

– *The* –
Case of the
Three-time
Loser

The moment Detective Paula Hammond stepped into the sprawling home in the upscale neighborhood in suburban Columbia, South Carolina, she felt an immediate wave of sadness. The house, which had been adorned with expensive antiques in every room, looked like a mini-tornado had ripped through it. Dresser drawers had been yanked out, and the contents dumped helter-skelter. Exquisite ceramics and wood carvings – mementoes of travels to far-flung places – had been swept from their shelves and lay scattered and broken on the floor. Chairs and tables had been tossed on their sides or backs.

The mother of two teenage sons, the tall 40-year-old investigator looked as trim and fit as her college days playing

basketball for Clemson. Her gentle manner and wholesome looks belied the fact that she was really a tough-as-nails homicide detective.

"Where's the body?" she asked Sergeant Steve Culpepper.

"In the basement. He was shot at least twice."

Down the hall, Hammond saw an elderly woman in a leather chair, her arms folded, rocking back and forth. The detective walked over to her, bent down, and gently clasped the woman's hand. "Mrs. Dietz, I'm deeply sorry for your loss. I can't begin to imagine the shock and grief you must be feeling right now."

"I'm too numb to cry and too hurt to move," moaned the 78-year-old woman. "Sixty years. We would have been married sixty years next month. Now I'll have to celebrate our anniversary at the cemetery."

"Mrs. Dietz, would you like to leave the house while the crime-scene investigators search for evidence? I can ask you questions later."

"No, Joseph would want me to be strong and stay here. Go about your business, Detective. I'll be right here to talk whenever you're ready."

Hammond squeezed the woman's hand and said, "We're pretty good at solving murders. Criminals usually leave some kind of evidence – even microscopic – that eventually leads us to them."

Culpepper took the detective downstairs, where the body of 81-year-old Joseph Dietz, a retired physician, lay on the floor in a pool of blood. The victim's head was covered by a towel.