



Silver and Scotch

By Barbara Hinske, copyright 2014

Retired Detective James Harrison tossed the clipboard on the counter and sank into the desk chair. He rolled up to the bank of video monitors and scanned the fourteen screens that formed a semi-circle around him. All was quiet and in order in the manufacturing facility where he now worked as a night security guard.

He checked his watch. It was almost time. The most notorious silver thief in the world and undeniably one of the most talented burglars in history—the man he'd spent his career chasing and finally brought to justice—was being released from prison. At any moment Jeffrey "Scotch" Blake would be given whatever money remained in his prison account, bus fare home, and a warm jacket. He'd walk out of the gates of the Ohio prison where he'd served time for one of the hundreds of burglaries he'd committed during the three decades that Harrison had chased him.

Would Scotch go home? Where was home for him, these days? And would this be the last Harrison would hear of him? They'd only



recovered \$700,000 of the more than \$18,000,000 they believed Scotch made from his heists. Surely he had enough money to go straight. But it wasn't only about the money for a guy like Scotch.

Harrison swallowed his unease and turned his attention back to the video monitors. Time would tell. And now that he was retired, it wouldn't be his problem.

Jeffrey Blake rolled up the sleeves of the standard issue jacket that the prison guard handed him. Short and slight, with a gymnast's build, he'd used his time in prison to maintain his strength and flexibility. Both had been crucial to his success.

The prison guard handed him an envelope of cash. "You've got bus fare to Nebraska, plus enough for food along the way."

Blake nodded.

"What do you plan to do out there?" the guard asked, nodding to the world outside the door.

Blake shrugged.

"With what you know, you could make a bundle working for an insurance company. Helping them avoid theft losses. You could be sitting pretty, not worrying about coming back here."



A smile touched Blake's lips. "That's what Harrison told me."

"Well?"

Blake turned and pushed through the door into the biting cold of the February morning.

Jim Harrison pulled into his driveway and checked the clock on his dashboard. His grandson would be starting another chemo treatment in a few minutes. He'd have time for a few hours of sleep before he needed to be at the hospital to relieve his daughter so she could go to work. Sarah supported her family of three and provided all of the benefits since her deadbeat ex-husband contributed nothing. Without medical insurance, they'd really be toast.

He set his keys on the kitchen counter and picked up the note left by his wife.

Plate of supper in fridge. Heat in micro for 3 min. Eat before you collapse into bed. We'll get through this. Love you more than life. N

He sighed and headed to the refrigeration. Nancy would be at Sarah's house, getting their other two grandchildren off to school, maintaining a happy sense of normality for them. What did people do without family in situations like this?



They'd planned a much different retirement. After the euphoria of putting Scotch Blake in prison, he'd retired and they'd charted a series of trips to Canada, Europe, and Asia. He'd finally be able to reward Nancy for sticking with him through all of his long hours and frequent absences from family functions and school events. He even missed Nancy's surprise 60th birthday party. All in the pursuit of Scotch Blake.

They'd gotten as far as London when the call came in about Scott and they cut their trip short, returning home just before his first surgery. Jim recognized the financial strain the prolonged treatment would place on his daughter and considered himself very fortunate to have landed the high-paying security job where he now spent fifty hours a week. It wasn't exciting—nothing like the heady days tracking Blake—but at least he could make enough money to help out.

Jeffrey Blake walked along the side of the road, headed to the bus station in the town. He stuck his thumb out but no one stopped for hitchhikers anymore, especially near a prison. Blake began to jog and soon found himself sweating, despite the cold.

His mind wandered as he covered the miles to town, pondering where to go when he got there. He'd spent the first year in prison plotting revenge on his junkie girlfriend who'd turned him in and testified against him in order to save her own skin. Now that he was in a position to actually find her, it didn't seem like it was worth the effort. If she



were still alive, she'd be even more messed up on drugs. Some people couldn't change.

What about him? Could he change? Did he even want to? Would sitting in a cubicle in front of a computer screen, working for an insurance company, ever be stimulating enough for him?

Blake reached the edge of town, pulled out the directions the guard had given him, and headed toward the bus station.

Mrs. Emma Blake pulled her scarf closer to her neck and rocked back and forth on the wooden bench in the drafty bus station. She nervously worked the metal clasp on her purse. The final bus of the night would bring her son from Ohio. He called her from a pay phone the day before and told her when he was scheduled to arrive. At times like this, she sorely missed Jeffrey's father. If he hadn't died, Jeffrey might not have gotten into trouble.

She stared out the large windows into the parking lot, empty except for a handful of cars. A set of headlights swung in a wide arc, turning into the driveway from the highway, and approached the terminal. He was here.



Emma Blake rose from her seat and waited just inside the double doors. The driver illuminated the interior lights of the bus and she could make out the silhouette of five people waiting to get off the bus. She strained to see if she could pick out Jeffrey.

The blast of cold air took her breath away as the first passenger, a soldier in uniform, threw the double doors to the terminal open and hurried inside. A young woman accompanied by three small children rushed forward to embrace him, obscuring her view.

She stepped to the other side of the happy group, her anxiety rising as the other passengers entered the terminal. None of them were Jeffrey. She turned to the bus and remained rooted to her spot long after the doors had closed and the bus pulled away.

Blake rubbed his hand over his eyes as the bus pulled out of the station. He'd seen his mother anxiously searching the bus for him. He'd intended to go home to her—to go home and to go straight. He might not work for an insurance company, but he'd find something to do. He wanted to see her, to sleep in his old bed, and have everything be all right again. Just like it used to be.

But everything wasn't like it used to be and it wouldn't be all right again. He couldn't go straight. For the last two hundred miles, he'd thought of nothing but the thrill he got from stealing flatware and



serving pieces from the rich and famous. Right under their noses while they slept in the false comfort of their high-tech alarm systems, surrounded by their Dobermans and Rottweilers.

So what if they never saw their great-great-great grandmother's teaspoons again? No one got hurt, except for a few insurance companies that paid out claims. Hefty claims. He grinned. He'd spent his time in prison getting into the best shape of his life and learning everything he could about electronics and alarm systems. Preparing for the biggest heist of his career.

Jeffrey Blake wouldn't break his mother's heart again. He wasn't going to go straight and he wouldn't give her false hope. It was too unfair. He despised himself for calling her out to the bus station and being too much of a coward to face her. She should give up on him, once and for all.

At least he caught a glimpse of her from the bus window.

Blake switched buses in Omaha, using his cash to get him as far into the South as he could. No one loved family silver more than an upstanding Southern woman. The silver pieces on her table told her dinner guests volumes about her.



His destination was Charleston, South Carolina. He'd read that you were considered "old Charleston" if your family dated back to the American Revolution, "new Charleston" if your people arrived before the Civil War, and "just visiting" if your lineage was more recent than the Civil War. There were plenty of old and new Charleston folks in the city and they all had silver.

He planned to help the good people of the city do some house cleaning—lighten their load a bit. He needed to get there.

Blake's money ran out in Nashville. He got off the bus and joined the ranks of day laborers, unloading trucks at the local manufacturing facilities. He slept at a homeless shelter and ate from dumpsters. At the end of his second week of this bleak existence, he teamed up with an exhausted trucker who welcomed the company of an able-bodied companion. They set off for Savannah.

Blake helped the trucker unload and wordlessly accepted the hundred-dollar bill that the man handed him. "Let's go eat. On me," the trucker offered. "Ever been here? Savannah's got some of the best food in the country. I know—I've hauled from coast to coast."

Blake shook his head. "Thanks. I'll be on my way."

"Where ya' headed? Maybe I can drop you off."

"Not necessary," he replied as he turned and walked away.



The trucker shook his head. The man was an odd one, that was for sure.

The day was balmy and sunny, a complete departure from the weather he'd left not more than a week ago. It felt good to walk. An hour later found him walking through the famous streets and squares of historic Savannah. He stepped into a gift shop and picked up a free tourist map. The back showed the distance to nearby cities. He was only one hundred six miles from Charleston. A bus ticket would be cheap.

Blake strolled along Congress Street and found himself in front of Paula Dean's restaurant: The Lady and Sons. She was famous before he went to prison. He decided to treat himself with some of the money the trucker had given him and loaded up a plate at the lunch buffet. Blake enjoyed the best meal he'd had in over five years.

He spread the tourist map out in front of him and studied it as he ate. The map highlighted a number of antebellum homes and museums. It appeared Savannah shared a love of Southern formality and was full of old-money families. Maybe he wouldn't be in such a hurry to get to the bus station after all. Savannah might be just the place to brush up on his skills.

Blake finished every morsel of his lunch and set off down Congress to Bull. He strolled along Bull, circling each of the squares, proceeding in the direction of Forsyth Park. The squares were lined with stately old



homes, many of them open to the public for a donation. He bet almost all of them displayed silver. Whether it was sterling silver or silver plate was another matter.

Blake stretched and sauntered into Monterey Square. He sat on one of the benches and let his mind drift. Casing a target was child's play here. No need to park miles from his mark and walk through wooded ravines by moonlight. He could investigate his targets for as long as he liked and anyone would think he was a tourist.

He glanced across the square. An elderly couple was busily setting up a tripod to photograph a home on the opposite corner of the square. The woman was reading aloud from a guidebook while the man adjusted his camera. Blake rose and wandered in their direction.

"...Mercer House," he heard the woman say. "Site of the famous murder of Danny Hansford and the book and movie *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*." The woman continued to recite the precious items in the house.

Blake crossed the street and noted that the Mercer House offered tours. He turned on his heel and headed back up Bull in search of a souvenir shop. His first order of business was to buy a detailed tourist guide and begin his research. He'd buy an official tour ticket and visit the home—later—for a "private viewing" of its silver.



Scotch Blake shoved the small wad of bills into the pocket of his prison-issue pants and stalked off. Working as a day laborer and sleeping at a homeless shelter was getting old. He needed to tap into the bank account that the feds never uncovered. To do that, he had to re-establish his identity as Thomas Johnson. He'd need a driver's license and the appropriate appearance. At a minimum, that would entail a sport coat and slacks; expensive shoes, wallet and belt; and a pricey watch. Looking like the wealthy Thomas Johnson, he'd go into a local branch of the bank and get a new debit card. With money from his account, he could check into a motel and accumulate the tools of his trade.

He'd have to be patient—never his strong suit. Blake headed in the direction of the tourist area along River Street. He usually found something to eat in the trashcans there.

The late afternoon was uncharacteristically warm and sunny, and the sidewalk cafes were brimming with tourists enjoying an early happy hour. As Blake stepped aside to avoid a family pushing two strollers and wrangling three obstreperous children, he noticed an expensive looking sport coat hanging on the back of the chair at an empty table along the railing. The other diners were either focused on their food or the commotion raised by the family. He quietly folded the coat over his arm and kept walking.



Blake abandoned his quest for food and turned south, walking all the way to Forsyth Park before he settled into a spot on a secluded bench and inventoried the contents of the jacket. He took a tissue from his pocket and inspected the wallet. The driver's license confirmed that his benefactor was a Mr. James Wallace from Las Vegas, Nevada. The wallet contained a handful of credit cards but to Blake's amazement, Mr. Wallace walked around with a lot of old-fashioned folding money—almost five thousand dollars, to be exact. Nobody legitimate carried this much cash. Maybe Mr. Wallace was a gambler? Easy come, easy go, Mr. Wallace.

Blake leaned back and breathed deeply. It would be more than enough.

The Armani sport coat was in excellent condition. He checked the label—it was a size larger than he usually wore, but he could make do. Mr. Wallace had nice taste.

The only other item in the jacket was Wallace's cell phone, which would be registered to a tracking application. He'd read about them. He wiped off his fingerprints and deposited the wallet, with the credit cards intact, and the phone in a trash dumpster in the park.

It was time for Scotch Blake to get back into business.

Blake decided to celebrate his good fortune by taking a tour of the Mercer House. He needed to get his juices going again. He donned Mr. Wallace's sport coat and set out.



As luck would have it, a tour was just starting and they had room for one more. He slipped into the back of the queue as the guide took them to the entrance at the back of the house.

Blake hung on every word and examined every window and door as carefully as he could without drawing attention to himself. Being open to the public, he concluded they'd secured the most valuable pieces elsewhere—including the silver. Tackling the Mercer House might be entail too much risk for the slim reward he would get.

Blake turned away in irritation when something the guide said caught his attention. "Be sure to pick up a flyer on the way out about Savannah's upcoming Home and Garden Tour. If you're here next month, you won't want to miss it. You'll be able to see twenty homes that aren't open any other time of the year."

Blake picked up one of the flyers. "Tickets are on sale in our gift shop. Right where you bought the ticket for this tour," the guide concluded.

Blake made a beeline for the gift shop and purchased a ticket for the first tour.

Blake handed the registration clerk cash for a week's stay and took the key to his room. He'd take his first hot shower in more than three



weeks and get a good night's sleep in a room to himself. It might be a budget motel but the accommodations seemed deluxe to him.

Blake was awakened the next morning when the maid rapped on his door, announcing "Housekeeping." Blake cracked the door and assured the woman that she could skip his room, he wanted to sleep in. She moved along to the next room before he finished speaking.

Blake rose, took another shower, and decided the first thing he needed to do was buy some new clothes. All outward appearances of his incarceration needed to disappear.

Blake found a bus schedule in the lobby of the motel and made his way to the local Wal-Mart for underwear and what he called his "work clothes." He reluctantly concluded that Wal-Mart fare wouldn't suffice for his trip to the bank. He'd have to shell out some serious cash for the look he needed.

Blake took the bus back to the motel and hastily deposited his Wal-Mart purchases. He headed to the shops in the fashionable part of the tourist district, and Thomas Johnson, his alter ego, shouldn't be sporting Wal-Mart bags.

Blake surveyed himself in the mirror, pleased with his reflection. He looked every bit the successful businessman he portrayed himself to be. Now all he needed was an expertly drawn counterfeit driver's



license. He headed to the electronics store where he paid cash for a computer and printer that could do the job.

Blake rose early the next morning, anxious to be at the bank when the doors opened. If they checked the license for the embedded hologram on the genuine article, he would be in trouble. He knew Thomas Jackson's PIN and the answers to his security questions, so he hoped that they wouldn't check too closely.

Blake held his breath as he passed the license across the desk to the assistant manager. She studied the photo on the license, looked up at him, and smiled. "Nice photo," she commented as she handed it back to him. He released his breath. The assistant manager bent over backwards to help "Thomas Johnson." He'd be able to pick up his new debit card at the end of the week. In the meantime, he withdrew two thousand dollars from his account.

Blake treated himself to a meal of authentic Creole cuisine and a bottle of wine. He was ready to launch into action.

Blake set the alarm on the bedside clock for four-thirty. He dressed quickly in his new Wal-Mart jeans and plain long-sleeved navy T-shirt. He checked the mirror: clean and neat but non-descript. His hair was



growing out from the prison buzz cut and was beginning to look scruffy. He'd get a haircut later that day.

Blake retrieved the flyer detailing the upcoming Home and Garden Tour. The flyer listed a website for "more information." He logged into the site on his computer and found what he was looking for—the address of each of the twenty homes on the tour. He printed it out, folded it carefully, and placed it in the pocket of his jeans.

Blake shut down his computer and concealed it in the drawer containing his clothing. If it got stolen, so be it. He was a wealthy man.

Blake arrived at his intended location on Drayton shortly before seven that morning. He'd calculated that there were several homes on the tour within easy walking distance. And, unless he'd miscalculated these aristocratic homeowners, they'd be spending a fortune pruning their yards and polishing their interiors in anticipation of the tour. He understood that being included on the tour was a highly coveted honor and no one wanted to disappoint. This presented the perfect opportunity for a respectable-looking day laborer.

He approached the first house on his list as two vans pulled to the curb, followed by a pickup truck loaded with wooden beams. An older man directed two young men to begin unloading the beams and carrying them to the backyard. The men dutifully pulled one of the beams from the stack and staggered as they tried to hoist it to their shoulders.



Blake rushed in, grabbed the beam, and supplied the needed extra push. The foreman turned to Blake. “Thanks.”

“No problem.”

“You looking for work?” the foreman asked.

“I am,” he replied.

The foreman nodded. “We’re building a pergola in the backyard,” he said. “We need to finish it this week. And we’re behind schedule. Can you come every day until we’re finished?”

“Sure thing, boss. I’m your man,” Blake replied. “I’ll be at this house as long as you need me.”

Blake worked on the pergola, all the while surveying the windows and entrances to the house. He figured out the layout of the rooms and caught glimpses of the furnishings. His plan was coming together nicely. They finished the task near the end of the fourth day.

“Know anyone else that needs help around here?” he asked the foreman as he handed him his wages.



“Can you paint without making a mistake?” the man asked, waving to a house on the other side of the street. “My brother-in-law is working over there and the owners have banned all but two of his crew. They’re supposed to paint the entire interior before the tour, but no one is good enough. He says that there’s enough carved molding to make you lose your mind. And they haven’t moved a single thing out of the way. You have to work around all of their stuff.”

Blake smiled. He’d never painted a thing in his life, but he was a fast learner. “Painting is my specialty,” he replied.

“Go tell Frankie I sent you. He’ll hire you on the spot. And don’t say I didn’t warn you,” he said as Blake turned and headed for the grand old home.

Blake spent the next ten days painting molding, trim, and baseboards. Despite his lack of experience, he had a steady hand and was very good at the work. If he ever wanted to go straight, he mused, he could be a painter in these fancy old places. He even found the work relaxing. But he wasn’t after relaxation, he reminded himself. He was after the thrill he got from committing the crime.

His pulse quickened when they started working in the dining room. The sideboard was crowded with a silver tea set, a pair of ice buckets, and a dozen other serving pieces. Moving it away from the wall and covering



it with plastic gave him the perfect opportunity to assess what was sterling (most of it) and what was silver plate. He mentally cataloged the items. The painstaking attention he gave to painting the windows allowed him to select the best entry point for a midnight visit.

By the time they'd finished their task, Blake had placed the house on his final list of targets. He spent the remaining days before the tour working in and around other homes scheduled to be seen and added two of them to his list. With only a week before the tour started, he needed to head to New York City and renew his acquaintance with his fence.

Blake purchased a suitcase at Wal-Mart and checked out of the budget motel. It was past time to move along. When he returned, he'd see about a short-term vacation rental that he'd arrange through a disinterested clerk at an online rental agency.

His flight to JFK arrived slightly ahead of schedule and he took the subway into Manhattan. He checked into a small, nondescript hotel near Grand Central Station and changed into his Thomas Johnson attire. He strapped on the expensive-looking watch and noted the time. If he set out immediately, he'd reach the shop in the diamond district before lunch. To the outside world, the shop looked like every other Hasidic jeweler. Blake knew it as the place where he'd received twenty cents on the dollar for the silver he brought in. Most of it was melted down,



with only the most valuable antiques quietly spirited away to Europe for private sale.

It was time to find out if he could still convert silver into cash.

Blake remembered the location of the shop accurately. It was down a long hallway that ran perpendicular to 47th Street, in a building full of small jewelers. He feigned interest in a collection of rings in the window of the shop across the hall until the customer left the shop he was seeking. He pushed the door open slowly and met the gaze of the elderly woman behind the case.

Her inquisitive gaze soon hardened. “You,” she snarled. “When did you get out?”

“Recently,” he replied pleasantly.

“He’s not here, you know. Still in prison. All because of you.”

“I hadn’t heard,” he began and she raised her hand to cut him off.

“I don’t want you here. Get out. If you’re stupid enough to take up your old ways again, you’ll have to go to the Russian mob down on Canal Street. The mob owns it all, now. Ask for Alexi. And God help you if you get mixed up with them.”

Blake stepped out onto the street. He knew she was right. He’d be crazy to get mixed up with the Russian. He set off for Canal Street.



Blake departed the Savannah terminal and headed for the taxi stand. He waited patiently in the sun, allowing the warmth to drive out the chill he'd felt since he'd talked with Alexi. He'd gotten twenty percent from the jeweler and now his take would be a measly ten percent from the Russians. Alexi had quickly shut down his attempts to negotiate the amount.

Did he still want to go through with it? That thought had plagued him all the way back to Savannah. He knew he did. He had enough money stashed away for a lifetime, but this wasn't about the money. Never had been.

He stepped to the front of the line and nodded at the next cabbie in line. He'd take a six-month vacation rental, buy a serviceable used car, assemble his tools, and get started after the conclusion of the Home and Garden Tour next week.

Jim Harrison walked the route through the manufacturing buildings, posting the required notations on the check sheet. His mind wasn't on his work. He was wondering, as he usually did during the quiet midnight hour, where Scotch Blake had gone and what he was up to. Harrison had contacted Blake's mother and learned that he hadn't gone home to her after he got out of prison. The news bolstered his suspicion that Blake was up to his old tricks. Time would tell. He'd hear something if he was correct.



Further south, Blake walked the historic district all day, every day, until the Home and Garden Tour started. He catalogued the hours of operation of every shop and restaurant, and made notes about the location of each barking dog he passed.

He was first in line when the tour started and spent the weekend going through each of the homes, adding five others to his list of targets. He just might settle in Savannah for good.

Blake checked the contents of his duffle bag one last time: screwdrivers; wire cutters; carpet knife; chisel; nail pullers; cotton nipple-tipped gardening gloves; flashlight; duct tape; towels to cushion the silver; and an empty duffle to carry it away. He adjusted the wadded-up rag stuffed into the toes of his sneakers that were two sizes too big. If he left a footprint in the moist Savannah soil, it wouldn't be his shoe size.

He picked up his list of targets and flicked it idly with his forefinger. The house near Columbia Square would be the easiest to get in and out of, but the one on Oglethorpe held the most promise. He was sure the tea set he'd seen on display during the tour was sterling. Plus, the owners had a couple of Rottweilers. And he was good with dogs—they never bothered him. He could get in and out of a house while the guard dogs slept peacefully. The papers mentioned it every time. That, and the fact that he always poured a drink and left it sitting on the now-empty sideboard. The owner would find it waiting when he discovered his



silver was missing. It was thoughtful, really—the owner would be wanting a drink about then. That’s why the papers dubbed him “Scotch.”

Blake smiled. He’d even become something of a celebrity. He’d been mentioned in *Gun & Garden* magazine. He checked his watch. It was almost midnight. Time to give the papers something to write about.

Blake parked the black Camry in deep shade along Jefferson, at York. He walked slowly down York, toward his prey. He circled the square, inspecting every home and car surrounding it. The lights remained out in the house that was his target. Satisfied that the street was deserted, he cut through the side yard and slipped through a narrow gap in the hedge bordering the back yard.

He waited in the shadow of the hedge and listened. Hearing no disturbance, he crossed the yard and climbed the stairs to the piazza that wrapped around the side of the house. He found the French doors to the dining room, noiselessly lowered his duffle to the floor, and began the painstaking work of removing the lower pane of glass from the door.

He was rusty, to be sure. It took him almost an hour to remove the eighteen-inch square, but he hadn’t broken it. He repacked his tools and squeezed into the room



Blake crouched and surveyed the room. Everything was as he remembered. He flushed with the familiar adrenaline rush. There, on the sideboard, was the tea set plus an ornate silver compote that hadn't been on display during the tour. He took a deep breath and began carefully ferrying the family treasures across the room and into the waiting duffle.

Blake checked his watch. He'd been in the house for almost thirty minutes. It was time to be on his way. He turned to the opening, then stopped abruptly. He'd almost forgotten to leave his calling card.

Blake crossed to the drinks tray that was set up under the bay window at the end of the room and surveyed the contents. He raised an eyebrow—this family had exquisite taste. He carefully opened the bottle of Glenfiddich and poured a generous portion into a cut crystal glass. He paused, wanting to take a taste of it himself, but knew that he couldn't leave DNA evidence behind.

Blake squeezed himself through the French doors, hoisted the duffle to his shoulder, and disappeared through the hedge.

Jim Harrison rolled to the side of the bed and answered the phone before it completed the first set of rings. He never knew when his daughter would need his help. The chemo ravaged his grandson's body



and left him terribly weak. Scott couldn't be left alone, but at least the treatments were working.

His bedside clock told him he'd only been asleep for a couple of hours. Harrison checked the identity of the incoming call. It wasn't his daughter. He couldn't place the 912 area code and almost didn't answer. It was probably some cursed telemarketer, interrupting the few hours of sleep he would be able to catch that day. Something—some dormant instinct—caused him to pick up the handset and answer.

“Detective James Harrison? This is Detective Dewey Grant, of the Savannah Police Department. We've had a burglary down here and could use your help. I think you'll be real interested in this one. I understand you're the expert on silver thieves.”

Jim sat bolt upright, all vestiges of sleep evaporating. “Let me get a pen and paper,” he replied. “I've been expecting this call.”

Detective Grant emailed Harrison a zipped file with the complete police report from the crime scene and the information they'd extracted from the homeowners. The stolen silver was all vintage sterling that had been in the family for decades. The insurance value was well over four hundred thousand dollars. They had photos of all of the stolen items, but Harrison knew they wouldn't help. The stolen goods were probably in the hands of the fence already and would never be seen again.



Harrison scrolled to the final photo in the file – the one of the glass of scotch left on the sideboard. Jeffrey Blake was at it again. There could be no doubt. The method of entry, the restrained rampage of only one room in the home to avoid setting off the motion detector in the hallway, and the signature cocktail left behind. Blake was back and was taunting him. He would know that, sooner or later, Harrison would be called in to consult. Harrison slammed his laptop shut. Blake was thumbing his nose at all of them.

Blake took his copy of the New York Times into the bar at the Waldorf Astoria and found a spot at a secluded table. Although it was only three in the afternoon, he ordered Glenfiddich on the rocks.

His meeting with Alexi had been fruitful, if unnerving. After his stay in prison, very few people scared Scotch Blake but Alexi was one of them. He took a deep swig of his drink.

Alexi had taken all the silver, but he'd only gotten ten cents on the dollar. He'd quickly abandoned his attempt to negotiate Alexi up to the fifteen percent. There was no future in wrangling with the Russian mob.

Blake opened the newspaper that he'd brought into the bar to make him look comfortable in the surroundings. He had little interest in it. That soon changed as his eye fell on the headline of a short article near the crease on an inside page.



Savannah wealthy no longer prefer Scotch

Blake smiled and picked up the paper to read the article. It was always thrilling to see his name in the paper.

They'd brought in his old nemesis, Detective James Harrison. The newspaper said he'd retired. Why in the hell couldn't the man stay retired? Harrison certainly loved pontificating about Blake. The New York Times article was full of quotes from him. Blake suddenly smiled. Retirement must not be much fun for Harrison. Catching Scotch Blake had been the crowning achievement of Harrison's career. And he'd never have caught him if his junkie girlfriend hadn't turned state's evidence.

Blake downed his expensive drink and ordered another. Maybe he could do something to make Harrison's life interesting again. But this time he wouldn't be stupid enough to entangle himself with someone who would betray him.

Blake returned to Savannah and meticulously carried out three additional burglaries on his list over the next two months. Everything had gone smoothly, with the only downside being the interactions with



Alexi. Familiarity with the man did not quell his uneasiness in his presence.

Blake took up the habit of reading the Savannah Morning News every day, cover to cover. He spent considerable free time running and lifting weights, staying in shape for the job. It was undeniably harder than it had been ten years ago. Maybe he was past his prime, but what he lacked in physical ability he made up for in experience and cunning.

On a Thursday morning toward the end of the second month, he found the report he'd been waiting for. Detective James Harrison was coming to Savannah to assist the police in their hunt for the infamous Scotch Blake, widely believed to be responsible for the rash of burglaries in the historic district.

Blake tossed the paper aside and pulled his suitcase from the closet. It was time to focus his attention on Charleston.

Blake presented the counterfeit ID to the clerk of the budget residence hotel. She kept one eye on the reality show on the television at the end of the counter—some nonsense about housewives in New Jersey. The women scarcely looked at his papers, ran his debit card, and presented him with his key. "Welcome to Charleston," she muttered without looking at him.

Blake smiled. She'd never be able to identify him in a lineup. Not that it would come to that. He had enough money, maybe it was time to stop.



He wanted a normal life, with a wife and kids. And he wanted to see his mother again, not from a bus window but in person.

He would go out in a blaze of glory—cap his career with a heist that would be legendary. One that would show Jim Harrison that Jeffrey Blake had come out on top, after all. He had just the target in mind.

Jim Harrison reclined his seat back for the flight to Savannah and turned to stare at the white nothingness of the clouds outside the window. He had to admit that he was exhilarated to be trailing Scotch Blake again, but he felt guilty about leaving his family behind. His grandson was excited for him, telling the doctors and nurses that his grandfather was the only cop in America that could catch Scotch Blake.

Harrison smiled. Nothing dampened that kid's spirits. That was why he continued to beat the odds and was getting better all the time. With any luck, he'd be strong enough for a heart-lung transplant when a donor became available. He closed his eyes and saw his wife and daughter as he said goodbye. They'd put up a brave front but he knew they dreaded the extra work his absence would place on them.

In the end, they'd all agreed. The money that he'd make consulting with the City of Savannah on behalf of the insurance companies would exceed what he made in a year as a security guard. If they were ever



going to dig out of the mountain of medical bills, he needed to take this job.

Detective Dewey Grant introduced Jim Harrison to the officers seated at the conference table on a Wednesday afternoon. “This is our burglary task force,” Det. Grant said. “I believe you’re familiar with our investigation. I thought we’d review what we’ve got planned for tonight. Have a seat.”

Harrison took the chair indicated. “We’re going to mount the largest stakeout in Georgia history. All of the houses he hit were on the recent home and garden tour. We’re going to station an officer at each of the remaining homes. You told us,” he said, turning to Harrison, “that he works on Wednesdays and Thursdays, which is consistent with our burglaries. We’re prepared to stakeout the area tonight and tomorrow night. Catch him in the act.”

Harrison nodded. “We tried that in New York. Put sixteen officers in a two-block area. No one saw a thing. I went to bed feeling relieved, thinking he’d seen us and been scared off. I no sooner got to sleep when the Chief called to tell me that he’d hit three houses. I asked what the addresses were, because I knew they couldn’t have been in our two-block area.”

Harrison made eye contact with the officers around the table. “I couldn’t have been more wrong. All of his hits happened within our



stakeout—right under our noses. The only way to get this guy is to go find him.”

Detective Grant had an uneventful night. No burglaries had taken place in Savannah that Wednesday night. He stared at his reflection as he shaved the next morning. He didn’t know whether to be happy that there hadn’t been any burglaries or disappointed that they hadn’t apprehended Blake.

Jim Harrison started pounding the pavement early Thursday morning. He planned to canvas the budget motels closest to the historic district to see if anyone recognized photos of Blake. He’d brought them with him from the files he still kept, after all these years, in the drawer of his nightstand.

The clerk at the sixth such establishment gave him what he wanted. “We get a lot of people through here, so I can’t be sure. I couldn’t testify or anything,” she qualified her statement, “but I think he came in a couple of months ago. Stayed two or three weeks. Was real interested in the home and garden tour.”

Harrison thanked the clerk and tucked the photos back into his breast pocket. Blake had been there. But where was he now?

Blake waited patiently for the guided tour of the Calhoun Mansion to begin. The mansion was the largest private residence in Charleston and was regularly open to the public. It was a glorious twenty-four



thousand square feet of Victorian excess, filled to the brim with the collection of valuable items acquired by its knowledgeable and wealthy owner.

He'd first seen the home when his girlfriend had insisted that they rent that deplorable romantic tear-jerker, *The Notebook*. The dining room in the movie had been filmed at the Calhoun Mansion. The movie became an instant favorite with Blake that had nothing to do with the plot. He later discovered that both *North and South* and *Gone with the Wind* had been filmed at the Calhoun Mansion.

Blake had fantasized about breaking into the Calhoun Mansion and stealing the silver from its dining room for almost a decade. Doing just that would supply a fitting grace note to his career.

Blake positioned himself along the outside of the tour group, bringing up the rear. His head spun with the magnitude of valuable art and collectibles in the place. The fact that the mansion hadn't been hit before indicated it must be fitted with a comprehensive alarm system. But he wasn't an ordinary burglar, and he'd defeated alarms before.

The tour included a handful of high-spirited women in red hats with purple feathers. They were on an outing and their tour guide was indulging their incessant questioning. Blake studiously avoided eye contact with their guide but hung on every word the man uttered. "Those are dog beds and blankets you see in every room," their guide



answered. “The owner has four Dobermans. Thankfully for us, they live upstairs during the tours, but they’re allowed to roam the house freely at night. I assure you, nobody wants to meet them after dark.” The ladies laughed and nodded.

Blake smiled. The presence of dogs roaming about meant that he wouldn’t have to deal with motion detectors. He could hardly wait to see the dining room.

Blake made careful note of the cameras mounted along the fourteen-foot ceiling of the first-floor rooms in the Calhoun Mansion. He was pondering how he would disable them when the Red Hat ladies asked a most serendipitous question.

“It’s a tremendous amount of work to polish all of this silver. It was just done last night, in fact. They do it every three weeks. They haul it all into the family kitchen—through that door over there—to give it a thorough going over.” The guide listened to the follow up question. “I don’t help polish it, but I do bring it back in here the next morning.” He summoned the group. “The kitchen isn’t on the tour, but the other family quarters upstairs are. We’re headed there now.”

Blake scanned the ceiling as they entered the master bedroom. There were no cameras anywhere or in any of the other rooms occupied by the family. Blake breathed deeply. There wouldn’t be a camera in the family kitchen, either. He’d wait until they finished polishing the silver



and retired for the night. Then he'd break into the kitchen and steal it from there. Blake shot a glance at their guide. With any luck, the man wouldn't have to wrangle with all of that silver in three weeks' time.

Detective Grant's stakeout on the next night was as quiet as the first. With no burglaries for almost a month, his task force was losing steam. And the Chief had denied his request for overtime for any additional stakeouts.

Jim Harrison spent the next three weeks going door-to-door through every budget motel, short-term rental agency, and car leasing company he could find, asking if anyone recognized the man in the photos he presented. Other than his early success, no one remembered seeing Blake. It appeared they'd hit a brick wall.

Harrison didn't have long to fret about it, however. The call came in at the start of his fourth week on the job. A donor had been found and his grandson had been cleared for a life-saving heart-lung transplant. He needed to leave immediately if he wanted to be at the hospital during the surgery. Blake would have to wait. Harrison was needed at home.

Blake walked the streets of Charleston's historic district, making a loop along Tradd, Meeting, South Battery, and Legare, familiarizing himself



with every alley, fence, passageway, and hedge. There were multiple ways to escape and places to hide. He was pleased.

To pass the time until the night the silver would be isolated in the kitchen at the mansion, he took the local papers and the New York Times into Battery Park. Blake settled into a bench by a fountain and turned his face to the sun. Maybe this would be the place to retire. He had enough to buy one of these old homes. He could fix it up and get it on a home tour. He'd bring his mother here to live out the rest of her life in this charming city. It might feel good to live a normal life.

He opened the Savannah Morning News and scanned the front page. He didn't find what he was looking for until he got to the editorials. Apparently one of the local residents was irate about the lack of progress on the "Tour Burglaries" as they'd been dubbed. Detective Dewey Grant was getting a thorough lambasting. One sentence, however, caught his attention. He lowered the paper to his lap and leaned back against the bench.

Jim Harrison had been called off the case to return home to New York. His grandson was having a heart-lung transplant at New York Presbyterian Hospital. Harrison would be needed at home for an extended time and wasn't expected to return to the case.

Blake slept fitfully that night and the next. He should be relieved that Jim Harrison was off the case, but the news had the opposite effect.



Blake shook his head. Maybe he wouldn't go through with the Calhoun heist after all. If he wasn't sparing with his old nemesis Harrison, what was the point? He had more than enough money. If Harrison was gone, there was no thrill in the thing.

Blake wandered aimlessly along Church Street when the idea hit him. It was perfect—absolutely perfect. Why hadn't he thought of it before? A lovely ending to his stellar career as a thief.

Inspired by his new plan, Blake carried out the Calhoun Mansion heist with precision. His take was bigger than he'd anticipated—the second largest in his career. He finished in half the time he'd allotted and was on his way to Canal Street and Alexi before sun up. He pictured the distraught tour guide when he discovered the silver wasn't waiting for him in the kitchen and smiled. The owner would now have a pile of cash from the insurance company to go buy more stuff for the place. They ought to thank him.

Blake unloaded the silver to his fence and made one last stop before he headed to the airport. He concluded his business and was whistling as the automatic door opened and he stepped out into full sunshine.

Jim Harrison slapped the New York Times angrily on the arm of his chair, waking his grandson. "Something wrong, gramps?"

"No. You go back to sleep. I'm going to get a cup of coffee. I'll be right back." He smiled at his grandson. Scott was doing great. His body



showed no signs of rejecting the transplant and he was way ahead of schedule on his recovery. Everyone was optimistic about his prospects. Jim didn't care if he and Nancy had to sell their house and drain their savings to help pay for it. He would go back to his security job and they could make do.

Harrison walked toward the nurse's station. Blake was still out there. He'd just read about the theft at the Calhoun Mansion. It had to be Blake. It was like he was taunting Harrison. Well, let him taunt. Harrison needed to stay right where he was, with his family.

Harrison paused. Maybe he had the upper hand after all. The jeweler who served as Blake's fence was in jail and the Russian mob had taken over that aspect of the business. No one in the diamond district was stupid enough to take on the mob. He'd start the rumor that the NYPD was about to pick Blake up and offer him immunity if he gave up his fence. The Russian mob would deal with Scotch Blake in a way that the criminal justice system couldn't. He'd probably wind up at the bottom of the East River. Could Harrison live with that? He thought he could.

Jim Harrison turned at the sound of his name. A woman he recognized from the hospital's billing department was approaching him. He bristled and was about to speak when she held up her hand.



“I thought you’d like to know that a man came in yesterday and paid your account in full. Your grandson is covered for the rest of his treatment.” The woman beamed.

“Who?” Harrison choked on the question.

“He wouldn’t give us a name.”

“There must be a name on the check,” Harrison replied.

The woman shook her head. “He paid cash.”

Harrison’s brows shot up. “Isn’t that unusual?”

“Highly. But we’re all very happy for you.”

“What did he look like?” Harrison already knew what her answer would be.

“Middle-aged man. Slight, but athletic. Looked like a gymnast.”

Harrison nodded. Blake—it had to be Blake. But he couldn’t prove it. He exhaled slowly. Their bill had been paid. He felt like a boulder had been lifted from his chest.

Harrison looked up in time to see Nancy getting off the elevator. She’d be so happy that they wouldn’t have to sell their home now. Didn’t she deserve this? He’d relay the information to his old Chief and leave it at that. Without an active investigation, it would go nowhere. And,



somehow, he didn't think he'd find the time to start that rumor for the Russian mob. If this is how Blake wanted to end things—if it were truly the end for Blake—he would live with the truce.

Harrison took Nancy's hand. "I've got good news."

THE END