

Chapter Twenty-Five, in which rigor sets in for James and reality sets in for Sylvia, who rises to the occasion before sinking to the floor.

It didn't really take very long for the files to copy, but it seemed an eternity to Sylvia. Every tiny noise made her jump and she knew that James' absence from the office would be beginning to be noticed. Although he was usually in by 7:30, the occasional late morning wasn't completely unusual. But he normally would have at least called his assistant, the curvy redhead Mary whom Sylvia disliked and distrusted and was sure was more than just an assistant. Oh god, she realised with an extra surge of loathing for the man she had mistakenly married, she probably reminded him of his mother. Well it looked like his fondness for his mum was going to be his undoing, if now posthumously, if she was right about the evidence she was sure was on his laptop.

Sylvia slipped out the portable drive with a sigh of relief when it finally finished ghosting James' hard drive, the longest fifteen minutes of her life so far it seemed, and gently closed the lid on the laptop. She carefully shut the passenger door and walked back out of the garage. Looking around Sylvia slowly became aware, as if waking from a dream, that the apartment would be thoroughly searched, and knew she had to hide the drive before calling 911.

Despite the evidence pointing to suicide she would fall under suspicion, as spouses naturally do and she stood to benefit rather substantially from his work life insurance, she suddenly thought with a jolt. It had never occurred to her that he would die. She had hoped he might go to prison, though that was out of style **for Americans**, just look at **New Jersey**, but commit suicide? It was too out of character. And would suicide nullify the insurance?

Sylvia shook her head, trying to focus on the immediate job at hand, and went out to the balcony where she hid her secret stash behind a favourite hibiscus. Looking around to make sure there were no prying eyes, she pulled out the carved wooden box and tucked in the mini-drive beside her rolling papers. She carefully lifted out a recently planted oleander and dropped the box into the

planter, tucking the plant back in on top, and smoothing out the dirt. Okay. Now just the gloves. Back in with the paint supplies in the cupboard.

Impossible now to look at the files, but knowing they were safe, Sylvia picked up the phone and dialed 911. After the operator made sure about the ventilation, she asked Sylvia to go and check to see **if James was really dead**, and it was all she could do to suppress a chuckle thinking of the old joke. Luckily it came out as a gulp and the operator assumed she was scared to check and told her she would stay on the line with her and that help was on the way.

Sylvia walked slowly towards the garage and as she opened the door she knew she was going to vomit or faint, or maybe both. She muttered something into the phone and dropped it, remembered to unlock the front door of the condo and made it to the bathroom. It was all real now. Before it had been exciting to think about, and she had felt revengeful towards James. Now he was gone it was different but the same. The crimes that had been committed had been committed and more were to come if she didn't act. But she would have to wait to act. She heard footsteps outside and let her head sink with relief onto the cool granite floor. She had always liked this floor she thought incongruously, and shut her eyes as the firemen, always first on the scene, burst through the door.

