

What readers of *Ghost Hampton* are saying...

To say Ken McGorry's *Ghost Hampton* is an entertaining read is a massive understatement. Through his skillful development of the downtrodden main character, Lyle, and the perfectly crafted temptress, Silk, the author somehow manages to get us all hoping for an unexpected happy ending to this fast-paced novel. – Kevin McCormick

Ken McGorry is an inveterate purveyor of wry humor and, with his latest effort, *Ghost Hampton*, he has expanded his sophisticated vision into, appropriately enough, the netherworld of the chic Hamptons. This is a horror story you will read with a smile. It is full of memorable characters, is suspenseful, with enjoyable sub-plots, and is funny, clever, sometimes poignant, and always intelligent. – Corey Dwyer

I always have great respect for an author who can get me to care about his protagonist and make to feel part of their journey. Through various sub-plots, a generous helping of subtle (perhaps sardonic) humor, “Lyle” and I embarked on a mission that at times evoked empathy, anger, frustration and fear (both for personal safety and that of a loved one). *Ghost Hampton* really paddles to the middle of the lake in terms of asking the reader to abandon disbelief and buy in. Chaos and terror ensue but ultimately we reach the shore with a resolved conclusion that left me exhausted but satisfied. – Edward Ahern

I don't usually read ghost stories, but I loved this book! I was completely wrapped up in the story and all the characters. Ken McGorry is so descriptive with the people involved and what they are thinking, feeling and seeing that it's like I am actually seeing what I'm reading. I can't wait to read Ken's next book. I may as well just plan on reading right through the night! It happened with *Smashed* and now again with *Ghost Hampton*. – Suzanne Ball

If someone explained the premise of *Ghost Hampton* to me, I probably would have found it hard to believe. But somehow Ken pulled it off and made the implausible possible. “Lyle” was very real and the context was so familiar. I became immersed in the characters (both living and dead) and the story. The frenetic pace of the journey deserved an ending which went to another level and *Ghost Hampton* did not disappoint.

I thoroughly enjoyed it! – Rebecca Foley

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

GHOST HAMPTON

Copyright © 2016 by Ken McGorry

All rights reserved.

Permanent Record Books

565 Plandome Road #164

Manhasset, NY 11030

www.ghosthampton.com

www.facebook.com/ghosthampton

ISBN 978-1-5305-7723-1

Revised Edition.

Cover design: Price Digital

Cover photograph: Andrea Hill/Getty Images

Author Photograph: Dawn McCormick

GHOST HAMPTON

Ken McGorry

For Mary Liz

The devil's agents may be of flesh and blood...

– A. Conan Doyle

PART ONE

CONDEMNED

1. Rush Hour

It was the roadwork on Montauk Highway that made Lyle Hall get the electric chair.

Since last winter, he'd made do with the self-propelled kind—his daughter Georgie called it the “Mr. Potter model.” To Lyle, it said *temporary*. A new electric wheelchair with high-end options would say *permanent*.

At 55, Lyle was not ready to say that. He'd made good progress over the spring and summer, strength-training his upper body. A perky female physical therapist came to his house in Bridgehampton twice a week; a tattooed trainer guy beat him up on Fridays. Lyle had the stretchy resistance bands and a rack of light dumbbells in embarrassing lavender in the living room. Dangling in the dining room doorway was the “Torquemada”—a sling-like contraption he used to hoist himself up and perform certain torturous routines.

Any strain or discomfort he felt was north of his L4 vertebra. Lyle had no feeling from the lower back down, since killing Elsie Cronk with his stupid Hummer last October. Almost a year now.

Each week he journeyed to Southampton to the spinal-injury clinic where they worked miracles. Lyle fully expected them to make him their next miracle and the team there was so positive and effusive that they kept the dream alive. As professionals, they didn't hold Elsie Cronk against him, but they knew. Everybody knew. Even though Lyle and Elsie and an old duffer walking his dog were the only witnesses, they knew.

With his SUV piled up on the War Memorial at Bridgehampton's main intersection, windshield spider-webbed and red, the first-responders, busy trying to free the elderly lady from her big old Ford, initially pronounced him dead. Lyle had a bona fide near-death experience and was comatose for two weeks. But few really cared. Elsie was the tragedy. Elsie had been on her way to her son's 50th birthday party. Lyle Hall lived.

Lyle's weekly visits to Southampton included sessions with Dr. Susan Wayne, a therapist specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder. Her job was to stave off depression, incrementally

step down his benzodiazepine dosage, and provide mechanisms to mitigate survivor guilt. Which Lyle had, though he didn't admit to it.

It wasn't his fault that Elsie blundered into his path, 85 years of age and blinded by the setting sun, cautiously making her overly wide right turn onto Montauk Highway—*who can't execute a simple right-on-red?*—in her late husband's aircraft-carrier-size Ford Futura. And everyone guns it a little, not just Lyle, when Bridgehampton's last traffic light turns yellow. Another damning detail was his destination—a bar in Montauk. Practically everyone believed Lyle was drunk when he collided with Elsie. Incredible how easy it is to believe the worst about somebody. Yeah, he drank. But he wasn't drunk when he hit the sweet old lady with the fresh-baked birthday cake on the seat beside her. He was on his way *to get* drunk. Huge difference.

Since last year, Lyle's had scant contact with people other than medical professionals and service providers. He spends the most quality time with Fred, the MediCab driver who's been getting him to his appointments since March.

Georgie's also a professional. Just 30, she's a newly promoted Southampton police detective. What she'd always wanted. Trouble is, now that she's thrown herself into her new job, she has this albatross of a dad distracting her. He bluffs that he can do for himself, but that makes things worse. Her solution is surgical strikes—like dropping off prepared meals that Lyle can microwave. And she makes sure to nag him over the phone. Take your meds. Keep up your hygiene. Drink plenty of water. Do your exercises. Shave off that unbecoming beard. Get a damn electric wheelchair, for God's sake.

Lyle has no one else. Certainly not Dar, his Floridian ex. Her role—play trophy wife to Lyle and wicked stepmother to Georgie during the crucial teenage years following her mom's death—ended acrimoniously years ago.

So Lyle is Georgie's cross to bear. And it was Lyle, before the accident, back when he was an important lawyer, who twisted a powerful arm to get her promoted to detective. She is abundantly qualified—a master's in forensic psychology and all—but she was still considered a girl entering a man's world. Now she's in a position where the man who made her challenging job possible is also a big, daily pain in the ass.

Georgie's nagging inspired Lyle's spiteful solo excursion. To prove his mettle that day of the roadwork, he took the Long Island Railroad from Bridgehampton to Southampton. Fred merely

dropped him at the station. Later, when Lyle returned on the “rush hour” train, one of a half dozen travelers disembarking at Bridgehampton, he was visibly exhausted from the day’s effort. Fred saw Lyle wheel out of the train car and quickly joined him on the platform to help negotiate the handicap-ramp switchbacks leading to the parking area.

The whole point had been to show Georgie that he could “do stuff” on his own, like propelling himself to his appointments in Southampton. The challenge proved otherwise, but Lyle would craftily use his physical meltdown as a cover for making his sudden about-face on the electric chair question. He could withhold the true reason for the new chair.

He’d be unable to withhold what was to follow. The detour took traffic slowly past the abandoned house.



2. The Whisperers

He heard her here. She was one of the whisperers. It seemed weirdly flattering at first.

Ensnared in the MediCab that exhausted evening of the detour, Lyle had the windows down, allowing in fresh air and the angling rays of the setting sun. Commuter traffic from the train station had been annoyingly redirected onto Poplar Street. Fred crept forward, foot on the brake, with eight more cars ahead of them. Wrung out after his wrongheaded foray to Southampton, Lyle's arms and shoulders ached; muscles, joints, his hands too. And he felt the onset of what Dr. Susan Wayne called "free-floating anxiety." In Lyle's case, a blob of uneasiness that could intensify into inchoate dread.

He was slumped in his Mr. Potter when the imposing shambles of a house came into view on his right. Everybody called it Old Vic. Sporting dumb old "No Trespassing" signs as long as anyone could remember, it was commonly held that Old Vic was once a brothel. Long ago, when Bridgehampton was part of the East End's whaling industry, before it grew into a high-end summer getaway, real-estate bonanza and snob haven.

Then there's the suburban legend that Old Vic was haunted. Who says? No one and everyone, whether they believe it or not.

The MediCab was crawling by Old Vic when Lyle first heard the whispers. He rose on his elbows, his chair secured to the van's floor, and listened. Cats in heat. No, wait. This was more subtle, conversational. A furtive murmur that piqued his curiosity. He needed to listen again.

"Hey Fred, make a right at the corner, please?"

"Course correction, Mr. Hall?"

"I want to circle back for another look at the old house. And Fred, call me Lyle, okay? Lyle is fine." It had been six months with the same driver.

Fred made the turn. Any such whim of Lyle Hall's, he knew, was good for a crisp off-the-books twenty. It was even worth a twenty to stop at the ATM—Lyle would entrust Fred with his debit card and pass code to avoid the hassle. He also let Fred smoke.

Fred drove around the block clockwise. From each side street Lyle got a view of Old Vic's battered cupola poking above the trees and roof lines of summer homes. It was unsettling—the cupola, a little booth standing atop the third story, was Old Vic's most exposed and weather-beaten feature. Any paint was scabby and vestigial. The cupola's large oval oculus suggested a blinded Cyclops, its leaded glass shattered by determined boys with BB guns long before Lyle was born.

They turned onto Poplar again, and approached the house.

“Slow down, please, Fred? Actually, could you park?”

Fred did so. Odd request, but Mr. Hall is, or was, a real estate tycoon.

“And roll down the windows, please? And mind turning off the radio? ...Thanks. Cut the engine too, please, Fred? ...Thank you.”

If Mr. Hall wants to smell Old Vic, Fred figured, this could be worth more than one folded twenty. He glanced at Lyle through his mirror, lit a butt, and texted his wife.

To the west, clouds glowing orange and pink were eclipsed by the hulking old house. It grew darker. The last of the traffic was now gone. Lyle strained to hear. He tried to listen *harder*, if that's possible.

Quiet. Listen.

He was right. Whispers, very hushed. They seemed to leach through the cracks in the Victorian's boarded windows. Random, silken sighs. Like a swirl of fallen leaves. The whispers sent a sharp chill through his chest. It didn't sound like English. Italian, maybe. But he picked up the expression of human suffering and sorrow. Worse still, a profound loss of hope. And something more—dread. The voices were female. He imagined them mourning something. Maybe a daughter. Or a baby. He imagined them conferring in secret. As if choosing one from among them, a brave one, to come forward.

Lyle shut his eyes and let the whispers penetrate him. That's when he saw it. Lids tight, he saw Belinda's tombstone. His first wife. The sweet-hearted one. But a new name was inscribed under *BELINDA*. His heart pounded to a stop. He could only make out that it began with a *G*.

Stunned and shaky now, he clearly heard a solo voice. It was delicate. A girl's.

Eye you touchy.

It wasn't a question. *Eye you touchy*. It wasn't English. It was terrifying.

As if discovered, the young voice, the headstone, the whisperers, all abruptly vanished.

Lyle opened his eyes wide.

Fred at the wheel. A decrepit old house. Sundown. A chilling breeze.

Fred admitted to hearing nothing unusual. The whole village would be chattering about disembodied voices if anyone else had heard the whisperers. Especially now, mid-October, when Bridgehampton turns quiet and there's little to bullshit about.

Fred started up the van and shifted into drive. Lyle took a last look at the brooding Victorian. The blush of sunset created a phantom red glow up in the cupola. He snapped a photo of it with his phone. But he didn't want to make a big deal of this. Cats in heat. Fred agreed. Cats can even sound like a crying baby. There was a sudden skitter as they pulled away. A black thing swooped out from the porch and darted into the dusk.

But this whispering was a big deal. A name added to Belinda's gravestone. An unearthly voice. Strange words. Waves of sadness. Lyle's mind, slowed to a crawl for months by his accident, now percolated with fragmented thoughts. Only a family member could be added to Belinda's grave. *G* could only stand for *Georgia*. At that realization, his heart skipped one icy beat. The whisperers wanted Lyle to see a vision of that tomb.

Maybe all this was nothing—a simple symptom of exhaustion. But Lyle didn't want another symptom. He'd like to be singled out. Flattered. Maybe this meant that, a year after his deadly car crash in the middle of town, Lyle Hall was somehow special.

Or had finally lost his mind.

Either way, the old wheelchair had to be replaced. The medical supply company was still answering the phone when he rang them. And they deliver.



3. Under Surveillance

“Dad, what are you doing?”

Georgie’s standard cell-phone greeting. It’s Tuesday morning and her tone—*keep this brief and to-the-point*—conveys how busy she is these days. How she has no time for her father’s eccentricities. Lyle knows this, but last night has changed everything.

“Surfing. Why.”

“I know you’re in town. I can hear angry townspeople. Going for coffee?”

Georgie’s voice grips his heart after last night’s strange vision. Her attempts at repartee feel precious now, it’s like he must memorize her words, or lose them.

“You must have eyes everywhere.”

“You know coffee’s not allowed, Dad. Caffeine Heart trouble. Et cetera.”

“You would deprive me of my one guilty pleasure. Gertie’s coffee doesn’t have much coffee in it, by the way.”

After a groan, Georgie says, “So you finally got a motorized wheelchair.”

“I’m impressed—your master’s in forensic psychology paying off.”

“Don’t do anything forensic and you’ll be fine. Listen, if you’re venturing out on your own in an electric chair, you have to have an orange pennant.”

“So I can look like the village idiot?”

“Your words, not mine. This is about not getting crumpled by a semi while crossing Montauk Highway. Which I know you just did.”

“Oh, Big Brother meets Big Daughter!”

“Dad,” Georgie is impatient now. She needs to get into a meeting with Aiden Queeley, Chief of Southampton Police. “We live by rules. That’s a new one as of today. I’m getting you a pennant for that chair. You’re going to use it. Okay? Gotta run.”

“Fine, fine, fine,” Lyle says, feeling her withdraw. The line goes dead.

Parked outside the Southampton Police Department staff entrance in her unmarked Crown Victoria, Georgie sighs at her phone. There's a bicycle shop nearby she can call. They sell pennants. Later for Citarella. Tired from her overnight schedule, the back of her head meets the headrest and she closes her eyes a moment. Dad. Lyle Hall, Esquire. Her responsibility. He was once hell on wheels. Like flash cards, her mind flips through images of life with father. His absenteeism, his drinking, his known eye for the ladies. That came to the fore most disturbingly back when Mom was in the final throes of her battle with breast cancer, and Georgie was only 15. His fixation on Dar. Her elevation to difficult wife and stepmother. Yet Lyle was generous with his money, an abrupt way to express his feelings, such as they were. Georgie eventually cut that cord, informing him she would pay for college herself with a school loan. And then another loan for grad school at John Jay. But when Lyle insisted on pulling strings to get Georgie her shot at a detective's badge, she had to accept. Then, after his horrific car crash, she had to make an effort. Drop off his meals and, now that he's out and about, monitor his movements. However, spending real face time with Lyle, even now in his damaged iteration, was still tense—so much old baggage. These days there were moments she thought she might lose it and just scream at him over the dumbest thing, like his forgetfulness. Other times she thought she'd burst into tears in front of him, confined to his chair. She was glad she could truthfully say she was busy, had to run, had a meeting. He had, after all, gotten her this job. So here she was at 30, Lyle's enabler and scold. She takes a deep breath and swings open her heavy car door. Oddly enough, they gave her a white car, but she tells herself *choose your battles*. Next up, Chief Queeley.

Rolling on the sidewalk toward Gertie's luncheonette, the beauty of the October morning strikes him. The cool crispness of the air seems to promise something to come. Lyle passes a parked police cruiser. The big cop at the wheel, Sergeant Frank Barsotti, nods to him.



4. Upstanding Man

Heading out alone now for the first time since his accident—Lyle had let go his hired “man handler” earlier—he encountered challenges right away. Just getting down the ramp from his porch is tricky. Then there’s the cemetery. It’s right across the street from his house. It’s very old. And Belinda’s there. Lyle’s been more conscious of that since his return home. And during his sleepless night a burning urge developed to just drive his chair over to her grave and look at the headstone. Did it have a new name? No way it could. And there was no way he was going into that cemetery alone. Instead, Lyle had formulated a shaky plan. Coffee’s a big part of it. As is his new chair.

Before hitting the coffee shop, he needs to stop by Fraser Newton’s office. Lyle’s first visit to see his ex-partner in a year. The quaint bungalow office stands just off Montauk Highway, behind a five-foot privet hedge. It has a handicap ramp Lyle never noticed before. The new chair handles the incline nicely as he rolls up to the door. It feels awkward. But the office is open. Fraser starts early.

Lyle had typically worked from his home office but he’d stopped by Fraser’s routinely. Entering now, he’s struck by its familiarity. The reception area’s leather chairs, working fireplace, framed whaling prints, hurricane lamps, scrimshaw and seafaring artifacts all mean to convey a sense of history and Protestant work ethic. And there sits Josie, Fraser’s longtime assistant, at her desk, smiling at him. Josie is self-assured and smart, attractive at 40 with her blond-streaked hair and firm figure. They exchange pleasantries; it’s been a while. But something vaguely uncomfortable hangs in the air between them.

Josie takes in the new Lyle. His beard, she knows, covers scars. Then there’s the weight loss, gray temples, exhausted eyes. And, of course, the wheelchair. Not the Lyle of old—tall, impetuous and able-bodied—but interesting.

Fast talking can be heard from the adjoining office.

“Is he on the phone?”

“He’s awake,” Josie deadpans.

Lyle rolls to Fraser’s door and nudges it open to make his presence known. Fraser Newton, super-WASP: handsome, thick dark hair, mid-forties, married, two kids, made a boatload of money with Lyle in their lawyer/mortgage-broker partnership, is indeed on the phone.

“No. That’s right. No can do. Trust me. My way is for the best. You’ll see. Gotta run. You too. Later.” He hangs up and meets Lyle’s gaze.

“Fraser.” Lyle rolls into the office. Fraser wears a navy blazer and gingham shirt.

“*Ebenezer*. Are you still paralyzed or something?”

“No, I just really love my new chair.”

“It is nifty. I got your surprise text—what was it you wanted?”

“To thank you personally for your support during my long, difficult recovery.”

Lyle studies Fraser’s expression for any sign of human commiseration.

“Hey, Newton Properties’ slogan is ‘We Care.’ Oh, Josie?”

“What,” comes Josie’s voice from the outer office.

“Didn’t we send something to Lyle in the hospital? Last year?”

“The complete get-well helium balloon collection. Two dozen. With unicorns.”

“There you go. And considerately hypo-allergenic.”

“I still have them at home.” Lyle rolls closer to Fraser’s desk. “I’ve got two things I want to discuss.” Fraser glances at his desk clock. It’s brass and nautical. “But first, who were you just screwing over on the phone? Anyone I’d know?”

“The deli. Ordering breakfast. So who do *you* want to screw over today?”

“Fraser, I want to *unscrew* something.” A wave of residual exhaustion hits him.

“Unscrewing, huh? Is that like the opposite of sex?”

“Possibly. Listen—first, I want to take care of Dar.”

“Take care of your second ex-wife? In a *Sopranos* kind of way?”

“I’m serious. I want to set things right. Ameliorate the bad blood. I want to purchase the Florida condo for her. Buy it outright and let her have it.”

“Let her have it, huh...” Fraser considers this. “You are a changed man. What if Dar remarries? Brassy blonde. Sunburned cleavage. Still in her forties. Some coot down there could be falling in love right now and getting himself a prescription.”

“Spare me your image of my ex. I just want her to be secure in her home.” Lyle leans toward Fraser. “Look. Last year I threatened to put her in a much cheaper place— *inland*—once the Bonita Shores lease was up. The end of this year.”

“So she expects the worst. During the holidays, no less. That’s so Lyle.”

“That’s what I want to change. Buy her the condo. They’re selling, right?”

“Florida? There may be a unit or two. What kind of mortgage you want?”

“Fraser, I want a cash purchase. And I’ll pay the maintenance.”

“I’m a mortgage broker and you don’t want a mortgage? Have I shown you the door?”

He gestures behind Lyle.

“C’mon, Fraser. Make it happen. I’m just not into mortgages at this point in life.”

Fraser sighs as he swivels to face a cabinet full of hard-copy files.

“Hmmm...Hall...Hall... Cash purchase...not into mortgages...”

Lyle takes in the sixty-inch oil painting over Fraser’s fireplace: sailors killing a big whale at sea. “The other thing is the old Victorian house on Poplar,” he says offhandedly.

“What about it?” says Fraser, his back to Lyle.

“I want to buy that, too.”

Silence. Fraser extracts a file and rotates back to his desk and Lyle Hall.

“Here’s the Bonita Shores file. Note how I’m ignoring your last statement and continuing as though you are not out of your fucking mind.”

“One-eleven Poplar.”

Fraser tries to read Lyle. “Ah yes,” he says with mock seriousness. “You speak of the, how shall I say, *haunted whorehouse*? You want to rescue a derelict property Southampton took over under eminent domain. A site whose condemned structures the township will demolish shortly, in order to build a park for preschoolers.”

Oh, shit. The old place is finally coming down. Soon. Why now? Lyle punts.

“Yeah. Fraser, I want to restore it,” he bullshits.

Fraser winces. “No you don’t, old boy. That place could collapse on its own this afternoon. It’s an eyesore, a public hazard. Shelter for vermin and who knows what.”

Lyle looks down. He actually does know what. And a terror is building in his heart that, if this demolition proceeds and he never hears that girl’s voice again, he’ll never decipher last

night's premonition—young Georgie's name being added to her mother's headstone. And he'll never hear his own girl's voice again.

Fraser cannot see Lyle's hands, how his fingernails dig into his palms. He narrows his eyes at the man in the wheelchair. "What have you done with the real Lyle Hall? The wise-ass. The man who'd pick up a truck if he thought there was a nickel under it..."

"Fraser." Lyle looks up. He sounds uncharacteristically earnest. "I just really want that place to remain standing and be renovated."

"For *what*? You're into historical preservation now? Isn't Dar pro bono enough? How often do we restore our old warehouses anyway? Seriously, Lyle, I'm concerned about you." Fraser peers intently at his old partner. "Really. You don't look so good. And another thing, where you gonna get the whores?"

Lyle grimaces as he meets Fraser's eyes. Decades of their business deals and close friendship swirl through him in an instant. He snorts. Suddenly both men burst out laughing.

"That's another reason I came to you," Lyle says through laughter. He takes a tissue from Fraser's desk and dabs his eyes. "I'll need your help with staffing."

"Gentlemen," says Josie from her desk, "I can hear you."

"Ah, I miss our old times," Fraser smiles. "Listen, I have a conference call in a minute. How about we circle back tomorrow? Maybe you'll be of sound mind by then."

"Maybe. So Fraser, as far as Bonita Shores. I need you to call Dar. I can't do it."

Fraser frowns. "That's a deal breaker. I'm not calling Dar Hall."

"This is me begging. It'll be a good call. I just can't."

"Tweet her, Lyle. I ain't callin' that gal for no amount o' money. Oh, and the way you want to structure it, this actually is for no amount o' money!"

Fraser is already on the phone as Lyle rolls back out to reception. Josie is up and leaning against her desk, her palms on the desk edge and her ankles crossed, barring his path. Lyle sees she's wearing a fitted shift dress hemmed above the knee. It's an autumnal bronze that sets off her gypsy-princess pearl necklace. Her legs, still tan, taper down to black heels. Josie pouts quizzically.

"You're not upstanding today?"

That means something, but Lyle can't place it. There are lots of things he can't place these days. Is she trying to bust his balls? They already are busted.

“No, but I do see a spinal-injury specialist in Southampton once a week.”

Josie smiles and stands. She leans toward Lyle. Her necklace dangles down as her fingers find the collar of his polo shirt. Lyle’s neck tingles, he absorbs her warmth and her fragrance. Familiar. Josie flips up Lyle’s collar so it’s standing, framing his head like a modern day Elizabethan. And something very strange ripples through his heart.

She stands back, hands on hips. “There. Upstanding, right?”

“Oh. Yeah.” He’s a little embarrassed. He actually used to pop up his polo collar when not wearing his usual expensive suit and tie. So obnoxious. Josie called the look “upstanding.” The thought gives him a twinge of regret. Why?

Josie now pauses outside Fraser’s office. He can be heard on the phone.

“I recall that rakish old Lyle of yore,” she smiles.

Rolling to the front door, Lyle grins. “Well, old Lyle rides again.”

Resisting an impulse to help him out the door, Josie watches him maneuver onto the ramp and roll down. The new Lyle certainly has issues. Even his issues have issues. Still, the man is...interesting.

Out on the sidewalk Lyle halts his chair. *Shit!* What an *idiotic* retort! His uneasiness returns. Then a flicker of memory comes. Then a flood.

Josie, younger. Lyle, healthy, clean-shaven. Josie would occasionally drop off papers at Lyle’s home office on Ocean Road. He might be there, dressed casually. Josie might playfully check the collar of his polo shirt and, if it wasn’t “upstanding,” she’d make it so, her forearms resting on his shoulders. One time, following golf and the inevitable cocktails, Lyle called Josie, asking her to bring over a client’s contract while he showered and dressed to meet the client for dinner. He now recalled how Josie arrived at his office, and there he was in a terry robe. How something else was upstanding. How pretty her panties were.

Ten minutes later, Josie was back in her top-down Fiat and Lyle was in his shower. Dar could have returned from shopping or tanning at any time, which intensified the secret dalliance. Lyle made subsequent phone contact with Josie at the office. He recalls referring to Dar as his

“future ex-wife” and saying he needed to see another contract. How she could let herself in. How she wedged the contract inside his screen door, rang the doorbell and drove off.

Josie got Lyle, all right. He hides an unexpected wave of emotion behind his sunglasses, suddenly feeling how Josie must feel. A good girl. Who he let go. Or drove away.

He gets his chair in gear and gets on his phone. He needs to connect with local historian and prig Noah Craig.

Coffee first.

