at the beginning of winter, they have to hunt
609 down with bows and arrows an unsullied sacrifice. A Virgin of high status in
610 what they call the great hunt. The great hunt, that's what Janet Kirkland said.
611 Mike, you don't think this is for real do you?

612 **MIKE:** I think, real or not, Janet Kirkland is in for a real unhappy holiday if we
613 don't get there quick. Any useful information on how to stop this?

614 **VICKI:** Just that if the priest fail they lose the god's favor, and their immortality.
615 Oh and the hobgoblins have this sort of magic camouflage. They can stand so
616 still that the human eye can't see them unless you know what you're looking for.
617 And in the snow, they're more or less invisible unless they are illuminated by
618 indirect white light, that's why people used to use those tin candle lanterns.
619 What should I do Mike?

620 **MIKE:** If you don't hear from us by morning, call Lieutenant Bowser and tell
621 him where we were headed, but not what we were doing or any of this mystic
622 stuff. Then clean out coffee shop safe and the one in our office and move to
623 Dallas. *Crap*, I lost a signal.

624 **TOMMY:** Dallas is too dry! There's a huge mansion straight ahead, and I'm
625 thinking that's our destination. So, we're outnumbered, have no idea what we
626 are really up against and we may not be able to see our attackers. What's the
627 plan here General Patton?

628 **MIKE:** Well, since Dallas is off the table: I say we find the girl, shoot any bad
629 guys that get in the way, and extricate ourselves from the situation as quickly
630 as possible and meet Vicki for waffles.

631 **TOMMY:** I'll pull up short at door and pop the trunk, you go around to the back
632 of the car and grab the shotgun and I'll cover you. Oh and don't die.

633 **MIKE:** Roger that.

634 **TOMMY:** *Here We Go!*

635 **FX:** *Tire screech/gravel spray, then gunfire that dies off*

636 **MIKE:** So, long story short...

637 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** *Too Late!*

638 **MIKE:** They were all gathered in the front of the house; just about to start the
639 hunt when Tommy slides the car in practically sideways. We jumped out and all
640 the skinny, Legolas looking clowns start shooting arrows at us. They mostly
641 bounced off the car, but two of them got Tommy, one in the right hip and
642 another one to his left shoulder. I got hit in the left foot and one glanced off my
643 skull. But they only got off one volley before Tommy and I started target
644 practice. Seems they weren't used to anybody shooting back and decided to
645 leave after five or six of them got some extra holes in 'em. Turns out that unlike
646 in the movies you can kill pretty much anything with a bullet. Hobgoblins and
647 pagans included. Sooo, chalk one up for the Second Amendment. Janet, Mrs.
648 Kirkland, was apparently forgotten about during the retreat. She wasn't hurt, but
649 they did have her dressed up in this weird deer costume.

650 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** But what about the hobgoblins? You said you couldn't see
651 them in the snow.

652 **MIKE:** And this is why I believe in Christmas miracles. See, just as we were
653 sliding into what we were pretty sure was gonna be our end... it stopped
654 snowing. Even in all the excitement, Tommy and I noticed it, but I guess the
655 hobgoblins didn't. They came charging straight at us in the light of our
656 headlights, and they where like the ducks in a shooting gallery. If the ducks
657 were four feet tall, man shaped and exploded into purple goo when you shot
658 them.

659 **SAMMY/SAMMI:** So what happen after the macho, stereotype last stand?

660 **MIKE:** *(Narrates)* The former Mrs. Kirkland was very grateful to us for saving
661 her life and she wrote a check with enough zeros to prove it. And, as rich
662 people always get what they want, she had no problem getting her non-
663 consummated marriage annulled. In the process of doing so, she met an
664 attractive young lawyer type guy, and I believe she is no longer suitable for
665 sacrifice. As for us, enough was enough. We closed the agency and the coffee
666 shop, and took the small fortune we received for the job and moved south, to
667 lands where snow never touches the ground. And while Tommy was right his
668 sister is too good for me: turns out Vicki likes the beach, so *WE* now live in a
669 little condo that looks out on the Gulf of Mexico. And Tommy, he decided that
670 Dallas wasn't too dry after all.

671 **Music up**