

Chapter 18

“Good evening and thank you for tuning into Newscenter 9 at Six. Our top story tonight, lightning struck the Canaan Bowl-o-Rama yesterday evening. One customer inside was seriously injured and transported to Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center with burn injuries. Lois Sanchez has this report...”

Images of the damage outside of the bowling center and then interior damage pan across the screen with Lois voicing over the images before the image comes back outside and focusing on Lois.

“As you can see, the Canaan Bowl-o-Rama received significant damage when it was struck by lightning last night. I’m here with the owner, Bud Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong, you were here last night when this occurred, correct?” Lois points her microphone to Bud and the camera angle changes to focus on him.

“Yes, along with two of my employees. A birthday party had left less than 20 minutes before the strike. I still had a group of college students and their group advisor in here bowling. The lightning bolt hit the telephone pole out here and caused a surge in the electrical system inside. It looks like most of my wiring is fried along with a lot of my equipment.”

“Any idea how long you’ll be closed?”

Bud shrugged. “That’ll depend on how long it takes for my insurance to kick in and when I can get an electrician in here followed by a contractor and then health inspectors. Could be a few weeks, could be a month or more. But I’ve got more immediate concerns than that.”

“That would be for the customer who was injured?”

Bud sighed. “Yes, the college advisor was sitting very close to an electrical outlet. I think he was charging his phone. When the bolt hit, electricity arced from the outlet and jolted him. I was immediately on my phone calling 911. The electrical surge also caused a couple of small fires. Two of the students immediately provided him with first aid and a third doused the fires with an extinguisher. Canaan paramedics were quick to arrive. I’m very concerned for him. He and his group have been long time customers here. Those two students probably saved his life, while the third’s cool-headed quick thinking may have prevented a bigger tragedy. There is one other thing I need to show you and your cameraman, Ms. Sanchez.” The camera follows Bud over to the blown power meter. “Please focus on this area below the meter.”

“What are we looking at, Mr. Armstong?”

“The better question is, what are we not seeing, Ms. Sanchez. This is why you saw a state police cruiser pulling out as you pulled in. The public utility guy pointed this out to me as he was disconnecting my building from the grid while replacing the transformer. Take a good look here.” Bud pointed to a thick, bare copper wire cut about half an inch below the meter box. And a similar wire sticking out of the ground about half an inch. All of it was tarnished. “This is why

we had a surge inside last night that electrocuted my customer, Ms. Sanchez.” Bud paused a moment. “It’s hard to not cuss about it on live tv. Someone cut and stole my grounding wire. As you can see, the cut area is tarnished, so this happened some time ago.”

“Why would someone do that?”

“Drugs, Ms. Sanchez. No one likes to talk about it, but we have a real drug problem hidden in plain sight here in New Hampshire. About six years ago, you reported on a series of copper thefts in houses for sale in Manchester...”

“Yes, I remember. A realtor would show a vacant house to a potential buyer only to find the power was off, and upon going in the basement, they’d find all the wiring in the basement ripped-out and sometimes the copper water pipes, too.”

“Yes, and this is no different, but on a smaller scale.”

“How come you never noticed it before, Mr. Armstrong?”

“Why would I? Electric New Hampshire swapped all the meters in this area for smart ones two years ago. If I want to monitor my power consumption, I can call it up on an app on my phone. Their people don’t have to visually inspect it to get a reading, anymore. Though, you’d think they’d want to do a visual inspection every now and then.” Bud shrugged his shoulders. “Now, they can drive by and get the reading without leaving their vehicle. That’s why I assume it happened sometime in the past year or two based on the tarnishing here and when the meter was swapped out. I wanted to show you this to warn others in the area to go check their meter and grounding wire just in case they’re a victim too. If they are, they should notify the state police and contact an electrician as soon as possible to get their home regrounded.” Bud shook his head. “Some drug addict cut this three-foot section of copper to sell it a year or two ago. They might have made 20 cents or so off it. As a result, one of my best customers is fighting for his life in the hospital and I’ll be closed for some time in order to make repairs.”

Lois nodded. “Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.” The camera panned back to the reporter. “We have been in contact with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. A spokeswoman wouldn’t identify the victim. They only indicated that they admitted a white male in his mid-30’s with severe burn injuries. That patient remains in critical condition. This is Lois Sanchez for Newcenter 9, reporting this evening from Canaan, New Hampshire. Back to you in the studio, Bill.”