

PROLOGUE

Vincent Hull lay on the floor, his gray pants and white boxers around his knees, right arm splayed out in front of him. His left arm curled under his body, as if protecting his privates. Everything about him was obscene, especially the fleshy buttocks exposed to the air. Jenna pulled off her jacket and bent down to where he lay on the left side of his face. She could see only one eye, that one unblinking. His famously long, almost shoulder-length, white hair looked slightly damp, as the poor man stared straight ahead at eternity.

Jenna sank backwards down into a chair next to the leather couch. Rigor mortis—she'd heard of it, possibly seen it on television, but didn't really know what it entailed. Would he be stiff like that? Probably not yet. She looked at her watch; over an hour since Vincent Macklin Hull's publicity person, Tasha, had telephoned her. She loosened one button on her blouse, undoing another. Clean, she was altogether clean and, of course, stone cold sober. She picked up one of the heavy cocktail glasses, pouring herself a stiff shot of vodka, careful to leave her lipstick on the rim. For a moment, she and the dead man communed in a sort of silent prayer. She touched his back, she touched his head and smoothed his hair. He was cool under her touch. This awful change between the living, breathing man he had once been to this lifeless pile of bones on the floor, it was horrible, much worse than seeing her grandmother in repose. She didn't want to put herself beneath him, as had been her instructions. Why not just sit right here and tell her story to paramedics? Perhaps, though, that would raise even more questions, since what she was doing there would look suspicious. She poured herself another, shorter vodka shot and drank it quickly.

Beside the man now, she took off one of her shoes, then pulled the bottom of her blouse out from her waist, but she could put her task off no longer, as she knew time was part of her assignment. She tried to lift his arm, but it was too heavy and flopped back down again. Should she roll him over? Could she? He was maybe six foot four and at least two hundred pounds. For a moment, across her eyes flashed the many photos she had seen of him in life, at charity dinners, holding little children's hands, clasping the rich and the famous with a grin. How would this particular image play if it were made public? But presumably, only the authorities would see it, thank god. She shoved him a bit, but he lay still. Finally she got at his head, her two legs akimbo above it and began to slide herself down under him. It was difficult, and only as she managed to get him to about her knees did she see liquid dripping out of his mouth.

As she pulled him up, that spit trickled down onto her breast. She grimaced and looked away from the pale face that loomed above her and continued wriggling. Her instructions had been to get his DNA all over her. The fact that there would be no semen, at least not in her, didn't seem to be a problem as long as she smeared something else of his over her. But maybe there was—maybe he was still wet from his longings. He might have expired in the very act and then withdrawn. Horrible thought. Still, she continued to wriggle, legs wide apart now, skirt hiking up so that her thighs rubbed against the dead man's pants. His head hung heavy and kept banging against her as she moved. She could smell, what? Liquor still on his breath, something metallic, and for a moment she thought she would gag.

But now she felt something else, his naked body. Though his arm and face were cold, he was hot still in the center, his penis against her leg, erect, heavy. Was this from just recent sex or from that thing called “angel lust,” when men die violently and end up hard as a rock? She turned her head and retched onto the floor. Most of the vodka came up, and then she began to cry. What the hell was she doing? She should get up and have another few drinks, start over with all this, but she could go no further. She did not want to feel this fifty-nine-year old dead body any closer to her or deeper into her.

She snaked her arm back to grab the telephone off the coffee table and pulled it down to her side. With great difficulty she punched in 911, but then hung up immediately. She had to have a script, some speech in mind that would sound authentic, and it wasn't too hard to imagine what that might be. She decided to turn her face directly toward Hull and look into his eyes. They were still dark but fixed, a blank. Did they now look upon God or some nasty Hell? She began to cry, and then she howled and she screamed, amping up the hysteria, grabbing the phone again, wailing now in earnest. When the 911 operator answered, she shrieked into phone, “He's dead, he's dead! Help, come quickly! It must be a heart attack.” When she had calmed down enough to give the address and the name of the dead party, the operator asked to have it repeated twice. “Yes, it's Vincent Hull. Come now!”

She shoved the phone away and lay quietly now underneath the man, his face so well known to her.

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