

The Baxter & Roberts Burglary

It was early in the morning. Simon Snaeth was wearing a grey summer suit with a light stripe, a light blue shirt, and a maroon tie with an abstract design in white and blue. He wore highly-polished penny-loafers with quarter eagles. He was in his front office, which resembled a living room, with comfortable seating, side tables and paintings. The largest object in the room was a glassed-in garden. Its glass lids were off, and he was examining it. Two men entered.

Snaeth turned to look at them and immediately said, "Good morning, Mr. Baxter." Baxter was a medium-tall heavy-set man with an agreeable and jovial face but a serious expression. "This must be your business partner, Mr. Roberts." Roberts was tall and rather thin, a man with dark hair who frowned.

"Yes, I'm Thomas Baxter, and this is Michael Roberts. Everyone calls him Bob." They shook hands. "How did you know us? We didn't call for an appointment. And what were you doing in your little... garden there?"

Snaeth smiled. "Your picture was in the news, Mr. Baxter. Thank you for your interest in the terrarium. I was only looking. It doesn't require much watering or weeding, but I tend to it every day." Snaeth replaced the tops that covered the enclosure and put some LED lights on top.

"What are those plants? I've never seen plants like that. And... those are very attractive rocks and pieces of wood. You have arranged it like an artist... don't you think, Bob?" Baxter asked.

Roberts only nodded and made a noncommittal noise.

"The plants are from the tropics. I get them from collectors. I have a pair of lizards in there, too." Snaeth looked back at the glass enclosure and saw that everything was in order. "Let's go into my office and consider your problem." He led the way through the door at the rear to a large modern office.

Snaeth asked them to be seated, and then sat behind his desk. "Now, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

Baxter said, "You seem to know already." He smiled. "I think I'd like to have a terrarium like yours. How big is it?"

"It's somewhat less than 1000 gallons, as aquariums are measured. I had it made to order. For what I was doing I didn't need a tank that was tall, the kind that people use for fish. It is about ten feet long and only 3 and a half feet high, and about the same width. That is enough room."

"What kind of lizards do you have?"

"They are not tropical lizards. They are called ground skinks. They live here in the United States. They like a moist environment, room temperature, places to hide, and they do not climb."

Baxter realized that the small talk was over. "We have been robbed and we need your help."

"I heard about the robbery. It seems to be a matter for the police."

“We have seen the police and they were not very helpful.”

“Yes, I know that, too. I’ve been watching and reading the media reports of it with interest. But I am not a detective. I do not investigate crimes. I am a lawyer and I restrict my practice to civil matters. Perhaps you have an insurance claim?”

“It is about insurance, in fact. Our insurance company, preliminarily, says we can’t prove that we were robbed and says we were negligent. The agent says the claim will probably be denied. I don’t really understand how this works. We did the best we could. How could we know this would happen?”

Snaeth reclined in his chair. “I doubt that you were negligent. You were robbed, I think, and the insurance company doesn’t want to pay.” He paused. “Well, let me see if I understand the problem. Briefly, you are partners in a jewelry store, Baxter & Roberts Jewelers, located on 7th Street downtown. Three nights ago, on Tuesday, September 14, you closed your store at 5:00 pm, the usual time. When you opened on Wednesday, about \$50,000 of merchandise was missing. No alarms went off, but the back door was forced open and some of your display cabinets were broken. Your security cameras were disabled.”

Baxter said, “That’s correct. But we underestimated the value of the jewelry. A lot of it was Bob’s work” – he gestured at his partner – “and it is art of a special kind.”

“I need to get details like that. I have to provide an inventory of what was stolen to the insurance company, and its value. I hope it won’t get to a lawsuit, but if you decide to hire me, the initial costs of filing a lawsuit are covered by your retainer. The first thing I will do is talk to your insurance company and try to make them be sensible. I bill at \$300 per hour, and I keep scrupulous track of my time.” He lifted the notepad from his desk. “These are my shorthand notes of our conversation so far.”

“I didn’t even see that you were taking notes,” Baxter said. “You do it without looking.”

Snaeth nodded. “I have practiced that skill because I need it. So, gentlemen, can we reach an agreement? This initial consultation costs you nothing if you say no.”

While Snaeth said this, Baxter and Roberts watched Snaeth’s left hand write on the notepad until it stopped. Then they looked at each other, realizing he had spoken as well. Baxter said, “We agree to hire you to get our jewelry back. What do you want as a retainer?”

“No, sir. I won’t try to get your goods back. It would probably be a complete failure to attempt it. I can only represent you in your insurance claim.”

“If that is all, then that is ... what it must be. What do you want as a retainer?”

“Five thousand dollars.”

Roberts said, “Ridiculous. We could get a lawyer for half of that, or less.”

“Perhaps. But there was a reason that you came to me. And you knew that it would be expensive when you did.”

Baxter looked at Roberts. Roberts shrugged. Baxter said, "It was my idea. All right." He pulled out a checkbook and wrote a check.

"Tom handles the business," said Roberts unexpectedly. "I just make jewelry."

Baxter chuckled, then told Snaeth seriously, "Bob is modest. He is an artist. We are starting to sell his creations all over the world."

Snaeth took the check and said, "Excuse me for a minute." He turned to his computer, brought up a document and asked, "What is the name of the insurance company?" He edited the page, asking a few more questions, and then printed it. He filled in some blanks on the printed sheets, and presented them Baxter and Roberts.

"As you see, gentlemen, I only engage to represent you in your insurance claim, and I cannot guarantee success. However, I can assure you of my best efforts. I have a dislike of insurance companies. I think they should pay when their clients have a loss. I need to know who is handling this for the insurance company." Baxter said he had talked to a woman named Unger. Snaeth said, "All right, I can call her."

Both men read the contract. Snaeth said, "Sign one copy, please, if you agree." They signed. "Thank you," Snaeth said. "I don't need any more from you right now, but I will be in touch soon." He looked at Baxter. "Very soon. I need a complete inventory, with prices." Baxter nodded. Snaeth took the other copy of the contract, signed it and added, "This is yours."

They got up. Snaeth saw them out. When Baxter lingered at the terrarium Snaeth discussed its construction and maintenance with him, and what the lizards ate. Baxter mentioned that it was like a display case for jewelry. Roberts waited somewhat impatiently.

After they left, Snaeth made a note and called the insurance company.

He reached Dorothy Unger, who was handling the claim. She made it clear that the claim wasn't denied yet, but she thought the circumstances of the loss were suspicious. She implied that Baxter and Roberts had concealed the jewelry and filed a claim on it. She said, audaciously, "If we deny the claim, and they still have the jewelry, aren't we right?" After he hung up, Snaeth made a note that she hadn't accused his clients of insurance fraud; she was too clever for that.

He left the office. Arriving by taxi at Baxter and Roberts, he entered the store, and saw two customers. One was being waited on by Baxter and another by a young lady. It seemed to be an ordinary jewelry store: it had glass cases around three walls (Snaeth thought that they could be converted to terrariums), some displays of commercial necklaces and earrings on tables and rotating stands in the middle; and in the rear, a counter with a cash register, credit card reader, and more displays of jewelry. Baxter excused himself for a second and came over to greet Snaeth. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

Snaeth kept his voice low. "I talked to Ms. Unger with your insurance company. She wasn't helpful, and she implied that the theft is an insurance fraud."

Baxter said in a low voice, "Yes, Unger, that woman. I don't like her. She didn't tell me that."

"No, she wouldn't. She didn't tell me, either, just hinted. Do you mind if I look around? I'd like to get an idea of how you run your business, talk to you and Mr. Roberts some more. I want to talk to your

employees, look at your security systems, locks and so forth... And I need to see your books. I need to prepare a written estimate of the loss."

After a second, Baxter said, "Sure. OK. Look around." He waved his hand. "First, these are the display cases that were busted. This one, and these two. Having the glass replaced the next morning cost us about \$2500. Why wouldn't our insurance pay for that, at least? Come this way." Baxter asked his customer to excuse him for a minute, and led Snaeth to a door in the left rear, behind the payment counter. "Here's the office. You can see all the business records. Here are my books." He showed Snaeth some ledgers and explained what each of them contained. "You'll find that it's all in order and up-to-date. I take notes, verify the sales from the cash register, and make entries every day after closing. A bookkeeper comes in on Mondays. Just a second." He sat at a computer and entered a couple of passwords. "You can look at the bookkeeper's work. He makes the computer entries. If you want to talk to Bob, he is behind the other door, outside and to the left. If you have a question, ask me." He returned to his customer.

Snaeth figured out the books fairly quickly. Baxter's entries were straightforward, and the bookkeeper entered them into spreadsheets on the computer. Baxter had a ledger in which he recorded purchases of gemstones, the cost of the materials to mount them and referenced the sale of the item. The sales were in another ledger by voucher number. The costs and the sales were duly entered in the spreadsheets. Another ledger tracked the net income and payments to the partners and employees. The business regularly maintained a cash reserve of about \$25,000.

When he returned to the showroom, Baxter was with another customer, but the assistant was more or less idle, making adjustments to the table displays. Snaeth approached her and she smiled. "May I help you, Mr. Snaeth?" she asked. "Mr. Baxter is busy. I'm Elaine."

"Yes, please. Since you know who I am, I suppose you know I'm helping Mr. Baxter and Mr. Roberts. I'd like to ask some questions."

"All right."

"How long have you worked here?"

"Three years... almost."

"Is it a good job?"

She smiled again. "Sure, I like this. I meet people and show them beautiful things, and they buy them. I'm happy when I make a sale. And Mr. Baxter is a great boss. He's given me ideas about how to sell, and he's given me two raises."

"What do you think about this jewelery on the tables here?"

"These are not our products. We obtain them commercially. They are all right for everyday use. If you want something special, our own jewelery is in the cabinets. We also do engraving and we can make things to order from a design."

Snaeth smiled. "Thanks. But I'm not a buyer today. Let me ask you something different. This is hard to explain, but I have a job to do. You had a burglary here and the insurance company might deny the claim. Can you tell me anything?"

"Why would they deny it?"

"It's a fairly large claim. They are looking for an excuse."

"Don't I know that! Someone scratched my car all over a few years ago, and they refused to pay for a paint job. They said I did it myself!" She calmed down. "OK... well, no, I don't know much. All I do is come here, work the floor, handle all the sales at the register."

"Do you get a lunch break? Does Mr. Baxter take you to lunch, or do you bring your lunch?"

She laughed. "I usually bring my lunch. Mr. Baxter is married and wouldn't think of taking me to lunch. I know that. He always brings his lunch and eats it here, in his office. He doesn't mind giving me a ride to work or a ride home, though. I help him open up and close." She laughed again. "Mr. Roberts takes me to lunch sometimes. He gives me a ride to work, or a ride home, too, but it's out of his way. I think he does it because Mr. Baxter asked him to. He's really very nice, you know, but all he likes is his jewelry." She shrugged. "That's all."

"Not quite. Do you know anything about burglar alarms and security here?"

"Sure. I have to know so I don't set alarms off by accident. Look at this." She went over to one of the display cases and pointed to a small button in a rear corner on the inside. "That's a motion sensor. If I need to open the back glass to show something to a customer, I have to use this." She pulled out an electronic device from a hip pocket. "This button disables the sensor until I push this other button and enable it again."

"Are you and Mr. Baxter the only people who work the floor?"

"There's Alicia, but she isn't here today. She's sick or something. I rode in with Mr. Roberts but we didn't stop and pick her up. See, the buses aren't reliable sometimes, and Mr. Baxter says he wants us here on time. He'd rather have the business pay a little extra to have everybody here so things run smoothly. He told me that himself. And I don't have to pay for parking. Alicia... she does the same things as me, but I'm supposed to handle the register."

"Thank you, Elaine." Baxter's customer had left and Snaeth went over to him. "Your record-keeping is impeccable. Your cash reserve seems rather large. Also, I want to interview Mr. Roberts now."

Baxter said, "The cash reserve is what we need these days. It's the same as the capital we needed to open the store, adjusted for inflation, increases in rent and so forth. These days, I don't know if this location might be sold out from under us and we'd have to move, so estimated moving costs are in there, too. We have more inventory and equipment now, compared to when we started. I handle that end of the business. We are not getting rich but we are secure. Bob keeps us going with his art jewelry." He grinned. "Go and talk to him. You'll see that he'd rather be working on jewelry than talking to you."

"I'll try not to disturb him at his work."

“Good luck.” Baxter grinned again.

Snaeth went to the right-hand door at the rear, knocked and entered.

“Mr. Roberts?” he called. The entire space was filled with slate worktables. On the tables were things that looked as if they came from a laboratory and others that might have come from a machine shop. Snaeth couldn’t identify all of them. He saw welding and brazing equipment, a centrifuge, a lathe, molds, and trays of sand and baths of water. He recognized grinding and polishing wheels. There were shelves of glass jars, glass jars on tables, and cabinets with many drawers. Roberts sat at a table, with a magnifying shield over his eyes, using a tiny blowtorch on an item that he held in pliers. He glanced up, held up a hand, and in less than a minute, put the object in a beaker of water sitting on a hot plate, which briefly hissed.

“Pickling solution. Mr. Snaeth, what on earth?”

“I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Mr. Roberts, but I’d like to ask you a few questions.”

Roberts sighed. “All right, but I don’t know anything.”

“I’d like to know how you became interested in making jewelry.”

“Ah...” Roberts swiveled his chair toward Snaeth and gave him his full attention. “I don’t see what that has to do with anything, but I’ll tell you. I started when I was a kid, when I saw some of the jewelry my mother wore. I started by carving pieces of wood, as soon as I convinced my parents that a knife was safe in my hands. By the time I was in junior high, I had started to make things of metal and stone. I carved and I made drawings. My parents let me use the basement of the house and I bought some tools. Nothing like what I have now.” He swept a hand to encompass the room.

“I copied from famous sculptures and paintings, I studied, and my own work improved. I was surprised, at first, that people wanted the things I made. I started to sell. Eventually I met Tom, and we went in together, and now, with this equipment, I can make anything. Do you know of Lalique, or Child & Child? I think I can be as good as that. As good as the best.” He indicated the piece in the beaker. “This is shop work. A wealthy lady wants a ring based on a design of mine that Tom showed her. She is supplying the stone herself, but Tom will make her pay well for the work I do.”

“Do you spend all your time here? Mr. Baxter is out meeting with customers...”

“No, I take several breaks during the day. Sometimes I get an idea from a sign, or a tree, or a cloud. I’ve been thinking about your terrarium today, but it’s a matter of scale, too. Maybe a necklace based on the forms of your plants. This, for instance, is based on the light I saw between two buildings. It’s just a pattern I made in tin.” He opened a drawer and showed Snaeth a worked piece of metal, quite abstract, then put it away and smiled again. “I think I didn’t answer your question. No, I rarely meet with our customers.”

“I heard that you take a lunch break with Ms. Williams or Ms. Parker sometimes.” Snaeth knew the names from looking at the books.

“Yes. Elaine.... Don’t tell her, but she has art in her soul, like me. She’s able to draw on a napkin very well. Tom has told me about her ability to make a sale ... make a sale! That’s all that Tom thinks about. Alicia is a very nice person. I like her a lot, really.” Roberts looked away for a second.

“Do you know what was taken in the theft? I want a complete list to file the insurance claim.”

“Yes, more or less. Tom’s inventory isn’t complete yet, but a lot of it was my original work. When I’m not doing this sort of thing...” -- he waved a hand at his current project again – “I can make anything I want. It will all sell eventually, Tom says, even the ones that are ... outré is what he calls them. We’ve sold my original pieces for good prices just by posting pictures on the internet. But now lots of the ones we had are gone. I think whoever stole the stuff wanted my work.”

“Could the stolen pieces be identified?”

“Yes, of course. Everything is photographed. Tom is using the photos to identify what’s missing. It will take time.”

“Thank you, Mr. Roberts. I’ll follow up with Mr. Baxter for a complete list of the things you’ve lost. One more thing, if you don’t mind.”

Roberts sighed. “OK, what is it?”

“Just out of curiosity, why does everyone call you Bob?”

Roberts smiled. “That’s simple. My father’s name was Michael, too, so my mother called me Bob, instead of his name. My middle name is Robert. My father didn’t have a middle name.”

“That makes sense. Excuse me; I’ll let you get back to work now.” Snaeth said and left, noticing on his way out that Roberts was moving to another table.

Snaeth talked to Baxter again, and told him he was satisfied with the security precautions. “I know an analyst who will evaluate your security system if it gets to that,” he said. He added that the insurance company had the burden of proof.

Snaeth returned to his office. He called the police and asked to talk to the person in charge of the Baxter & Roberts burglary. That person was Lieutenant Simpson, whom he had never met. After he waited on hold for about 20 minutes, Simpson came on the line:

“Snaeth, what do you want?”

“Lieutenant Simpson? Yes, this is Simon Snaeth. That’s what Sergeant Murphy says to me when I’m calling him.”

“Yeah, I know. I checked with him. He says you’re OK, for a lawyer.”

“That’s high praise, I suppose. I’m helping Baxter & Roberts with their insurance claim. I’d like to ask you, what do you think of their security systems?”

“There is nothing wrong with their security. They couldn’t have been burglarized like that. Someone who works there stole that jewelry. It would have been like this. They got in, disabled the alarm and cameras, stole the stuff while disabling the motion sensors, then wrecked things on the way out. They made it look like the back door had been forced. It’s the only way it could have been done. I think Baxter didn’t do it. He’s a steady businessperson. I don’t like Bob Roberts. And who knows about those women.”

“Thank you, sir.” Snaeth hung up.

Snaeth had suspected what Simpson said, and thought he might return the retainer and drop the case. He wanted to talk to Alicia Parker first. He went to work on some other matters, and then called it a day.

At about 8:30 the next morning, after he arrived at his office, his cell phone went off. It was Murphy. “Snaeth, I want you to come here. This could be connected with that burglary.”

“Who was killed?” Murphy was in Homicide; it could be nothing else.

“This Alicia Parker, who worked at Baxter & Roberts. I’m at 1019 Lincoln Road, where she lives. Lived. I know about your client confidentiality and all that. I want your opinion about this. You’ve met these people.”

Snaeth asked, “Are you willing to share information with me? They might help me with the insurance case.”

“Yes. We don’t usually share facts but I know you can keep your mouth shut and handle things discreetly.”

Snaeth said, irrelevantly, “Ummm... Alicia Parker was not my client.” He added, “Give me half an hour, Sergeant. Maybe more.”

“OK.” Murphy hung up.

Snaeth arrived at Alicia Parker’s house at about 9:15. Today, he wore a tan rough silk jacket with a light blue shirt, and a grey tie with a blue design after Klimt. His trousers were dark and his handkerchief was white. His shoes were Italian. There was crime scene tape around the house. It was a small, one-story, clap-boarded structure, with double-hung windows and a porch to one side of the front door with a rocking chair. After he identified himself to a woman cop who was outside, he was shown inside and met Murphy. Murphy was wearing his usual inexpensive but neat jacket, slacks and tie.

Murphy got to the point. “We sent a man here around 8:15 a.m. Baxter called us because neither Roberts nor Parker showed up today. Bob Roberts was supposed to bring her to work. What’s that about?”

“That’s the way they do it. Either Baxter or Roberts brings the employees to work so they don’t have to take the bus, they are there on time, and they don’t have to pay for parking.”

“Huh. OK. Here’s what we have.” The house was cheaply furnished. A section of the living room, near the door to the kitchen, was marked off. “They’ve removed the body. Try to stay out of the bloodstains, they’ll get on your shoes.”

Snaeth ignored it. “Why weren’t you watching these people? I inferred from Lieutenant Simpson that he suspected one of them had burglarized the store.”

“That’s up to Simpson. We don’t have the manpower to watch everyone, anyway. Now it’s a murder case, and it’s mine.”

“What happened, as far as you know?”

“Parker was stabbed. The knife was taken from her kitchen. There are a set of them. With her was this guy named Morris Robinson, who claims to be her boyfriend, her fiancé, in fact. Some fingerprints on the knife look like his. There were other ones, though. He says he didn’t kill her. He says he’s used the knife before when he was over here, fixing food. He called us about the same time as Baxter. We have him in custody.”

“All right, so he didn’t do it. How can I help you with this?”

“We think he did. He says he was with her yesterday, and they argued. He says that he couldn’t sleep last night, called her this morning, got no answer and came over here, and she was dead.”

“What did they argue about?”

“He won’t say.”

“Do you have an idea?”

“Robinson won’t talk, but I think that he disapproved of Parker stealing from her employers. He thought it over and went back and accused her, and then maybe she got mad at him and attacked him with the knife, and he took it from her and stabbed her in return.”

“Mr. Murphy, that seems to have a lot of holes in it.”

“Yeah, I... oh there you are, Steve. Snaeth, this is Lieutenant Simpson with burglary.”

“We’ve talked.” Snaeth shook hands with Simpson. Simpson was blond and had blue eyes that darted back and forth. He looked unkempt, in a poorly-fitting sport coat and no tie. There was a scar on his right cheek. He held his gaze on Snaeth’s face while they shook, and then took a dismissive look at his clothes.

Simpson cleared his throat and spoke to Murphy. “Have you found the stolen jewelry yet?”

“As far as we can tell it isn’t here. We’ve searched.”

“Was there any sign that someone else had searched?” Snaeth broke in.

“No,” Murphy answered.

Simpson said, "Well, it makes sense to me that she's the thief who faked the burglary. I thought it was an inside job. Maybe this Robinson fellow was in on it."

"Why would he kill her then, and not get the jewelry? Why call the police and stay here?" asked Snaeth.

"He stashed the jewelry somewhere, then came back."

"Why would he do that, then?"

Murphy looked at Snaeth. "So, you think the murder and the burglary might be connected. We don't know. Do you have an idea?"

"I'm not sure. I need to ask you some more things. But if I'm going to help you in this, Mr. Murphy, I'd like to have it all recorded. I can't reveal anything that my clients have told me, you know. I don't intend to do that, and I want to be able to prove it later."

Murphy looked at him for a few seconds, and said quietly, "OK. I'll be back in a minute." He went outside to his car. Snaeth and Simpson didn't say anything to each other, and waited until Murphy came back with a cassette tape recorder and a tape. "Let me test this... The quick red fox jumped over the lazy brown dog a-b-c-d-e-f-g."

The playback worked. Murphy rewound the tape, considered for a second, and started it. "Sergeant Murphy, Homicide. Conference at the murder scene... no, wait." He rewound again. "Sergeant Murphy, Homicide, July 26, 2022. Conference between between Lieutenant Simpson, Burglary, and Simon Snaeth, counsel to Baxter & Roberts, and me, regarding the possible murder of Alicia Parker. We are at her residence."

"This is Simon Snaeth. Thank you, Sergeant Murphy."

"Now Snaeth, what do you have to say?"

"I want to give some opinions, and ask some questions. I think Morris Robinson is innocent of any crime here. But crimes were committed without his knowledge."

"What crimes? Did your clients commit a crime?" asked Simpson.

"Come on, Mr. Simpson. I can't possibly say that. But I can make some assumptions. Let's assume that Morris Robinson is completely innocent in this matter, as he says. Let's assume that someone, a trusted employee, stole the jewelry from Baxter and Roberts. You agree with that, don't you?"

Simpson nodded, then remembered the recording and said, "Yes."

"I also assume that the partners, Mr. Baxter and Mr. Roberts, knew nothing about it. Are you with me, so far?"

Murphy said sarcastically, "Sure. Everyone's telling the truth."

“You’re being recorded, Murphy,” said Simpson with a grin. Murphy waved it away.

Snaeth continued. “But there are things that we don’t know about. Robinson says he and Parker argued. What did they argue about? Assume that they really are close friends and were considering marriage. Robinson says so. Suddenly Baxter & Roberts is burglarized. No jewelry is found here.”

“Wait,” Murphy said. “There were a couple of things. She had an engagement ring, a very fancy one, on her finger. I don’t know much about rings, but I think I know gold and diamonds when I see them. I think the ring came from Baxter & Roberts. Inside, it says, “M. R. & A. P.” That’s Morris Robinson and Alicia Parker. She was also wearing a very nice pendant on a gold chain, an emerald, maybe.”

“What do you know about Robinson? Could he have afforded a ring like that? Or the pendant?”

“No way,” Murphy said. “He works nights as an assistant manager at a fast food place, and because he has a truck, he helps people move furniture and so forth on the side. He told me that. We haven’t checked it out yet, but it seems legit.”

“Then we are making progress. Would Baxter & Roberts have given it to her? I can’t reveal what they told me, but they didn’t tell me about that.” Snaeth wasn’t going to mention that he knew that no such transaction was on Baxter’s books.

“Maybe they did, a gift. Employee appreciation or something.” said Simpson.

“You’ve met Mr. Baxter, haven’t you, Mr. Simpson? Would he do that?”

“Probably not, I guess. He’s all business, as far as I can tell.”

“If that ring is gold and diamonds, and I think it is, it’s worth a lot,” said Murphy. “It’s not anything ordinary. It looks like it glitters all over.”

“Very well. Now, building on my assumptions: the friendship between Robinson and Parker and the appearance of an engagement ring. Maybe they were engaged. Maybe someone else killed Alicia Parker. Who and why?”

“Why? To get the jewelry,” Simpson said. “But I’m not really getting it. If Robinson didn’t kill Parker... oh. He could have taken the ring and pendant and left. Even if he didn’t find the rest of the jewelry.”

“Right, sir. He could have taken the ring at least. And if the rest of the jewelry was here, he could have taken that. I think that getting the jewelry isn’t good enough. Maybe that was part of it, but I see the possibility that this was not a murder for gain, but a crime of passion. Sergeant Murphy?”

“Yes, that’s very possible.” Murphy said definitely. “Alicia Parker was stabbed four times according to our preliminary exam, and any one of them would have killed her. Snaeth, you’d better get on with it.”

“Patience, Sergeant. It’s getting to the point where my duty to my clients and my obligation to justice are in collision. Just one more question. Have you spoken to Baxter or Roberts?”

“Baxter knows nothing, he says. We have a guy at the jewelry store, and Roberts isn’t there. We sent someone to Roberts’s place, but no one is there.”

“I’m afraid that I expected that. I predict that you will not find Mr. Roberts right away.”

“Why?” Both police officers spoke at once.

“Roberts thought Alicia was his girlfriend, and he thought he was going to marry her.”

“That was Robinson.” Murphy said. Simpson looked blank.

“I think Alicia’s plan was to steal the jewelry and run away with Robinson. She stole it. But Robinson, when she told him, wanted no part of it. They argued. He won’t tell you why because he doesn’t want to betray her... betray her memory, I suppose. And also, he has trouble accepting a certain thing that seems likely.”

“What thing?” said both Murphy and Simpson.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if Roberts spent the night here sometimes when Robinson was at work. You’ll find his fingerprints in the bedroom, I bet. And on the knife. Is it obvious to you now?”

“Roberts killed her, I suppose,” Murphy said. “You’d better spell it out.”

“Hypothetically, after Robinson refused to cooperate, Alicia invited Roberts, her other lover, to come here in the middle of the night. But Roberts found out that she had fooled him. She really wanted to marry Robinson and had also stolen the jewelry. He was enraged, and killed her. Then he got the jewelry back.”

“You’re not explaining anything, Snaeth. You’re just putting Roberts here instead of Robinson... well... except...” said Murphy, looking puzzled.

“Perhaps he made her show the jewelry to him, and that’s what made him angry enough to kill. People who know him will tell you it’s all he cares about. Perhaps the jewelry was hidden in the kitchen somewhere, and therefore the knife was nearby. I think that after Roberts got the stolen goods back, he might have taken it to the store and left it there.” He spoke to Simpson. “Tell Baxter to look in Roberts’s workroom.”

“The hell I will. I’ll tell the man we have there to look,” Simpson said. “But I’m not really following this. Murphy asked you to spell it out.”

Snaeth said, “The initials on the engagement ring are the initials of Michael Roberts. He made it for Alicia Parker. He was deceived.”

They both blinked and were silent.

“I can’t protect my client if he is a murderer.”

* * *

They were in Snaeth's office. This time, Baxter had made an appointment.

"Well, I have the jewelry back. I found it in one of the cabinets in Bob's shop, in a pillowcase. But he's in jail for murder. He was halfway across the state, just driving and daydreaming, I guess, the way he does."

Snaeth nodded and said, "He didn't like being played for a fool by Alicia Parker. She had a very devious and dangerous plan. She was playing two men against each other."

"You don't have to be brutal. I get it. My business is ruined."

"Why would Alicia try such a crazy scheme? You knew her. I think she must have underestimated Morris Robinson. If he had been willing to cooperate with her, this might have turned out differently. Maybe you wouldn't have your jewelry back."

Baxter sighed. "I guess she got the idea from a movie or something. She liked movies. But it never works in the movies, either, does it?"

"No. Here's a check for \$5,000. I'm refunding your retainer. There's no insurance claim any more. But let's think this through. Bob never stole from you. In addition, he returned what was stolen to the partnership. Will the partnership pay for his legal costs? Or does he have to pay himself, out of his share of the partnership?"

"Good grief, I hadn't thought. This is worse. There's nothing in our partnership agreement about being charged with murder."

"Of course not. It depends greatly on what you want to do. If you want a good defense attorney, I know one of the best. Rich Walford. I'll call him and arrange for a discount on his fee."

"I've heard of him. Can you do that?"

"We are friends. But, I want to add... Now you have a issue that involves partnership law. A fairly complicated issue, I think."