

## Chapter 6: The Murder

*November 1990*

*Lucy Davis*

When the alarm sounds the next morning, I slam the off button, get up, dress, then walk to the local bar and phone the rabies shelter to tell them I'm feeling sick and won't be coming to work. "Jenny," I say to the clerk who took over Tiffany's position. "It's Lucy. I'm sick again. Sorry. Guess I'll go see a doctor."

"Lucy," Jenny's voice comes over the phone, "hold on a minute."

I wait on the line until I hear, "Hello, Lucy, Randy Diehl here. You know, this is the sixth time this month you've been ill. We can't tolerate this any longer."

I stand at the bar, hold the phone away from my ear, and gaze at it. My head is pounding with anger. Then I say into the phone, "You know what, Mr. Diehl. I quit!" and I hang up, unconcerned about my future. I've been wanting to quit my stupid job ever since I first shoveled shit. Finally, I've found the courage to do so. *Lately, in fact, I've been finding the courage to do a hell of a lot*, I think to myself. *If only I could find Brian and keep him where he belongs. With me.*

For the rest of November, I sit idly in my studio apartment day after day, hoping Brian will show up. I never stop thinking about where he might be or what he might be doing. I also wonder if Mrs. Potthoff is back on the bleak streets of Van Buren. *How can Brian afford to keep her in a nursing home now, without a job?* I keep thinking. Then I finally decide to take action and find him. I call Manpower but they won't give out information and Brian never mentioned the address of his mother's nursing home.

I begin to wonder if Brian himself is living on the streets of Phoenix and by December first I decide to hop on a bus to 7th Avenue and Van Buren. It is early evening when I arrive at Woodland Park and look around at the people sprawled out on the lawn, sleeping, drinking, and laughing together. But I don't see Brian's mother. Then a man shouts, "Hey baby," and another man approaches and asks me for money. I shoo him away and head to Shorty's Tavern. While I'm sipping a glass of wine a man sits beside me and asks my name. For an instant, I consider going home with him, if he has a home, but he's drunk and smells so disgusting that I return to Woodland Park. This time I spot Brian's mother reclined on flattened boxes beside her shopping cart full of useless junk. The old woman is wearing the same blouse, slacks, and gray cardigan sweater but now she has a ragged quilt wrapped around her shoulders to fend off the chill.

I near her and ask, "Mrs. Potthoff?"

Brian's mother slowly opens her eyes and peers at me. "What d'ya want?" she groans. Her voice is phlegmy and horse and her oily gray hair is matted.

"It's me, your daughter-in-law. I'm married to your son. I'm surprised to see you back out here. Why aren't you in your nursing home?"

In her drunken stupor the woman struggles to sit up. "My son's who?" She tries to focus on me. "Do I know you?"

"I'm Brian's wife, Lucy Lu. I helped put you in the nursing home. It was my money that kept you there. Three thousand dollars, I'll have you know. What happened? And where's Brian?" My voice is yelling, I realize, so I calm down and smile at Mrs. Potthoff. I hardly want to alienate my only link to Brian. Thinking of my boyfriend suddenly fills me with concern. The money obviously wasn't enough to keep his mother in nursing care. And therefore, Brian must be feeling horribly guilty. No wonder he was so moody and angry.

“Who’s Brian?” the old woman asks, looking around suspiciously.

“Your son.”

“Ah yes, my son. And what do you want? You’re bothering me.”

“I don’t mean to bother you. I love your son. We got married in Vegas and we’re going to honeymoon in Hawaii.”

The woman squints at me, straining her head when she says, “Why ain’t that sweet. Married that shithead son of mine and you’re going to Hawaii.”

“Now, now, now, Mrs. Potthoff. You mustn’t talk like that. Brian’s been nothing but good to you.”

“Oh, yeah. Well, no. He’s a good boy. I say yes to getting married and going to Hawaii. Let’s have a toast.” The woman searches the area, her little world. “Had it here a minute ago.”

“Are you looking for wine?” I ask, thrilled that Mrs. Potthoff is accepting me, although the homeless woman probably doesn’t know what she’s saying. I feel like I’m bound to find Brian through her. Day and night, I’ve been missing my fiancé so much that sometimes my chest and head physically throb with pain even after a large dose of phenol. “I can get us some wine, if you’ll wait here,” I say.

“I ain’t goin’ nowheres.” The woman sprawls back down and I run off to Poncho’s Market, the nearest convenience store. When I return, Mrs. Potthoff is snoring on her boxes.

“Here,” I say. “I brought you a gift.”

The woman coughs and looks at me. “You again. Go away. You’re bothering me, like that reporter fellow.”

“But I have wine for you.” I show the old woman a bottle of red Thunderbird.

“Lixir! Isn’t that sweet.” The woman struggles upright.

I sit beside her, trying not to let the odor overwhelm me. “A toast,” I say and unscrew the lid.

The old woman reaches for the bottle, obviously aching for a drink, but I push her back. “Ah ah. First, mother dearest, you must tell me where Brian is. Your son.”

“Oh yes, my son.” The woman scratches her head and clears her throat. “Are you really married to my son?”

“That’s right. I’m also Mrs. Potthoff. Mrs. Brian Potthoff. Now I need to find him.”

The woman glares questioningly at me and says, “I hate to disappoint you, Mrs. Potthoff, sweetie, but I ain’t seen my son in a hell’v’a long time.”

“No, no, Mrs. Potthoff, that simply isn’t true! We were here a few weeks ago. If you want some elixir, be a good girl and try harder to remember. I want to know where your son is. Right now!” I hold the bottle from her reach, taunting her.

“Ah, all right.” The homeless woman straightens herself against the shopping cart as if trying to recall her son’s whereabouts. “Cincinnati,” she says at last.

“No! That won’t do.” My stomach knots up with fury but I try to calm my voice by speaking slowly. “I know he’s around here somewhere.”

“Okay, all right,” the woman struggles to say. “I think he’s living on Washington Street. But that’s all I know.”

“When does he come to see you? I know he does. He’s a good son, your only child. He really cares about you. And he’ll be a famous artist one day, with my help. I promise you that, Mrs. Potthoff.”

The woman gives me a confounded side glance, seemingly trying to answer properly but she's too far gone to comprehend my questions. "He's here every Sunday, bless his heart. Now how about that toast, dear lady. To your marriage."

"Good girl. When on Sundays?"

The old woman thinks a moment, coughs, and then says, "Don't know. He's an odd one, that son of mine. Just shows up sometime on Sunday after the church bells start ringing."

"Are you sure?" I'm growing impatient and intolerant of her stubborn stupidity.

"Oh, I'm real sure about that. The church bells ring on the day he comes around to see me," Mrs. Potthoff proudly says as if she's found a stretch of clarity in her mind. "Yes, indeed. Anytime on Sunday that rascal boy of mine. He is a good son, that he is."

"Okay then, on Sundays. Here's to your son and my husband." I take a swig of the fruity Thunderbird, grimace from the repulsive taste, spit it out to my side, and hand the bottle to Mrs. Potthoff.

"To my son." The old woman guzzles down as much wine as she can before I take back the bottle.

I stare at the vulgar woman while the sickeningly sweet taste lingers in my mouth. It's the worst wine I've ever had but to the old woman, obviously, it's the elixir of the god Mercury. For an instant, I consider bringing Mrs. Potthoff to my apartment but the old homeless woman is just too disgusting, more intolerable and tedious than my boring parents. *No*, I think to myself, while looking at my mother-in-law, *she must stay in this down trodden park so that on Sunday, I can surprise Brian. Maybe I'll even help her do herself in. Brian doesn't need to know I've done anything to his mother. No one does. And once the old woman is gone, Brian will be free from*

*her and entirely mine. He'll return to me and we'll resume our happy lives together. We'll really get married and then honeymoon in Waikiki or Honolulu.*

I leave the park and return to my apartment but all the while I can't stop thinking about Brian or his mother.

Over the next few days, before Sunday arrives, I find it difficult to concentrate because of my constant thoughts about Brian and his mother. Reading is out of the question. I consider calling the *Jeffers Hour* and while on the air declaring my love to Brian and begging him to come home to me. He sometimes listens to talk radio because of my influence. But I decide to reserve that idea for later. My best bet now is Brian's mother. *That old crone stole my money to squander on cheap wine*, I spend hours thinking while sitting on the sofa listening to radio ga ga and stewing in a hive of wasps, as Moe often said about me whenever I was upset or pouting.

Finally, in a fit of rage, I hurl my glass of Chablis against the far kitchen wall and shatter it all over the apartment. "Swift," I say out loud. "See what you make me do, Mrs. Potthoff, you ungrateful piece of shit!"

The next Sunday I return to Woodland Park early in the morning. To blend-in with the homeless crowd I wear jeans and the wrinkled, stained blouse from Tiffany Shelton, which I retrieve from the back of my closet. I also put on a long black wig that Lucinda gave me after I first arrived in Mesa. *I wore it one Halloween when Cecil was alive*, I remember her telling me. The long nylon hair falls down my front and back and the wide thick bangs nearly cover my eyes. I'm convinced I look homeless, tousled, and hopeless. No one, not even Brian, will recognize me. At least I don't smell bad.

After I get off the bus at Van Buren, I begin walking toward the park while seeing the same derelicts coughing and hawking up spit. Then a man calls out to me in a drunken voice,

“Hey, lady.” I sharply turn and see a lanky middle-aged man pissing against a garbage dumpster beside a building. I flip him off and continue crossing the street. The man follows me and shouts, “Come here, sweet miss, I want to talk to you.”

“Shut up. You filth!” I scream at the top of my lungs.

The man chuckles and saunters to a nearby tree. He’s still laughing to himself as he flops onto the ground and picks up a bottle of wine.

*Riffraff magots*, I think to myself. *Ought to do away with them all.*

At the far end of Woodland Park Mrs. Potthoff is sitting on cardboard boxes near her shopping cart. At nine in the morning, it appears that the woman has just woken up. She rummages through a sack and pulls out a jelly doughnut to eat. It’s probably stale.

I sit against an acacia tree far enough away so she doesn’t notice me yet close enough to watch her. Amid cooing mourning doves and the onslaught of traffic noise, I watch Mrs. Potthoff for over an hour eat her breakfast and do nothing. The late autumn sun intensifies but I’m cool enough in the shade. Finally, the old woman works her way up and pushes her cart to the end of the street. She spits and goes into a bar probably to pee, certainly not to wash her face. I then follow her to Poncho’s Market, wait outside the store, and watch Mrs. Potthoff buy wine and sweet rolls with money she has stashed in her clothes.

When she exits, she asks me, “Spare a quarter for an old lady, honey?”

*Brian’s mother fails to recognize me, her own daughter-in-law*, I’m thinking with amusement as I place a dollar in Potthoff’s dry hand. “Here! Now beat it,” I say.

The old woman mumbles something as she places the dollar in her bra and returns to her cart outside the store.

I enter Poncho's and buy a bottle of Thunderbird, for authenticity. "Where'd you come from?" asks the store clerk, a chubby Italian man in his fifties. I merely glance at him and return to the park where I find a young Native American couple occupying my spot under the acacia tree. They both have long black hair, rather like my wig. They're wearing denim shirts and jeans and dark sunglasses, something I should have added to my own disguise.

I lean against a nearby palm within view of Mrs. Potthoff who is back at her boxes guzzling wine. Within an hour, Mrs. Potthoff falls asleep and I curl up beside the palm and nod off myself. When church bells begin to ring, I wake up. Immediately, I notice that the old woman and her cart are gone. I'm horrified, heartsick in fact, and feel certain that I've missed Brian. I toss aside the bottle of wine and look around for Brian's burdensome old mother.

"Hey, you," the Native American man says to me. He and his young woman remain entwined on the ground, their long black hair flowing together.

"What?" I scowl.

"Are you throwing away that liquor?"

"It's yours," I say and scan the area. The man who is probably twenty leaps up for the wine, leaving his woman giddy with laughter.

"Did you see that old lady over there?" I ask him as he grabs the bottle of Thunderbird.

"You mean ol' Wind Tunnel?" he asks.

"Yeah, Old Wind Tunnel," I repeat with impatience. "If you're referring to the fat lady with the cart."

"She usually heads to that vacant lot on 10th and Adams about now. She looks for treasures," the young man chuckles.

"Was she with a short mustached man, her son? Brian Potthoff."



“Son? Didn’t know ol’ Wind Tunnel had it in her.”

“Yeah, her son! He comes here every Sunday.”

“Okay, right,” the young man replies. “Don’t get rude. Like I said, check down on 10th. She’s around. She can’t move fast even for a wind tunnel.” He returns to his companion and together they guzzle the wine.

I grab my bag and rush down the street while picturing Brian and thinking how happy he’ll be to see me. *And he’ll know I forgive him and understand his predicament. Of course, Mrs. Potthoff meets her son on Washington Street. Perhaps he takes her to a café for lunch. What else can he do? She’s probably too stubborn and too stupid to go to the shelter.*

Nearing 10th and Adams, a seedy part of town near the State Capitol, I spot a vacant lot of dirt, rocks, weeds, carts, and trash disarrayed against an abandoned brick building. At the far end of the lot, behind a shopping cart loaded with junk, Mrs. Potthoff is crouching in her frayed wool cardigan. Brian, however, is nowhere in sight.

Crushed with disappointment, I’m convinced that the old woman is purposely misleading me about Brian. The thought makes me furious and I wonder what to do. I could wait out the rest of the day, but the noon sun begins to make my scalp itch under the synthetic wig and the smell of my perspiration makes me feel like a tramp sponging off the bleak, mean streets. I’m disgusted and disgusting and can hardly stand myself.

Still, there’s a chance Mrs. Potthoff told me the truth and I’ll die if I miss Brian, so I wait a while longer. From a distance, I watch Mrs. Potthoff rummage for “treasures” and pick up an old shoe and a bottle that may be worth something. I grow angrier and angrier at my predicament.

From behind me I hear a man shout above the traffic noise, “Hey, it’s you!” I turn and see the same drunk and lanky man that pestered me earlier that morning. “Wait up, sweet miss,” he yells, crossing the street.

“This is too damn much!” I exclaim, and toss my wig into the field and stomp off toward the bus stop. For a moment, I completely forget about Brian. My only thought is to return to the comfort of my modest studio away from the sewage of the streets.

Back at my apartment, I shower and then rest on the sofa, scolding myself for giving up so easily. Even if I missed Brian, I still must deal with his mother. I can’t let her get away with all the misery she’s causing both Brian and me.

By four o’clock, I slip back into my homeless attire and wrap a scarf around my head. Then I catch the bus back to Van Buren while thinking that Brian might be there and that it’s time for my luck to change.

The church bells are ringing again when I spot Mrs. Potthoff asleep near her cart. To my dismay, Brian is nowhere in sight. I stand by the snoring woman and notice the black wig in her cart. I roll my eyes in disgust and feel so disappointed that I decide to confront the old lady for lying about her son.

When I tap her shoulder with my foot, Mrs. Potthoff loudly grunts. The stench in the air makes me as nauseated as the grasshoppers I drank at the Conglomeration. In fact, while pouring bottled water onto the woman’s ruddy cheeks to revive her from a drunken stupor, I imagine live grasshoppers splashing onto the ground. The image makes me dizzy.

The woman snaps awake, “What is it?” she coughs but then drifts back to sleep.

“Wake up!” I bend over and shake her shoulder, repelled by her grungy cardigan.

Mrs. Potthoff tries to focus on me, her intruder. “Go away, slut,” she moans. “Can’t you see I’m a sick old lady? Ain’t got no drugs. No leads.”

“Come on dearest, get up.” I nudge her again.

Mrs. Potthoff struggles upright and smiles but doesn’t bother to wipe the water off her face.

I remove my scarf and tenderly dry her.

“Thanks,” she says. “Some cad tried to drown me.”

“I brought you a present.” I indicate the wine in a paper sack. “But first you must tell me why you’ve been a naughty girl.”

“Naughty girl? Who are you?” she asks.

“You remember me, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do.” The old woman widely grins, showing dirty, stained, and a few missing teeth. “Let’s have a toast, honey. What d’ya say?”

“Not so fast, mother dear. First, tell me why you lied about Brian?” I sit cross-legged on the ground beside her.

“What?” She rubs her eyes.

“Stop it, Mrs. Potthoff—Wind Tunnel.”

The old woman chuckles. “You been talking to that Indian fellow, haven’t you? He’s been calling me that ever since he heard me fart a real good one.”

“You’re disgusting.” I laugh to pretend I’m amused. I don’t want to lose rapport with Brian’s mother. “Yes, we’ll have a toast as soon as you tell me about Brian, your son.”

“My son, right?” Potthoff asks, as if trying to please me. Her thirst for alcohol seems unbearable. “Don’t know. Wish I did. Maybe he’ll be along shortly. Please, have pity on a sick old lady.” She reaches for the sack of wine at my side.

“Not so fast.” I push her back, tiring of this situation. But I must find Brian. And this old woman is my best lead.

“Please, pretty please,” Potthoff begs and holds her hands in prayer.

“All right.” I hand her the wine. “Drink yourself into oblivion where you belong.”

“You’re an angel of mercy,” she says and takes the sacked wine.

I smile and say, “Brian called me that the evening we first met.”

“Called you what?”

“An Angel of Mercy.”

Potthoff guzzles the wine, gasps for a breath, and then gulps some more. “You don’t know how much I ‘preciate your generosity.”

I suddenly pity the woman—Brian’s mother, a homeless alcoholic with nothing to live for. At the same time, I can’t help but ask, “What happened to all the money I gave you? And why’d you leave the nursing home?”

“Money? Who told you about my money?” Potthoff holds the bottle aside, as if she’s afraid I might take it.

“Oh, never mind,” I say. “And don’t worry, I won’t take your wine. It’s a gift. Here,” I pull a package of Doritos from my bag, “have some dinner.”

“You are an angel.”

“That’s right. Be sure to tell Brian, my husband. Remember?”

“Oh, that I do.” Potthoff nibbles on the chips and washes them down with the wine.

By dusk, I have no more patience to wait around for Brian and I tear a piece of paper from the wine sack and scrawl out a note that reads *Darling, I have never stopped loving you and never will. You are my life. You alone have hijacked my heart. You can torment me, abuse me, stone me, spit in my eye, but I'll go on loving you until the day I die. In fact, I would die for you. Kill for you. Please, please come home to me.*

I decide not to sign the note. Brian knows my handwriting and he knows I'm his one true love. I stuff the note deep inside the woman's breast pocket along with a ten-dollar bill. "Promise me you'll give this note to your son, Mrs. Potthoff. I must leave now. Got a life of my own, you know."

"Oh, I promise." The old woman pats her chest over the note. "First thing when the church bells start ringing."

I take the woman's hand and stare in her eyes. "Be sure you do just that. It's a matter of life and death. And if you're a good girl and do like I ask, I promise to come back with more of your favorite elixir!"

Mrs. Potthoff gently squeezes my hand and looks content, like she's just made a new and generous friend. I know the feeling.

A week goes by but Brian never shows up at my apartment. *Certainly, his mother gave him the note* I keep telling myself *and he understands we are meant to be together.*

Expecting Brian to return by Christmas, I buy him a bottle of Jack Daniel's and two polo shirts, one red and one green. But the days continue to pass as I wait for Brian to show up. Two days before Christmas, I can no longer stand the idle waiting and I become furious with Mrs. Potthoff because I know she didn't give Brian the note. By eight o'clock in the evening, I dress in Tiffany's wrinkled pink blouse and toss the bottle of Jack Daniel's in my bag, along with

some bread, bologna, and cheese to feed Brian's mother. As I stand at the refrigerator door, I freeze for a moment then grab the syringe I used to give Sylvester his 5-way shot and a few baggies of phenobarbital sodium crystals. All the while I'm thinking *Who knows how the evening might unfold?* Then, in the pitch darkness, I catch the bus to skid row.

The Van Buren area is quiet as I saunter toward Woodland Park. It seems that most people are away, probably doing last minute Christmas shopping at the malls. Someone passes me and says, "Merry Christmas." I don't reply. Tonight, I'm in no mood to be merry and ho ho ho jolly. I'm on a mission to end Brian's hardship and clean up and clear out human trash.

At the far end of the park, I locate Mrs. Potthoff and half expect to see a makeshift Christmas tree from Brian or the shopping cart decorated in Christmas lights. But no. Only Mrs. Potthoff is lying on the ground and she's covered herself with black plastic garbage bags. The night before it had rained and the old lady probably thinks it'll rain again tonight because scattered clouds are obscuring the moon and the stars.

I sit beside Brian's sleeping mother and say, "Wake up, Mrs. Potthoff. I've brought you a Christmas present."

"Go away," she mutters. "I ain't in the mood for Christmas."

"No, dearest. I'm sure you could use a taste of sweet elixir before beddy-bye." I take the bottle of whiskey from my sack, open the lid, and place it under her nose.

Aroused, Mrs. Potthoff struggles up, rubs her eyes, and stares at me in the dim street light. "It's my Christmas angel," she grins.

"That's right." I smile. "Now, Mrs. Potthoff, were you a good girl? Did you give the note to your son?" The homeless woman scratches her scalp. "You forgot to, didn't you?" I open the

woman's cardigan, reach into her blouse pocket, and pull out the note. The ten-dollar bill is gone.

"I knew it!" I exclaim with anger. "I can't depend on you for anything, can I?"

"Oh, no? You can," Potthoff says and feels around all her pockets as if looking for another surprising note.

"Never mind." I put the note back in her breast pocket. "I've got another idea."

Suddenly, the wind starts blowing through the acacia trees and I hear a voice in my head. *Who's there?* I ask myself. But then I hear only traffic horns, a car alarm, and a siren in the distance. In my peripheral vision I see flashing blue police lights, and then many, many voices begin wafting in the smoggy air. People are chattering inside and outside of my head and the odor of fried venison liver and onions is attacking my senses. *Do homeless people grill meat?* I ask myself. *No*, it becomes clear, *the smell comes from a deer hunting camp. And the salty, gamey taste in my mouth is the potent raw meat that Scottie and Martin are making me eat.*

My mind reels back to the deer hunting trip of 1973, the year I turned nine and started my period. The year Scottie tried to kill me with his rifle. *I'm wading down the cold stony brook in a pair of flipflop thongs collecting pretty stones to give to Lawrence and Esther and waving my cattail wand to create magic. The white feathery fluff blows into the golden aspens where God's fingers are sifting through piles of golden coins that jingle in the breeze.*

*In the distance, I hear the first rifle shot. That's okay* I tell myself *hunters usually trek along the ridge and down the mountain glen to look for the rutting four-point bucks. Nobody hunts along the ranch road where I'm Sacajawea leading the Lewis and Clark expedition. Or so I'm thinking. Then the next bullet rushes past my head in slow motion. . .*

The siren is growing louder, the blue flashing lights are becoming brighter and more intense. But I gain focus on what I'm about to do like a deer hunter who is aiming for the kill shot.

As if waking from a coma, I stand before the homeless old woman and hold up the bottle of Jack Daniel's. "The time has come to do what I must do," I say aloud, pause a moment and correct myself. "No. I must do what God tells me to do. No. I mean what I'm destined to do. Brian will find the note on his mother and know I did the good deed and he'll be home by Christmas morning."

"Hungh?" the old woman stammers.

I hand her the liquor, "Here, Mrs. P. Merry Christmas. Drink up, I don't have all night."

"Nope," Potthoff takes the bottle. "Me neither. And a Merry Christmas to you, sweet angel of mercy." She drinks with a lust and gluttony I've never seen before. *Can she even tell the difference between Thunderbird and Jack Daniel's?* I wonder. "Slow down," I lower the bottle from her mouth. "I can spend more time with you." I remove the bread and bologna from my bag and make her a sandwich. "I bet you're hungry."

The old woman grabs the food. She apparently went to bed hungry. What a sad thing to happen to an old lady. To anybody.

"Slow down," I scold. It's horrible to witness such behavior. I stare at her and start thinking about Brian. How did he end up with such a burden? It's hard to believe this pathetic creature is the mother of my one true love. *Life really gets stupid when it comes to family*, I think then begin realizing that I haven't called my parents in over two months. And that I tossed their unopened Christmas card at the back of my closet. They'll be worried, I know. Maybe they're expecting gifts from me. *But who cares? Let them suffer like they made me suffer with their*



*cheap gifts and deliberate taunts. My parents knew what Scottie was doing to me. They knew he shot his rifle at me. They didn't care. My brother was just being a boy, in their minds, and I was just a stupid little girl of no consequence. I was a nonentity in their lives. No, there aren't any gifts from Lucy Davis this year except for my gifts to Brian. I delight in my thoughts and begin laughing out loud.*

Mrs. Potthoff finishes her sandwich and guzzles down more 'lixor. "Save some for me." I take the bottle from her. Suddenly, I feel struck by a howling gust of wind, one that emerges from the desert and then blows through the city into the homeless park where it nearly knocks me down. I feel lightheaded and have no reflections or thoughts except to take precise aim. *I'm a deer hunter now, not a rabbit in a stew.*

I reach in my bag for the syringe and phenol and then add the crystals to the remaining whiskey and shakes the bottle until the crystals dissolve. Potthoff lies back and seems satisfied with having a full belly. I pull back the syringe plunger to draw in air. I tilt the bottle on my lap, push down the plunger, and fill the syringe with four times the dosage to down a large dog. If this isn't enough, I'm thinking, I'll try another hit, then another, until I finish the job. Mrs. Potthoff's enormity and ill health make the task uncertain. She may end up in a peaceful slumber for the night. And what use would that be? I'll have to wait around to be sure that the drug takes effect just like I used to do at the pound before the technicians loaded the dead animals in a pickup truck to dump the dead bodies in the desert.

*Killing is so easy*, I tell myself while looking at the amber liquid in the syringe. In my mind, images of animals at the pound begin to blur together. No one kitten or puppy, cat or dog stands out to me like they used to do. In fact, I see only mangy, sickly animals with matted fur and pussy eyes—gross, unwanted creatures.

The old woman belches from the whiskey and I feel repulsed as I tell myself that people will assume she died of a heart attack caused by her alcoholic condition. The thought makes me snicker.

“What’s so funny?” Potthoff remarks, reaching for more of her ‘lixer. In the street light, I see the silly grin plastered on her face.

“No more alcohol dear,” I say. “Not now. I have medicine instead to help ease your pain.”

“My sore aching muscles?” Potthoff innocently asks. “Doctor told me I have RA and lupus.”

“That’s right. I have medicine for your muscles, your RA, and lupus. Diabetes too, if you’ve got that. Brian told me all about your ailments.” I move closer to the woman, carefully hold the syringe upright, and help her lie comfortably on her back. She’s heavier than I expect.

Potthoff moans as I get rid of air bubbles in the syringe like I did when giving Sylvester his shot. I push the plunger until a drop appears at the tip of the needle. “There we are, dear Mrs. P. This will only take a moment and then you’ll feel like new.” I lift the old woman’s blouse and try to locate the area of her heart under her left breast. I reassure myself that no one will notice the needle mark under such a mound of flesh.

“It’s my muscles that trouble me. Not my heart,” Potthoff remarks. “My ticker ticks just fine.”

“Oh? Well,” I say. “I’m a nurse, you see, and you must trust me. An injection into the heart is the quickest way to reach your entire body, especially your muscles. Besides, don’t you know that the heart is a muscle, too?”

“My angel,” Potthoff whispers. It seems she’s found a comfortable position; one she probably finds before nodding off.

“That’s right, fall asleep.” I concentrate on the task at hand. I must hit the heart exactly right or the effect will take longer. When I locate the right area, I plunge the needle deeply into her flesh and inject the amber liquid. All the while, I’m sensing it ooze into my own heart. The sensation is thrilling, like having a wish come true.

I then vigorously rub the area to help cover any sign of a needle mark. A small amount of blood seeps from the injection site and I wipe it with the edge of my “homeless” blouse from Tiffany Shelton.

“Ouch,” Brian’s mother declares in a delayed reaction.

“It’ll be over in a minute, sweetheart. And then you’ll feel good forever and ever.”

At the rabies shelter the drug usually took effect within a minute, seconds sometimes, but with Mrs. Potthoff I wait five, then ten minutes while checking her carotid artery now and then. The stubborn old lady doesn’t easily die. Her heart *is* strong.

“All right, then,” I say as I prepare another dose with the remaining mixture in the whiskey bottle. I again inject the drug into her heart. This time I hold my fingers over the carotid artery and feel the woman’s life magically slip away. I’ve extinguished the flame that burns inside her and the church bells in her head.

I place her hands on her lifeless chest, cover her with the plastic bag, and then step back to observe the motionless body. I feel exhilarated, no longer empty inside. Now I’m the one on top of the cliff looking down and throwing rocks at the stupid, worthless, human trash. God himself speaks to me and says, *Ye have dominion over every living thing that moveth.*

I laugh aloud, look around, throw the syringe and empty bottle into my bag, and head for the next bus home.