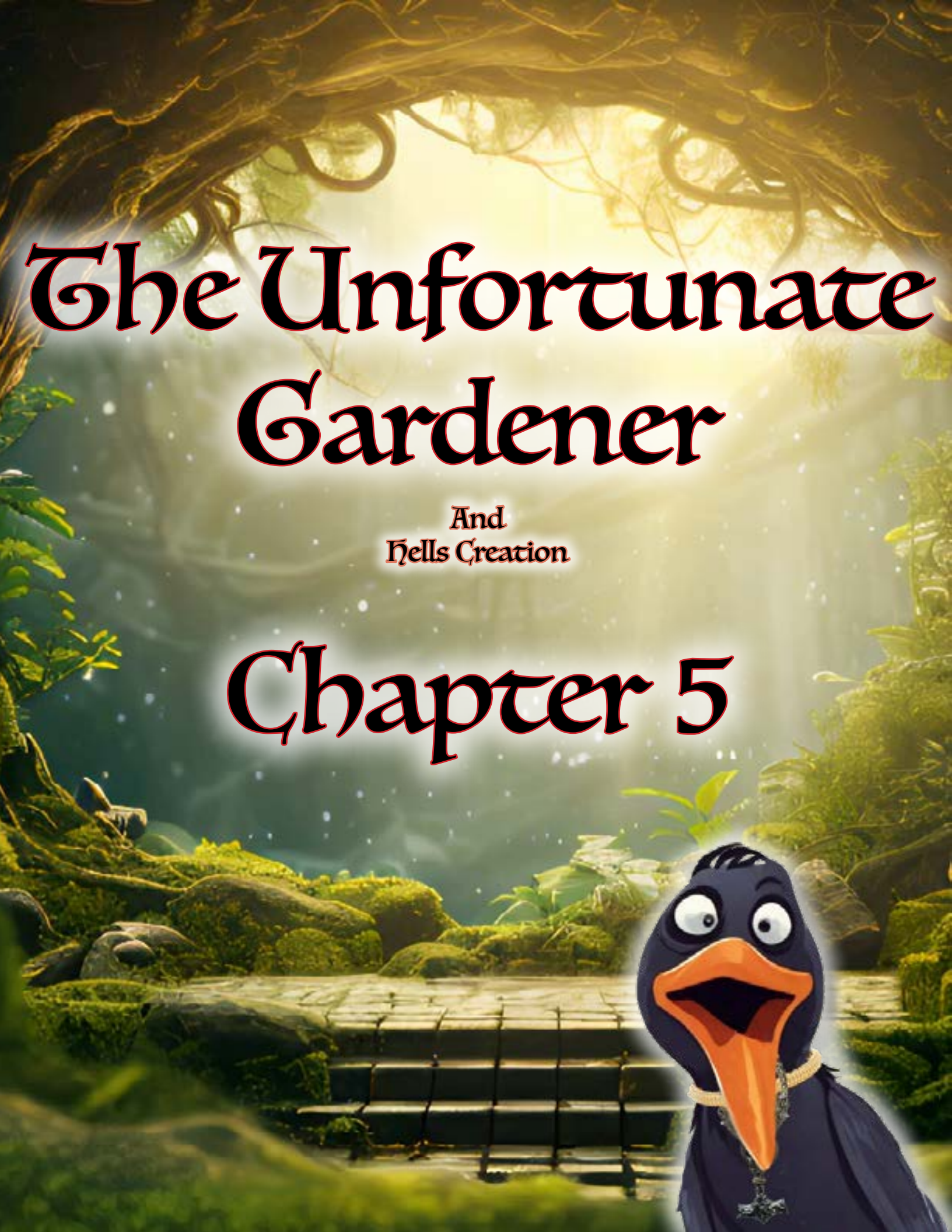




The Unfortunate Gardener

And
Hells Creation

Chapter 5



The Unfortunate Gardener

It's been a couple of weeks since his brother returned to Halifax. His conference was a resounding success, and the art gallery thieves have been apprehended, with all the artwork returned to the gallery. August is coming to an end, and things are quiet in the city—perhaps too quiet. Declan had a distinct feeling that things were about to take a turn for the worse. As his old friend John Branan said, “Murder is on its way when your world is quiet!”

Declan was sitting downtown having a coffee in a quaint little coffee shop when his phone rang with a thunderous roar of a flock of ducks, “Quack!...Quack, Quack... Quack!...Quack, Quack.” Very professional, he thought to himself. It was apparent that his brother had messed with his phone settings before he returned to Halifax. At the sound of the last quack, Declan could see everyone in the coffee shop looking at him. He was going to have to change that ringtone; that said, it was kind of fun and did make a statement.

On the other end of the phone was a friend of his, Mike Toods; he worked in Odell Park for the summer as a gardener; and would be studying Biological Sciences at UNB starting in the fall. Mike was frantically yelling into the phone but Declan could just make out what he was saying: “Declan! Dude! Dude! You won't believe what just happened in the park!.....There's a dead dude in the park!....Right in the park!...I saw itall gross and stuff...A dead dude in the park! You've got to come and see thisit's right up your alley.” Declan understood that Mike needed some time to calm down before sharing any more information, so he kept his response brief and direct, “I'm on my way, Mike! Thanks for the heads up, dude!” With that, Declan was up and on his way out the door of the coffee shop and on his way to the park. He realized he needed to get to the crime scene before things got crazy.

It would take Declan about 30 minutes to run to Odell Park from the coffee shop, so he was a little out of breath when he arrived at the park entrance. Not surprisingly, Corporal Woods was there setting up the perimeter to keep all the gawkers back from the crime scene. The park was completely closed off, and the only access was through the police checkpoint, where the police spokeswoman was currently giving a news brief. Just then, Declan heard his name being called and saw Corporal Woods as he walked up to the barricade about 30 m from the ongoing news briefing. Corporal Woods moved the danger tape so Declan could walk under it. And had

a slight smile as he was happy to see Declan, especially after solving the art gallery robbery. Corporal Woods said with a slight grin. “ It’s good to see you again, Declan. We have a bizarre case that you might be interested in..... To say it mildly.....Come on, you have to see this one!” With that, Corporal Woods and Declan walked up the small hill leading to the left of the park entrance towards the small pond and kids’ park at the top of the hill. As normal, Declan scanned his surroundings, committing everything to memory. It was as if he had the ability to store it in a nice little file in one of his brain’s filing cabinets. You see, Declan has what is called a photographic memory.

At the summit of the small hill, a charming walking bridge spans a serene section of the pond, enveloped by the lush, natural plant life of New Brunswick. Declan was drawn to an unusual plant featuring striking blue flowers located just a meter from the edge of the walking bridge. However, his curiosity quickly turned to concern when he noticed a blanket draped over what appeared to be a body. Corporal Woods approached carefully, bending down and started to lift the blanket, but stopped and looked at Declan with a concerned look and said, “You have seen a dead body beforeRight....Are you going to be okay with



this? I am only showing you this because...well, I feel you need to understand what happened if you are going to be of any help to us.” Declan nodded and said, “I am good to go, let’s see.” Corporal Woods lifted the blanket back, revealing a startling and somewhat disturbing scene. There lying on the ground was an individual who looked to be 40 or 50 years old with a pickaxe embedded deep into his chest. Declan remarked with a bit of dark humour, “Wow I think we know what killed him, and it wasn’t old age!” Corporal Woods started to lower the blanket. Declan noticed several blue flowers in his right hand, and thought, “Why flowersDid they have a meaning?” Corporal Woods carefully laid the blanket over the body but stopped and started to pull it back again and said. “Sorry, almost forgot,” he said inquisitively as he lifted the blanket for the second time. “There was one other thing..... The deceased looks like he started to spell out his murderer’s name or something on the side of the bridge in blood.” Declan could now see what looked to be a J and an L marked in blood on the side of the bridge just under the wearing surface of the bridge. Declan thought to himself, “J and an L.” What would that mean?

Declan and Corporal Woods both stood up, and stepped back a few meters, wondering what it all meant as they started to walk back to the entrance, they heard a call from one of the coroner's assistants who worked part-time with the forensics section. His name was Ashton. "Hey, Corporal Woods...I think I know what killed him!" Woods stopped and looked over at Ashton. Ashton continued to say, "It was that big pointy thing stuck in his chest!" Corporal Woods just shook his head and started walking again, mumbling, "Everyone's a comedian these days." As they continued walking down the path, you could hear Ashton chuckling in the background, along with a couple of uniformed police officers.

Upon reaching Corporal Woods car, he leaned through the open passenger-side window and retrieved a large file folder. Holding it out to Declan, he remarked, "Just so you're aware, the man up there with a pick in his chest is far from innocent. In fact, he's anything but." Woods opened the folder and began to read. "His rap sheet is extensive: multiple drug offences, five assaults, six charges of assault with intent to cause bodily harm, and the list goes on. He's also been linked to a criminal organization known as 'Hells Creations.'"

Corporal Woods paused, closed the folder, and met Declan's gaze. "Despite all that, he's been working with us as an informant for several months. We were on the verge of dismantling the crime syndicate with the evidence he was about to provide."

Declan, with a curious tone, asked, "Do you think he was murdered by organized crime elements?"

Corporal Woods responded swiftly, "That's what it looks like. All the evidence is pointing in that direction. What I see up that hill is a warning to anyone else considering defying 'Hells Creations'—this is what happens."

Declan promptly inquired, "Hey, Woods, is there any chance I could take a look at the file?" Corporal Woods smiled and replied, "Of course, but you'll need to sit in my car. The file stays with me, so if you want to read it, you'll have to do it here." Declan really needed to see the full file to get a grasp on what had happened; he looked at Woods, gave him a thumbs up, and reached for the car door. Once inside the car, he started to flip through the file, thinking to himself, wow, this is a very extensive file. It has everything about the man you need to know, even the things you never wanted to know!

Halfway through the file, Declan discovered the information he was seeking: a detailed section on his post-secondary education and hobbies. He swiftly closed the file and took out his phone to check the previous night's weather. The forecast had predicted rain in the late afternoon, followed by dense ground fog from 9 PM to 6 AM. This meant that visibility would have been poor, providing an ideal cover for a criminal to hide in the darkness and thick fog.

Declan glanced up at Woods and inquired, "Has there been any evidence of someone else at the crime scene last night?" Woods responded promptly, "No, nothing. Why do you ask?" Declan opened the car door, stepped out, and left the file folder on the passenger seat. After closing the door, he turned to Woods and said, "How much do you want to bet that you'll find no fingerprints on the murder weapon other than the victim's?" Woods appeared puzzled and asked, "Do you think the murderer was wearing gloves or that they wiped the weapon clean?" Declan replied swiftly, "Neither. If I'm correct, you'll find no other prints on the murder weapon besides the victim's, and there will be no indication that the weapon was wiped clean either."

Corporal Woods furrowed his brow, clearly perplexed. "Alright, Declan... normally, I would be inclined to accept your conclusions. But this time? Not so much. Are you suggesting that the murderer just sprinkled pixie dust around the crime scene to cover their tracks? And then what, called the mother ship to beam them up?"

Declan chuckled, shaking his head. "Not quite... but that was a good one—pixie dust!" He laughed lightly before continuing, "Seriously though, I'm just brainstorming some theories. That said, I need to see where the victim lived. Is there any chance I could visit his actual home?"

Woods fixed Declan with a stern gaze. "What? You want to see the safe house? That's not going to happen."

Declan quickly interjected, "No, not the safe house—the victim's real home, the one you were keeping him away from."

Woods considered this for a moment before responding, "That shouldn't be an issue. Hop in the car; we can head there now."

Just then, you could hear laughter coming from the crime scene. Corporal Woods turned around and yelled, “What are you people doing up there?” You could hear Ashton’s voice yelling back, “Sorry, Corporal Woods. Constable Davis just slipped on the wet grass beside the bridge and just about fell in the pond!...Sorry, we are just about done and should be on our way out of the park shortly.” Corporal Woods yelled back. “Just make sure you leave nothing behind, and we will see you back at the station.” With that, Corporal Woods climbed into the driver’s seat, mumbling, “It’s like Eric Andre and Hannibal Buress up there, a real comedy show.” Declan looked at Corporal Woods, confused, and asked, “What?” Corporal Woods smiled and said. “The Eric Andre Show...You know, the one on Adult Swim Network.”

They pulled out of the park’s parking lot and started down Waggoners Lane. It was only about a two-minute drive to reach the victim’s home. It was a quaint little cottage design, somewhere you’d imagine finding your grandmother sitting on the porch knitting you a pair of socks. But what Declan really wanted to see was the gardens around the house. They were all very manicured, with several hundred different flower species professionally placed around the front of the house. Declan looked over at Corporal Woods and said. “I am not interested in seeing the inside but would rather focus on the garden in the back of the house.” As soon as the car came to a stop, Declan swung open the door and made his way toward the back of the house, following a meticulously manicured stone walkway. Corporal Woods leaned over and said, “How about closing the car door next time?” But Declan was already lost in his world, captivated by the vibrant array of exotic flowers lining the path.

Upon entering the backyard, Declan was captivated by the breathtaking beauty that unfolded before him. The garden was a masterpiece, with cascading rows of flowers stretching seamlessly across the entire yard. These weren’t just ordinary flowers; they were rare blooms from all over Canada, including Fairy Slippers, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, and Yellow Lady’s Slippers. The garden even featured Canadian Columbine, Arctic False, and could it be a patch of Furbish’s Lousewort, showcasing an impressive diversity. Whoever curated this garden clearly possessed exceptional expertise and a deep appreciation for horticulture.

At that moment, the back door of the cottage swung open, and Corporal Woods emerged, tripping over the door frame and shattering the peaceful ambiance that Declan had been savouring. Declan muttered to himself, “Like a bull in a china shop.” Just then, Corporal Woods glanced up, narrowly avoiding a tumble to the

ground. He surveyed the scene before turning to Declan, remarking, "Wow! someone certainly has a lot of spare time. I mean, this is impressive, but I can think of a few other ways to spend my free time."

Declan swiftly shifted the conversation, a pressing question gnawing at him. He fixed Woods with a puzzled stare and inquired, "If the victim was under police protection, how did he end up in the park without an escort?....Or did he have an escort, and there is something you're not telling me?"

Corporal Woods began to walk slowly towards Declan, appearing deep in thought as he contemplated his next words. After a moment, he looked up and said, "It seems our victim managed to evade his protective team at approximately 11:30 PM last night. I was informed that he was insistent on retrieving those 'little blue beauties' before they were taken and destroyed. None of his security team understood what he was mumbling about. However, he slipped into the bathroom and quickly climbed out the window of the three-story building, scaled down the wall and disappeared into the darkness. The next thing we knew, he was dead!"

Declan finally understood what had occurred on that dark, foggy night in Odell Park. Only one detail remained to be verified, and if his suspicions were correct, the case would soon be solved.

Declan took one last look at the stunning garden, reflecting, "All this beautiful work will go to waste now that its creator is gone." He then glanced over at Corporal Woods, who was busy checking his phone for messages.

"Hey, Woods, want me to solve your case for you?" Declan offered.

Corporal Woods chuckled sarcastically, "Sure, like you've figured it out already!"

To Woods' surprise, Declan replied with a grin, "Actually, I have! It was quite simple; all the clues are laid out in a clear pattern. Even my brother could figure them out. That said, there's just one last thing to check."

"What's that?" Woods asked, intrigued.

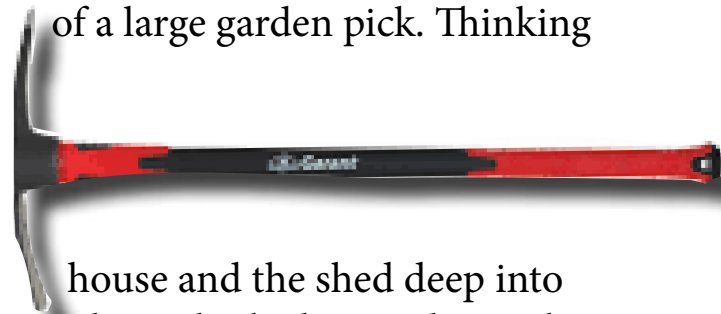
"Fingerprints! Are there any on the murder weapon? Oh, and I need to check the

garden shed as well.” Declan added.

“Alright, you check the garden shed, and I’ll make a call about the prints.” Corporal Woods said, nodding in agreement.

Declan stood in awe as he surveyed the winding path of the most breathtaking garden he had ever encountered. The dedication and effort that someone must have poured into cultivating the soil to create such beauty was truly remarkable. As he approached the shed, he opened the front door and peered inside. To his surprise, the shed was impeccably organized, with everything in its rightful place. Intriguingly, there were outlines drawn on the wall, as if someone had traced around each tool while it hung, ensuring they would know exactly where to return it to once finished. While excessive to most—who often toss their tools haphazardly into a corner—Declan found it oddly inspiring. His gaze was drawn to one particular spot on the wall, where a distinct outline indicated the absence of a large garden pick. Thinking to himself “I know where that is!”

Declan closed the garden shed door and started back down the path. Corporal Woods was now sitting on the bench halfway between the house and the shed deep into a conversation on his phone. He hung-up his phone, looked at Declan with a confused look and said, “The only prints on the murder weapon are our victim’s prints, and the strangest thing is that there was no sign that the weapon was wiped clean.” Declan smiled and replied, “That’s because it wasn’t,...I need to go back to the crime scene and have one last look...I can explain everything once we are there.” Corporal Woods smiled and said, “Sounds good...Lets go, all this green stuff is starting to creep me out.”



It was just a short drive from the victim’s house to the park. The police barriers had been removed, leaving the parking lot nearly deserted. Declan and Woods arrived and parked close to the walkway leading to the pond. They stepped out of the car and began their walk up the path. Declan glanced at Corporal Woods, his voice steady and assured. “All the clues are right in front of us; we just need to piece them together like a giant Tetris puzzle.” Corporal Woods shot him a sarcastic grin and replied, “I don’t do puzzles, especially not Tetris! So, can you please just get to the point already?”

Once they arrived at the murder scene Declan climbed down beside the bridge where the victim was found and started to move the grass around until he found it; a 28cm x 36 cm slab of 5 cm thick slate stone. The interesting part was the dent and scratch across the top of the stone.

Declan stood up and said in a firm voice, “ This was not a murder, but rather stupidity, driven by obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). You see, our so-called victim had to have those blue flowers for his garden. He came here after escaping from your protective custody team and picking up his garden pick from his house. He wanted those blue flowers desperately. It was late at night, and just after a heavy rain had fallen earlier, so the bridge was wet. I suspect he slipped on the bridge with the pick in his hand. His instincts took over, and he reached down to stop himself, with both his hands outstretched and with a pick in his right hand...pointy part pointing up. He fell an extra 3 ft off the side of the bridge, where the blunt end of the pick came in contact with the slate, stopping the pick but not stopping our victim. The pointy end was driven deep into his chest. He rolled over, and with his last dying breath, he marked J & L in blood on the bridge and grasped those blue flowers in his hand as he passed on.”

Corporal Woods turned to Declan and said, “That explains why there were no other fingerprints on the murder weapon. But what do the letters J and L signify?”

Declan replied, “The pickaxe was taken from the victim’s shed. I noticed it was missing during our visit, and if you examine the mark on the wall inside the shed, it will correspond perfectly to the size and shape of the pick. As for the letters, J and L stand for Jacobs Ladder, a rare flower native to New Brunswick. It has only been found in one other location in the southern part of the province, along the Wolastoq River. Our victim was clearly passionate about gardening and must have wanted them for his collection.”

Case Closed

Accidental Death by an Unfortunate Gardener

