



Her life as a man: *left*, Camilla Lyman as she appeared at the Winsor School in 1950, and, *right*, in later years, after dog steroids caused her to grow a mustache and lose her hair.



## The Case of the Missing, Cross-Dressing Brahmin Heiress **BY JOHN SEDGWICK**

How could it be that the daughter of a prominent Boston family could disappear and almost no one cared?

**I**n search of any last remnant of Camilla Lyman, the burly, cross-dressing Boston heiress and dog fancier who vanished nine years ago, I drove down Interstate 95 to her last known place of residence, in Hopkinton, Rhode Island. A friend of hers named George O'Neil said he had spoken to her by phone there on July 18, 1987, but the conversation ended when the line went dead. That wouldn't have been out of character for her. Never exactly normal, Lyman, then 54, had been acting increasingly erratic of late, possibly because of the powerful, bull-derived steroid hormones she'd been taking. Meant for dogs, the pills had thinned her short gray hair to a widow's peak, allowed her to grow a thick mustache and caused her voice, one friend said, "to drop down into the basement." With the transforma-

tion, she had legally changed her name to the more masculine-sounding Cam, and friends had started referring to her as "he."

When O'Neil drove over to check on her the next morning, he says, he found the telephone ripped off the wall, and Lyman's treasured attaché case was missing. Crammed with her family jewelry, cherished dog photographs and up to \$300,000 in cash, it normally went with her everywhere, and she even slept with it in her bed. Many of her dogs had been left unfed in their pens. O'Neil says he searched the grounds but turned up no sign of his friend. Despite these troubling circumstances, he did not call the police. He figured she had simply gone off. She often did that, he said.

If so, she has never returned, nor has she ever surfaced anywhere else. Last summer, after an exhaustive court (continued on page 252)

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(continued from page 238) proceeding, the state of Rhode Island finally declared her legally dead. That allowed O'Neil, who—in another curious development—emerged as the sole beneficiary of her will, to put her Hopkinton property up for sale.

It was a creepy story, the Lyman matter, but I was drawn to it for reasons that went beyond morbid curiosity. Camilla and I are kin, in a sense. My mother had gone to the Winsor School in Boston, the private school that all the Lyman girls attended. When I looked at Camilla's class list, I was surprised to see that I knew six of its fifty-eight members. More broadly, Camilla and I were both heirs of the grand Wasp tradition, but she provided an intriguing twist. Solitary, gruff, dog-loving, mannish, Camilla Lyman represented what literary critics call a "demonic parody" of the bossy, asexual female of the Wasp species. She was Barbara Bush on steroids.

In pushing these qualities to a subversive extreme, Camilla put herself dangerously at odds with the other great Wasp ideal of family. Theoretically all encompassing and all enduring, Wasp family values are represented by the house that stands proudly at the center of these families, big enough and strong enough to contain the sprawling generations. But the Lyman house in Westwood, Massachusetts, could not contain Camilla. She was so offensive that

Lyman property is mostly a rather forlorn bit of woods. As the wind blew through the bare trees, curved around her ghostly Victorian house, ruffled the water on the desolate little pond and tossed some leaves up against the chain-link fence surrounding the lavish \$525,000 kennel that used to hold her dogs, I was struck by how quiet everything was. It was not the silence of the graveyard, exactly, although there are plenty of grim stories about the possibility

sparkling blue countertops and shiny linoleum. The downstairs rooms were tight, empty spaces that I couldn't imagine had ever held such a lumbering figure as the nearly six-foot Camilla, especially with all her dogs dashing about underfoot. I checked for signs of the ripped-away phone, but all the house's telephones had been removed and any damage repaired. Upstairs, half doors and stained wall-to-wall carpets marked the two bedrooms where

some of the dogs had slept. I looked through closets, behind doors, in bathrooms. Nothing remained of Lyman, not even a hook where a picture might have hung.

The agent had still not arrived, so I ventured through a small hall door I hadn't noticed before. It led up some narrow, creaky stairs to a barn-like attic. Over by a far wall, set in a heap of odds and ends like so much trash, was a plastic crate filled with antique family photographs. I flipped through them quickly. Some of the photos were of her mother, the former Margaret Perkins Rice, whom I had heard Camilla always disliked. Most were of her father, Arthur Theodore Lyman, whom she adored. Supposedly, when Camilla was in full masculine regalia, she looked exactly like him.

There was only one thing of Camilla's own among these relics, a large silver trophy, awarding Best of Breed to her German short-haired pointer, Ricefields Jon, in 1958. He was Camilla's first champion dog,

named after the family mansion where she had been raised. In her will, she'd asked O'Neil to make "a suitable bequest or gift" in the dog's name from her estate to the American Kennel Club Museum of the Dog in St. Louis, but as yet he hasn't.

I first heard about the strange case of Camilla Lowell Lyman from her nephew Terry Lyman. He and I had been meeting for lunch once or twice a year for nearly a decade, for reasons that were never quite clear to me. He had read a book I had written about the foibles of young heirs and heiresses, and he announced in a peremptory way—one that is, I would later learn, a Lyman family hallmark—that he and I should have lunch. And so we did. He was a tallish, slightly gangly fellow a few years older than I, with a Boston lockjaw accent and a pleasant sense of humor.

He first told me the Camilla story sometime in 1994. He related it in the abstract, without mentioning names. He simply



Camilla in full masculine regalia as the Valley Kennel Club awards her dog the New Champion ribbon in 1986

**Camilla Lyman represented what literary critics call a "demonic parody" of the bossy, asexual female of the Wasp species. She was Barbara Bush on steroids.**

the Lymans tried to cast her out; and when she finally left on her own, she entered a social oblivion that made her ultimate disappearance merely a formality.

After I decided to pose as a prospective buyer of the Hopkinton estate, the asking price of which had plummeted to \$399,000, the real estate agent had me on the grounds seemingly in minutes. The caretaker opened up the place for me and then let me look around by myself while she waited in her car. The agent would be along shortly, so I had to hurry if I wanted to snoop around unobserved. Forty-two acres altogether, the

that Lyman's body might be buried somewhere on the grounds. (In one of the more Hitchcockian variations, it is said to have been passed through her meat grinder and fed to her dogs.) It was more the silence you hear when you pose a question and wait for an answer that does not come.

After a glance around the grounds, I made straight for the house, sure that was the place to hold any remaining secrets. But the interior had obviously been given an industrial-strength cleaning. Although Lyman had always been a wretched housekeeper, the kitchen was spotless, with

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wanted to know if I found it interesting, which I did. I thought it astounding that an heiress could simply disappear—without getting a rise out of the tabloids at the very least. Almost two years passed before he filled me in on the details. There were legal aspects to the case that had to be cleared up first, he said. The family had been attempting to have Camilla declared legally dead—and, simultaneously, to keep George O'Neil, as her beneficiary, from inheriting Camilla's portion of three substantial family trusts once she was. The matter had involved countless lawyers for the family and two private investigators and had burned up hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees. But the legal marathon finally concluded, and earlier this year, Terry invited me to meet him at his antique-filled waterfront apartment to tell me a little more about his aunt.

I had heard that Camilla had possessed as much as \$6 million to \$11 million, and I was curious to know where it had come from. "It isn't from any one source," Terry said with an airy wave of the hand. "It's just there." Actually, as I later learned, the history of the Lyman family fortune is largely the history of Boston business, as it goes all

the way back to the fur trade with John Jacob Astor in the early 1700s.

After three centuries of inherited prosperity within the Lyman family, Camilla was born in 1932, the youngest of four children. She was called Butch by the family, but only because she was always so big and brawny. She shone at sports at Winsor, but classmates were put off by her shy, wallflower manner and occasionally explosive temper. Camilla's emotional trouble was gradually exacerbated, rather than eased, by her family's social position. The Lymans had certain standards to maintain, and when they couldn't, they pretended to. And when they couldn't pretend any longer, it was too late. Now that she appears to be gone for good, the family may feel it's all for the best. "I think their worst nightmare is that Camilla should turn up alive someplace," says one longtime family friend. "None of them ever got along with her. What would they do with her?"

Camilla went on to Hollins College in Virginia but dropped out after a year and returned to live with her parents. She soon drifted into her lifelong habit of staying up all night and sleeping through the day. She bickered constantly with her mother, a

proper old-Bostonian who was nicknamed Mousie because she was anything but. Her father tried to smooth things over by buying Camilla a show dog named Bombi. That one dog led quickly to many. She insisted on keeping all the dogs in the house with her, uproarious as that must have been for her parents, who routinely dressed for dinner and often entertained the social and political elite of Massachusetts.

Camilla's father died of lung cancer in 1968, and Camilla plunged into mourning. She started wearing her father's shirts for comfort. Gradually, she edged further into masculine territory. She dressed like a man on top, with a shirt, tie and blazer, and like a woman below, with a skirt and stockings. And she began to reveal a physical attraction toward other women. She once went over to a female friend's house and, learning that she was in the bath, charged right up into the bathroom to stare at her as she lay in the tub. "She absolutely devoured me with her eyes," the friend said. "I felt I was being ravished."

Her mother couldn't deal with her anymore. She bought a small ranch house for Camilla across the street and made plans to sell the big house and move to a little place

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in nearby Dedham. The strain may have proved too much for her, though, and she died suddenly, in 1973, of a heart attack before she could enact her plan. Her siblings insisted Camilla move into the ranch house anyway, but she soon set fire to the kitchen while cooking dinner for her dogs. She moved back to the big house and, with her inheritance, bought it from her mother's estate. By then she'd started snitching her neighbors' pets and taking in strays, and pretty soon a horde of dogs and cats was roaming Ricefields like so many rats. The health department was called in, but Camilla didn't care. When the roof started to leak, she moved into a camper and lived there for months.

By 1983 she'd had it with Westwood. She had befriended George O'Neil and his wife, June, at a dog show in Maine some years before. As O'Neil tells it, she called him up one day frantic because she'd interrupted a burglary at her house and was too scared to live there any longer. He helped her move to Rhode Island, and in October 1984, she signed over a power

her. Her absence might have gone unnoticed for years if it hadn't been for an old family friend who had always received a card and a poinsettia from Camilla at Christmas. But Christmas 1987 had come and gone without anything from Camilla. The woman's daughter phoned Camilla's sister Edith Kuhn in California. Edith didn't seem concerned or even interested. "Do you want someone to take all that family money that some ancestor worked so hard for?" the woman's daughter pressed her. That registered with Edith, who conferred with Camilla's other sister, Mary-Margaret Goodale, in Maine. Goodale called the

sachusetts, to hunt for her. Founded by ex-FBI officers in 1947, MCI specializes in the location of missing persons, and it had succeeded in finding more than 8,000, never once failing to get its person.

When Allen first heard about the Lyman matter, he figured it would take a day or two to resolve, a week at the outside, even though Belin had only a post-office box for an address and a rudimentary description of Camilla. Allen is still at it today. An overgrown college kid with thick, tousled hair, Allen, now 44, has surprisingly little of the world-weariness that Chandler and Hammett have taught us to expect from private

eyes. His most salient characteristic, aside from the bulging Windsor knot on his necktie, is tenacity. He has billed \$33,000 on the Lyman case and left unbilled more than \$60,000 of his personal time. "I guess it's become an ego thing, a kind of crusade," he tells me as he picks at a Caesar salad in a Boston restaurant. "Of all the people involved—the family, the lawyers—I sometimes feel that I am the only person who really cares about Cam Lyman. And it's been very tough to let it go." Of course, he wouldn't mind removing the only un-

solved case on the firm's record, either.

A check of Camilla's dog licenses at the Hopkinton town hall quickly revealed an address and phone number on Collins Road. The house was empty, the shades drawn, when Allen drove by that afternoon. Knowing Camilla was nocturnal, he returned that night and found a couple of people there, although neither of them fit Camilla's description. When he called the house a few days later, a deep, gruff voice answered. Allen asked for Camilla. "She's not here," the person answered. "What do you want?" Allen replied that he had some documents that she needed to sign, which was near enough to the truth. "Well, she's not here," the person repeated and hung up. Allen thought that was a strange way to refer to someone who hadn't been seen for over a year and who owned that very house. Odder still, when he raced down to the house to see who had answered the phone, he didn't find a soul. "I thought that might be Cam," he says now. "I'd heard she was moody." But if it had been, where was she?

Curious about Camilla's relationship to George O'Neil, whom Belin knew had power of attorney for her, Allen called



The lavish \$625,000 kennel Camilla used in Hopkinton to hold her dogs

## When Camilla disappeared that July day in 1987, no one missed her. Her absence might have gone unnoticed for years if it hadn't been for an old family friend.

of attorney to him, possibly to allow him to make the transaction on her behalf. She was in bad shape. A real estate agent who dealt with her said that Camilla would "run and hide" whenever she came around to discuss the sale of the Westwood house. In the end, a developer bought Ricefields for \$650,000 and renovated the house from top to bottom but still couldn't get the stink out of it.

When Camilla moved to Hopkinton, she might as well have gone to another country. Westwood was hardly a bustling metropolis, but at least there were people she saw fairly regularly. In Hopkinton she had few friends other than George O'Neil. When she disappeared that July day in 1987, no one missed

lawyers at the old-line Boston firm of Choate, Hall and Stewart who served as trustees for the largest of the three trusts that were dispensing, altogether, \$75,000 a year in dividends to Camilla. (She may have received additional money from one or more New York-based trusts that have never been located.) "Apparently, they never bothered to check to see if their client was alive," the daughter says crisply.

The lawyers discovered that, sure enough, their checks had for many months been endorsed not by Camilla's signature but merely by a bank-account number. But it wasn't until August 1988 that G. d'Andelot Belin, the lead lawyer for the Lyman trust, called in Charles John Allen, president of Management Consultants, Inc., of Lexington, Mas-

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O'Neil at his house in North Kingstown, twenty miles northeast of Hopkinton. Allen pretended to be interested in buying a Clumber spaniel, a breed that both O'Neil and Camilla favored. Before she disappeared, Camilla had won a number of major competitions with a Clumber named Raycoft Sheriff. Yet when Allen gradually swung the conversation around to the subject of Camilla Lyman, he was surprised that O'Neil downplayed her skills as both a breeder and a handler of dogs. More puzzling, Allen was pretty sure he recognized O'Neil's voice from his calls to Camilla's house.

When Allen and an associate named John Corrigan visited O'Neil to conduct a formal interview and ask him more pointedly about Camilla's whereabouts, O'Neil quickly grew agitated. "I've never seen a person so nervous," Allen says. "He didn't know what we knew, and I think that scared him." In a roundabout fashion, O'Neil explained about Camilla's departure and recounted a bit of their last conversation. Camilla apparently had been furious that, because of a Canadian postal strike, her application to a show in New Brunswick had not been received in time. Since O'Neil handled all her

business affairs, including the mailing of applications, she blamed him for the snafu. Oddly, O'Neil did not tell Allen that, when he went to the house, he found the phone ripped off the wall. That detail did not emerge until the probate-court hearing in 1994. But O'Neil did drop a tantalizing possibility: his belief that Camilla might have gone off to have a sex-change operation.

Allen did his best to check that out over the next year and a half. The transsexual network is only a little less secretive than the Mafia, but as close as Allen could determine, no more than five female-to-male sexual transformations involving individuals over 40 had occurred from the time of Camilla's disappearance in July 1987 to the end of 1988 at any authorized medical facility in the world. None of them fit Camilla's description.

The more Allen considered the matter, however, the more dubious he became that Camilla would undergo a sex change. Camilla had a near pathological aversion to doctors. She hadn't shown up for a routine gynecological exam in decades. Now she was supposed to have submitted to the most invasive surgery imaginable? Besides, even if

she had had the operation, there would have been no reason she couldn't return to her life in Hopkinton afterward, since most of the dog world already considered her a man. She had appeared on TV with a mustache at the Westminster Dog Show in Madison Square Garden—much to the amazement of her sister Edith, who happened to be watching.

O'Neil did not respond to Allen's skepticism, however; he simply suggested another scenario: He thought Camilla might have gone off with a lover, and he dropped the name of a longtime American Kennel Club employee to whom Camilla had once given a \$1,500 brooch. When Allen found the woman, however, she downplayed any relationship with Camilla and, more important, knew nothing about where Camilla might be.

Then there was a possible connection to a friend in Pennsylvania. Allen never did determine the friend's gender. "We think he's a man who sometimes dresses as a woman," he says now, uncertainly. Camilla had been sending the friend money since the late '70s, and she had visited him or her regularly. This became significant in 1989, after Pennsylvania police reported that the heavily decomposed remains of a body of approximately

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Camilla's height and build had been discovered by hunters near a road outside Philadelphia in late October 1987. "I really thought that might be it," Allen says now. Since the body was little more than a skeleton, the medical examiner couldn't determine the gender. Fourteen teeth were missing from the skull, but that, surprisingly, didn't rule Camilla out or in, since she had avoided dentists along with all other doctors. The family considered running a DNA analysis to compare the Jane (or John) Doe with Camilla Lyman and went so far as to consult with Cellmark Diagnostics, a leading DNA laboratory that would later do some of the genetic sequencing in the O.J. Simpson case. Curiously, although the skull had been retained by the medical examiner, Cellmark determined that the rest of the body would have to be exhumed to get a usable DNA sample. Then, to compare it with the DNA of Camilla Lyman, one of her parents would have to be exhumed, since no trace of Camilla's own ge-

netic material could be found anywhere. Allen searched Camilla's house with a magnifying glass when he finally obtained access to it but, despite a careful examination of Camilla's hats and caps, couldn't find a single hair. While the family was considering how to proceed, a forensic artist rendered a possible face, and the police distributed the sketch to the family. It showed a cold, thuglike individual. Mary-Margaret Goodale, who hadn't seen her sister in person for over a decade, placed it on her kitchen table for a week and simply couldn't decide. In their uncertainty, the Lyman family consulted a purported forensic expert named Frank Bender, known for his appearances on *America's Most Wanted*, who projected a photographic image of Camilla onto the skull and declared that it was no match. Allen was not entirely convinced, but Bender's opinion persuaded Camilla's siblings that the chance of a positive outcome was slight enough that it wasn't worth disturbing the dead to obtain their DNA. Without a definite identification, Allen slipped back into uncertainty. "I couldn't say it was Cam, and I couldn't say it wasn't."

It was unclear how Camilla might have gotten to Pennsylvania, even if one takes the

possible connection to a friend into account. Human beings do not simply dematerialize and then rematerialize several months later, 250 miles away. They leave traces of themselves en route—credit-card receipts, telephone records and the like. After twenty-three years in the business, Allen can follow these paper trails like a bloodhound. Having searched a variety of databases, he can now say with almost absolute certainty that no one with Camilla's name or Social Security number used a credit card, purchased property, passed through customs, acquired a driver's license, traveled by airplane, opened a bank account or made any other significant financial transaction anywhere in the United States after July 19, 1987. Even if Camilla had disappeared with an attaché case full of cash, it is doubtful, given her rate of spending, that even \$300,000 would have kept her very long or that someone wouldn't have surfaced by now with a story about a nearly six-foot transvestite with a wad of bills.

**Even if Camilla had disappeared with an attaché case full of cash, it is doubtful that someone wouldn't have surfaced by now with a story about a nearly six-foot transvestite with a wad of bills.**

Might she have changed her identity completely? O'Neil claimed that Lyman had some books on the subject. But even so, Allen believes that it takes a higher-up in the CIA to pull off a total ID makeover, since that requires severing every last tie with one's past. Lyman's web of associations was more tenuous than most, but still it would have meant giving up the few family friends to whom she had always been loyal, the dogs she obviously loved and her many colleagues in the dog world. Her attachment to the shows was so strong that, in her will, she asked that her cremated remains be scattered over Madison Square Garden during the Westminster Dog Show. Thinking he might spot her under another name at a show, Allen attended several and twice saw individuals who were, he says, the "spitting image" of Camilla Lyman. Neither of them, however, proved to be her.

As the investigation proceeded, Allen found himself coming back again and again to the role of George O'Neil in the whole affair. Although he described himself as Lyman's closest friend, O'Neil demonstrated remarkably little interest in finding her.

While he did not call the police the day he discovered her missing, he did call his lawyer, Robert Ragosta, up in Cranston. Ragosta, as it happens, also possessed power of attorney for Lyman. Although O'Neil assured Camilla's brother, Ted Lyman, in a big meeting attended by the lawyers for all the parties in November 1988, that he would file a missing person's report for Camilla, he never did as he promised. With some annoyance, Lyman had to file the report with the Hopkinton police himself. Around that time, more than a year after Camilla's disappearance, O'Neil hired a private investigator named Joel Picchi to track her down. Yet Picchi says O'Neil seemed unconcerned with his progress for a long time thereafter. "Clients are usually breaking down my door for reports, but that was not the case with O'Neil," Picchi told me. "He never called me at all." Nor was he particularly helpful in furnishing the information, such as Lyman's telephone records, necessary to conduct the investigation, says Picchi.

According to Allen, there were also a number of financial irregularities in matters pertaining to O'Neil's use of his power of attorney. Such a power is supposed to be used solely to represent the interests of the individual who confers it. When Allen checked into the activity of Lyman's account at the local Citizens Bank and her Merrill Lynch money-market account, he discovered that, for several years, checks signed by O'Neil for amounts from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars had been written to individuals with no apparent connection to Lyman. Also, O'Neil's lifestyle improved significantly around the time of Lyman's disappearance. He came to one dog show by chauffeur-driven limousine, and he and his wife started taking extended trips to Europe.

Although a Massachusetts attorney appointed to represent Lyman's interests repeatedly asked for an accounting of O'Neil's payments on Lyman's behalf, O'Neil never furnished one. Relying on information provided by Lyman's various financial institutions, however, the attorney concluded a recent report to a Massachusetts court: "It would appear that Ragosta and O'Neil have nearly depleted Cam's personal assets." O'Neil has never revealed the original power-of-attorney document itself, which Allen has been seeking for years to determine if Lyman's signature is genuine. (Copies of the document show that the signature varies from other samples of her handwriting.) The copy is remarkable enough. Robert Ragosta is the notary on both O'Neil's document and his own—something that even the cautious d'Andelot Belin was moved to call "crazy." O'Neil's

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document was witnessed solely by his father-in-law; the name of the Ragosta witness is illegible.

To get some answers, I needed to call on George O'Neil myself. I had first tried on a trip to Rhode Island in mid-March, but I had arrived after dark, and my courage failed me. The house is well off the road, down a narrow drive that is bounded by a building on one side and a fence on the other. I could hear his dogs growling in the distance, and the whole setup was unnerving. When I returned the next morning, I found the place to be a tight compound of two smallish houses looking out onto about twenty dog runs. It was a little piece of Dogpatch compared with Lyman's extensive spread. I knocked on the O'Neils' door, and a house sitter said the couple would be in England until later in the month.

When I came back ten days later, O'Neil's wife, June, showed up at the door with three or four yipping spaniels. When I explained

I tried another approach. "I gather you're her beneficiary."

"Of what?" he replied, lighting up. "There is nothing. Not after the bills are paid. Everything else is in a trust." He was referring to Camilla's portion of the family trusts that he'd agreed not to go after—so long as the family didn't go after what he'd already gotten. He knew I knew that, and I knew he knew. There was no point pursuing it.

"But you also have power of attorney."

"That's right."

"How did you get that, anyway?" I tried to find a winningly casual tone, but I might as well have served him with a subpoena.

"She was afraid to go to court on something else, so I handled it for her."

This was the first I'd heard that the power of attorney had stemmed from any court case. Previously, he'd said it was used in the selling of the Westwood house. I asked what the "something else" was.

He shot me a dismissive glance. "Good

ing Lyman's disappearance as described by Mr. O'Neil are sketchy, and his actions for a long period of time are unsettling." She concluded darkly: "It is not in the realm of common experience for over a year to go by without the closest associates of a person calling for an investigation as to his/her unknown whereabouts and condition."

Why, given the obvious irregularities of the case, have the police never investigated? I put the question to Chief Weeden. He said that there was no *corpus delicti*, or clear evidence of a crime, and that no one close to Lyman had stepped up to claim that one had been committed. He added that any evidence there might be of a crime in July 1987 dwindles with each passing day. "Two, three years after the fact, what have you got?" Weeden asked. Allen tried to interest federal and state investigators without success. For all his own suspicions, he was beginning to despair that the many peculiarities of the Lyman case would ever be properly examined when an IRS official called him in April 1995 to say he was looking into O'Neil's financial dealings in connection with his power-of-attorney privileges. "After all the time I'd put in, that came as a big relief," Allen says. The investigation has gone on now for over a year and a half. Although the IRS does not comment officially on ongoing investigations, one of the tax men on the case initially told Allen that the work was "productive," but at press time, the agent had come to doubt that the IRS would end up taking action against O'Neil. Despite the information Allen had provided, the IRS had apparently concluded that there was not enough documentary evidence to prove O'Neil had diverted Lyman's funds for his own benefit. "The money went somewhere," Allen insists. "I find the IRS's attitude troubling and demoralizing."

The financial aspect, however, was only one part of the story. There was another aspect, and for that, I had one more question to ask George O'Neil. I hadn't dared to put it to him there, in person, in his little house, so far from the street. I decided to wait until I was safely home and could speak to him by telephone. I'd spent some time pondering precisely how I would phrase my question, since it was such an awkward thing to ask. When I called, I settled on this: I told O'Neil that several people close to the case believed he knew more about the disappearance than he was saying. "And frankly," I wound up, "they think you may have murdered Camilla Lyman yourself."

"Oh, that's nice," O'Neil replied sarcastically. "That's very good." Then his voice gained an edge: "If somebody says that and you attach a name to it, I'd be happy to sue the hell out of them. Would you like to start?"

### Why have the police never investigated? There was no clear evidence of a crime, no one close to Lyman had claimed that one had been committed, and any evidence there might be dwindles with each passing day.

my business, she reluctantly let me in. The house was cramped and airless. Dog mementos covered the walls. O'Neil was sitting wearily in a comfortable chair with his legs on an ottoman as he watched a World War II documentary on cable. He was tall and somewhat haggard, with dark hair, a wide mouth and a blasé manner that verged on the smug. June told me how "appalled" Cam would be if she knew I was there asking nosy questions about her. "That's why she put up that fence, you know," she said, glowering at me. "She didn't want to be bothered by other people." I was tempted to tell her I thought Lyman was past being bothered, but I didn't want to be difficult. When I tried to direct my questions at George, June jumped in to answer for him. Fortunately, the phone rang, and June answered it in the kitchen, leaving George and me alone. He continued to recline in his chair, his eyes fixed on the TV, while I stood beside him, his spaniels swishing around my ankles.

"Do you think Cam is still alive?" I began, gently.

"I don't know," O'Neil said gruffly, reaching for a cigarette. "She was over 21. She did what she wanted."

try," he said dryly. "That's nothing of any concern to you."

When I asked about Ragosta's power of attorney, he explained that Ragosta was Lyman's lawyer. But why did she give him such sweeping power?

"Because she chose to," he responded firmly, pausing slightly between each word.

He also said that he had given an accounting of his use of the power of attorney to "the court" (he didn't say which court, but any accounting of it would be news to Lyman's Massachusetts attorney) and that Ragosta did file a missing-persons report with Hopkinton's police chief, George Weeden (although Weeden doesn't remember getting one from him). Then a car pulled into his driveway, and he said I had to go. "I've got to go to work to make some money." And that was it.

I was not the only one to whom O'Neil responded in such an evasive and contradictory fashion. Charles Allen had found him a tangle of inconsistencies. And after O'Neil had testified in the probate-court hearing, Judge Linda Urso declared that "the testimony of Mr. O'Neil is not wholly credible" and added that "the circumstances surround-

## Crime

I told him I'd just as soon not be sued, and to my surprise, his tone moderated slightly. "I'm sure there are a couple of people who think that," he admitted. "But the family thinks they've found the body."

That caught me out for a moment, until I realized he was referring to the corpse in Pennsylvania. "There seems to be some confusion about that one," I told him.

"Who's confused? You?"

"The investigators," I said, "among others."

"Talk to the family, then," O'Neil said breezily. "They're the ones who identified the body."

I told him that if he meant Mary-Margaret Goodale, she had never done any such thing. According to the summary of the probate-court proceeding, the only version of her testimony available among the public documents, she remained uncertain. "She said there [was] never any final determination made as to the identity of the body found in [Pennsylvania]," the summary put it. O'Neil

than Camilla, with a shock of gray hair and lively eyes. I told her I wanted to ask about the whole mystery involving her sister. I braced myself, sure she would order me off the property, but to my surprise, she eased herself out the door, carefully keeping the dogs inside, and sat down with me on her front doorstep to talk.

She had never really known her sister, she confessed, largely because Camilla was six years younger. When she had left home, Camilla was "perfectly attractive and affable." If she later turned sour, Mary-Margaret was not there to witness the transformation. Camilla had visited a few times in Maine, pulling up in a station wagon with several dogs. A certain estrangement had set in, she knew, but it seemed acceptable to both sides. Those visits ended long ago. Mary-Margaret thought that her sister had never gotten over the anger she must have felt at her father's death. "He was just a lovely man," she said, smiling at the memory.

### How could Camilla Lyman have become so thoroughly repulsive that, despite her fortune and her family name, she could disappear from the face of the earth and scarcely be missed by anyone?

then suggested it might have been Edith Kuhn who had made the identification. But Edith didn't testify at the hearing. O'Neil told me I needed to check the court record. Before hanging up, he added one last envoi. "You're an irritating bunch," he said.

In referring to the marked indifference of Lyman's "closest associates" to her disappearance, Judge Urso was alluding not only to O'Neil but also to Lyman's siblings. O'Neil's motivation I thought I understood, but the surviving sisters' puzzled me. In some ways, they were doubly responsible—first for letting their sister pass out of their lives and then for appearing not to care once she was gone from the world entirely. I'd been reluctant to speak to them because I had been told many times by Terry Lyman and other relations that they were deeply private people who were adamantly opposed to talking with reporters about their sister's disappearance.

Determined to press the issue, I flew to Brooklin, Maine, to see Mary-Margaret Goodale, the sister to whom, according to Terry, Camilla was closer. Mary-Margaret was a sprightly woman, considerably smaller

Mary-Margaret hinted that some acrimony over the division of her mother's estate may have severed relations with her siblings for good. "Camilla wanted everything to stay the same, but of course it couldn't," she said. Once the estate was settled in the mid-'70s, she never saw her sister again.

When Mary-Margaret first learned of Camilla's disappearance, she wrote her a letter, to assure her that what she termed her "lifestyle," which she'd known about from friends, was not a barrier between them. She sent the letter certified mail to make sure it reached her. The green receipt card came back, signed by O'Neil or Ragoosta, she says. Her brother, Ted, headed up the family's effort to find out what had happened to Camilla, but Mary-Margaret admits that the task wasn't his highest priority. When Ted died of an aortal aneurysm in 1993, neither Mary-Margaret nor Edith took over from him.

Mary-Margaret has been convinced since 1989 that her sister is dead. She does not know how Camilla died, nor, frankly, does she care to. "I never felt it was my business," she said. "I felt it was Camilla's business." Even if there was foul play? "It's past," she

said quietly. "I'm not saying that's the right attitude. But it's very much my attitude." After all this time, she simply wanted "closure" on the case. "I want to be able to put a headstone on a grave," she said.

Now, with the decision by the Hopkinton probate court to declare Camilla Lyman legally dead, she can do that. It is a tradition in the Lyman family for individual grave-stones to be carved with an insignia that symbolizes the deceased. Camilla's father, for example, has a tree, since he was an ardent conservationist; her brother, the fisherman, has a fish. Camilla's has the head of a German short-haired pointer. Earlier this year, it was put in place, with no body below, beside her father's headstone in the family plot in Westwood. "I feel so good about that," Mary-Margaret said. "It just seemed right."

The case may be closed in Mary-Margaret's mind, but it is not in Charles Allen's. Determined to eliminate every last possibility that Lyman might be alive, he continues to attend dog shows on the off chance of finding her at one. Indeed, he spent months tracking down yet another Lyman lookalike at a Rhode Island event earlier this summer, ultimately concluding the woman was not Camilla. He has also looked into the possibility she might be living under an assumed name in Hampton, New Hampshire. There were some canceled checks from Lyman's account paying real estate and auto excise taxes up there, and a woman of the same name as the one in Hampton was the recipient of some medical services that were paid for from Lyman's account after the disappearance. Unfortunately, Allen's latest information is that the Hampton woman has been there for twenty years, virtually eliminating the possibility that she is secretly Camilla. Allen is also tracking some of Camilla's antiques that he thinks O'Neil may have possession of and possibly sold. But if he does uncover the fate of Camilla's property, it is doubtful he will ever learn what happened to her. With the apparent collapse of the IRS's interest, and with Terry Lyman the only living member of the family to express much curiosity about his aunt's whereabouts, it is unlikely that sufficient pressure will be brought to bear on O'Neil to reveal all he knows. Still, even he will not be able to resolve the larger mystery of Camilla Lowell Lyman—namely, how she became so thoroughly repulsive that, despite her fortune and her family name, she could disappear from the face of the earth and scarcely be missed by anyone. ●

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