EXCLUSIVE

The

LAWYER

and the

DEAD

GIRL

By Lisa DePaulo

On May 25th, 26-year-old Julia Law was found dead in the bathtub of her lover, high-flying Philly attorney CHUCK PERUTO. But that’s only the beginning of the story.
What really happened in Chuck Peruto’s house that night?
THE GIRL IN THE BATHTUB
It's 10 a.m., the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, when he gets the call. He's at the Shore. Chuck is always at the Shore, particularly the first weekend of "Chuck's season," as his friends call summer. This isn't unusual. Nor is it unusual for this particular 58-year-old man, Chuck Peruto Jr., a hugely successful criminal defense attorney and son of one of the most esteemed lawyers in Philadelphia history, to be waking up to the ring of his cell phone at 10, having spent much of the previous night at the legendary beach bar that is the Princeton in Avalon.

Last night, though, he was preoccupied, texting back and forth with his 26-year-old girlfriend, Julia Law (“What the hell are you doing without bubble bath in your house?” she wrote around 10 p.m., followed quickly by “I love my Chuckie Pie”), who was at his stunning Rittenhouse Square apartment back in the city. That night, he says, he went home with someone else—specifically, Trent Cole, the linebacker for the Philadelphia Eagles. They crashed together at a mutual friend’s house. (Later, Chuck would remember the look on the detective’s face: Trent Cole is your alibi witness?)

But that's Chuck. Fun, lovable, wild and crazy Chuck, as much a Philadelphia institution as the Liberty Bell, and much more entertaining. Or was.

English is Jaime's second language, but he knew enough, apparently, to say: There's a girl in your bathtub.

"She's allowed to be there," Chuck recalls replying. "That's my girlfriend."

But Jaime presses, tries to tell Chuck that the girl isn't moving. Chuck remembers thinking: Please don't let him tell me she's dead.

"Get her out of there! Pull her out! Wake her up!" Chuck orders through the phone. And then Jaime tells him he thinks she may be... muerta. Now Chuck is shaking, crying, he's throwing on his sweats from the floor and running to his car, he's not believing this can be happening. "What color hair does she have?" he says he asked Jaime. An odd question, to say the least, but as he tells it now, "I wanted to believe it was anyone but her."

He tells Jaime to call 911. Then he calls 911. The call somehow goes to dispatch in Sea Isle City, not Avalon, which, he says, will later give the cops pause. ("I have no idea why," Chuck says.)

He gets into his white Mercedes, not even stopping to brush his teeth, and drives a hundred miles an hour to get back to the city. From his car, more phone calls. His 33-year-old son Chas, his only child and the father of Chuck’s two grandchildren, has also gotten a call from Jaime. To Chas, Jaime seemed unhinged; it was hard to understand what he was saying. Chas says he instructed Jaime to take a photo with his cell phone. The photo comes through. A gruesome picture. Now there is no doubt. On the phone with his father, Chas tries to let him believe there's still hope, so he doesn't kill himself on the road. His father is sobbing.

Chuck calls Rich DeSipio. Rich is the top lawyer in...
Chuck’s office and will figure prominently in the days to come, the person who will serve as Chuck’s spokesperson to the media—a disastrous choice by any measure. For now, DeSipio, in the checkout line at Wegmans with his elderly mother when he first heard the news from Chas, tries to calm Chuck down. Says he’s on his way to the Delancey Place apartment. He’ll be there, he tells Chuck. Rich DeSipio will always be there.

It’s almost 11 a.m. when Chuck pulls into the driveway off Delancey. The place is already teeming with cops, news trucks. A reporter sticks a microphone in his face, and he recoils. He will later recount that some cops greeted him with hugs. Everyone knows Chuck, including cops he will sometimes eviscerate on the witness stand, then take out for a drink.

They won’t let Chuck inside. He goes to his office around the corner—twice—before eventually the cops take him down to Homicide, where, for seven hours, he answers questions. It’s a joint he knows well from representing “alleged” criminals all these years. His brother-in-law, also a lawyer, accompanies him, but Chuck insists it was in the role of brother-in-law, not lawyer. “I wasn’t going to lawyer up,” says Chuck, a peculiar thing for a $500-an-hour defense attorney to say, and he knows that. He admits that none of the things he did in the days and weeks to come were things he’d allow one of his clients to do. His father, the venerable Chuck Peruto Sr., now 86, who heard the news on television, calls him on his cell phone while he’s being questioned by homicide detectives, and “He’s freaking out,” remembers Chuck. “He’s like, ‘What are you giving a statement for?’” Chuck also fields a call from Genna Squadroni, his 25-year-old recent ex-girlfriend of three years, who is also freaking out, though in her case apparently not due to a girl being found dead in Chuck’s bathtub, but to the fact that Chuck had been dating that girl at all, a paralegal she’d hired at the law offices of A. Charles Peruto Jr. As Chuck is being peppered with questions from the cops, Genna leaves a string of expletive-filled rants on his cell phone. Welcome to Chuck’s world.

The homicide detectives, the coroner, the forensic experts, spend a good 10 and a half hours at the scene. And while Chuck says they later privately told him they “knew this was an accidental death,” it was a 26-year-old woman found dead, naked, facedown in a watery grave. They had to do what they had to do.

Chuck returns home around 8 p.m. The homicide detectives still aren’t finished, still won’t let him inside, so he sits on his stoop for a while, then takes a long walk, ends up at Little Pete’s. (He ordered eggs.) Once they finally let him in his house, he answers more questions, points out “some things that they missed.” He says there were two empty half-gallon orange-flavored vodka bottles in his recycling bin that they hadn’t noticed and didn’t take. He tells them his theory: From the photograph he saw, there were towels in the water. On the rack above the tub, a few decorative towels were hanging, larger ones folded on top. It was—and remains—his supposition that Julia tried to grab onto the towels to get out, then fell back into the tub.

Eventually, the homicide detectives clear out. Chuck is alone in his gorgeous place, which has suddenly become a very creepy place. It’s a mess (and Chuck is meticulous), covered with the residue of charcoal fingerprint dust—on his leather chairs and crystal lamps, even his antique gumball machine. His bed has been stripped of the sheets where he and his love spent their last “euphoric” night together, two days earlier.

He wanders around aimlessly. He needs a shower, but is afraid to go into the bathroom. Finally, he does. He stands there and stares for a long time. At the tub in which she died. And he cries. It’s a beautiful tub, not some cheesy big Jacuzzi as many would assume, but a tasteful European-style deep soaking tub, white porcelain with claw feet. In it, he can see her bodily fluids. Feces and blood. (Both can be excreted in the initial hours after a drowning.) The tub has been drained to
about two inches of water. Now it’s clogged.

Days later, when his pal Rich DeSipio tells the Inquirer that Chuck even cleaned the bathtub, for the dead girl’s “dignity,” a great many red flags are raised. It’s a curious thing for two criminal defense attorneys to put out there. But Chuck says he did what he had to do. “I didn’t want a cleaning service to do it. I wanted to do it. That’s where she died. I wanted to clean it myself. So I did.”

He says it took him a good 90 minutes. He started with Windex, but that didn’t work—fingerprint dust is a bitch—so he switched to Tilex. When the tub was finally clean, he says, he filled it and got in. He is telling me all of this exactly one month later, in his living room on Delancey. I’m curious: Why? Was he trying to figure out how it happened?

A long pause. “I was just lost,” he says. “I was praying that it was a dream. I wasn’t positive that it wasn’t a dream.”

He says he stayed in the tub until he was “like a prune.” Then he got out and dried himself off.

THE DEATH OF JULIA

Papazian Law, a beauty and sweetheart—no one who knew her disputes either of those things—three days before her 27th birthday, was and remains an unfathomable tragedy to those who loved her, and there are many. It was also, in the early days, almost surreal. Because, first, this was a uniquely Philadelphia tragedy. A very young and very pretty woman had died mysteriously in the home of Chuckie Peruto, the definition of “hot-shot lawyer,” who at 58 was still famously known for dating women in their 20s. As one prominent Philadelphia lawyer remarked to me while the news was first breaking, “It was only a matter of time.” Which is to say, it was only a matter of time before Chuckie’s arrested-development lifestyle would end badly. But with a dead girl in his bathtub? That’s beyond ending badly. (Nor did it end, apparently, as any observer of Chuck’s Facebook page knows. That page was again quietly littered with photos of him surrounded by beautiful babes down the Shore, on his boat, in the clubs. Chuck says he doesn’t post all of these himself; Facebook friends do. But still. Really, Chuck?)

The first time I sit down with Chuck for this story, on a hot night in June, I ask him about that—about his propensity to be with very young women—and his answer, at first, is shtick. “The age of the girls I date has never changed,” he says with that Chuck grin. “Every girl is 24 to 26. I just got older.” There should be a ba-da-boom, but there isn’t. We’re in his office on Pine Street, inside a grand old townhouse with PERUTO in Roman letters in marble on the front facade, the offices where Julia worked for him for two years as an $11-an-hour paralegal.

“Let’s start with why I’m doing this,” he said when I arrived. “I just want to clear the air. There are so many incorrect things that I’ve read. And heard.” But mostly, he said, he wanted Julia to be portrayed “as the angel that she was.” “And to answer the question,” he said, “of, ‘Why is he talking when there’s a grand jury?’ They can kiss my ass.” He says if she’d died in her own bathtub, or even anyone else’s bathtub, “You wouldn’t be here right now. No one would even know the name Julia Law.”

This is true. It is also true that I’m here because there is now a grand jury investigation into Julia Law’s death. The news that District Attorney Seth Williams had convened a grand jury in the case came to light in an Inquirer article 13 days after her death. Chuck was furious that he was “blocked out” from this news, that he wasn’t given a courtesy call first, that he had to read it in the paper. By this point, his once-chummy relationship with homicide detectives had cooled. Chuck quickly put out a statement that it was his understanding that the D.A.’s office was “not investigating me, they are investigating the death, and there’s a big difference.”

Investigating her death? If by that he meant how she died, there’s an answer to that—it’s called an autopsy. But no autopsy report has been released to the public. Nor has the toxicology report. Or the police report. By definition, a grand jury is beyond secretive; it’s designed to protect witnesses who might otherwise be afraid to talk. The D.A.’s office declined to confirm or deny any of the details about Julia’s death that were being reported in the press: that she had a staggering blood-alcohol level of .4 to .45, meaning, if true, that 40 to 45 percent of her blood was alcohol; that an empty pill bottle was found by the tub; that the cause of death was likely drowning following a seizure; that there were no apparent signs of foul play. The most exculpatory “fact” put out there—that there were “no obvious signs of trauma to the body”—was first divulged by Rich DeSipio, who said the cops told him that.

Grand juries—even in Philadelphia—aren’t convened over nothing. Peruto says he believes this one was called for political reasons, citing, among other things, Seth Williams’s political ambitions. But going after a high-profile lawyer with nothing in your holster isn’t usually the best route to the mayor’s office. Chuck also believes the D.A. is gunning for him because he’s Chuck Peruto, and that it’s part vendetta, because the assistant district attorney assigned to the case, Carlos Vega, “has a real jealous streak when it comes to me. He’s never beaten me on a single count of anything. We just had a jury trial, a death penalty case. [My] guy was found not guilty of everything. And,” he adds, because he’s Chuck and can’t help himself, “it was at least manslaughter.”
as should be expected, was all over the tale of the dead girl in Chuck Peruto’s bathtub. The decimation of newsrooms notwithstanding, this was Chuck Peruto. Chuckie Jr! For a great many years—decades, in fact—the local press (this magazine included, if not especially) lapped up the Chuck narrative. He was a gift to reporters, starting with his extraordinary talents as a quote machine. Only Chuckie could end up defending now–executed serial murderer Gary Heidnik, who killed, dismembered, cooked and possibly ate his female victims’ body parts, and later admit that he made up the cannibalism part—“I would leak it and by week’s end, he’s a cannibal”—to build an insanity defense. (“I never believed it for a minute,” he told me. But he argued it vociferously in court.)

And let’s face it: He was fun. It was hard to dislike Chuck Peruto; even most of his ex-girlfriends still adore him. And that, of course, was the key to our fascination. In a town with a dearth of celebrity, Chuckie always provided ready-made tabloid fodder. Every few years there was another feature in the Daily News mulling whether Chuck Peruto, the city’s most famous swordsman, was about to “settle down,” always accompanied by a photo of Chuck with another “love of his life.” Almost all of these young women looked interchangeable—long, straight, shiny dark hair, big brown eyes, awesome bodies.

Until Julia, it was all great fun. In true Philadelphia fashion, the rap on Chuck was simple: He might be a hot dog, but he was our hot dog. Like the beloved, flawed, only-in-Philadelphia, larger-than-life rakes who came before him and happily thrived in the same zip codes—Bobby Simone, Leonard Tose, Ed Rendell, Neil Stein—Chuck was a legend. A true Philadelphia character.

The national press rarely took note of Chuck Peruto, which often dismayed Chuck Peruto. He was Philadelphia’s Mark Geragos—and seriously, can you imagine if a dead girl ended up in his bathtub?—but suffered the curse of a great many illustrious Philadelphians, in that he was barely known outside Rittenhouse Square. That changed on May 25th. There was a quick flurry of national press about the girl in the bathtub, from Good Morning America to CNN to the New York Daily News. Most outlets deemed the story newsworthy because Chuck was a “Mob lawyer,” which was laughable at best. Though

Julia loved making age jokes. “What girl in her right mind would date a guy 30 years older?” she said.
his name ends in a vowel—let’s face it, always a red flag—the closest he got to being a “Mob lawyer” wasn’t representing Nicky Scarfo, as was widely reported, but handling a mere disorderly-person offense for Joey Merlino, a.k.a. Skinny Joey, who, it should be noted, didn’t call Chuck Peruto when he he got shot in the ass on 6th Street or when he was indicted on racketeering charges, but did call him when he was arrested for throwing a beer bottle at a cop in Longport.

Chuck pleaded it down to a littering fine. Which, frankly, should have gotten him a lot more Mob clients.

In any event, the story plummeted from the national radar when Peruto didn’t appear in handcuffs and when the building at 22nd and Market came crashing down.

But back home was another story. What transpired in the press—and on Chuck’s own Facebook page—was nothing short of bizarro-world. And at the end of the day, it was precisely this “weirdness from Chuck,” to quote one source close to the D.A., that put the wheels in motion for a grand jury.

Where to begin? In the days after Julia died, Chuck didn’t officially give interviews, but he texted reporters. He called her “a beautiful, caring, free-spirit hippy [sic], who I was blessed to have known.” He said “all who knew her would miss her kindness.” He said that “words can’t express how sad I am to have finally met someone who I believed truly loved me.” Except for the hippie part—which enraged her family—there was nothing disrespectful in Chuck’s texts. It’s what was missing that was notable. People grieve in different ways. But, the curious wanted to know: Where was the outrage? The horror in a 26-year-old woman. He’s mystified as to why I’d think that. “We never ever once had a fight, not even a disagreement,” he says.

But it was Chuck’s own Facebook posting on Sunday the 26th, the day after, that really raised eyebrows. This is it, in its entirety:

I never thought I’d post something personal, but I’m just unable to thank each and every one of you individually, for your warm wishes. It’s very hard to find someone who really matches you on all eight cylinders. I found my soulmate hippy, and can never replace her. We worked and played, and never got enough life. I’m grateful we made every minute count, without a single dispute about anything ever. I’m especially sad for her 10 yr old brother, who was her sidekick, along with her loving and close sisters, mother and step-father. Earth lost the best one ever. Happy birthday baby.

Without a single dispute about anything ever? I tell Chuck I thought that was a curious thing to throw in, and somewhat unbelievable in a relationship between a 58-year-old man and a 26-year-old woman. He’s mystified as to why I’d think that. “We never ever once had a fight, not even a disagreement,” he says.

But a fight was brewing. By day three of the news coverage, DeSipio had informed the press that Julia’s family had asked that Peruto and the firm’s staff not attend the funeral.

The next morning, Julia’s stepfather, Joe Casella, was quoted in the Inquirer, and the family released a statement to the press, to clarify what Casella called “misinformation.” He told the paper that at the time of her death, his daughter had been upset about “a significant long-term and loving relationship” that was ending, but that relationship, he added pointedly, “was not with Peruto.” In their statement, the family said, “We especially want people to remember our daughter for who she really was—a hardworking recent college graduate who was a loving and gentle soul. We are particularly concerned about attempts to describe our Julia by people who claim to really know her. These ascribed quotations, as reported in the press, are both troubling and offensive to us.” Casella made clear to the Inquirer that the family didn’t want Peruto or DeSipio at the funeral, but that the staff, in fact, could come.

The service was at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Absecon, where Julia grew up. Chuck spent the hours during the service texting the mourners from the firm for updates.

That same day, DeSipio, ever helpful, had provided to the Daily News the name of the ex-boyfriend to whom Joe Casella had alluded. He was Mark Hinrichs, a handsome and gentlemanly 36-year-old lawyer—who also worked for, ha-da-boom, Chuck Peruto.

LET US PAUSE. It’s been three months since the beautiful, spirited, loving Julia Law died, in a way no one should ever die. Drowning, regardless of any other contributing factors, is gruesome. (In a strange irony, Chuck Peruto told this magazine just a year ago that his biggest phobia was . . . drowning.)

In the course of my reporting, I discovered things that I seriously wished I hadn’t. I started with Chuck, whom I’ve known (and liked) for many years. From our first meeting for this story on the evening of June 24th through the days and weeks that followed—long, long sessions, all on the record, in his office, in his home on Delancey Place, in various restaurants near the Square, often as he cried—there was no question that Chuck Peruto loved this girl. And was grieving for this girl. From there, it got complicated.

Then there was Mark Hinrichs, who spoke to me in the law offices of Nino Tinari, which was a whole other mishmash. When Chuck was a little boy, Nino Tinari was like an uncle to him, a close pal of his father, the esteemed Chuck Sr., to whom Nino says he is eternally grateful for his mentorship and friendship of almost 50 years. They were like family. Nino was often at the modest Peruto home in Overbrook, with Chuck and his little brother Joey at the top of the stairs, eavesdropping on the adults’ conversation. And Nino Tinari was there for Chuck, like an uncle, when, in 1983, Chuck’s brother Joey, aged 26 like Julia, was found dead.

Mark Hinrichs went to work for Nino
Chuck Peruto

Tinari after he cleaned out his office at the Peruto firm in the wake of Julia’s death. He needed another job. Though that is perhaps too simplistic a way to put it. What happened to Mark Hinrichs was a web of deception and betrayal, and nothing short of chilling. Particularly on the day Julia died. He says he heard the news from Rich DeSipio, in a phone call at 2 p.m., and, shattered, went to DeSipio’s house for comfort. Mark was a kid from Allentown with no family in Philly; his closest friends were the people at the Peruto law firm. That night, he sobbed in DeSipio’s arms, and at one point asked, “Who found her?”

Mark had just assumed she was in her own tub. He had no idea, he says, that she was dating their boss. “Why was she at Chuck’s?” It only got more heartbreaking from there. Hinrichs says he still didn’t know for sure until he returned home at midnight and played a message from Chuck, which he has kept. It’s a halting, odd phone message, in which Chuck says that “Homicide just left” and that he’s really sorry that he and Julia never told Mark about their relationship. Chuck then says they wanted to, “but you know Julia, she kept changing her mind ... and then this happened.”

At around 3 p.m. on Saturday, five hours after Julia’s body was found, another friend of hers received the news she was dead, while at a Memorial Day barbecue in the suburbs with his wife and kids. He collapsed to the ground. This man’s last text message to Julia had been sent only a half-hour earlier, at 2:35 p.m.: “just heard reports of someone dead at 20th & delancey ... are u ok? please call me.” He’d been concerned because he and Julia had texted all night the night before, dozens and dozens of texts, until shortly after 1 a.m. He’d starting texting her again around 8:30 a.m., to see if she could meet him before she left for Absecon to see her family. He would try to get away from his wife and kids to see her, as he had for the six years he and Julia had been involved.

Julia met this married man when she was 20 and waitressing at a sports bar to help pay her expenses at Drexel. He’s in his early 40s now, a very successful city professional with an Ivy League background and friends in high places. He spoke to me on the condition that I not disclose his name; his wife still doesn’t know about his relationship with Julia. Like Chuck, he says he is most concerned that Julia not be portrayed in a negative light. He was in love with her. They all were. “It’s not her fault that everyone loved her,” he told me. And then, as often occurred in our numerous conversations, he broke into tears. For the sake of this article, I am going to refer to him as “M.B.” (I don’t just mean Married Boyfriend; Julia liked to call him “Mr. Big,” or “My Bear.”)

I would very much like to say that Julia Law’s six-year affair with a married man, one painstakingly documented in her many texts and emails that I have read (Julia was a big texter, and also a forwarder), as well as her voicemail messages and M.B.’s statements to me, is irrelevant to this story. But it isn’t. Nor is her one- and a-half-year relationship with Mark Hinrichs, nor her five- and a-half-week romance with Chuck Peruto, who says he didn’t have a clue that her “friendship” with M.B. was anything but platonic. (M.B. says he hasn’t been interviewed by the police.)

In the weeks leading up to her death, Julia was, quite frankly, in over her head. She was a 26-year-old woman torn about a lot of things, including three men who couldn’t possibly have been more different. What they had in common was that they all adored her. Sadly, she may not have believed that. It is also safe to say she might not have ended up with any of them.

**JULIA CAME TO work for Chuck Peruto in August 2011. She was deliriously happy when she got the job, which she pursued when she saw it posted on his Facebook page. (She was one of his several thousand Facebook friends, though they had never met; he had friended her.) Chuck is a big dater, so screening fell to Genna, his then-23-year-old girlfriend, who also worked at the firm.**

In an interview in Chuck’s apartment in late June, Genna tells me that when she first saw Julia, she thought, *No fucking way am I hiring her.*

But, “Unfortunately,” adds Genna, “she was an intelligent girl who had one of the only résumés that made sense.” (Facebook is Chuck’s employment agency.) Chuck assured Genna that he’d never started dating a woman who worked for him. (This was technically true; Genna was hired a year after they started dating: “It’s real good because I’m the boss and when I want to take off, she takes off.”)

Which brings us back to that question of Chuck and much younger women. “It’s strictly the fun part,” he says. “You have to understand. Girls—with age comes responsibilities. I have enough responsibilities for 10 people. So when I want to relax—selfishly, I admit—I don’t want you to have your responsibilities and then bring them home. I just want to party. I just want to relax. I want to have fun and go places and travel and be a goof. And you can’t do that with somebody who’s got responsibilities.” Such as children, elderly parents, even a job.

The irony, of course, is that dating 20-somethings comes with a whole different set of responsibilities. His. “Chuck’s choice of young women aren’t young women coming out of Brown,” as one powerful Philadelphia lawyer and casual friend of Chuck’s puts it, rather succinctly. Chuck admits that most of his relationships start on the beach—“the great equalizer,” as he calls it. “They don’t know what you do for a living, they aren’t looking at your watch, it’s just you and your bathing suit, and it separates the men from the boys.” When he started dating Genna, she was a lifeguard entering her final year of college at West Chester; he says he loved going with her to all the campus parties during her senior year. He was 55.

Contrary to popular belief, Chuck’s serious relationships aren’t hit-and-run; he’s a serial monogamist. But they all have something in common. In almost every case, there’s an issue with “the girl” that requires his help, be it substance abuse or something more. His friends believe he’s pathologically attracted to young women who need help, and he doesn’t deny that. The day I meet Genna, she has shown up at his apartment because she’s had a rough night. On our way from his office, Chuck had to stop at CVS to pick up some Pepto-Bismol for her.

Chuck has jumped through hoops for some of the women he’s been involved with. He’s paid for rehab, therapists, schooling. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to connect the dots to his brother Joey, the one who died at the same age as Julia, choking on his own Quaalude-induced vomit. Chuck realizes most of the women he gets involved with are going to have drama. “I’m well aware of that,” he says, “Anybody who’s going to date a guy much older has a daddy issue.”

Julia Law fit the bill, though not completely. Despite her youth, she was, in many ways, different from the others. She wasn’t a girl he’d spotted on the beach and become instantly infatuated with. He’d known her for two years, while she worked for him.
And he liked her, got to know her, first as an exceptional employee, then as a friend.

But Julia also had problems, some of which may not have come to light except for an odd event that occurred a couple weeks after her death, when her mother petitioned the Orphans’ Court to be given possession of Julia’s remains. Her concern, from court testimony, was that Julia’s father, who was described in her obit in the *Press of Atlantic City* as her “birth father,” not be given possession of the remains when they were finally released from the medical examiner’s office. Though Julia’s father, Frank Law, who spoke to me on the record, didn’t contest the proceeding, there was still testimony given in the courtroom from Julia’s mother, Lauren Law. She said, among other things, that she was the caring parent when Julia had battled alcoholism and been in treatment facilities, multiple times, for an eating disorder. Those hospitalizations were news to Chuck Peruto. Though not to M.B., who in 2008, when she was a patient for bulimia at the Renfrew Center, visited her daily.

A few months after Julia got to the firm, she started dating Mark Hinrichs. They were an adorable couple, greatly liked by the rest of the gang at Peruto Law, which has always been a rather chummy enterprise. It was common for co-workers to go out for drinks, dinner, whatever, the boss included. Things were so cozy that while Julia and Mark were dating, they took a vacation and stayed in Chuck’s Miami Beach condo.

But at the end of 2012, things started to shift. There was tension between Chuck and Genna, tension between Julia and Mark. The former was more obvious. On December 7th, Chuck threw his fabulous annual Christmas dinner, whatever, the boss included. Things finally released from the medical examiner’s session of the remains when they were announced he was going to take Julia to New York for a Louie bag. She responded, he says, “My treat.”

From emails and texts Julia sent before the trip, she was both nervous (she was going back to the boss’s Miami condo ... with the boss) and excited. But mostly, she was worried that she wouldn’t look perfect in a bathing suit. “She kept saying, ‘I’m too fat to go,’” says Aisha Davis, her closest girlfriend at the firm. “She was maybe 98 pounds soaking wet.”

She was five-foot-five and wavered between 105 and 110. She also fretted about the trip to M.B. He responded by taking her shopping. She wanted a sexy sarong to go with the black bikini he’d already bought her. “I just wanted her to be happy,” he says.

The plan for the four nights in Chuck’s lavish two-bedroom condo was for Rich and Julia to share the second bedroom. That never happened. The three got in around nine the first night. Chuck opened a bottle of wine and put on some music: the Doors, the Stones, Led Zeppelin. Julia, he recalls, “starts singing every word. I didn’t realize she loved classic rock. That is always missing when you date a young girl.”

At 11, Rich went to bed. Later, the First Kiss would be a topic of Chuck and Julia’s subsequent texting. “Do you remember the first time we kissed?” she once asked.

“Yes, I was opening wine in the kitchen and I turned around and you kissed me, and I would have never made the move on you.”

The morning after, the two of them were giddy. “It was euphoric for me. Euphoric,” says Chuck. For the next few days in Miami, “He was like a little kid,” says Rich, “wanting to show us stuff and buy us stuff.” He took them to nice restaurants, one night ordered a $400 bottle of wine. All Julia would let him buy her was a pair of sunglasses. “Julia was so different,” says Chuck, who says the usual drill was fall in love, “then go buy Louie bags.” (Louis Vuitton, the official designer to 20-something girlfriends of Chuck Peruto.)

The first day on the beach, Chuck announced he was going to take Julia to New York for a Louie bag. She responded, he says, by reaching into her own bag and pulling out Chuck still didn’t think he had a shot.

That would change in April. Over lunch with Julia and Rich, Chuck says, he was still moaning about Genna. Julia was moaning about Mark. Rich was moaning about something. Suddenly, Chuck said, “Fuck it. Let’s go to Miami.”

“Just drop everything?” Julia said.

Yep, said Chuck. “My treat.”

Back at the party, Chuck told Genna to let it go, but Genna isn’t a let-it-go kind of gal. One party guest remembers that “chairs were thrown.” (Chuck denies this.)

By early 2013, both couples were on the rocks. Chuck and Genna broke up on New Year’s Eve, when, she says, she walked out shortly before midnight “and caught the last train to Jenkintown.” (Genna has a way with words.) The issue: kids. Chuck says that when he first started dating Genna, she didn’t want to have babies, but suddenly she “changed the program.” (Worth noting: She was 25.) He didn’t want to break up—“We had a great thing, I could have gone on like that for a long time”–but she put her foot down. By all accounts, Chuck was forlorn (well, forlorn for Chuck) in the months that followed. He cried in the office, and walked around mumbling, “I’m never dating anyone under 35 again.” One employee—Julia—guffawed.

“You’ll never date a girl who’s 35,” she told him.

Julia knew how to break his balls. He liked that. She would tweak his famously large ego, sometimes addressing her work-related texts and emails to him “Dear Genius.” She loved making age jokes. And sometimes they weren’t jokes. When he was moping over Genna, her reality check was this: “What girl in her right mind would date a guy 30 years older?”

“You should be so lucky,” he told her.

Chuck says he truly believed that Julia Law was out of his league, and he never considered trying to hook up with her. (Yes, he uses that term.) “Number one, she was ridiculously pretty. And every comment she made to me was so sarcastic that I really didn’t think she liked me. I mean, I thought she liked me, but not romantically.” And, she was an employee. (Oh, that.)

In early March, Julia and Mark broke up. People in the office recall it was tense with the two of them still working there, their offices were next to each other. Chuck remembers Julia crying a lot. Others remember how she kept trying to get back together with Mark, who didn’t seem interested.

By the end of March, Rich was encouraging Chuck to pursue Julia. Rich believed—and still believes—that the rap on Chuck always misses the point: Chuck wants to be in love, Chuck loves being in love. He wanted a real long-term relationship. He just needed the right girl. Rich started telling him that the right girl was right under his nose. “You’re crazy,” Rich would tell him, “you’re letting a good one go. And the timing is perfect.”
“this folded-up flier that looked like it had been in her purse for a long time.” It was about a performing-arts school in Philly that didn’t have the money to stage a play. “And she said, ‘Instead of getting me the Louie bag, save their play,’” remembers Chuck. “That was Julia. She wanted to save the world.”

By all accounts, Julia Law was incredibly kindhearted. Maybe too kindhearted. If there was one thing that came up over and over in my reporting, it was that Julia wanted to please everyone, never disappointed anyone. This trait would figure greatly in the weeks to come, as her life became more and more complicated.

When the trio returned from Miami, Julia spilled the beans about her new romance to Aisha. Before long, everyone knew. Well, everyone except Mark, from whom it was carefully and intentionally hidden.

Julia and Chuck did the things new lovers do: He gave her a key to his apartment and she gave him hers, though he says he never once set foot in her place, because she was embarrassed by the tiny rented walkup at 20th and Walnut. They went to cute restaurants on the Square. He took her to parties. One glorious weekend, he drove her to New Hope in one of his many, many cars, a ’65 Cadillac convertible. They drove with the top down, blasting classic rock, then spent the day holding hands, exploring the quirky shops and cafes. Chuck says it was in New Hope that he told her she reminded him of the Woodstock era and started fondly calling her his “hippy girl.” Julia would later email everyone except Mark, from whom it was carefully and intentionally hidden.

Yet the following weekend, she agreed to meet Mark in Fitler Square. Mark wanted to talk to her about reconciling. They had split up, he says, because both of them had some issues to work out, but he missed her, he loved her. So they talked. “I think she was a little surprised, because I hadn’t responded to some of her wanting to get back together in the beginning,” Mark says.

To Team Chuck, it seemed Mark was putting a full-court press on Julia, perhaps after having gotten a whiff that there might be someone new in her life. Mark says he was in the dark that there was anyone else, let alone their boss. He says he just missed her, wanted to try again. He was encouraged by her telling him that she hadn’t met anyone else—and that she still loved him.

And this is where the life of Julia Law started to get very messy, where she veers from carefree romantic spirit, a Philadelphia Carrie Bradshaw, into an in-over-her-head, very confused young woman. In the last two weeks of her life, she was juggling Chuck, Mark and M.B. On May 9th, she texted M.B.: “Why would I be with chuck. Yea I’d have a comfortable ass life but … I’m so fucked up and sick over this mess I created.” M.B. replied: “u are trying to be nice and do the right thing by both—but ur happiness is more important!!!” Later in the conversation, she asks M.B.: “Will u always want to be with me no matter what man I turn out with?” He texts that he will. “Really want you to tell me to not be with chuck. I can’t believe you’re not,” she replies.

Right up until the very end of her life, Julia Law was not only in constant contact with M.B., but she was forwarding him texts and email exchanges between her and Chuck and her and Mark. From my numerous conversations with him, I have no doubt that M.B. was deeply in love with her, to the point of obsession. He was also a friend, perhaps her closest, someone she could talk to about anything without judgment. And so she did. For six years. His own psychology was fraught. He loved her and wanted her, but it was quite clear, to both of them, that he was never going to leave his wife, his kids, his seemingly perfect life.

After Julia died, the guilt M.B. felt was enormous. Julia, he says, couldn’t bear to be alone, “and when she was alone, bad things happened.” She was alone that night and shouldn’t have been, he says. He’s tortured himself over her death; one night in July, he drove his car into a tree while sobbing uncontrollably. If only he had gone there … if he had mentioned something rather poignant.

Chuck surfaced again, he was enraged—not about Julia’s affair, but because my knowing this about her might cast her in a negative light. “I don’t give a fuck if they indict me,” he shouted to me one night. “I don’t give a fuck if they arrest me for her murder. I don’t want her to be portrayed as a pig. She was not a pig! She was an angel.”

He’s correct about both of those things. But it’s also true that like many girls in their 20s, Julia Law made a lot of very bad choices.

In one of our prior discussions, Chuck had mentioned something rather poignant. In those early, heady days when he and Julia were falling in love, he would tell her how perfect she was, and she would always demur. “I have flaws,” she said.

He laughed. “You with flaws is 10 times better than the next perfect girl,” he replied. “But Chuckie Pie,” she told him, “if you knew everything about me, you might not love me anymore.”

Ten days before she died, Julia Law reached out to an online forum called “My Way Out,” for alcoholics. She sent a note to someone she had corresponded with in the past, who went by the handle of K9Lover. “Hey K,” she wrote, under her own handle of Lamb777, “I know I probably seem a little flaky at his point … honestly, i have been going through more and more life crap and just has caused me to drink more and i didn’t want to be honest with myself or anyone else trying so hard on here … didn’t deserve i should post … anyway, i’m ready to come back.” She went on to ask K about something she thought he had written previously about tapering off alcohol with “prescribed benzos for withdraw/seizures? i kinda tried tapering with beer and it just has not worked.” She added that she “happened to have some [Klonopin] … I researched the hell out of it and know it’s what they use for alcohol withdraw, etc. … sorry for rambling. I hope you had a nice weekend … thank you for listening.”

M.B. knew of Julia’s problems with alco-
custom, he took her to a bar at one of Center City’s more posh hotels. She unloaded on him, as she always did, about how torn she was about Chuck and Mark. Chuck, she told him, was so seductive. Maybe she did love him. It was so much fun, except for the working-for-him part. And even though he was “too old,” he’d made it clear that he would have babies with her. She told M.B. they’d even discussed baby names. Mark? Mark was a doll, perfect on paper, and her family loved him. But there wasn’t that “snap-crackle-pop,” she said. M.B. got them a room at the hotel that night. Julia took a bath in the fancy tub. She loved baths.

On Wednesday, after work, Julia went to see her psychiatrist, who wrote her a new prescription for Vyvanse, a form of Adderall. Earlier that day, she had been openly distraught. She told Rich DeSipio and Aisha, and Chuck and M.B., that she had revealed to her younger sister, Alexa, that she was dating Chuck Peruto. The news hadn’t gone over well. Her sister, she said, had screamed at her for getting involved with someone so much older. Though Julia begged Alexa not to tell their mom and stepfather, she’d done so anyway.

And so once again Julia turned to M.B., who picked her up at her shrink’s and took her to a hotel bar for drinks, then to buy a window fan for her apartment. While he was putting it together, he says, she was on the phone with Chuck. To his ears, they were fighting. (Chuck denies this.) But all agree there were two issues: that Julia now had to deal with her mom and stepfather knowing about Chuck, and that she could no longer spend Memorial Day weekend with him at the Shore, as they had planned. Instead, she was going to see her family in Absecon. She told friends she suspected they were going to stage an “intervention” about Chuck. A source close to the family vehemently denies this, but from Julia’s texts, she believed it.

On Thursday, Julia spent the night with Chuck. Or at least most of it. His plan was to head to the Shore around 9 p.m., but when he got home in the early evening after work, there was Julia—she loved to come home from work first and put one of his shirts or jackets on, with nothing on underneath. What transpired, he says, was nothing short of “bliss.” He would later say there were two absolutely perfect and “euphoric” nights, their first and their last. Thursday night, he says, “was just one of those nights I felt extra
close to her.” He ended up telling her about Joey. “We were lying there,” he remembers, “and I told her that I failed some people in my life. And I talked about being selfish, self-absorbed, and worried about my own career and not taking the time to worry about my good friends. …” He pauses. “Even though it’s 30 years since my brother died, it’ll be 30 years October 13th, it’s still, um, fresh. And I was telling her how I failed him. Because I did. ‘Cause he was doing all these Quaaludes and I didn’t know it. And he was doing them right under my nose.” He gets choked up. “And she was telling me how the signs may have been there but it’s not my fault for not seeing them, because people cover them. And she went on about how you never know what’s troubling somebody and it’s not my fault. Twenty-four hours later, she’s dead.”

At about 11:30 that Thursday night, Chuck says, Julia held onto him in bed and didn’t want to let him go, “which is the feeling I want to take to my grave.”

He left around midnight. Another regret. But he had to be at the Shore first thing in the morning, he says, to get the rental properties in Margate that he owns ready for the seasonal tenants. This is a side business of Chuck’s. (This also explains the shirt thing. Chuck texted Jaime Friday afternoon to pick up the shirt he forgot. Jaime went to the Shore every weekend to help.)

Friday, Julia went to the office. She texted a lot. She told Aisha she was in love with Chuck. She told Rich she wanted Chuck to propose. At least one person in the office, a sassy and smart woman named Stephanie Mattero, had pulled Julia aside a few weeks earlier and told her straight: Chuck never going to marry you, and he is certainly not going to have kids.

Julia, distressed, had confronted Chuck that night. Of course he would, Chuck says he assured her. He would marry her, he would have the kids with her, he would fly to the moon with her.

But on her last day alive, it was anything but the sun, moon and stars. Based on various emails and texts, Chuck, down the Shore without her “because of this stupid intervention,” was getting a bit impatient as to why she didn’t just give Mark no for an answer. Mark, on the other hand, was still orbiting, apparently bewildered. How she handled all of it said a lot about Julia Law and her inability to disappoint anyone. At 11 a.m. that morning, she started sobbing in the office.

**“She had just”** talked to Mark. And whatever their conversation was, it made her cry,” says Aisha, who held her and comforted her.

Earlier, Julia had told both Rich and Chuck that she had texted Mark that morning and made it clear they were done. Mark tells a different story. He says she was in tears when she called him that morning, as he was selecting a jury, and he rushed back to the Peruto law firm to console her. There, he found Aisha.

“Mark, she really doesn’t want to see you right now,” Aisha told him.

“Please, please, I just want to see her,” he said.

Finally, Julia came to the door, still in tears. Mark says, “I kept asking her, ‘What’s the matter? What’s the matter?’ But she wasn’t making sense.” Finally, she calmed down. After Mark left, she called Chuck to tell him she had finally done it: told Mark point-blank that it would “never ever” work with them.

Mark says she said nothing of the sort. Was she spinning out of control? Had it all caught up with her? She was lying to almost everyone. And possibly herself. Julia left the office around five. She went into Mark’s office before she left, thanking him for being there for her that morning. They hugged, and he mentioned that it would be her birthday on Tuesday. He didn’t want to pressure her, he says, but he let her know: If she didn’t have plans, he wanted to take her out to celebrate. Julia told him she would call or text him later. Which she did.

Whether she went home first or straight to Chuck’s is unclear, but she was texting pretty much nonstop starting at 5:13 p.m.

To Mark: “Thank you.”

At 5:43 to M.B.: “I’m so out of control horny, it’s insane.”

At 6:24, to Chuck: “What are you doing?”

Chuck: “Getting ready to nap, got all the apartments ready, wish you were here napping with me.”

Julia: “I’m sorry I didn’t go with you. I’m about to do the same. I was ready to go back to my apartment, but I think I want to go into your bathtub and masturbate, to be honest. But not soon.”

Chuck: “You’re killing me. How am I supposed to sleep?”

Julia: “I couldn’t help it, I’m sorry. I feel like I’ll have to or I’ll die.”

He asks her to send him naked pictures for him to see when he wakes up from his nap.

Julia again: “your tub is better than mine.”

Chuck: “It’s your tub, too.”

On and on the texts went, in and out like breaking surf, to anyone and everyone, all night. To Aisha, to Mark, to Chuck and M.B., even to a girlfriend in Florida. What’s remarkable about the texts isn’t just the multi-tasking, but the fact that they are, for the most part, amazingly lucid for someone supposedly on her way to a .45 blood-alcohol count. Complete sentences, perfect grammar. Also striking is how eclectic they are, ping-ponging from the dull to the salacious, often at the same time. Her texts to Mark are the tamest, mainly expressing her gratitude to him for being there for her. Meanwhile, with Aisha, who is black, Julia was inquiring if it was true about black guys.

At 9:50, she was texting M.B. about Wayne’s World, which she said she was watching on Chuck’s TV.

A little before 10, Chuck writes to tell her, “I wish you could come to Memories tomorrow night.” After a few more texts, she writes back: “People keep saying or writing that I’m the shit. Really don’t approve of that statement. Be a little more original. But more importantly: what the hell are you doing without bubble bath in your house?”

Then she gets upset because Chuck doesn’t respond to her right way. Soon after, she writes: “Seriously wish you were here :(. ”

At 11:05, she starts sending links to girl-on-girl prison porn to M.B.

In her final hours, her texts get more sexual. And more erratic. I’ve edited them considerably.

At 11:45, to M.B.: “omg are you watching it … omfg … I love you :( … I am literally lost without you … I’m a fuckin blind girl without a dog … I yearn for you.”

M.B.: “Wow.”

Her last round of texting with Chuck starts at 12:04 a.m. He is, of course, at the Princeton, and tells her he’s just run into a guy who was on his jury. “Wow,” she replies. Then adds: “I would give anything for you to [perform a sex act] right now. Anything. I would really give anything.”

Chuck: “How bout just a smile?”

At 12:16 a.m., after more discussion of the porn video, M.B. tells her: “forgive me … I’m gonna crash … I’m spent.” He is home, watching his kids. “send me lots of dirty texts I can read when I wake.” … I am obsessed with u and so empty until I see you
Again ❤❤❤... Sweet dreams jules.”

At 1:17, from Chuck at the bar: “At the Prt now. So bored. ... Surrounded by idiots tonight. U should be here with a fire going.”

At 1:28, she sends a text, her last to M.B., that he doesn’t get until the morning: “U really suck You are the worst.”

Julia at 1:30, to Chuck: “That is really a shame man I’m so sorry.”

This is the last text I’m aware of that she sent.

Chuck’s reply, at 1:40: “Dnt b a wise guy. They’re gonna identify ur ass w my dental records.”

“Can you believe?” says Chuck today.

She didn’t respond. Probably because she was already dead.

**probably, without an** autopsy or toxicology reports, or even an official estimate of the time of death—let alone an official cause, though it’s been widely reported that she drowned—it’s hard to piece together exactly how Julia Law died. But this much seems clear: She stopped her manic texting at 1:30 a.m. She apparently had copious amounts of alcohol in her system, and she had access to Vyvanse, and possibly Klonopin.

Then there was the strange twist of the girl in the video.

In the days after Chuck gave his seven-hour statement to police—but before the grand jury was announced—he was called back down to Homicide more than a few times. Once to give a DNA sample. Once to view a videotape.

Chuck’s son Chas, who manages the apartment building that Chuck developed and lives in, turned over all the footage (he says without looking at it first or making a copy) taken from two security cameras, one at the front door, one at the back. The footage the cops wanted Chuck to see was time-stamped 11:03 p.m. the night Julia died. Chuck describes it as a grainy video of a woman, visibly inebriated, entering the building in such a state that another person, clearly an Asian woman, is literally holding her up. The image ends as they ascend the steps inside the building. At 11:06, the mysterious Asian woman is seen leaving the building. Chuck lives in the fourth-floor penthouse. Detectives wanted to know if he recognized the Asian woman. He did not.

But neither did Chuck Peruto recognize Julia. In fact, he maintains that the woman in the video is most definitely not Julia. He points
Chuck Peruto

out that it would have helped his case if he’d just said, “Yeah, that’s her, she must have gone out and met with some trouble.” “But it wasn’t her,” he insists. Even though the cops told him that the tan jacket the woman in the video was wearing was found on his dining room table.

It gets weirder, because everything in this case gets weirder. Mark Hinrichs was also brought in to view the videotape. He was distraught—“It was very hard looking at a video of this woman who looks like someone you lost”—but thought he recognized the jacket. (Photos of Julia in a tan jacket were provided to me by M.B., of course.) Both Chuck and Mark throw arrows about this. Chuck: “He was with her for two years and thinks it was Julia?” Mark, sarcastically: “Does Chuck know that she was in his house?”

The video raises some questions. For starters, Chuck’s building isn’t exactly the Dorchester; it has four apartments, one of which is owned by Chas’s mother-in-law. If it’s not Julia on the tape, then who? And if she did go out, for what? A pack of cigarettes at the Wawa? (She smoked, but Chuck believed she’d quit.) To meet someone? And who was the Asian woman? A friend? A good Samaritan? And how could Julia be texting while she was too drunk to stand up?

At the end of the day, all of this will likely come down to forensics. But a bathtub death is complicated. According to experts, it’s one of the most difficult deaths to evaluate. “We don’t see a lot of trauma [to the body] in these cases,” says Andrea Zaferes, a death investigator who specializes in bathtub drownings, and who was a consultant for the prosecution on the Drew Peterson case. This is why, she says, “more bathtub drownings that are homicides are missed than are found.”

Noted forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht concurs. The trauma, as with the Whitney Houston case, “may not be even noticeable externally.” He adds: “The problem you have from a prosecutorial standpoint is that when someone is so inebriated, no force is required to keep them submerged. So you’re not going to find any evidence of injury or bruising on the fingers or anything like that. Because the person is out of it, they’re not fighting back. You just put them under and hold them under without any problem. But you can’t prove that, you know? How can you prove that?”

As for Julia’s exceedingly high reported blood-alcohol level, the fact that she was an alcoholic would mean she’d have a very high tolerance. It wouldn’t be unusual for her to be functioning all night until the booze basically hit her like a ton of bricks. Wecht estimates that with her size and weight, it would take nine to 11 shots of hard liquor to get to a .4, and more drinks than that if she was drinking wine.

It’s true that in many drownings, the body “turns” facedown, due to what happens to the lungs and gaseous decomposition. However, in this case, there wouldn’t have been enough hours for that—particularly in the still water of a bath. Which would imply she died facedown. Zaferes cautions that police reports of “floating” rarely match the actual photos from crime scenes, and she’s investigated more than 900 bathtub deaths of adults. She says it usually means the dead are on their sides, with their heads submerged. If they’re truly “prone,” says Zaferes, “facedown, chest on the bottom of the tub, that would be unusual.” And a big red flag to investigators.

Chuck declined to share with me the photo Jaime took that morning (which, frankly, was a bit of a relief). But the way he describes it, Julia is prone, head down, with her knees bent underneath her, pulled into her chest—submerged in what looks to be about a foot of water.

Which leads us to how. Could Chuck Peruto, in particular, have harmed her? The great thing about text messages is, they can be traced precisely from where they were sent. The cops have Chuck Peruto’s cell phone records, and presumably the towers his messages pinged from. “I was in Avalon, period,” he says. The police also have his E-Z Pass records, which he says will show him leaving for the Shore Thursday night and returning Saturday morning. On the way down, he took the back roads, but he says he took the Expressway back when he got the call from Jaime. He would have to be incredibly clever to have had someone else drive his car through tollbooths at the right times (or make calls from his cell phone). He also seems to have a slew of alibi witnesses.

When I ask Chuck what he thinks the cops’ theory might be to implicate him, he answers instantly: “Had the Mob do it.” What? “Had the Mob do it,” he repeats. Jesus. “Yeah, that’s my reaction. If it wasn’t possible [that they could think this], I would laugh. The Mob would just do this for me ’cause I’m such a goombah.”

Not to mention why on earth he’d have wanted to. Chuck says he didn’t even know about M.B.—and thought he’d slain the dragon of Mark. But even if he had known, is that enough to drive back to Philly without a confrontation and kill your girlfriend in your bathtub?

And yet there’s a grand jury investigation.

And, since this is Philly, plenty of rumors and theories. When I first arrived in town in late June, it was hard to go anywhere without “the Chuck thing” coming up. It was Topic A from the coffee line at Metropolitan Bakery to the Palm to the toniest hair salons to, I was told, the shiva for Sharon Pinkenson’s dad, which anyone who was anyone in city power circles attended.

Which only hit home what a truly city scandal this was.

By early July, a particular rumor had taken on a life of its own, particularly among the Rittenhouse set: that a witness had seen Chuck leaving his home on Delancey at 8 a.m. that Saturday morning—two hours before Julia was found by Jaime. Even some who hated Chuck and heard this were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt (sort of): Could it be that he came home early in the morning, found her dead, and freaked out?

By the fifth or sixth time I heard about the “eyewitness,” my sources even claimed to know who the witness was. It was a high-profile Philadelphian—you’d know the name—and the tale of the 8 a.m. Chuck sighting soared through Rittenhouse like a forest fire. Only it turned out not to be true. Or, at least, not verifiable. (The cops say no such statement was given.)

That’s Philly for you.

Julia’s remains were obtained by her mother in mid-June. The family won’t comment on whether or where she was laid to rest, but from proceedings in Orphans’ Court and from what her father believes (though he hasn’t been told, either), she was likely cremated. She had said, according to her mother’s testimony, that was her wish. An unusual thing for a 26-year-old to be thinking about, but everything about the tragic tale of the girl in the bathtub is unusual.

When I ask Chuck about this, his voice catches. He seems even more distressed than when I told him about M.B. “Please don’t tell me they cremated her.” A long pause. I can hear what seems to be weeping coming through the phone. “I want to visit her,” he says, finally. “I want to go to her grave.”

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