

PROLOGUE

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It was an oddly matched pair, walking through the wetland. Both were shod appropriately in waterproof boots, both were covered in mosquito repellent, both were wearing loose, water-resistant clothing. One of them, a botanist, was a very small man – barely five feet. Tiny hands. Boots probably purchased in the kids department. The other surveyor was reasonably tall – about five ten or eleven – but seemed huge next to the botanist. They each carried a "sharpshooter," a heavy, narrow shovel used when taking samples for soils and wetland surveys.

They made their way slowly, taking soil samples and filling out forms, examining the flora, listening for bird calls.

"Hey," the little botanist exclaimed, "that sounds like a least bittern. Look over there at about eight o'clock. See that spot of orange? I think that's him." They pointed their binoculars toward the sound.

The little bird, the smallest of the North American herons, was huddled in the grasses of the marsh. The two of them grinned and low-fived – at least the tall one low-fived. It was kind of a middle-five for the little botanist.

They moved slowly through the wetland, the little botanist

## A Fine Climate for Murder

skipping ahead, bending down every now and then to examine an interesting plant or to dig up a soil sample, and then darting away to repeat the process a bit further on.

“Holy crap,” he shouted. “Look at this!”

The other surveyor caught up. The little botanist was beside himself with excitement. Literally jumping up and down. He was pointing at a clump of flowers. “Look. Look. *Cypripedium candidum*. Small white lady’s slipper orchids. A whole field of the suckers! They’re damn near extinct. Man, wait’ll we tell the Society what we found. What a find!”

The tall surveyor bent down and examined one of the flowers, nearly as excited as the little botanist. “C’mon, let’s get this written and published before someone beats us to it.”

The two of them turned back, the little botanist moving ahead excitedly, bending every once in a while to examine leaves that could be of the orchid. The tall surveyor following closely behind, raised the sharpshooter and brought it down, hard, on the back of the little botanist’s head. The botanist went down. The tall surveyor turned him over, stamped on his throat, removed all of his clothing, picked him up, carried him deep into the marsh, took the little guy’s sharpshooter, and departed.

It was weeks before the little botanist was found and by then there wasn’t much left of him.