



THE NOSTALGIA MURDERS

By Rosemary Yaco

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ROSEMARY YACO

A Lynne Lewis Mystery by Rosemary Yaco

Author of the Lynne Lewis West Africa Series:

Murder in the Peace Corps

Appointment in Togo:

Murder in the Fulbright Program

Cotonou Means Death:

Murder at the American Cultural Center

Murder at a Small Embassy: Evil in Benin

Dedicated to the past and to those that strive to safeguard its records and to interpret its mysteries in order to understand the present and the future.

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I would like to thank my editor, Sonia Yaco, who is also my daughter, for her careful, perceptive, artistic and creative help. And also to thank her for inspiration from the archives she provided of our family and my early life, which has some similarities with that of Lynne Lewis.

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Although the author used memory and research sources to make the locale and era real, the people and incidents are fictitious. No such people attended the fictional Northern High and performed the acts that puzzled and shocked Lynne Lewis who is also fictitious.

Chapter 1: A Voice from the Past

At last, Lynne Lewis succeeded in getting both of them asleep at once. She sighed with contentment. She was pleased to be the mother of the nine month old twins, Savannah and Ben. But sometime she longed for times like nine years in West Africa, when she could occasionally be alone with her thoughts. She poured herself a fresh cup of coffee and looked around her at the expensive but tiny apartment in the prestigious Watergate Building in Washington D.C. In many ways, it was an improvement over the housing provided by the American government in what passed for luxury in that impoverished African country. Now there was always reliable, clean, hot and cold water coming out of the tap. Stella, a perky red-haired student at Georgetown University, who came twice a week to clean, watch the babies and give Lynne a chance to go to some lunches and receptions and occasionally go to libraries to do research for the book she would some day write about West Africa.. With all her modern appliances and lively Stella's help she enjoyed an American standard of convenience, cleanliness and comfort. But she missed the big mansion she had shared with her State department husband and the faithful government paid servants who had done the housework. As much as she loved the babies, she sometimes felt restless after her nine years in West Africa, in her Peace Corps, Fulbright, and United States Information Service jobs and then, after she was Everett's wife, an Embassy employee. Her husband was now desk officer for West Africa at the State Department and it was important for them to attend social functions to keep up the networks that were highly important to his career prospects which were bright now that he had tenure and this influential post. In two or three years, he would be expected to take an overseas position again. Always ambitious, Everett now hoped to be Ambassador in a small largely unnoticed country or Political Officer in a large important one.

This afternoon, for once, she had the luxury of thinking what she would do with her precious hour to herself before the twins woke up, crying and needing care.

Her stylish, small living room with its kitchen el was especially crowded right now. A UPS man had to fit a big box onto the tiny elevator this morning and brought her something to fill any leisure time she might have in between days with the children and some evenings with Everett. Marriage to Everett and having children was what she had dreamed of in her last years in Africa. But she felt something was lacking. The box crowding her room might give her something of her own to think about and work on whenever she found a few free moments.

Several weeks earlier she had received a letter from Grand Rapids, Michigan that puzzled her.

Dear Lynne,

Despite our fragmented family I finally have tracked you down. The first members of our scattered kin that I contacted said they hadn't had a current address for you for years. Finally, someone came up with the news that you are married to a State Department Official and have twins. Congratulations!

You may or may not have heard that I am the executor for my sister Ethel's estate. Poor dear died several weeks ago after a long, boring illness. I found homes for her cats, and am now concentrating on the papers. In case you are wondering, there wasn't enough money left to cause a fuss and after the bills are paid, what's left will go to the Humane Society. I learned from a note she left me that she changed her will ten years ago when she learned you got a doctorate from Michigan State. By the way, that achievement of yours pleased us all. After three hundred years in America, you are the first of us to have such an honor. We are still waiting for the first member to make a lot of money. When Ethel cleaned

our mother's big old house she found a trunk full of Mother's papers. Anyway, she figured that since you are a scholar, you would be the one to deal with them and certain problems mentioned in them. Like me, Ethel settled in Grand Rapids and bless her heart, had kept those documents in the attic all these years, occasionally looking over a few of them and worrying because, as she kept saying vaguely, "Something should be done."

I will send them to you soon. They are unsorted, but the volume of the diary that is on top is what Ethel kept rereading. Do what you think is right with them. If you want to destroy them, you have the legal right. As to whether you have the moral right, you will have to decide.

*Faithfully yours,
your Uncle Albert*

"Fragmented family!" How true! Lynne saw her grandmother only when she was a young child. She knew Aunt Ethel, a spinster, as they used to call her in those days, had taken care of her in her last days and had continued in the family home.

Lynne was born in East Lansing, Michigan. Her parents went to college there and then got state jobs in Lansing and settled down there. When she was very little, her parents took her to Grand Rapids for holiday gatherings with her grandmother and other relatives. But after some sort of fierce family blow up, her parents stayed away from the whole Grand Rapids clan.

Lynne sometimes heard from Uncle Albert, usually in a note on a Christmas card. This letter hinted at something mysterious. What? She ripped open the big box. She would at least peek at the papers, and plan to look at them a little at a time during the year ahead while she was home with her lively twins.

At the very top of stacks of yellowed papers she saw a notebook, decorated with expressions of an earlier era. "Come on hepcats, don't be a drip, let's do the chicken scratch, I drool for you, wanna go steady, Ooh, Frankie, you send me."

On the first page, dark blue ink proclaimed, "DIARY, LUCY LAWRENCE, November 1944-May 1945" and then, in red ink, "Private. Do not snoop!"

Thinking of the family history she knew, she figured Lucy would have been about fifteen when she wrote this. Lynne was intrigued. What kind of person was this young woman who became her grandmother? She tried to recollect what her mother, Margaret Lawrence, had told her. She remembered her mother's description. "She was lively and intelligent, could be fun to be with. But she could hold a grudge." Something happened to make a breach between her mother and grandmother. Perhaps they would eventually have made up before her grandmother's death but Lynne's parents were killed in an automobile accident when Lynne was in college. Now, after all this fragmentation, as Uncle Albert called it, she found herself wanting have some sort of connection to her family's past.

She was about to read the first page of the diary, written in an untidy scrawl, when the telephone rang. She crossed the room eagerly to get it, thinking it was about time for her husband's afternoon call. Everett had turned into a surprisingly good husband after their return to the United States. She thought fleetingly of the time when she had suspected he was a murderer and wanted to kill her to hide his guilt. And that blonde trespasser Daphne! But he turned out to be devoted to the twins and to love and cherish Lynne, partly because she was their mother, and partly because they had shared so much of the danger and strangeness of West Africa for nine years. He was one of those men who improved in looks with age. As a young state department official, he had

been rather dorky, awkward, and stiff. Now he had filled out a little. He wore his hair a little longer now and it was still brown and had a wave. He walked with confidence now, probably because of his success and promotion. And working out at the office gym made him fit.

“Hello!” Probably her voice held her happy expectation of his call.

It wasn't Everett! A woman's voice, one vaguely familiar, said sourly, “You sound happy! You must be pleased to have pulled off the theft of the family papers!”

“What? Who is this? Do you have the wrong number?”

“No. You are Lynne Lewis. I'm your cousin Mercedes. Don't try to play innocent.”

During her years in Africa, Lynne seldom thought of her family. When her parents died, she had thought of herself as really having no relatives. But now, she remembered a few, mostly uncomfortable family parties when she had met some aunts, uncles and cousins. Uncle Albert, the executor was a nice guy. And Aunt Ethel sent a card and note every year. And now, she remembered her cousin Mercy. Back then, someone had said to the laughter of the group that Mercy showed no mercy when she wanted her way. Once when Lynne's mother had been ill, she had stayed with Mercy and her parents for a week. She still remembered, that as a four year old, Mercy started her demands with a piercing loud wail, and only afterwards said, something like, “I want some candy.” Her mother scuttled around to fulfill her desire. Lynne had a few other contacts with Mercy, always unpleasant. What was her problem now?

“Oh, Mercy. What is bothering you?”

“Send me my grandmother's diary. It is full of lies. There was no murder. She was an evil woman.”

Murder! That word! Again. Why did she always run into it! In Africa, she had been involved in solving a number of murders in the tiny American communities of Togo and Benin. How could a diary written in 1944 talk of a murder that would arouse this high level of hostility from Mercedes in the new millennium?

“For your own good, Lynne, take my advice. Send it to me immediately. Don't read it. They aren't all dead yet. Knowing too much can still hurt you!”

Chapter 2: Glamour Girls at Northern High

Lynne began reading. The first page was dated November 7, 1944.

Dear Diary:

Even though there are two blank pages left in my old diary, I'll start this new one that I got for my birthday. I have a lot to say. This has been the strangest day in my life.

Lynne found herself almost in a trance, feeling she was her grandmother, Lucy Lawrence, fifteen years old at Northern High.

As Lucy dressed in her gray short, straight skirt, and new blue cardigan sweater buttoned down the back, and put on her bobby socks and saddle shoes, she remembered it was election day. Her parents were already out the door since they had gotten up an hour early to go vote. She knew they felt it was crucial to elect President Roosevelt for a fourth term. "You don't change horses in the middle of a stream," her father solemnly said often. He and her mother thought Roosevelt was a sort of a saint, who led the country during the seemingly hopeless, depressing days of the depression when she was a baby and her Dad was lucky to have a sixty hour a week job that paid 15 dollars a week. They even named the cat Delanor, for the president and his even more saintly wife. That forceful three colored feline rubbed up against her leg as she wrote, demanding a pat.

She bundled up in the navy pea coat that was so stylish now. Her brother Frank bought it for her in the PX on his naval base. It was cold. A fringe of long icicles hung from most windows. After twenty minutes of brisk walking through on the frosty sidewalks, she reached the main entrance of Northern High. Inside the door, she greeted the life-sized statue of Abraham Lincoln in the front hall. "Good morning, Abe!" Northern High wasn't in the north of Grand Rapids, but on the west side. It had been named for the northern side in the Civil War. When it was established in 1900 some of the founders were proud veterans of that conflict. The building was getting old and dilapidated. Since the crash of 1929 there had been almost no money for repairs. Somehow things were kept together by the janitors: in recent years, since the draft started, the handyman/janitor was Mr. Begley, a 4 F, not physically fit for service in the armed forces. Lucy saw him, limping a little, in his bib overalls, carrying a hammer and other repair tools. He was probably on his way to the assembly auditorium. She knew he was especially proud of his care of the big stage there with its polished wooden floor. Lucy wondered how much longer he could continue replacing boards and supports and keeping it usable. When they had their almost daily rehearsals of the chorus line for the big yearly show, she could feel the stage floor shaking.

Lucy had been persuaded to attend those sessions even though she would rather be in her history class to please the principal, Mr. Charles Weston, who the students secretly called Charley. Charley's philosophy was that everyone should "get into the picture."

He often expressed the philosophy that group social activities made good democratic citizens. He would excuse anyone from any class to attend a rehearsal of the Folliettes, chorus line that was the main attraction in the Northern High Follies which made the school famous throughout the whole western part of the state. He told Lucy that he was disappointed that she obviously preferred to spend her free time studying,

reading, and writing. Lucy knew he was right. She even liked to spend her school time in classes, listening intently in case the undereducated faculty said something valuable. After being exhorted to participate, she agreed to be a producer and be on the scenery committee for the Follies. Charley told her that he needed someone intelligent and reliable like her to help, since the fifteen year old would-be glamour girl dancers with their coatings of pancake makeup seldom followed through on necessary administrative tasks.

The early part of the day was ordinary, with no hint of the horror to come. She almost bumped into Wheel Wexler, dark and intense, also obviously deep in thought. He was in the category of valuable, dependable students. But he hadn't needed urging to join the production committees. Determined to be a wheel, an important person in the school, even though he wasn't an athlete, he was a member of at least five clubs, an officer of most and president of three. He had told her he was going to be a Big Man On Campus. A BMOC.

Tall, blonde Joanne greeted Lucy as she was twirling the combination lock to open her locker. "Hi there! Well, this is the day your friend Rosenfeldt will be thrown out! My uncle says he's a dictator and he practically ruined the country."

Lucy didn't like to quarrel with Joanne. They were best friends despite Lucy's parents who never quite fit in and Joanne's family's fundamentalist church background and conservative attitudes that perhaps went with their status as owners of the West Side Dairy.

She mildly protested. "Roosevelt won't lose. People realize he's saving our country from the Nazis. You'll see!"

Joanne laughed and began to talk about her favorite topics, fashion and school gossip. "My mother bought me a fuschia sweater. I know that it's the new color now, but I'm going to return it to Wurzburg's. Since I am on the Fashion Board, I have to be sure I don't wear just any old thing. Don't you think I look better in blue?" And then, switching the subject and lowering her voice, "Wait until you hear this. Someone from Ottawa High told me what Betty Lou was really doing when she left Grand Rapids for almost a year, saying she had to visit an aunt."

Lucy knew that Joanne was jealous of Betty Lou who was the most popular girl in the school. Even though both their families were of Dutch background, Betty Lou's let her wear make up, go to movies, and do other worldly things like singing and dancing in the Northern Follies. Joanne's family was stricter. Joanne even had to hide her lipstick in her purse and put it on after she got to school.

"Tell me about it after school. I have to get to class."

Lucy didn't like to admit it, but she envied Betty Lou too. She wished she could make the wonderful, all around guy, Dutch Van Oldenburg look at her the way he looked at Betty Lou. She was sorry Betty Lou ever returned from her long visit to her aunt to take up again her place as the school queen. And now she was the star of the Follies show. The bell rang and they rushed off to a series of classes. She felt happy because when she passed Dutch, he noticed her and said, "How ya doin' Sport?" with a friendly smile. She felt no premonition that they were all going towards a terrible happening. The hall was full of teenagers, rushing thoughtlessly bumping into her and each other. Some of them were quite young since the seventh and eighth grades were in the same building.

"Lucy," someone said in a neutral way. It was George Lawrence. Strange in her somewhat isolated family, she had a cousin in the school. George was a pain, stiff and

too proper, a goody-goody, a mama's boy, and a tattle tale. She returned his greeting in an unenthusiastic manner to match his. "George."

At two o'clock she went to the Follies rehearsal. Charley was delighted to excuse her from history so she could, "get into the picture."

Twelve attractive girls dressed in short stiff ballerina skirts wearing noisy, clacking black patent leather tap shoes, were milling around, jostling to be in front of the big mirror on the wall or looking at hand held compacts, powdering noses, refreshing bright pink lipstick, combing mops of carefully curled, mostly blonde hair. Most of them were from Dutch families where natural blondes were common. Six of the costumes were blue and six were white, all with pink polka dots.

Betty Lou, because she was the star, had a different costume with an especially wide and fluffy net layer of pink skirts reaching far above her knees.

They barely greeted Lucy, but she checked their names off the list and examined them to see all the costumes were ok and no threads were hanging. Little Danny Kaminski, his big ears almost flapping, was rushing around, checking the technical aspects of the show. He was younger than the others, having skipped several grades because he was so clever. Some people said he was a genius. He was the only one that understood the ancient spotlight and stage light system, kept together with tape and spliced pieces of wire. Parts of it came from the previous century. Danny was short and thin, with wispy mouse-colored hair. His small triangular face was framed by two big ears that looked almost like handles. He wore glasses, as all really smart boys seemed to. She wondered how many of the good looking athletic boys were making do with limited vision in order to protect their appearance and reputation. According to the movies, when you take off the glasses, someone falls in love with you.

The twelve Folliettes did a number on the stage. None of them wore glasses. In their makeup and fluffy costumes, every one of them looked pretty, even glamorous.

Then, the spotlight was on Betty Lou, the star. She sang a moving song about missing boy friends in the armed forces called, "I Don't Get Around Much Any More." She said she was dedicating it to our boys in the war, especially those that landed at Normandy and were now on their way to Berlin. Then there was a big dance number. The twelve Folliettes danced in a crescent around the back of the stage. Their clacking taps bombarded the room with sound as Carol Dykstra played Tommy Dorsey's Boogie Woogie.

Then came the moment that Lucy would always remember with a shudder. Betty Lou entered from the left, tapping her way to the spot where she was scheduled to do a solo number, while the others continued doing rhythmic steps. Miss Shelby, the drama teacher, had outlined in white chalk the area where Betty Lou was to dance her main solo: no one else dared to step into it.

Lynne was in front of the stage now, in the first row, to observe how the production would look to the audience. She saw very clearly the whole panorama on the stage. She saw beautiful Betty Lou enter, saw her start her wildly energetic solo, then, heard a cracking noise, so loud that it penetrated all the other din, and saw Betty Lou fall though the floor, and out of sight. A hole had opened up and she disappeared! Probably into the basement.

There was panic. Betty Lou was probably badly injured. The drama teacher sent a student to get the school nurse who was there that day. They probably would need a doctor, but they knew most of the young ones were at war and the old ones no longer made house calls because their waiting rooms were always crowded. Lucy followed the nurse to the basement and saw lovely Betty Lou on the cement floor, bleeding, in a

strange, unnatural position. The nurse examined her. "She's unconscious. Very weak. Get her to Butterworth Hospital, right away. Some of the strongest boys carried her to the principal's Hudson, one of the few cars in the parking lot because of gas rationing.

Lucy and the performers and teachers from the auditorium watched nearby, joined by a throng of others that heard the commotion and came out to see what was happening.

The principal supervised placing of the still unmoving Betty Lou into his car. He gave the keys to the head coach to drive and asked him to report back when he learned how badly hurt the school star was.

Lucy, in the crowd, had a sense of unreality. How could this have happened to what started as an ordinary day at Northern High?

Someone in that gaping noisy crowd spoke a muffled judgment, "It serves her right!" Lucy looked around. Who said it?

She tried to read the expressions on the faces of those just behind her. Danny, with his strange thin face and huge ears looked agonized. She noticed her cousin George had joined the crowd. He looked oddly impassive. Neat, blonde Joanne came from history class. Maybe she was hiding a look of pleasure when she saw Betty Lou, all crumpled, being carried. Unk Dykema, the history teacher who loved to squeeze any girl that came within range, looked highly distressed. Charley, the principal, looked strong and serious. Was one of them hiding deep feelings? Who was glad that Betty Lou was badly hurt?

Chapter 3: How Did It Happen?

Lynne, deeply involved in reading her grandmother's account of that shocking day in 1944, was startled into the present when she heard twin wails, sounding like fire sirens. She plunged into the noisy, harried routine she still followed at least four times every twenty four hours. Changing two diapers, heating two bottles, feeding two babies who each wanted to be attended to first, kept her jumping from one to the other. In the midst of all this, she thought she heard a faint knock on the door. Maybe someone delivered a package. No time to check that out now. Finally, all crying stopped. She looked at her beautiful quiet babies, intently sucking their milk from the propped bottles. When they were both satisfied she placed the two babies, now smiling and laughing, into the playpen with an assortment of soft toys.

Then she remembered the knock and opened the door. No one was there and nothing had been delivered. It must have been someone looking for a neighbor.

The telephone rang. This time, it was Everett.

He asked how the twins were and said he would be home for dinner at six.

"Everett. I'm having an unusual day. That box of papers my uncle mentioned arrived this morning. Then I got a threatening call from my Cousin Mercy."

"Why? What about? How could she be threatening? Did we get a Christmas card from her?"

"She told me it was dangerous to read my grandmother's diary."

Everett's voice had the impatience she often heard when he was an important official in Benin and she tried to talk to him. "Lynne, can this wait until evening? I'm busy here."

Talking about it could wait. But her thoughts raced. She must read on to see if the diary would tell her why Mercy was saying such things. The twins were quiet now and she could go on reading.

"Dear Diary, this is a day I will never forget. When I heard that reaction to Betty Lou's serious fall, I looked around, trying to see who would have said Betty Lou deserved to fall. Then I started searching my own soul. Betty Lou could be cruel. She once called me a sloppy cow. But almost everyone seemed to adore her and said besides being pretty, she had a great personality."

After only a few sentences, Lynne was once more mentally transported to that place and era when her grandmother was going through difficult and perilous times.

Lucy knew that obviously the rehearsal was over. And she couldn't think of trying to concentrate on the history class. Groups of students were talking, trying to make sense of what had happened. She walked over to where Wheel Wexler was standing. He was sometimes a pain with his self-important manner, but at least he could think things through.

"Why did the accident happen? The floor was strong enough where the twelve Folliettes were stomping like a herd of cattle. Why did it fail where Betty Lou was dancing alone?"

"Lucy, everyone knew that no one but Betty Lou was supposed to step on that square chalked on the stage."

Wheel continued grimly, "I'm going to find out why she fell. I supervised the preparation of the floor, myself. Let's go down to the basement and see what we can find out." As they walked, he continued talking, "I knew the stage creaks when you walk on it."

It is old and dangerous. I told Charley about that. But he didn't care. He insisted it was ok. He loves the Follies. He says it's good for wartime morale."

The light in the basement was dim, but their eyes got used to it and they could see quite well. They saw the big blood spots where Betty Lou had fallen. Wheel found a flashlight and shined it on the ceiling which was under the stage above. There was something odd about the hole Betty Lou had fallen through. Three wide planks were still fastened firmly on one end, but were slanted down.

Wheel said, "Yesterday Mr. Begley and I worked to strengthen the stage. We knew that area was especially weak because it had once had a trap door for a magic trick. We put extra boards underneath it. And we cleaned up carefully after ourselves."

"Really? But look!" Lucy pointed at some sawdust on the floor.

"Yes. Really. And something else." Wheel looked the tool table over carefully until he found the big blue metal saw with its sharp teeth.

"This isn't in the right place. Someone has used this besides me and Mr. Begley. That sawdust, those little splinters of wood, they weren't here yesterday."

"Wheel, I don't understand. How did that terrible accident happen?"

"Oh, come on now Lucy. You know. You can see. There was no accident. Someone sawed through those boards. Someone intended to terribly hurt Betty Lou!"

Chapter 4: Radio News

Horrified at Wheel's pronouncement that obviously the injury to Betty Lou was intentional, Lucy said, "Terrible! I'm afraid you're right. I'm worried about how badly she was hurt. The nurse didn't say. Maybe tomorrow we can learn from the hospital. What a thing to do! How evil can people be?"

Wheel said seriously, "We'd better tell the principal about this." He signed. "I know he won't like being told. He wants to think everything is fine, even though Betty Lou had to go to the hospital, and he still hopes that everyone is getting into his darn picture. If I try to tell him someone did this on purpose to hurt Betty Lou, he'll be angry with me."

"Why don't you wait a while. He'll probably investigate and learn the truth himself. No point making yourself the bringer of bad news and the scapegoat."

He nodded, looking miserable.

No one made an attempt to continue with classes. Students and teachers wandered the halls, talking about the terrible accident. Many of them, perhaps risking danger, walked on the stage in the assembly room, getting as close as possible to the gaping hole. At 3:30 as usual, the final bell rang. The teachers shooed everyone out of the school. Lucy hurried home, brooding about what had happened.

Her mother was just a housewife after the birth of her first child, Frank, who had been drafted and was now in the Navy. But this year, as a patriotic duty, she went to work at Seaters, a furniture factory that was converted to make military equipment. She came home, wiped out every night. Lucy's war effort was to in part replace her and make some sort of dinner every night and have it ready promptly when her father came home from work at after walking the two miles from his office.

Usually she concocted some sort of casserole, using a little rationed meat to flavor a large amount of noodles and vegetables. She always put in plenty of onions because they were one thing that was locally grown and plentiful. She saw she had some macaroni and cheese left over so she added that to her mixture and put the whole thing in the oven. She was so upset about the horror of the day that she slipped and almost fell down the cellar stairs when she went to get a jar of the applesauce she had helped her mother can in September. Then when she set the table, distressed and preoccupied, she dropped one of her mother's good plates. Luckily, it didn't break.

She wondered how to tell her parents about her hideous day. She knew they were both under stress, worried about Frank's safety in the Pacific and the progress of the terrible war. Her mother came in first, looking strange in the factory worker clothes that she wore in her unaccustomed rough job, slacks and a turban to keep her hair out of the machinery. A moment later, her dad entered, not looking tired at all. When Lucy was little, she remembered him in his grey mailman's uniform, striding energetically all day, and still seeming fresh at the end of the day. Now he had been promoted and was a supervisor. He worked in the main post office and wore a grey suit and white shirt. He was tall, husky man, and always looked to Lucy, strong and in control of life.

Her parents both spoke, almost at once. "Hello. Lucy! How was your day at school?" But before she could give some carefully framed answer, they were greeting each other, and throwing themselves into chairs at the kitchen table. They didn't seem to notice that she was upset. Her father turned on the radio. And, as usual, they didn't want her to talk at supper while they listened to Lowell Thomas and concentrated on the news. Usually it was about the war. Lucy always found this irksome and boring. She didn't know where most of the strange places were that they mentioned. Today the

broadcast was different, but equally boring to her. Since it was election day, her parents wanted to hear predictions about the vote. They felt victory in the war depended on reelecting their hero, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They had even named the cat Delanor, after him and his wonderful wife Eleanor.

A few early returns started coming in almost immediately, and every time Lucy tried to tell about her day at school, her parents shushed her. She gave up. She didn't know what to say anyway.

She reluctantly believed that Wheel was right, and someone performed a deliberate act to hurt Betty Lou. But it seemed odd that the floor gave out just the moment Betty Lou started her solo in the special designated spot. They had all been practicing for weeks, sometimes with ten people all over the stage. It seemed more than suspicious-- strange, threatening, frightening. She knew her friend, Joanne believed that God planned and intended everything that happened. Would Joanne believe that Betty Lou was finally being punished for the sins that Lucy and Joanne had noticed, even though Betty Lou was the most popular girl in school?

Her parents continued to be enthralled with the election news on the radio. When they moved the quart of ice cream sized radio to the living room and settled on the davenport, she heated a kettle of water on the back burner and then washed the dishes.

She went to her room to write in her diary. There, its inviting blank pages were ready to receive her thoughts, impressions and details of her day. She didn't need to worry about disturbing her anxious parents or calling down their judgment if they felt she had the wrong take on things.

Delanor, the cat pressed herself up to her knee and purred as she scratched away. She wrote in detail about all that had happened and finished with her confused feelings about it. She was getting sleepy, so got into her pajamas. She wrote a few more words, then closed her diary. She was haunted by something she had heard that day. Joanne said she had learned a secret about Betty Lou. Why had she spent almost a year with an aunt in California? Did that have something to do with the low-pitched remark from someone in the crowd that her accident served her right?

Lucy's clock said it was almost ten o'clock. She was about to turn off the light when she heard a joyful shout from the living room.

"Lucy, come here. This is a historic moment!" Her father and mother were hugging each other, then were clapping. Her mother said, exultantly, "He's way ahead. It's obvious that he won. We won! We beat that Dewey. Now we can beat Hitler!" They listened to the confident words and melodious voice of Roosevelt.

Lucy loved to see her parents happy and excited. It didn't happen very often now days. Too often, the war news depressed them and made them fear for her brother. She could get their attention now and tell them about the awful thing that had happened at school. But she decided to wait until morning. Let them have a time of hope and triumph before they tumbled into bed, to get some sleep and oblivion for some hours before they awoke to their work and another day of worry.

Her father said, "Lucy, you go to sleep now. We'll turn in soon. We just want to hear the late local news and hear how our conservative neighbors are reacting to this endorsement of our guy's policies."

She kissed them good night and went back to her room.

She was almost asleep when she heard her father call, "Lucy. Come here. Quick! What is this all about?" She heard her mother cry out. "Oh no! It couldn't be. No. No!"

Chapter 5: Past and Present

Lynne's reading of the diary was interrupted by two voices wailing. The twins were bored with the play pen. She had better play with them so they would be in a good mood when Everett came home. She put them on the rug and showed them how to put wooden rings on a peg. They tried to copy her. When she showed them a ball and said, "Ball," they made a variety of sounds. She praised them. "You guys are great!" and they responded with laughs and smiles.

As she continued her motherly tasks, half of her mind was on the story in the old diary. She wondered if the young star's accident was still a mystery now in 2007.

Everett came home in a loving mood. They propped the babies up in their highchairs and each put bits of food on the high chair tray between their own bites of their meal. Everett told her some gossip from the day's activities on the Africa desk. Afterwards, he helped bathe the gurgling babies.

About ten o'clock they got them both asleep and they had some time for more concentrated talk. Everett asked, "What were you telling me about those family papers? It sounds like they aren't as dull as I thought they'd be."

Lynne told him what she had learned so far in her reading.

"And you said that your cousin Mercy called and wants the papers?"

"Yes. She wants me to turn them over to her, without reading them. She even said they're dangerous."

"Weird. And didn't you say something about murder? This reminds me of our time in Africa. Somehow, murder seems to follow you."

"Yes. But she said there was no murder."

"Well, usually, when a person takes the trouble to say there was no murder, that means somebody thinks there was one!"

"I can hardly wait to read more. Granny Lucy wrote an amazing diary!"

"Yes. I'm curious too. But I don't see what in those old papers could be a threat sixty years later."

When they were almost asleep, the phone rang. "I'd better get that. There was a serious situation in Togo today."

He spoke into the phone on the night table.

"Everett Knowlton here. Hello. Hello. Strange! There's no one there!"

After a night of sleep interrupted by infant feedings and a busy morning giving breakfast to her husband and children and doing a pile of laundry, Lynne had a chance to go on reading the diary. Again, she soon found herself slipping into the mind of her grandmother, Lucy, in 1944.

Hearing her mother's emotional outcry, Lucy hurried to the living room. On the radio, she heard the news announcer finishing up a report. "Beauty queen, Betty Lou Vandenberg, will be mourned by the Northern High Community. Marjory Oglethorpe, English teacher, summed up the tragedy like this. "They put off needed repairs on that weak stage because of wartime shortages after years of fund shortages in the depression. It is so sad that we have one more casualty of the war."

"Tragedy? Is he saying Betty Lou died?" Lucy said. Her mother answered her, "Yes. She died. Why didn't you tell us about this? Why are you so secretive?" Her mother was crying. "She was your friend. You know how you loved having her go camping with us at Grand Haven just before you started eighth grade."

Lucy hadn't told her mother that Betty Lou had barely spoken to her since the week at the beach and showed that she scorned her. That trip had been a good way for Betty Lou to get out of her parents' supervision for a while and see one of her many boy friends every night, completely trusted by Lucy's admiring mother.

"I was concerned about her. But, I only knew she fell. I didn't dream she'd die. You were so busy with the war news and the election, I didn't want to bother you."

Her father appeared to mourn Betty Lou less. "That girl was always showing off. Well, at least you're all right. They'd better make some extensive repairs. And they'll probably cancel that silly show now. But you stay off that stage."

Still snuffling, her mother went to bed. Lucy didn't really feel like crying. Her father said to her sympathetically, "Your mother didn't know the real Betty Lou. Still, it's sad for anyone to die so young. Sorry a thing like that had to happen so close to you. But, just be brave. Everything will be all right. Life goes on! You'll feel better in the morning."

Somehow she slept most the night, despite some hideous nightmares about dying and death that somehow made her feel guilty. She woke to the cold snowy morning at the regular time.

Her mother was back to her usual early morning careful concentration on making the breakfast, packing her lunch and getting ready for a day at the war plant.

Her father looked like he hadn't slept well. His hair was ruffled. He took a long time in the bathroom before he came out, ready for work at the post office.

Lynne bundled up with a wool scarf and mittens, but her legs were bare. None of the high school kids would wear leggings anymore. She hurried through the cold, her galoshes squeaking in the snow.

Joanne was waiting for her at her locker. She said, "My uncle says that things will be bad in the country now that terrible man Roosevelt won the election yesterday."

Lynne hated to argue with her best friend, so didn't defend her family's hero.

Clusters of students lingered in the hall, talking about Betty Lou's death. Some seemed stricken, stunned and sad. Some seemed almost pleased. When Lucy and Joanne started toward their first class together, Lucy said. "Joanne, tell me. Yesterday you said you knew a secret about Betty Lou, and her visit to her aunt in Texas last year. Tell me about it."

Joanne laughed maliciously. "Do you know that joke about the girl who took a chance on an Indian blanket?"

"What do you mean? Do you think she got in trouble? And none of us knew it? How? Who?..."

"Maybe I shouldn't tell you now. We're not supposed to say bad things about the dead."

"Tell me."

"No. Really. I shouldn't. She just died. I'll let her keep her secret."

Chapter 6: Honor Guard

At 10 o'clock, the second hour of the school day, Lucy and Wheel as members of the Honor Guard, had the job for an hour of checking the student supervised study halls and rating them. They poked their heads into the first one. The fifty students were expected to be studying quietly with only the student supervisor in charge. The room was moderately noisy. Words about Betty Lou's death floated in the air. And someone was throwing paper airplanes. Lucy hated playing cop and getting anyone in trouble. She let Wheel give a warning. "Calm down now. Get to work or we'll have to give you a bad report." Despite that, they checked off the form, saying the room was satisfactory.

Back in the hall, Wheel said, "Lucy, I wonder if anyone else has noticed the obvious signs that Betty Lou was injured deliberately. We should go back to the cellar and see if they've roped it off or something in order to be sure no one will change it before the police look at it."

"Police? Do you think they'll call the police?" Lucy didn't like to think that Betty Lou's death was going to be considered a crime.

"Even though probably the person only meant it as some kind of joke or just wanted to hurt her a little or scare her, it did kill her. That makes it murder."

Lucy shuddered. Murder was something that happened in Agatha Christie's stories or in some big wicked place like Chicago. Not in Grand Rapids.

Wheel was persuasive. "Let's check this next study hall, then zip down to the basement. We'll hurry and look at the other rooms afterwards."

They went down the cellar stairs as they had the day before. The light was still dim. This time, they got the flashlight off the shelf immediately. When they turned its beam to the tool rack, they saw the big blue bladed saw was back in its usual place.

"Oh oh! Someone has been doing some cleaning up." Wheel exclaimed.

They looked at the spot under the hole in the ceiling that matched the hole in the stage floor above. The blood stain on the floor was still there, but turned to a dark red as it had dried. They examined the area more closely.

"Wheel, do you see what's missing?"

"Yes, for one thing, the sawdust." He pointed the flashlight beam to the area on the ceiling where the boards were still slanting down from the stage above.

"Do you see that?"

"What?"

Wheel was scornful. "Come on now. Can't you see the saw cuts are gone from the boards?"

"How could that be? Did we imagine them yesterday?"

Wheel said, "Of course the cut marks were there. We both saw them. And if you knew something about carpentry, you'd know that someone must have used wood filler to cover them. You mix it up with water and then push it into a hole or a gash. It dries and looks like wood. Anyone who does a little repair work knows that! Let's look at it up close. Where's that step ladder that was here yesterday? Look. It's been moved. It was up against the wall. Today it's close to the shelf."

He put the ladder under the hole and climbed up. "Yes, that's what was done. And someone even rubbed some dirt into it so it looks like it has been there a long time."

"We should've talked to the principal yesterday like I said." Lucy was upset and angry.

"Yes. I'm sorry. I was wrong. We'll go to him right away."

"But will anyone believe us now?"

When they got back to the main floor, Lucy's annoying cousin George met them. He had a satisfied smirk on his pimply face. "You guys are in trouble. I told the principal he ought to inspect some study halls himself. You checkers are always too lenient. And today, the kids are all talking about Betty Lou's death instead of studying. I could hear it from my post at the hall monitor's desk. The principal inspected a study hall just now and saw it was in an uproar. It was the one you should have checked 15 minutes ago."

"We've got something more important than study halls to talk to Charley about."

"I don't know about that. He's really mad. He's so proud of his student supervisor system. You could be in big trouble. He said if I see you I should tell you to report to his office immediately."

When they reached the office, the stern secretary, Miss Jones, told them to go right in. Principal Charley Castor's face had a fierce scowl. "You two are a disgrace. Our honor guard system is the pride of the city. The school board has proudly reported on it and the way students are getting into the picture and showing the power of democracy. But just now I visited a study hall that was like a zoo, students yelling and throwing things before they saw me enter. You were late in your inspection."

Lucy waited to hear more. She let Wheel speak for them. "I'm sorry that the room was disorderly. But we were doing something important."

"Where were you?"

"We were in the cellar. We were..."

The angry principal interrupted him. "What were you two doing in the dark down there alone?"

Lucy started to tell him, "We were..."

The principal went on with his tirade. "I can just imagine what you two were doing. I could expel you for that."

Wheel burst in, speaking very fast, not completely coherent. He said they were investigating why Betty Lou fell, saw evidence that someone tampered with the stage floor, now saw someone had cleaned up that evidence.

"Stop. I hate hearing your lies. I didn't know you had so much imagination. You're making up a story to hide your leaving your post as honor guard inspection to be alone in the dark with Lucy. Don't say another word."

Lucy and Wheel followed his command. There was silence.

Then the principal spoke, more calmly, "In order to cover up for yourselves you're trying to create scandal in my school. Betty Lou's death was a tragic accident. People will mourn her and her family will hold a fine funeral for her. Then we'll go on with our patriotic duty, just as our armed forces continue after losses and death. The profits from the Follies will be donated to the War Effort. We'll get someone else to do her part in the show. The mayor called me this morning and said he'll provide emergency funds to repair our stage and make it completely safe. He'll send the maintenance crew from city hall today. The show will go on. People will appreciate our dedication." He seemed caught up in his eloquence, musing to himself. "Attendance at the Follies will be higher this year than ever because of this." Then he got back to a more matter of fact tone of voice, sounding as he usually did, like a solemn advisor to youth. "You two had better get back into the picture. If we don't forget this incident, your future can be threatened. You were both on your way to getting the school's highest honor, a Gold Key, and maybe scholarships to Michigan State. I'll overlook this lapse. But I will be watching you!"

Heads down, Wheel and Lucy started for the door. But Wheel stopped, took a deep breath and bravely tried again. "Yes. I'll do my duty. But, will you tell the police what we saw?"

Chapter 7: Pesky Kids

Wheel and Lucy hurriedly inspected two more study halls before the bell rang for the lunch hour, then went to find the janitor. They knew when he had a few free minutes he often went to his office in what had once been a big broom closet. He had a little radio there and when he could, liked to listen to the war news. His son, born people said, because he got a girl in trouble when he was in high school, was in the army somewhere in Europe. They found him sitting on a rickety chair, eating an onion sandwich.

He was a moody guy. But Wheel went right ahead with his question. "Mr. Begley, did you clean up the basement where Betty Lou fell through?"

He answered with a fierce scowl. "Are you my supervisor now? You kids are pests. No. I had too many other things to do. They told me to mop the floor there, but I can't do everything at once."

"Well, someone did some cleaning. They swept the floor. Who do you think it was?"

He sounded really angry now. "You're crazy. No one else in this whole building will push a broom. They all think they're too good to do it."

"Come and look. Maybe you can help us figure this out. Someone also started some repairs."

"All right. I'll finish my sandwich and then I'll go there with you and see what you're talking about." He gobbled his meal in huge bites. Then he limped along with them and they soon were back in the dim cellar.

"Well Wheel, this time we have a chaperone." Lucy joked.

Mr. Begley snarled. "There's nothing funny about this. I see that little girl's blood is on the floor. No one cleaned that up. What are you talking about?"

"Well, there was sawdust and now it's gone. And there were cut marks where the boards broke. Look. Someone repaired them."

Mr. Begley shook his head somberly. "You and me made the stage as strong as we could before those dancers jumped on it. But I told the principal many times that old stage was going to crash any day now. Now he must be broken hearted. His little sweetheart is dead."

"We think someone did it on purpose."

"You're just making that up. Poor little Betty Lou It's bad enough she's dead without you making up stories."

They went back with him to his closet office, trying to convince him to see things the way they did and help them push for an investigation.

"Shut up. And leave me alone." He opened up his locker in the corner and put away his radio and lunch bucket. Wheel stayed on his heel, arguing all the way.

When they left his little room, they saw the crew promised by the mayor was there to start the repairs. They brought in a load of lumber, extension cords with trouble lights, and drills. The school rang with their banging and pounding in the auditorium and basement.

Wheel and Lucy ate their Wonder Bread sandwiches in their home room. Wheel said glumly, "Well, that does it. All the evidence is destroyed. They won't tell the police."

Lucy agreed. "Yes. No one wants to stir up trouble about her death. But you and I should find out more about what really happened. Who felt so strongly about her they wanted her hurt or dead? I'll make Joanne tell me what she was hinting at about Betty Lou's long visit with her aunt in Texas last year. That may have something to do with it."

Wheel was silent, with a gloomy look on his face. “A lot of people had strong feelings about her. Did you notice Begley’s locker when he put his things away?”

“No. What about it?”

“Pasted inside of it on the back there was a big picture cut from a newspaper.”

“So?”

“It was a picture of the homecoming queen. You know--Betty Lou Vandenberg!”

“That’s creepy! He’s old--he must be at least thirty five.” Lucy exclaimed.

“Yes. Creepy. I do a lot of reading--history, psychology, True Detectives. Intense feelings are dangerous. Watch out for love. It’s worse than hate!”

Lynne in her comfortable Washington Apartment was fascinated by the story that was unfolding in her grandmother Lucy’s diary about Betty Lou’s death in 1944. The babies had awakened and started their usual high decibel cries, but she let them cry, put on the bottles to warm and stood at the stove with the diary in her hand. She continued reading in between poking the bottles in bottle holders and babies’ mouths, skipped burping them and went on reading. She did have to put the diary down while she changed diapers. As she did that, her mind was full of questions. Was Lucy right when she was so sure Betty Lou Vandenberg’s death was intentional? And didn’t the authorities ever wonder about it and do an investigation? Could they just forget the whole thing?

Mercifully, Savannah and Ben were quiet and seemed content in their cribs when she put them into them again. She resumed her avid reading but the telephone rang. This was a man. Did his voice seem vaguely familiar? It sounded old, and somehow sinister. “Did your grandmother attend Northern High in Grand Rapids?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I’m doing a survey. Will you answer some questions? I can make it worth your while.”

Something about this was phony. Was this one of those intrusive telemarketers with a scheme to get her to subscribe to a magazine or directory?

“I’m not interested.”

The voice became hostile. “You better be interested. It could be a matter of life and death!”

Chapter 8: A Sweet Interlude

The unknown caller's voice projected menace. Startled, Lynne slammed the phone down. What was going on? Did this have something to do with her grandmother's diary? She would hurry and read it as quickly as possible. Maybe she would find out why two different people were threatening her. She resumed reading apprehensively and soon was swept up into fifteen year old Lucy's account of her life the week in 1944 when Betty Lou Vandenberg was killed.

Despite her urgent feeling that the authorities should investigate Betty Lou's death immediately, at 1:00 and Lucy had to go her next class. Everyone had to take Practical Arts. Wheel, like her cousin George, Danny Kaminski and all the other junior boys had to go to wood shop. Lucy and all the other junior girls were required to go to cooking class.

Miss Hornby, the teacher, in the green dress she always wore which made the students call her The Green Hornet, stood in front of the cooking class at a counter wearing a white apron. She said in her silly, high pitched voice, "You know they say girls are made of—sugar and spice and everything nice. Well, I have a treat for you today, girls. We haven't any sugar because of rationing, but a friend with a farm has given us five jars of honey."

She demonstrated a step in the recipe for the day, for apple crisp, then told each of the five groups to do the same thing at their work tables. Each girl had a knife and carefully worked on two apples. As they peeled, the girls chatted in low voices.

"I feel so bad because Betty Lou died. She was such a wonderful person," Donna Vander Kamp's tone was mournful. Lucy knew that Donna had wanted to be a cheer leader and Folliette like Betty Lou and tried to copy her moves, hair style, and everything else. Lorraine Kaminski objected. Lorraine wasn't much to look at, with a figure like a pear but, something like her genius little brother Danny who had skipped three grades, she was smart. "Come on. You know she was conceited and mean. Donna, she told everyone you are too clumsy to be a cheer leader. And, after a teacher praised me for a paper most of the kids flunked, Betty Lou turned to me and said that I really ought to do something about my hair, that it had frizzy curls."

Lucy tried to mediate a little. "Yes, she called me names too. But, that's not a capital offense. Someone hurt her deliberately. I looked at that stage floor and saw the evidence."

"Why would someone hate her that much?" Lorraine asked.

Miss Hornby rapped on her table. "Hush girls. Keep your mind on your work. When the apples are peeled, cut them into neat, regular slices."

Carol Dykstra's plump body and dimpled cheeks kept her from looking like the Folliette/cheerleader crowd. She continued the conversation in a low voice. "Maybe it wasn't hate. Maybe it was a kind of love, like in that play they are making us read, Othello? I think all the boys were half in love with her." Lucy turned to Joanne. "You know something about her. Why did she visit her aunt in Texas last year?"

"Well, it wasn't for love of her family. Since you're all saying bad things about her, I guess I can tell you something that is bad, but true and important. Did you notice she was gone more than nine months? Well, I have a cousin that goes to her aunt's church in Texas. Everyone there knows that Betty Lou was in trouble and had a baby there that was adopted out."

There was a shocked silence. They seemed to be more stunned about this than about the possibility of an intentional killing. Despite a common saying about hot as Dutch love, girls from nice families didn't act like this. If a girl did get in trouble, her family would find the boy responsible and there would be a shotgun wedding.

"But who was she doing it with? She didn't have a steady boy friend."

"Well, she did date Dutch."

The others were all displeased. Lucy knew they all had crushes on Dutch. He was the nicest, smartest, best looking boy in the school and a fine athlete too.

"Dutch wouldn't go all the way." Carol protested. And Donna agreed. "He's a nice boy. His father's a minister."

"He went out with her, but he knew better than to get too close to her," Lorraine insisted.

"Well, there's that school bad boy Jinx Jenkins. She went out with him. He would do anything," Lucy suggested.

"Sure," Carol agreed. "We know he was in all kinds of trouble, including with the police in Chicago or wherever he came from."

"Yes," Donna added. "I saw him smoking a cigarette on the way home one day. He doesn't really have a family. If it was him, no one would want Betty Lou to marry him."

They seemed satisfied. Lucy thought, "Betty Lou Vandenberg was even dumber than I thought, getting involved with that intriguing but disreputable boy."

They concentrated on lining their pan neatly with apples slices. Miss Hornby showed them how to pour honey and cinnamon on them. Then she demonstrated the crumble topping.

Since butter was scarce, they used that new substitute, margarine. It looked awful in its natural white state which they didn't bother to color with the packet that came with it. As they took turns in mixing the shortening with the flour, they started talking about a new subject. They had heard that the principal said the Follies would go on and someone else would get the star part.

"Who will they choose?" Donna wondered.

Joanne said, "My mother said the whole thing is worldly and should be cancelled. God punishes wicked works. Look what happened to Betty Lou!"

Lynne was used to these religious comments from her best friend. But she knew she was really just jealous of girls who were allowed to participate and talented enough to be chosen.

"Tammy should get the part. She can sing and dance better than Betty Lou ever could. Betty Lou only got the part because the principal thought she was so darn cute," Carol told them.

Lucy thought about Tammy with her black hair and dark eyes like raisins in a pudding. A high stepping majorette with the band, she had a lot of personality and self confidence even though she sometimes had to help her father at his gas station. She and Betty Lou said they were good friends, but everyone knew they were rivals.

Lorraine expressed what Lucy was thinking, "Betty Lou and Tammy, two stars from two different sides of the tracks."

"All right girls. It's time to get them into the oven." Miss Hornby announced.

One person from each table carried a pan of the dessert to the front of the room and put it into the oven at high heat. The smells of cinnamon made the girls eager for the end of the class when they would get a taste.

While their food cooked, Miss Hornby talked about those new things, vitamins. She threw an alphabet soup of details at them about nutrition, body parts and health in some sort of categories of a,b,c,and d. Three of the girls at the table didn't bother to get out their pens. With Lorraine there, they knew she would take perfect notes and they could copy them afterwards. Whenever there was a written test there was always a group of copiers clustered around her. Lucy listened carefully, interested because she was doing the cooking at home. Twenty minutes later, another selected person from each group went to get the pans out of the oven. Carol Dykstra brought theirs back. They cut the apple crunch into five pieces and ate from the pan with a fork. The honey, the warm apples, the cinnamon, seemed so much more real than earlier thoughts of Betty Lou Vandenberg's end. The bell rang and they jumped up and started out of the room. Lorraine, always a smart aleck said, "Well, that was a good lesson. This only shows, there's some sweetness in life!"

Chapter 9: Those Who Know History

Peering out the dirty window of the high school, Lucy could see another dreary November day with only a dusting of snow to hide the trash left on the sidewalks. At two o'clock, she went to history class. She hadn't attended it often because several times a week she had been excused to work on the Follies. But since rehearsals were cancelled while the stage was being repaired after Betty Lou's death, she and six of the Folliettes were present for once. She was annoyed to notice the reaction of the boys in the class to the group of glamour girls who combed their hair and refreshed their lipstick at their desks, admiring themselves in their compact mirrors before the class came to order.

Mr. Dykema, the teacher walked in, looking sad, old and distraught. His mostly bald head like his face was a sickly gray color. He had deep circles under his eyes. Almost everyone called him "Unk" because he was affectionate with students, especially the girls. Today, as usual, he started the hour by walking around the room, checking home work, mainly that of the girls, and gave each of them a little hug, pinch, pat or squeeze. The Folliette group played up to him, needing his forgiveness, since they seldom did homework.

Lucy didn't like Unk's hands on her and dodged out of his way when she could. She always did her schoolwork and especially enjoyed history. She escaped his attention today with just a pat on her hand. Unk gave her a forlorn smile.

When he went on to the next row, Joanne whispered to Lucy, "He really is taking Betty Lou's death hard. She always was his pet." Others chatted in low voices when Unk was in another part of the room. There was speculation about what would happen to the Follies now that Betty Lou was dead. Donna seemed obsessed by the subject of the Follies. She had some of the blonde prettiness that most of the Folliettes had, but somehow, she was usually judged second-rate by the popular group called The Clique. She said now, in a knowing voice, "The Follies will go on and the committee will choose someone to do Betty Lou's part right away." Tammy chipped in. "The principal called me in at noon and gave me the star part."

"Oh, you'll do a good job."

Tammy beamed at Donna. "Yes. And since I'll no longer be in the chorus, I asked him if you could take over my old spot." Donna flushed, probably with joy, through her heavy pancake makeup.

Lorraine frowned, which made her face even more unattractive than usual and said, "Betty Lou's death was convenient for you two, wasn't it? She only got that part and the cheerleading spot because the Dutch have so much power in this town. Did you ever see a Polish homecoming queen?"

Lucy saw the others were shocked. People didn't often say things like that. But she knew there was truth to it. In the city, there were three nationality groups. Besides the Dutch and the Poles, there were a few whose families came from Britain or Germany and had been in America a long time, like her family and Wheel's. Tammy's family came from somewhere else. No one talked about it.

Tammy scowled.

Lucy thought, "Would a girl kill another over a part in that silly show?" She hated the idea, and trying to be friendly, said to Tammy, "You were a good friend of Betty Lou's, weren't you?"

Tammy looked sad. "Yes. You understand, don't you, Lucy? I was a majorette. She was a cheerleader. We competed, but we got along. Betty Lou always said that the

show must go on whenever anyone got sick or fell down. I'm just doing my duty for the school."

"Quiet everyone!" Unk did his best to roar, but his voice was weak. "Quiet down now. Think about history."

But Donna continued in a low voice. "What did the principal say about me, Tammy?"

"He said you're ok. So, welcome to the crew, Folliette!"

Finally Unk went to the front of the class and wrote on the black board with chalk, "Those who do not know history..."

Without explaining this cryptic phrase, he started a disjointed talk on presidents of the United States. He said they were all fine men who contributed to their own era. He sometimes mumbled and it was hard to follow, but Lucy took notes on the mess the best she could. She saw that Lorraine's brother, young Danny, the grade skipping genius with the big ears, was scribbling away as if all Unk's garbled words made sense. Wheel was listening carefully, but only occasionally wrote a few words. Dutch, so good looking in his red Northern High letter sweater, listened politely, but wrote nothing. Lucy's cousin George, his bumpy complexion looking like cottage cheese dotted with currents, seemed to be pretending to take notes. In the past, Lucy had seen his notebook and knew there were almost no words in it, just drawings he made with his new ball point pen of war planes and tanks shooting at each other.

After about twenty minutes of this, Unk asked, "Any questions?" Jinx Jenkins, Lucy knew, hated to be lectured to or to be bored. Even though she knew he was a bad boy, she thought him attractive. He always dressed in the way people described as snappy, with a glen plaid jacket, bow tie, hair carefully combed with a wave in a short pompadour. He said in an impertinent voice "If they were all such fine men and loved by everyone, why were so many assassinated or attacked?"

Unk Dykema sputtered a mostly incoherent reply but ended by saying firmly some things that made all of the presidents sound like saints and heroes.

Lorraine decided to torment him too. "How about Grover Cleveland? Didn't he get a girl in trouble and almost lose the election?"

"You two only know a few scandalous stories that enemies made up. And what do you know about anything?" Unk's wrinkled round face with dark circled eyes looked tormented. He seemed beside himself now. "What do you know about love?"

Jinx obviously had enough of this class. He said loudly to the kids near him, "Yeah, like that fat old man that made out with girls and the round heeled babes that let them have their fun. Betty Lou was just like them. I have a pretty good idea of which old geezer knocked her up."

About ten of the boys shouted him down. "Shut up you. Shut up. You don't know how to act. Go back to Chicago."

Unk looked like he was going to have some sort of attack. His wrinkled face turned a mottled red and he started trembling. He pointed his shaking hand at smirking Jinx. "Leave the room and go to the principal's office." As Jinx was leaving, Lucy heard him say under his breath, "Pervert!" He looked pleased at the fuss and happy to be released.

Then Unk Dykema resumed talking. He spoke in scraps of phrases, and seemed almost crying. "People that don't know history. They pass on stories and hurt people."

After class, Wheel said to Lucy, "Some of those old presidents had really immoral love lives."

“Yes. They weren’t fine men like Roosevelt. He has five children and a fine, close marriage with Eleanor.”

Wheel nodded, and then said lightly. “That’s what my parents say too. Even Fala, his dog is nice.”

Chapter 10: Ways of Love

Lynne in her Washington apartment in 2006 laughed cynically at her grandmother Lucy's naive total praise of FDR and his model family life. In the present new millennium era of investigative journalism and private life-delving history writing, it was ironic to read Lucy's near worship of a leader. Lynne had recently read a book called, "Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II." In it she found descriptions of alienating affairs and relationships in the first couple's lives that came close to ending their marriage. And some of the books by their children complained that poor Eleanor didn't know how to be a mother. As far as she knew, the black Scotty dog, Fala had never been investigated and exposed. She thought of her own marriage. Did people who knew her and Everett only from the outside think it was and had always been a "fine, close marriage?"

She heard from the babies' room that it was time to pay some attention to Ben and Savannah. She changed their diapers and put them on the rug to crawl and play with her. In the midst of peek-a-boo, the phone rang.

It was from Everett's secretary. "Mr. Knowlton asked me to tell you he can't get home for dinner because the situation in Togo is heating up. He'll send out for a sandwich and will stay close to the phone and computer."

This was too much like her husband's way in Africa. Annoyed, she put the roast away for the next day and ate some cottage cheese for dinner. She spooned some baby food down the wide open mouths of the squirming twins, getting as much on their cheeks and shirts as inside. Then she gave them baths. When she bathed Savannah, Ben kept up a wail of indignation. When she bathed Ben, he was full of smiles and Savannah took up the protest. When she got them to sleep, she went on reading the diary.

She was eager to learn Lucy's reaction to that raucous history class. Once more, she slipped into a state of extreme identification with those teenagers in 1944.

When classes ended that day, Lucy and a group of juniors lingered in the front hall. The dark, snowy outdoors visible from the front window of the school did not entice them into starting their long, cold walks home.

The Red Hawks booster club was having a glazed doughnut sale in the front hall area. Biting into the sweet soft pastry, a treat in her usual sugar rationed menu, lifted Lucy's spirits a little. Jinx and Tammy stood in a cluster of their schoolmates. Tammy patted her black glossy Rita Hayworth style curls. Lucy inserted herself into the group. She spoke to Jinx, but the rest listened curiously to their conversation. "Wheel and I investigated the underside of the stage. We're sure that someone damaged it and meant to kill Betty Lou."

"I was wondering about that. So many of those chicks had been tromping on the stage all for months and no one fell through," Jinx said.

Lucy continued, "You hinted that you think some old man got Betty Lou pregnant. Did you mean Unk?"

"Unk isn't the only old coot that was hot for her. You'd be surprised at some of them."

"Well, whoever you mean, do you think that guy killed her to keep her quiet?"

The circle around them, Lorraine, Danny, George, Dutch, Donna, and Tammy, were wide eyed. Lorraine was the only one that spoke. "Oh come on now, Lucy. You have been listening to too many episodes of The Shadow."

Lucy ignored her. "Jinx, tell me. Do you think that's what happened to her?"

Jinx seemed to take the idea seriously. He answered, "That would make sense. But, when people kill, it's as often because of love or jealousy as self protection. I learned that in Chicago."

Lucy persisted. "Okay, then. Who loved her jealously? People say you dated her. Should I suspect you?"

Jinx had a wicked smile. His dimples flashed. "Yes, I dated her. She was a cute chick. And easy. But she didn't mean anything to me. I noticed a lot of other guys, old and young were after her. She was a terrible, selfish tease. I think I know who loved her enough to kill her. Poor devil!"

Cousin George and skinny big eared little Danny looked horrified. Donna seemed close to tears. Wheel got into the conversation. "Jinx, don't you have any morals? If you know, you must tell the principal or the police."

Jinx laughed. "Even if I wanted the person punished, no one would believe me. You know what the teachers think of me!"

Wheel persisted. "Then tell me who you think did it and I'll make them pay attention."

Jinx ignored him. He finished his doughnut and licked his fingers. "Come on, Tammy. Let's leave these junior G-men. I'll walk you home." He put his arm around her. Her dark eyes looked inscrutable. She let him lead her away. Lucy heard his teasing, insinuating voice. "Come on, baby. I want to show you something."

Lynne looked up from the diary. She had barely known her grandmother. But reading the diary, she identified with her so much she had to force herself back into the present. Her grandmother had died about 10 years ago, while Lynne was in Africa. All the other people she was reading about must be either dead or very old. So, why was her cousin Mercy so concerned about the story?

Since the babies seemed to be sleeping nicely, Lynne returned to her reading. She saw Lucy's next entry was dated November 11, 1944. Lucy said her parents stayed close to the radio all day. They heard the announcer tell about Winston Churchill's visit to triumphant Paris on that Armistice Day. This cheered her mother up, she said, "That means the war is almost over. Germany is done for. Soon Japan will be defeated and Frank will come home." And after that, the diary skipped ahead to November 20 to say, "I haven't written for a while. I've been busy and discouraged about the situation at school. Wheel and I can't get any of the grown ups to believe that Betty Lou was hurt and killed intentionally. They never did call the police. They practically rebuilt the stage to make it safe and any trace of evidence was destroyed. The principal continued to act unfriendly to Wheel and me, probably because he thought we were messing around in the dark cellar that day. A lot of the kids were angry at Jinx Jenkins for calling dead Betty Lou bad names. He apologized to everyone that complained about it to him and some of them forgave him. Betty Lou's family didn't invite any students to attend the funeral. Things are almost normal again; rehearsals for the Follies resumed with Tammy as the star and with Donna taking her place in the chorus line. Donna really is pretty clumsy, but no one seems to be complaining. Jinx asked Tammy to go steady. Wheel and I continued as producers of the Follies and have been excused from many history classes. When I see Unk Dykema in the halls, he seems to have regained his old enjoyment of life. I manage to dodge his pokes and pats most of the time. Thanksgiving Day will be the last day of November. I remember one year when I was little. President Roosevelt had Thanksgiving earlier. Like most good Democrats, my parents thought it was a good idea. They thought it would help business and give more time to shop for

Christmas. Now I think people are too worried about the war to buy many presents. Some families are giving each other War Bonds.

A hunting trip for that weekend after Thanksgiving was scheduled long ago. Everyone is eager to get some more meat than the tiny amount the rationing coupons allow. Unk is taking a group to his hunting shack near Newaygo. They plan to shoot at least five deer, take them to the slaughterhouse, divide them up and give every family a share. Most of the junior and senior boys from the school are going. My dad is going along with a couple other dads to help Unk supervise.”

After that, Lynne saw that once again, Lucy’s diary skipped many days. The next entry was November 29. “My dad was as excited as the boys at school about going on the hunting trip. When he packed his bag and got out his gun, he was humming, “Happy days are here again.” I hadn’t seen him look so eager and cheerful since Frank was drafted. Oh what if he had known how it would turn out! What a tragic year! So many troops killed in the war, and now, another student dead!”

Lynne was shocked as she read this. What happened to Northern High students that year in 1944? Just then, she heard a thump at the door of her Washington apartment. She went to answer it. No one was there, but she heard the door to the stairs slam. She found an envelope on the floor with a typed note in it. It said. “If those papers are not returned to their proper guardian, your cousin Mercedes, within a week, you will be sued!”

How crazy! Who was harassing her? Cousin Mercy didn’t even live in Washington.

Chapter 11: A Hunting We Will Go!

Lynne speculated about who could possibly be behind the harassment and the threatening note. Mercy had always been a brat, but she didn't live in Washington. And Mercy's father, Uncle George was very old. He was some kind of retired civil servant. Lynne locked her door carefully and went on reading the diary, doubly intent on learning what in that old pile of papers could be important now, more than 60 years later. Once again, she drifted into a state of participation, feeling she was living, with Grandmother Lucy, her life in 1944.

Lucy was envious of the boys going hunting, but she enjoyed having some time alone with her mother. For once, she listened to the war news with her. She helped move the pins on the world map on the wall as the radio announcer explained the day's troop movements. The American soldiers were almost to Berlin.

It was good to see her mother rested and hopeful for once. But she had a few sad moments. She mentioned Betty Lou and asked Lucy if anyone still believed that someone caused her death on purpose. Lucy felt protective. Her mother was thin and worn and at least an inch shorter than Lucy. Lucy decided to let her have her happy day. She spoke reassuringly. "No. No one thinks that. I guess Wheel and I are just suspicious and read too many comic books."

The temperature went down to zero. Lucy no longer wished she had been allowed to go on the hunting trip. Friday night she and her mother saw *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the local movie theatre. It was really funny, about murder. Lucy liked it, but her thoughts went to Betty Lou. If she was murdered, that wasn't funny. Saturday morning they slept late. They did some window shopping in the afternoon and that evening listened to "Your Hit Parade" on the radio. She especially liked Song Number Three, I'll Be Home for Christmas. Her mother wiped a few tears from her eyes but said, "Maybe Frank will be home for Easter." Then they listened to the late news. The announcer said that troops were progressing toward Berlin and that the Free French took Strasburg. Her mother smiled, and yawned, ready to turn in after a good day. But then the announcer started on local news. He said, "We have a tragic story. We cannot give complete details until the family has been notified. Today, a Grand Rapids boy, fifteen years old, died in an accident at a school sponsored hunting trip in Newaygo."

Lucy was stunned and shocked at the radio announcement of a death of a young hunter. She tried to be a little upbeat. "I guess that means Dad is all right." But many boys that were important to her were on the trip. Was the dead boy one of them? She thought of Cousin George, her best friend Wheel, and wonderful Dutch. She was even mildly fond of that smart drip, Danny, wild Jinx and others. How could it happen? Unk Dykema prided himself on training the boys to shoot and on running a careful and reasonable hunt. He had done it for years with no problems.

It was late in the evening of the next day when her father returned. He looked crushed. Instead of his usually strong bearing, he seemed weak and almost limping. He patted Lucy's arm gently, and pushed past her. He told her in a low, sad, but firm voice not to worry, to go to sleep, and that he would talk to her in the morning. He locked himself in the bedroom with her mother. She could hear a low rumble of their conversation but couldn't make out words through the door.

She couldn't bear the situation and called Wheel. "Will you meet me at the park and tell me what happened?"

He protested. "I just got home. I have to talk to my parents."

“Please, Wheel. I’m really suffering.”

He sounded reluctant. “Ok. But after I talk to my folks, I have to wait until they go to bed. I’ll try to meet you in an hour.”

She waited an hour in torment. Then she bundled up in galoshes, mittens, a scarf and her heavy winter coat. She quietly slipped out the back door. Outside it was painfully cold. She walked to the park, through four blocks of sidewalks covered with a thick coating of snow. She waited what seemed another hour, shivering. She almost never saw Wheel outside of Northern High or school activities. They were friends and allies at school, both serious good students who didn’t belong to the party set. Lucy often thought Wheel was ridiculous with his stiff, serious, self important way of acting, always very neat in a dress shirt and glen plaid sport coat. But she could rely on him when she needed him.

At last she saw Wheel. Tonight he looked different. In his parka jacket he looked bigger, but somehow less sturdy. His nose was bright red from the cold. She had never seen him look so disheveled. His hair was ruffled. His black velvet earmuffs, probably a forlorn attempt to be nattily dressed, were somehow on crooked.

He seemed glad to be able to talk about the horrible happening. He almost moaned, “I don’t know how it happened. Why could it? Unk gave strict instructions about how we had to hunt. Everyone was supposed to remain on a long curved line and shoot only ahead. There were over twenty in our Northern High group, a bunch of students, Unk, your father, and the principal who surprised us all by driving up to join us for a day. We couldn’t always see each other because of the trees between us. We were all wearing red plaid jackets to make it clear that they were humans and not deer. All except that rebel, Jinx. He was wearing an army jacket that he got from a friend who stole it from a PX. Probably he didn’t have proper hunting clothes and was too proud to admit that his foster parent, an aunt, wouldn’t give him money to buy one.

We realized there were some strangers in the area. We heard distant shots and Unk warned us to be extremely careful. All of a sudden when a deer bounded out in front of us I shot. I heard many other shots from the others, hidden from me by the trees. Some shouted out they saw a second deer and there were more shots. Then, Unk shouted, “Hold your fire! That’s enough! No more shooting! We’ll see if we got him.” But as they went forward to look and see if we killed the deer, we heard more shots that seemed to come from the far left of the line of Northern High hunters. We heard a loud wail like someone was in terrible pain. I saw Jinx, not where he should be but ahead of us next to a leafless tree, wearing his khaki jacket, now dripping with blood. He fell to the ground and lay in the snow.

The grownups dragged and lifted him to the car, drove him to the nearest town, looking for medical help. By the time they found someone, a doctor, a feeble man too old for the army, all he could say was that he couldn’t help him, he needed a priest. But it was too late for a priest too.”

Lucy saw Wheel seemed almost to be talking to himself. He summed up, dramatically, “Jinx, that wild, girl chasing, bad mouthing juvenile delinquent is dead.”

Chapter 12: Death in Khaki

After her meeting in the park Lucy managed to slip back into her house without her parents noticing she had been out. She didn't get much sleep after her meeting with Wheel. She turned in her bed restlessly the rest of the night. Whenever she closed her eyes she saw the scene described by Wheel, especially the sad, still, bloody body of Jinx. It just seemed like too much of a coincidence to have another accidental seeming death among the junior class at Northern High. Wheel had seemed dazed, and didn't act like he was suspicious that Jinx might have been shot on purpose. But what would he say after he rested and thought it over? Jinx was tied somehow to memories of Betty Lou and her murder. He had insulted her memory, called her a tramp, scorned her. Did someone in the hunt camp love her and feel rage at Jinx's disparagement? Or, had someone at the camp killed her and think that Jinx knew it? Jinx had said that he knew which old man had seduced Betty Lou and got her pregnant. Many of the hunters knew that he hinted that Unk was her old lover. Everyone knew that Unk liked young girls too much in a non teacherly way. Had Unk used this opportunity to get rid of his accuser?

Was Unk afraid he would lose his lifetime career if people knew he actually followed through on his desires and was the father of a baby that had been adopted out?

And Wheel said Charley, the principal, visited the camp and was on the hunt. This was the first time he had ever done that. She remembered the hints and rumors that Charley had some kind of extreme fondness for Betty Lou. Could he be the old codger that got her pregnant? Lucy was often annoyed by the principal and his constant exhortations for everyone "to get into the picture." Had he used his authority to get Betty Lou into his private picture, perhaps giving her the lead in the Follies as a reward?

Lucy gave up on sleeping before dawn and went down to get some breakfast. Her parents were in the kitchen looking like they hadn't slept. She remembered she wasn't supposed to know that the dead boy was Jinx or be aware of the details his death.

Ordinarily her father liked to make Ralson hot cereal for Lucy, even though she usually only pecked at it. Today he slumped dejectedly at the table. Her mother made hot cocoa, and put a lot of precious sugar in it. "I think you're probably too upset to eat your Ralston this morning. Fred, tell her what happened at the hunt camp."

Her father seemed just barely able to talk. His hands trembled. "We were all there, about 20 of us in a long line separated by trees. We shot a deer. Practically everyone shot at it. It sounded like a war. Then, another figure, tan colored, appeared. Most of us had the sense not to fire because we couldn't see the shape. Somehow, there were other hunters in the area, not in our party. Maybe it was one of them, but, anyway, someone shot two shots. We heard a wail, a human wail of pain. Unk told us to hold our fire. I rushed ahead. It wasn't a deer." He looked sadly, apologetically at Lucy. "It was that young hoodlum, that seducer of innocent girls, Jinx Jenkins. As usual, he wasn't following the rules. Instead of the red hunting jacket, he was wearing some sort of soldier suit. He was covered with blood, lying in the snow."

As her father talked he became more energetic, and forcefully and loudly expressed strong feelings. "He was a bad boy and died as he lived, always a rebel." Lucy's mother's faded face showed distress, and anger. "I know Fred, that you liked Betty Lou, just as I did. She was Lucy's friend. I doubt if anyone seduced her. She was strong minded, and went after what or who she wanted. Jinx was one of them."

Lucy was surprised to see her usually compatible parents almost glaring at each other. Lucy's dad went on the story, his voice showing strength now.

“By the time we got him into a car, and then found what passed for a doctor in that godforsaken area, a guy too old for the army to want, half senile, Jinx was dead.”

Lucy wiped her eyes. Hearing it the second time, told this time by her emotional father, made her start sobbing. Sixteen was too young for even a wild big mouth rule breaking boy to die. She stopped her crying for a moment to ask her father where he was standing in the hunt.

He looked angry. “Why do you ask? Do you think I shot him? I know he wasn’t worth much. He treated Betty Lou badly. He probably was kicked out of Chicago for forcing himself on a girl. He was on probation for something. And I could see that you admired him even though you knew he had been in trouble with the law. But what are you implying?”

Lucy had never seen her usually quiet, well-mannered father act in such a strange suspicious way. Was he a third old guy on the hunt who might have been involved with Betty Lou? The thought made her sick to her stomach.

The announcer on the seven AM local news said they could now tell the name of the victim of the Newaygo hunt. He said Harvey Jenkins, known to his friends as Jinx, was shot, wearing a tan jacket that blended into the landscape. More details were given, that his father was dead, his mother was a long term patient in an Illinois hospital and he had been living with a great aunt in Grand Rapids. The Sheriff of Newaygo County said the tragedy was obviously an accidental death. He told all hunters that they should exercise extreme care and always be sure they saw their target clearly before shooting.

Lucy knew the sheriff, like the doctor they had consulted, was probably too old to be useful to the military.

In bad shape after her shocks and sleepless night, Lucy still wanted to get out of the house and away from her overwrought parents. She threw on some school clothes and made the long cold walk, brooding as she walked.

At school she found clusters of students in the halls talking and the words floated in the air from each group, “Jinx, death, hunting.”

Everyone seemed depressed. Probably many of them started counting, “one, two...” A lot of deaths for one junior class in the space of six weeks. A lot of the boys disliked Jinx and were jealous of him. But Northern wasn’t a violent school. Ordinarily, the boys didn’t even fight each other. Many of the girls admitted that, like Lucy, they had been fascinated by Jinx. It was frightening to realize that a vital young person could die in a matter of minutes.

Mr. Begley, the janitor, his red hair shaggy and rumped as usual, helped the teachers to shoo students into classrooms. Lucy started toward her classroom, but stopped to ask him what he heard from his son in the army. He looked cheerful despite the general gloom.

“I got a v mail letter from my son yesterday. It was two weeks old. But he said they are doing fine and they expect to end the war in Europe soon. He said he will send me a fine souvenir, maybe a gun from one of those lousy Nazis they make surrender.” She hadn’t seen him smile like that in a long time.

“It will be coming here. I get all my mail here now. My landlady’s working in a war plant and doesn’t want to be bothered by mail for the roomers. One of these days I’ll be showing it to you.”

Lucy didn’t know what moved her to switch to a sad subject. “Terrible thing, Jinx’s death, wasn’t it?”

Begley’s clownish face had a big scowl. “That young devil deserved it. He was always messing with Betty Lou. Things happen for a reason.”

Cousin George and some other boys were standing near them. He bobbed his head affirmatively. "Yes, he deserved to die after what he did to Betty Lou." Danny looked on with saucer eyes. Lucy scurried into her classroom. Somehow they all got through the day, sometimes going over the terrible thing that had happened to the wild attractive boy who had intrigued the girls and annoyed the boys. Wheel seemed especially subdued. He avoided Lucy's eyes when they happened to be together.

At last Lucy was back at her locker, putting her books away. Wheel stood next to her. He insisted, "No. I don't want to talk about it. Something terrible is going on. I have to think about it."

Suddenly a stranger burst into the front entrance. He was young, maybe a high school drop out and wore a Western Union cap.

"Elmer Begley, Elmer Begley, where can I find him?"

Mr. Begley appeared from the direction of the broom closet. He said, angrily, "What do you want. Why do you want me?"

The Western Union boy seemed unwilling to talk now that he had found the man he was looking for. But he put a yellow envelope into Mr. Begley's hand. He tried to push it away. When the boy pushed it in back, he opened it, then read a few words. He handed it to Wheel. "You read it. I can't I won't."

Wheel read, "I regret to inform you that your son, Edward Begley was killed in Action near Berlin. The commander in chief of the European Sector sends his deepest regrets and gratitude to this fine young man who gave the last full measure of devotion to his country."

"Oh, oh. This is too terrible. Oh, Mr. Begley, I'm so sorry. Your son in the army is dead!"

When Lucy finished her long cold walk home that night the evening paper was on the porch. Two big stories were on the front page, one an account of the hunting death of Jinx. The other had the headline: War Continues. It started out, "Despite expectations for an easy victory after D day, Allied troops are still suffering casualties as they push towards Berlin." The death of one local boy, Edward Begley was announced as well as that of ten others from Michigan.

Lucy felt choked with sobs. All these deaths in khaki! Young men gone before they had a chance to live! And Jinx, poor Jinx, had lost his life, senselessly, without even serving his country!

Chapter 13: Ancestor Archives

The entry written in November 1944 in her grandmother Lucy's diary ended with the words, "This is too awful. It makes me sick. I can't bear to think about it!"

Lynne in her Watergate apartment Washington in 2006 was moved by the story of Jinx's death and her grandmother's comment about it. She looked away from the page. She decided to go to her computer and try the web to see if she could Google any information about what was the reaction to that death in 1944. She tried a variety of phrases, "murder", "Northern High 1944", "suspicious death Grand Rapids", "Newaygo hunting death 1944", "delinquent boy killed in hunting death". She found many citations, but none relating to the specific case she was interested in. Maybe she would find out more about it by looking at the other papers in the box from Uncle Albert. Rummaging through the old documents in it, mixed in with prom programs and announcement of War Bond drives, she found, yellowed and brittle, the very copy of the Grand Rapids Press mentioned in her grandmother's diary. The story about Jinx's death gave a few more details. It said that the boy had been shot twice. It definitely stated that the authorities declared the death an accident and no arrests were contemplated. It said they did not know who made the careless shots that killed the tan coated boy who probably looked like a deer from a distance. The story went on to give statistics of the number of accidental hunting deaths in the Newaygo area in the last ten years. The newspaper account didn't blame Mr. Dykema at all for the death in his camp. It said that he was a dedicated teacher who conducted his hunt carefully and reasonably, just as he did his teaching in history. It quoted the Newaygo sheriff who said it was an unfortunate accident and that the shooter was probably one of the other, unknown hunters in the area that the Northern group had heard. The aunt Jinx lived with was reluctant to talk about Jinx. Finally, when pressed she said, "I'm sorry he's dead. But he has been nothing but trouble since he was born. His father was the same. He died in a bar fight."

The story also said Jinx was on probation for stealing a car in Chicago. Arrested for joy riding, not for forcing himself on a girl as Lucy's father had said! Lucy thought, "Good heavens! I had always been told my grandfather, Fred Lawrence, had a stainless reputation. But did he lie about Jinx's actions in Chicago in order to make Jinx out to be the person that got Betty Lou pregnant? Was grandfather Fred the seducer, and then the murderer of Jinx?"

She had to learn more about these family secrets. She knew that something had made her mother break with the Grand Rapids family many years ago. Was it learning about this?

She tried the Washington area telephone book to see if she could find any of the characters in the diary's drama. Someone here in Washington was extremely interested in the box of papers and had been harassing her.

There was no listing for Mercy. There was, however, a listing for Cousin George in the Maryland suburbs. She thought she remembered he was some sort of retired civil servant. She realized it was now 10 PM, too late for a considerate person to call. She started planning about what she would say to Cousin George when she talked to him. She would remind him that in his high school, two students, friends of her grandmother and also his classmates died under suspicious circumstances within six weeks. Why hadn't she ever heard this story? And how could Mercy say, as she had in her aggressive telephone call, there was no murder?

Then the babies woke, stridently demanding food and attention. About midnight Everett returned. He pecked her cheek. He said there was another coup attempt in the

African nations that he was supposed to keep track of. “Will you wake me early in the morning? I have to get back to that mess.” He pulled off his clothes, flopped into bed, and was almost instantly asleep.

The next morning, after getting Everett off to work and bathing and feeding the babies, Lynne started the investigations she had planned. She called the number she found for Cousin George, only to get an answering machine. She left a message with her telephone number, saying, “It’s important!”

Frustrated, she thought about what she could do to learn more. She reread the letter from Uncle Albert announced that he was going to send her the papers Aunt Ethel had been storing. She realized he had been hinting at some sort of scandal that she should deal with or bury. She noticed especially:

“Ethel settled in Grand Rapids. And bless her heart, had kept those documents in the attic all these years, occasionally looking over a few of them and worrying because, as she kept saying vaguely that something should be done. Do what you think is right with them. If you want to destroy them, you have the legal right. As to whether you have the moral right, you will have to decide.”

She placed a call to Uncle Albert in Grand Rapids. She hadn’t seen him or spoken to him in years. Trying to keep the relationships straight in her mind, she made a little diagram on a sheet of paper. Lucy wrote the diary in 1944. She later became the mother of Albert, Lynne’s mother, Ruth, and Ethel, who had just died after decades of safeguarding the papers in the box. Lynne’s mother had been estranged from the family and then had died early. She was pleased to hear a voice saying “Hello,” and explained who she was. Uncle Albert was cordial and seemed glad to talk to her at first.

But when she started asking questions about the old deaths and the possible scandal mentioned in the diary, his voice got frosty. He said he didn’t know about all that, didn’t care about family history, didn’t pay attention to gossip. He had done his duty by passing on the papers as required by his sister’s will. “I sent the papers to you to decide what to do about whatever Ethel was worried about. Just go ahead and do it. I don’t want to be involved.”

Lynne said, “OK, Uncle. I really want to learn more about this. Good bye now. Take care of yourself.”

She expected to hear only a grumpy, “Goodbye.” Instead, Uncle Albert said, “Well, don’t expect me to tell you that my grandfather, Fred Lawrence was a saint.”

“Then you can tell me something about him,” Lynne said hopefully. But there was only a click on the other end of the line.

Maybe she could get something out of Cousin George. She tried his number again, getting the same discouraging result. Was he asleep? Out? Was he one of those that hated telephone calls and only checked messages and returned them in dire circumstances? Or, did he screen calls and just didn’t want to talk to her?

She realized she really had to do some laundry or the babies wouldn’t have anything clean to wear. She washed and dried three loads, folding them and putting them away as she got each one from the dryer. Everett called to say it looked like war in Africa had been averted, once more. He would be home for an early dinner and would tell her all about it.

She continued trying the call to Cousin George every half hour or so. She nervously waited to hear from him and learn more about those deaths in Grand Rapids, fearful of more harassment about Grandmother Lucy’s papers.

Chapter 14: On with the Show

Looking forward to having Everett come home early and tell her about his important work at the Africa desk of the State Department, Lynne made dinner and set the table. During the many difficult times in Africa, she used to hope for and dream of a time like this, in her own home with Everett with their own baby. Of course she didn't imagine they would have double good fortune - twins!

She expected her husband to come in the door of their pretty little Washington apartment any minute. She needed his help and comfort over the worry about her grandmother's papers. When the telephone rang she hoped it would be Cousin George answering her call. But she heard Everett's voice. "Lynne, there's a problem. Hold everything. I'll be home an hour or two late. Please wait to eat dinner with me. I'll explain when I see you."

She wondered how long the memory of Everett's neglect and unfaithfulness in Africa would be in the back of her mind. Something still knotted in the pit of her stomach every time she heard him or his assistant say on the phone that pressing business prevented him from coming home on time.

She tried to have faith in him and empathize with the important work he was doing. Her nine years in Togo and Benin left her with an enduring love for that part of the world and she was proud that he was helping that troubled area.

All her dinner preparations were complete and the babies were content in their play pen. Everett should be home soon. She had some time to read more of the diary.

She saw that once again Grandmother Lucy had gone many days without writing. The next entry was December 13.

Lucy had started recovering from her distress at the deaths of Betty Lou and Jinx. Donna was dressing and acting more and more like Betty Lou. Lucy thought she was hoping she would be a substitute for her. She knew she had adored that blonde vixen before her death. That drip, Cousin George, asked Donna for a date. Everyone was surprised when she accepted. The Follies show been held. Bright eyed Tammy, Betty Lou's replacement, did well. Donna, who took Tammy's place in the chorus line, clumped along and only occasionally kicked her left foot in the air when the others kicked their right. Lynne hoped Betty Lou wasn't killed over competition for those spots. That would be too silly. Now that the Follies were over for the year, that possible motive seemed even more ridiculous. The now ex-Folliettes were back in history class. Unk was so depressed that his squeezing of girls was only half-hearted. A bright spot in all their lives, people felt the war was almost over. The Allies were triumphantly sweeping Germany and commentators said Allied troops would soon meet with Russian forces in Berlin. Lucy's father and mother had been cool toward each other after their dust up about Jinx. Lucy's father seemed changed. Those two dead young people were suspiciously close to him. He no longer seemed like the calm, grey man Lucy thought she knew.

On December 17, there was a black inked border on the page. Lucy said, "I was just getting over the deaths of Betty Lou and Jinx and then the death of Mr. Begley's son. And, I thought the war was almost over, but last night at dinner, my parents were so riveted to the radio, I listened to hear what was happening."

The Nazis made a massive final push that was a complete surprise. Allied troops suffered heavy casualties for three days. Bad weather prevented Allied air forces from helping the beleaguered troops. Lynne, reading this felt like she had been there, and

shared the terrible news with Lucy and Great grandfather Fred and Great grandmother Susan. Lucy said her father looked old. Trying to find some consolation, he said, "Well, at least Frank is in the Pacific. He's probably safe." By December 21, the German forces had surrounded Bastogne which was defended by the 111 Airborne Division and Combat Command B of the 10th Armored Division. Most of the medical supplies and medics had been captured. Food was scarce and ammunition was extremely low. General McAuliffe made a very American answer to the German's call for surrender. "Nuts."

Lucy's diary continued to tell what she felt about this war news. "I know some local boys are probably there. With censorship, no one is supposed to know where individual soldiers are. But little hints slipped through between the blackened censored lines of v-mail letters and some careless remarks and they were passed on to others. People said that buck toothed boy friend was probably there and Dutch's handsome big brother. Were they cold in that snow? Were they hungry? Might they get terribly wounded without medical care?" Probably because of the death of Mr. Begley's son Lucy started acting more like an adult, thinking of the war as a reality.

It was almost time for Christmas vacation. In cooking class, Lucy and her friends expected to do their usual half mocking pattern of compliance and ignoring the teacher. But Miss Hornby was tear-stricken and distraught. Her nephew was at Bastogne. She didn't have a cooking project for them. She snapped, "Read your nutrition book, Chapter One." And sat staring sadly into space.

Now, every night, Lucy listened to the news with her parents.

Wheel was a news buff and also had a cousin in the Bulge area of Germany. He was in agony. He no longer had such a masterful stride. Lucy tried to distract him by getting him to work on another, painful subject, the two Northern High deaths.

Wheel said, "If there is a killer at Northern High maybe he is too preoccupied by this terrible war news to think about whatever caused him to kill our two friends."

In the weeks that followed, there was one surprise. Casper Kowalski, a football hero from the class of 1940 had come back from his service as an M.P. in Italy, limping from war wounds. He had been snapped up by the police department and rushed into accelerated training. He came to the school to talk to principal about the two deaths. Lorraine, who worked in school office, overheard them. The principal said investigation was ridiculous. There was no foul play, only two sad accidents. Wheel tried to talk the young policeman, but Unk stood over him and insisted that he go back to class.

Even Christmas Day was filled with gloom, with anxious fears that this last big push of the Germans would succeed. But finally, on the 26th, the announcers said, "Patton's Third Army 37th Tank Battalion of the 4th Armored Division reached Bastogne, ending the siege." A week later, an announcer said, "The Germans have been pushed back. There will be more fighting, but victory in Europe is assured."

Lynne, reading this, rejoiced along with Grandmother Lucy and her family in 1944. The babies had been getting more and more fussy. She fed them, trying to keep her eyes off the clock and her mind off her husband who was once again late.

Just as she finished bathing Savannah and Ben, Everett came in. "The paper work took longer than I expected. Oh, it's good to be home and with you." He kissed her fervently. Together they settled the babies for the night. While they ate dinner, Everett told Lynne the details of the crisis he and a group of government officials, American and African, had averted. Once again, a promise of money from the World Bank had been helpful.

They put their dishes in the sink and sat on the couch to enjoy this rare private time to share their lives without interruption. Everett asked Lynne how her research into the old family mystery was coming.

"I'm anxious to have Cousin George call back soon. I want to learn what he knows about all this. Grandma Lucy didn't like him much. In the diary she called him a drip."

"A drip? Lynne, he may be far more menacing than that. I don't think you realize the position you are putting yourself in." Everett's voice was serious.

"You say Grandmother Lucy believed there was a murderer in her circle of acquaintances in 1944. And, you are learning this from the papers that were delivered to you recently. You tell me you have had strange things happen, like someone is stalking this apartment, odd telephone calls and hang-ups, footsteps in the hall, threatening messages left you. And how did that intruder get in? You need some sort of identification. Someone still alive knows about this and wants to intimidate you. Someone that has access to our building. Your cousin Mercy told you to give her the papers, that there was no murder. That makes me think she knows there was a murder. And more, that she suspects that someone that she cares about did it. Think about it."

Lynne was suddenly terrified. "You mean the murderer might still be alive, here in Washington now, connected to this building, trying to prevent the story from getting out? Oh, why didn't I see it that way before?"

"Yes Lynne. You might be in grave danger."

"But, Cousin George would be almost 80 years old. How can I fear him?"

"My years as a diplomat have taught me at least one thing. Some old men are active, powerful, and bad."

They looked at each other, sharing fear.

Just then, the telephone rang.

Chapter 15: Getting Into the Picture

Lynne and Everett remained motionless while the phone rang three times. Then, both at the same time, they jumped up to answer it. Lynne got there first. She held the receiver to her ear. “Hello?”

There were no words from the caller. Had the person hung up? But then she heard labored breathing, like someone had asthma. She went on, “Yes. Who is this? Is this you, Cousin George? Did you get my messages?”

There was more rumbling of tortured breathing.

“Please, can you talk? I have so much to ask you.”

More labored breath.

“Who is it?” Everett demanded. “Let me talk to him.”

Lynne shook her head no and tried once more. “Can you call me back? Are you sick?”

Then she heard a click.

She explained to Everett what she heard.

“I don’t like this a bit, Lynne.”

Lynne made one more attempt to dial Cousin George’s number. But once again, after four rings she got his answering machine. She left a message. “Did you call me? Are you all right? Please call me back.”

“I don’t think you are wise to keep calling this man. He may be mentally ill. He may be planning to hurt you. Until we get this all sorted out, keep your door locked with the chain on and don’t open it unless you know the person outside. Let’s take some time to think what we can do. Maybe we can get a restraining order or arrest him.”

When they finally got to sleep, mercifully the twins had a good night and didn’t make a sound until morning.

Everett left early. “I think you should be safe if you stay in the apartment and keep the door locked. Remember, there is a security man at the door downstairs. Call him or the police if any one threatens you. And let’s try to think of a plan for dealing with this. In the meantime, keep reading that diary. Maybe you can learn who the really dangerous person is.”

After the babies had their breakfast and a play time with her, they seemed content with a bag of new blocks Lynne had bought to be prepared for times she especially wanted them to be self-amusing.

She got out the diary and soon was swept into Grandmother Lucy’s world in January 1945.

Monday the streets and sidewalks were covered with fluffy snow. School started again. In the first all school assembly of the new year, the principal was back in high spirits. He read off a list of announcements and then made an impassioned speech, mentioned all of the clubs, committees, and activities, exhorting everyone to “get into the picture.”

Lucy, Wheel, and Lorraine met in the hall for a few minutes afterwards, mocking the man they scornfully called Charley. They knew he cared more for what he called “democratic activities” than he did any kind of intellectual development.

Lorraine said, “What will he emphasize now that his precious Follies are over for the year?”

Wheel answered, “He really loves the basketball season and the chance it gives our empty headed cheerleaders to twitch their bodies and show off.”

“Yes, that is probably what he will put his energy into now. And don’t forget, in March they will start tryouts for next year’s cheerleaders. When Betty Lou died, that left a hole in the squad. They had to redo all their routines to get along with just six girls. And two of the girls will graduate, so that means next year three new girls have to be chosen. Some of these girls, like Donna, have been practicing the cheerleading moves since seventh grade. The competition will be fierce and hostile.”

“Yes. In some ways, you can consider the Follies were practice grounds for would be cheer leaders.”

Lorraine, very much out of the social picture, obviously was a careful observer, she added, “Yes, Donna now thinks she has a chance. Once she took Tammy’s place in the Folliette line, she has had a surge of popularity. George asked her out. She went with him once, but now I think she wants bigger game. Have you noticed she is looking more and more like Betty Lou all the time? She has her hair dyed the same color?”

Lucy remembered how cruelly Betty Lou used to make fun of Lorraine’s, frizzy hair and the sweaters her mother knitted for her.

Lorraine continued, “Donna found out where Betty Lou bought her clothes and now has outfits just like the ones she wore. She might actually succeed as a substitute Betty Lou.”

Big eared Danny, Lorraine’s brainy little brother had been hanging nearby listening. He surprised them by an outraged comment. “She could never take Betty Lou’s place.” Poor Danny. He was such a skinny little twerp. Someone said he had sent away for a Charles Atlas body building course so he wouldn’t be like the guy who is helpless when a bully kicks sand in his face.

Lorraine didn’t comment. She never argued with her smart little brother in public. But she had told Lucy that he had a picture of Betty Lou on his bedroom wall.

Wheel said, “Speak of the devil... look who’s coming down the hall.”

“A devillette!” Lorraine exclaimed, as Donna strutted down the hall wearing a new angora sweater, pencil slim gray skirt, and new saddle shoes. She flicked her long perfectly curled hair that obviously had been put up in curlers the night before as if to say. “Betty Lou is gone. She’s no longer queen here. I’m the new Betty Lou.” She stopped in front of funny little Danny and went through a mock flirtatious routine. “When are you going to call me? I love brainy men. Maybe you can help me pass Chemistry.” She gave one of his big ears a little tug. She turned to her new satellite, apple cheeked Carol. “Yes, I’m going to try out for cheer leader in February. The head of the squad told me that it’s a sure thing for me.”

George was hovering near Donna. He seemed to feel possessive now that he had had a date with her. But now, it seemed, other boys were interested. Mugsy Van’t Hoff appeared and smiled down at Donna from his six foot stature. His red letter sweater announced what everyone knew. He was an athlete. He was the hope of the basketball team.

Wheel and Lucy had a moment of private conversation. Wheel said, “Notice that the kids didn’t even mention Jinx. For them, it was as if he never existed.”

“Yes.” Lucy sighed. “He’s out of their lives and minds. I heard that someone from Chicago got his body, and buried him there.”

The bell rang. The little cluster of contending teenagers had to go to the next class.

She and Wheel met after class. Wheel said, “About Jinx. I’m not satisfied. I didn’t especially like him, but he shouldn’t just die without people caring about it. Let’s just

take our study hall checking reports to old Charley in person today, and then talk to him about finding out more about why and how Jinx died.”

“You’re going to get me in trouble.” Lucy responded. But then she said, “I shouldn’t be a coward. I know you’re right. Let’s make him think about it.”

At first, Charley seemed glad to see them. He made some remarks about their being fine young people who were in the picture. But when Wheel told him he felt he should ask for a more careful investigation into Jinx’s death, he mocked him and told to forget it. “You are just a child. Let us grownups handle these things. You obviously have too much time to imagine things. I want you to be president of the basketball team’s booster club.”

Wheel refused. So horrified, he forgot to be politely deferential, he insisted. “Mr. Weston, you know with Jinx that makes two suspicious deaths. You should have someone take this seriously.”

The principal’s round face turned purple. “Maybe you shot Jinx. You aren’t very skillful with a gun; you never have done much hunting. In your guilt you’re trying to invent and blame a mysterious killer.”

Wheel started, “But!...”

“No buts. You’re losing your good reputation here. You have never been punished for that episode in the cellar with Lucy. Watch out young man. I’m thinking of having your parents in here and telling them about it.”

Lucy gasped. She knew that Wheel’s dad was dead and that his mother was sick and not capable of dealing with a confrontation. She thought, “He must know that too. He’s just trying to scare Wheel.”

They hurriedly left the office.

Lucy said, “Why is he being so dictatorial? I thought he believed in democracy.”

Wheel said, “He acts like a man who will say or do anything to hush up discussion of the deaths. He must have something to hide.”

Chapter 16: Mr. Truman and Friends

Lynne had to stop her reading and bustle around doing baby care and housework. Later, Everett called to say he would be home early that evening. And it was only five when he hurried in the door. “Ah. I see you’re all right. I’m concerned about you. Let’s think about this whole nostalgia thing you’ve gotten into and see what we can do about it.”

Lynne like his caring, but didn’t like his talk about “Things you’ve gotten into.” It sounded like he thought it was her fault. Well, maybe it was. She resisted a defensive reply. She was glad he was going to try to help her.

During their early dinner they didn’t even try to talk while the babies ate with them. “Oh, it’s good to be home and with you.” Everett beamed. He kept smiling even when baby Ben threw his cracker on the floor and baby Savannah laughed and did the same. “Look how well they can use their hands! Pretty good for nine months”. He managed the difficult job of eating his own dinner and between bites, putting little pieces of finger food on Ben’s tray while Lynne did the same for Savannah. When they got the babies down for the night, they settled onto the couch for a leisurely talk. Lynne told Everett what she had read that day and how badly the principal was acting.

Everett said, “Grandma Lucy is giving us too many suspects. She’s pointing to a lot of the older men she knows.”

“Yes. Both Lucy and Wheel seem to distrust the adults in their lives. Lucy makes each one sound suspicious, the principal, the history teacher, Unk Dykema, and even Lucy’s father, Fred Lawrence.”

“And didn’t you say earlier that she wondered about the janitor, Mr. Begley, his praise of Betty Lou and finding her picture pasted inside his locker?”

“Yes, but, if you think the same person killed both Betty Lou and Jinx, Begley is out. He wasn’t on the hunting trip.”

“Are you sure about that? Maybe she just didn’t mention him.”

“I’ll pay close attention as I read and see if I can learn more about it in the diary later.”

“But, if it was any of them, they would be really old now, about eighty. They’re probably not still alive. If they are, I doubt if they are sneaking around your hall.”

“Yes, probably not personally. But, a younger relative might be trying to protect their reputations.”

“Yes. We know Mercy wants that diary kept quiet. She is the one that called you and demanded it back. And someone put a note under the door telling you to give the papers back to her.”

Lynne objected. “But as far as we know, she’s not in this area.”

“Well, we know George has an address in Maryland near D.C. He doesn’t answer your telephone messages. Let’s see if we can check him out. He wouldn’t really be too old to be skulking around our hall. This weekend, let’s get a sitter for the babies and take a ride to that address you have. Maybe we can learn something about him, talk to his neighbors, maybe even talk to him.”

Lynne was pleased at the idea. Maybe they could clear up this whole puzzle. And, a trip with her husband, without the babies, would be a treat in itself. “Great idea. I’ll keep the doors carefully locked until then and read as much of the diary as I can.” They tumbled into bed, united for once.

The next morning after she got Everett off to work and the babies settled in their play pen, she went back to the diary. Once again, in her imagination she was swept into Grand Rapids in January

On January 20 Roosevelt was inaugurated for fourth term. It was Saturday and Lucy listened to the ceremony on the radio with her parents. She loved the Eastern cultured accent of their hero. The president sounded strong and ready to carry the war to its end. His words thrilled her. "Americans of today, together with our allies, are passing through a period of supreme test. It is a test of our courage—of our resolve—of our wisdom—our essential democracy. If we meet that test—successfully and honorably—we shall perform a service of historic importance which men and women and children will honor throughout all time."

It made Lucy proud to be an American, determined to fulfill the crucial mission explained in such beautiful words by their commander in chief. She vowed that she would save her allowance to buy victory stamps and a War Bond, save every scrap of metal and paper she could and when the weather got better work hard in the victory garden her father was planning so they could produce a lot of their own vegetables and not use food that could help feed the brave soldiers that would bring about this victory. She knew her parents too were inspired to be better patriots.

The next day, the Grand Rapids Press had a story about the inauguration with a picture of the president being sworn in by Chief Justice Harlan Stone on the South Portico of the White House. It said there was no formal celebration because it was during the height of the war. The president and Mrs., Roosevelt served a lunch of chicken salad that was mostly celery for two thousand supporters. There was a picture of Harry S Truman, the new vice-President in the paper. Lucy's father said, "We now have a new person on the scene, Vice President Harry S Truman. I guess Vice-President Henry Wallace caused too much controversy. They say Truman used to run a haberdashery."

"That's a funny word, Dad. What does it mean?" Lucy asked.

"It's a store where they sell hats and ties and shirts. You know, there's some old joke about how unimportant vice presidents are. That's lucky for the country with a guy like him as vice president." There was a picture of Truman arriving for the swearing in with his sour faced, dumpy wife and tall, fur coated daughter. Truman wore a black overcoat and a gray fedora hat. Lucy's father examined the picture carefully. "I guess the politicians picked him because they could all agree on him and he will just fade into the background. What an ordinary looking man!"

He didn't seem to notice what seemed obvious to Lucy--her father, Fred Lawrence, looked a lot like Harry Truman.

Participating with her family as they commented on the chosen leaders for the serious world situation, Lucy was suddenly overwhelmed with love and respect for the little, grey, insignificant looking man that was her father. He was so serious and hardworking and good! How could she have had any suspicions about him?

Chapter 17: Girlfriend Have Secrets

There were no classes Monday because of teachers' meetings. On Tuesday, Lucy got to school early, eager to talk about the inauguration. A cluster of kids was already there, hanging out near their lockers.

Wheel hadn't arrived yet. Lucy should have known better, but she enthused to her best friend Joanne. "Did you hear the president's speech? It was so thrilling. I made me feel like a soldier in an American army saving democracy."

Joanne was combing her silky blonde hair. Her voice was scornful. "That man! My father says he has ruined the country."

Lucy began to wonder if she really liked the person she had considered her best friend. Joanne's eyes looked cool and proud as she said triumphantly, "You probably don't know that I am dating Henry Dykstra from Christian High. He's on their basketball team."

Lucy realized that she and Joanne hadn't been sharing every day's thoughts and events for a while. Since when? Maybe since she and Wheel had become convinced that Jinx was shot intentionally. Joanne went on in a spiteful voice. "Yes, Henry and I are doubling next Saturday with Donna and Mugsy. We are going to a big Youth for Christ concert at the Civic Auditorium." She put away her comb and continued. "Catch you later. I'm walking to class with Donna. She says she has a secret to tell me."

Lucy noticed that Lorraine and her brother Danny had arrived and were observing the scene with fascination. They both knew how close Joanne and Lucy had been for a long time. Wheel walked in and he and Lorraine shared their pride in the speech the president made. As usual, young Danny, the genius who had skipped two grades to be at their level, was left out of the talk, but was obviously watching and listening to everything. Mr. Begley, the janitor, rumped and scruffy as always with his hair tousled with bits of cotton stuffing stuck to it from his habit of napping on the threadbare quilt in his closet came limping down the hall, pushing a broom. Somehow, he looked better, less grief stricken and pained than he had since his soldier son's death. He nodded at the group and stopped to talk to Wheel. "Did you hear the war news last night? Our Spitfires destroyed the factory where the Huns were making the fuel for those V-2 rockets that Hitler called his secret weapon. The war will be over soon." Then he mumbled half to himself. "It looks like my boy didn't just die for nothing. Not like that bad egg Jinx, just shot down like a deer."

Lucy listened carefully. "Yes, Jinx was shot like a deer. Did you see it?"

Begley said in a loud voice. "I wasn't there. But the boys say it was terrible."

Wheel spoke up and in a firm, serious tone said, "Mr. Begley. Weren't you in the area that weekend? Somebody told me they saw you at a gas station up there, near Newaygo."

All at once, the conversations among the waiting students stopped. They were all listening.

Lorraine said, "Well? Were you at the hunt?"

"I didn't go up with the others. I didn't feel like holidaying. But my mind was like a squirrel cage thinking about my boy at war. So, I agreed to go with one of my neighbors to a shack he has up there near Newaygo. We slept in Saturday, then went out to hunt and right away got a nice buck. We tied it to the hood and started down and were in Grand Rapids before morning. "

"You didn't like Jinx, did you?"

Begley's face took on a sly look. "That's for me to know and you to wonder about. You young smart alecks don't need to think you know everything about me." He started pushing his broom again, then stopped, and added. "And you don't know everything about that young hoodlum, either!"

Lucy and Lorraine walked down the hall to class together. Lorraine said, "Begley is sort of crazy. I heard he has a picture of Betty Lou in his closet. Maybe he was in the woods hidden and shot Jinx because he was jealous and knew that Betty Lou liked Jinx."

After class, Wheel stopped Lucy. "We've got to talk. No one else is investigating the deaths. We have some new things to think about. Maybe we can figure something out or make a plan of what to do next. When can we talk?"

"Well, you could walk home from school with me and we could talk then and while I prepare dinner for my folks."

"Great idea. I'll call my mother and tell her I'll be home late." He sounded embarrassed.

Lucy knew there was something odd about his mother but had never pried.

"My mother never goes out."

"What do you mean?"

"It's some kind of sickness. I think they call it agoraphobia. Since my father died, she stays in the house." He looked intently at Lucy, as if waiting for her to make some mocking comment.

She tried to show sympathy, and concern and also interest. She only succeed in saying, "Oh."

Her noncommittal reaction seemed to reassure him. Maybe he was glad for once to tell what he ordinarily kept secret from everyone. "She reads a lot and writes a column for the shopping news. I've told her about what we suspect about the two deaths. She's trying to think of something we can do. She says if we had some evidence or even a real plausible theory, it should be possible to get the police interested."

After their last class, Wheel came to Lucy's locker. Lucy looked at him. His dark hair was neatly combed as usual and he looked almost like a grownup in his plaid suit jacket and white shirt. He wasn't a dreamboat like Dutch and Mugsy. But she wasn't ashamed to have the kids see him walking her home.

Once out of earshot of the others, Wheel said, "You heard that business about Begley being in the Newaygo area the day Jinx died. My mother talks to a lot of people on the phone. Someone told her they had heard that someone saw him at that gas station. And you heard, he admitted it. No one else knew it. He could be the one that shot Jinx. The woods were thick there, with so many trees and leaves that we couldn't see all the hunters that were in shooting distance."

"Why would he kill him?"

"Well, you heard him. The way he talked you can tell he didn't like him. We know he did like Betty Lou, too much, and didn't have a chance with her. Maybe he hated the idea that she went out with Jinx and showed she liked him."

"Well, he does seem a little crazy. But if you think he might have killed Jinx, do you think he could have killed Betty Lou? Why would he kill her? He had a real crush on her."

Wheel stared into the gray winter sky as they walked. "You know that strange poem we read in English class. It keeps repeating the line, 'Each man kills the one he loves.'"

“Yes. I didn’t quite get it. But some people say strong love and hate are close together. And can you imagine how cruel Betty Lou must have been to him if he tried to ask her out or made a pass at her?”

Lucy thought of cute, shapely, teasing, Betty Lou and remembered seeing her deliberate flirtation with some poor unpopular boys, just to humiliate them when they asked her out. Lucy and Wheel arrived at Lucy’s house. Lying on the snow on the walk they saw the Grand Rapids Press which had big headlines about the bombing of the Nazi fuel plant. They picked it up and opened the door. Lucy’s spotted cat, Delanor, greeted them.

“Maybe with all these murders, we should all start locking our doors,” Wheel mused.

“I hate to think of doing that. My folks are proud to live in this safe, peaceful town. I don’t know if we even have a key.”

“Yes. It’s the same at my house.”

“Let’s put our coats in the closet and then you come and sit in the kitchen while I cook. It’s hard to find something for dinner with all the good things rationed.” She put some macaroni in a saucepan with water and started cutting up some apples.

Wheel took the lead in their conversation again. “Okay. About Begley. He could have killed Betty Lou. Remember, he was the one who made the repairs to reinforce the stage. He could have gone back at night and sawed those boards so that they would break when she danced on them.”

“Yes, of course. He told us he did a good job. I don’t know if he was acting guilty or not when we talked to him about it that day. He’s such an odd duck anyway.”

“I agree. He could have done both of them. We need to know more about him. I’m sorry his son died in the war. But if he’s a murderer, he still should face justice. How can we find out more?”

Lucy put down her knife for a moment. “I know! Lorraine.”

“Lorraine? What about her?”

“Lorraine. You know, she works in the office. Today with Joanne chumming with Donna, I’ve been walking to classes with Lorraine. We’ve always liked each other. I think I can get her to help us. I’ll tell her our suspicions. I think she can sneak into the personnel files and find out some things about Begley. If he’s been in trouble before, it will be easier to get the police to question him about our murders.”

The macaroni was done. Lynne put it in a greased casserole and poured a can of Campbell mushroom soup over it. She found just two hot dogs left over from their meat ration for December, sliced them and chopped up an onion. She put the whole thing in the oven. Then she cut the apples in slices and added some cinnamon and a little water and put them on to simmer. She hoped they would be sweet enough. She didn’t want to use any of their precious sugar tonight.

“Well. We have a plan. Is there anything else we can do? Let’s think,” Wheel urged.

“Another thing we learned today. Joanne says Donna is going to tell her a secret. Donna was always following Betty Lou around. Maybe Betty Lou told her who got her pregnant. I still think that whole situation is the key to her murder somehow.”

“And that is the secret that Donna is going to tell Joanne!” The idea excited Wheel. “How can we find out what she knows?”

Lucy stirred the apple sauce, thinking.

“Joanne and I were close for a year. Maybe, even though she is trying to brush me off, I can keep up some tie to her. She might like that, make her feel powerful to have me almost begging for her friendship. I hate to do it.”

“But you will. Because you know how important this is.”

“Okay. I’ll try to get close to her again and get her to tell me Donna’s secret. Which was Betty Lou’s secret.”

“Yes. It’s urgent. Someone is killing the kids at Northern High. We’ve got to find out who and keep him from turning on someone else.”

Chapter 18: Closeness and Communication

After their long talk about the deaths, Lucy and Wheel had a new closeness. Wheel was at Lucy's locker when she got there the next day and seemed eager to talk to her. He just said a few words when a group of the others arrived and were in earshot.

Cousin George, his pimpled face aflame, said to Lucy. "I suppose your folks are in seventh heaven over the inauguration. Or do they believe in any kind of heaven in your Congregational Church?" He was deliberately hostile.

"Oh come on, George. Let's let our parents do the arguing about politics and religion." She thought, "He is such a dope!" But she tried not to show her feelings and said, "Well, what else is new?"

But he had already turned away and was listening to Donna and a group of cheerleaders. Donna said to them, "Will you help me practice the moves so I can do a good job when I try out for the cheerleading squad in February?" Lucy noticed that they were encouraging her. Maybe they had decided as some of the boys seemed to have that she was a good substitute for Betty Lou. Her hair, makeup, and clothes were so much like her. She had almost perfected Betty Lou's way of walking and standing.

The highly popular cheerleaders went on in a group to walk the hall, with envious eyes following them. In their costumes of short pleated red skirts and white sweaters with the big Northern design on them, their swaying walk was almost a performance. Lucy noticed that George watched their every move. Even Wheel's eyes followed them. The custom at Northern High was for everyone to walk the square of halls several times before school, checking to see who was there, saying "hi" to some, snubbing others. While the others were in motion, Wheel had a moment to talk to Lucy. "I've been thinking about Begley. He may be the killer. Maybe he really thought he had a chance with Betty Lou. He's not so old. He had his son when he was fourteen. Maybe she led him on for a joke. She liked to do things like that. And then, when she made a fool of him, he got so mad he decided to kill her."

"Well, I know one thing. If I see him coming in an empty hall, I'll get away quick. And I'll never again go to his closet office without several people with me," Lucy vowed.

The hall was filled with the other teenagers now and Wheel went on to class. Lucy saw Tammy in her same old black skirt and sweater, one of the few outfits that her Dad and stepmother provided for her. She looked sad, probably, Lucy thought because Jinx died. After all, he was her boy friend. Through it all, her pixie like charm showed through and three boys on the basketball team walked with her. Dutch and Mugsy walked ahead of them. What a pair of hunks! Mugsy was tall and well built and despite his nickname, good looking. He was not only was the high point man in basketball, he had his own swing band that played for school dances. He stopped to talk to Donna, then walked on with Dutch.

Maybe Donna was still not completely up to their standards. She stood at her locker with her eyes on them as they walked on. She seemed grateful when Joanne arrived and started gushing flattering things about her new sweater.

Lucy thought of this whole morning teen-age ritual, with its triumphs and defeats. Could it really be true that some monstrous person had deliberately killed two of the group that had been so full of life just a few weeks ago?

When Lorraine got to the bank of lockers, Lucy made a special effort to be friendly with her. Maybe she would be her new best friend. She felt a little fake, since it was all part of the plan she and Wheel had made to use her access to the school office. But she really liked her and had more in common with her than she did Joanne. When

they walked to their first class together, Lucy said, "Can I call you at home tonight? I have something important to talk about." Lorraine looked pleased. "Sure," she said.

In 2006 in Washington, Lynne and Everett arranged for Stella to take care of the babies Saturday morning and at nine o'clock, they got the car out of the Watergate garage. It was good to be out in the world with her husband. She had been concentrating on household duties and reading all week.

Everett drove their car expertly in the Washington traffic and then on the expressway. Lynne thought about some computer research she had done on those that Lucy had called old men who showed an adoring interest in Betty Lou. First she had tried Begley's name. It's hard to find much on the web about people who forty years ago led ordinary lives without published writings. She couldn't find anything about him. She would have to get some help from a friend who knew more about computers to look up old records and see if he had a criminal record before his job as janitor and then to find out if he was ever charged with anything in regard to the deaths of her two friends. She was however, able to find mention of his son, Edward Begley Junior, on a list of Michigan men who died in the Army in World War II. Even though her latest diary reading convinced her that Begley was most likely the killer, she looked up Cousin George. A few days ago she had been convinced that he was the person menacing her and probably the killer. She kept calling his Washington area telephone. He didn't answer the phone or return her calls.

She was necessary to find out where he lived so they could see him and talk. She did her best to find out more using the computer. She found his name on a list of Department of Commerce civil servants retiring in 1996 after thirty years. It gave an address in Woodbridge, Virginia.

Everett left her to her own thoughts for a half hour. Then he asked her, "Did you ever meet Cousin George or maybe he is your cousin several times removed?"

"Yes, I met him once, when I was about seven. Uncle Albert described our family as "fragmented" in that letter he sent me about the diary. Well I guess that word fits. My mother and father took me to a party Grandmother Lucy was giving in Grand Rapids. My mother had told me that Cousin George and his wife disagreed about politics and religion with Lucy and her husband, my grandfather. She also told me that Cousin George had a face with pitted scars like people with severe acne had back in those days and warned me not to say anything about it.

It seemed like the grownups were getting along all right when we first got there. But later, after we ate, I was playing with all the cousins and my mother got into a serious talk with Cousin George and my grandmother. I heard tones of sharp anger and then some loud voices. Then my mother grabbed my hand and said, "Come on Lynne, we're leaving this place." We rushed into the car with my dad and drove the long distance home to East Lansing. My father asked my mother why everyone was so angry and my mother said, "Not now. Little pitchers you know."

My dad said "What? What are you talking about?"

And my mom said, "Later. You know little pitchers have..."

And my dad said, "Oh, I get it."

And of course, so did I. I wasn't so dumb at seven."

An exit took Lynne and Everett to a snow covered neighborhood with attractive modest houses and large lots. There were a few evergreens but more hardwood trees--oaks and a few elms with their bare-branched winter look. They went up and down some hilly streets until they found Fremont Place. They drove slowly, peering at all the houses

until they saw a neglected looking 1950's style wood frame house with 2750 in shabby numbers over a door on what looked like a separate entrance to a separate apartment.

"That's it!" Lynne called out.

There was no car in the driveway and no signs of life at the house. Though it was a gloomy winter day, there were no lights on. Did anyone live there? Where was everybody? She knew in this area many people commuted to D.C. But, this was Saturday.

"Let's see if Cousin George is home." Everett made his voice especially hearty, probably to encourage Lynne. They knocked on the beautiful old door with a stained glass window on the top. At first they knocked softly, then with more and more aggressive vigor. Finally, they heard. "Go away. Leave me alone." The voice was loud enough to hear through the door but had a quavering quality.

Everett said loudly, "Let us in. We have to talk to you."

"I told you go away, you thief." The voice was louder and stronger.

Lynne suddenly felt very cold and afraid, standing in the snow in front of the dark house. "Everett, we'd better go."

But Everett went ahead. "This is Everett Knowlton. I'm not a thief. We want to talk to you."

"You hoodlums think you can trick me. Go away or I'll shoot you."

Everett said in a low voice to Lynne. "I don't think he really has a gun. He's just trying to scare us." He took a step forward. "Come on now, Mr. Lawrence. We just have to talk to you about some family matters. Please let us in."

"Family! Bah!" Get out.

Everett remained standing in front of the big oak door with the beautiful stained glass window. Lynne had noticed in Africa that her husband could be stubborn. He said in his Acting Ambassador voice, "Just let us talk to you for a few minutes."

Two shots rang out. Bits of stained glass flew to the sidewalk. A narrow black leafless branch from a tree just over Lucy's head crashed down.

The man roared out, sounding satisfied, "I warned you!"

Chapter 19: It's Not Just Relatives

When the shot burst out the window and the sound echoed in the wintry landscape, Lynne screamed, "Cousin George, you could have killed us!" She had the impulse to run, but somehow didn't, just moved to a side of the door. Everett moved to the other side. They both stood still. Everett said in a low voice, "Well, he did warn us. He probably thinks we're some kids coming to rob him."

Lynne spoke up in the loudest voice she could muster. "Cousin George, This is Lynne. Lynne Lewis, Lucy Lawrence's grand daughter, Margaret Lawrence's daughter." She hoped she was out of range of the gun in case Cousin George was not convinced she wasn't a threat. Trying to keep her voice loud and confident, she continued. "You know me. I left messages on your machine. I need to talk to you!"

There was silence, then they saw the door swinging slowly out. Everett moved in front of the open door and peered in. The room was unlighted. In the dimness they saw a few feet from them a white-haired man in a wheel chair. Near one arm they saw an apparatus that Lynne had seen advertised on TV called a grabber, which enabled a person to pick up things, even turn a door handle, while about three feet away. Leaning against the chair on the other side was a rifle.

Lynne stared, trying to readjust her eyes. This is not what she had expected. She scrutinized the man who must be her Cousin George. He looked extremely frail. His legs in dirty looking khaki pants looked thin and shrunken. They seemed to just hang from the knees. Obviously Cousin George was not the person who had been creeping in the halls outside her apartment door, leaving her threatening messages.

"Well, what do you want?" George growled. The quavering voice said, "You can talk. But make it fast."

"Uncle Albert shipped me a box of my grandmother's papers. I've been reading a diary she wrote when she was 15. That was a terrible year. You were there. Can you tell me anything about it? Your daughter, Mercy called me and demanded that I give her the papers without reading them.

"That sounds like her. She's a bossy witch."

"Why did she do that?"

"I don't know. She sends me an ugly tie every Christmas and that's our main relationship."

"I wonder if she's trying to protect someone."

"Well, it's not me. I have no guilty secrets. And, she would probably like me to be in trouble. She still says I owe her money. Her mother was always asking for money after the divorce. A couple of sows!" He seemed to be in a rage.

Lynne tried a little change of the subject. "My mother took our family to a reunion when I was about seven. You were there. Something happened that day. My mother never visited any of the other family members again."

"Yes. Your mother, Margaret, was another one of those managing bossy women. She got mad, said some wild words and slammed out with you and her husband. She never came back to Grand Rapids again."

George seemed calmer talking about this so Lynne probed deeper. "Mercy said there was no murder. But the diary shows evidence for murder of Betty Lou and probably death of Jinx too.

"Mercy! She's a schemer like her mother."

"Do you believe Betty Lou and Jinx were murdered?"

“Yes. Of course!” His wrinkled old face which still showed those unfortunate acne scars looked angry.

Lynne took a deep breath. So Grandmother Lucy was right. She tried to think of the next thing to ask him while he was willing to talk.

But before she framed a question, he spoke again. “Yes, it sounds like the diary did a good job of telling it like it was: our schoolmates Betty Lou and Jinx were murdered before Christmas that year. And if Lucy told it all, you’ll learn that’s not the end of it.”

Lynne started a question, “You mean...?”

But George interrupted her. “You know what I mean. Are you stupid? Now, get out of here and leave me alone.”

“Please George, what do you mean?”

“Those deaths were not the only ones that year!”

Then he wheeled his chair forward a few feet and manipulated the grabber. The next thing Lynne knew, the big oak door was slammed shut. Through it, Lynne pleaded, “Please, tell me more.”

“Get out. And don’t come back. I still have my gun.”

Lynne and Everett didn’t want to take a second chance at being hurt. It seemed cowardly to run, so they walked away very fast, jumped into the car and raced away. Lynne was silent, trying to sort out her feelings about this strange interview with her really strange relative.

After they arrived at home, paid Stella and looked in at the sleeping babies, they talked about their experience. Everett said, “We can see that George is in no shape to be the person prowling your halls and leaving messages. But, he still could be the murderer. He seems to be paranoid. Maybe he was even when he was a boy. Even if he is chair bound, he could have someone helping him. Was that his shaky voice on the phone telling you to give the papers back to Mercy?”

“I don’t know.”

“He could have paid someone to deliver threatening notes.”

“Yes. And there is still the problem, how did the stalker get into our building? Didn’t the guard ask for ID. That is a puzzle no matter who the messenger was. But yes, he could be the person who killed. Grandmother Lucy said he was an odd duck when he was 15. Age hasn’t improved him. He didn’t seem to care if he killed us with his shot.”

“Yes. Let’s stay away from him. But, see how fast you can read that diary. The key to all this is in it. And he warned that more violent events happened later. That may help us to know who was the cause of them. And we still know someone has been prowling around your hall, someone who is not your old feeble cousin George. But how does all this fit with Begley? If he was the killer how could he be involved in Mercy’s objections and the probing? He would be really old if he is still alive. We don’t know that he ever lived in our area. According to the diary, our pair of bobby sox detectives has a plan to learn more about that weird janitor. Get on with your reading and see what they found out. And continue with your doubly locked doors. If the prowler bothers you again, we’ll call the police.”

So, on Sunday, when Everett worked on some papers he had brought home from the office and the twins gurgled in their play pen, Lynne went on reading the diary. She soon was swept imaginatively to Grand Rapids in 1945.

Lucy started working on the double plan she and Wheel had decided on. She walked to all their several classes with Lorraine and then for the first time went with her to her homeroom to eat lunch. By the end of the day they were acting like best friends.

After their last class looking to be sure no one else was in ear shot, Lucy asked Lorraine to see what she could find out about Begley when she went to work in the school office during her free periods the next day. Lorraine looked at her piercingly, as if she realized that she was being used. But then she said, "Ah. I get it. But OK, Lucy. I want to find out who killed those kids too. I'll be glad to help you."

Lucy felt herself blushing, caught in her duplicity. "That's great. But, really, can I call you at home? I like to chat with a friend while I'm watching my parents' dinner on the stove."

Lorraine smiled. "Sure. That'll be great. It will give me someone to talk to besides my pesky little brother who's always showing off."

When they got to the lockers, Joanne was putting her books away. She started to say something to Lucy, then stopped herself as Donna in her pink angora sweater and new saddle shoes joined her. Where did her family get the ration coupons for so many pairs of shoes? She did a few of the moves in the "Loyal to you, Northern High" cheerleading routine, her pointy breasts in the Maidenform bra bouncing with each movement. At least ten of the boys, including Wheel, George and Danny, watched with mouths agape.

Joanne enthused, "Donna, you're sure to be picked for the cheerleading squad!"

Begley came by, pushing his broom. He stopped and stared at the gyrating blonde in the pink sweater. His eyes had a fierce look. Then he blurted out, "You kids are all brats!" And he moved on, continuing with his sweeping.

When Lucy said to Joanne, trying to put the warmth in her voice that had been natural in their two years as best friends, "See you tomorrow" Joanne responded coldly, "Don't count on it."

"Oh oh," Lucy thought. "The part of my plan about restoring friendship with Joanne and getting her to tell what she learned about Donna's secret isn't going well."

Chapter 20: A Little Knowledge

Lynne continued reading her Grandmother Lucy's story avidly. She hoped any minute to learn something that would tell her who killed Betty Lou and Jinx. She turned a page, and wailed "No!" in disappointment. Instead of going on with its account of the pressing investigation of the best suspect, Begley, the diary made a big skip. The next entry was dated February 10. Lynne's loud protest woke the babies who joined in a duet of wails. Lynne jerked her mind into the present of Washington, 2006.

Everett was so intent in his work with papers from his office he didn't seem to notice either Lynne or the crying babies. She'd better take a break from her intensive reading. The babies needed her. She fed them and then put them in high chairs with a few toys on the trays. They amused themselves by picking up each one and throwing it on the floor. At least they were enjoying themselves. She made a light supper for Everett and herself.

As they ate, she reported on her reading. "I feel like I'm getting to know Lucy and her school friends and rivals. Begley is acting grumpy. I thought I was going to get some information about his past. But, Lucy has one of those gaps in time in the diary and the next entry is about two weeks later. I'm fed up with reading now. Let's watch the news and then see something good on TV."

"Ok. But, not West Wing. It's too much like real life here in Washington. How about a monster movie?"

"Fine. I'll get back to the reading tomorrow."

Lynne heard a thump at the apartment door. She and Everett looked at each other. What was that?

Everett said, "You stay here. I'll check." He opened the door cautiously. Lynne was right behind him. She could see that the hall was empty. But on the floor there was an envelope. Inside was a sheet of paper. When she opened it, Lynne said, "This is like a joke or someone trying to act like those old mysteries." She saw a message made up of capital letters cut out of newspapers. It spelled, "Stop your nosiness. Return the diary. Or else!"

After a troubled night's sleep, Lynne started another day, trying not to let her upset state of mind keep her from being patient and warm with the babies while she fed them. But maybe they sensed something and kept whining fretfully. She played a few games of ball, blocks and peek-a-boo and all three cheered up. When the twins were back to sleep she went on with her diary reading. It was important to find out why someone didn't want her to see the diary. In it somewhere there must be clues to who was behind the threats.

"Dear diary, it wasn't so easy to put our double plan for getting clues about the deaths into operation. Joanne is acting unfriendly and Lorraine resists breaking the rules of her employment in the office by looking at Begley's folder."

Lynne read on and once more got swept into feeling that she was participating in those January days at Northern High in Grand Rapids in 1945.

Lorraine was turning out to be a wonderful best friend. She wasn't pretty, but that was okay. She wasn't as smart as her annoying genius little brother, but the things she said made a lot of sense and she was an omnivorous reader. Her family, like Lucy's, adored President Roosevelt. She wasn't the picture of style like Joanne who was on the Fashion Board of Wurzburg's department store. But she didn't have Joanne's mocking manner. She didn't really fit in with the Folliette cheerleader group. She was Polish,

definitely not in the group called the clique. But, then, neither was Lucy, who was, like Wheel, somewhat of an outsider in the west side of Grand Rapids, being not either of Dutch or Polish heritage. Soon she and Lorraine were meeting at lunch hour and between classes and talked on the phone every night after school. Lucy told Lorraine her theories about the deaths of their two school mates and what investigation they had been able to do. At last, Lorraine agreed that that afternoon when she was working her usual two hours in the school office, she would find a time when she could look at the files unobserved to see what she could find out about Begley. If they learned that Begley had a criminal record they would know they were in real danger would get their parents involved.

Today, Lorraine and Lynne walked to history class together. Lorraine's fuzzy black curls bushed out around her face. Her wrinkled blouse and skirt did nothing to enhance her pear shaped body. But Lucy realized she preferred her lively wit and good nature to the critical fashion plate, Joanne, who had been her previous best friend.

Lucy and Lorraine had read the assigned chapter for history and the first half hour of the class was a boring repetition of it with the teacher, Unk Dykema, droning on about legislation in the early New Deal era. Lucy listened dutifully, taking notes about numbers and dates, things that were hard for her to remember. Then Unk closed his book and stood before the class, said, "History is being made this week. What is happening?" His dramatic delivery clashed with his fuddy duddy appearance.

"What is that event?" Only one person raised a hand. The rest avoided Mr. Dykema's eyes. Lucy hoped she wouldn't be called on. What was he talking about? Danny Kaminski, Lorraine's little brother was frantically waving his hand. He was such a brain he had skipped three grades and his skinny 11 year old body looked ridiculous in the high school classroom. Now, he was so passionate and earnest, his big ears seemed almost to be flapping.

"No one else is volunteering? Okay Danny, tell us."

"President Roosevelt is meeting with the other two country leaders, Churchill and Stalin, to make a plan so there won't be any more wars. There will be a United Nations Organization and every country will have democratic elections. Each country will be independent. You know England entered the war when Hitler invaded Poland. Now President Roosevelt will see that Poland is free again. My cousins, fighting with the Allies in the Free Polish forces, can go home again to a proud and free Poland!"

Several tall blonde boys in the back row snickered.

Lorraine ducked her head but couldn't hide the red blush on her face. To emphasize that she and Danny were Polish in this high school was to stress the fact that they were nobodies in the kids' rating system.

Unk beamed his approval. "Yes. That's it. A pattern for peace and justice in the world! The rest of you, remember what Danny said. Tonight and the next few days read the newspapers carefully. On March 1, the President will tell Congress all the details of their agreement. Never forget this in years to come. This is the start of a new era in human history."

Lynne was almost in a trance, she was so deep into the diary story of that history class in 1944.

The telephone rang. Its loud peal jerked Lynne back to the present of 2006. She reached for it with dread. Was it the stalker again?

Chapter 21: Reaction and Research

Lynne picked up the receiver reluctantly. She said hesitantly, “Hello?” expecting some traumatic message from the mysterious person again.

But it was Everett. “Sorry to tell you once more I’ll be home late, about seven. How are things going?”

Lynne told him about the touching remarks Danny and Unk made about the Yalta conference and the promise for Poland’s freedom

Everett she said, “I’m glad funny little Danny and the others had some joy thinking World War II restored their country to the Poles. I wonder what they thought as the years went by and they realized with the rest of the world that Poland was completely under the iron thumb of Russia for over 40 years. He sighed. “Well, I’ve got to get back to work. Be sure to keep your door locked and bolted.”

Lynne got back to her reading and soon felt like she was in that classroom in 1945.

Another thing happened in that history class that Lucy thought she would remember in years to come.

At this point, Unk did something he hadn’t done before. He asked everyone to take out a piece of paper and a pen and write a paragraph on what effect this Yalta conference would have on the present and future history of the world. “Go ahead. I want to see every pen moving.” Lucy had been thinking about very same question so quickly wrote a paragraph she was proud of, then let her eyes wander around the room.

The assignment was unusual, but as usual Unk used this it for an excuse to go around the room, peering at the girls, touching and squeezing them as he talked about what they were writing.

Donna was sitting in the front row. Usually, lazy students like her tried to sit in back, but obviously Unk had noticed that she had crafted herself into a reasonable substitute for the dead teen queen, Betty Lou, and last week had made some excuse to place her in the middle of the front row where he could stare at her long legs in the short skirts she wore. Today, maybe in order to save the best for last, he started in the back of the room, and selectively picked the most seductive girls and to give extra help and criticism. Lucy noticed that Donna wasn’t writing much. She probably hadn’t been listening and didn’t understand the assignment. What a dummy she was, in her expensive clothes and pancake make up. Unk got to Donna. He started his favorite routine, leaning close to her to see what she had written. Then he pointed at her paper, with his arm as if unintentionally so close to her it grazed her breast. Donna did something no one had ever done, at least not in public. She squealed. “Get away from me you dirty old man!”

Every eye was on the two of them. Her voice was loud, “Don’t you ever touch me again. Betty Lou told me how you were always bothering her. You can’t do it to me. If you come near me again my father will get the law on you!” And she jumped up and ran out of the room.

Unk looked humiliated and afraid. He seemed to be struggling to decide what to do or say next. But just then, mercifully for him, the loud bell rang, ending the class period.

Lucy, Wheel and Lorraine stopped for a moment outside the classroom door. Danny walked out, no longer in his exultation over the Yalta conference. He edged over to the three, but they moved their bodies to pointedly exclude him.

Lorraine asked the other two, “Do you think after all, Unk was the one that got Betty Lou pregnant? Is that the secret Donna told Joanne she knew?”

Lucy answered, “Good question. And I have another one. What will happen now?”

Wheel sounded very grown up and sure of himself. “Probably not much. Tomorrow people will pretend that nothing happened. Donna will go back to class, to the seat in back she used to have. And Unk won’t bother her anymore.”

The next two hours Lorraine was scheduled to work in the office. “I’ll do my best today to get a look at Begley’s file. I think I can just slip it into my notebook and find a way to return it tomorrow without being caught.”

Wheel praised her. “You’re really going to help us find out what’s going on! You may save our lives.” Her homely face lit up at his praise.

Lucy laughed. “You’re being melodramatic. But, it is important. Can you two walk home with me after school? While my parents’ dinner cooks we can see what you’ve got.”

While Lorraine and Wheel spread the papers out on the kitchen table, Lucy threw together a sort of shepherd’s pie using the leftovers of the special meal her mother had made Sunday for her father’s birthday. During these war years she had learned how to make some sort of meal out of whatever she had to work with. She lit the oven and greased a casserole dish. She put in a dab of mashed potatoes, then added a few left over canned peas, and topped it with three little pieces of chicken on top. She poured the bit of gravy from Sunday and put it all in the oven. The family had saved sugar coupons all month in order to give them to the bakery to have them make a luscious decorated birthday cake. Thank goodness, there were three pieces left for dessert. That would help fill them up.

She joined Wheel and Lorraine at the kitchen table. “What have you learned? Does Begley have a criminal past? If he does, I’m going to make a fuss until someone talks to the police about him and the two deaths.”

Lorraine said, “I think you’re going to be disappointed. Begley doesn’t sound like a bad guy. Just one time he was stopped by the cops for drunk driving. They threw him into jail that night until he sobered up, then let him go with a warning.”

That wasn’t what Lucy expected. “That’s all? No bar fights or ex wives with black eyes?”

Wheel, who had continued reading, answered her question. “No. Nothing like that. On the contrary. It seems that Begley was much admired in the town he came from. He was a repairman at the grade school in Newaygo. A front page story clipped out of the newspaper says he saved a little girl who ran into the street in front of a truck. He ran to push her out of the way. The truck hit him pretty hard. His leg was broken in three places. He spent three months in the hospital. That’s why he’s 4F and limps.”

Lorraine continued. “Yes. He was given a special award by the Board of Education as the Employee of the Year.”

Lucy tried to readjust her thinking. “Oh my. So our odd, grumpy janitor is a hero! I guess we have to look for a different villain!”

Chapter 22: Who's Next?

Lucy, Wheel, and Lorraine exchanged perplexed looks after reading the records that showed that Begley had a reputation as a hero in Newaygo. They had a little war council, deciding what to do next in their investigations. Wheel said, "I think Donna learned something from Betty Lou about which old guy she was monkeying around with. Maybe I can get her to tell me."

Lucy and Lorraine looked at each other. Lucy didn't want to hurt Wheel's feelings. But she knew Donna felt he was just a grind, not worth talking to.

Wheel and Lorraine both agreed that Lucy had the best hope of finding out what Donna knew. But Lucy sensed that Donna scorned her, especially now that she had a good chance of being chosen for the cheerleading squad. So they were back to the old plan. Could Lucy get Joanne to resume their old intimacy enough to get her to tell what she learned from Donna? Lucy said, "If you read Perry Mason mysteries, you know we're talking about hearsay, tripled."

Lorraine was given the assignment of getting closer to Unk and learning more about him. Lorraine said, "I'll try. But I know that Unk isn't interested in me except when none of the glamour chick crowd around." And Wheel agreed to specialize in getting close to the principal. This too would be hard since Charley suspected him of taking Lucy to the dark basement for sexual purposes.

Not really satisfied, they ended their pow-wow. Lorraine and Wheel hurried away, hoping not to be too late for supper with their families.

The next day was the long-awaited time to choose the cheerleaders for next year. Classes were excused an hour early so everyone could watch this contest to see who would be the most popular and admired girls in the school.

Most of the juniors and teachers took places on the bleachers in the gym. Even Miss Hornby, the cooking teacher was there, wearing her usual green, sitting in the second row.

Charley, the principal, was beaming. He enthused, "It's wonderful to see you all here. It's important for our democratic school community to have everyone get into the picture." Always one to ignore unpleasant realities, he didn't mention the sad fact that one purpose of the event was to choose a replacement for dead, probably murdered, Betty Lou. Lucy saw Wheel working at his assignment, sitting as close as possible to the principal, and Lorraine with her eyes pinned on Unk. Lucy tried to do her task and gave Joanne a friendly hello. Joanne's answer was cool. Her eyes were on Donna. She doubtless felt that if Donna got on the squad, she, as a present friend of hers, would be elevated in the school status rank. And probably showing open friendship to a bookworm like Lucy didn't fit into her plans. Lucy decided she would try again, in a more private situation. Thirty hopefuls tried out. Most of them were in the Dutch crowd which so successfully won places every year. Several pretty and lively applicants were Polish. Methodically the committee went through the routine of giving everyone a chance. The Northern High song had an elaborate sequence of moves. It ended with "We pledge our heart and hand to our alma mater Northern High." The present members wore the coveted costumes, short red pleated skirts and long sleeved white sweaters with the northern logo like the one on team uniforms over the breasts which were, due to the routine, often bouncing. Over and over they tried various combinations of three applicants and the four cheerleaders who would continue the next year. The regular cheerleaders seemed never to tire of showing their sexy young bodies. At the end of each song, Charley said, "That's fine. Thanks. Who's next?" Short haired and muscular Miss

Van Houten, girls' gym teacher, and the judging committee would choose the next three girls to try. The other judges were the senior head of the cheerleading squad, Tammy representing the majorettes, and Dutch, representing the three athletic teams he starred in. Several of the gym teacher's special pets among the female students were competing. Lucy could tell the judges liked most girls who were members of the Dutch clique. She had to admit they were by far the best. They had been practicing since seventh grade, coached by friends and relatives on the squad. Donna still had a bit of the clumsiness that had previously plagued her. But somehow, her new recent determination and confidence had given her a special charm. Among the onlookers watching avidly Lucy saw George, with his tortured pimply face, and skinny Danny, his big ears red with his excitement. Mugsy seemed to be enjoying hugely the feminine display. He probably had a special interest in the outcome of the competition since he was now dating Donna. Dutch gazed with cool attention and judiciously gave his opinion when asked for it. Probably since he was dating Tammy, the majorette, clearly the school's most admired girl, he wasn't as frantic about the charms of the leaping girls as the less popular boys.

Lucy hated the hungry look Unk had as he watched the gyrating teenagers. She could see that Wheel was noticing it too.

After two hours, the principal said tryouts were over. The six members of the judging committee gathered in the far corner of the gym for a private conference.

Then the principal made the announcement. "Let me introduce the two cheerleaders chosen to represent our school at all athletic contests and pep rallies starting in September when our two seniors have left. Come on up next to me." He gave the names of two who were Folliettes, tall, blonde girls, both from Dutch families. That was no surprise. There was loud clapping. "And, now to fill the spot of the fine young lady who is no longer with us, Donna Vander Kamp." Donna leapt up to stand next to him. There was loud clapping and the formal meeting was over. Onlookers hurried down from the bleachers to congratulate or commiserate with their favorite contestants. Then something unexpected happened, understood best by members of the junior history class. Unk, flushed and eyes glowing from his orgy of young girl watching, pushed his way to where Donna and the winning contestants stood. He put his arm around Donna's shoulders and said, in a loud, emotional voice, "Hurray for you, my dear. You were wonderful!" Donna pushed him away and her shrill voice echoed through the gym, "I told you don't touch me, never touch me." The room was silent for a moment, then, as if to cover up this shocking breach of school etiquette, a swarm of students and teachers rushed up to the front, babbling congratulations. Lynne was very close to Unk and saw his silly fat face contorted with rage. She heard him say to Donna, "You little tramp! You humiliated me in public for being a good, caring teacher! You must have punishment!"

Lorraine, working on her assignment to watch Unk, had managed to follow him and was only inches away. She no doubt also heard those angry words and saw that look on his face. Joanne tried to push her way up to Donna who had been acting like her best friend the last few weeks, but the newly chosen cheerleader turned away decisively, to talk to her squad mates.

Lucy hurried out of the gym, feeling guilty because she wouldn't have time to make her parents a hot supper. She knew they were both beside themselves with worry over her brother Frank in the Navy in the Pacific. And annoyed at spending two hours glorifying the shallow girls she disliked and was jealous of. One good thing--if getting the cheerleader slot made Donna so conceited she dropped her new friendship with Joanne, maybe she could get some of Betty Lou's secrets from her that had been passed on from Donna. If Betty Lou had told her that Unk was the father of the baby, Lucy

decided she would tell her parents. She hated to bother them until she was sure. She knew every day they were obsessed with war news and every time the doorbell rang, feared it might be a dreaded telegram saying Frank was a casualty or worse. But, she knew these murders were important too. If she had real reason to believe Unk was killing her friends, she would convince her parents to tell the police. If she was sure Unk really had sex with young Betty Lou who had been only thirteen at the time, she believed he could also have murdered her. The rage she had just seen made him seem capable of it. And then, to keep Jinx from telling everyone, he might have killed him too. None of them were safe until they found out the truth.

Chapter 23: Waiting

Lynne, reading Lucy's diary in Washington in 2006 shivered. What a cruel, conniving bunch those teachers and teenagers were in Grand Rapids in 1945! She thought of that quoted phrase of the principal, Charley. "Who's next?" Old crazy Cousin George said there was more violence in store for that group in 1945. Who else would be attacked or even killed? Would that perverted history teacher do something awful to get even with Donna for her rejection? Who would be next?

The phone rang. It was Everett's assistant. "Mr. Knowlton has to deal with a crisis in Togo. He must stay in office late."

Lynne sadly remembered messages when they were in Africa caused by Everett's unacknowledged meetings with a gorgeous blonde consultant. Suspicion swept over her. What could possibly be happening in Togo at this hour? It would be 11 PM there. Darkness would have fallen there hours ago.

Lynne fed and bathed the babies and got them to sleep. She didn't feel like going on with the reading so she gave up for the night. Then Everett surprised her and got home at eight o'clock. As she gave him a warmed over supper he told her about the latest government crisis in Togo. With cables flying back and forth from Africa, the U.S. Embassy in Togo had been able to help mediate a struggle between two factions and help reach at least a temporary agreement.

Everett was loving and companionable, and later, even made sweet love to her. That night, she felt close and loved by Everett. She vowed not to doubt him again. She actually forgot about the deaths in Grand Rapids in 1945 for a few hours.

The next day, after she got Everett off to work, took care of the babies, and did some housework she had been putting off because of her concentration on the past, in the early afternoon she got back to reading the diary. She was disappointed again to see there was a break in entries. This time, ten days. She read a page dated February 26, 1945.

"Dear diary: I haven't been writing because I'm discouraged. Everyone says the war is almost over. But really, every day there is terrible news. And I know we can't expect spring here in Michigan until April but it's almost March and it's dreadful outside. There is snow everywhere. The windows drip with big icicles. I now listen to the war news carefully with my parents every night. Our armed forces are attacking the Japanese in the Pacific. Frank, my brother, is right in the horrible area where our boys are being killed. With the censorship we don't know whether he was involved in the attack on Manila and the terrible fight in Bataan or is involved in the bloody battle of Iwo Jima.

"I'm still concerned about finding our North High killer, but can't get anywhere with it. Joanne walks with me to classes again, even though unknown to her I am still best friends with Lorraine. I keep working on getting her to open up with me again. One of these days she'll tell me the secrets she knows. Joanne has many bad things to say about Donna, but she refuses to say anything about dead Betty Lou. Joanne and I really are feeling close lately because she has a favorite cousin with the Marines somewhere in the Pacific. We talk about our fears with each other but are careful to be brave about it when we talk to our mothers.

"Unk Dykema is looking sour and worried ever since Donna denounced him in front of everyone. He never calls on Donna in class any more and someone says he gave her a D on an assignment.

“Old Charley, the principal, obviously thinks the way to deal with the frightening war news with its announcements of deaths of local boys almost every day to push the school into having a Winter Fling dance the first Saturday in March. He calls it, “keeping up home front moral.”. Maybe he’s right. Maybe this will help keep everyone’s mind off the terrible times we are living through. Most of the senior boys will have to go into the armed services as soon as they graduate. And, if the war isn’t over soon, next year our junior boys will have their turn at risking their lives to defend our country and American way of life. Charley got the Folliette and cheerleader crowd to make decorations and put up posters all over. He wants all the juniors and seniors to go. I don’t have a date, so agreed to work at the coat check desk. Wheel will help me.

“Mugsy’s band, the Northern High Swing Sophisticats, will play. Some of the kids are happy and excited. I keep feeling that something awful is about to happen.”

At this point, Lynne’s phone in her Washington apartment rang. It was a wavering cranky voice. “Now I know who you are. You left a message on my phone. Why did you come bothering me? I’m going to send you a bill for the repair of my window. I had to shoot to protect myself.”

“Cousin George, you’ve got nerve, asking us to pay when you could have killed us!”

Expressing his demand seemed to cheer him up. “Well, what was it you wanted? Someone has been bothering you about that diary? You know I don’t get out of the house.”

Lynne pressed him. “You do believe Betty Lou and Jinx were murdered?”

“Of course. And so did everyone else. But they wouldn’t admit it.”

“Did you hire someone to leave messages at my door, to call me and threaten me if I didn’t give the papers back to Mercy?”

“No. I was telling you the truth. I almost never hear from Mercy. We haven’t had anything good to say to or about each other for twenty years.”

“Ok. Then please tell me more about those deaths in Grand Rapids in 1945. Someone is threatening me about it. Someone connected somehow to Mercy.”

“That was a terrible year. Bad things kept happening. The war was bloody and awful. I had that terrible acne skin. The girls mocked me but I couldn’t leave them alone. Betty Lou, Donna--I wanted them to go out with me but they made fun of me. It was miserable. I had a wild temper then but only my family knew that. They thought I killed those kids to get revenge for being left out of everything. I was two years older than Lucy, had been sick in grade school and kept back. They made me join the Navy at 17 that spring. They thought I was the killer.”

“Well, who was the killer?” Lucy insisted.

“Don’t know. Not me. Probably one of those old guys that messed around with Betty Lou. But the killing stopped when I left town. Looked bad. The family wanted to keep it all secret. Probably Mercy heard the old stories from someone and even now wants to protect the reputation of the family. She wants the old secret kept, not for my sake, but for hers.”

“If you haven’t been harassing me, who does Mercy get to bother me? She doesn’t live in Washington, does she?”

“No. She lives in Chicago. She’s a schemer like her mother. She’s aggressive and greedy. She uses people, makes up to powerful people. She won’t give me a penny but with her rich friends travels all over the globe.”

"Please, Cousin George. Help me. I might be in danger. Help me learn who did those killings so long ago."

"Have you considered Sammy the Slasher?"

"Oh Lord. He's really out of his mind," Lynne thought. "Sammy the Slasher?" she repeated.

"Yes. There was a lunatic that slashed girls on the street about that time. Maybe he got involved with Northern High kids and did the killing."

Lynne tried again to get some useful information from him. "You said there was more violence after those two deaths."

"You ask too many questions."

"Please. Who else was got hurt or killed?"

"This is too much. I can't remember. And I don't want to remember." George made a sound that was almost a moan.

Then, his voice became brisk and strong. "Now, young lady, that window was valuable stained glass. Worth a lot of money. But I'll only charge you for replacing it with modern glass. I'll send you that bill." And the phone receiver crashed down.

Chapter 24: A Winter Party

After Cousin George's bizarre call, Lynne thought about whether she was afraid, shocked, or amused. Probably some of each. She decided that Cousin George had a precarious grasp on reality. But maybe he had given her some good information. She would finish reading that diary with his remarks in mind. She should get clues about who was menacing her. She got back to her reading.

Once more, she was swept into imaginatively participating in that time when her grandmother Lucy was 15 and America was in the midst of a total world war.

Lucy's feeling of dread continued. She not only was in fear of a hated telegram from the war department about her brother, but she felt strongly that there was so much ill feeling, jealousy, lust, and unrequited love that somehow caused the two unacknowledged murders and the killer was still a danger to the Northern High School community. When she saw her history teacher in class or in the halls she eyed him apprehensively and was careful never to be alone with him.

Charley, the principal, was leading them all on to forget about the war and deaths and concentrate on the Winter Fling dance. The decoration committee was excused from some classes to make a hundred sparkly snow flakes, despite the paper shortages. Tammy's uncle in the construction business gave them some glue and mica.

The day of the party, Lucy was in good spirits. The news at supper time said the American troops would probably defeat the Japanese in Manila by the end of the day.

She had a pair of new shoes for the party, black ballerinas, made of cloth and synthetic soles. They hadn't needed to use precious coupons. She wore her best sweater and straight black skirt and was wearing lipstick in that new color, Red Apple.

She put on galoshes over the new shoes and bundled up with scarf, mittens and her long coat. The night was cold and when she walked from the bus stop, the snow made a squeaky sound with each step. Roofs were covered with snow and big icicles lined the windows. It would have seemed pretty on a Christmas card, but was not good for March 3. "Oh well," she told herself. "They say, in like a lion, out like a lamb. By the end of the month we'll have really nice weather."

Lucy had been asked to go early to help set up. Miss Van Houten, the girls' gym teacher was in charge of arrangements. When she walked in the door she said, briskly, "Lucy, check on the prep den to be sure no one has messed it up. The chaperones might want to slip in and adjust their clothes away from the loud music and the crowd of teenagers. I want everything neat and clean, at the start, at least."

Lucy went right away. The prep den was a little room off the gym that overlooked a little courtyard. Sometimes it was used for cheerleaders to adjust their costumes or honored guests to rest a few minutes from the noise of basketball games. It had a lamp, a few chairs, a mirror, and a big window that opened easily to give a little air when the gym became over heated and unpleasant from the smell of the sweaty bodies at basketball games and dances. That room wasn't specially decorated for the Winter Fling. But everything looked neat and clean and the lamp was turned on.

She went back to her work station at the checking desk. All the doors to the school were locked except the front one. The principal didn't want any outsiders from other schools or the neighborhood to crash the party. Lucy and Wheel had a table near the front door, in front of the auditorium. Their job was to take the boots, hats, mittens and coat of each person that attended and, put them on one of the auditorium seats, and give everyone a ticket telling where their things were. They also were responsible to be

sure that no one took anything. At the beginning, she and Wheel both worked together, rushing to check the things of all the people that entered the big front door.

Donna came in wearing a stunning pair of extremely high heels. They were in the latest style and looked like real leather. How did her family manage to get her so many pairs of shoes? Did they buy them on the black market? Her glamorous image was marred because, not used to stilts, she was tottering. She stumbled as she entered and grabbed onto big strong Mugsy. Right behind the pair were the other members of Mugsy's band and the lucky girls who came with them and would sit in the glory of the chosen near the bandstand, waiting for their dates. Soon Lucy could hear them tuning and checking out their instruments. Charley, Unk, and Miss Hornby, the green clad cooking teacher, arrived next.

Joanne was one of the first of the students to enter. She came with her boyfriend from Ottawa Hills. Both were tall, blonde, and attractive. They went to the same Dutch Reformed church. They almost looked like they could be brother and sister. Lucy was surprised to see Joanne because she knew that her religious mother didn't approve of dancing.

Joanne leaned down and said in Lucy's ear, "I convinced my mother to let me come. But I promised her I won't dance."

Lucy watched the others come in. Dutch came in with Tammy. Almost all the juniors and seniors were attending. The cheerleaders and Folliettes all had dates. All the basketball and football team members did too. But many of the others didn't. Carol Dykstra was wearing a ruffled blue taffeta dress an older cousin had given her. She looked flushed and fat. She had been dropped by Donna once Donna became a cheer leader and was popular. But she waddled with pride, sure of herself, knowing she was chosen by her soldier boy friend in Europe. Lorraine and her little brother Danny entered, looking as if they wished they could be invisible. Lorraine was going to work at the punch bowl and Danny had volunteered to help if needed. Lorraine wore a ruffled taffeta dress that was far too dressy. She never did follow the styles. And Danny somehow looked even younger and skinnier than usual in a suit that was probably a hand-me-down from his cousin, now in the armed forces in the Pacific.

The gym was a fairyland, with its big glittery snow flakes. Lucy could hear strains of swing music as the band warmed up.

Soon, the gym was filled with kids. Lucy and Wheel took turns, one always guarding their desk and the wraps inside while one was free to stand at the open door of the gym or go inside and feel involved in the school ritual. Somehow, Lucy felt she had to go to these things, as part of her high school life. She knew she would feel she was missing something if she didn't. But, she was glad she was on a committee and had a function. Otherwise she would have been part of the disconsolate group of wallflowers of both sexes, too shy or inexperienced to get a date or ask someone to dance. Most of them just sat or stood on the sides of the dance floor and watched with painful envy.

Poor Cousin George had a new plaid shirt and tie. His face was aflame with a fresh outbreak of acne. But, she saw him asking, first, one, then another, then another of the pretty girls to dance. And she saw each one shake her head, "no."

Most of the time, little Danny stood at the punch bowl, ready to serve. Occasionally he took a forlorn tour around the room. The dating couples snuggled up to each other in the semi darkness of the room, as the band played the slow pieces that everyone knew how to dance to.

She heard most of the pieces announced as most popular on last Saturday's hit parade: "I'll Be Seeing You," "Long Ago and Far Away," "I'll Walk Alone," "I Couldn't

Sleep a Wink Last Night”, all poignant songs of frustration and loneliness. She wondered if she would ever have a real boyfriend and instead of yearning in general as she did now, be missing a wonderful, special person, maybe someone in the service.

About every third dance was a fast one, called by some boogie woogie or jitter bug. The boys couldn't do the intricate steps, but some of the girls, mainly the cheerleaders and Folliettes could. They danced the chicken scratch with each other. The first one was Tommy Dorsey's Boogie Woogie. Later, there was a patriotic fast one, Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy. When the band played Mairsy Doats, every one joined in and sang. Now there was a cheerful, silly song they could enjoy whether they were social stars or not. Lucy was still singing it under her breath when she returned to the coat check desk to give Wheel his turn at watching the dance. "Mares eat oats and does eat oats and little lambs eat ivy. A kid will eat ivy too, wouldn't you?" She wondered if kids really ate ivy. She had only seen a young goat, a real kid, once when she visited the Detroit zoo with her parents.

Wheel looked nice with a fresh haircut. He wore his checked sport coat but tonight had a white shirt and a tie. He actually wasn't bad looking. But his stiff way of walking and his solemn expression kept him from seeming sexy like Dutch and Mugsy.

Lucy almost forgot the dread of coming disaster that she had had earlier, worrying about her brother in the war and the killer striking the Northern High community. Unk Dykema was circulating, taking advantage of the semi darkness to give pretty girls an affectionate squeeze. He liked to say he was everyone's uncle. But Lucy hated that excited look in his eyes. She rushed past him.

Miss Van Houten seemed fascinated by some of the girls twisting and turning in the Chicken Scratch. Charley, the principal, strolled around the edges of the room, proud and pleased to see so many of his students "getting into the picture." The dance started at eight and was supposed to end at eleven so everyone could get home by midnight. By ten some of the dateless gave up and were claiming their wraps to leave.

Just before eleven, Mugsy as director of the Swing Sophisticats, announced they would take a short break before doing the final set and the last tune, "Star Dust." Wheel watched the desk while Lucy took another turn observing the party goers. Mugsy went around asking people loudly, "Where's Donna?" Instead of faithfully and adoringly waiting near the bandstand for her man to have a free moment, she was gone. Lucy thought, "Probably that hussy is in some dark corner with some other boy. She doesn't even appreciate Mugsy and couldn't even stay near him."

Lucy felt one of her garters was slipping and her stocking was sagging. She really should have followed her mother's advice and worn a garter belt. She decided to pop into the prep den and adjust it.

Inside, by the light of the single lamp, she saw a disturbing sight. Looking limp and still, Donna lay in awkward position on the floor. Lucy went closer to her. What was happening? Was Donna playing some kind of trick? Was she sick?

Donna lay on her back. Her mass of blond waves had sinister red streaks. There was a gaping bloody wound on her forehead. Her pretty legs were awkwardly sprawled and one foot was twisted in her fine high heeled shoe.

Lynne, reading this, gasped, "Oh! Oh! Oh! Horror!"

Chapter 25: A Blunt Instrument?

Lynne's outcry when she read about Donna's death was loud. The babies wailed in chorus. So Lynne was involved in a long process of soothing, changing diapers, giving bottles to the babies. At last they were in their play pens. There was still a free hour before dinner. As she hurriedly read, she was back in that hideous night at Northern High in 1945.

Lucy screamed at the awful sight of Donna lying bloody and dead on the floor of the prep den. She ran out in panic. "Mr. Weston! Mr. Weston! Where's the principal?"

Principal Charley Weston ran up to her. "What's the matter?" He followed her back into the prep den. Evidence that something terrible had happened was so strong that he couldn't avoid it or gloss over it. "My God! We must call the police." He swung into action. He lifted Donna's limp arm and felt for a pulse. "She's gone," he said. Mugsy had followed them into the room. His big chest heaving with emotion. The principal told him to stay outside the prep room door and guard it; not to let anyone but the police in. The six foot tall musician did it, but stood there sobbing.

The principal quickly found Unk and Miss Taylor. "Guard the door to the building. Don't let anyone out." And then he went to the office to call the police. For once, the principal was decisive and forceful. Lucy followed him, and heard his side of the conversation, excited and impatient. "I want to talk to the West Side Precinct. Emergency." He was rather incoherent at first and had to tell them several times what he saw and what he wanted. Finally, he seemed satisfied and said, "Ok. Ok. I won't let anyone touch anything. But hurry. It's hard to control so many people." Then he told Lucy, "Their force is depleted because most of the able bodied cops are in the war. At our West Side precinct there's only one old man on duty tonight helped by a 16 year old cadet. He's reluctant to come here and leave their station untended. I convinced him to call the daytime clerk and have her get someone to cover for them. He finally agreed and they're coming right away."

The principal went to the mike on the bandstand and asked everyone who was in the Honor Guard or ROTC to come to the bandstand. Wheel and Lucy and the rest of the Honor Guard, were used to checking study halls and hall passes. Six other members of the group beside ten boys, most of them athletes, came up, saying they were in the Reserved Officer Training Corps.

The principal announced, "There's been a terrible accident. You'll have to help the police when they come and take whatever steps they ask for. Until they come each one of you take an area and patrol it, keeping everyone calm. Then Miss Hornby, who taught sewing as well as cooking, said, "Wait a minute. I have some packages of red bias tape. I'll get them and we can tie a band around the arm of each of you. That way people will know who is official."

The principal asked Miss Van Houten to take over the job of guarding the door to the prep den. He went back to the mike. Everyone gathered around. Word of the death had reached most of them. "Students. Something terrible has happened. Donna Vander Kamp is dead." Many of girls started crying. The cheerleader group was stricken. Some were almost hysterical. The principal continued, "Does anyone remember when Donna Vander Kamp left her seat and why?"

Mugsy said when they played the last slow one, "I'll Get By" he saw her looking lovingly at him.

But then when they did “Chattanooga Choo-choo” his bass part was difficult and he had to concentrate and didn’t watch the audience. Then when he finished that one, he started looking for her. He asked the other girls. Most of the girl friends of the other band members said they hadn’t noticed, they had been watching their boy friends play. But one said she saw Donna just get up and leave without saying anything.

“Did anyone see someone go into the prep den?”

“I saw Lucy going towards it, just before she ran out screaming that Donna was hurt.” Dutch reported.

No one else spoke up.

Miss Hornby was back with tape and scissors. Soon everyone in the group of Honor Guards and ROTC members had red bands around their right arms. By now, about 45 minutes had passed and the police pounded on the front door. When they were welcomed in, it was just as Charley was told over the phone. There were just two of them, one a fat policeman with white hair in uniform, the other, in something like a uniform, was a tall, thin boy. Sergeant Van Dyke, the old one said, “First of all, keep everyone in the gym. Have some ROTC boys guard the door.”

As soon as Sergeant Van Dyke entered the prep den and saw poor, still Donna he said, “We’ve got to get a doctor. We can’t help her, but to get a death certificate we need one.” Miss Van Houten was given the job of calling a list of doctors to find one who was in town and would answer the phone. The grizzled policeman continued, “I won’t touch this poor little girl. But, I’ve had some experience with wounds and death. It looks like someone hit her with something heavy. What we police call a blunt instrument.” He turned to his cadet assistant. “Okay, Jimmy. You’ve got your camera and some flash bulbs. Get some good clear pictures of the girl and the room. I don’t see anything that will help us.” Then we’ll search thoroughly for the weapon.

The principal said, “There must have been something left over from the preparations for the dance. Earlier in the day, a parade of kids and teachers was in and out. All week they had the supplies for the decorations, the hundred snow flakes, even the ladder and the tools they would use. There were several hammers. Something must have been left there and the killer grabbed it and used it to hit her.”

They turned on all the bright lights, looked in all the corners and nooks. They opened the desk drawers. There was nothing there that could have been used as a weapon.

Begley got the key to the prep den. When everyone was out of it and the door locked, the police officer put the key in his pocket. He told the principal. “I don’t want anyone to go there until the doctor comes. We have to find that thing that someone used as a club. The helpers in the gym must keep everyone calm, also, look in all the corners, sides, under chairs for a blunt instrument.” The lights were turned on. They were extremely bright and illuminated every corner. “We will make up three person teams with a teacher, an ROTC boy and An Honor Guard member in each. Then two of the teams must go through the school. See if any of the rooms are unlocked. Search the bathrooms, halls.”

But no weapon was found. There was nothing in the halls or bathrooms. All the other rooms were locked. Someone thought of Mr. Begley’s closet, but that was locked too and so was the stairway to the basement. Before the police let the crowd out of the gym, they made a quick trip themselves. They returned. The cadet told Lucy, “We searched all the bathrooms again and all the halls. It was true, the other rooms were locked.”

The sergeant then instructed the helping teams, "Now, we have to search everyone before they leave. Make a list. Look for anything that could be used as a weapon.

The police sergeant instructed Lucy and Wheel to get each person's wraps, one by one but search them carefully first.

The police sergeant and principal stood near the checking desk when the last people got their things. Some of them were still sobbing as they put on their coats and boots. The doctor finished his examination and the police ambulance took Donna's pathetic little body to the morgue.

The policeman locked the door to the school and put the key in his pocket. "Tomorrow, Sunday, no one will use the school. We'll stop the janitor from cleaning. We'll send more of the regular police in the morning. We've got some good men, 4 F's. One's lame, one's a little deaf, and one wears bottle thick glasses. But they know what they are doing and will check things out. Maybe they'll find something we've missed."

Lorraine said her parents were coming for her and Danny. Would Lucy like a ride? She was grateful. She was too shaken by all this to put up with walking or taking the bus and walking the necessary blocks at both ends. Wheel said, "I'll wait with you. Then I want to walk home. It will help me think." It was still cold and more snow had fallen.

Wheel said, "This time, I hope they get Unk. He finally did it. Did you see him prowling all night? He looked at Donna like he wanted to eat her. He probably followed her into that room and made a pass at her. When she protested he hit her so hard he killed her."

Lucy was doubtful. "That's a good story. But did you see him after the lights went on again? Did he look like a man who had just killed someone?"

"Yes. I saw him. And he looked completely normal. He had a light grey suit on, and I didn't see any muss or blood. He looked upset, but no more than the rest of us. But he's an evil man. He probably can kill and they just look like anyone."

Lorraine spoke up. "They're going to need some proof. He'll never own up to it. But if they can find the weapon, they can look for finger prints on it. Then they'll have him for sure."

Lucy asked them, "What do you think the murder weapon was?"

"Maybe it was a hammer or some sort of stick that the gym decorators left behind."

Lucy protested, "But I was sent to see if the prep den was neat before the party. It looked all right to me."

"Did you look at everything? Could there have been something in a corner or leaning against the desk, or on the floor?"

"Well, I suppose so. The room looked cozy with only the light from the lamp, but a lot of it was in the darkness. I was looking to see if it was presentable, not searching to be sure there wasn't a club or tool."

Now Wheel put his mystification in words. "But, afterwards, every inch of that room was searched, even the drawers. And the whole school. Nothing was found. We looked everywhere. Where could the blunt instrument be?"

Lorraine's parents came and the girls and Danny got into the car. Wheel said good night to them. Just as the car was about to pull out, Lucy rolled down the window.

She shouted, "I've got it! I know where the weapon is. I just realized it. There's deep snow now and it's covered. But the police will look more carefully tomorrow and they'll find it."

“What do you mean?” Wheel asked.

Lorraine’s father stopped the car briefly to let them finish their interchange. “You know, the window in the den was open. Obviously, the killer threw the weapon out the window. It’s under the snow in that enclosed courtyard. The police will find it.” And the car zoomed on.

Chapter 26: A Bad Dutch Uncle

Lynne looked up from the page, stunned by the account of that winter prom in 1945. Her eyes fell on the clock. “Oh dear! I have to make dinner.” She rushed around, getting things ready for Everett’s return.

The next morning the babies were settled down for a nap when Stella, the Georgetown University student, came to clean and take care of the babies.

Lynne took advantage of her presence to go down to the lobby to get the mail that had been accumulating. There was actually a bill from Cousin George for the window he shattered shooting at them. Obviously he had sent it even before he called. He also included a short note: “Yes, that was a hideous year. Maybe the worst was when we found Donna lying bloody and dead in the prep den. When they finally let me have my coat and leave that night I went outside and vomited. I ran home crying and shivering.”

Lynne thought about Lucy’s account of the disastrous Winter Fling. If skinny, pimply George killed her, he might have been horrified at his act and shivered and vomited. According to George, his family had insisted he join the Navy because they thought he was guilty.

There was also a letter from Uncle Albert. He said, “Mercy has been bothering me again. She wants those papers the worst way. She’s aggressive and untrustworthy and has some friends that have the same trait. She has no right to the papers, clearly left to you in your aunt’s will. It seems there is an old family scandal. Mercy wants to hide it, but, use your own judgment.”

Lynne was eager to continue reading the diary and see how others reacted to Donna’s death. But she had agreed to attend a morning coffee at the home of one of Everett’s colleagues to introduce a candidate for state office. Women with important jobs in the government and wives of influential people would be there. They would have made arrangements to take the morning off to show solidarity with their hostess, a local political activist.

Lynne knew at least by sight most of the thirty women in the big gracious room in the pillared Maryland house. From the buffet table she got coffee and a plate of tiny catered pastries and found a chair with a group of chatting women. Bits of conversation drifted in the air about politics, appointments, promotions, new posts, changed regulations, and plans for dinner parties. Someone was being witty about the many government agencies. “There’s even a commission called History, Art, Culture.”

Someone responded, “That’s a whole lot for one commission to cover. Is it vast in size?”

“No, they have a modest office and a large room of stacks containing books and documents. Whoever thought of it and got it established is probably long dead and no one ever increased the funding.”

The women nearby laughed appreciatively at her speculation. “How do you know?”

“I thought I might write a paragraph in my newsletter about it. I met a strange old duck there who used to be an important man, and now is volunteering to explain the records. I couldn’t really understand him or get him to stop talking, so made up an excuse to escape.”

The voice seemed so familiar! Lynne peered at the speaker. Why, it was Lita, who served in the Peace Corps in Togo with Lynne. The two of them escaped to Lome when their houses were burned by mobs trying to overthrow the dictator. Lynne had a wonderful time talking with Lita about the old Africa days.

Lita said, "And to think Eyadema is still the President of Togo!" She told Lynne she wrote a community news event column for each issue in a shopping newspaper in Maryland. The hostess rang a silver bell to get quiet and order. She introduced the speaker, a candidate running for a state office. The title of her speech was *The Role of Women in Politics in the New Millennium.* Lynne continued thinking about the days when she started her African adventures in the Peace Corps.

As Lynne drove back to her apartment, she noticed a very old car that seemed to be following her. When she turned a corner, it followed. She couldn't identify the driver, but it looked like an old man. When she turned into the Watergate parking area on the ground floor, she noticed the car was still close behind her. She waved at the guard and speeded past him. She knew he wouldn't let any strange car in. But maybe the man didn't even want to come in. She couldn't see in the mirror. Was she just nervous, thinking strangers were following her?

She took the elevator to her floor and was soon back in her apartment. Stella greeted her and told her the babies were dears and had just gone back to sleep after their bottles. Lynne settled herself in a comfortable chair and went back to reading the diary. Soon, in her mind, she was living those days in Grand Rapids with fifteen year old Grandmother Lucy.

Lucy was shocked and shaken by yet another death. But now, she felt free to tell her father about it and get his help in making the authorities arrest Unk, the man she was sure was the murderer. In the past, she had some suspicion of her father. He had a surprising reaction to Betty Lou's death and he had been on the fatal hunting trip when Jinx was killed. But Lucy had made a conscious decision to trust her father, appreciate what a good man he was and not keep him on that list of lustful old codgers who might have had a reason to kill Betty Lou. But, as much as she wanted to stifle it, there remained in the back of her mind that doubt. Now, for the first time since then, she was sure he was innocent. She knew he hadn't been at the school the night of the Winter Fling dance when Donna's died. What a wonderful relief!

When she arrived home, both of her parents were asleep. She waited until morning and then told them about the horrible death. The ideas Lucy had been hiding from them poured out in an emotional stream. She told them she believed that Unk killed Donna and also he had killed Betty Lou and Jinx. Her mother started sobbing.

Her dad said, "Lucy, you should be ashamed! Unk Dykema has been a good Dutch uncle to all the students at the high school, giving good advice and leading school activities. And look at what you've done! You've upset your mother. You have a wild imagination. You must control it. Things like your scandalous tales just don't happen in a school like yours. There has just been a run of terrible luck, bad accidents killing those children."

Lucy was frantic. "You have to believe me. I know they were murdered. You wait and see. Today the police will search that courtyard carefully and find the weapon. Then everyone will know."

"You wait and see, young lady. When they investigate this more thoroughly, they'll find that somehow Donna fell and hit her head on a sharp corner of the furniture. Now, I don't often give you orders. But I tell you now. Don't you dare come to me with any more of your fantastic accusations. Your teachers and principal are all highly educated, respected people. From now on, you're forbidden to read mystery stories or see mystery movies. Tell me any more of your wild stories and something worse will happen to you!"

Lucy felt whipped and disillusioned. But when the police searched the courtyard and found that weapon, surely they would know it was a murder. She grabbed her coat and went outside. Right away she could see there was a thaw in the night. The snow turned to rain. The snow was gone from the ground. That would make the police search easier. She stayed away from her parents as much as possible and somehow got through the day.

When she got to school Monday she heard the halls buzzing with talk of Sunday's search. When Begley came by with his broom, Lucy asked him what the police had found.

"They made me come in and help them. The cops looked over everything even though they were three poor specimens, one deaf, one, almost blind, and one limping as much as I do. But, since the snow was all melted, it was easy for them to search the courtyard carefully. There was absolutely nothing there that could have been used as a club. Everyone thinks Donna's vanity did her in." He chuckled inappropriately.

"What do you mean?"

"They think it was those high heels that got her. She tripped and fell and in a freak accident, slammed her head so hard it wounded and killed her."

That evening the newspaper announced another accidental death at Northern High. According to the story, the coroner, Henry Van Syke, said Donna had stumbled in her high heeled shoes, fallen and cracked her skull. A reporter asked him why she was face up when they found her. Mr. Van Syke, who was brought back to duty after retirement when the regular coroner was activated with his National Guard troop, said she probably got up and staggered around, then fell on her back.

Lucy read it with disgust and speculated on how this decision was made. The overworked unqualified police force reasoned, since they found no blunt weapon, there was no murder and convinced the doddering old coroner who wasn't even a doctor to agree with them.

The next day, Wheel and Lucy and Lorraine ate their lunches together and made a plan for what to do next. They still were sure that Unk killed Donna. They had to get some evidence against him. Lorraine had new idea. She said she would get into the faculty file and take out Unk's records. She said, "I bet anything that he has been accused in the past of molesting girls. Charley is so eager to keep his school fully staffed even in wartime and so unrealistic, he probably has been covering this up. If we find Unk was accused either here or in a previous school we'll force some grownups to act."

Wheel and Lucy were enthusiastic about this daring plan even though Lorraine could get in real trouble if she was found out.

Lorraine went on, "I'm tired of all this. Unk will murder us one of these days if someone doesn't lock him up. I'm going to get those records this afternoon. Meet me in the back empty study hall when the last bell rings today. We can talk until Begley comes to sweep and lock up the room."

When the dismissal bell rang the three of them met. Lorraine was triumphant in her guilt. "Here it is." They sat close together and skimmed the file. There were three accusations in Unk's previous school, all investigated and called not true by that principal. But, he was allowed, even encouraged to transfer.

Since he had been at Northern, five times parents had made accusation based on complaints of their children. Each time, Charley as principal said he investigated and said the stories were groundless.

Wheel exploded, "There you are! An obvious total whitewash. Charley wouldn't consider him guilty unless he saw him make out with a girl before his eyes."

Lorraine added, "And then he wouldn't believe it. He'd probably go out and get new glasses."

Lucy was thoughtful. "That does it. For a reasonable person, that would be enough to start a careful real investigation. But, I've already tried to convince my father to get someone to look into Unk's behavior. He says he'll punish me if I mention it again."

She stared at the papers gloomily. Then she said in a triumphant voice. "I just had an idea, someone powerful I can talk to."

The other two looked surprised. Lucy continued. "I'll go to the mayor and tell him all about it."

"The mayor?" Wheel said doubtfully.

"Yes. The mayor. Somehow, Bobby Davis got to be mayor. I don't know how, but I know it's true. He used to have a shoe shop in our neighborhood. He'll remember me. For years I always took the family shoes to him to fix. I'll go directly to his office, tell him the whole story, show him Unk's file. He's a nice sensible man. He'll arrest that molesting murderer!"

Chapter 27: Danger at the Watergate Apartments

Lynne in her Washington apartment in 2006 was pleased. It looked like Lucy and her friends had found the killer. But the whole thing was puzzling. If Unk was a murderer, how could Cousin Mercy say there was no murder? And Cousin George said his family made him join the Navy because they thought he was a killer. It seemed that someone had succeeded in hushing up the whole affair for 60 years.

And someone besides Mercy was eager to keep Lynne from reading that diary and acting on what she learned in it. Could murderous Unk still be alive? She did a rough calculation. Lucy and her friends called Unk and the principal old codgers. But they could have been forty, the age of Lucy's father. Now in 2006, Unk, Grandfather Fred, and the principal would be around 100 or dead. The person haunting Lynne's hallway might be the child or even the grandchild of the murderer, trying to make the dread secret remain a secret. George's daughter, Mercy of course, was the one who was openly threatening her. But why? George said he no longer had much to do with her. And what possible connection would there be between Unk and Mercy? And, since Mercy was in Chicago, who did she get to actually do the menacing of Lynne? As she thought this, there was a loud thump on her door as if someone was trying to force the door open. Her heart pounded. She went to the peep hole. She saw only a door shutting at the end of the corridor. Cautiously, she opened the door. This time the note lying there was typed. In capital letters it said, "Send the documents by DHL to Mercy within twenty four hours or you will be killed. Any time I want to, I can see you at your window in my rifle sights."

Lynne looked out her window in fear. Who could see her? Who could shoot her? Shaking, she closed her blinds and went to a part of her living room that was far from the window. Luckily, the babies' room had no windows. What should she do? She thought about how the box of family papers had turned out to be a time bomb, threatening to hurt her at any moment.

Just then, Everett called. His voice was cheery. "It isn't often I have time to check in with you. But, for once, I'm sitting at my desk, just waiting for someone to keep an appointment. How are things going?"

"Bad. Really bad!" Lynne read him the letter left in the hall.

Everett instructed her, "Shut the blinds and stay away from the windows. A shooter with a telescopic lens could zero in on our apartment from the nearby buildings."

"I already did that. But what else should we do?"

"For God's sake, stay in the apartment and keep your door locked and bolted. I have to keep this an appointment of international importance in a few minutes. If we manage to avert that revolution in Benin it will save many lives. As soon as I get a few minutes, I'll do some thinking. That note may just be from someone with a grandiose imagination. Now, how are you holding up?"

"I'm really scared. I ran into threats, attacks, and danger in Africa. Somehow this feels worse. But I'm starting to calm down a little. I'll be extremely careful and when you get home we'll decide what to do."

"Yes. You were always brave, even the times when you were actually attacked. But don't be too brave. If you think someone is trying to break in, call 911 right away. But for now, I think you should find a safe corner and read that diary as fast as you can. Before we call the police it would be good to know who we are looking for. We may be close to some answers. If we learn who the murderer was that should help us find who is so concerned that the truth doesn't come out."

“Yes. We’re finally getting somewhere in our Grand Rapids mystery. Lucy has decided to go to the authorities with her theory that the history teacher has been killing the kids at Northern High.”

“That’s an amazing, ugly story. I still don’t understand why the murders and their solution weren’t made public.”

“Yes. And how Mercy could possibly say that there were no murders.”

“I have to hang up now. My secretary is sending that guy in. I hope by the time I see you, you’ll know what really happened back then.”

Lynne went back to reading, but was disappointed again. Lucy said she was disappointed too. The next page in the diary had a date of March 26. Lynne read, “Dear diary. I have been so discouraged I couldn’t write. Even though I was sure we had some evidence that Unk has been and is a degenerate, and probably the murderer, I can’t do anything about it. The mayor was called out of town, working for an important Civilian Defense project in Washington. Nobody seems to know when he will be back at his post here, and I can’t get anyone else to listen to me. I tried again to talk to my father about the situation and he got grim. He told me to stop the disloyalty or he will take severe measures.

“I talked to some of the other kids and a lot of them are suspicious of Unk and afraid of him. Instead letting him hug and squeeze them, a lot of the girls dodge when he comes near and hurry away when it looks like they might be left alone with him. They knew he had been feuding with Donna, and then she died. No one has any idea of how we can get some of the grownups to listen to us. I talked with some of the girls about what Donna was doing at the dance that night. The band members’ girl friends still say they hadn’t paid attention to what she was doing. But one of the cheerleaders said Donna told her she was going to slip into the prep room to comb her hair and put on more lipstick. The gym was so dark she couldn’t see if anyone followed her.

“Somehow, the school has slipped into its regular routines. Since no one had the heart to have new cheer leader trials, the principal named one of the cheer leaders who had been chosen for duty next year to take Donna’s place the rest of this year.

“The war is still not over. Our boys took Iwo Jima and Manila. General Mac Arthur thrilled everyone with his return to Bataan. And everyone cheered when we learned that our plane bombed Tokyo. But my brother is still in what they call ‘harm’s way.’

“Now that March is almost over, at last, spring is here. Old Charley had another of his morale building ideas. Every family must contribute some of their gasoline ration points for a big city bus to take the juniors and seniors to Holland Michigan for the tulip festival. We are all so bored, discouraged and anxious, anything different will be welcome.”

Lynne tried to increase her reading speed without missing anything that could be important. She skimmed a little, trying to learn if Lucy really did contact the mayor. Then the telephone rang.

She eagerly hurried to answer it. She would be glad to have the comfort of talking to Everett.

But it wasn’t Everett. Someone old, male, and sinister spoke. Was it the same person she had heard in the previous threatening call?

“You got the message. You now have 23 hours to get that diary to Mercy. My trigger finger itches.”

Chapter 28: Terror in the Tulips

The clang of the receiver at the other end hurt Lynne's ear. What kind of creep would leave a message like that? Who talked about "itchy trigger fingers?" nowadays? It sounded like dialogue from a cowboy show of the 40's that you would see on the classics channel.

Who was this weird person? Was he really dangerous, or just bizarre? She knew the door was locked and bolted and the blinds were down. She stayed away from the range that could be reached by the windows, just in case. The twins were napping and safe in their windowless room. Lynne settled herself in a little nook in a corner of the living room well out of line with the windows. She could see the door in case anyway seemed to be trying to get in there. She could reach the telephone if something happened that made her want to call for help. She would stay there and see if she could read the diary to its end and get an idea of who was threatening her in 2006, 60 years later.

Soon she was imaginatively back in Grand Rapids with her grandmother Lucy in 1945.

Lucy tried to reach the mayor to ask him to investigate Unk, but she learned he was still in Washington. She tried to talk to the Miss Hornby, the cooking teacher who was at least friendly. But that rattle brained old lady just looked upset. Her hand kept clutching and releasing the collar of her usual green dress. "You shouldn't say terrible things like that about Mr. Dykema."

Lucy even talked to her minister, at the church her family sometimes attended, the one that Joanne scornfully mocked, when she and Lucy were best friends, saying, "You might as well spend Sunday in a beer parlor as go to the Congregational Church." The minister was kind and sympathetic, but told her that creative people like her often had over active imaginations and that she should talk things over with her parents.

Lucy gave up for the present and went back to her old plan, to try to get friendly again with Joanne and see if she could find out what she had heard from Donna about the father of Betty Lou's child. They had taken to talking to each other on the phone after school again. On April 12 Lucy had just reached home and turned on the radio. She was listening to "Accentuate the Positive", thinking she would work on the message of that lively song when a radio announcer broke into to say that President Roosevelt had just died. Stricken and home alone, she called Joanne who seemed almost her best friend again. But Joanne said, "Good."

Lucy just sobbed. Joanne made a sort of apology. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I know you liked that man. But, my uncle said he's been ruining the country. Maybe things will go back to the good old ways now."

Lucy mumbled goodbye and hung up. That evening, her parents shared Lucy's mourning. They were devastated. "Who will lead us now to win this terrible war?" They were not comforted to learn that Harry Truman was sworn in at 5:30 as the new president. They listened to accounts of Roosevelt's death in Warm Springs Georgia where he was getting a few days' rest. He swam in the warm springs, enjoyed the company of some friends and cousins, signing some important papers his assistants thrust at him. They said Eleanor Roosevelt sent a message to her four sons in military service, "He did his job to the last, just as he would want you to do."

Lucy and her parents sat up late, full of sorrow, praising their great fallen leader.

The next day at school Begley looked pale and grief-stricken as he pushed his broom. First hour there was an assembly mourning the president's death. Many of the teachers and students were sad and solemn, even crying. Wheel, Lorraine, and Danny as well as Lucy all were shaken and tearful. But some, like Joanne, were hostile and bored. They muttered insults in low voices. Someone sitting near Lucy said, "Well, the new president will have to be better than that new dealer. He couldn't be worse."

Lucy remembered the drab little man whose picture was in the newspaper on inauguration day. He had run some kind of clothing store. How could he lead the country?

The next few days Northern High was on its regular class routine. Lucy tried to hide her anger at Joanne and continue her attempt at getting her to confide in her and tell her what she knew about Betty Lou.

Charley, the principal still thought the way to get through all life's tragedies was to "get into the picture" with school activities. He went on making plans to lift spirits by the trip to Holland, Michigan to see the tulips. A week later, an old bus filled with the junior and senior class students of Northern High made the trip to Holland in an hour, clanking and wheezing. The girls' gym teacher, Miss Van Houten and Unk were chaperones.

Once at their destination Lucy walked up flights of wooden stairs to the platform of a windmill where she could see tulip fields stretching out in all directions. Acres of beautiful tulips in plots were divided and connected by little paths that made a sort of labyrinth. The fields were sorted for color, red, yellow, white, pink, and even a new shade, a kind of blue black.

She thought of a song that her mother sometimes sang: "Tiptoe through the tulips with me! Knee deep in flowers we'll stray,... And if I kiss you in the garden, will you pardon me? Come tiptoe through the tulips with me!"

She couldn't get the catchy little tune out of her mind. In the past, she had loved the picture it evoked of flowers and color and love. But today she was afraid and saw possibilities that someone could hide in the tulip fields and molest a girl. Silly. Tulips were not nearly as tall as a person. Only someone crawling, or a girl lying down or dead could be hidden in the rows. Oh, she had to stop these morbid thoughts! Maybe those people that accused her of a lurid imagination were right.

At the base of the windmill there was a little stand that sold tulip bulbs. Lucy and most of the others bought bags of them to take home. It was hard to believe that those funny little bulbs that looked almost like onions could produce such beautiful flowers. Lorraine said, "My mother will really like these. She loves to garden." She and Danny bought a lot of them.

Lucy and the other students walked through the paths between fields, looking more closely, warned not to touch or pick. Lucy, Wheel and Lorraine had decided that they would try to always keep Unk Dykema in sight. Even if the grownups wouldn't listen to their accusation of him, they would watch to be sure he didn't kill another of the cute young girls he liked so much. With their growing suspicion and new fear of him most of the other girls speeded up when he came in sight.

Sensitized by her belief in Unk's bad behavior, Lucy noticed that Miss Van Houten was affectionate and physical with some of the girls, giving some of them a pat and squeeze whenever they were near. Some of the girls seemed to like her attention and some seemed to be trying to avoid it. Lucy turned a corner on a path and saw someone crouched on the ground, crying. It was Ann, a shy girl she didn't know well. Ann said, "Miss Van Houten touched my breast."

“She shouldn’t get away with doing things like that. When we get home, you must tell your parents,” Lucy urged.

“Oh, I’d be so ashamed!”

“Well, for today, stay out of her way.”

Lucy still was sure Unk was the killer. She hoped Wheel had Unk in sight because she hadn’t seen him for a while. She hated to leave the crying girl, but hurried on along the path, looking for Unk.

She saw beautiful flowers, but was too upset to really notice them. She wanted to find out where Unk was, but hoped she would find him where she would be safe with a lot of people around. The path did a sort of u turn. She didn’t see anyone on it ahead of her. Almost running now, she wanted desperately to rejoin the group. Suddenly she felt a hand on her arm. She shrieked. It was Unk. “Lucy, you should stay with the others. These paths are like a puzzle. You could get lost and no one could find you.” He had a sort of twisted smile. She felt there was menace in his voice.

“Yes. You’re right.” She started running away from him, her heart pounding. No one could save her. There was no one else in sight.

Chapter 29: A Patriotic Dish

Gasping for breath, Lucy ran to get away from Unk. She didn't try to scream. There was no one to hear her. Unk had probably killed three of her friends and wouldn't hesitate to kill her. She didn't look back, but could hear his rasping, middle aged panting behind her. She speeded up. Then she came to a place where a path intersected her path. She turned into that and almost ran into Wheel who was running from the opposite direction. On a collision course, they stopped.

"Wheel. Thank God you're here! I'm scared. Unk is following me."

"Yes, I see him. He's almost here. With the two of us together, I think he won't hurt us. I tried to stay near him but somehow lost him. Did he do anything to you? Threaten you?"

"I thought so. That's why I'm running. But now I'm not sure. He told me I'm not safe here. I don't know what that means."

They stood together, catching their breath. Soon Unk caught up with them and stood over them. He was panting, and could scarcely get words out. On his face was a twisted, ghastly smile. "Good, Lucy. You've been following my advice and trying to rejoin the others. Keep on this path but when you get to the red tulips, turn right and you will be back where the others are. Wheel, show her where they are."

Unk followed along with them and all three joined the main group of students. They all stayed together for the rest of the tour. Lucy couldn't decide who was watching and who was being watched. She was glad when it was time for the whole group to get on the bus. Wheel took a seat next to Lucy. As they rode, in low voices they assured each other that they would find a way to get some authorities to do something about Unk. This was too much to endure. But Lucy didn't know how she could do this.

So, the next day at school proceeded like any ordinary day. Lucy went to cooking class. Miss Hornby quavered, "Girls, we will continue with the recipes planned and written on the schedules I sent home with you. This is one of a group that comes from the government to improve home front nutrition. It is our patriotic duty to eat foods that give us good nutrition and also save on meat which must be provided for our brave soldiers. This dish is delicious and filling and nourishing. Without meat, using onions, a product that is plentiful now in cold storage throughout the winter. You remember, today, we make a casserole dish, called Scalloped Onions." Miss Hornby demonstrated how to grease an ovenware dish and cut onions into quarters. She told them, "We have enough baking pans so everyone can use one. I'll make a few extras. For a treat, you can take your dish home to serve your parents for dinner tonight. And here is a recipe card for each of you to give your parents. If there is a special shut in that you know, a few of you can take one of the extras to that person."

Lorraine said, "This is a fine lesson. My parents were interested in that message she sent home with us. I'm glad we have a recipe. I'll make it at home again."

Lucy said, "You're optimistic to see good in anything. I'm so concerned about the danger we're all in, I can't enjoy anything. After classes, let's you, me and Wheel have a real council of war and figure out an aggressive plan."

"Lucy. Are you whispering? Concentrate on your lesson." Miss Hornby's voice showed her displeasure. She went over the list of ingredients.

They all fell to work, quartering the onions. To Lucy's surprise, her cousin George poked his head into the room.

"What are you doing here? Are you a girl now?" Lucy didn't like George, but usually tried to hide it better.

“I have a note to deliver to Miss Hornby from the principal. What are you making today?”

Lucy thought he was a pest, but answered more pleasantly, “Onion casseroles. They were listed on that handout they told everyone to take home yesterday. It’s supposed to be patriotic to make it for a main dish instead of meat.”

But now, George didn’t seem to be listening. His eyes looked past her and rested on the table where four of the most popular girls were grouped together. His pimply face was red, maybe from excitement or embarrassment. He picked what looked like a deliberate path to Miss Hornby in which he had to squeeze past three of the cheerleaders.

Miss Hornby took the note and opened it. Her wrinkled old face showed a smile. “How nice. The principal congratulates us for cooperating with the office of Civilian Defense in making a recipe from their new publication. Thanks George. If you want to stay, you can learn how to make something good for your family.”

George agreed, and found a chair near the blonde, buxom cheerleaders.

Lucy muttered in disgust, “My cousin George is such a drip. Those girls wouldn’t go to a dog fight with him.”

They busied themselves, measuring, chopping, and beating. There was a tap at the door. Another message? It was Miss Van Houten, the gym teacher. “I saw your handout. Can I have one of your recipe cards? It sounds like a good meal.”

Miss Hornby seemed flustered. “You’ve never visited us before. Of course. And would you like to stay and see us finish up our creations and get them in the oven?”

“That will be nice. I’m free until next hour. And she got a chair and sat next to quiet little Ann. Lucy remembered Ann had complained about being groped by her on the tulip outing. Ann looked unhappy but didn’t protest.

Beaming, Miss Hornby continued. “Now, girls, put all your ingredients together in your pan and sprinkle some pepper and paprika on top. Then you can put it in the oven. The passing bell is about to ring. I’ll take them out when they’re cooked. I’ll leave the door to the room unlocked so you can come in and get yours to take home.”

Two hours later, Lucy was uneasily sitting in history class. What a strange situation, to listen to a lecture on American legislation from a teacher who probably has killed your friends!”

Unk Dykema had been acting depressed in recent days. He must have noticed that the students were suspicious of him. He had even tried to be nice to the boys. But very few of them responded. He still seemed to be making a strong effort to avoid Lucy’s eyes. But, today his mood seemed improved. He announced that someone had given him a wonderful onion casserole made in Miss Hornby’s class. He would eat it for dinner tonight. His smile reminded Lucy of the old days when Unk seemed sure of the approval of the pretty little girls and their parents.

“I found it on my desk just now with a nice note. Who gave it to me? Don’t be bashful. I appreciate it very much.” His eyes swept the room like a search light, looking for the girl that gave him the gift. None of the students would admit to leaving it.

There was a buzz of whispering in the room. Wheel said. “What deluded fool actually likes Unk and would give him a present?”

And Lorraine made it stronger. “Who would present a gift to a murderer?”

Chapter 30: Dyspepsia

No one answered Unk's question about the donor of the onion dish. Eventually, he said, "Well, thank you, anyway" and went on with the lesson, showing some of his old, oily self confidence.

After their last class of the day, Lorraine and Lucy went to the cooking room. A succulent oniony, cheesy smell floated in the air. They wrapped their casseroles in newspapers to take home, then met with Wheel in the corner of an empty study hall.

Lucy noticed that Wheel was wearing a new glen plaid sport jacket. She looked at him appraisingly. He really wasn't hard on the eyes! She usually only thought of him as a partner in her enterprises, study hall inspection, school committees, and the investigation of the murders. The thought flitted into her head. "He might make a fairly good boy friend!"

"What are you looking at?" Wheel demanded. "Is my hair messed up or something?"

"No. I'm just thinking. Let's just make a decision real quick. We have to do something before Unk kills more kids. Tomorrow, let's go to the principal, all three of us and insist, really insist, that he call the police. If he says no, we'll make a huge fuss."

Lorraine, that habitual book worm said, "I read that when the women in England wanted the vote in 1917 they padlocked themselves to the police station or something until someone listened. Maybe we could do something like that."

Wheel said, "You like to read that old history. But there are more recent examples. My father told me about the sit-down strike in Flint here that forced the General Motors to allow negotiate with the union. Workers just went into the plant to their work stations and wouldn't leave."

Lucy exclaimed, "Oh, I should have remembered that. I was seven at the time. My dad was in the National Guard and had to go with them when they were called out to keep order. He hated to go. But, thank goodness, Governor Frank Murphy had the Guard just stay there and didn't order them to go into the plants and hurt anyone. My dad said Murphy remembered his grandfather who was executed in Ireland for rebelling against the government."

"Yes. That's what happened. And the sit down strike worked. Lots of good things came from it like the eight hour day. We can do something like that if we have to." Wheel continued soberly, "I don't like to cause trouble, because my mother isn't well. But enough is enough."

The three well-behaved honor students were silent, trying to think through their plan. Their lives might depend on it. Probably Unk could tell that they especially distrusted him. They might be the next students of Northern High to have one of his fake accidents.

The enticing smell of the onion casseroles escaping from the newspaper wrappings tormented them. They were hungry for their dinner and the comfort of their homes.

Finally, Wheel broke the silence. "Okay. Let's come to school 15 minutes early tomorrow with a specific plan of action if the principal says no. Think how we can make such a spectacle of ourselves that it will cause a tremendous scandal and Charley will have to do something about Unk."

Lucy agreed, but hoped they wouldn't really have to do it. It wasn't in her nature to do something against the rules. Even the idea made her a little sick to her stomach. Her parents would be hurt and angry. But she felt strongly they had to do something.

Her parents loved the onion dish. They were especially proud that she had made it. Her mother said, “Lucy, you should make it sometime when our relatives come to dinner. I think I should invite Cousin Amy and her husband some Sunday soon.” The three of them ate every morsel.

It was a good evening. The radio gave them excellent war news. The 24th Armored Division won a big battle against German troops. They liberated a prison camp they called Stalag VII which held 30,000 American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

When the broadcast was over and Lucy could talk she said, “That is so wonderful! I wonder if our English teacher, Billy Clay was freed. I heard he was in heavy fighting almost as soon as he entered the army, then was captured.”

Her mother said, “Was he the one all you girls had a crush on? He had just graduated from college. He worked at the radio station too, didn’t he?”

“Yes. That’s the one. He was a doll. Always wore a bow tie. We were devastated when the draft board took him from 4 F status and sent him off to war.”

Her mother, for once, looked relaxed. The usual worry lines and little frown were gone from her face. “Yes. I hope he was freed and also a lot of other Michigan boys. The war is almost over. I know now Frank will be returning from the Pacific soon.”

In the night, Lucy suddenly woke up. Why hadn’t she thought of it before? Her mother mentioned her Cousin Amy. She was married to Sam Browning, a deputy sheriff in Wyoming Township. Lucy had met him a few times at family parties and he seemed to be a pretty good guy. He was a member of law enforcement and far enough from the situation to be more objective than the other grown ups she had talked to. If the principal wouldn’t agree to go to the police, she would call Sam. Tomorrow morning she would say to Wheel and Lorraine, “Let’s try one more time with the principal and if he won’t go to the police let me contact my relative. And if that doesn’t produce results fast, let’s just sit in front of the door to Charley’s office, with some big signs telling why we’re there and make every single person that tries to enter that room step over us and listen to what we say.”

She fell into a dreamless sleep and woke in the morning feeling good about her decision. Teenagers really could do something. The boys at war were only a few years older than she was. Even though many of them died, many of them were in the forces that were bringing victory both in Europe and the Pacific.

As she dressed for school she felt resolute. Today was the day Unk Dykema, pervert and murderer, would meet his Waterloo!

But when Lucy’s parents turned on the radio for the early news, a startling announcement was made.

“Peter Dykema, popular history teacher at Northern High, affectionately called Unk by his students, was rushed to Blodgett hospital yesterday evening with severe abdominal pains and suspected appendicitis. He was treated for intense intestinal distress, but six hours later, he was dead.”

Chapter 31: Something He Ate

Lucy and her parents were horrified at the news of Unk's fatal illness. But, dutiful people, her mother and father went to work and sent Lucy off to school. All that morning, Lucy felt like a character in a horror movie. There was something unreal about these things that were happening to the people of Northern High. Was death all around her? How could Unk die so fast, when he seemed to be in good health? Had someone somehow killed him? And did that show he wasn't the killer? And that meant that someone else was. If that person killed him, how did he do it? And of course, why? Was he just a homicidal maniac? And was he still wandering around? Or was Unk's death and the three others really tied to Betty Lou and the secret pregnancy she tried to hide by her visit to her aunt in California two years ago? Jinx had said an old fogey was the father of Betty Lou's baby and then Jinx was shot soon after. Lucy and Wheel had considered several of the older men who had showed an interest in Betty Lou and had narrowed their suspicions down to Unk. Now where should they look for another suspect? And could they find him before he chose his next victim?

Regular classes were held. But, in Lucy's first class, the kids were exchanging distressed comments for most of the time and when the lesson started, somehow it drifted off into exchanges of shock and distress or silence. Lucy listened in on many private, low voiced conversations.

She even skipped some classes to hang out in the waiting area of the school office, to overhear what she could. The room was full of people, some newly arrived excited visitors, talking of information, fears, guesses, and theories. She heard one side of telephone conversations, the secretary trying to deal with them and remarks and orders shouted to her by Charley, the principal, from his inner room. A babble of loud and distressed or quiet and disturbed voices mingled. Someone said that Unk had been married but his wife had died of influenza in 1917. That he had some living relatives, a brother and sister and nephews. Paul Dykema, Unk's portly, highly self confident brother talked on the office phone to the hospital staff to get some details about the death. With the phone still in his hand, he buttonholed Miss Hornby when she came in for her mail, almost accusing her of making dishes in her class that caused food poisoning. Spots of red appeared on her wrinkled old face as she vehemently insisted the casseroles were fine when she took them out of the oven and that they it was safe to keep them at room temperature for the rest of the day. Proof was she had eaten one and was in perfect health. Several students, in the office for one reason or another, spoke up to say their families ate them and they all felt fine.

Lucy was very conscious of the state of her body. She felt nauseous. Was that a sign of food poisoning? Or was it just because she was so upset? She had eaten one third of the onion dish at her house. She noticed every little bit of discomfort from her stomach on down. Even so, there were only little twinges, no real symptoms.

Miss Hornby went on talking defensively to other teacher lingering near the mail slots. "I was told the police went to Mr. Dykema's house and got what was left of his casserole. Greedy man, he had eaten the whole thing, really enough for six people. But there were scraps on the bottom. They took them to analyze it. You'll see, whatever he died from, it wasn't what was produced in my classroom. Mr. Dykema was given one of the four extra casseroles. I prepared those myself. The extra ones were in white dishes. When I took the dishes out of the oven I noticed one of the white ones was missing. One of the students must have taken it out ahead of time to be sure to get one of the extras."

Miss Van Houten was getting her mail too. She said, "I asked sweet little Ann to get one of extra onion casseroles for me. I ate a big piece for dinner and it was delicious." Unk's brother listened to the person on the other end of the phone line for a few minutes, then reported to the world in general, "A specialist at the hospital is analyzing it the remains of the casserole. They won't let me have my brother's body for a funeral until they have performed a post mortem."

The school secretary shooed Lucy out of the room. She saw Wheel and Lorraine in a corner near the stairs, deep in talk. She joined them and told them what she had learned by her eavesdropping. Lorraine said, "If this was a murder mystery, instead of life, it would turn out that there was arsenic in his dish."

Lucy said, "Don't be silly. Where would anyone get arsenic around here? There wasn't any in the cooking room or anywhere in the school."

Wheel countered, "Well, ask Mr. Begley. Did he use arsenic to kill mice in the basement?"

"Poor Mr. Begley. Ragged and sloppy, with his unkempt hair, he's always being suspected," Lorraine replied. As they talked, the main door of the school opened and two uniformed policemen entered. The principal rushed out of his office to meet them. Lucy and her friends tried to stay out of sight, staying close enough so they could hear the principal say, "Check the whole school for all kinds of poisons. Start with the janitor, Begley and places he worked and stored his supplies." They rushed off in the direction he pointed.

Then the principal noticed the three students, obviously snooping. "You must belong somewhere. Go to your assigned classes."

They actually attended class for an hour, continuing like the others to speculate about Unk's death. Then, Lucy returned to the waiting room, carrying a sheaf of papers as if she had an errand there. She heard a policeman reporting on the phone to his supervisor "No. We searched all supply rooms, cupboards, and Mr. Begley's little office and locker. There are no poisons in this school. They say they never use them, and control mice with traps instead."

When Lucy went out to the hall, she saw Wheel. He said, "I've been doing some thinking. It's obvious the patriotic onion casseroles were tasty and there was nothing wrong with them. The kids in the cooking class took them home and their families ate them and they didn't have any problems, everyone except Unk. It will probably take a while for them to analyze the scraps of his dish and the contents of his stomach. Someone must have sneaked into the cooking room, inserted a poison in one pie, and left it as a gift in the history room to deliberately kill Unk. The police can't find any poisons at the school. But poisons are available to everyone. It has to be one that tastes good or is tasteless since it seems that Unk gorged himself on his tainted food. The notice about the patriotic pies went out to everyone in the school the day before so the killer could have been prepared."

Lucy could only nod, dumbly. Her mind was filled with fear. Lorraine joined them and together they tried to think of who was involved in the cooking lesson, who knew about it, who was acting suspicious.

They recalled that two unexpected people had been in the cooking room. Miss Van Houten had dropped in and was paying especial attention to Ann. And Cousin George arrived with his message from the principal, then stayed and had a fine time squeezing in very close to the blonde cheerleaders. But, at the end of the hour, everyone left Miss Hornby to finish up. And, she said she would leave her door unlocked all afternoon so students could pick up their casseroles when it was time to go home.

Lucy saw the head secretary bearing down on them. "Quick, let's get out of here. Let's go to our classes so we don't get into trouble."

At last, the school day was over. Lucy prepared a simple supper for her parents and stayed close to them all evening, looking for normality and comfort. They seemed tacitly to agree not to talk about the death.

The war news was good. Berlin was being taken by the Allies. Lucy's mother's eyes glowed. "Soon this terrible war will be over." Unk's death at that moment seemed secondary.

At school the next day, things seemed back to normal. Students were paying their usual half hearted attention to lessons, the cheerleaders were strutting in the halls with their boyfriends. Mr. Begley was sweeping the floor, grumbling at the sloppy kids.

Lorraine, working her shift in the office even said she heard the principal say at least once the words that had been so usual for him, "Get everyone in the picture."

Lucy and Joanne were on good terms again and met to eat lunch together. They talked about the radio announcement that the big prisoner of war camp was about to be liberated.

Lucy said to Joanne, "That probably means Billy Clay will be coming home soon. You remember him, don't you? He was our English teacher for a while and he also worked at WOOD, the radio station. He was young and cute."

Joanne laughed. "I sure do. I adored him. And I know something about him that you don't." The mischievous look on her face made it clear she enjoyed the bit of gossip she knew.

"And, I know some other things about Betty Lou and who loved her and who hated the one Betty Lou loved."

"Oh, tell me. You must. It's very important. Maybe knowing will let me do something to stop all the deaths at the school."

"Oh, you're always so dramatic. We've had some bad luck at the school with all these accidents. But, anyway, one of these days I'll tell you some things that will stun and surprise you."

"You think it is all a joke, just a piece of gossip. But it is deadly serious. Please, Joanne, tell me. If I know, maybe I can do something to save our lives."

Chapter 32: Joanne Spills the Beans

When Lucy made her urgent plea to save them all by telling what she knew, Joanne laughed. “We’re not in danger. You get your crazy ideas from all those scary movies your mother lets you go to.”

Lucy knew Joanne’s mother’s Dutch Reformed religion didn’t allow her to go to movies. And she knew they didn’t read newspapers either.

Joanne tossed her white blonde hair and continued to hint at juicy secrets she knew. But she wouldn’t tell anything more. She said, “Maybe tomorrow.”

Later that afternoon Lucy and the other juniors went to the room where they usually had history. The school had brought in a substitute teacher. He said in a melodious, but quavering voice, “My name is Mr. Hekman. I taught drama many years. Now I will be your history teacher for the rest of the year. Turn to page 239 of your book.”

The students stared at him, as if they didn’t understand his language. They always considered most of their teachers, around forty like their parents, to be to be old. But this character was really old, with white hair, a white moustache, wrinkles on top of wrinkles. They gaped at him.

He said, “Oh, I know. You’re in shock. Mr. Dykema, your teacher, has eaten his last meal. But history tells us, and surely this bloody war has taught us, life must go on!”

And, of course he was right. They went through the motions of listening to him, then went home at the end of the hour, did their homework, and returned to school the next day. The students of Northern High somehow absorbed this recent violent death of those familiar school day figures. Lucy wondered if you eventually become numb to shocks and sorrows. How did the soldiers all over the world go on with their duties and lives after more and more of their companion were killed?

Lucy knew her parents were shocked and puzzled about Unk’s deaths. They said his sudden death was very strange. Her mother said, “I don’t see how anyone can say the casserole caused his death. We ate every bit of the one you brought home, and didn’t have any bad effects.”

Lucy kept trying to convince Joanne to tell her what she knew about Betty Lou and her lover but Joanne obviously enjoyed the power she had over her and kept saying, “I’ll tell you later.”

Soon Lucy got used to Mr. Hekman, the strangely dramatic substitute history teacher and started preparing for her final exams. Miss Hornby stopped her explanation and defense of the casseroles that had somehow killed Unk Dykema and was offering more dishes that were nourishing and used almost no meat. So far, there was no news about the analysis of Unk’s body and the remains of the onion dish.

Since the war news continued to be good, this made an aura of hope, despite the unsolved death of Unk. Most of Europe was occupied by Allied troops.

Now, it was May. In cooking class, Miss Hornby announced she would teach them how to make a nutritious bean soup. Lucy and the others still felt nervous about cooking in the room that had produced the fatal casserole. But they did their best to cooperate with their cooking teacher. Miss Hornby said with satisfaction, “I begged the butcher to save bones when he sliced ham for a party.”

Lucy and Joanne shared a work table. Following Miss Hornby’s directions, Joanne measured the required number of cups of the pre softened white navy beans that the teacher had soaked all night. She was putting them into a pot when she was

distracted by looking at a new pink angora sweater a girl at the next table was wearing and half of the beans onto the counter.

“Joanne, you spilled the beans. Well, we can scoop them up and use them anyway.” They added the water and bones.

Miss Hornby said, “Hurry and get them cooking on medium high heat. If you do, they’ll be soft enough to eat before the class is over.”

The soup was soon boiling briskly. They had a long time to wait, stirring occasionally to keep the soup from burning. They were supposed to be studying a nutrition chart. Instead, they whispered to each other.

The little accident in their cooking process reminded Lucy that she needed to keep trying to get information from Joanne.

“Joanne, tell me now. I have to know. You were friendly with Donna and she was close to Betty Lou. For a while there you and Donna were hinting that you were talking about certain secrets. But even before that you had some source of knowledge about Betty Lou. You were the first person to hint that Betty Lou’s visit to her aunt had a hidden reason.”

“Well, it’s good gossip, but I don’t believe it has anything to do with Unk’s tummy problems or the other accidents. Anyway, Jinx talked about an old fogey chasing Betty Lou. Donna said Betty Lou said that was true, that some old guy was making passes at her. Jinx said some old guy got her in the family way. The kids thought it might be the principal, or Unk or even, please forgive me, your father. Probably all of them had a sort of crush on her. But, Betty Lou mocked them and said she wouldn’t let any of those ugly old men near her. She said her secret sweetheart was someone very dreamy. For a long time she wouldn’t tell Donna who it was.”

“Well, go on. Who was actually messing around with her?”

Joanne obviously wanted to keep some secrets to herself. “I’ve told you enough. I’ll let you think about it for a few days. These beans are soft now. Let’s put the other ingredients in and finish up our soup.”

“Oh, please! Tell me more!”

“Well, here’s another thing Donna told me. She said that Betty Lou told her there was a woman who was bothering her.”

“What do you mean, bothering her?”

“You know. Like a man does. Poking her, fussing over her, trying to be alone with her. She was furious when she learned that Betty Lou got pregnant, and said, to her, ‘Tramps like you don’t deserve to live!’”

“But who? Who was it?”

Joanne laughed. “Maybe I’ll tell you more another day. Now the bell is going to ring.”

This was one of the days Lucy had gym class after cooking. She hurried to the dressing room and got her regulation suit out of the basket labeled with her name. She, like the other girls, hated that gym suit. It was bright blue with a blouse part that was all right, but attached to it, the bottom part was not stylish shorts, but bloomers, puffing out with elastic on each leg, making the slimmest girl look fat and dumpy.

She went into a stall and hurried to get into it. Behind the curtain in the next stall she could hear not one voice, but two. One wailed, “What can I do. She seems to follow me where ever I go. She sat on the bus with me when we visited the tulips, she sat next to me in cooking class, sometimes she waits with her car around the corner from the school and offers me a ride home. I’m afraid to refuse. She can fail me in gym. I hate gym anyway, can never catch a ball, can’t even jump rope.”

Lucy could tell one voice was Ann. She heard the other one, who turned out to be Lorraine say, "You really ought to tell your parents about this."

"Oh, I couldn't! My dad would somehow say it was my fault and really punish me. My mother would say I was a sinner to even have such thoughts."

"Well, I don't know what to tell you. I'll have to think about it, but, be careful. Stay away from her. I heard that she was always after Betty Lou. I saw in the records that Betty Lou complained about her to the principal. And then not long afterwards Betty Lou died."

"Oh come on. You don't think..." Ann didn't finish her sentence.

Lorraine answered, "I don't know what to think. Someone is killing us kids, for some reason. I thought it was Unk. But now he's dead. Maybe it is Miss Van Houten. She seems to be everywhere the juniors are and often nearby when someone dies. Even Unk. She unexpectedly visited the cooking class where that deadly casserole was made."

The two of them left their curtained stall just as Lucy left hers. The three of them stood there, in their ugly blue bloomers, with distressed faces.

"I could hear what you two were saying. It fits with what I just learned from Joanne. We've noticed how she always has a pet in her gym classes. Right now it's embarrassing the way she follows Ann around. Ann, you told me Miss Van Houten touched your breast when she found you alone in the tulip field. People thought having an unholy love for a student was a cause of the murders. Nobody considered it might be a woman with that love. Maybe she had a dyke passion for Betty Lou.. The gym teacher is strong and athletic. She could probably saw a board and make the weak spot in the stage that Betty Lou fell through and was strong enough to hit Donna with great force with some sort of blunt instrument. She wasn't on the hunting trip when Jinx was killed. But was she staying in one of the northern towns that weekend like Begley? Donna said she was furious about Betty Lou's pregnancy. Maybe she killed her in a rage, then killed the others either to cover up that killing or because she still was furious because they had been interested in Betty Lou."

Ann started sob.

Lucy continued. Now she was sure of what had happened. "Yes. That's it! I can't wait to tell Wheel. We've found the murderer!"

Chapter 33: Sammy the Slasher

After her conversation with Ann and Lorraine in the locker room, despite her new fear of the teacher, Lucy went with her two friends to the gym for their class, all in their absurd blue bloomer gym suits. As it turned out, Miss Van Houten was non-menacing, even boring as she led them all through exercises designed to improve their health as a part of the Civilian Defense Home Front strategy. Even so Lucy was sure now that Miss Van Houten was likely to be the killer.

After class, she was eager to talk to Wheel alone. After they talked over her new information, if he agreed, she would go back to an earlier plan, to talk to Mayor Bobby Davis. She had read in the paper that he was back from his consulting trip to Washington. She would go to see him, remind him that for years she had dropped off her worn shoes at his shoe shop, talk to him about the deaths of people at Northern High and tell him her suspicions of Miss Van Houten.

Every time Lucy saw Wheel in the halls that day, he was deep in conversation with Lorraine. She decided to have one of their three person meetings and asked them both to meet with her in an empty classroom after school. Once there, she started to tell Wheel what she suspected. But Wheel was full of news of his own. He had heard from several good sources that the people analyzing the remains of Unk's casserole and his stomach contents had decided on the cause of death. Yes. It was that casserole. But they didn't find any of the ordinary poisons. They did find that his dish was made of half onions, and half tulips bulbs.

Wheel told them he remembered hearing that in Holland this past year, driven by starvation, the Dutch had eaten tulip bulbs and it killed many of them. "So the question is, who sneaked into the cooking room and added tulip bulbs to one of the casseroles, then came back in an hour and took it out of the oven and left it on Unk's desk? I can't stay any longer this afternoon, but think hard about who bought tulip bulbs on that school trip to Holland Michigan, who knew they were making casseroles and who knew the cooking room was going to be unlocked. I'm going to be busy helping my mother this weekend. But come to school early Monday so we can talk about it."

The weekend seemed to drag on forever. Lucy was eager to have Wheel help her decide what to do next.

Monday, Lucy went to school early, and stood near her locker, waiting to talk to Wheel. But Wheel didn't come until just before the bell rang. Probably another of those problems with his invalid mother. She hoped to see some of her school comrades, hear what they knew about the tulip bulbs, and learn what they thought. Cousin George came to his locker and started talking about a headline in the Grand Rapids Press. "Sammy the Slasher. Tenth case since December. Waits on dark streets wearing dark clothes, follows girls alone waiting for buses, or walking, slashes them with a knife and, then runs away. Mostly he only cut their clothes, sometimes he makes flesh wounds. The girls described a man as about forty, thin, short, dark, wearing old clothes, and a cap. He never said anything, but sometimes came out with a weird laugh. Last night's attack was especially bad. It occurred on the West side, not far from Bridge Street. The knife went through her coat and cut her. She is in hospital. She said she screamed and he ran."

Lucy had read in previous stories that he was first called Sammy the Slasher by a playful reporter, then the name was picked up by everyone. They had no clues about who he was and why he slashed girls. He had been operating all over the city.

The odd young genius, Danny, Lorraine's little brother was hanging around in his usual way. His big ears were pink and stuck out as if to help him overhear. He wasn't

invited into the conversations, but wasn't chased away. He seemed fascinated by George's story and kept asking him questions.

"A knife? He slashed them with a knife? What kind of knife?"

George answered impatiently, "All I know is what is in the newspaper. You can read it yourself."

Lucy was frightened to hear of one more threat to all of them. She often had to walk alone on the dark streets from the bus stop. Several times she felt like someone was following her, but then told herself she was just making up a drama, that Grand Rapids was a safe city. She never told her parents she was sometimes afraid coming home alone in the dark. She knew they would say if she felt there was any real danger, she should just stop going out at night.

Wheel hurried home after school without the promised talk with Lucy about who could have put the tulips in the onion dish. She felt it could have been Miss Van Houten who had been on the trip to Holland Michigan where so many of them had bought tulip bulbs and who had unexpectedly appeared in the cooking class.

At supper that night, Lucy's parents were especially concentrating on the radio news. Lucy was preoccupied with what she had learned in school that day. Then, after she and her mother did the dishes, despite her new fear about Sammy the Slasher, Lucy went to the school for the big spring concert. She attended every year and in tonight's program, she had been assigned the task of introducing one of the numbers. She tried to swallow her fears. Probably Sammy would take a day off from his menacing or would be in another part of town.

And Lucy longed to do something different for a while to take her mind off all the terrible things that had been happening. And maybe she would get an opportunity to talk to Wheel about her new plan for getting the mayor's help in investigating Van Houten.

The gym was full, and the concert was wonderful. The chorus sang "God Bless America." Then the music teacher announced the next song, saying, "With God's help, it won't be long until we can stop singing songs like this next song, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." During intermission, Wheel said to Lucy, "sorry we didn't have time to talk. I came late this morning because my mother sick. My aunt's with her now."

"Well we have a few minutes now." Lucy quickly summarized for Wheel what she had learned about a woman threatening Betty Lou and Ann's fear of Miss Van Houten. He agreed that she should try to talk to the mayor.

Then the music started again. Mugsy's jazz band played Tommy Dorsey's Boogie Woogie. The lively music made Lucy forget her fears for a few minutes. After the concert, Lucy walked to the bus stop with Wheel and Lorraine. For once, they were in a light, almost giddy mood. They all took the Bridge Street bus, and Lucy got off first.

As she was walking the four blocks to her home, she thought again of George's stories about Sammy the Slasher. The night was especially dark, even though it was spring, it was ten o'clock and there was no moon. She heard footsteps behind her. She walked faster. The steps seemed to go even faster. She was afraid to look behind her, afraid of what she would see. The steps seemed closer and closer. And then a body brushed up against her. It was a short man, with a black cap, some black curls escaping, wearing a dark shirt and pants. Sammy! She wondered considered screaming, but the house she passed looked dark as if everyone was asleep. And it might just make Sammy leap into action. She tried talking to him. "Please. Leave me alone. Don't hurt me." The man's hand went in the air. She saw a knife. She speeded up to a run. She could hear him running after her. He caught up with her and she felt the knife against her coat.

Then she did scream. At first, her voice seemed shut off as if she didn't know how to make a noise, but then she got out some loud piercing sounds that somehow frightened her even more. "Help! Help! Help!"

Sammy laughed in a strange way.

Then she saw a Ford turn the corner and draw up to the curb near her. Sammy saw it too, and abruptly changing directions, rapidly ran to the other side of the street and then out of sight.

"What's going on? Looks like you're having a bad time. I'll get you home safely," a voice said.

Relief swept over Lucy. How lucky that a kind person happened to be riding by. She opened the door jumped in the car, almost babbling in her terror. She was saying, "Oh, that man! He attacked me. You saved me! Thank you so much. I was so scared!"

And then she recognized the driver. It was Miss Van Houten!

Chapter 34: Triumph

Lynne Lewis had been crouched on the floor in a corner of her Washington apartment for hours to be out of the range of the windows that some threatening person had told her he had in his gun sites. She frantically read Grandmother Lucy's diary about 1945, trying to read faster, but not wanting to miss anything that would give her a clue to her present danger. There were just a few pages more. Soon she would know who the killer of those four people in Grand Rapids was and give her an idea who was threatening her in 2006.

Her eyes ached and she was nauseous with fear. As she read, she was swept imaginatively into the time when Grandmother Lucy was 15, trying to deal with the deaths in her high school that she was so sure were murders.

Lucy was terrified when she realized that to escape the man who had attacked her with a knife she had jumped into the car of Miss Van Houten who had probably killed three of her school friends. But Miss Van Houten acted as if Lucy's fear was because of the attacker and only natural. "You must be quaking after an encounter with that man. He's probably that Slasher the papers have been talking about. Her voice was calm and normal. "Are you all right? He didn't cut you, did he?"

Lucy said in a low voice "No, he just cut my clothes."

Miss Van Houten continued. "I just gave your schoolmate, Ann, a ride home. She lives not far from here. When we get to your place, we'll call the police. Now, where do you live?"

Lucy managed to tell her. Within minutes, they were in front of her dark house. Really confused now because Miss Van Houten was so nice and non-threatening, she hurried out of the car and rang her doorbell to waken her parents quickly.

When her mother and father came to the door, alarmed, half asleep, in their night clothes, there was a period of confused drama. Lucy told her story, Miss Van Houten told what she saw, Lucy's father called the police and gave them a short version of it what happened. "They want me to be sure you weren't wounded."

Lucy took off her coat and showed them the knife hadn't reached her dress or body. Her father reported that to the police and continued, "Hurry and look for him. He may still be in the area." After he hung up he reported, "They'll ride all around the neighborhood and then come and tell us what they've found."

Lucy's mother and father put on bathrobes, and then they sat in the living room, waiting for what seemed to Lucy like hours but was probably less than one. Her father seemed dazed and was mostly silent. Miss Van Houten looked kind and worried. Lucy's mother sat next to Lucy on the couch, crying quietly, clutching Lucy's hand in hers. Finally, near midnight there was a loud knock on the door. Lucy's father rushed to let two uniformed policemen in. The young one with the limp said they had cruised the neighborhood, but not seen anyone out on the street.

The old one said somberly, "This slasher guy is worrisome. But so far, he hasn't done much real damage. The girl he hurt two nights ago got some iodine and a bandage and is home now. Usually, he just cuts their clothes, like he did with you. If we ever get a suspect, we'll call you to help identify him." He started to the door, but stopped and turned back.

"Young lady, until we catch this guy, you shouldn't be out alone at night."

Lucy's father agreed. "Yes. We won't let her." He sighed. "Grand Rapids has always been a safe city. How terrible that the world has gotten so full of bad people."

Her mother sobbed. "You have been walking home alone in the dark all your life and I never thought a thing about it. Now, it will be as bad as my worry over Frank in the Pacific."

Miss Van Houten said, "Yes, Lucy. It just isn't safe for a girl to be on the street alone now. If there's something at school, you want to go to at night and will be returning alone, I can help you. I can give you a ride." She looked at Lucy in a way Lucy had never seen before. Lucy didn't like the overly fond look on the gym teacher's face.

In the morning, during breakfast, Lucy talked with her parents about the slasher incident. She assured them she would follow their order not to be alone on the streets at night. That morning they didn't listen to the radio war news. Her mother had somewhat regained her composure. But several times, she squeezed Lucy's hand. When Lucy went to go out the door, her mother kissed her goodbye, an unusual thing.

"Come right home from school. I don't want to worry about you at all tonight."

"Ok, Mama. I'll do that."

Lucy was on time for school, shaken by her scares the night before. She wanted to talk to Wheel about her encounters with Sammy and Miss Van Houten. But, once again, Wheel rushed in just before the bell rang, with barely enough time to get his books out of his locker.

When Lucy got to class, instead of listening to her English teacher, she tried to make sense of the painful evening and to decide what she should do next in her search for the Northern High killer.

Fifteen minutes into the class, a student who worked in the school office burst in. She handed the teacher a note. The teacher read it, then said with excitement in her voice, "Students. I have something wonderful to tell you! The war in Europe is over! Germany surrendered. Our president has proclaimed today as V. E. Day, Victory in Europe. School is cancelled until tomorrow."

Probably victory against Japan would occur very soon. She would see her brother Frank and life could be normal again. Lucy heard church bells ringing. She got her sweater from her locker and hurried out the front door. Lucy ignored the mystery deaths at Northern High, her suspicion of Miss Van Houten, even last night's scary meeting with the Slasher. Victory! The end had come to the terrible war in Europe!

She looked around for Wheel and for Lorraine. It would be great to celebrate this with her two best friends. But, when she didn't see them in the crush of students in the hall, she went along with the cheering group, rushing outdoors without even stopping at her locker.

She joined the crowds of students, adults, children, people of all ages, shouting, talking, and singing, some even dancing in the street. People moved toward the downtown section of town, sometimes stopping to greet friends and exchange comments of happiness. They continued all the way to Campau Square, the center of the business district, where thousands of people from all parts of the city were hugging each other and literally jumping for joy. Someone had rigged up a platform with a microphone. The mayor, mothers of soldiers, and some returned soldiers, made little speeches or offered prayers of thankfulness. One former prisoner of war, tall and thin, looked familiar, but Lucy was far from the stage and couldn't see clearly. Some local singers presented patriotic music like "God Bless America" and some sentimental songs with special meaning, like "The White Cliffs of Dover", and "I'll Be Seeing You." A seller from the nut store dressed as a huge peanut walked the crowd, selling bags of fresh roasted nuts. Stores got out their precious hoarded supplies of ice cream and sherbet. A baker came around with glazed donuts.

Lucy kept running into her fellow students. Many squeezed her and squealed with joy and excitement. Carol Dykstra was so happy she almost floated, knowing her toothy boy friend would be home soon. Lucy was almost knocked down by Joanne and some athletes and cheerleaders, doing a sort of group song and dance. Some of the girls did some moves from the go Northern cheers, and some did a few steps of a Folliette dance routine. Joanne stopped momentarily to shout at Lucy over the noise of the crowd. "Lucy, did you notice our old English teacher, the one we called Johnny, is in town and was on the stage with the others returned vets? Now, that he's home and a war hero, I'll tell you a secret I've been hiding. Betty Lou said he was the guy that knocked her up!"

Obviously, he hadn't murdered her. He was in the war in Europe when all the deaths occurred at North high. But probably some other person crazed by love for her had killed her because of the pregnancy.

Chapter 35: The Answer?

Lynne groaned in Washington when she read that Lucy learned Betty Lou's baby was fathered by their young English teacher who just returned from the European War. She had spent so much energy, speculating about who got Betty Lou pregnant, thinking somehow it would point to the person who killed her and that would point to the person that was menacing Lynne in her apartment in 2006. That all seemed to come to another dead end. Was the lesbian gym teacher so enraged by the baby that she killed Betty Lou and three other people almost a year later? Lynne was tempted to skip ahead and read the last paragraph of the journal, but was afraid she would miss some important clues or misunderstand Grandmother Lucy's words. So she went on, reading as fast as she could. There were really not many pages left.

She was soon swept up imaginatively again to that V-E street celebration in 1945.

Lucy saw Mugsy the class clown and swing band leader, always a showoff, with Tammy, marching, dancing, singing the tune of Muskrat Ramble, breaking into it with loud shouts from time to time. Now and then, he and Tammy stopped to hug each other. Well, they had been a couple for many months. And on this day of victory, people were behaving as they never did before.

She even saw the principal, Charley, and with him, a string of teachers winding among the crowd, dancing in a conga line-- Miss Van Houten, Miss Hornby in her green dress, the coaches, the substitute history teacher. Three steps forward kick, three more forward and kick. Begley, the janitor, managing despite his limp, brought up the end of the line.

Far from the group of teachers, Ann and several other girls and boys were doing some sort of wild square dance. Lucy saw poor outsider Danny, Lorraine's genius little brother, trying to fit in with one group after another, but always being rejected. His big ears seemed to flap in the wind.

Then she saw her pimply cousin George, looking forlorn, alone, with a gloomy, sad expression on his face.

"George. Are you ok? You don't seem very happy about the victory in Europe."

"Lucy. No. Not really. The war isn't over for me."

"What do you mean?"

"My parents decided that there is danger of my being arrested for the deaths at our school. I told them everyone believes the deaths were accidents. And I didn't do anything to anyone. They believe me, but a friend at the police department told them they were thinking of bringing me in for questioning. They found some letters I sent to Betty Lou. Sure, I was crazy about her. But so was everyone else! My dad marched me down to the recruiting office yesterday and made me sign up. I'm leaving tomorrow. I guess they'll still need troops in the Pacific and in the army of occupation."

His look of utter misery touched her. For many reasons, she didn't believe George was the killer. She had suspected that he had a crush on Betty Lou, but didn't know about the love letters. Maybe it was a good idea to get him out of town before he was dragged into a mess.

Lucy tried to get back into the feeling of celebration, but soon remembered that she had promised to return home right after school. So, about two o'clock she started walking, still among celebrating crowds. She saw many people kissing on the street, something that she had never seen in Grand Rapids before. Then she saw an unlikely

sight. That young couple. What were they doing? They were clutching each other, locked in a long kiss like you saw in the movies. Good God! It was Wheel and Lorraine.

She rushed home as fast as she could.

She was too upset to want anything to eat. She had always assumed that she was the girl Wheel liked the most. She had thought that someday they would start going steady. She went ahead with her regular duty of preparing dinner for her hard working parents and managed to find something in the refrigerator and cupboards to get some sort of a meal ready for them at the regular time. But they too must have been swept up in the celebration and didn't return until nine o'clock. When they entered, with apologies, Lucy couldn't remember seeing her mother so happy. "Oh, Lucy, Frank will be home from the war soon!"

Just before Lucy went to bed, she got out her journal. Fooey. She was sick of writing in it. Sick of thinking of Wheel as her special friend now that she had seen him madly kissing Lorraine. The war was almost over. Soon it would be time for exams and end of her junior school year. She wrote:

"Dear diary. Goodbye. This is my last entry. If I have something to say, I'll say it aloud, to my parents, and to my friends, real friends. I'm going to look for a real boy friend. I don't believe George is a murderer. But I'll let the police or someone else worry about finding the person that killed Betty Lou and the others." And after that she wrote in capital letters, THE END. "

Lynne in Washington, cowering on the floor in a corner of her living room to be out of reach if the threatened sniper sent bullets into the windows, read the last words in Lucy's journal. She almost threw it in her disgust. How could Grandmother Lucy do this to her? After all this! To stop writing now! She had been reading for hours today frantically, feeling her safety depended on learning what the diary said about the killer. And she still didn't know who the killer was. And worse, she didn't know who the person was who was threatening her now in Washington in the year 2006 because of the old Grand Rapids deaths in 1945. Who was that person who might at this very moment be aiming a gun at her window or walking down the hall to attack her in her apartment? After all this, there was no answer. As if they could sense her distress, the twin babies started a loud, plaintive wail.

Chapter 36: Everett Acts

After her big disappointment at finding grandmother Lucy ended the journal without telling who the murderer was, it was good to have a practical problem to solve. She made her way to the babies' bedroom, mostly on her hands and knees, to be sure she was out of range of the windows which the mysterious threatener had said were in his gun site. Inside the room since there were no windows in it, she could stand up and sooth the babies, and change their diapers. But, Savannah and Ben kept fussing. Lynne knew they wanted their bottles, so she made her way to the kitchen, still careful to be away from the windows. She snatched prepared bottles and standing sheltered by the bulk of the frig, put them in a pan with some water to heat.

Her thoughts were painful. Where was Everett? How could he leave her to face this fear and danger alone? This business of being a State Department wife had gone too far. Everett knew she was in danger. He had said he was involved in another of his international emergencies, but she needed him. She was angry with him, angry with Grandmother Lucy, and murderously enraged by the person who was threatening her.

The phone rang and, bending down, she reached it. I was Everett. His confident and normal voice calmed her down. "I know you've had a hellish time. But I assume you are okay since you're answering the phone. I have some good news. It looks like we have solved the crisis in Africa at least temporarily. I have asked for an immediate compassionate leave for a week to stay with you and solve this threat. I'll be home soon. I've had the State Department dining room pack up a fine meal for two. Just hold on a little longer. I'll be home soon. I have my key. When you hear me and see I have unlocked the door, cautiously cross the room and take the chain down.

It happened as he has promised. Soon he was with her. They set up headquarters in the windowless babies' room. After they fed the babies and put them in the playpen they ate their fine meal crowded into the tiny pink and blue decorated room.

Everett sounded strong and reassuring as he told Lynne his plan. "Now, I've called in some favors people in law enforcement owed me. Tomorrow in the daylight, they will send some teams in to sweep the area near our apartment and see if there really is a sniper pointed at our windows. If we don't get this figured out in the week, I'll move you out to a hotel or my sister's house in Virginia. Or, my parents would love a visit from you. But first, together we'll go through the other papers that were sent to you with the diary and look for clues."

Lynne's spirits began to rise. Everett would help her, even protect her! She told him what she considered to be the main points she had learned since she talked to him. "One thing that struck me, it was just as Cousin George told us in one of his rants, that his folks had made him join the Navy because he was suspected of doing the murders."

"Yes, when we met him and talked to him, obviously he wasn't completely sane or reasonable. What a loony, shooting out his own window to chase us away when we went to his house to talk to him. But that part seems to be true. And that tells us that there was at least some suspicion of murder on the part of the police, despite the official newspaper denials. According to Grandmother Lucy, George did admit being crazy about Betty Lou, but denied wanting to hurt her. But we could see he is too old and infirm to be the person who is actually, physically stalking us."

"Yes, all the people mentioned in the diary have to be pretty old if they are still alive. If one of them is the murderer, an accomplice must be the one to creep in our halls."

Everett wiped his mouth and hands and went on telling Lynne his action plan. "The first thing, we have to find out more about Mercy."

Lynne agreed. "She's the one who denied there were murders, demanded that we give her the diary back, and even threatened us. But George said he and his daughter Mercy are on bad terms. If that is true, he isn't the person so determined to stop our investigation."

Everett continued, "Yes. And I have a friend in the FBI in Illinois who will stretch his jurisdiction a bit and visit her in Chicago, see if he can scare her into telling what her interest in this."

"And another person to check up on, remember George said maybe Sammy the Slasher did the murders. Lucy tells about being attacked by him." Lynne quickly told Everett about Lucy's encounter with the strange slasher.

"Yes, he's a possibility. We'll think of a way to find out more about him."

The fine food was gone and they realized it was late and they were tired.

"I'll make us a nest with some pillow and comforters on the floor here, where we can all be together and feel safe away from all windows."

"Good idea. Tomorrow we'll put our plans in motion and really start acting to end this siege."

Lynne fell asleep immediately, but woke suddenly at dawn. She dreamed a strange dream about a birthday party and a boy with big ears being mocked. "You can't even get a driver's license!" Then the telephone rang. Lynne grabbed it, thinking it might be from the forces Everett he had put in motion. Instead, it was the muffled, hostile voice she had heard before.

"I told you to send the diary to Mercy. The deadline is past. I'll punish you. I will be waiting outside your door."

Chapter 37: Searching

After his threatening words, the caller slammed down the receiver. Terror seized Lynne momentarily, but then she looked over and saw Everett. For once, she wasn't alone. Together they would deal with this. She told her husband that the hostile telephone caller had said he would be waiting outside and would punish her.

Then they heard a knock on their door. They ran to it, still keeping away from the windows. Could that be the avenger? Certainly, they wouldn't open the door to him.

They heard a firm voice, "Police. Everett. Let me in. This is Ronald Granby. You asked me to personally take charge of the search. I want to talk to you, then we'll start making a thorough sweep of the area."

Everett cautiously opened the door a crack and saw it really was his old friend, Ronald. Lynne recognized him from the times they had all gone out to dinner together. They took down the chain and welcomed him inside. They quickly found places to sit away from the window.

Lynne told Ronald about the call and said, "Maybe he's lurking in the hall right now."

"I've got a crew with me. We'll check over the halls, elevators and lobby first, then the area outside. Have you any idea who we should look for?"

"Not really. But it was a man's voice. And he might be pretty old. I think it is all tied to some murders in 1945."

Ronald nodded and went on explaining. "We have ten men working on this. After we've looked for the threatener, if we don't find anyone, we'll go on with our plan, look for any buildings that might have a clear shot to your apartment. You people stay inside, stay away from the windows until I come back and give you an all clear."

Three hours later, Ronald returned. "We didn't see anyone suspicious outside your apartment. We have left a plain clothes man outside your building in case someone turns up. We made a sweep of places a sniper could use as a shooting site. We're sure that there is no place where someone could aim directly at your windows. You're on a side of the building that is inaccessible from any high place. Any of the buildings that would give a clear shot are on the other side. It's pretty obvious that your caller made an empty boast. I think you should cautiously try getting out and let us see if someone follows you. Why don't you two go over to the restaurant in the Watergate complex, the one with that nice waterfall above it. Try to relax and eat a good lunch. We'll have some men watching you and see if anyone takes an unhealthy interest in you."

"You want to use us as bait," Lynne said.

"Something like that. But I think it's pretty safe. A public place, and our watching men."

As it happened, though Lynne had forgotten it, this was the afternoon that their housecleaner was expected. She was trustworthy and could watch the babies for an hour or two. They opened the shades, stood upright, and walked tall. Soon, the cleaning woman came. They told her not to open the door for anyone until she heard their voices and their key in the lock.

As they ate lunch, still wondering if someone was following them, Lynne started enjoying being with her husband. He seemed confident and strong. He had never been so close to being truly good looking. But Lynne's thoughts were still on finding the person that had such a malignant interest in her. When they went back to the

apartment, they would tackle those other papers about the old Grand Rapids days. They made a list of what to look for.

Lynne scrawled on a paper place mat:

- 1. Sammy the Slasher, could he possibly have done the murders?*
- 2. Any indication that authorities suspected the four deaths were murders?*
- 3. Anything that told why Cousin Mercy was so intent on getting control of the diary?*
- 4. Careers of the class members who had known the four murdered people.*

As they ate their crab cakes, Lynne said to Everett "I had a strange dream last night. I can't remember it clearly. But it frightened me and seemed important."

Everett's voice was concerned and approving. "You are working night and day on this problem. Maybe your unconscious was trying to tell you something you've learned about this case."

"Maybe. But it was trivial, insignificant. Something about a birthday party." As hard as she tried, she couldn't recall more.

Their food was delicious. They finished with French pastries. There were no signs that Lynne could see of any stalker or would be attacker. When she stood up to leave, Lynne turned around and gave the whole room a careful examination. It all looked normal. She didn't know which people were the plain clothes men watching her. Then, she saw someone staring at her. Who was that little old man, with the intense look! His eyes were like search lights, fixed on her. She shivered. Good God! He had huge ears!

Chapter 38: Getting Closer

Still shaken by the strange man's piercing stare, Lynne returned with Everett to their apartment. Ronald, Everett's police friend, stopped in soon after. Ronald and Everett agreed nothing was learned at the lunch. The watching plainclothes policemen had not noticed any significant activity on the part of people in the restaurant, the street, or in front of the apartment house.

Lynne protested. "Wait. I guess you didn't notice. But I saw a man, an old man just staring intently at us. He had huge ears. I know this has something to do with the case. Oh, what did the diary say about ears? And ears were in the dream too."

Ronald gave her an exasperated look. "I didn't see any thing suspicious. Well, if you remember something we can check on, we'll be glad to do it."

Everett agreed. "Try to recall. Hunches are often important. But now that we've arranged for the Stella to stay and take care of the babies as long as we need her today, let's get busy and tackle the rest of the old papers in that box. They must have been kept for some reason. Maybe the answer is right there." Everett sounded confident and cheerful.

Lynne agreed and soon after now that they had the assurances of the police that no one would really be able to send a bullet into their window, they were settled comfortably at a table in the apartment.

Lynne proposed, "Let's start with the list we scrawled at lunch. First, let's look for Sammy the Slasher. Let's each take half the papers and skim their headlines. What can we learn about him? Could he possibly have done the murders? Soon they each found several newspaper clippings about Sammy. Lynne read them quickly. There were accounts of his frightening a number of young women and slashing at their clothes, then running. There was even an account of the incident Grandmother Lucy was involved in when she gratefully but fearfully accepted a ride home with the frightening gym teacher who was too fond of some of her female students.

"Oh, I've found it--the real story," Everett exclaimed. "This was in the newspaper about six months after the incidents. It says Sammy was in an insane asylum four years, but somehow escaped and was out for just two weeks before he was caught and returned to the hospital."

"Let me see it. Great. I'll check with some notes Lucy took about the dates of the murders. Yes. There were no deaths during the time he was out. So clearly, he was a red herring, and had nothing to do with the Northern High deaths."

"Yes." Lynne reported on another find, "To put a footnote on Sammy, years later Lucy's psychology class at Grand Rapids Junior College, saw Sammy the Slasher at the Ionia Prison for the Criminally Insane. There was an exhibit that showed Sammy did elaborate art work. The pictures and models were violent, with a lot of blood and knives. He was also doing wood work as therapy. He made a fine coffee table for his mother."

"Okay. Sammy's in the clear. Did you find anything that gives us a good suspect?"

"No. Not really. According to the things I'm reading, it seems that publically, just as Lucy said, the authorities didn't hint that the deaths might be murder. Even that last death, Unk expiring after eating the casserole someone gave him, they declared was a terrible accident--that someone had mistakenly used in an onion pie the tulip bulbs they bought on the trip to Holland Michigan. They explained they look a lot alike. There's a paragraph explaining that tulip bulbs are often poisonous, that during the war, the

Dutch were starving because of Hitler and ate bulbs because there was nothing else. Many people died from them.”

”But George did tell us that really the police were investigating and were going to question him. Because of that George’s family pressured him to join the Navy.”

”Okay. Let’s go through our clippings and see what we can learn about George.”

They flipped through their piles for about fifteen minutes. Then Lynne broke the silence. “I don’t see anything that implies that the police had any suspicion that George had anything to do with the deaths that Lucy was so interested in.”

”Yes. I didn’t see any hint of suspicion of him either. I saw one thing that said that George served honorably in the Navy, came out and married. In another it said he was in the U. S. Civil Service, and had one daughter, Mercy. George told us that he and Mercy are completely estranged. We know at present he is pretty strange and suspicious. He almost shot us and shot his own window.”

”Yes. He obviously is an odd character. He was nearby when all four murders occurred and we know he was infatuated with Betty Lou before she died.”

”But we have no evidence against him. He could be the killer. But, because he is infirm and bound to his wheel chair, he personally couldn’t be the person wandering in our halls and delivering threats.”

”Well, who else? What can we learn from the papers?”

They each went on examining their half of the stack of papers. Suddenly Lynne gasped. “There’s something about Lorraine, the one who took Wheel away from Lucy. She and her family moved away from Grand Rapids soon after the VE Day. There’s a letter from her to Lucy telling that Danny, her brilliant little brother had a nervous breakdown that summer and was hospitalized.”

”What did the journal say about him? I’m trying to remember. Lucy seemed to think he was a pest and was always trying to avoid being with him. But, what else?”

”Well, you’re the one that read it. Didn’t you tell me that he had a big crush on Betty Lou? Was he the one that had her picture in his locker? Do you think he was he some kind of psycho who killed all those people including her, because he was mad about her, starting with her, and then with others who he thought had succeeded with her, then had a breakdown over guilt?” Everett’s voice sounded light, but his face was serious.

”Lucy said that Lorraine told her Danny had a picture of her in his locker. She said he was a queer duck, but she never thought he was violent. And here’s a clipping that says a few years later Danny graduated from Harvard with honors and became successful and had an important career with the government. He made a lot of money.”

Everett was silent for a few minutes, continuing to make his way through his pile of the Grand Rapids papers. “This is interesting. It’s a feature story written about ten years after Betty Lou’s death. It says ten years earlier there was a series of bizarre accidents that caused the deaths of four Northern students and one teacher in a period of six months. It says some people suspect there was foul play involved. The article ends by saying after the history teacher’s death there were no more mysterious incidents involving people at the high school.

They mentioned that George joined the Navy and Danny was hospitalized. They also said that a whole class graduated soon after and most of the boys went into the service.”

”Does it seem to be insinuating that one of them murdered the four people?”

”The writer seems very careful to leave it all vague. But a suspicious or knowing person would have understood what he was hinting at.”

“We should find out about the lives and careers of the other people mentioned in the diary.”

“Yes. But first of all, we should get the police and FBI to check on George. And how about Mercy. She’s the one that started warning us not to look into the deaths.”

As if in answer to Lynne’s remark, the telephone rang.

She leapt to answer it.

She heard George’s old, raspy voice.

“That vicious daughter of mine called me. Call the cops. She’s evil. She’s the one that’s threatening you!”

Chapter 39: Talk With An Expert

The clash of his old fashioned telephone receiver hurt Lynne's ear. She tried to be calm as she told Everett what Cousin George said. Everett commented, "We know that guy is pretty crazy, but maybe he really knows something. Whatever you do, don't go near him again. Next time he might really shoot you."

"I'm going to call him back. Maybe he's ready to tell me something."

"Okay. But first, let me call my friend Harold in the FBI. He will stretch a point, call it an interstate matter and do a little investigating for us."

After his call Everett reported, "He'll go out and try to question George at his house. He's going to wear his bullet proof vest. In the meantime, go ahead and see what your nutsy cousin will tell you over the phone."

Lynne called George's number. She was pleased to hear after the first ring the raspy old voice, quite pleasantly saying "George Lawrence here."

"Hello Cousin George. You called. Your message alarmed and interested me. Can you tell me anything about Mercy?"

This time, George seemed eager to talk. Words spilled out. "She was always a brat. Took after her mother. When I left the old lady, Mercy took it personally, used to call me up and curse me. She was really dumb but good at school work and graduated from college. She got a good government job because she sweet talked her buddy, that louse. He's old now, but she still has a plum job with the government. Maybe she's a spy. She called me yesterday telling me she wants Lucy's diary. She still will do anything for her pocket sized sugar daddy, trying to protect his name forty years after the crimes. She's probably ready to shoot you to keep you quiet." All this dramatic venom poured into Lynne's ears. He was obviously not completely sane and was recklessly spewing hate.

She tried to get some valid information. "Cousin George, please tell us. Who is the man she's trying to protect?"

George was silent for a few moments, then said in a teasing tone. "You're so smart. You should know. It was someone that was there, someone who killed all those people at Northern High without being suspected, someone who seemed helpless and harmless, then turned out to be powerful."

"Please, tell me who. I read the diary, but don't know who you're talking about."

"He probably was full of poison because he was never popular. I know how he felt. I should have killed all those people, but I didn't. I really was helpless."

"Please Cousin George. That person says he will hurt me."

"Well, good. Lucy, your grandmother always was a snob. She thought she was better than I was. Let Lucy's friend get my revenge too." And he clashed the phone down again.

Later, when Lynne tried to sum up the call for her husband she found herself starting and stopping, rambling, and correcting herself. Finally she said, "He sounds really irrational. But he says that Mercy is trying to protect a man, someone that went to high school with the others, someone who was once a nobody and turned into an important person."

"Well, who is it?"

"He wouldn't say, only said I should know."

Later, the FBI friend stopped in to have some coffee with Everett and report on his visit to George.

“That guy really shouldn’t be on the loose. But with the laws now days, it’s hard to Baker Act anyone or keep them confined. He didn’t actually shoot at us, so we can’t arrest him. All he said was, that Mercy would see that Lynne is killed if she doesn’t stop digging up the past. He said that’s all right with him. Oh, one thing we are sure of. From observing him and also getting into some medical files we don’t actually have the legal right to look at, we know that he’s unable to walk more than a few steps, needs the wheel chair even in his own apartment. He personally couldn’t have been lurking in your halls and buildings.”

Lynne decided to go on with their plan to learn more about the people who were close to Northern High in 1944. Living in Washington, she felt she should not be far from governmental sources that would help her inquiries. She looked in an index of government agencies and saw one that she thought might have figures on education in the Midwest in the war years. It was called History, Art, Culture – the commission someone had mentioned at the political coffee she attended. Lynne called the number listed, and stammered out roughly what she was interested in. She talked to one dubious woman, one hostile man, several robots, one person who cut off the connection. She was transferred five times. Finally she talked to someone who said she would transfer her to an expert on the subject, Mr. Kaminski.

How strange. What a coincidence.” Could it be the same one?

“Kaminski here.” The voice sounded cultured, somewhat like an Easterner, different from Grand Rapids voices. There was something familiar about it.

She started out in what she hoped was a businesslike fashion, saying she wanted some information about students and teachers in Michigan in 1944.

“You’ll have to be more specific.” The voice sounded patient, well educated, and willing to help.

Lynne burst out with what was on her mind. “My goodness. Did you come from Grand Rapids, did you yourself go to Northern High School, was your sister Lorraine Kaminski? Did you know my grandmother Lucy Lawrence?”

“Yes, I came from Grand Rapids. I’m Lorraine’s brother. Her little genius brother that everyone ignored or laughed at. If Lucy mentioned me to her family it was to mock me. They all did that. Most of them are gone now. The worse ones have been moldering in their graves for 40 years.”

His voice rose to an eerie squeak. “But Danny the little drip made his mark. I got even with them. And no one ever knew it!”

Chapter 40: The Wounds of Childhood

After his weird outburst, the expert continued in a well modulated voice. “Yes, a lot of people respect me and my money. I’m retired now. I’m on a lot of prestigious boards and commissions, but I’m still bursting with energy and like to contribute my services. I’m sort of an emeritus here, come in one day a week, to give advice, deal with special statistics. Yes, I knew Lucy. She died long ago. And of course, all the teachers have been dead for years. Wheel and my sister Lorraine are hanging on but have all sorts of health problems. But they don’t care. They’re enjoying life. They have a lot of grand children.” He sounded bitter. “Maybe you don’t realize I’m several years younger than they are and never having married, have kept my health.” His laugh really was bitter now. “I can help you, but you’ll have to come into the office and make photocopies yourself.”

Lynne agreed to come at four o’clock the next day. Everett was deeply involved in some arrangements he was making with his police and FBI friends to try to track down Mercy and have someone interview her. He agreed to spend most of the day with Ronald, going over what they knew about the old Grand Rapids case.

Lynne asked Stella to come the next afternoon and care for the babies. She was pleased to have found a way to getting more information about the Northern High people, and now, especially, to see Danny Kaminski in person and find out if he really knew anything.

Everett left for to his meeting with Ronald early and Lynne went for her appointment at 4 o’clock, following carefully Kaminski’s directions to find his the agency in Washington’s rabbit warren of government commissions and offices. When she reached the History, Art, Culture section at first she thought it was closed, because it looked dark through the frosted glass. But the door was unlocked and she entered. There was no one at the reception desk.

She heard a voice before she saw anyone. From the hall came the words, “I will be with you in a minute. I want to see the descendent of Lucy.” The voice was Kaminski’s. Not the squeak, not enraged, but the business like cultured voice she had first heard, a little loud so she could hear it in the next room.

She raised her voice to answer. “I’m glad you’ll see me. I’ll be glad to wait if you aren’t ready for me yet.”

The voice became more easily audible and she heard footsteps. “Come right in, down that hall. I’ll show you the papers you need.”

The answer pleased her. She hurried toward the voice, wishing she knew how to turn on the hall light to dispel the late afternoon gloom. She went down a short hall.

“Yes, that’s right. Come on in. The stacks are to your right.”

She entered now, and in a corridor flanked by tall shelves of books and documents saw a slight figure in a navy blue business suit. She turned toward him. “Thank you for meeting with me,” But he moved down one of the narrow aisles of the crossing rows of shelves.

“Yes, I’ll help you with your research.” She heard his voice behind her. She turned. Only one dim bulb was lit. But finally in the half dark she could see his face.

“Oh, God!” She was suddenly shivering. She saw him clearly enough for a wave of fear to engulf her. He had huge ears that stood out on a malevolent face like handles on a jug. Horror! It was the man who had followed her with his penetrating glare at the restaurant.

She intensely wanted to get out of there. But he was between her and the entrance. "I'm sorry. I must go." She tried to sound matter of fact.

"You're going to stay until I show you they can't torture a young boy, make life a misery to him and laugh at him without someone paying for it. Since the others are all dead now, there's only you, a direct descendent of that snob Lucy who ignored me and laughed when she learned I loved Betty Lou. You'll be the sacrifice to partly atone for a whole school full of cruel, self centered dullards. I killed four of them, but never got around to all the others that laughed at me before they locked me up. And that old pervert, Unk, squeezing the pretty young girls whenever he got near them, making Betty Lou put up with it so she could pass history. A monster! The wounds they inflicted healed over, but the scars remain. You will pay their debt."

"Please. I'm sorry. Forgive me, forgive them," She hated to beg, but couldn't help herself.

"The doctors filled me full of pills and I learned how to give the right answers in their so-called therapy. Then I excelled in Harvard and had a great career. In my important State Department years, I was able to hire George's daughter, Mercy. She admires me, was always loyal."

"No, this is a good end to it all. When you die, no one will know about those papers. No one will want those old yellow scraps. Lucy never suspected me in high school, but when I got locked in the loony bin, she heard some of the things I admitted to the doctors. She told my sister she was going to write it all down and show how she was sure I was the murderer. Lorraine was furious, and told me about it. But nothing happened about it for years. Later on Lucy married and was respectable and probably didn't want to make a fuss by telling people about it. Mercy knew Ethyl was storing a box of Lucy's old papers including a diary. When Aunt Ethyl died, Mercy was told your uncle sent them to you. I told Mercy the papers were full of gossip and lies and would hurt my reputation. It's wonderful to have one true friend like her. Mercy asked you to return them. You had your chance. I left you notes and called you too. You wouldn't pay attention to us. A big chronic snoop, just like your grandmother. Now you'll pay."

"Oh please. I've lost all interest in the subject. Let me go and I'll send the papers to you."

He continued as if he hadn't heard her. "Mercy told you, there were no murders. I did them so cleverly they were called accidents. And now, I'll finish it after 40 years with one more, you. That will be an accident too. I don't want a scandal after all these years. That all was long ago and those people at Northern High deserved what they got. People who wound children deserve death or worse."

She started to run away from him but saw no back or side exit, just a maze of stacks of documents in rows that crossed each other.

Lynne looked at Danny Kaminski minutely, trying to measure his strength. She was taller than he was. He was thin and old. Could she push him out of the way, run past him, get out? She wondered if the door had locked when she shut it on entering. Would she need a key?

Now really terrified, she ran toward the hall that led to the reception desk. The old man was right behind her. She felt his cold clammy hand with a surprisingly strong grip on her arm.

"I'll call the police and tell them you broke in, threatened me, chased me through the stacks and a row of shelves fell on you. They'll believe you broke into the office. It's past closing time. The door will be forced. They will see that a stack of heavy cartons fell on you. Say goodbye to life. I'm getting even once more!"

Lynne was afraid, but she it was so absurd she almost felt like laughing at his fiendish and melodramatic words. The thin old man with his strange big ears looked frail and was not as tall as she was.

“Now, I will kill you.” He reached for the one decorative object in the room, a bronze statue. He poised it over her head.

Could he really kill her with that statue? When he lunged, terror replaced any possible amusement. He missed her, and crashed the statue down on a row of books with such force the shelf toppled. She started to run away from him toward the back of the room, even though she couldn't see any way out there.

Then, she heard the outer front door open. A woman's voice called out, “Mr. Kaminski. I'm sorry. I appreciated your letting me go early today, but I realize I left a package in my desk.”

Kaminski was so startled he dropped his bronze weapon. Lynne shot out, past the secretary, out the door, running as fast as she could. She was wearing high heels and felt herself tripping. She lost one shoe, took off the other and in her stocking feet ran out the door.

Chapter 41: Revelations

After her escape from the harrowing attack by Dan Kaminski, Lynne ran, shoeless, out of the government building, down the streets to her car, threw herself into it and speeded to her apartment. With shaking hands, she fumbled to unlock the door and burst into the living room. "Everett, the murderer almost killed me. Call the police or someone, quick."

Everett hurried from the babies' bedroom. "What are you talking about?"

Lynne, sobbing, told him Danny Kaminski had tried to kill her at the closed Office of Culture, Art, History. Everett was shocked and also angry that she had placed herself in such danger. He called his police friends and they conferred a few minutes. Then Everett said to Lynne, "They'll rush over there, cover all exits of the building, and pick him up if he's still there. They may have to break a door to get in, but will have some strong men who know how to do it. Now, fill me in on the details."

Hours later Everett's police friend called and reported they had arrested Dan, who was obviously deranged. When they got him calmed down, after all his efforts to hide his crimes, he was eager to tell everyone everything. They called his next of kin, his sister Lorraine. She told them he had been acting strange lately, had refused to take the medications that had kept him reasonably sane for the past few years after he had a recurrence of the psychotic episode he had as a teenager. She did not want to see him. They called his attorney who came immediately and advised him to say nothing. Despite his lawyer's advice, he insisted on talking. He was given Miranda warnings but agreed to recording his rambling confession.

Soon after, Lynne got a telephone call. A quivery female voice identified herself as the Lorraine Wexler. "I used to be Lorraine Kaminski. I hear you are the grand daughter of Lucy Lawrence. It turns out my brother Dan killed all those people when they are children. He has been paranoid and hostile these last years and refused to take his medicine. The police say they probably won't press charges if he is committed to a private sanatorium. We can find a very nice one that will keep him comfortable and also completely locked up. Fortunately his high level career, and lack of marriage and children left plenty of money for that."

Lynne didn't know how to answer, so just repeated some of what she had just heard, "So he can be committed to a nice private sanatorium."

Lorraine continued. "He wanted to confess completely to me, but, I can't bear it. He was a strange little boy and now he's a monster of an old man. I want nothing to do with him. But he insists he must talk to someone who knows the story. Since you read the diary and have been investigating, he wants you to hear it."

A week later, Lynne went to the lovely private hospital in Norfolk, Virginia that looked like a fine guest house, ready to listen to whatever Dan wanted to tell her.

A decorative but strong, tall, wrought iron fence surrounded the building. A guard in an impeccably tailored uniform glanced at her identification and said, "Welcome. Mr. Kaminsky has been lonesome. I think he will be glad to see you. But, sometimes he gets excited. A guard will be watching discretely out of his sight."

A uniformed attendant dressed in pink took Lynne to a patio in a well tended garden. The little man with the big ears was sitting in one of the chairs. The shriveled up old man burst out with speech the minute she arrived. "No one knows or cares how I got my revenge, but I'll tell you. To start with, the first one, Betty Lou. It hurt me to kill her, because I loved her. But she ignored me and played sex games with everyone, other

students, old men, teachers, but not me. Then, my sister told me that people said she had even had a baby.

“And I watched the Follies rehearsals, and made good preparations. I didn’t know much about tools but I had to take wood shop like all the other boys so I learned and I was good at anything I set my mind to. I sawed that hole on the part of the stage where she, the star, danced. She died while she was showing off. No one even suspected me. I sneaked into the school at night and cleaned up all the saw dust. The principal refused to believe that someone had sawed and weakened the stage. He just said it was old. They repaired it and the show went on as scheduled.”

Lynne worked hard to seem to listen to his abhorrent story sympathetically.

“And, Jinx, the second one. How did he die? And why?”

“Jinx bragged that he knew who got Betty Lou pregnant I went hunting with the teachers and the other boys I was in the woods on the other side. I shot well enough to hit him.”

“And Donna? Why did she die?”

“She was at the dance, all covered with makeup, trying to look glamorous. She even walked like Betty Lou. I wandered around the dance floor, alone, and ignored. No one looked at me or cared. I slipped into the little dressing room to cool down. Donna was there, alone, fussing with her clothes. I asked her to dance with me. She laughed at me, said she wasn’t that hard up. She turned her back on me. I saw outside hanging on the roof there were big icicles. I opened the window and pulled out a huge, heavy one. When I was young, I was small and thin. But I answered an ad for a Charles Atlas dynamic tension course and I became surprisingly strong. I whacked Donna with that big icicle. She fell down immediately and hit her head. Her eyes turned up and I could tell she was gone. I just left the icicle there. I closed the window and the room was warm again. Then I went back to the dance floor and asked an ugly fat girl to dance. By the time anyone else went into that little room, the icicle had melted and didn’t leave a puddle on that dark carpet. There was all that fuss about looking for any kind of weapon. But of course my big ice club melted and the puddle didn’t even show on the brown carpet. When they couldn’t find one even after searching the whole school, the police decided no one hit her, she just stumbled in those high heeled shoes and cracked her head.”

Lynne was repulsed, but tried to keep her voice accepting and interested. “So that’s how you did it. Then how about the history teacher? Why did you kill him?”

“Oh, Unk. He messed around with all the girls, especially Betty Lou. She let him so he would give her a good grade in history. I couldn’t stand the way he handled her whenever he was near her. I needed a good way to kill him. I was a book worm and had read in some magazine about deaths in Holland because of eating tulips when the Nazis were starving the people. I planned ahead and bought the bulbs on the Holland, Michigan trip, knew I could find a time to slip them into Unk’s food. My sister Lorraine always told me what they were making in cooking class so when she told me the recipe for onion casserole, I knew that was my opportunity. The casseroles were all left on the counter for the teacher to put in the oven. The door wasn’t locked. I slipped in and put the bulbs I had cut up in a white dish. Then later on, I sneaked in again and got the dish out and put it in Unk’s room with that note, saying it was in appreciation because he was such a wonderful teacher, that old child molester! He was so vain he believed someone wanted to give him a special gift and so greedy he would eat the whole thing.”

Repelled by his satisfaction at killing, Lynne changed the subject. “Have you been calling me on the phone and lurking in my hall, leaving notes?”

“Yes. I gave you opportunities to cooperate.”

“How did you get into the building? Didn’t the guard ask for identification?”

Dan laughed. It was a high, squeaky sound. “Oh, that was easy. I used to live in the building, just kept my ID and flashed it at him.”

“But why?”

“You know why. I wanted you to give those papers to Mercy. She was loyal to me and would see they didn’t make a scandal for me. Mercy didn’t realize I am the killer, but knew you were trying to stir up trouble. At the time, I didn’t want my reputation ruined. But now I see the deaths were a triumph and I want everyone to know. I’m still lively and ran down the hall fast so you wouldn’t see me.”

Sitting in the beautiful grounds of the costly private hospital Lynne could scarcely believe the vicious tale coming out of the mouth of the wrinkled old man. A bird in a nearby tree twittered and the sun filtered through its branches. The scent of flowers floated in the warm pleasant air.

Feeling disgust at this horrible human being, she still felt impelled to learn the answers to questions she had been wondering about. “Would you really have killed me? You don’t even know me.”

“I didn’t plan to kill you, just wanted to frighten you into giving up the papers and stop snooping. But, I was in a really bad mood when you came to my office. Then I really wanted to kill you. Now, I’m glad I didn’t. It would only cause me more trouble. And I wouldn’t have anyone to tell the story to.”

A young blonde nurse came with a little tray. “Here’s your medicine, Mr. Kaminski. And then it will be time for a nice nap.”

Lynne stood up to leave. “Is that all you wanted to tell me?”

Danny Kaminski rose. His eyes blazed as he put his face as close to hers as his diminutive height allowed him to. “Yes. That’s all. Tell them the whole story. Tell George, and Wheel and anyone else still alive from those days. Let them know even though they didn’t notice me I was watching everything and people died because of that.”

Chapter 42: Nostalgia

After her talk with the pathetic, vicious old man, Lynne returned home, determined to finish looking at her grandmother's papers and get them packed for storage. Everett told her the FBI contacted Mercy. Mercy told them she wanted the papers that had been given to Lynne because she had heard they were full of unfounded suspicions and they insulted an important person. She swore she didn't send anyone to threaten Lynne. Everett was back at his office and also back to his long days with new emergencies in Africa for him to deal with.

The next weeks, Lynne stayed home, busy with household duties and caring for the twins who now were no longer content in their play pen but wanted to crawl the length of the apartment, exploring everything in reach. When she found time, she worked on the Lucy papers. One morning once the twins were down for nap, eager to put an end to her period of concentration on the Grand Rapids murders, Lynne hurried to get out the box of papers. She had a supply of big manila envelopes and sorted as she skimmed. She found headlines about the progress of the war. After VE day, the emphasis in the Grand Rapids Press and Grand Rapids Herald was on soldiers coming home from European duty and also the continuing war in the Pacific. One clipping announced the end of the school year. Then, in August, there were big headlines, VJ DAY. A story dated a few weeks later said Lynne's Uncle Frank, Grandmother Lucy's brother had returned home from the Pacific "without a scratch" and planned to use the GI bill to start college. There were no more clippings about any violence or accidents at Northern high. At last, Lynne was almost at the bottom of the pile. She pulled out a booklet with a satin cover double wrapped in tissue paper. Inside she saw Grandmother Lucy's handwriting. There was writing only on the two pages. It said:

Nostalgia. What does the word mean? Fond memories of past times? I have some, but that whole last year of the war was horrible. My brother was in danger, boys I knew were being killed every day. Then the dreadful deaths at school, three schoolmates and a teacher. I knew they were murdered, but no grownup would pay any attention. Then finally, VE day came and there was joy and celebration but that same day I realized that all this time Lorraine had been pretending to be my friend but had been seducing Wheel who had been so close to me. In August, the wonderful thing of course was that victory in Japan brought peace and the war was over. My brother Frank came home safely, as they say, without a scratch. That summer, we had long talks about Northern High School and Grand Rapids. He said he had met many people in the war and seen a lot of the world and he wanted to get out of our smug home town. He would use the GI bill to go to college in East Lansing. I envied him. I tried writing a poem:

*She and her brother
Agreed on one thing:
They vowed to escape from Grand Rapids.
She does not like
That proper neat town
Where fifteen years
She learned about alienation
Among the tulips.
Will she get out?*

*Lines, ties, mysteries, entangle her.
She rests among them, waiting.*

Lynne had tears in her eyes as she read. She wanted to know more about Lucy's later life. She decided to try again to contact Cousin George. When she called him, he surprised her by saying he would like to talk to her and suggested she come to see him the next Saturday. She was still wary, remembering the gun he had shot during her last visit, and Everett arranged for her to bring along a young policeman in plain clothes. She told George she would come with a young family friend who would drive her.

When she arrived, George, sitting in his wheel chair, opened the door for her and her escort and invited them in. He was calm and almost smiled.

"Well, what do you want to know? Your husband called me and told me Dan Kaminski did the murders. Danny was a little wimp. I didn't know he had it in him."

"I want to know why my mother stopped seeing or talking to my grandmother and the rest of her family when I was a little girl."

"Your grandmother Lucy fell in love with a boy from South High School in Grand Rapids and got married a couple of years after she graduated. She wanted to forget those terrible days when we were at Northern High. She didn't feel any nostalgia for them. But your mother kept asking about it, wanting details about the deaths, speculating about there being murder and wondering who did it. She kept ruining family parties. When we told her to forget about it, your mother got very hostile, condemned us all. Told us we were a bunch of ostriches with our heads in the sand. Someone, maybe my daughter, Mercy, told her not to come to our gatherings anymore. Lucy looked sad but agreed. Your mother swore she would never see us again until we agreed to demand an investigation. She stalked out, dragging your father, and you with her."

Lynne realized Lucy never did escape from Grand Rapids but kept her diary and the papers that described the painful puzzles the rest of her life.

After she dropped off the kind policeman, on her way home alone in the car, Lynne spoke aloud, to herself and the memory of her grandmother. "Well, Lucy, you never escaped. I got Danny to explain the puzzles that you wrote about. And, I did escape. I spent nine years in West Africa and now I'm in Washington. Rest in peace."

Epilogue

A few weeks after Lynne's talk with Cousin George, she and Everett got big news. Everett was appointed to a tour of duty in Benin again. In six months they would be back in Cotonou and could take the twins with them. And, wonderfully, Everett was going to be Ambassador. They would live in a palatial mansion with a polite, sleepy guard to watch over them.

Lynne told Everett, "I'll be glad to get back. Africa was uncomfortable and dangerous. But I have nostalgia for our adventures there."

THE END