

"The Writers' Retreat" by Richard Ciciarelli

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An author took all his ideas from others. Who took his life from him?

"Ken Moyer was a plagiarist, a thief," Sheri Lathrop said. She was speaking to Police Chief Tom Wayfare.

"He stole story ideas, characters, plot twists...anything he could."

"Yeah," Henry Dana agreed. "Then he'd crank out a detailed plot outline, get it to Hawthorn Publishers before us, and we'd have to rework our books because no publisher will put out two similar books."

"So you all hated him?"

"We write suspense novels," Bert Ticotin explained. "The plot is everything. Of course we hated him."

"Then why were you all here together?"

"We had no choice," said Bert. "We're all under contract to Hawthorn. They arranged for all of us to spend a week here getting our new books outlined and organized."

"And you all claim to have been asleep last night when we figure Moyer was killed?"

All three authors nodded.

"Okay. You may all return to your rooms, but don't leave this property until I say so."

After the writers had left, Wayfare strolled back through the spring growth of the Maryland woods to the office of Jack Comstock, owner of Comstock's Retreat.

"What do you know about all this?" Wayfare asked.

"Not much. I found Moyer's body this morning by the fountain as I was going to the writers' condo units to wake them for breakfast. We rent out rooms to authors who want to work on their books with no interruptions. Our apartments have no telephones, no televisions, no radios...nothing that might distract the writers from their work."

"And their publishers pay for this?"

"Not always. In fact, usually the writers come here on their own. Hawthorn's sending us four of their people is very unusual."

"Do you believe Ken Moyer was a literary thief?"

"I've heard others who came here make comments about not discussing a work-in-progress with him. These three are not the only ones to accuse Moyer of plagiarism."

"And these writers -- where do they originally come from?"

"All over," Comstock said. "Bert Ticotin is from London, Henry Dana is from Chicago, and Sheri Lathrop is from Portland, Oregon. The retreat is well known. My family's been running it for three generations. As I said, the only unusual thing



about this group is that they were sent here by their publisher and didn't come on their own."

Chief Wayfare was about to ask another question when he was interrupted by his lieutenant.

"We just checked Moyer's apartment," the lieutenant said. "It's been torn apart. Somebody was pretty desperate to find something in there."

"I wonder if it was a plot synopsis, something Moyer had stolen." Wayfare rubbed his chin.

"Oh, and another thing," the lieutenant added. "The medical examiner pried open Moyer's closed fist. This was in it."

He handed Wayfare a crumbled ball of paper. Wayfare carefully opened up the wadded paper to reveal a note written in spiked handwriting. It was dated 12/4.

"I found an item you might be interested in, a rough outline for someone's plot that didn't make it into the paper shredder. If you're interested, meet me at the fountain at 10 tonight." It was unsigned.

"Well, looks like we were right about the time of death," Wayfare said. "Someone lured Moyer out last night, then bashed his head in with a rock."

"But who?" the lieutenant asked.

"According to Mr. Comstock, his only clients this week are Lathrop, Dana, Ticotin and Moyer, so that narrows our suspects down to three, four if you count Comstock himself. And I think I have an idea I know which one it was."