

The Case of the Abandoned Loafers

It was mid-morning on a Monday. I was still settling into my new quarters in a high rise on Ash Street in downtown San Diego when I heard an unusual noise. It is the noise of someone knocking on our apartment door. For most people that is not unusual even though most of the time it's someone selling extended warranties or solar panels. I should explain that the apartment building is undergoing renovation and my roommate Sara Slocum and I occupy half the top floor. If you're wondering how I can afford it, so do I since I pay a pittance to Slocum to rent my room. She has a private security business, of which I'm an employee. There is a delay in my answering the door due to my surprise at having a visitor and the general background noise as the plumbers, electricians and carpenters work on our floor and throughout the building. My first thought is that aside from the building manager, it is somebody needing to access our apartments to tend to some construction detail.

I step over boxes, books and large paper maps of South Africa that Slocum had left spread out over the floor while researching a case. My possessions are meager after my years in the Marines Corps. None of the untidiness is due to my moving in.

The rapping on the door continues as I make my way to the door, I open it and to my surprise, it is a Catholic Priest. He is dressed in dark pants and short sleeved white shirt, a concession to the summer heat no doubt and of course a creased white collar. He is thin and a taller man than myself and older. His brown hair is full but fading and his face is tanned but not in a leathery way. I must confess, no pun intended that I was at a loss on how to engage him in conversation. So, I gesture for him to enter.

"Good morning. I'm sorry to disturb you but I'm looking for a woman." The priest says. To the regret of my eternal soul, I am not a church going man so I imagine meeting a priest outside of church must be like meeting your cardiologist in the meat and dairy section of the supermarket while holding a T-bone steak and a dozen eggs. A rather awkward exchange ensues between us.

"Good morning, I'm Fred Sutherland," I say. After a heartbeat, I continue. "You're looking for a woman?"

"I'm looking for someone named Sara Slocum. Are you her husband?" He asks me.

"Her husband? Good Lord, no," I say then awkwardly add, "Sorry, that just slipped out."

He smiles.

"She and I live together."

“Oh?”

“I don’t mean she and I are living together in the biblical sense. We’re not doing anything. I mean we do things; we work together but we are not doing anything in the sense you may be thinking.”

“I see. Is Ms. Slocum home by any chance?” He gets back to his original inquiry.

I’m preparing to make excuses so as not to disturb Slocum in her study but that is a moot point as she sweeps into the room still in her robe. Her robe flies open, thankfully she has her running shorts on and black sports bra. She approaches and stares at the priest standing in the doorway. She is holding a piece of paper. She turns on her heel and rushes over and picks the map of South Africa off the floor and takes it over to the window.

“Hello, you two,” she says over her shoulder to the priest and myself. “Would you gentlemen be a peach and hold this map against the window.” The priest and I look at each other and comply. Slocum places the piece of paper up to the map so she can see how the tracing on the paper matches up to the map.

“I knew it. The diamond mine is on tribal territory,” she says. Slocum reaches for her phone in her hip pocket and composes a text. “Sutherland, that concludes the South Africa affair.” She addresses the priest. “Hello. Who are you?”

He stretches out his hand and says, “I’m Father Green. I have a parish up the coast.”

I shake his hand as Slocum, due to hygiene and germaphobia, declines his hand. She then says, “Good for you.”

“I apologize for the unannounced intrusion.”

“Most prospective clients text, e-mail, call or sometimes even post a letter,” she says.

“I didn’t feel comfortable with that. I felt I had to talk to you in person,” he says.

“My day is free now, so let’s hear your story,” Slocum says.

Father Green settles into a chair at the table near the balcony window, he pauses as he looks at the ocean view, gathering his thoughts no doubt and begins.

“I’m not sure if this is a matter I or you should be involved with but I don’t feel I could, in good conscience, just ignore these nagging doubts. My church is just up the coast, in La Jolla. The

family has been through a horrific experience already but I came across some information, I'm unsure of. This is something..."

Slocum interrupts, "this information. It's from the confessional?"

"Yes."

"Is it of a criminal nature?" Slocum asks.

"Well, not strictly speaking..."

"But the possibility exists?" Slocum presses.

"Possibly but it's not something I believe or even think possible," the priest begins to rise from his seat. "On further reflection, I've wasted your time."

"You have some information on the Lopez murder I take it?" Slocum tells Father Green.

The priest's face turns ashen, "yes but how did you know that?"

"The Lopez family has been very philanthropic over the years, particularly to the church and its charities. They have homes in Cardiff and La Jolla and as you said, you have a church up the coast. The murder was a bit of a sensation in the news feeds two weeks ago."

"I recall," I interject. "The youngest son is suspected in the murder. Jon Barry."

"Excellent recall, Sutherland," Slocum praises.

"I remember because Jon Barry played Detective Nick Stone on my favorite show, 'Cop Police'." I tell him. "It was a bummer when he quit the show and went into rehab for prescription drug abuse."

The priest adds, "Jon Barry is a stage name."

Wrinkling her brow, Slocum says, "Jon is suspected of poisoning his father and the last person to see him. Home security cameras confirmed it."

I say. "Seems that it's solved itself. Even the glacial pace of the police department should be making an arrest."

“The housekeeper saw Jon too. He hasn't been arrested and the information that I can't disclose might just be tangential anyway. Jon and Mike Lopez are brothers and heirs to the estate. As well as his cousin, a lawyer, Mr. Fleet.”

“And the church no doubt?” Slocum adds.

“Yes, a modest bequeath.”

“That can't be released until the matter is settled?”

“That's not why I'm here.”

“Oh, yes. The confessional of which you cannot divulge. So we are back to the question of why are you here? Not one of the Lopez's surely.”

“I can't say.” Father Green says.

“Was she a witness?”

“No.”

Slocum leans forward her elbows on her knees as she interlaces, tenting her fingers, “what did the housekeeper tell you?”

Growing red in the face, the priest blurts out, “how did you know?”

“Process of elimination. Well, we are making some progress then.” Slocum says.

Taking a deep breath, Father Green reluctantly adds, “something was taken from the house.”

“By her?”

The priest is silent.

“Ah, she is a witness then. Or an accomplice? I can talk to her...”

The priest says, “I can't locate her. That's partly why I'm here.”

“Missing. I assume you notified the authorities? To find this housekeeper?”

“I tried but they gave me the run around. The desk sergeant told me she probably went to Mexico. That is why I'm reluctant to depend on them. When I got around to the confessional and my obtuse responses then they really grew disinterested.”

“No doubt. Her name?”

The priest hesitates then says, “Mrs. Norford.”

“Hardly a Hispanic name but anytime the police can't locate someone, their default is Mexico. What a convenience for them, living near the border.” Slocum says.

“I can't relate to you what she told me in the confessional but I fear for her safety and there is no one else to help me find her. Reaching into his pocket, the priest takes out a single key. “I don't know what this is to. She gave this to me and told me to do with it what I thought best if something should happen to her.”

After Father Green departs, Slocum tosses the mystery key to me. I'm no locksmith but I'm pretty handy with Google and YouTube. It doesn't take long to identify the key. It's for a safety deposit box. There is a number on the key. It takes a little more virtual leg work to find out that the key belongs to a bank in Oceanside, CA.

The next morning, Slocum and I take a car down to the harbor to the police station. We empty our pockets at the metal detector then take the elevator to the third floor. As we are walking up the hallway to the office.

A voice from behind us, calls out. “What do you want Slocum?” As we turn, a man in the hallway says, “I send a text if I have something for you, not the other way around.” The man is in his forties, his greying brown hair has a natural tonsure. We already have a priest for a client but I'll wager this man is no monk. He is dressed in a wrinkled white shirt, bright blue tie, loosened at the collar. He is wearing khaki trousers and black shoes.

“I or we are engaged in a case for a client, Detective Tracey” Slocum says.

“You are? Well, who is this guy? You the client?” He asks me.

“No,” I interject. “Fred Sutherland. I'm her associate.”

“He is my assistant, ” Slocum says.

“Your former military, aren't you?” He says to me.

“Yeah, I am,” wondering how he knew.

“A lot of people working around her are former something or other. They get out and become cops, guards, or fancy security consultants,” he says.

He turns his attention to Slocum. “What case are you working?”

“The Lopez murder.”

“We’re doing alright, thank you very much. Rat poison in his burrito. Sure, it presents as a heart attack but shows up in a routine tox screen.”

“The investigation is moving slow.” I offer.

“In my experience, you're careful when rich, connected people are involved. It's no secret. We have our eye on his youngest son.”

“Curious, you would think somebody on a cop show would be a little more clever,” I remark.

“Go figure,” the detective says. “We even have his finger prints on the can of poison.”

Slocum cuts into the conversation, “I was engaged to investigate the whereabouts of a Mrs. Norford.”

“She was the housekeeper for a few weeks. One of our guys interviewed her at her apartment. Has migraines just like my sister,” The detective says. She didn't have anything to add. She went up north visiting an aunt or something. Why are you looking for her? Never mind. I don't want waves in this case, if you find something let me know.”

I assume our missing person case is solved. “Is she a suspect?” I ask.

“This ain't our first rodeo, Tex. There were only two people in and out of that house that entire week. The security cameras have this Mrs. Norford, who had no motive and the guy's youngest son who had millions of motives, all of them dollars. We have video of Mrs. Norford leaving the house then to the train station. Jon Barry is on video entering and leaving during the time the crime happened. The older brother showed up later and found the old man.”

“Can I have access to the police report on the case?” Slocum asks. “Earn my fee.”

The detective is silent for a moment then smirks, “Knock yourself out. I guess we all gotta make a livin.”

“I'll turn over any evidence I come across.”

“You do that. You’ve helped out on some cases and haven’t screwed me over. At least not yet. I’ll have a copy sent over to you.”

Slocum gives me the task of checking social media, cell numbers, addresses for Mrs. Norford and her aunt in the police file. The local address is a one bedroom apartment in east county. Far more interesting is the aunt’s address. I looked up the address for the aunt, it’s 602 Jamestown Ave in San Francisco. The address checks out assuming you want to go to Candlestick Park. Mrs. Norford’s cell number goes straight to voicemail. Somehow, I don’t think this will surprise Slocum.

“I was surfing La Jolla Shores this morning, lost track of time,” Jon Barry proclaims when he enters our apartments the next morning. Dressed in an Hawaiian shirt, shorts and sandals. Even though near middle age, he has the slim tan build of a Southern California surfer, even his hair is still thick and blonde, though to Slocum’s eye, the blonde hair gets assistance from a haircolor bottle.

“Thank you for coming by,” I say. “Considering the situation.”

“Father Green asked me to stop by. Besides, I got nothing to hide.”

What can you tell us about Mrs. Norford?” Slocum asks.

“The housekeeper? I didn’t really know her. Dad was getting a little out of it, a little forgetful. He downsized his house and didn’t want a nurse yet but he did need a little help around the house. She would come in a couple hours a day. My brother said she had experience, references. I mean it’s just cleaning and cooking.”

“What was she like?”

“Middle aged woman. Grey hair and big glasses. Scarf. Kinda of a frumpy woman. I only saw her a few times as she was leaving to go home I guess. I would stay with dad and she would get a day off. I’d get my dad out of the house to restaurants and movies and stuff. We had kinda reconciled, so for the last few months I’ve been coming down to the house.”

“Reconciled?” I ask.

“We kinda been on the outs over the last ten years or so. To be honest as I got sober and he got older, I kinda realized what a jerk I've been. We kinda reconnected, you know?”

“And your relationship with your brother?”

“In high school plays together, drama club, stuff like that but when we graduated dad wanted us to get serious. Mike did, I guess I didn't.”

“Were there any valuables missing from the house?” Slocum presses.

“I don't think so. My cousin would have noticed something was missing. That's kinda his job.”

“Anything of value missing from the house?” Slocum stares intently at Jon Barry.

“No.”

Seemingly satisfied, Slocum changes tact, “was the housekeeper at the house when you came by with takeout food?”

“Like I told the detectives, I wasn't there that morning. The cops think I did something just because I was clearing out some rodents, you know how it is near the beach...” Stopping mid sentence and says, “ wait a sec. My cousin did say something about coins...it could have been a robbery.”

Slocums's eyebrows arch up just as there is a knock at the apartment door. Then the doorbell which I didn't know functioned. So I step over to answer it.

Standing in the doorway is a familiar looking man in a suit and tie, a brief case dangles from his hand.

“Hey cousin!” Jon Barry says to the man in the suit.

With a deep sigh, the man says, “I'm also his lawyer. The name is Fleet. Detective Tracey informed me of your interest.” He turns to Jon Barry and says, “Jon, what did I tell you about talking to people?”

“They just wanted to talk about dad's housekeeper. Did you know she's missing?”

“I do. The police want to talk to you about that as well.”

Father Green arranged a meeting with a reluctant Mike Lopez. We are seated in his office as he breezes in and says, “what is it you people want?” Unsurprisingly, he is wearing an expensive suit, dark brown leather shoes and a Rolex on his wrist. Like his brother, Mike Lopez is slim and young looking for his age but unlike his brother, Mike Lopez is struggling to retain his hair.

“Just a few questions. Are you the primary heir of your father’s estate?” Slocum asks.

“That's none of your business. Surely you don’t suspect me?” Mike Lopez says. “I found him and called 911 right then.”

“Purely hypothetical, Mr. Lopez. Applies to your brother as well.”

“I’m disgusted that you would even consider us suspects in the murder of my father.”

“I’m exploring the alternatives. In cases like this, the person of interest is usually those that gain financially. Usually a family member.”

“I see what's going on here.”

“Not at all, I was speculating. Don’t you think inheritance of such a substantial estate is a motive.?”

“I’m wealthy in my own right.”

“Greed has no limits Mr. Lopez.”

“Always a smart answer. Are you busy tomorrow at 200?”

“I can make room on my calendar.” Slocum says.

“I want you at the reading of the will. You can fully understand the extent of my father’s estate. In fact, I insist you attend. You can slander me in front of my attorney.”

“We will be there.”

“Fine. I think you already know the family lawyer, Mr. Fleet.” He nods toward the door for Slocum and I to leave as he says, “If you will excuse me, I have some pencils to sharpen.”

That evening as Slocum comes out of the kitchen deep in thought with a cup of tea in hand, I gesture for her to come over. I take the tea from her and hand her a virtual reality headset.

“Sorry, old man. I have no interest in those macho shoot em up games,” Slocum says.

I shake my head, “I created a virtual crime scene from the police photos. Every room they photographed.”

“You don’t say,” she takes the VR headset and slips it on. “This is outstanding!”

Immersed in the crime scene, I take a seat in one of the armchairs sipping her tea so it doesn't go to waste. About twenty minutes later I’m reading the newspaper when she cries out and whips the head set off and interrupts me in the midst of a very interesting article on building a new football stadium.

“Sutherland! Where is the security video from the Lopez house?”

“Here on my laptop, part of the police file. Did you find something?”

“Please queue it up on the display.”

I click a few files and open them. As Slocum views the security footage, she says to me, “switch to the photos of the kitchen. Something is out of place.”

I glance at them, compared to our small kitchen the crime scene kitchen is remarkably clean and tidy.

“Something that doesn’t belong,” Slocum urges me. I peer at the picture of a kitchen table, part of a stove, a pantry door in back. “Look on the floor.”

“A pair of shoes.”

“Men’s loafers,” she corrects. “Fashionable and pricey.”

“Why would shoes be left in the kitchen?”

“Notice the pantry in the back, a padlock on it. Installed recently.”

“That's damn strange,” I say.

Slocum stops the security footage, leans back and smiles as she tells me, “We have something for Detective Tracey so I fear tomorrow morning will be quite busy. I believe someone has been leaving a trail of breadcrumbs but they don't lead back to the intended little bird.”

“Good afternoon, gentlemen,” we say to Mike Lopez, Jon Barry and Mr. Fleet as Slocum and I enter the law offices of Fleet, Macham and Genealite. “I realize it's a faux pas but I invited other interested parties.”

Detective Tracey and two uniform officers enter the room.

“I have no objection,” Mr. Fleet replies.

“Neither do we,” Mike Lopez says, speaking for him and his brother. Detective Tracey plops down into a chair in the rear of the office, the two patrolmen stand on either side of him.

Mr. Fleet says, “I’ll start with the generalities of reading the will. Even after a generous charitable donation, your father left a substantial estate. However, this is rather awkward I’m afraid, certain provisions he made.”

“Everybody knows dad disinherited me,” Jon Barry says. “That’s what my dad shouted from the rooftops. I’m the ungrateful and lazy son.”

“It’s not that,” Mr. Fleet replies. Looking at Mike Lopez.

“Well, just read it,” Mike Lopez says. “Father discussed the change with me and asked for my opinion. I supported the reconciliation with Jon and my father’s decision since it brought our family closer.”

“Well, that’s a relief. Your father recently changed his will. After Jon cleaned up his act. Your dad had a change of mind,” Mr. Fleet says. “Jon gets the bulk of the estate.”

“I’m shocked, I don’t know what to say? We had gotten along better recently but I had no idea,” Jon Barry says.

Everyone in the room is silent as they stare at Jon Barry.

“I assumed he had told you.” Mike Lopez says.

Jon Barry says. “Dad never said a thing to me about it.”

“Those are the provisions,” Mr. Fleet says. “Mike, if you choose to contest, you have that avenue.”

Mike Lopez sits there, looks at his brother and smiles,” nonsense if that is what my father wanted then so be it. Jon, if you need financial advice, I would be happy to oblige.”

“I'm happy that it all worked out,” Slocum interjects. “I have what I think will be some additional good news. Detective Tracey opened a safety deposit box in a small bank in Oceanside.”

“Really?” Mike Lopez says. “What’s that have to do with us?”

It's what they found and what they didn't find,” Slocum says.

“What’s that mean?” Jon Barry says.

“The police found pill bottles for painkillers and also gold coins. They were your old prescription bottles Mr. Barry,” Slocum says.

Jon Barry blusters and replies. “I don't have a safety deposit box and if I did, why would I keep prescription bottles in there?”

“Oh Jon, I thought rehab took this time,” Mike Lopez sighs.

“Was it the missing coin collection?” Mr. Fleet says.

Slocum says, “the gold coins.”

“Jon, didn't you have an apartment in Oceanside for a time?” Mike Lopez asks.

Jon shrugs.

“Jon, I know losing your job and expensive rehab but if you had money problems you could have come to me,” Mike Lopez says.

Jon Barry says, “I don't know what is going on here.”

“Jon, don't say another word.” Mr. Fleet says. “Perhaps we should adjourn and I confer alone with Jon?”

Slocum holds up a hand and says, “ Curious detail about that box. Jon Barry's prints weren't on the coins, just on the plastic pill bottles,” Slocum says.

“So?” Mr. Fleet says.

“It's what we did not find. If someone had just acquired gold coins what would they do?” Slocum says.

They don't respond. In the silence, I say, “count them?”

“Exactly, you handle them in some fashion,” Slocum says.

“Maybe they wiped off the prints?” Mike Lopez says.

“Why would they bother? It's going into a safety deposit box. And why did Mrs. Norford have a key to the box? There is no record, no security footage at the bank of anyone matching Mrs. Norford description accessing the safety deposit box. There is footage of someone that somewhat resembles Mr. Barry.”

“Are you suggesting my brother disguised himself in some way?” Mike Lopez says.

“Interesting that you should mention disguises Mr. Lopez. Doesn't your family have more than one person that has strode the boards?”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Mr. Lopez says.

“Weren't you in highschool plays and a few local theater productions? Before your father convinced you to abandon it?” Slocum says.

“Years ago before I became too busy.”

“You gave up your dream.”

“I wouldn't say that. Listen, this isn't about me. It's my brother and I think we need to stop and have our attorney...”

“Of course, of course. But I haven't finished telling what was found in the box.”

Jon Barry asks. “What?”

“Three hairs. Consisted of two hairs from a grey wig with traces of a propecia medication,” Slocum says. “Who in this room is losing their hair and uses a drug for male pattern baldness?”

Mr. Fleet is already bald. Jon Barry with his full head of hair. Mr. Lopez reflexively touches his thin hair.

Slocum says, “by now the police have searched your home, located your baldness medication.”

“But Jon is seen at our father's house, the cameras,” Mike Lopez utters.

“A person with blonde hair looking very much like Jon Barry is seen entering and leaving the house,” Slocum corrects.

“I don’t believe it!” Mike Lopez jumps from his chair. “Slocum is making wild accusations and I have had enough. I want to take legal action.”

Slocum continues, “the costume shop you frequented in La Mesa, you paid cash but you probably didn't realize they had cameras inside to deter teenagers from playing with the costumes.”

“So what if I was there? That doesn't prove anything.”

“The hairs I mentioned in the safety deposit box. The third hair is a human hair with a follicle still attached, Mr. Lopez,” Slocum says.

Detective Tracey cuts in, “the DNA is a match for you, Mr. Lopez.”

Mike Lopez collapses back into his chair. Everyone in the room stares at him. After a moment he says, “it wasn’t about the money. Spreadsheets, reports, boring meetings and the constant stress, all to please my father. He never once said he was proud of me but when Jon got that stupid show a couple of years ago, all of the sudden dad was so proud of him. Even after Jon lost his TV job because of the drugs and went into rehab. Then he changed his will. It was easy to frame my brother but the police kept dragging their feet. My acting fooled my father day after day. Kindly Mrs. Norford could come and go as she pleased until she gave my dad that burrito...,” He buries his head in his hands as he says, “ I’m the real actor in the family.”

“A very peculiar case.” I say to Slocum back in our apartments that evening.

“How so?”

I look at her incredulously, “Mike Lopez dressing up as his brother I can believe but as Mrs. Norford then to go to confession? It’s absurd.”

“Risky, perhaps. No one really got a good look at Mrs. Norford. He was playing to the security cameras. He could fool his father since the man had dementia. For his plan to work, Mike Lopez couldn't afford to have a stranger in his father’s home so he became the housekeeper. And it was a simple matter to impersonate his brother. While his brother was surfing with no corroborating witnesses, made it a simple ruse.”

“Still quite a risk for Mike Lopez to take.”

Slocum says, “perhaps. But I suspect some thespian vanity played a part. Playing his brother, the professional actor. Fooling a priest he had known and somewhat resented. If he could fool Father Green, well...”

“Fool anybody,” I say.

“Quite.”

“But also desperation. When the police were slow to follow the breadcrumb of clues he set out. He felt compelled to improvise that bit of theatre in the confessional about the safety deposit box to spur things along.”

“I must ask. What caused you to suspect Mike Lopez?”

“Actually, I have you to thank for that. The virtual crime scene program you developed from the crime scene photos provided an excellent way for me to investigate the scene. When I asked myself the question; what should not be here? I noticed the loafers.”

“Shoes?” I respond.

“Correct. Why would Mike Lopez leave his expensive loafers in the kitchen? residueWhich led me to ask what else is peculiar?”

“Such as the empty closet with a lock on it.” I say.

“There are no locks on other doors except for that closet in the kitchen then it does become interesting.”

“You wondered why was it locked?”

“Correct. That is where he normally kept his costumes. Upon closer inspection the police located makeup residue and tissues in the pantry. He carelessly left his loafers outside the kitchen pantry.”

“Why did he come back to his father’s house as himself?” I ask Slocum.

“He needed the body to be discovered while his brother was surfing.” Slocum tells me. “He knew how the cameras were situated to maximize his impersonation of his brother and his tour de force as Mrs. Norford. When I looked at the security footage from the cameras that he had installed, I noticed that Jon Barry was wearing white shoes. Mrs. Norford wears white shoes. ”

“But Jon Barry wears sandals,” I say.

“Precisely. Suddenly, everyone is wearing white shoes. When Mike Lopez visits the house that day he is wearing white shoes. Perhaps in haste he left his loafers in the kitchen or didn't have time to switch shoes or simply didn't bother to change shoes.”

“If he hadn't forgotten his loafers, he might have gotten away with it.”

“Quite possibly,” Slocum says. “In the execution of his plan, he neglected a detail.”

There is a knock at the door. “That will be Father Green,” Slocum says.

I rise from my chair to open the door.

“Mr. Sutherland, Ms. Slocum,” Father Green says.

“Good evening,” Slocum says. “Would you care for something? Coffee, tea? Sutherland and I were having a nightcap as we recapp the case.”

“I'll have what you are having,” Father Green says.

“Glenfiddich?” Slocum says.

After a moment's hesitation, “that would be fine,” he replies.

“Please have a seat on the sofa,” Slocum pours a drink into a tumbler and passes it to Father Green.

“Thank you. I know these days, people like to handle business and social interaction in more impersonal ways but I prefer face to face interaction. I want you to know that I will personally see that your fee is paid in full. It might take some time.”

“My terms are simple. I require the pleasure of your company and conversation over a soothing glass of Scotch this evening, Father Green.”

“I don't understand?” He says.

“Don't worry about any monetary compensation. The Lopez estate has been very generous.”

“Since it was all a lie. I suppose there is no harm in telling you...” Father Green says.

“Mr. Lopez as Mrs. Norford provided some tidbit in the confessional that directed you to Jon? A key for a safety deposit box that she somehow came into possession of?”

“Yes,” he replies sheepishly.

“You didn't betray a confidence. By coming to me you quite likely avoided leading a lamb to the slaughter.”

Father Green adds, “she or rather he pulled the wool over everyone's eyes.”

“The black sheep returns and chaos ensues,” I chuckle.

“The parable of the Prodigal Son,” Father Green says.

“One son that runs off and spends all his money from his father. Then comes back home and his father welcomes him back. I know that story,” I say. “It's about forgiveness and all that.”

“Correct. But what about the other son?” Father Green says.

“What do you mean?” I say.

“In that parable, the father has another son. A diligent son that stayed home, did all the work and all that his father expected,” Slocum says, suddenly in a deep reverie.

“Exactly,” Father Green says. “How do you think that other son felt when his father welcomed the prodigal son home? The father gave a feast and showered the prodigal son with gifts and a new inheritance while the other son was told to be happy that his brother had returned.”

Perking up, Slocum says, “a rather warped family dynamic in my estimation,”

“Perhaps. When you look at the story from the other son's perspective it can seem unfair,” Father Green says.

“Indeed. No doubt that is how Mike Lopez viewed his family situation,” Slocum says. “In his thinking, he had given up his dreams of being in the arts for the world of finance so his father would be proud of him. Mike Lopez sacrificed his dreams but he did get one final acting role and it killed.”