

“The Untimely Ms. Garth”

December 30

Pleasant, harmonious sounds drifted from every direction. The party really was quite agreeable. Everyone danced and talked among his friends having a glorious time. We were in the aft lounge for this first evening. A small band was playing on the stage, its soft music lightening the atmosphere. The meal in the lounge was open seating, and people were mingling with one another.

Without warning, the lights flickered, then died. The room was bathed in total, insufferable darkness. Then, the music stopped. Only the gently rocking floor and annoyed voices whispering were heard for a few moments. Suddenly, a woman screamed. She screamed a terrible, piercing scream. There was a pounding of feet as people fled the lounge. The crowd rushed out in every direction, engulfed in terror. Something was terribly wrong. When, at last, the power was restored and the room was once again illuminated, the terror's source was clear. Crystal Garth lay stricken in the center of the dance floor. Her lips were blue and her skin was pallid. She seemed on the verge of death.

Upon recovering from my initial shock, I remembered my status as a doctor. *Not just any doctor, though, I am the world-renowned Dr. Pat Pigglewinkle III, at the vanguard of forensic physiopathology<sup>1</sup>.* I pushed myself through the forming crowd to examine the young woman. If she was still alive, then every moment counted! I bent over and examined her; lifting her wrist with professional care, I gently checked her pulse. It was rapid and faint. I determined that she would need cardiopulmonary resuscitation. I was leaning over to administer mouth-to-mouth, when I was struck by a fearful insight. I reeled back and ran for help.

I ran to the sick bay all the while thinking how close I myself had come to dying. The girl was obviously poisoned. If I had not reared away from her, the mere touch of her lips may have been the proverbial kiss of death. *I*

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Physiopathology deals with the function of living systems when inflicted with disease. Forensic physiopathology is the science dealing with the physiological aspects of disease upon living organisms for criminal reasons.

*say this because as I bent over her, I noticed that her breath had the faint smell of bitter almonds. This odor is a characteristic of Prussic acid, id est cyanide. The acid is a colorless liquid which evaporates at room temperature. The fumes in her mouth could have very easily poisoned me as well.*

Upon arrival at the sick bay, I alerted the medical staff to the poisoning of poor Crystal in the Starlight Lounge and of the immediacy of the case. The medical team scurried to the lounge with the proper equipment as I paced it and informed the competent looking ones of my hypothesis. When we arrived at the lounge, we found it mostly empty. I noticed a few small groups of people standing around and talking nervously, occasionally gesturing at the body. Specifically, I recognized the noted painter Henry Fitzhugh, a somewhat disagreeable and short-tempered man, and my friend, Isadore Punklebottom, who has received various awards in the field of journalism. All these things, I noticed in the instant that the medical team and I crossed the floor. Suddenly, Crystal's body convulsed. Her chest rose as she gave one final, hysterical scream, "Hankwell!" and collapsed, dead.

A figure ran out of the shadows toward the corpse. He knelt next to it and kissed its face. Then he began to wail.

"Oh what have I done!? Why? She didn't have to die! No, not like this . . . no . . . not . . . like . . . this."

The figure broke down into sobs. As I approached, I realized that the figure was Jeff Hankwell.

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I ran over to Jeff and had him removed from Crystal. Immediately, I gave him some puffs from an oxygen inhaler. Because Prussic acid works by interfering with the use of oxygen, it would be beneficial to add as much oxygen to the his respiratory system as possible.

Someone must have called for help because the security personnel arrived on the scene. Hankwell was too shaken up to be interrogated. He was taken into his room and confined there until later. Security began by interviewing the woman who had screamed in the lounge. I admit that I eavesdropped and picked up some of the conversation. Her name was Shellie Sinkwell. She had been attending the dinner due to her connections as the daughter of some powerful politician whose name eluded me. Apparently, Shellie and Crystal had just met each other and were getting along royally when tragedy struck. The last thing Shellie remembered saying to Crystal was

something about how evil men can sometimes be. She was assuming that Crystal would agree wholeheartedly, but the girl became suddenly distraught, as if she had remembered something. That's when the lights went out. Someone brushed by Shellie going in Crystal's general direction. Shellie made a comment about how unconventional the darkness was, people bumping into you and all. Crystal did not respond. She took a step in Crystal's direction and felt something on the ground. It was a body. That was when Shellie screamed.

All these occurrences, I took in completely obliviously to the goings on around me. This was turning out to be quite an interesting mystery. Then my turn came. I was meticulously interrogated concerning what I knew of the murder and Mr. Hankwell. The security found the interviews very perplexing. They had never dealt with a murder before.

I returned to my cabin in a daze thinking about the events that had transpired. My hand was resting on the door handle, about to open the door, when I saw a note at its base. I leaned over and picked it up. It was a letter from Crystal.

Dear Pat,

I'm afraid that someone has been following me since last week. Yesterday, I got a threatening letter faxed to me. I don't know what to make of it. You know me, I don't have many enemies. I can barely remember the last time I was in a fight and yet . . . Oh Pat, you've got to help me. I know things didn't work out between us, but that's all in the past. The person who faxed that letter threatened my life if I don't give some secret password. It's all so cryptic. I don't know any secret passwords! Then, the letter demanded that I meet this nameless person on the International Deck at midnight, New Year's Eve, to tell him. I don't know what to do. Should I go to this bizarre meeting and try to tell them that it's all one big mistake? Please, even if we're not the friends we used to be, I need your help. Meet me in my room tomorrow night at 8:00. I'll be waiting for you.

Love, Crystal

After finishing this note, I was totally bewildered.

*First, a girl dies uttering the name of someone I know, then, I get this crazy note from the girl, and I never knew her! Oh, you are probably wondering how I know Hankwell. Jeff Hankwell was an old classmate of mine. We had gone to Cambridge together. I hadn't seen him very often, though. I really only knew of him from the rumors my girl friends told me. They said he was a womanizer, and they advised me never to get mixed up with him. Could he be the key to the mystery? The last words on a dying woman's mind and a womanizer. Perhaps he was the one who poisoned her. Then why do I have this note in my door entrance? Maybe . . .*

The world was suddenly full of questions. I decided that it would be best to enter my cabin and sleep on it.

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December 31

I awoke the next morning from a terrible nightmare. I had been the protagonist of a murder mystery in which a young, upcoming chemist was poisoned by her jealous ex-boyfriend. Strangest yet, throughout the movie in my mind, the musical theme “A Time for Us” was playing. It was actually slightly amusing to have this adventure injected into my life. *No, what am I thinking?* I shook my head to clear my mind of these thoughts. *This is reality! There is no chance that I would take the detective's guise to solve a murder! My job has never taken me into gumshoeing; I have always been the one to examine the evidence. There's no threat of getting involved with the bad guys in that. But solving a murder! I could get in a lot of trouble. What a fool I am to dream of this!*

But, there is something romantic and exciting about solving a murder mystery. Maybe if I went to that meeting mentioned in Crystal's letter, I could find something out. Besides, I could not go to the authorities with solely the note and my idea; they would never believe me.

Just as I finished these thoughts, I heard a knock at the door. I got up, stretched, and put on some overgarments. The knocks sounded again.

“Just a moment,” I answered yawning as I walked to the door.

I opened the door and took a step back in astonishment. Standing before me was none other than Jeff Hankwell! He implored that I let him in, and I consented.

“Pat, I've got to talk to you. It's about Crystal. I don't know if you've heard or not, but I'm the main suspect in the murder. The only clues they have so far are her last words and that she was killed by some cyanide capsules. Inspector Hodgepodge thinks I might have given them to her to alleviate her scotophobia.”

“Wait just a minute, Jeff,” I said. “What's 'scotophobia'?”

“Scotophobia, is fear of the dark. Most likely, someone she trusted handed it to her during the blackout. Then, she ingested the tablets and croaked.”

“What!? You mean like 'ribbit, ribbit'?”

“No,” Jeff replied annoyed. “That was pretty lame, Pat. Sometimes, I wonder just how you got to where you are.”

“Sorry. Hey, do you know what this music is?” I asked as I hummed a few bars.

“Can’t say that I do.”

“Oh well. Enough chat; now, what did you come to talk about?”

“Well, I know we weren't the best of friends, but we always got along, didn't we? I've changed since you knew me last. I--,” he paused as if trying to put something in the best possible light, “I don't have the same habits I used to. And you're a forensic physiopathologist . . .”

“That doesn't count for much when it comes to investigating a murder,” I reprimanded him.

“I know, but you're the closest to a friend I've got,” Jeff pleaded.

“Okay, Jeff, I will do what I can. But for now, just try not to do anything suspicious until the murder is solved.”

I had decided not to tell Jeff about the midnight meeting tonight or about the note and my not going to the authorities. *I do not want to take any unnecessary risks, especially because of his shady history. Yes, I know he said he has changed, but those are just words. Until I know more, I will have to suspend judgement on him.*

It was about this point in my plan to have breakfast. Strangely though, I felt little urge to eat. Something strange was going on here, and I will to get to the bottom of it at the midnight meeting.

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11:58pm

After I finished eating dinner, I went to my room to get ready quickly for the meeting. I donned my beige trenchcoat, put on some sunglasses, and placed a brown derby hat on my head. I was ready. I ran discreetly to the elevator and took it up to the International Deck. *You are probably wondering about now, "How is Pat going to find the meeting spot?" Well, it is actually quite easy. The International Deck comprises an open center and a running track around it. At night, no one would be out on the running track, which makes it an ideal spot for a rendezvous.* I opened the door and went outside.

As soon as I stepped past the door, I was pushed forward toward the aft of the ship. Something pushed me relentlessly. I could not get my footing and was unable to turn around to get a look at my assailant; the force was too strong for the moment. As it lessened, I grabbed onto a metal ribbing on the surface of the exterior of the ship. I used this as a pivot point to turn-- and face directly into the wind. I breathed a sigh of relief. On the first day of the cruise, we had been warned of the wind outside, but I had not believed how strong they said it would be. Reassured that things were mostly going according to plan, I paced the perimeter of the running track. I was coming around one of the corners of the ship when a sudden movement caught my eye. Someone on a lounge chair jumped up and ran inside. I began pursuit and rushed inside after him. I took a look around, but no one suspicious could be seen. None of the nearby occupants saw anything curious, either. Disheartened, I returned to where that person had been sitting. The only thing I found was a white envelope on the table next to the chair. I picked it up and turned it over. In large, bold letters, read the name "Dr. Pat Pigglewinkle III."

I sat down to catch my breath. *What could this mean?* I pondered long and hard. *I might as well open the envelope and see what it has to say.* Before I began tearing it open, though, I felt it to see if there was any kind of booby trap on it. *I am really getting into this detective stuff.* I almost jumped when I felt a light, rectangular object at the bottom of the envelope. It seemed to be punched with many holes. It felt a little like a key card. With that, I cautiously opened the envelope, being careful that I didn't set off anything. It was a key card! And a letter! With trembling fingers, I took out the letter and read it.

Its content was so horribly ingenious, I cringed at the thought of it. The letter explained that I had been

framed, and how I should avoid the security that was due to pick me up tomorrow morning.

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1:00am

I was restless. *Pat*, I thought to myself, *what have you gotten yourself into this time? That letter is absolutely perplexing. To think that I have been framed, what a joke! And that note I found at the foot of my door. Absolutely ludicrous.* I was running down to the first floor to find the maintenance. *Maybe they know what happened last night when we had the blackout.* When I finally arrived at the maintenance room, I found it locked. I banged and shouted and ran in circles. When I finally got someone's attention, I immediately began to ask questions. The staff was completely bewildered. They didn't know what this psycho was raving about. Finally, when I calmed down, I began to articulate what I wanted to ask.

"Do you happen to know what happened last evening at dinnertime? Do you know what caused the blackout?"

When I received a reply, I thanked the maintenance staff profusely and ran back up the stairs. I must admit I attracted plenty of strange looks. A figure running up and down in my attire is not the norm on a boat. But I ignored them with a single-minded focus. I ran up to room 204, the one Crystal had been staying in. It was not difficult to ascertain which room was hers; it was the one surrounded by police tape. So, I dug through my pocket until I found the key card that had been in that letter. I took it out and tried it in the door. It worked! The door opened, unveiling an extremely messy room. Nothing was in order. The help must have been given orders not to enter and disturb anything. I began to search the room. Nothing was under the bed, under the covers, or in the toilet. There were no clues in the sofa or in the beige wastebasket. So, I checked the only place left, the vanity. I opened the drawer. In it was a bottle of Xanax, a tranquilizer used to calm people suffering from phobias. *If this does not pan out, I will have to go over the room with a fine-tooth comb,* I chuckled to myself. I took out the bottle and opened it up. *Strange, usually these capsules are filled with little pellets. These have a fluid in them.* I took a capsule over to the sink and covered my mouth just in case. I broke open the capsule, and the liquid vaporized. My jaw dropped. The bottle contained capsules, all right, but they were filled with Prussic acid<sup>2</sup>. This must be the bottle Inspector Hodgepodge

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Again, I was able to tell from the almond-like aroma. My lab tests later confirmed this fact.

had speculated about! I took out an oxygen inhaler to insure my body would function in case I had breathed much of the acid. I lost all respect for Jeff Hankwell at this point. *He must have substituted these capsules to Crystal to murder her. Sure, he has changed, changed into a murderer!*

*What insanity! I know Jeff was an unpleasant person, but murder is downright evil. I must go search his room for some concrete evidence.* As I began to walk nonchalantly to the elevator, I bumped into Isadore Pucklebottom.

“Where are you off to now, Pat? Dinner's in the other direction,” she inquired, charming as usual.

“Oh, nowhere in particular. I am not really all that hungry now. I was thinking of going back to my room for a nap.”

“Don't be silly, Pat. I know where your room is. And you are most certainly going the wrong way. What's that crafty look in your eye? Tell me what you're doing.”

“Can you keep a secret?” I asked confidentially, leaning toward her.

“What do *you* think?”

“That is why I asked,” I kidded her, “But really, I am going to Hankwell's room to investigate the murder.”

“What? A pretty little person like yourself going off to fight the bad guys all on your own? I think I'll come along and help you out.”

“No, you really cannot come with. This is serious. I think Hankwell murdered Crystal Garth.”

“Sure, so does everyone else.”

“Isadore, I think that with far more than a hunch.”

“I know, Patty, and I believe you. And I'm still coming with.”

With that, she grabbed my arm, and we whisked away to Jeff's room. On the way, Isadore talked nonstop. I was scarcely able to tell her what I knew. She filled me in on all the details about Jeff and Crystal's relationship I could ever have cared to know and then some. I wondered how she found all these things out. Anyway, the gist of what she said was this: Jeff and Crystal were dating quite seriously. All of a sudden, they broke up. Something happened; nobody was sure quite what, though. Then they ended up on this cruise together and Crystal was murdered. *If you ask me, it sounds pretty convincing. But I still need some evidence.* Oh, and Crystal was dating

Henry Fitzhugh, of all people, most recently. *It is certainly a small world.*

Somehow, we arrived at Jeff's door just as Isadore finished talking. Isadore took a key card out of her pocket, and put it in the lock. The door opened. I turned quickly to Isadore.

"Give me that key," I demanded. "It is a master key card! Where did you acquire this?"

"You're so funny, Pat. Why do you talk like that? 'Where did you *acquire* this?'" she laughed lightly, teasing me.

"Answer my question, Isadore," I growled.

"Oh, I have connections."

*She most certainly does, I thought. Especially, the tight grip she has on my arm.*

The room was neat and orderly, a stark contrast to Crystal's. We walked in and scouted around a little. The search went faster than it had in Jeff's room but turned up as much. Again, I checked the vanity and found a clue within. It was a disk labeled "**CONFIDENTIAL: Do Not Touch Without Security Clearance 446-B1.**" I took it out and showed it to Isadore. She oohed and aahed over it. Her journalism nose kicked in as she saw a story brewing. I could see her formulating a headline for an article she would write.

"Hankwell Murders, Young Girl Dies on Cruise."

"Pretty good, Ms. Pucklebottom. Can we get on with the case, now? You know, you will not have much of a story if we get no farther than this," I advised.

"I guess you have a point. I have a laptop in my room; let's check out this file."

With that, we went off to her room. *I am not sure how much money she makes, but she must certainly have been here on a low budget; her room is one of the smallest I have seen.* The bed folded partway into the wall to make a couch. The w.c. took up an entire half of the room, making it difficult to walk past when the door was open. Regardless, the room was cozy, and I enjoyed sitting on the bed next to her. I admired the expertise with which she checked the disk for viruses and hacked her way into the file system. Then, she called up the file and read it. It was an exact copy, word for word, of the note I had found at my door! You must remember, though, that Isadore did not know about this note. After she finished reading it, she looked at me with a raised eyebrow. I shook my head 'no.'

"I found it at my doorstep the night of the murder. I do not know what it means. It was my choice not to tell

anyone else about it. Instead, I conducted the investigation into the murder in which you have joined me.”

She nodded her head in understanding.

“What do you think we should do now?” she asked.

“I think we should call a group meeting tomorrow morning to castigate the guilty party. I think I know who did it now.”

“What!? You don't think it was Hankwell? All the evidence seems to point in his direction.”

“Not all of it, Isadore. I will explain at the meeting.”

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**January 1****9:00am**

I awoke well-rested and braced myself for my inevitable capture. Security was due to apprehend me any moment. *When they come to arrest me, I will ask them one thing: to call a meeting of all parties interested in the murder.*

“Make sure Isadore Pundlebottom, Henry Fitzhugh, and Jeff Hankwell are there. They are centrally important to my case,” I will tell them.

At precisely 9:30, I did exactly so. As expected, they were reluctant to skip the chain of command in order to obey the whim of the apprehended. I worked my charms, and they consented to a meeting. Half an hour later, everything was ready.

“I want to know why I was called down here now!” Henry Fitzhugh demanded. “What's the meaning of this? I have my rights, don't I?”

“Yes, Henry. You still have your rights,” I replied, “but you are going to need to be patient as we unravel the events of the past few days. Everyone must be patient as we-- Oh, I am glad you showed up Shellie. I had forgotten that you might be interested in the events to come.”

“Come on, Pat. Get on with it. I've gotta be at a ping pong tournament in a hour,” Henry Fitzhugh insisted, obviously irritated at being detained.

Looking around, I decided it was time to begin. I gestured for everyone to gather around as we were about to commence unraveling the story.

“The story begins a few years ago,” I intoned. “Isadore has told me that Jeff Hankwell and Crystal Garth were dating seriously.”

“That's true,” a random member in the crowd affirmed.

“Crystal was a very innocent girl. Some may call her naïve; I do not think she was. As it is with most women, she believed she could change Jeff. Women always go for the bad guy; there is no doubt about that. And that is exactly what Crystal did. Indeed, she was one of the lucky women who achieved her goal. Their true love

taught Jeff to be a better person. She taught him a woman's value, and he left his previous way of life.

“Unfortunately, nothing is forever. A few months ago, Crystal and Jeff broke up. Jeff may have recently changed into a better person, but he was still incompatible with her. It was a very bad breakup. They loved each other immensely, but life together would have been impossible for them. One of the things that impeded their relationship was Crystal's scotophobia. Some of you may not know she suffered from a fear of the dark; others of you may deem it unimportant, but it has great import on our case. Jeff loved the darkness. It might be a taste he acquired in his previous lifestyle or just something macho about having to protect the people around oneself from their fears, but that is unimportant. Her phobia and other minor conflicts eventually drove them apart.

“The breakup sent Crystal into a depression. She did not know how to react. Should she be happy that she changed him or sad that she could not keep him for herself? Her victory was bittersweet. Then, she met Henry Fitzhugh over there.”

“Yeah, so what!? She asked me out! Are you accusing me of--”

“Quiet, Henry. I am speaking. And so, Crystal began dating Henry on the rebound. It was an abusive relationship.”

A murmur of conspiring whispering ran through the crowd. Henry Fitzhugh shifted anxiously in his seat.

“They had been dating until two evenings ago. Crystal had probably been trying to conceal their problems. This, I conjecture because of the autopsy report. I have spoken with the medical staff that performed the operation. Not only did they concur with my cyanide ingestion hypothesis, but they found evidence of physical abuse.

“On the night of Crystal's death, I found something interesting at the foot of my door after I returned from the lounge. It was a note allegedly written by Crystal to me. It pleaded for my help on intimate grounds. This really confused me at first because I had not known the girl. Most likely, whoever planted the note thought I would take it to the authorities, thus putting myself on center stage. In light of my knowing immediately how Crystal had died and the personal format of the note, the authorities would have added me to the suspect list. Honestly, it was only a stroke of luck that I did not take the note to them.”

I twisted my foot in embarrassment, “I really just wanted to investigate on my own because I thought it would be a fun break from the monotony of everyday life.”

The crowd giggled a little at this. Henry relaxed in his chair a little and managed a nervous smile. Isadore and Jeff seemed completely absorbed in my story.

“Later the next evening, I went to the meeting mentioned in the note. It was on the International Deck. When I arrived there, I went out onto the running track to meet whoever would be there. There was someone there waiting, but he jumped up and ran inside. I chased after--”

“Dr. Pigglewinkle?” Shellie Sinkwell interjected timidly, “that was me. I was out there on the track just thinking alone. I had been crying about Crystal's death and I didn't want anyone to see me.”

“And? You are not saying something, Shellie dear,” I gently prompted.

She stuttered, “I thought that if anyone had found me out there, I might be implicated in the murder. You know, it was kinda suspicious of me being out there and all.”

“Thank you Shellie. That really changes what I was about to say. I am going to have to think about that a little more while I am speaking. But, what I was going to say is that after I could not catch the-- Shellie,” I corrected myself, “I returned outside to find an envelope on a nearby table. Did you leave that there Shellie?”

“N-n-n-no. I didn't even notice it. I was so absorbed in m--”

“Okay, so the letter explained how I was framed. It also informed me that I would be arrested this morning, giving me some time to think of how everything fit together and to bring the case to a conclusion. Here,” I said as I handed the letter to an officer, “this is the letter. Now, the letter also told me that the murderer was none other than Jeff Hankwell.”

Jeff sat straight up in his chair in terror.

“Yes, it accused Jeff of the murder, and until recently, that is who I thought perpetrated the deed. I even went so far as to search Crystal Garth's room for supporting evidence.”

I glanced at the policemen, “Yes, I know I was not supposed to, but I did. Her key card was in the envelope I found. Now, the fact of the matter is, I found Prussic acid, the stuff that killed Crystal, in her room. The acid was encapsulated and located in Crystal's bottle of Xanax. Xanax was the drug she was probably given to calm herself down when she had to be in a dark room. When the lights went off, she took a capsule and died. I assumed Jeff was the one who had tainted the capsules. I also speculated that Jeff had turned the lights off for this effect.

“Then, I headed toward Jeff’s room to check out what could be found there. On the way, I bumped into Isadore Pundlebottom, and she insisted of accompanying me there.”

“That’s right, everyone,” Isadore interrupted, “then I opened the door for him and we went in. We searched high; we searched low; but we couldn’t find anything incriminating Jeff of murder. That is, until Pat looked in the vanity drawer and found this,” she said as she held the disk in the air. Hankwell looked bewildered. “I took the disk to my room and looked at the file on it with my laptop. It was an exact copy of the note Pat had found at his doorstep. We figured Hankwell must be the murderer. Then, Pat got this funny notion and decided to call a meeting. He didn’t tell me what his notion was or that he would be arrested. That’s as much as I know.”

“What I decided,” I continued, “was this: Hankwell could not have done it, because he has neither have the depravity to murder nor the technical know-how to make Hydrocyanic acid. Furthermore, he knows a good woman when he sees one and would not get rid of one so perfect. He loved Crystal deeply, regardless of their incompatibility. Then, I realized that the murderer must have been someone else. Someone who was close to Crystal. For example, the abusive Mr. Fitzhugh over here.”

At this, Henry Fitzhugh jumped out of his seat and lunged at me. The security were ready for this, as I had told them to be, and they restrained him.

“Now, Mr. Fitzhugh, if you will kindly permit me to continue speaking, you will receive a far lighter sentence. Thank you, I appreciate your goodwill,” I continued. “It would have been in Mr. Fitzhugh’s best interest the send me that note after the murder so as to put me on the wrong track. After all, as much as I have never worked in the field of scouring for clues, I am the most experienced on this ship at discovering criminal uses of chemicals to kill or maim. Fitzhugh must have hoped that I would take this note to the authorities, thus putting myself in the limelight as a suspect. The police could easily have formed a case that I was the one who killed Crystal, and she had the misfortune of asking me for help. How could Crystal have known I was both the subject and object of her note? Then, I became nervous that she was telling others of my activities, and I murdered her. It would be a good case, too, because I was at the scene of the crime and so helpful in identifying the death. But I must move on. If I continue this line of thought any longer, I may actually convince myself that I did indeed murder Ms. Garth.”

A round of nervous laughter ran through the room.



“Well, I should say that was a good plan, Mr. Fitzhugh. Unfortunately, it failed, and you could only come up with a similar plan. This one was to plant that letter at the meeting spot. Having Shellie there was just a bonus. This plan was completely unimaginative. It left all the thinking to me. You had me framed, which is what you intended in the first place, then expected me to build an argument against Jeff to get myself off the hook. The implication in the letter was just there to put me on the right track. You even gave me Crystal's room key so that I could search her room and find the fatal acid. Then, you planted that incriminating disk in Jeff's room. It would not have been that difficult to do, just walk in when the cleaning service isn't watching.

“What really gave you away, though,” I confided, “was the key card you left in the letter.”

“How do you figure?” Fitzhugh asked cautiously.

“Who else would have an exact copy of that unique card? You were dating her. It is perfectly reasonable that you would have her room key.”

Henry surged forward again, “How did you . . .? You can't . . . !” He composed himself, “I did not murder Crystal. I can prove it to you, too. There are about fifty guys that were playing ping pong with me at the time of the murder,” he asserted.

Well, he had me there. I turned a distinct shade of red and became quite flustered.

“If it is not Jeff, Henry, or myself, who could have done it?” I pleaded.

“It must have been you,” Fitzhugh accused. “What's your alibi? You were at the scene of the crime and all that other stuff you said before.”

“There really is no way to prove I did not murder her,” I began, “except, perhaps that I lack a motive and that I never knew the girl until the murder,” I countered.

“Oh,” said Jeff, quietly, “I guess that means we don't know who the murderer is.”

“Unless,” speculated Isadore, “unless Crystal wasn't murdered.”

Quite certainly, Isadore had the floor now.

“Is it possible? Is it possible, I ask, if Crystal prepared a concoction of that Prussic stuff using her chemistry skills? Is it further possible that she made those capsules herself with the intent of killing Fitzhugh?”

“You're crazy!” Fitzhugh exploded, “I don't believe it!”

“Actually,” I added, “I think Isadore is on to something. That would explain why she died in the lounge. Shellie's comment about the depravity of man combined with the power failure. . . that is correct,” I replied to a few startled gasps, “It was solely a power failure. . . that these two terrible things mixed to throw Crystal into a tizzy. Then, she took her Xanax pills out of habit, forgetting that she had poisoned them, and died. She realized what she had done as she lay gasping for breath and called for her true love: Jeff Hankwell, who had been at her side since the power failure. He was the one who brushed past Shellie just before she screamed. Crystal had, in fact, committed suicide.”

At this, Jeff broke down crying. Fitzhugh just sat there frozen.

“I therefore accuse you, Henry Fitzhugh, of the abuse of Crystal Garth. Abuse that drove her over the edge to suicide. More formally, I accuse you of obstructing justice by placing those notes and by planting evidence in Jeff Hankwell's room. You are indubitably culpable of the aforementioned heinous felony.”

“What'd he say!? What'd he say!” Fitzhugh screamed.

With that, the guards took a protesting Fitzhugh into custody.

“You guys can't throw me in da slammer without tellin' me what the doc just said!” he appealed.

“Another thing: that man's horrible syntax. I could never stand Henry Fitzhugh's complete disregard for English. That was a definite clue-in,” I expounded.

Then, that voice in the audience added:

“And you're such an expert on syntax, Pat. Man, are you pretentious!” the voice quipped.

I had solved my first case! I was jubilant and dejected at the same time. *It is truly a pity that Crystal got stuck with that abusive jerk, Fitzhugh. Life can be funny like that. Just give a girl sulfuric acid, some potassium cyanide, and some knowledge of chemicals, and there is no telling what can happen. Truly a shame,* I mused.

“Hey Pat,” Jeff asked, only whimpering a little now, “what did that music in your head mean?”

“Oh that,” I smiled wryly, “That was my subconscious giving me a clue as to what happened. The music I tried humming is called 'A Time for Us.' It is a piece in Zeffirelli's movie *Romeo and Juliet*. It seems, that Crystal committed suicide still loving you, much as in that story.”

“Oh,” Jeff replied laughing sadly.

Suddenly, that voice from the audience asked a question.

“Dr. Pat, how did you learn so much about relationships. You seem to have a plethora, as you would say, of knowledge on this subject.”

“It is easy,” I tittered, “I am a woman. We women are experts on relationships.”

My audience broke into applause as much at my clever response as to my glorious victory. Once again, I proved that doctors are not all bad. Especially those of the feminine variety.

For you, *Doctor Soltis*. Remember, Crystal Garth is someone we both know well. This is the real mystery.