

A Lifetime of Exposure

A McKinney Brothers Novel

P. J. Grondin

PROLOGUE

1976

The pit was dug in preparation for the basement of the new house. Located nearly one hundred yards off a lightly traveled back road in eastern Virginia, south of the Quantico Marine Corps Base, the only path back to the pit was a rough construction road. It was intended for trucks delivering materials for the new home and for construction workers vehicles. The thick stand of pine trees prevented anyone from seeing the site from the road.

Even though it was early in the morning, long before dawn, a young man was hard at work digging a smaller hole inside the pit. It wasn't a perfect hole, a little over two feet deep, two feet wide and four feet long. A slab of Virginia granite kept the hole shallow. The spade wouldn't break through that barrier. It would have to do. The early morning was wearing on. The dark, moonless night worked in his favor. The humidity, though, took its toll.

But he was young and fit. Except for the time, a workout like this was not unusual. Working in construction had its advantages in keeping the weight off. Even so, sweat poured from his forehead and soaked his shirt. There was no turning back now. Fear kept him going. It wasn't a fear of the darkness as much as what the darkness might be hiding. Anyone could be watching him, wondering what he was doing, working into the early morning like a man possessed.

His next fear was the mechanical noise might attract attention. It was unlikely. The construction site was isolated from any other homes or businesses. But in these parts of Virginia, sound carried a long way, echoing off hillsides and into the valleys. When he started the cement

mixer, it sounded like a noise that would raise the dead. The motor made a whirring sound that rang in his ears. Ever since working in the engine room of an aircraft carrier during the Vietnam War, his ears had never stopped ringing. Every time he was near a running motor, it amplified the ringing. The noise in his ears was out of synch with the noise from the motor. It drove him crazy. This early morning it was particularly bad. The motor seemed to pierce the darkness. He was sure that anyone within miles would hear it and wonder about its origin. Surely, someone would come to investigate.

But he had no time to worry about that. The deed was done. The evidence was literally at his feet. There was no time to waste fretting over what could have been or how the situation might have been handled differently.

As the cement mixer spun, he poured in two bags of concrete and the right amount of water. He let the mixer spin and do its job to create the first batch. A noise, coming from beyond the walls of the hole, startled him. He froze as he tried to listen more intently. Then he spun around, trying to catch a glimpse of its source. The sweat poured over his forehead and chest as his nerves worked overtime. As he looked up at the dirt walls of the pit, his anxiety jumped another notch. *Get a grip. There's nothing there except the darkness and your nerves. Maybe a raccoon.* He shook his head in an attempt to shake off the tension. He took one more look around the entire perimeter of the hole. The silhouette of the mounds of earth on the edge of the hole looked like distant mountains from his vantage point. In the dark, he could barely make out their shape. He couldn't see a single, living thing. The walls of the pit were only six feet high. The plan was to use backfill to allow the lawn to slope up to the entrance to the three bedroom home that was to be built here.

The first batch of cement was nearly complete. It was time. This was the part he feared most. He scampered up the ladder and made his way to the beat up Ford Econoline Van. The panel doors were locked. He dropped the keys twice, his nerves getting the best of him, as he tried to rush. Finally, he unlocked the doors and flung them open.

There they were. Three trash bags. There was no time to waste. If he was caught standing here with these three bags within his reach, he'd surely pay a price, possibly with his life.

He grabbed the first bag and lifted. It wasn't very heavy so he

carefully draped it over his shoulder. The contents made metallic, scraping noises as it settled onto his back. Quickly, he made his way down the ladder to the hole where the concrete footer for the new basement would be poured on Monday. He eased the bag into the hole, trying to remain quiet. He hurried up the ladder for the next bag. This one was heavier. There was no metallic sound from this bag. It made more of a squishing, wet sound. When he heaved this bag over his shoulder, something hard hit his back. *Damn, that hurt. Have to be more careful.* He looked down and noticed something dark staining the ground. He set the bag down and noticed a hole where the sharp object protruded through the bag. *Damn.* He adjusted the bag so the hole was pointing upward. Nothing he could do about the bone sticking out. Soon, it wouldn't matter. He followed the same routine as with the first bag, placing it in the hole. *One more to go.*

The third bag was lighter. It was soft on his back. This trip went quickly. It was a good thing because the mixer was finished with the first batch of concrete. He placed the final bag in the hole. Using a shovel to move the bags around in the hole, he poked too hard. The second bag split open wide. He gasped.

Two horrified eyes stared up at him. They were lifeless eyes, but they showed the terror experienced with the last breath of life. He remembered the look. It hadn't changed in death. But those eyes seemed to be staring directly at him.

After the momentary shock wore off, he returned to his task. The bags were in place. He dumped the first load of concrete into the hole. It was obvious that he would need at least four more loads. That meant another thirty minutes with the mixer. Then he would cover the concrete with a layer of dirt. He'd be gone by 4:00 AM at the latest.

That was okay. It was Saturday morning. It would be another fifty hours before anyone would be back at the site. By then, it would look like it had when everyone left on Friday afternoon. The problem would be gone forever. The crew was to pour the footer on Monday. The basement walls were scheduled for later in the week.

It was a fitting grave.

Chapter 1

October 1997

Jillian Rockledge was on cloud nine. She looked around the bedroom while stretched out on her back in the middle of her king-sized bed. She adored everything she could see. The master bedroom of her new 6500 square-foot home was nothing short of sensational. It was gigantic, 720 square feet, not including the two walk in closets and master bath. The bath opened into the bedroom. No doors separated the combination shower and dressing area from the rest of the bedroom. The walls were painted pastel peach with contrasting dark walnut trim. The trim alone had cost a fortune. In the bedroom a bay window looked out over the back yard, essentially a forest. There were no neighbors within a quarter of a mile.

She not only loved the sight of her new bedroom, she loved the scent. Everything was new. The aroma of new carpet and the scent of newly cut hardwoods hung in the air throughout the house, her house. The feeling of owning such a beautiful home was like no other.

Jillian and her husband, Nelson helped design the home with the professional designers from Messier Homes. Messier was the builder of choice for young up-and-coming professionals in Virginia, west of Washington, D.C.

Jillian and Nelson fit that profile perfectly. Jillian was an attorney with the law firm of Forest, Harbridge, Weston, and Gross. Nelson was also an attorney, working on the staff of Senator William T. Barnhouse, Republican

from the State of Ohio. Their combined income was a comfortable \$425,000.00 per year; impressive since they were both in only their third year at their respective positions.

Their future was promising indeed, not that it was of concern to either of them. Jillian came from a prominent, wealthy family near the nation's capital. She had a trust fund in excess of \$3,000,000. They planned to leave the trust intact since they had adequate incomes to support their surprisingly conservative lifestyle. Their new home was the most recent departure from the Scrooge-like hold they'd had on their savings and investments outside of the trust. Their other two major expenditures were Nelson's dark green BMW 540i and Jillian's cream colored Volvo 850. The new cars were necessary status symbols for them to fit into their respective positions.

Jillian was one of the newest of the twenty-three associate attorneys in the firm, but she was on the fast track to junior partner. That was no small feat considering the firm's policy to only hire top graduates of the best law schools in the country. In her first year on the payroll, she'd managed to build a clientele that generated income to the firm that outpaced many of her senior associates. She was noticed with admiration by many of the partners and jealousy by those that couldn't compete with her talent.

Besides being absolutely brilliant, Jillian was drop-dead gorgeous. Her hair was brunette, shoulder length, and perfect. Her smile was radiant and her complexion was flawless. And if none of that caught a man's eyes, her body was a masterpiece. She was tall and slender with curves in all the right places. She had a natural, powerful sex appeal. At work she wore conservative business clothes, never revealing anything that would cause an office scandal or cause her bosses to call her on the carpet

for improper dress. She didn't need to draw any undue attention. In fact, she made it a point to present herself in the most professional manner. This gained her the respect of the senior partners of the firm. In short, she had the total package for a professional attorney with a brilliant future.

At home she wasn't nearly as cautious as she was at work. When she closed and locked the doors to her beautiful home, her hair came down and she kicked off her shoes. After work weeks that were usually on the long side of sixty hours, she let loose with a little wine or a mixed drink and wore as little as possible without running around completely naked. This was only if she and Nelson didn't expect company, of course. This evening, she was on her second glass of wine. She'd already showered and was in bed flat on her back, wearing only a pair of light pink, French-cut panties. She was waiting to ambush Nelson for some pre-late-night-dinner sex. She knew he'd be up for the challenge.

As she relaxed on the comfortable pillow-topped mattress, she dozed off. Her mind wandered to the construction phase of the house when the basement had just been poured, then to when the electricians had installed the wiring. Finally, the drywall was installed. The one and only flaw in the house flashed in her mind. There was a slight, musty smell in one corner of the basement. They couldn't figure out the cause, but as Nelson put it, they were blessed if that was their only complaint. The odor wasn't spreading, so they'd decided to live with it unless it got worse. In her dream, their Golden Retriever, Fenton, went into the basement as soon as the stairway was completed and whimpered when he got near that corner. He even scratched the concrete block walls as if trying to dig for a bone. Jillian saw herself taking the dog by the collar and guiding him up the steps.

Then her dream shifted back to the tradesmen performing their work. Their muscles rippled as they moved lumber to saw horses. The mental scene was so vivid that she could smell the wood being cut. Her nose tickled from the sawdust as she breathed in the particles. She sneezed and awoke as she did. She was surprised to see her husband holding a feather, lightly brushing the end of her nose. She rubbed her nose, then rolled to face him. She smiled.

“You can be such a troublemaker.”

He looked her over from head to toe, then lay down beside her. He was fully clothed in his white dress shirt and dark gray dress pants. He’d taken his suit coat, tie, and shoes off. They were neatly placed on the chair across the room.

His gaze settled on her breasts. “So, what’s for dinner tonight?”

She smiled. “I thought we’d start with a little ‘Treat a la Jillian,’ then move on to the main course.”

“What would the main course be?”

“That would be the Nelson special.” She smiled a seductive, sensuous smile that made Nelson sweat.

He leaned over and kissed her passionately then pulled back. “I’ll be right back.”

She lay back in bed again, her eyes following him to the bathroom. He stripped off the rest of his clothes and headed into the walk-in closet. She wondered what he was up to as she heard him moving things around. She heard a zipper noise, like he was putting on pants or opening a carrying case or a . . .

When he came around the corner of the doorway to the closet, he was holding their mini-camcorder up to his right eye and heading towards the bed. At first, Jillian giggled at the thought.

“Very funny, Nelson but I’m not in that business.”

She smiled at the camera but her smile was tightening.

“Come on, babe, it’ll be fun. Think how turned on we’ll get watching ourselves on video.”

“No way! What if somebody finds the tape? What then?”

“Who’s gonna find it. We’ll lock it up in the safe. We’re the only ones who know the combination. What can it hurt? Really, it’ll be a blast. I’m getting excited just thinking about it.” And she could see that it was true. But she wasn’t comfortable being taped in the nude, much less having sex.

Now her smile was gone and she was more forceful. “Nelson, turn the camera off and put it away. I’m not going to end up like some Hollywood slut in the tabloids. Something like that could ruin our careers. I mean it. Just our luck we’ll end up on some porn site.”

* * *

Her statement drew laughs from nearly three thousand people from all across America who, unbeknownst to Nelson and Jillian, were watching the entire exchange on the Sensual and Exotic Club Network. Those watching didn’t have to wait for Nelson’s tape. They were enjoying the live feed.