

Moray

Although he did not need notes, young, distinguished professor of philosophy, Dr. Matthew Moray left for his Philosophy 101 lecture with his notebook in hand. Passing by his office wallboard, he sneered at the photograph held there by thumbtacks. Department heads, dressed in academic robes and wearing colored hoods denoting their degrees and honors, were not in his league. Moray's was the only doctorate on the entire staff from an Ivy League school. Comparing their credentials with his was like comparing a stick figure to the Mona Lisa.

When the university offered Moray a position, he had told his wife, "I'm taking this job because the good universities have no openings." Describing the committee who interviewed him, he said, "They need my degree to help them qualify for accreditation." Fingering his Phi Beta Kappa ring, he thought, *The head of the department will age out soon. They'll ask me to head the department. Of course, I'll accept. It's the fastest way out of this second-rate, no-name university.*

At least, we have this in common. Just like me, many students are here because they couldn't get into a better school. His expectations were not high. Pseudo-intellectual students, eager for their first encounter with classical philosophy, flocked to his classes.

Moray swept into the lecture hall like a prince coming to claim his throne. Students filled the 285 seats, and more lined the walls, hoping others would drop the course and they could get in.

Moray arranged his notebook on the podium and looked out only as far as the front row. He caught himself gaping at a pair of shapely, crossed legs.

Raising his eyes slightly, he beheld what he called perky breasts, a symmetrical face, and shiny hair. Crowning it all was a smile of adoration. He had seen that look on

the faces of female students before. *Probably infatuated with a person of authority*, he reasoned. *Young, impressionable girls often moon over professors.*

She came by the dais after class to ask about a point in his lecture. Her name was Cassandra. After his second lecture, Cassandra waited to ask yet another question. Moray was pleased that at least one student in the crowd showed some understanding.

One day Cassandra looked unhappy. She remained in her seat after class. He walked over to her. “Cassandra, you don’t seem yourself today.”

“Thanks for noticing, Dr. Moray. Things have come together to make the perfect storm today,” she sighed. “My bus pass expired yesterday, my bike broke down, and I had to walk to school. Now I’m dreading the walk home.”

“What direction do you go?” he asked.

“I live near Parkside and Lincoln,” she replied.

“That’s on my way home. I could give you a lift.”

“Could you? I would be so grateful.”

As he drove, they chatted about his lecture on the arguments for the existence of a divine being, one of Moray’s most popular lectures in the Bible belt.

She said, “I see now that the arguments are based on facts, but they’re still not facts—only arguments.”

He said, “I think you got the point.”

When he stopped at the curb, she got out quickly and thanked him. He watched her bound up the stairs. He found himself thinking, *She’s cute but too young for me.*

Two more times Cassandra had a problem with transportation. Each time Moray dropped her off at her apartment. Class after class, she flashed her smile from the front row. *What a bright light she is*, he thought. *Most students’ brains are like street lamps that turn off automatically when the sun comes up.*

Friday she hardly looked up the entire lecture. After the room emptied, he went to her, still seated.

“Cassandra, what’s the problem?”

“It’s my boyfriend,” she said. “We’ve been together for almost two years. He told me last night he’s seeing someone else. It was unexpected.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he said.

“It’s not your problem,” she conceded. “He gave me the usual line: He wasn’t happy, he wasn’t being fulfilled, and he wanted to explore other options.”

“If he feels that way, perhaps you should explore other options, too,” Moray said.

“As pretty and smart as you are, there must be a long line of young men who would like to meet you.”

“Most of the guys I know backed off after Gary and I got together. I’m not sure any of them would be interested now. Besides, I feel like I’m not the same person I was before I started taking your class.” Her face lit up with admiration. “What a difference you’ve made in the way I think and how I understand life.”

She paused and looked up at him, only a little embarrassed. “I’m stranded—again. I would accept a ride, if you don’t mind. I could walk, of course, if you’re not leaving soon.”

“It’s no problem. I’ll give you a lift.”

When they arrived at her apartment, she pleaded. “Would you mind coming up for a few minutes? The apartment seems so empty. Gary took all his things when he moved out.”

What can be the harm? he thought. *I’ll be comforting a student I respect, spending a few minutes with a person who needs someone to talk to.*

As they entered the studio apartment, she asked, “Would you like coffee, or perhaps something else to drink?”

“Coffee’s fine,” he said, reminding himself he didn’t handle alcohol well. Brewing would take a while. As he speculated about how to fill those minutes, she sat down near him at the small table.

“Do you use cream?” she asked. “Sugar’s on the table.”

“I take it black.” Attempting to lighten the mood, he added, “No use spoiling the taste.”

She looked at him and said, “Your course has been a tremendous help. Before I met you, I was thinking about dropping out of school.”

“What a waste,” he said. “You have a lot to offer.”

She moved closer to him, and his pulse quickened. She looked directly at him. “You’re so kind and understanding. Not everyone would be so caring.” She poured the coffee, and when she sat back down, inched her chair closer to his.

Moray blushed.

What’s happening? Is she coming on to me? I’m almost twice her age! His face flushed, and she backed away.

“Thanks for coming up. I appreciate every minute you give me.”

He rose, sighed deeply, went out the door and down the stairs. Driving home, he thought, *That was close! I’ve known teachers who got caught messing around with a student. Back east, it wouldn’t be an issue. But here in redneck country, it’s a foolish and unnecessary risk.*

In the foyer of his home, he met a frowning wife, arms on her hips. “Did you get the things on the shopping list?” Seeing his empty arms, she said, “You forgot again.”

He thought *Whatever happened to ‘Welcome home, dear, how was your day?’*

“Damn!” he said. “I’ll run to the store.”

“Never mind.” Her tone was flat. “We’ll make do with leftovers.” She ferried food from the refrigerator to the microwave, and after a few minutes, called Moray to dinner.

He toyed with his food. When he looked up, she was staring at him. He had difficulty meeting her gaze. *Why am I nervous? I did nothing wrong. She’s the one who’s letting herself go, putting on extra weight, nagging me. My God, has she no self-respect?*

Lying beside his wife in bed that night, Moray knew he should want her. He let his hand fall on her breast, and she turned to him willingly. But as he made love to her, in his imagination, he was making love to Cassandra. “Cassandra” smiled. “Cassandra” admired his love-making. And he left “Cassandra” longing for more. His wife turned her back to him and went to sleep.

The next day in class, looking at Cassandra, he wondered, *Did she fantasize about me last night as I did about her?*

After class, she came up to him. He knew she had yet another emergency, and she’d accept a ride home.

On the drive to her apartment, Moray felt her presence in the seat opposite him. He sensed the fullness of her figure and felt a hunger rising. For her part, she sat quietly. When they arrived, she invited him up.

Entering her apartment, he noticed her carefully made bed with a vase of fresh-cut flowers on the bedside table. She made no effort to open the drapes. Instead of overhead lights, she switched on a small bedside lamp. Cassandra brought a bottle of wine and two glasses to the table and poured each of them a drink.

Moray began to breathe rapidly

Raising her glass, Cassandra said, “No other teacher has treated me like you do. I care for you. I’m aware of our age difference, but it doesn’t matter. I hope you feel the same.”

“I do care for you, but I wouldn’t want to take advantage of you.” The wine was causing him to lose his focus. “You’re my student,” he reminded her.

“I think I’m beyond being a student. I feel so close to you.” Her face was that of an innocent kitten begging for love. “I hope it doesn’t embarrass you that I find you attractive. I’ve never had a better teacher—or friend.” She placed both her hands over his, took one of his hands, and raised it to her cheek.

Moray felt aroused as he had not been for a long time. His adrenaline rush screamed, “*Damn the consequences! Be a man!*”

An hour later, on her bed, he said, “You’re so beautiful. You’ve made me feel . . . well, I haven’t felt this way in a long time. I feel invigorated, almost young again.”

“You’re wonderful,” she said. “I’ve never felt so safe.”

Cassandra’s emergencies were not great, but they were steady, needing a ride home, once, sometimes twice a week. Each time, Moray was in her apartment for more than an hour. But the longer their arrangement continued, the more clearly he saw the threat it could be to his future.

The sex is great, and Cassandra is beautiful, but she doesn’t fit into my plans. He planned his exit like lines in a play. In Cassandra’s apartment, seated at her little table, he began, “I’m feeling ashamed.”

“Ashamed? Of me?”

“You? Of course, not. Of myself. I lost interest in my wife. Still—she doesn’t deserve to be hurt,” he said.

“What are you saying?” she asked.

“I’m saying you’re gorgeous and smart, but I’m not proud of myself. I hope you’ll forgive me.”

Moray stood and took from his pocket a velvet-covered box, opening it to reveal a gold chain, and a pendant with bore the image of his philosophy fraternity.

“I want to give you something to remember me by.”

Cassandra stood with her back to him. He could not see her tears as he connected the gold chain behind her neck or her hand rising to caress the pendant.

The following day Cassandra came to class late, sat in the back row, unsmiling. Perhaps she had seen their relationship growing into something more than he had. He needed to heal the wound if he could. When the students were leaving, he met her in the aisle and blocked her exit. “Cassandra, could I see you for a moment?”

“Of course, Dr. Moray,” she said. The room was soon empty except for the two of them.

“Did you enjoy the lecture today?”

“Is that what you wanted to see me about?”

“Not really,” he said. “I feel I’ve hurt you. It’s entirely my fault. I want to apologize again. I hope to make it up to you. I don’t know how, but I’ll try to find a way.”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” she said. “Gary came back last night. We’re back together again. He was very upset when I told him about us. He said something about working it out with you. If he calls you, I think an apology will set things right.”

Moray’s wife was in the kitchen loading the dishwasher when the phone rang. Moray, in the living room, lifted the receiver and heard an unfamiliar voice. “Dr. Moray?”

“Yes.”

"It's come to my attention you've been messing around with one of your female students."

"Cassandra told me you might call," Moray answered. "I apologize for any misunderstanding. I hope it's all behind us."

"You hope so," came a cold voice, "but I don't think it's going to be so easy. You can't take an apology to the bank."

"Meaning what?" Moray asked.

"Meaning one word from me, and the university would likely fire your ass. I'm guessing your wife wouldn't be too thrilled about it either."

"I agree my wife wouldn't be thrilled, but I doubt if it would affect my teaching career. Cassandra isn't a high school student."

"If you want to take a chance, be my guest. Otherwise, I want to hear a cha-ching soon."

"Are you trying to blackmail me?" he said.

"You catch on fast for a college professor."

"What are you suggesting?" asked Moray.

"This is not a suggestion. For starters, you should hand over to Cassie a plain envelope containing one thousand dollars in bills no larger than a twenty. Tell her it's your gift to Gary. Do as I say, and you can keep your little job," he said and hung up.

Suddenly the specter loomed large. If he reported the attempted blackmail, his affair with Cassandra would surely be in the newspapers. He could see jobs at better universities vanishing in thin air. On the other hand, if he paid Gary, he might think he had a good thing going, get greedy, and ask for more. Moray felt like a rock climber

suspended by a thin rope Gary could snip at any time, now, or in the future. He needed time to figure out what to do.

At the end of the month, before the close of his lecture, Moray said, “Miss Phillips, may I see you after class?”

When all the other students had left, he took from his briefcase a plain envelope. He placed the envelope in Cassandra’s hands. She looked puzzled when he said, “Give this to Gary.” She accepted the envelope and fingered its bulk. She looked puzzled. Cassandra placed the envelope in her book bag and left without a word.

He thought *She doesn’t know. But by the time she hands this to Gary, she’ll have it figured out.*

Months later in a lawyer’s office, Moray asked, “Are our conversations protected by attorney-client privilege?”

The lawyer answered, “So long as the problem you mention is not a crime, and is, as you say, an indiscretion, our conversation is protected. What indiscretion have you committed?”

“It’s not about me. I’m asking for a colleague. He slept with one of his female students. My friend realized it was a huge mistake and has broken it off. Now, someone who learned about it is trying to blackmail him.”

“Blackmail’s a crime. All your friend has to do is blow the whistle on the blackmailer,” said the lawyer. “However I’m sure you’re aware in our community, any scandal would put his career at risk.”

He knew he was not thinking clearly. “If my friend got a signed statement from the woman involved saying they never had relations, would that stop the blackmailer?”

“Just the opposite. If your friend went to the trouble of getting a legal document denying it, an investigator would ask him why he felt the need for such a document if he’s

not guilty. So long as the blackmailer has the affair to hold over your friend's head, the blackmailer holds the winning hand."

Moray left the lawyer's office, casting about for options. He found it hard to put the pieces of the puzzle together: Gary's threat, Cassandra, his future, his infidelity. He rejected hiring a private detective to follow Gary, to see if he could record Gary accepting the blackmail payment, or to see if any of his acquaintances might rat him out. Involving a detective added a new and unwelcome dimension to his puzzle.

If I had only got a position in a real university, this would never have been an issue. But in this Bible Belt, it could destroy my career or at least set it back light-years. Without my academic career, I have nothing. What I've dreamed of all these years is slipping through my fingers because of a sniveling two-bit blackmailer and his spineless girlfriend. He'll bleed me dry, and still not keep quiet. But not if I can secure a new teaching post before it becomes public.

Soon after he visited the lawyer, Moray heard from Gary. "Sorry to say this, Moray, but my expenses are going up, so I'll need more money next month."

Moray was growing desperate, "You're draining me dry as it is. I'm running out of resources. Have a little pity."

"Oh, yeah, I'm a pity expert, old man! You'll see how serious I am when you get back to the university."

Later, Moray passed a much younger colleague in the hallway. He showed Moray a small, yellow scrap of paper and said with a smirk on his face, "Moray, old buddy, what does this mean? The note says, 'Ask Moray about Cassie.'"

"Just a little inside joke. Think nothing of it," Moray responded and walked on to indicate its insignificance.

Moray walked into his office, slumped in his swivel chair, and sat staring at the floor. He had no idea where Gary might probe again, but he was sure it was coming. With no relief in sight, his anger churned like lava in a volcano. He was barely able to see to drive home.

On his doorstep was a rose with a note attached: "To M with love, C & G." Breathing a sigh of relief he had got home before his wife, he threw the rose aside, crumpled the note, and stuffed it in his pocket. His mind raced. *Is there no way to stop this leech? One way or another, he'll destroy me.*

Moray threw his jacket on the sofa, trudged into his library, and withdrew the note from his pocket. Eyeing it, he poured himself a tall glass of scotch. Each sip he took added flame to the fire.

As the alcohol seeped into all parts of his body, ideas, like building blocks, began to come together. If he resisted, Gary would laugh as he brought him down. He was horrified at the idea, but as he took the last gulp of scotch, the idea overwhelmed him: *If Gary were dead, my problem would be solved.*

The word *murder* was foreign to Moray's morality, but there it was. His mind explored the extreme of a shortlist of possible solutions.

If I were to do this terrible thing, I must appear to be the victim, which I truly am. It would have to look like self-defense. An old man in the next block had been beaten in a home invasion recently. Burglaries in Moray's neighborhood, although sporadic, were frequent enough to justify the use of a weapon in self-defense. Of course, he could never bring himself to it, yet he couldn't control the urge that compelled him forward.

The following morning, slightly hungover, he removed his handgun from his bedroom closet, checked its condition, and placed it in the desk drawer in his study.

On the last day of the month, Cassandra, wearing yet another new and attractive outfit, approached him. “Cassandra, tell Gary I can’t pay him this month.”

She lowered her gaze and walked away quietly.

He waited by the phone. It didn’t ring on the first night—or the second. On the third night, he heard the now familiar voice. “You’re late with your payment. I guess I’ll have to drop by the dean’s office tomorrow and let him in on your little secret—maybe invite a newspaper photographer to get a nice shot of you lecturing.”

“Gary,” he tried to make his voice sound desperate, “you don’t understand. I’ve withdrawn all the ready cash I have. My bank account is flat. I can get cash from my retirement funds, but not till next month. Can’t you cut me a little slack?”

“I suppose we can work something out. You must have something in your house worth a thousand—a painting, some jewelry, something.”

“I have a gold watch.”

“OK, professor. One gold watch. Don’t try anything funny. Cassie knows where I’m at and what I’m doing.”

“I’m trying my best. Can you come after 11:00? My wife will be in bed. I’ll leave the garden door to my office unlocked. Come alone. I want this to be just between you and me.”

By 10:30, Moray had said goodnight to his wife. He made sure the French doors to the garden were unlocked. He waited in his study with the safety on his gun turned off. The knife he would place in Gary’s hand, wiped clean, would bear no evidence Moray had ever touched it.

On the tiled garden path rested a large stone which Moray planned to throw through the windowpane into the library, showing how Gary had gained entrance.

Shooting Gary in the chest would indicate Gary was coming toward him and not running away. Gary would be dead before his wife, awakened by the sound of the gunshot, got downstairs.

As soon as the police finished their investigation and left, he would rush to Cassandra's apartment to convince her he had shot Gary in self-defense. He'd stress if Cassandra went to the police, she would implicate herself in a felony and probably go to jail. Her only chance was to stay clear and say nothing.

Moray rehearsed questions the detective would ask: *How did the intruder get in?* "Through the door leading in from the garden."

How did he get the door open? "He must have thrown the rock through one of the panes and stuck his hand through to unlock the door."

What were you doing when he forced his way in? "I was in deep meditation which I do every night in the darkness before retiring. The burglar didn't expect anyone to be present since the lights were out. The breaking glass jarred me out of my trance. As soon as I got my bearings, I turned on the light. There was this crazy man."

Did you recognize him? "No."

What happened next? "I was scared out of my wits. He was a lot bigger than I am. His face looked like he was on drugs. He seemed startled to see someone in the room. He came at me with a knife. I jerked open the drawer, grabbed my revolver, and fired. I meant to stop him, not kill him."

What was a loaded revolver doing in your desk? "I moved it there only two weeks ago. Since there have been problems in the neighborhood lately, I just thought of it as insurance. I never expected to use it." His sensible answers would make further investigation unnecessary.

He had thought of everything, and it happened like a well-rehearsed play. Gary appeared at the garden door. Moray motioned him in. As Gary approached Moray and sneered. Moray opened his desk drawer as if to retrieve his watch, called up all his courage, and without a word, he fired. Gary fell forward in front of the desk, and Moray hurried to place the knife in his hands and made sure Gary's fingerprints were on it.

Following the shot, he laid the gun on the desktop. From the garden, he threw the rock through the window and let it lie where it landed on the carpet. Then he dialed 911, identified himself, and said, "Please send an ambulance and the police. A man has been shot."

He placed the phone back in its cradle and waited. He heard a noise, glanced up at the garden door, then leaped from his chair. There stood Cassandra. "What in hell are you doing here?"

"I was waiting in the car for Gary," she muttered. Seeing Gary's body on the floor, her face contorted. She turned to Moray and spoke barely above a whisper, "Did you shoot him?"

"I tried to reason with him, but he got angry and came at me. He might've killed me," Moray said, indicating the knife he had placed in Gary's hand.

She protested, "Gary didn't carry a knife."

The office door opened and Moray's wife entered the room. "What was that horrible noise?" She saw the body on the floor and Cassandra, weeping. "What's going on? Who's that man—and this woman?"

Hearing the faint sounds of sirens, Moray began to panic. Ignoring his wife, he spoke firmly to Cassandra, "Get out! When the police arrive, you'll be implicated for blackmail. Leave now if you want to protect yourself."

Cassandra whined, “I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to understand!” he barked. “If you want to stay out of jail, leave! Now! Say nothing of this to anyone!”

On the verge of tears again, Cassandra’s looked from the body on the floor, to Moray and Mrs. Moray. Moray grabbed Cassandra’s arm, rushed her to the garden door, and snarled as he pushed her. “Go now, or you’ll be in this deeper than you can imagine!” She limped away as if in a trance and disappeared into the darkness.

Moray turned to his wife, pleading. “The police will be here shortly. Please, just go along with whatever I tell them. Answer their questions, but under no circumstance volunteer a word about the woman you saw. She is one of my students. After this mess is over, I’ll explain everything.”

The sound of an approaching siren intensified the pressure Moray felt. “Can you do that for me?”

“What’s this all about?” she demanded as the sirens grew louder.

“The man on the floor is a burglar. When he saw me, he went crazy and tried to attack me. I shot him in self-defense. Tell the police about the shot you heard and what you see here.” He was shouting. “Just say nothing about the woman and don’t mention the word ‘blackmail!’”

The sirens died, and within seconds the doorbell sounded. Moray signaled to his wife to let them in. She obeyed like she was in a daze.

Detectives and paramedics rushed in. A short man, wearing an off-the-rack suit, said, “I’m Detective Willard. You Moray?” He examined the body on the carpet, and paramedics soon determined the wounds of the man on the floor were fatal. Photographers took a series of shots of the scene.

The detective withdrew a wallet from Gary's pocket. After identifying him, Willard directed an officer to search their files. The officer entered the code on his laptop and in seconds reported, "Sir, the only record for Gary Dorman shows an arrest on suspicion of mugging. Never charged for lack of evidence. Nothing else comes up."

As the paramedics wheeled the body out of the room, two officers entered the house with Cassandra, holding a wadded handkerchief in her hands. Her face was tear-streaked.

The officers said to Willard, "Sir, this woman was sitting in front of the house in a car. We asked her what she was doing there, and she couldn't explain, so we brought her in."

Moray interrupted. "Officer, this young lady is a student of mine at the university. She dropped by for tutoring."

"Isn't this hour a little late for tutoring?" asked Willard.

Moray glanced sideways at the detective and raised his eyebrow. "It was a special kind of tutoring."

"Oh," said the detective.

Moray began to perspire. "I think I need a drink of water. Honey, would you bring me a glass, please?" Willard nodded his permission for her to leave.

She didn't move. Instead, she looked at the detective and said, "I think I prefer to stay and hear what my husband has to say."

The detective shrugged. "Let's see what the young lady has to say," he said.

"Ma'am, what is your name?"

"My name is Cassandra Phillips."

"Can you explain what you're doing here?" Willard asked.

Her creased brow and trembling chin produced a cold sweat in Moray. His mind raced. *Will she do as I told her? Has she realized her risk of going to jail?*

Cassandra collapsed into the high wingback chair that faced his desk, still weeping. She lifted her face to Moray and sobbed, "I'm so sorry, professor! I've got to tell the truth!"

Moray prepared for the worst.

"I fell in love with my teacher. I've been chasing him the entire year, and he's ignored me. I came tonight to try once more, to see if he had any feelings for me at all. But it was no use; he sent me away."

Moray stifled a gasp. His wife gave him a "drop dead" look.

Cassandra continued, "I was sitting in my car when I heard a gunshot."

"Well, Dr. Moray," Willard said, "on the surface, this seems open and shut, but things are not always as they seem, are they? We'll wait for forensics to finish their report to determine how to go forward. Professor, Mrs. Moray, and Miss Phillips, we'll need formal statements from you at the station tomorrow. I think we have what we need for the time being."

The detectives followed Cassandra out of the house. Moray and his wife heard the cars pulling away—then the silence.

Mrs. Moray looked at her husband and said, "Now, what is this about blackmail?"

"Sit down, Honey. I have a confession to make," he said as he ran his thumb over his Phi Beta Kappa ring. "I had an affair with Cassandra. It was early last semester. It was brief, and it's been over for months. After I broke it off, she and her boyfriend began blackmailing me, threatening to go public. If it got out, I knew it would end my career and our chance for better things, so I paid several thousand dollars to keep them quiet."

Cassandra came tonight to collect a payment, but I told her I'd had enough. I wasn't going to pay anymore. She left. A few minutes later, her boyfriend broke into the library. He came at me with a knife, and I shot him in self-defense."

She took a few minutes to process all the information he had just given her. Her mind fell on his infidelity. "I'm not surprised you had an affair," she admitted. "I've suspected for a long time."

Her chin rose and she looked down her nose. "Why did that woman lie to the police?"

"If she admitted they came here to get money, she would face charges of blackmail. She lied to cover her butt."

"This is an ugly mess I can't make sense of. I can't believe what's happening," she shook her head. "I'm going back to bed. You get the sofa."

She'll keep quiet. Would Cassandra, also? Moray wondered.

Moray finally dozed off on the sofa and went into a deep sleep. The next morning, still dressed in clothes from the previous night, he staggered into the kitchen in search of some breakfast. He drew water and started the coffee. Before the brewing had finished, he heard a car in the driveway, and his wife came in the back door.

"You're out early."

She said, "I've been to church."

"To church?" He was incredulous. "For what?"

"I went to confession," she replied.

"Confession?" The word alarmed him. "You didn't say anything about last night, did you?"

“No. Things have been bad between us for a long time. I felt neglected and pushed aside. I can’t tell you how bad I felt. It turned me into a harpy.”

“So what did you confess?” he probed.

“I confessed the failure of our marriage—my failure as a wife. I should have been more supportive. You’ve worked so hard to get ahead. I’ve let you down. I’m genuinely sorry. I had a long talk with the priest. If you’re willing, I want us to start all over again.”

Relief swept over him like a fresh ocean breeze. “You have nothing to apologize for. I’m the unfaithful one.” *In this instance*, he thought, *I’ve told the truth*. He opened his arms to her and they embraced. He held her as she sobbed softly.

Several days after the event, the local newspaper printed a follow-up story on the shooting at the Moray home. He was a hero. He had defended his home, the report said, just as most others would do—or would hope to do.

In succeeding months, the story disappeared from the news cycle. Moray’s lectures were full. Students were in awe of him. Cassandra dropped his class. Mrs. Moray lost 25 pounds and looked like her old self after a makeover and a new wardrobe befitting the wife of an important professor. She attended faculty functions, chatted up every guest there, and organized a few very successful parties herself. In bed, she made Matthew hum like a new Corvette.

Things, he thought, *couldn’t be better*. With less than two months left in the year, Moray received official notice the board chose him as the new head of the philosophy department.

A light! he thought. *Light at the end of the tunnel. As head of the department, I'll have a much easier time attracting the attention of a better school. It's my ticket out of this God-forsaken desert.*

At the end of graduation exercises, Moray and his wife attended a faculty reception where they schmoozed with the alumni, especially the rich ones.

Afterward, his wife went home while Moray wandered back to his office to luxuriate in his success. He sat alone, surrounded by boxes and files ready to be moved to the larger office of the department head.

In a locked drawer in his desk was an unopened letter he had received three days earlier. His hand trembled slightly as he inserted his key, pulled open the drawer, and withdrew the letter. The embossed envelope bore the insignia of his alma mater. It was not from a professor but the dean. Moray was sure it could mean only one thing: an invitation to fill an opening, possibly even head of the department. He had paid his dues in this outpost of civilization.

He slid his letter opener under the flap of the envelope. Before examining its contents, he glanced up to see, coming down the hall, the familiar face of Detective Willard, followed by an assistant. He watched Willard stop to ask directions from the secretary before proceeding to his office. The door was open, but Willard knocked. Moray invited the men in and asked them to sit down.

“What can I do for you, gentlemen?” Moray remained calm.

“Well, professor, I'll come right to the point. The case of the burglar shot in your house was not so simple as we thought. Forensics showed Dorman was not high on drugs. With that theory out the window, we began searching for another angle. It took a considerable effort, professor, but we finally got access to your bank account. Our search

turned up what looked like withdrawals from your account, and corresponding amounts deposited to the account of Miss Phillips.

Moray squirmed in his chair.

“At headquarters, we asked Miss Phillips if she could explain the large deposits each month into her account. At first, she maintained it was money her family sent her. I asked if her family would verify her story. We showed her the matching amounts withdrawn from your bank at about the same time she made deposits. We made it clear if this turns into something other than self-defense and she lies about it, we would charge her as an accessory. She told us about your affair and showed us an amulet that matches the ring you’re wearing.”

Moray tried to look disinterested. “Mr. Willard, I never denied an affair. Having an affair with a student does not implicate me in anything further.”

Willard continued, “She also said you invited Dorman to your home, and she waited in the car while he went in. When she heard the shot, she hurried in and saw Dorman lying dead. She said he wasn’t armed.”

“You’re taking her word Dorman had no knife. It is equally possible he had a knife she was simply unaware of. Would a blackmailer go unarmed to a meeting with his victim? He was at my house. I wasn’t in his. Your case is circumstantial, based on the word of a witness who invented a story which is in her self-interest. If you arrest me, and this goes to trial, and I’m subsequently found innocent, I can promise you a civil suit against you and your department for damages. Multiply my annual salary by 20 years and that’s the amount I would be seeking. You can imagine the effect it might have on your career.”

“I take your point, professor,” said Willard, “however, the way it looks to me is your motive of self-defense might not stand up against the fact that you’re the only one who stood to gain by having Dorman dead. I’m willing to bet arresting you is more likely to enhance my career than throttle it.”

Willard ended with, “Professor, we’re taking you in on suspicion of murder.”

Willard’s assistant produced handcuffs and indicated for Moray to extend his wrists. The chains rattled as the three of them filed past a wide-eyed secretary.