



BARRY NAVBORS was busy raking up leaves when he heard the scream. It was coming from the thick patch of trees behind his house. By the time Barry threw down his rake and ran up the wooded path, the piercing shriek had stopped. Little Nellie Shell stood frozen in the middle of the path, ready to scream again. “Nellie, what’s the matter?”

The 11-year-old pointed. A blood-stained shirt hung from a low branch, blocking the path. Barry looked past the shirt and saw what had made Nellie scream. It was a man staring blankly up at them from the bottom of a ravine. They were close enough to make an identification. The thick, black-frame glasses, the colorful tattoo on the left forearm, the balding head. “It’s Mr. Chirac,” Nellie wailed. “See the knife?” Barry saw. A kitchen steak knife protruded gruesomely from a gash in Joël Chirac’s bare chest.

Fifteen minutes later, the Toronto police arrived at Barry Naybor’s house. “I took Nellie home,” the long-haul trucker explained as he led the troopers to the site. “She’s been told a hundred times not to use the woods as a shortcut to school. But you know kids. The bloody shirt is . . .” Barry paused and looked around. “It’s gone.”

Not only was the shirt gone, but so was the body. A trooper lowered himself into the ravine and began to inspect the flattened branches. “Are you sure you really saw . . .” Then his eyes fell on the bloody steak knife.

At the local hospital, Annette Chirac was nearing the end of her shift. Annette was French Canadian, like her husband of two years. Both were known to speak passable English. “Joël works for a drug company,” the petite nurse said. “He left this morning on one of his sales trips. Is anything wrong?”

The senior trooper gently explained the situation. “My poor, foolish . . .” Annette wrung her hands. “I told him to take those threats seriously.”

“Threats?” The trooper perked up. “What threats?”

Back at home, Annette showed them a trio of letters, all promising Joël Chirac that he would soon die. “The first came last month. Once, when he was on the road, I got a phone call.

A man whispering—same sort of thing. There didn't seem to be any motive; so, Joël never took them seriously.”

The police launched an intensive investigation. The only clue, a bloody fingerprint on the knife, was put through the department's AFIS computer and miraculously came up with a match. Nathaniel Sims, a sales representative for a rival drug company, had his prints on file, the result of a traffic arrest years earlier. Sims lived 170 kilometers away and had no known association with Joël Chirac.

Sims was brought in for questioning. He seemed shy and harmless and claimed to have no idea how his prints could have gotten on the knife. The police couldn't help noticing the tissue paper stuffed up one nostril. “I've been having a lot of nosebleeds lately,” the timid suspect explained. “It's just nerves.”

The next day, they placed Sims in a lineup, hoping Chirac's wife could identify him. As Annette Chirac studied the faces, her eyes kept returning to Sims. Suddenly she was nervous. Several times Annette seemed about to speak, but never did. And she never made an identification.

Just a few hours after the lineup, the police had their evidence. The blood on the weapon matched Sims's blood type. Also, a check of phone records showed a call from the Sims house to Chirac's on the same day Annette-received the phone threat.

When the police arrived with an arrest warrant, Betty Sims invited them in. “Nathaniel just left. Moose season starts tomorrow. He never misses it, except when he's on some sales trip. He camps out the night before, just to get an early start. I don't know exactly where.”

An all-points-bulletin described Nathaniel Sims's car. Shortly after dawn, a Mountie spotted the tan Pontiac in a roadside turnout. He trudged up the nearest path and soon found his man at a campsite. Nathaniel Sims was still half-zipped into his sleeping bag, held in place by a steak knife that looked suspiciously like the knife used on Joël Chirac. Dead.

Whodunit? (1) What happened to Joël Chirac? (2) Who killed Nathaniel Sims? (3) What clue connects the killer to the crime?