



DEVIL'S CONCUBINE

A HAUNTING AND TWISTED TALE
OF MURDER

Carla Landreth



In a small Texas community, a woman is found murdered and scalped. Homicide Detective Gavin Reece believes the case to be cult related but soon realizes nothing is what it seems. Reece will uncover a killer's seven year slaughtering and discover the murderer is preying on one of their own. On a deadly collision course, Reece will do the unthinkable to catch a killer.

Devil's Concubine

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First Edition

Chapter 6

He liked nights to be like this where he didn't need to depend on a lantern or flashlight to help him. The transparent blue moonlight made him calm and not feel as if he had to hurry to dig. He could take his time. Once he dug the shallow grave, he reached over and picked up the large clear plastic-wrapped body and tossed her in like a piece of trash, but making sure her face would be facing the eastern sun of the morning.

He did spend one moment, like a moment of silence, to look back on his fresh kill. He wished she'd worn that pretty green outfit she had on the day he bumped into her. It went so well with her ash blonde hair. But you don't always get what you want. The blue outfit was okay. She was such an easy person to talk with, yet she was hell to get. Even after she offered to take the money, she refused to roll down the window enough for him to give it to her. But with a little coaxing and his charming ways, she rolled down the window, and that's all it took--gaining her trust.

He figured it wouldn't be long and he would read in the paper that a thirty-three-year-old single woman who worked for a medical billing company was missing. Everyone would be looking for her, but he'd be the only one who would know where she was.

Soon his moment of thought was completed. He grabbed the shovel and began covering the shallow grave. Afterwards he would pick up a smooth gray stone and place it for a headstone.

* * *

Gavin stood staring at the dry erase board. Richmond had his arms crossed, frowning while Costner, still a bit confused, tried his best to see what they were looking at.

"The only link between Barb Nielsen and Bill Crummel is The New York Experience Salon," Gavin said.

"But neither Borge nor Burke ever went to The New York Experience Salon," Richmond said.

"Maybe the other two are connected, and we just don't know it. I mean, Borge and Burke, a college student, could have tried this place and nobody knew about it."

"But still I doubt if they have The New York Experience Salon in common. We're looking at different classes of people here and, let's face it, Borge could barely pay for the daily bills, much less an upscale salon," Richmond said.

"Maybe somebody treated her," Costner said. "You know, like a girl's thing. Sometimes Tiffany goes out with her friends and they go somewhere, you know, special. A place men aren't supposed to go, a place that they normally don't go but only once in a while to treat themselves."

They were quiet for a moment. "The kid could be right," Richmond said.

"Let's not forget the tanning. We know for a fact Crummel and Burke both tanned with special tanning oil. We need to find more about that," Gavin said.

"It's certainly not the run-of-a-mill kind. Tiffany uses some when she goes to the tanning bed that smells like marijuana. Anyway, according to Tiffany, only certain places sell it. That's why she has to have it," Costner said.

"Then checking into the tanning oil may be something we need to look into," Richmond commented.

Gavin gathered the pictures of each of the victims and placed them into a folder. He wasn't sure if he was getting mad

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because Richmond thought Costner came up with the idea or the fact that's what Gavin was trying to point out. In either case it made him mad, and he wasn't going to sit by and let the new guy take credit for something he was implying.

"Where are you going?" Richmond asked.

"I'm going to The New York Experience Salon--see if the staff ever saw our victims."

"Then you can take Costner with you, and I'll see if Burke or Borge ever had a girl's day out," Richmond said.

"Fine." Gavin grabbed his jacket and the file and started out of the office, but realized that Costner wasn't with him. "Are you coming?"

"Yeah, I'm coming," Costner said.

The New York Experience Salon was exactly what it implied, a cosmopolitan atmosphere filled with chrome, leather and glass. There were some soft features such as plants, but nothing much else. However, it was inviting, with the table in the middle of the reception area. Not only was coffee, tea and water served, but if desired wine with your muffins, cheese and crackers, something Costner found interesting. Also on the table were various business cards of the staff and other businesses obviously the salon used, such as Mirage Wig Company and Fancy Face makeup artists.

Fredrick Duncan, the manager, came out greeting them with a big smile. His blue pinstriped suit with a pale pink shirt underneath said it all for Gavin as the man began talking.

"Hello, I'm Fredrick Duncan. I was told you wanted to speak to me?" he said, examining them closely.

Gavin showed him his badge. "Detective Gavin Reece. Is there some place we could talk more privately?"

Mr. Duncan glanced around the room full of customers. He made a motion with his fingers.

"I have an office. Follow me."

Gavin and Costner followed him to the small office, which was more like the front of the salon.

"Would you gentlemen like something to eat or drink?" he asked.

Gavin declined, but Costner took the offer.

"Now, what can I help you with?" He sat at his desk.

"How long have you been manager of this salon?" Gavin asked.

"Well, I've owned and operated this place for the last ten years."

"Is it expensive?" Costner inquired, sipping his coffee.

"It's not cheap, but you'll see that I can accommodate any budget. Are you interested in becoming a client?"

"Well, I was thinking of my wife. Mother's Day," he said to Gavin.

Gavin pulled out the pictures in the file.

"Do you know this person?" Gavin showed him the first picture.

"Yes, Bill Crummel. He was an interesting customer. He paid with cash only. I thought that was odd. But who am I to turn down cash?" He smiled at Costner.

"What about this person?" Gavin asked.

"Yes, Barb Nielsen. I bet nobody knew she dyed her hair. I can fool the best."

"Did you just dye their hair?" Gavin asked.

"Uh, let me see." He punched a few keys. "I put all my clients, new and former, on the computer. It makes life so much easier. Here we go. Bill Crummel; oh yes, he had the deluxe treatment. He tanned with our special tanning oil, had the male

Brazilian wax, chest wax, leg wax, and brow wax, hair done, pedicure and manicure.”

“He did that every month?” Costner inquired.

“Yes. He was meticulous about his grooming habits.”

“What about Barb Nielsen?” Gavin asked.

He punched a few more keys, and her profile came up on the computer.

“Barb was a little more picky. Her hair was done, so nobody, not even her husband, could tell she dyed it. Black number 56. She had the normal bikini wax, brow wax, and leg wax, manicure and pedicures, nail polish Crimson Red.”

“No tanning?”

“No, she had a bad scare once. She thought she had skin cancer. Turned out it wasn’t, but Barb never would tan after that. Even gave her a free sample hoping it would change her mind,” Mr. Duncan said.

“Free sample of what?” Gavin asked.

“Tanning oil. Tropical look in a bottle, I call it. Can give you the golden look without having to sit on the beach and burn your buns for it.”

“What’s it called?” Gavin asked. “The tanning oil?”

“Endless Ibis Tanning Oil. It cost--”

“Fifty dollars a bottle,” Costner interrupted.

“Very good, detective. I see you know your oils.”

“My wife loves Endless Ibis Tanning Oil. I myself think it stinks. Have to admit the result is real nice, especially at fifty dollars a pop,” Costner said.

Mr. Duncan reached inside his desk and brought out a voucher, signed it, then handed it to Costner.

“Here you go, Detective. The next time your wife needs more tanning oil, you have her bring this by and she can have a free twelve-ounce bottle of Endless Ibis Tanning Oil. That’s

also good for a free tanning as well. How about you, Detective Reece, would you like a voucher?"

"No, thank you," Gavin answered as he pulled out the other two victims' photos. "Do you know any of these people?"

Mr. Duncan looked over the pictures. "I've never seen them. They certainly aren't any of my clients."

Gavin put the photos back into the file.

"You talk with your clients. I bet you're like a therapist to them," Gavin said. "You hear all sorts of things."

"Of course. I'm a lot cheaper than those therapists, plus you get to look pretty when it's over."

"Did Crummel or Nielsen ever mention they were having troubles?" Gavin inquired.

Duncan smiled. "Everybody has troubles. But the kind you're looking for was never mentioned. Nielsen was having trouble with Latham, the trumped-up queer. Apparently he's a bossy sort of individual. I should know; he's one of my clients. The only trouble Crummel had was which outfit he should wear. He was a little obsessed with his looks."

"I don't know much about hair dye, but you have a supplier, correct?" Gavin asked.

"Yes, our supplier can get us shampoos, mousse, hair dyes, anything we need and any brand we want."

There was a small knock on his door, and a young man peeked into the office.

"Mrs. Smith is here, and she wants you now," he said.

"I'm on my way. I'm sorry I have to get to that. Mrs. Smith is particular about her hair color and, well, I'm the only one who can do it. Is there anything else?"

"Yes, could I have a list of all the employees who were working at the time Crummel and Nielsen came to you and your supplier, if you don't mind," Gavin said.

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"Of course, I'll have my assistant get it for you."

Mr. Duncan left as Gavin sat there. Costner was ready to leave, but stopped and looked at him.

"Are we ready?" Costner asked.

"Can I see that voucher for a moment?" Gavin took it and examined it.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I have a feeling we're missing something." He handed the voucher back to him. "Where did Burke go?"

Costner opened his notebook and looked. "Serenity Spa."

* * *

Inside Serenity Spa was an explosion of college girls. Blondes in shorts and tight Serenity Spa tank tops moved about the room attending to customers. The annoying laugh with preppy attitudes added to Gavin's dislike of them. Normally, in the past, Gavin would find the scenery interesting, but this time he just took it in stride. Costner, however, needed to be watched. Flirting could lead to something else with this place. Costner, being naïve, needed to be watched like a little brother. Gavin had only met Tiffany a couple of times. She was like one of these girls. Gavin thought it would probably be easy for Costner to fail in the marriage department if left alone.

The owner, Sakira Wong, came out jabbering something in a foreign tongue as if she were upset. The college girls must have known what she was talking about as some dispersed and went back to work. She approached Gavin.

"Yes, you wanted me?" the short woman announced.

Gavin stuck out his hand. "Detective Reece, and this is Detective Costner. Is there somewhere we can talk privately?"

"I have no other place unless you count the break room," she said sharply. "The sofa over here will be just fine."

They sat on the nearby leather sofa in the school colors of rust and white.

"Do you know this young woman?" Gavin handed her a picture of Burke.

She looked at it and handed it back.

"Yes, Jenny Burke. She was a good customer. Always paid. She and her friend liked the deluxe waxing and the tanning. I tell them men like such. No swimsuit tanning here. Tan lines turn men off," she said, shaking her head.

"If you don't mind me asking, what kind of tanning oil do you use?"

"Endless Ibis," she said.

"Jenny dyed her hair. I presume it was done here?"

"Yes. She and her friend had the full work. Head and pubic plus tail bleaching. Everything must look good."

Gavin was a little shocked by Ms. Wong's announcement as he glanced over to Costner, who was writing everything down.

"You bleach the private areas?" Costner looked up, shocked.

"Yes. A must. Burke, she was in one of those films; something wild. Carrie!" she screamed out.

A young blonde-haired woman came out, bouncing like a cheerleader.

"Yes, Ms. Wong?" she said.

"Jenny Burke. What film?"

"Oh, she was in Wild Fillies Eight," she answered, smiling.

"The borderline porn videos," Costner answered.

"You know it. She was so lucky to get picked. Jenny and Jessica were so gorgeous. That's why I'm coming here. If I get

everything done, you know, like my boobs, then when I go to Miami this spring break, hopefully they'll be filming. I want to be in Wild Fillies so bad." She leaned in and lowered her voice. "I've even dropped fifteen pounds since the camera adds ten. I want to look so good."

Costner just smiled, almost hypnotized by the exuberating cleavage that presented itself to him. Gavin cleared his throat when he saw Costner cross his legs.

"Thank you," Gavin said as Ms. Wong shooed her away.

"Sure, no problem." She bounced away just as she had come into the room.

"Ms. Wong, do you know any of these people?" Gavin handed her the photos of the other victims.

Ms. Wong took her time, but shook her head.

"Never saw these people. Sorry." She handed the photos back.

"One last thing, Ms. Wong. Could you give me a list of employees at the time Jenny was your client, including any whom you may have let go?"

"Be right back."

Gavin relaxed as Wong left. Costner sat there stiff before shifting in his chair.

"Think of your grandmother in a sexy thong," Gavin whispered.

"What?" He nervously shifted.

"Think of something that's a big turnoff. Granny in a thong--couldn't get worse than that."

"What are you talking about?" Costner retorted, then sighed. "Wait, you weren't thinking that I was thinking ... you know. Because I wasn't. I love my wife."

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“Nobody questioned that. You’re only human. Sometimes a situation presents itself that you can’t help no matter how much you love your wife. The difference is you don’t cross that line.”

Costner sat there quietly and muttered a loud sound.

“I’m perverted if I think of my sweet grandma like that,” he said.

“Then the suggestion worked.”

Chapter 7

“Something about this isn’t right. I mean, the tanning oil is a link, but isn’t. The hair dye is a link but isn’t. Everything is but isn’t.” Gavin rubbed his temples trying to deter a headache. He turned away from the dry erase board to Richmond. “What did you learn?”

“Suppliers only supply places of business,” Richmond said, “no private sales. However, a salon can carry their product and customers can buy from there. As for your fancy oil, the supplier only sells to salons who sell to the customer.”

“What about the list of employees?”

“Well, two were dead; don’t worry, they died naturally. None of the employees of The New York Experience had a record, but several had parking tickets, including Fredrick Duncan. That Serenity Spa seems to be busy with all sorts of traffic tickets, but since it’s near a college, what do you expect? I checked out Ms. Wong. She emigrated here in 1981 from Vietnam, no parking violations or record of any sort. I checked to see if any of them got tickets near where our victims were last seen--no hits.”

“Hey, Gavin, I was looking at the inventory of Borge’s car to see what they found.” Costner stood from his desk.

“Yeah?”

“Business cards in the console. Didn’t we see some business cards at that one salon?”

“Yeah, one was for Funny Face makeup and another was for wigs.”

“Mirage Wigs,” Costner said.

Richmond and Gavin both glanced up. Costner walked over with the sheet of paper.

“Borge had one of those business cards,” he said.

“Which salon had the card?” Richmond asked.

“The New York Experience.”

“Duncan said he never saw Borge,” Costner said smugly.

“He’s probably telling the truth. If this salon had a business card for this service, then what says the others don’t?”

“I didn’t see any business cards at Serenity Spa,” Costner said, thinking.

“No, *you* were having to think of your grandma,” Gavin said.

Richmond looked at him, shaking his head and smirking. “So you gave him the grandma speech? What kind of spa was it?”

Gavin glanced at an uneasy Costner before he lowered his voice. “College girls. Just gave him a little advice before he made a mistake.” He looked over to Costner, who was sitting quietly. “Costner, Costner.”

Costner was still frowning as he was thinking.

“Hey, kid,” Richmond said. “You only think such when you’re in danger of ruining your marriage.”

“Costner, I want you to call Serenity Spa and see if they would have or give business cards if a customer requested one,” Gavin told him, taking the file from him.

Costner quickly went back to his desk as Richmond stood beside him.

“Even if the cards were at the salons, you have to prove the victims picked up a card.”

“We’re going to have to ask the families about wigs. Do me a favor? Find out what you can about this Mirage Wigs. If we’re lucky we may have found a break.”

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* * *

He sat in his car and watched as the young woman came out of the restaurant with her girlfriends. Her long red hair glistened in the bright sun. It wasn't one of those carrot-top hair colors, but soft, light, layered and long, making him desire it even more. He quickly sucked in his breath, closed his eyes, and tightened his grip around the steering wheel as she tossed her hair back when her friends were all getting into the black Lexus. It was almost as good as an orgasm, but not quite. That would be a feeling he would get after he got that beautiful red hair.

He slumped in the seat as she pulled out of the parking lot and drove past him. He turned on the ignition of his car and followed her.

Gavin sat on the opposite end of the sofa from Denise. She sat there with her long slender legs crossed away from him. She rested her head on the back of her hand that was propped up on the sofa. Just by her facial and physical expression, Gavin knew she didn't want to be here as much as he wanted to.

Dr. Boland sat at her desk as she always did and waited for someone to speak, to start the conversation. She glanced at her watch, then glanced at them.

"How is work?" she finally asked, looking at the two of them.

"Okay," Gavin said.

Denise smirked.

"Something wrong?" Boland asked.

"His work is always okay," she said. "It's the same answer every time we're in here."

"I have a job. I can't discuss what's happening with an ongoing case. That's privileged information," he said.

"See what I have to put up with? Privileged," she said to Boland. "This is the way he talks at home. Privileged."

"But it's my job," he argued. "People depend on privileged. That's how I get convictions."

"Whatever," she said.

"What about you?" Boland asked Denise. "What about your work?"

"It's going great. I'm looking to be a partner in my firm."

"Partner in real estate? Darling, I figured you were already a partner as much time as you spend at work," he said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Denise asked defensively.

"I'm just pointing out you spend a lot of your spare time traveling and working. By now you should be partner, not looking at it," he said.

She sighed. "Not this again."

"Not what?" Boland asked.

"What?"

"You said not this again. What is it that's not again?" Boland asked of Denise.

Gavin got comfortable. He couldn't wait to hear this.

"It means he makes it look as if I'm never home."

"You're not," he said. "I'm home more than you."

"That's not true," she complained. "I've been home just as much as you. How many times do you drag your sorry ass home in the wee hours? Go to bed, get up in a couple of hours and leave. That's our relationship."

"My job is important and hard. People depend on me."

"I have worked very hard to get where I'm at and people depend on me, too." She turned her attention to Boland. "I began as a go-to girl. I fetched coffee, ran papers off when asked. Then I decided I wanted a piece of the pie. So while I'm

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working, I get the schooling I need to be an agent. Now that I have a license, I want more. I deserve more, and Mr. Grayson said--"

Gavin laughed softly, amused with her tale. She glared at him.

"What's so funny?" she inquired.

"Nothing. Go on with your story," he told her.

"As I was saying, Mr. Grayson has been taking me under his wing and I'm learning a lot,"

Gavin couldn't help it, but her story was getting better as he covered his mouth and cleared his throat.

"And teaching me how to be a better real estate agent. He said I could make partner soon."

"Mr. Reece, you seem to find this amusing?"

"I don't find it amusing--I find it absolutely laughable."

"Why's that?" Boland asked. "Your girlfriend has worked her way up to a high position in a business she entered. I figure you of all people would be supportive."

"First of all, I am supportive of anything she does. I was the one who told her she should think about becoming a real estate agent. I flipped the bill for the schooling so I've been supportive."

"Then why the smirk?" Boland asked. "If you supported Denise as you say--"

"You know, I'm sorry, just forget it."

"Once again he shuts down," Denise said. "He does that all the time."

"What?"

"Every time when the subject comes to you, either you apologize or you say I'm working on a case. Conversation with you is limited."

“Work is work. When I come home, I just want to relax. The last thing I want to talk about is my day.”

“See? I told you. Shut down.”

“Is that what you want? You want me to talk about my day?” he questioned.

“It would be nice if you did every once in a while. I tell you about mine.”

“Sweetheart, telling me you’re going out of town isn’t about you telling me about your work or your day. Especially on the phone.”

“I tell you about my day. I’ve told you about clients and work. You never want to listen or talk about yours.”

Fed up, Gavin stood angrily. “You want me to talk about my day?”

“Yes, just for once.”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Mr. Reece--”

“No, she wants to know about my day, I’ll give it to her! Here it is, sweetheart!”

“Mr. Reece!”

“I go to a crime scene and, when I get there, there are four bloody bodies that have been shot. Two are gang-bangers having it out, and the others are an innocent child and mother. Now I have to figure out what’s happened by going to the morgue and watching them cut up this small child who turns out to be three years old. I need the bullet, you understand. In the meantime, I have family wanting to know when they can get their loved ones and all the while telling me how sweet they were. But deep down I can’t trust what they tell me because, you see, it’s in a gang neighborhood, the neighborhood that would rather me leave it alone. Everybody is a suspect. Now tell me, do you still want to hear about my day?”

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The room sat quiet as Denise made a loud swallow and Boland put her pen down softly. Nobody made a sound as they sat there, but for Gavin's cell phone. He finally looked at his phone. It was a call from Richmond. Not saying anything, he just walked out of the office.

Richmond sat at his desk as Gavin came in and tossed his jacket onto his chair. Gavin paused at his cluttered desk and sighed before sitting down.

"Problem?" Richmond asked.

"No, just had a bad lunch date. What do we have?"

"Well, the kid found out that Serenity Spa has business cards, but she was out at the moment. Apparently wigs are popular among the college kids." Richmond rubbed his pencil between his hands. "I talked with Bethany Borge's family. They said she went to Adam and Eve Salon. I called about your business cards. They said they did have them, but they were out of them," Richmond said.

"Did you ask the Borge family why she would have such in her car?" Gavin inquired.

"Her mother had cancer last year. She took her mother to the place and bought her a wig."

"What about the other victims?"

"Well, according to the other families, Crummel wasn't ever interested in wigs. Burke bought a wig for a costume party she attended, and Nielsen had a bad hair job by another hairdresser. So she changed hair dressers."

"What did you find out about the Mirage Wigs?"

"I had to do some fast-tracking. The owner, Chris Bannock, has moved his business more times than a cricket jumping. His taxes aren't in great shape, either. If I didn't know better, I'd

say this man is doing everything in his power to run a business and keep it from the government.”

“Don’t they all?”

Gavin reached for the address from Richmond, then grabbed his jacket. He glanced around and noted that he hadn’t seen Costner.

“Where’s Costner?” he asked.

“I gave him a longer lunch hour. I figured he needed it. Where are you going?”

“I’m going to Mirage Wigs. You want to come along?”

“Don’t you want to wait for your partner?” Richmond questioned.

“You were the one who gave him the extra long lunch hour,” Gavin pointed out. “You coming or what?”

Richmond made his usual heavy sigh, grabbing his jacket.

* * *

The business was located at a warehouse with two glass doors with a small sign above them saying Mirage Wigs. Inside the front entrance were rows of wigs on shelves and a metal table with a cash register. As Richmond browsed around touching some of the wigs, Gavin went to the checkout counter to ring the silver shopkeeper’s bell that sat alone. He quickly noted some business cards sitting in a holder. Three cards were for salons: Giorgio’s, Stylist Cuts, and The Hair Station. Gavin took one of each and placed them in his jacket pocket before ringing the bell again.

“These wigs seem real,” Richmond said, touching the blonde Paige boy wig.

“That’s because they are.”

A tall, thin, and casually dressed man came from the back carrying two wig heads. He set them on the counter.

"Chris Bannock. How may I help you?"

Gavin didn't hold out his hand, but instead held out his badge, which caused Bannock to quickly recoil.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Come to shut me down?"

"No, wanted to know if you knew these people."

Gavin pulled out each picture of the victims. Bannock looked at them, but didn't say anything for a moment.

"I can't recall, officer," he said. "Many people come and go. I don't recognize any of them."

"Are you sure?" Richmond asked.

He shoved the pictures back. "I told you I don't recall them."

"That's funny because they had your business card," Richmond said.

"A lot of people have my business card," he said. "That doesn't mean I know them."

"Take a look at them again." Gavin shoved the pictures in front of him.

Bannock picked up the pictures and looked at them a little longer than before, but didn't change his answer.

"Don't know them. Why? Should I?"

"They bought wigs from here." Gavin glanced around, remembering what Richmond said about Bannock moving. "I mean, you."

"Well, officer, they may have bought wigs from me, but I don't remember selling to them."

"Are you the only one who works here?" Richmond inquired as he looked around the building.

"Yes, I've had people in the past work for me, but they come and go. I don't see the need in hiring people when I can do the work for myself anyway."

“Those employees who come and go. Do you remember any of them being a little hinky?” Gavin inquired.

“They come and go so fast I couldn’t say,” Bannock replied.

“You may have paid cash for your workers, but I seriously doubt you wouldn’t remember at least one of them. You couldn’t have hired that many.” Gavin leaned onto the counter.

“More than you think, Detective. As I said, cash and a quick turnover.”

“Why do you suppose that is?” Richmond asked as he scanned the store.

“I don’t know, maybe because they find out I don’t have a retirement plan,” he joked.

“So you’re telling us that you don’t know any of your customers or any of your former employees? I find that hard to believe, don’t you, Richmond?”

“Most businessmen know who they hire and fire. As for customers? Shoot, my brother-in-law runs a huge furniture store and he can tell you who bought what,” Richmond said.

“So, looking around this place, I’d say Mr. Bannock here probably doesn’t have them coming in and out like that brother-in-law of yours.” Gavin glanced around.

“Nope, it’s pretty quiet around here.”

“So again I ask nicely,” Gavin said to Bannock.

“I don’t know those people,” Bannock answered, pointing at the pictures. “But as for employees, I might remember one or two. But if you think I have an address or something on them, forget it.”

“What were their names?” Gavin asked.

“Roy.”

Gavin waited then looked up.

“Roy?”

"Yeah, Roy. Don't know his last name. He was a bum; literally."

"Do you know where we can find Roy?" Richmond asked.

"No. He was homeless when I found him."

"Let me get this, you hired a homeless man to work for you?" Gavin frowned.

"Yeah, nothing wrong with that."

"Why did he leave?"

"Besides scaring off the customers? I hired him to work in the back to do stock, but for some reason the big dummy kept coming up front spouting nonsense about the end coming and things like that. So I let him go."

"You wouldn't by chance know where we can find Roy?"

"How should I know? I found him over by Lu Lu's café. He was digging in the trash for food," Bannock answered.

"What does he look like?" Gavin asked.

"He's nasty and wears ratty clothes. He's always wearing this big green army coat. Doesn't matter how hot it is, he's wearing it."

"Why did you hire someone like that?" Richmond asked.

"Because he was cheap," Bannock answered.

"Meaning you fed him what? A Happy Meal for a day's work?" Gavin sarcastically remarked.

"It was three. Plus he got room and board in the back. Once a week I let him use the water hose to clean up."

"How old?" Gavin questioned with aggravation.

"How would I know? He looked old. They all look old."

"Now about your customers," Richmond said.

He shook his head.

"One thing about employees, another about my customers."

"Look, either you give us a list or we come back with a warrant."

“Bring on your warrant. My clients aren’t on the record, either. You’ll have a hard time trying to find them since they also pay in cash.” Bannock then pointed at the cash only sign. “Just as my sign says. Cash Only. Look, you have anymore questions, you can direct them to my lawyer.” He whipped out a business card with his lawyer’s information on it. Richmond took it.

The shopkeeper’s bell rang as the glass door opened and two middle-aged women came into the store.

“As you can see, I’m a rather busy man.” Bannock walked away to attend to his customers.

Gavin sighed as Richmond shook his head.

“I say our wig man here is hiding something,” Richmond said.

“And he sure doesn’t want us poking about, at least not without his lawyer,” Gavin said.

Chapter 8

Gavin ran the information he had on Roy through the system; a homeless man wearing a heavy army green overcoat. Not much to go on, but enough where it included most of the homeless population.

"Oh, I know who his lawyer is--Franklin Pierce," Richmond said as Gavin and Costner looked at him strangely. "Bannock's lawyer. A real jackass. We won't get anything from this Bannock now."

"Who's Franklin Pierce?" Costner asked, confused.

"A lawyer who seems to get the worst criminals off. You remember him, Gavin; he did that Buckner case we had last year."

With that information Gavin leaned back and threw his hands in the air.

"That jackass? Great."

"Something wrong?" Costner asked.

"You could say that," Richmond said. "Even though we have the case in a nice little package with a bow, Pierce can manage to get things thrown out that most courts wouldn't throw out."

"So he's good?" Costner said.

"Good? No, kid, he likes to abuse the law. In doing so, he makes our job harder," Richmond said. "Mark my words. Bannock has already called him and told him two detectives came by today and hassled him. I figure tomorrow morning Pierce will be down here accusing us of harassment and to leave his client alone."

"But you just questioned him," Costner said.

“Don’t matter, kid. Lawyers are son-of-a-bitches when they want to be.” Richmond sat at his desk fiddling with his pen. “Are we any closer to our homeless man?”

“The system has five homeless men who have been picked up at least once who has the name Roy, and not only fit our description but also believe the world is coming to an end,” Gavin said.

“Great, and I guess finding them will be impossible,” Richmond said.

“Well, they didn’t leave a forwarding address,” Gavin answered. “I’ll send a uniform over with photos to Bannock. Maybe he can ID our man. What about that warrant?”

“That’s like pulling teeth. The DA wants more than what we have. He said he didn’t want to start a witch hunt.”

“Then let’s find something,” he told them. “Costner, why don’t you look into any suppliers that Bannock uses? He said the wigs were real. Let’s just see how real. Richmond, get hold of accounting; see if they find anything unusual with Bannock’s finances.”

* * *

Her slick Lexus came to a halt at the red light. He pulled up beside her. The women were all laughing and talking to one another. He made quick glances at her, noting she had a long slender cigarette in her hand. She acted so proper and prim as she blew the cigarette smoke from the cracked window. Her friends sat in the car with cigarettes, their mouths moving like fluttering butterflies. There was one woman who didn’t talk, but instead sat by the window staring out, at him.

He quickly acted as if he wasn’t looking at them as he looked straight ahead. He adjusted his sun shades and sighed. He reached for the radio, but glanced around pretending he was

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waiting for the light to change. He saw her again. She ran her hand through her red hair before taking another drag from her cigarette.

Becoming angry, he watched the red light and waited. He felt it was time to show her who was in charge. As soon as the light turned green he quickly moved forward and turned in front of her, cutting her off. He heard her horn blare as he quickly drove off.

He observed her in the rear view mirror as she was flipping him off and moving her mouth. He smiled at the fact she was upset.

* * *

At Mack's bar Gavin sat on the stool, waiting. Lilly had called earlier, excited that her contract as a preschool teacher had been renewed for the next two years. She wanted to celebrate, despite him still feeling the bad mood from earlier.

He heard the crowd of ladies laughing, some people playing pool and a couple beside him talking about where their night was leading. But never once did he look up as he worked on his beer. The day's events stuck in him like never before.

Therapy; what the hell was he thinking? Did he really want to do this? Try to save a relationship that only he seemed to care about? He hated what he did today, exploding like he did. Denise didn't deserve that nor did Dr. Boland, but then again, they pushed it. They pushed it to the boiling point.

His phone rang, then vibrated on the bar in front of him. Hesitating at first, he picked it up. He looked at the caller ID, but didn't answer when he saw it was Denise. She had called more today than ever before in their entire relationship. He started to turn off the phone when Lilly came up to him. Quickly, without her noticing, he stuffed it into his pocket.

“Hey,” she said excitedly. “I’m sorry I’m running late. I had a child whose parent was running late. You haven’t been waiting long, have you?”

“No, let’s get a booth.” He stood, but for the first time noticed she was glowing; something he hadn’t seen her do in a long time.

“Is something wrong?” she asked, glancing down her dress, then checking her forearms. “I don’t have glue or markers on me, do I?”

“No, just glad to see you happy,” he told her as they went to a booth to sit.

She couldn’t refrain from telling him all the details of her day. In doing so she was like a breath of fresh air exuding somehow over to him. That is, until his cell phone rang.

“Are you going to answer that?” she asked.

He shrugged. “It’s probably work.”

“Shouldn’t you check anyway?” she asked, concerned.

He knew she wouldn’t be happy until he did. He dug into his pocket and glanced at it; Denise again.

“It’s work,” he lied, shoving his phone back into his jacket pocket.

“Do you need to take care of it?” she asked.

“It can wait until tomorrow. I want to be with you and celebrate.”

The waitress came up and took their drink order. Lilly, feeling festive, ordered a Long Island tea while Gavin played it safe with bourbon and tonic.

“So how was your day?” she inquired.

If she hadn’t asked that, he may have forgotten the bad day of events in therapy.

“Not my best day,” he said.

“What happened?” she asked.

"I don't want to bore you. Besides, this is your day."

"Gavin, you're a lousy liar. If I was a betting woman, I'd say that look either has to do with your job or Denise. I'm banking more on Denise."

He took a sip of his beer. "You always know, don't you?"

"What?" She smiled as the waitress set her drink in front of her.

"You always know what's bothering me. Why can't Denise do that? I had a little tantrum in the counselor's office today."

"A tantrum?"

"Denise seems to think I don't talk about my day and, the truth is, I don't want to talk about my day. I want to come home and relax, spend my time with her without putting my day in there, but she'd rather I talk about my day."

"And this caused a tantrum?"

"Not my finest hour. I gave her the full blow by blow of my day and, in turn, I'm pretty sure the counselor thinks I need more therapy."

"And now that she may know about your day, how does she feel?"

"I don't know. I left before she could respond," he said. "I got called out."

"Oh, Gavin."

"The last thing I want to do is make her think of horror stories. I want to come home and have this romantic dinner and just enjoy each other. Work should stay at work. Never bring your work home."

"Sounds good in theory," she said, which got her a funny look. "Look, Gavin, we have to talk about our day. It can be a bad day or a good one, but we need to talk about it because if we keep everything bottled up, it'll eventually destroy us. Speaking from experience, of course."

Gavin then recalled the moment her life was changed forever. If she hadn't turned to him, she might not be sitting there giving him advice on his life.

He snorted. "Yeah, you snapped at your parents, you secluded yourself, you were missing work--"

"I was shutting down as a human being. If you hadn't persisted in finding out what was wrong, if I hadn't talked about it, I would have probably destroyed myself. You don't have to give her explicit details; just how you're feeling. That's all she wants."

"You're probably right, but for now this is your moment, and I'd prefer to celebrate it with you and not discuss Denise."

For the rest of the evening Gavin found himself staring at her. Not that he hadn't looked at Lilly before; on plenty of occasions he'd done that, but tonight he felt different. Maybe it was the liquor, maybe it was the sucky day or perhaps, just perhaps, it was Lilly.

He listened to her talk and watched her push her hair back from her face when she laughed. Was it possible he was developing deeper feelings for Lilly as he hung on every word she said? He was beginning to think so.

The smell of rain flooded the parking lot as Gavin opened Lilly's car door.

"Thank you," she said as a breeze began to pick up, rustling her dress. "I guess I'd better get home before the storm hits. Goodnight, Gavin."

"Lilly," he said.

"What?" She looked at him with a smile.

His mind was telling him to run, just turn around and run before he made a mistake. But his heart must have been registering something else, for at that moment he wanted to kiss

her. He could have, but he didn't. Instead he brushed her hair that blew across her face as she stared at him.

"Congratulations," he told her.

"Thank you. You better get home before Denise sends out a search party." She started to get into her car but paused as he stood there. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Why?"

She shrugged, smiling. "No reason. See you later."

He came into the bedroom still thinking of Lilly. Denise sat in bed reading a book. She looked up before putting it down. She glared at him, and he figured she was still mad over this afternoon.

"I've been trying to get hold of you all day," she said, placing her reading glasses on the nightstand.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I was busy with a case." He sat at the end of the bed. "Look, Denise, I get it now. You want me to talk about my day. I understand that, but I don't like talking about it. So I'm sorry I didn't pick up the phone so we could talk, and in the future I'm going to talk more."

"You still don't get it, do you?" She placed her book on the bedside table.

"I'm spilling my guts here, and you tell me I still don't get it?" He stood, confused.

"I made partner today," she announced.

"You made partner? That's great," he congratulated her.

She shook her head, sighing.

"I thought we could celebrate, but once again, you failed."

"We can go out to dinner tomorrow night and celebrate," he suggested. "You know, a bottle of champagne--"

"I have to go out of town for two days. I'm to show some property at Lake Travis."

“Then we can celebrate when you get back,” he suggested.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “Your little outburst, ignoring me when I called.”

“I’m sorry. I wouldn’t have had my outburst if you and Boland didn’t push it. As for ignoring you, maybe I did just a little, but I also know somebody who’s been ignoring around here, too.”

“I don’t want to argue. It’s late and I have an early morning. We can talk about this when I get back.” She reached over and turned off the lamp before snuggling down into bed. “Try not to move about when you get in bed. I have a headache.”

Gavin stood there not sure whether to be angry or confused. If she thought he’d climb in bed with her tonight after her attitude, she was sadly mistaken. The more he stood there, the more he thought he didn’t do anything wrong. He did what most men would have done; congratulated her on her promotion and apologized for his behavior. Most men wouldn’t have gone that far. He walked over to his side of the bed and took his pillow.

* * *

He came into the office carrying a store-bought coffee from Allsup’s. Richmond quickly frowned, his eyes traveling to the styrofoam cup. Gavin sat down rubbing his eyes and yawning. The couch wasn’t the best place to sleep last night, but at the time Gavin didn’t think much of it. Now this morning he was paying for it. His back was sore, and he tossed on the thing all night, unable to sleep. He wished he could blame the restless night on the couch or Denise, but the truth was, he thought of Lilly.

“Did you sleep in your clothes?” Richmond inquired.

“Something like that. Where’s the kid?”

"He's in the back. Like you, he had to sleep in his clothes." He grinned. "Apparently he felt the need to tell Tiffany why he got a little longer lunch. They don't keep things from one another, he said. Live and learn. So what was your excuse?"

"I don't know. Denise made partner, I said that was great, offered to take her out to dinner, and got shot down, as usual. I still don't get it, she said. So I slept on the sofa last night because of it."

Richmond smiled as Costner came back into the room. "It seems you two have more in common than you realize."

"What did you find out about Bannock?" Gavin asked.

"They are still going through the man's finances, but he isn't much of a bookkeeper. By the way, we got Bannock's client list. He wasn't too happy about it, but a judge told him that his client list isn't protected."

"Costner?" he asked.

"Uh, from what I can tell, the wigs are real."

"Where does he get the hair?"

"That's something you're not going to like. I contacted Locks for Love Foundation. They told me the hair is sent to them by the client. Mr. Bannock isn't associated with Locks for Love, nor is he with any other foundation that deals with real hair."

"So Bannock is taking the hair and making the wigs himself?"

"He'd have to. I just got his list of clients. I thought I'd cross reference our victims to see if they appear on the list."

Gavin was surprised by Costner's sharpness, considering he, too, had slept on the couch the night before.

"Anyone got some aspirin?" Gavin rubbed his eyes.

Costner set his bottle of aspirin in front of him as an offering.

Officer Mike Tarrant, a uniform cop who had moved from night shift to day shift, came up to Gavin's desk.

"Detective Reece, I took the photos that you gave me. Bannock identified this man here." Officer Tarrant handed him a photo. "Roy Dempsey."

"None of our victims match," Costner said, looking up from the computer.

"Do me a favor? Get this photo out. Let's see if we can locate him." Officer Tarrant nodded at Gavin's request. "Costner, you said the hair comes from clients?"

"Yeah, it's not very long."

"Print up the list for me, would you?"

Costner handed a surprised Gavin the lists. "Like I said, it isn't very long."

"Very good, Costner," Gavin complimented as Richmond eyed him. Gavin ripped the list in half, holding one piece up. "Hey, Costner, why don't you call these people, see what you can find out. I'll take the other half."

Costner beamed with a smile. "Yeah, sure."

By the afternoon Gavin had gone through the list. Everyone was accounted for except one. All he got was an answering machine. Costner came back with his list. He had two that the phones had been disconnected. In fact, the addresses were bogus. In the meantime, Richmond had some interesting news.

"The son-of-a-bitch is using people," he said. "He's hiding his business behind a non-profit company called Strands. He supposedly takes in their hair, makes it into wigs, then donates them to people who can't buy wigs," Richmond explained.

"But?" Gavin asked.

"But he doesn't donate the wigs. They found no evidence he did. I'm guessing those fine wigs on the shelves at his shop are his donors."

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“That should be enough to bring him in,” Costner said.

“Yeah, enough to bring him in for fraud, but we don’t have anything to tie him to these murders,” Gavin said, thinking. “I say we hold off. A little time may get us more than fraud.”

Chapter 9

The following day the uniforms had no luck finding Roy Dempsey. So Gavin, not the type to sit around and wait for things to happen, took Costner out. They went to Lu Lu's, where it was stated by several was Roy's favorite place to hang out.

Gavin and Costner sat at a booth as the only two waitresses worked the busy café. A thin and pale waitress finally came to their table, handing them two menus.

"I'll be right back," she said as the cook banged the bell, screaming at her.

Costner opened the menu as Gavin looked around the café. A couple caught his attention who sat in a booth across the room. They seemed happy as they smiled at each other and held each other's hand across the table. Lilly crept into his mind after that, along with Denise. Wonder what the shrink would have to say about his present situation?

"I wonder if the salad is any good?" Costner asked.

"I'm sure it is," Gavin said as he, too, had opened the menu.

The waitress came back with her little pad.

"Sorry about that," she said. "What can I get you to drink?" she asked.

"Diet Coke," Costner said.

"Unsweet tea," Gavin said. "Could we ask you a few questions?"

"Honey, I'm married. Happily," she said.

"Actually, we were wondering if you've seen Roy?" Gavin asked.

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"Honey, you're going to have to narrow that down. I know a lot of Roys."

Gavin pulled out the picture of Roy, but before she could look at it, the cook was screaming at her again.

"I'll be right back," she said, rushing off.

"Maybe we shouldn't have come during lunch hour." Costner watched the busy waitress.

"We had to eat and, since we had to be here, it's just as good as any other place."

The waitress returned this time with their drinks.

"Sorry about that. We're a waitress short today," she said, retrieving her pad and pen from her apron. "What can I get you?"

"I just want a club and fries," Costner said.

"What about you?"

"The same," Gavin said.

She wrote it on the pad, then took up the menus.

"Excuse me, before you go, have you seen this man?" Gavin showed her the picture.

She glanced at it as the bell rang again as the cook was screeching orders.

"Yeah, I think his name is Roy. Excuse me."

She again ran away, picking up the order that sat on a shelf in front of the cook. She took the plates of food to the next booth over, then went to another table as the man called out for her, holding up his glass. She returned to their table.

"Now, did I get your order?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," Gavin said, this time not only making sure the picture was visible, but also his badge. "We asked you about this guy here."

“Yeah, Roy. He hangs out back most of the time. I usually slip him something to eat. Poor man; I think he used to be a preacher.”

“Why do you say that?” Gavin asked.

“Well, he’s always quoting from the Bible or talking in riddles.”

“Does he carry a Bible around?” Costner asked.

“No, sweetie. What he carries around in his pocket is Uncle Jack. Say, Roy isn’t into any trouble, is he?” she asked, concerned.

“No, we just need to talk to him about his former employer,” Gavin said.

She snorted, shaking her head. “You mean that perverted Mr. Bannock?”

“You know him?”

“Well, if you mean does he come in here trolling for sugar mamas, the answer is yes. He’s always got some sort of scheme that involves someone else’s money. I didn’t like him hiring Roy, but who am I to say where Roy can work,” she said.

“Did Roy ever mention what Bannock was doing?”

“He may have, but with all the ramblings, who would know? That’s probably why Bannock hired him in the first place. If he did do anything illegal, who’s going to believe a mentally ill person, right?”

“When was the last time you saw Roy?” Gavin asked as the bell rang for an order pick up.

“Two days. He usually walks me to my car. I get off at night. But these last two nights I haven’t seen him.” The bell rang impatiently. “Excuse me.”

The waitress quickly went away.

“Why do I have a feeling Mr. Bannock did something to Roy?” Costner frowned.

"Scaring is a typical tactic aimed at the mentally ill. He may not have physically harmed him, but . . ."

"But verbally. I don't like Mr. Bannock now," Costner said.

The waitress returned with their food.

"Excuse me, Miss, just one more question. Would you know where Roy hangs out?"

"Well, he mentioned one time about seeing the bombers from the war, then another time Gorillas In The Mist. Sorry, guys. I told you he speaks in riddles. Hey, if you see him, would you tell him that I haven't worn my sunglasses at night."

"What does that mean?" Costner asked.

"I have no idea, but every time he saw me, he'd say don't wear your sunglasses at night. I figure it was because I had them on my head. Pay the counter when you're ready," she said, going back to work.

"I don't think Roy will be much help. Especially if he thinks he's seeing things that don't exist." Costner took a bite of his sandwich.

"Don't write him off just yet. Just because he seems to be talking nonsense doesn't mean he's talking nonsense."

"Gorillas in the Mist and bombers from the war? It still sounds like nonsense to me." Costner stuffed a French fry in his mouth.

"He talks in riddles," Gavin said. "That's our business--to solve riddles."

"We solve murders, not riddles."

"Costner, I'm telling you this because it seems somebody has to guide you. A murder is a riddle. The evidence, the witnesses; each piece is a puzzle and each puzzle, is a riddle. You figure out the riddle, you find out who done it."

Costner thought about it, then nodded.

"I see. So Gorillas in the Mist is what? He watched the movie?"

"I'm guessing he watches gorillas at the zoo," Gavin said.

"Okay. I could see that. What about the bombers? Especially World War II ones."

"There's a museum that houses vintage airplanes on the edge of town. I bet Roy hangs out there sometimes," Gavin told him.

"It's worth looking into," Costner said.

After they ate lunch, they went to the zoo, going straight to the gorillas. They met with Amy Lornes, a young fresh-out-of-college zoo keeper for the gorillas.

"Yeah, Roy, he always comes by at least once a week and talks to the gorillas. They're nothing more than ramblings."

"That's what we heard. Did any of the ramblings stick out?" Gavin asked as they walked along the sidewalk.

"Well, there was something he said every time he left. *Harm comes to kindness*. Don't know what it meant, but in a funny way it was amusing. He said it every time."

"Anything else?" Gavin asked.

She thought about it. "He told me once to protect my glory. Again, I have no idea what he was talking about."

"When was the last time you saw Roy?" Gavin inquired.

"Last week. He usually comes on Tuesday, but not this time. I didn't see him." She got a call on her radio. "Sorry, I have to go. Anything else?"

"No. Thank you," Gavin said as he and Costner began walking down the sidewalk.

"Nobody has seen him, give or take a week? I don't like those odds."

"It's moved our timeline off a few days. Maybe we can learn more at the museum," Gavin commented.

At the museum Costner marveled at the huge selection of bomber airplanes while Gavin talked with the curator of the museum, Paul Nobleman. The elderly man walked beside Gavin as they talked about Roy.

"Roy, Roy, Roy. I like him. I let him clean up around here. He likes to work."

"He also likes to ramble," Gavin said.

"Ramble? Who would say that?"

Gavin cocked an eye at him.

"Okay, it may be ramblings to you, but if you listen to him, it makes sense," Nobleman told him. "If it didn't make sense, then you wouldn't be here."

Gavin smiled. "You got me there. My partner, on the other hand, would debate that."

"That kid who came with you? No offense, but I doubt if he even knows what he's looking at. Sure, it's a plane, but does he know the history or what kind it is?" Nobleman questioned with a smile. "No, Roy is smart, just expresses it differently."

"I agree. Do you know where we might be able to find him?"

"Well, at night he goes to Lu Lu's café, sometimes the zoo. There's an underpass he stays at sometimes in the park. He calls that place the Golden Gate. When it gets cold, I let him stay in the back here. Is Roy in some sort of trouble?"

"We're not sure. Did Roy ever mention if he was having problems?"

"Well, I know he hadn't been happy lately, if that's plausible," Nobleman said. "Talked about a vacation."

"I guess he didn't tell you why he was unhappy?"

"No, Roy doesn't come out and tell you what he feels or what he's thinking. Sometimes I wish he did."

"Did you know he had a job?" Gavin asked.

“Roy has had several jobs; you have to be more clear,” Nobleman said.

“A wig shop,” Gavin said.

“Yeah, he mentioned that place. He hated it. Said some strange stuff about that place.”

“What kind of stuff?”

Nobleman began recalling. “They sacrifice unto devils . . . not to God. That’s what he said.”

Gavin wrote it down and stared at it.

“You said he talked about a vacation. Any particular place?”

“He’d be higher than a kite,” Nobleman said.

“Any idea?”

He shrugged. “I know I haven’t seen him for at least a week.”

“Look, if Roy comes by, keep him here and call me.” He handed Nobleman a card.

“Sure.”

Costner came up to Gavin with a smile and some pamphlets.

“Did you find anything out?” he asked.

“No. I guess you found something,” Gavin said, pointing at the brochures.

“Yeah, this place is neat. I think I’ll bring my kids here. A little history goes a long way.”

Gavin stood there looking at the planes.

“Yeah, it does,” he said, thinking. “Costner, do you take your kids out kiting?”

“Yeah, sometimes. When the weather is good. Certain times of the year is great, like spring, some days in summer and a few days in--”

“What about now?”

"Yeah."

"Where do you take them?" Gavin inquired.

"To the park. There are several places to fly kites," Costner replied.

"I think I know where Roy is."

The day was fairly pretty for people to be at the park. Gavin decided to split up with a couple of uniforms and search the usual places kites were flown. Unfortunately, they didn't find Roy. Gavin decided to broaden their search. They searched the underpasses of bridges, bushes, and tree thickets--the normal places for the homeless. A few homeless said they hadn't seen him in awhile. After two hours of chasing their tails, Gavin met up with Costner at the snow cone stand.

"Any luck?" Costner asked, taking the cherry snow cone.

"No, you?"

"Well, I've been told aliens land here at certain times at night, sucking up human beings. That's the reason for the used foil on their boxes," Costner said.

He laughed. "They may be telling the truth for all we know." Gavin saw some kites flying in the air. "Did you check over there?"

"Those weren't there a few minutes ago," Costner said.

Gavin took off with Costner behind him. They began searching the small crowd that had started to gather.

"I don't see him anywhere," Costner said.

Gavin began reading his surroundings. "Costner, he wouldn't be here, but he'd be nearby. Where would he be able to see the kites?"

"Over there, near the pond and the trees," Costner said, pointing.

"I already checked. Someplace we wouldn't think of."

Gavin had a gut feeling that Roy was hiding somewhere nearby, if only he could figure out what Roy meant. A couple strolled by pushing a child's stroller, dropping some of their stuff. Gavin bent down to pick it up when he noticed a flyer gently blow by. He grabbed it and looked at it. It read about a balloon fest that would be taking place for the next two weeks. This would be the second week.

"He didn't mean kites," Gavin said. "He meant . . . he'd be going up high like a kite."

"What are you saying? He's shooting up?" Costner inquired, confused.

"No, hot air balloons." He showed Costner the flyer. "We've been looking for kites when he meant he'd be watching hot air balloons."

"If Roy is there, that's the reason nobody has seen him for the past week. He's at the hot air balloon show," Costner said, tossing his leftover snow cone into a nearby trash can.

The brightly colored balloons had drawn a huge crowd, bigger than what Gavin thought. The two uniforms each split up, taking the north and west sides of the show. Gavin and Costner took the south and east sides.

Gavin slowly scanned the crowd until he thought he saw Roy among a crowd of people; the army green coat was a giveaway. He quickly weaved his way through the crowd following the person he was sure was Roy. Finally he grabbed the man on the shoulder and was surprised to quickly learn it wasn't Roy, but a man who looked familiar. Gavin went back to searching when Costner called him on the two-way.

"Found him," Costner announced on the radio.

* * *

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It was the same thing. Every time he thought she would be alone, she wasn't. He followed her to the café, realtor, and doctor's office. Each time she met somebody; she'd leave with them. She was the most complicated person he'd chosen so far, but her hair was so beautiful, and it would be great in the collection.

He picked up his note pad and looked over his notes. She'd stayed on schedule so far, and if he was right, she'd have an hour to herself later this evening when she took her evening walk through the park. Sure, she'd have that yapping dog with her, but it was small, so zapping it would be easy. The thing was scared of anything. He watched it once jump when a car backfired, so detaining that thing would be easy.

She came out of the courthouse, stopping to talk with some co-workers. One of them walked her to a park bench. She sat down and waited for a moment until another co-worker came out and joined her.

They talked briefly, then they walked away to her car. She was met by another person, male this time. They talked briefly, then he got into the car with her and left.

* * *

Roy had been good coming with them. He quietly sat at the table smiling as Gavin came in carrying food. He pulled up a chair beside Costner and began unpacking the burgers and fries from the large sack. Richmond walked in with the drinks.

"Here you go, Roy, a cheeseburger with no onions and fries. Plus a Diet Coke," Gavin said.

"Thank you kindly, sir." Roy reached for his burger and fries.

"Now, Roy, as we told you earlier, we need to ask you some questions."

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste," Roy said, taking a bite out of his burger.

"It definitely is," Gavin said, taking the picture of Bannock from the file and pushing it in front of him. "Do you know this man?"

Roy brushed his mouth clean with the back of his hand, then leaned forward.

"Him? He's the devil in disguise."

"I'm sure he is, Roy, but do you know him?" Gavin questioned once again.

"I must not lie. I slaved for the man once until I broke free of his chains," Roy said bravely.

"A name would be better," Richmond said.

"Bannock. Chris Bannock. The man must own up to his deceiving ways."

"What do you mean?" Gavin asked.

Roy took a sip of his drink.

"Man shall not lie; if he does, he'll be punished."

"What has he lied about?" Richmond asked.

"I watched him double tax his customers."

"Double taxing is illegal. Why didn't you turn him in?" Gavin asked.

"The serpent can come in many forms and sometimes in pairs." Roy went back to eating.

"Are you saying he threatened you?"

"Some people are good at fulfilling promises. Mr. Bannock always fulfills his promises," Roy said with his mouth full of burger.

"Did you only see him double tax? Did you see him do anything else besides doubling taxes?"

"I saw nothing else," Roy said.

"We can give you protection," Costner said.

Devil's Concubine

"I'd be lying if I said he did. Man shall not lie."

Roy continued eating as Richmond showed his disapproving look of the witness.

"Is there anything you can tell us about Bannock?" Richmond inquired.

"He likes his wigs."

Richmond rolled his eyes.

"We got that. Anything else?" Richmond questioned impatiently.

"Obsession can be deadly," Roy told them.

Richmond shook his head and leaned into Gavin.

"We aren't going to get anything from him," he whispered.

Gavin sat there as Richmond started toward the door.

"Roy, you said he was obsessed."

"Yes, the man fornicates with the wigs in the back room after they're brought to him." He leaned in toward Gavin. "I saw it with my own eyes."

Richmond looked at him strangely as Gavin pulled out the other photos of the other victims.

"Roy, have you seen these people before?" Gavin asked.

He once again leaned in and shook his head.

"No."

"Okay, I think we've troubled you enough," Richmond said. "When you finish eating your burger and fries, you can go."

"Sampson wasn't strong without his hair."

"What did you just say?" Gavin asked.

Roy didn't repeat himself, instead rattled off something else. Richmond shook his head and went out the door. Costner just smiled, but Gavin knew Roy was telling him something, if he could figure out what it was.

Carla Landreth

“Roy, these people. Have you seen their hair before?”
Gavin inquired.

“It’s their glory.”

“Roy, do you need anything else? Like another drink?”
Gavin asked.

“I could use something to quench my thirst. I seem to be a camel. Could I have water this time?”

Gavin quickly met Richmond outside the room.

“What are you doing? The man is talking nonsense most of the time,” Richmond complained.

“No, he’s not. Believe it or not, I think he’s seen the hair of our victims. When I asked if he’d seen their hair, his reply was it’s their glory. See if we can’t get a warrant for those wigs.”

Chapter 10

He was careful not to get close to her as she walked along the sidewalk with her dog. They passed several people, but he knew, when they got around the bend, the traffic of people would be few and far between until she hit the main road again where she had parked her car.

She stopped once to let that damn dog piss on a lamp post. Then she and the thing went on their way, unaware he was watching, waiting for the pounce. Again the dog stopped and began sniffing as if he was about to piss again, his opportune time.

Unaware he was behind her, he came up and, with one zap, he used the taser. She dropped the leash to the barking dog before she fell to the ground. The dog darted off, not sticking around. He shoved the taser back into his jacket, exchanging it for duct tape. He taped her mouth and bound her hands as she began to moan and move. Then he picked her up and carried her to his car on the side of the road at the edge of the path.

He put her in his trunk, but not before he touched her hair and smiled. His triumph, however, was short-lived as a car slowly drove by.

“Just go by, don’t stop,” he mumbled to himself as he shut the trunk.

They didn’t drive on as he hoped; instead, they came to a halt. He sighed and rolled his eyes when they honked their horn. Making sure his cap was down, he turned to them.

The small Honda car rolled down the passenger window, revealing a young couple, probably college age by the looks.

"Excuse me," the young woman asked. "Could you tell us where Highway 12 is at?"

"We're sort of lost," the young man said.

Still staying by the car he hesitated to answer. "Yeah." Then he pointed from the direction they came from. "Go back up to the main highway, turn to your left, and go until you meet a caution light. That's Highway 12," he told them.

"Thank you," the young man answered.

"Anytime," he said.

They rolled up their window and turned around before driving away. He glanced around, then got into his car and left.

He took his usual route, but felt as if he was being followed as he looked in the rear-view mirror. The car lights shined brightly as he squinted to shield from the glare.

The closer he got to his destination, the more nervous he was becoming. He'd slowed down to let them pass, but they slowed down with him. When he sped up, they did, too. Finally, fearing he was being followed, he changed his direction and turned off onto a dirt road, then came to a stop. They drove by without even a thought.

He backed up and went on his way.

* * *

Gavin tossed his pen onto his desk, frustrated. Everybody else had called it a day and went home, leaving him to work on the case. Richmond warned him the judge wouldn't be signing off on anything until tomorrow and to call it a night. Gavin was too keyed up to just call it a night and, since Denise wasn't going to be home, what was the rush? He took a quick break getting a cup of coffee. Upon his return, he overheard Detective Lamar on the telephone with his wife. If Gavin thought his

relationship with Denise was complicated, Detective Lamar had him beat, if he was hearing right.

"Not this again," he said. "Look, we'll talk about this when I get home. What do you want me to do? We do it all the time when I'm not working. That was uncalled for. I do have to pay the bills, you know." He pulled out a cigarette and lit it. "I love you. We'll talk about this later." He hung up the phone, then looked at Gavin. "Take my advice, Reece, don't get married."

"I thought you and your wife were happy?"

"We were until her sister had a baby last year, and now all she wants is a baby."

"So give her a baby," Gavin said. "You've been married what, four years now?"

"I've tried. But a man can only have so much fluid," he grumbled as he answered his ringing phone.

Gavin laughed, sitting at his desk, but his smile soon became serious. He remembered the time he and Denise talked about a baby. It was only briefly. Now, thinking back, it was a good decision not to have a child, but the idea of being a father had never escaped his mind.

"Hey, Reece, where's Richmond?" the front desk woman asked.

"He left for the day. Why?"

She handed him the yellow slip. "His daughter called. Needs him to pick her up from work."

Gavin took the message and looked at it, but was furious when he saw the time on the message.

"Wait a minute. This message was nearly an hour ago."

"Sorry, I just got on shift and found it. Make your grievances with the shift commander." She walked away.

Gavin pulled out his cell phone to call Richmond, but got no answer at his home or cell. He then tried to call Lilly's cell,

but all he got was her voice mail and nothing more. So he called her home, thinking she may have found a way home. There, too, he received the answering machine.

Fearing something was wrong, he drove to the school, but she wasn't there. He drove the route she normally took home and found her sitting on a bus bench with a shoe off, rubbing her heel. He pulled up into the bus lane and rolled down the window.

"Did someone call for a taxi?"

She limped over to him with a broad smile. "Gavin."

"Well, I heard a young lady needed a ride home."

"I'm so glad to see you."

She got into his car, looking frazzled.

"Why didn't you call me?" he asked.

"My phone went dead. I couldn't get a taxi because I had to use my cash for the tow truck who only took cash. I couldn't get back into the school to use the office phone because it was locked. So I decided to risk it and walk. I broke a heel." She held up her red shoe as thunder clapped. Small raindrops began to drop onto the windshield of the car before it became heavy. "Could it get any worse?"

"Rough day?" he inquired.

"We had a staff meeting. New laws and school cutbacks."

"Don't worry, home is just a short ride away."

Rain pelted them as they made a mad dash to her front porch. She dug in her purse, pulled out her keys, and began to unlock her door.

"You want to order some take out?" she asked.

He was about to take her offer when she turned to him. Even with her hair a complete mess and mascara running down her face, she flashed a smile at him, which warned his inner self.

"Uh, I have to get back--"

"Oh, I forgot. I guess you have plans with Denise."

"Yeah, we have something planned," he said.

"So things are getting better?" She pushed open her front door.

Thunder rumbled as if he was being warned not to lie.

"Yeah," he said.

"Are you okay?" she inquired.

"Yeah, why do you ask?"

She shrugged. "You just seem ... never mind. Look, thank you for bringing me home." She leaned in and started to give him the usual kiss on the cheek, but Gavin for some reason met her kiss with his lips. He wished he could say he jerked away, ashamed he was kissing Lilly. Instead the kiss became more passionate before he finally pulled away from her. She stared at him, surprised.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I ... I didn't ... I didn't mean--"

"Gavin," she mumbled, still staring at him, shocked.

Without any sort of warning to himself or to Lilly, he was kissing her again. He tasted her soft sweet lips as he kissed her deeply. However, before he could savor her anymore, Lilly broke off the kiss.

"What are you doing? Gavin, this is wrong," she said.

"I know."

"No, you don't understand. You have Denise."

"It won't happen again. I promise."

"You're right, it won't happen again. I won't put myself through this, not again, and especially with you. I think you'd better go." She stepped into her house and shut the door.

* * *

Richmond was doing all the talking, but Gavin, who was in charge of the case, said nothing as he thought about what had happened between him and Lilly. He knew if Richmond found out about the incident, it would be the end of their friendship.

“Gavin, did you hear me?” Richmond questioned.

“What?”

“Jesus, Gavin, what’s with you this morning? Your mind is supposed to be on this case.”

“My mind is on the case,” he said. “I was just thinking. Go on with what you were saying.”

“What I was saying is Quinlan said she won’t be able to trace the wigs back to our victims because wigs don’t have follicles. So getting a warrant for the wigs is useless.”

“What about you, Costner? Got anything to share?” he asked.

Costner quickly gulped his coffee and picked up a piece of paper.

“Well, his finances hardly make any sense, but his client list is interesting.” He handed the paper to Gavin. “There are three people on that list whom we can’t find.”

“What do you mean, can’t find?”

“Well, according to his list, three people--Bertie Johnson, Lucy Smite, and Elizabeth Lowell--gave him hair twice this year. But the addresses and phone numbers are bogus. So I ran the names in the system and I haven’t found anybody.”

“They could be our victims?” Richmond said.

“We won’t know without more than this.” Gavin played with his pen.

“There’s more. These same people have donated their hair for the last seven years.”

“Just about the time our first victim came up missing,” Gavin recalled. “How long has Bannock been in business?”

Richmond picked up a file and skimmed through it. "Eight years. What are you thinking?"

"Eight years of bouncing around, no good records. Something is definitely not right."

"What if we bring Bannock in?" Costner asked.

"We have to have a reason to bring him in," Richmond said. "We got that warning already from Bannock's lawyer."

"So what are we going to do? We have three people here whom we're pretty sure are our victims," Costner said. "Perhaps, if we told Bannock he wasn't a suspect, just ask him some questions?"

"I highly doubt a friendly talk will be in the works," Richmond said.

"We may not have a choice but to bring him in for questioning; him and his lawyer," Gavin said.

* * *

Bannock sat in the conference room with his lawyer, Franklin Pierce. Gavin sat across the table waiting for Bannock to answer his questions. Bannock had been making this interview impossible with his silence, with only his lawyer doing the answering. Gavin figured he had to get Bannock upset to get anything from him.

"We found Roy, by the way," Gavin said.

Bannock sat quietly, emotionless.

"Do you want to know what he had to say?" he asked. But Bannock didn't answer, and neither did Pierce. "He claim's you were double taxing. Is that true?"

Pierce leaned over and whispered in Bannock's ear, then Bannock sighed.

"Mr. Bannock won't answer that," Pierce said.

“That’s okay. We’re going through your finances. If you were doubling taxing, it’ll show up. You don’t look that smart to hide money in an off-shore account.”

“That was uncalled for, Detective. Mr. Bannock doesn’t have to answer you unless, of course, you’re charging him. In that case, I still wouldn’t let him talk,” Pierce explained.

“What about Bertie Johnson, Lucy Smite, or Elizabeth Lowell?” Gavin asked.

“What about them?” Pierce asked as Bannock sat there with his arms crossed, a smile on his face.

“Does your client know them?”

Pierce leaned over and whispered to Bannock. He nodded at what Pierce said.

“They’re donors,” Bannock said.

“We know that. What we want to know is, have you met them?”

“I met them, yes.”

“Where?” Gavin asked.

Bannock chuckled. “You know where, Detective.”

Gavin didn’t respond, just kept staring at him.

“They came in with their hair,” Bannock said.

“Going through your files, everybody else has an address or phone number but these three women. Why is that?”

Bannock shrugged. “Some clients want to be anonymous.”

“Why put them on the list if they’re anonymous?” Gavin inquired.

“For my protection against people like you.”

“You said these women came in with their hair. Do you know anything about them?”

Bannock leaned over to his lawyer and listened to him whisper before turning his attention to Gavin.

"I don't know much about them. Bertie Johnson is an older woman. When I first met her, I thought she was a man; she was that ugly. All that makeup reminds me of Tammy Faye, except Tammy's makeup was better done. She brings me hair all the time. Lucy Smite--"

"She brings you hair all the time? Your records showed she only comes in twice a year," Gavin said.

"Yes, she comes in twice a year, but she brings in several locks of hair at one time."

"You mean other people's hair?"

"Yeah, she gives me the hair and I have them made into wigs," Bannock said.

"Where's Bertie Johnson?"

"How should I know? She comes in with big manila envelopes that have hair in them. I don't ask her anything else," Bannock told him.

"Don't you have to have their address?"

"No, I don't. Anyone can donate anonymously; that's why it's called anonymous. Look, she gave me an address when she first came in. When I sent out a thank you note, it was sent back. So I went to the address, and it was bogus. After that, when she came in, I didn't press. I just took the hair."

"Do you remember the address?" Gavin stared at him.

"I told you it was bogus."

"The address?" Gavin shoved his yellow tablet to Bannock and laid a pen beside the pad.

Bannock took the pen and began writing.

"What about Lucy Smite and Elizabeth Lowell? What do you know about them?"

He smiled as he thought about it. "Lucy Smite is a gorgeous Asian woman. I asked her out a few times, but she turned me down."

Carla Landreth

"I wonder why?" Gavin mumbled.

"One of these days she'll go out with me. I'm not giving up that easy. Elizabeth Lowell is a strange woman. Always carrying this little dog with her. The thing is yapping all the time."

"What about their addresses?" he asked.

Bannock didn't say anything, just began writing on the yellow pad.

"You said you get the hair made into wigs. Do you make the wigs or do you use someone?" Gavin asked.

Bannock sighed before glancing over to Pierce, who nodded.

"I send the hair to a company. They make the hair into wigs, then ship them back," Bannock said. "Once I get the wigs back, I send them to a hair salon where they cut and shape the wigs. That's why my wigs sell so well."

"Name and address of the company, please." Gavin pointed to the yellow pad. "And while you're at it, the hair salon that does the wigs."

Bannock wasn't happy. He muttered under his breath as he wrote.

* * *

Somerset Wig Makers kept accurate records; however, they were so accurate that whatever information Bannock gave them, they took at face value.

Erin Mitchell, a representative for Somerset Wig Makers, agreed to talk with Gavin and Costner.

Miss Mitchell was a young small-framed woman with blonde shoulder-length hair.

"You see, we never meet the people. The hair is sent to us, and we just manufacture wigs for stores," she explained from her desk.

"These wigs are made with real hair?" Gavin inquired.

"We mostly deal with natural materials, yes, but we also have synthetic wigs," she said.

"Could you explain how the wig process is done around here?" Gavin inquired.

"Yes. Hair is sent to us. The hair, please keep in mind, must be a certain length for us to work with, usually no less than eight inches. From there the decision of netting, lace, or high definition is made."

"What does that mean?" Gavin asked.

"Simply means the wig is made from netting that's dyed the same as the hair color. High definition is a more Cadillac-style wig. What would normally be netting would be material that's matched with your skin tone of your scalp. Those wigs require measurements of the client's head. The hair can be synthetic or natural materials."

"Do you style them here?" he asked.

"We can. But it depends on the client."

"Did Mr. Bannock ever have any of his wigs styled here?"

"No. Mr. Bannock was pretty straightforward. He claimed to have his own stylist, even though we gave him a few business cards of salons that deal with our wigs. He still insisted on his own salon. We did remind him that the wigs needed special attention, such as washing, conditioning, and tightening hair knots. Our wigs are guaranteed for ten to twelve years if they're taken care of properly. If he used his own stylist, we reminded him he could damage the wig, therefore, canceling our guarantee. Still, Mr. Bannock said his hair stylist knew all about caring for wigs," Mitchell told him.

“Did he ever say who this stylist was?”

“No, I sort of thought that it may have been him,” she said. “Mr. Bannock seems like a cheap man. I figure he was styling the wigs himself and probably charging his customers in the process.”

“You said the hair has to be a certain length.”

“Eight to nine inches from the base of the neck, sometimes more. Anything shorter won’t do. You see, we have to cut the dead ends, then attach it to the skull cap. By the time you get all of that done, plus the shaping, your long hair will be about shoulder length,” Mitchell explained.

“Can anybody just walk in with some hair?”

“You could, but you still have to fill out the proper paperwork,” she said.

“Which would include name, address, and phone number I assume,” Gavin asked.

“Yes.”

“But what about Mr. Bannock? You just took his word?”

“Yes, because when he handed in the hair, he had all the paperwork done. He did nothing wrong.”

“Once you receive the paperwork, do you check it out?”

“Frankly, we depend on the people to be honest.”

“How about these people? Have you ever seen them?” He handed the photos of the victims to Mitchell.

She took her time and looked them over before frowning and handing back the photos.

“I wish I could be of help, but our customers mail their hair in. I couldn’t recognize them if you asked me. Sorry.”

“You said you keep paperwork on the people who donate. Could you look up the names on this list here?” Gavin asked, passing her the list of the victims.

Mitchell took the list, glancing over them. She turned to her computer keyboard and began typing the names into the computer.

"Sorry, none of these people are on our lists," she said.

Gavin thought for a moment.

"How about a Bertie Johnson, Elizabeth Lowell, or a Lucy Smite?" he asked.

Once again Mitchell typed in the names and waited for a moment. She shook her head.

"Sorry, we don't have anybody by that--wait a minute. Bertie Johnson," Mitchell said.

Gavin sat up. "Address?"

"Printing it up," she said.

Mitchell quickly handed over the sheet of paper. Gavin grabbed it and looked at it with some hope, but soon was dashed when he saw the address. It was the same bogus address that Bannock had.

"Can you tell if she mailed it in or did Bannock bring it in?" Gavin asked.

"Sorry, the address you have there is what's on the records."

"But you knew Bannock was bringing you the hair for wigs."

"Yes, but as I said, the hair comes in special envelopes with paperwork. Mr. Bannock told us that he offers to bring in the hair for donors."

"All hair has paperwork, correct?"

"Yes. It's inside the envelope. Each time you donate hair, you must submit paperwork."

"So Bertie Johnson would have to have paperwork if she sent in her hair?" Gavin asked, thinking.

"Yes."

Carla Landreth

“Could I have a copy of her paperwork stemming from the time she began donating to present date?”

“Sure.” Mitchell punched in a few keys and waited as the printer began printing.

“Everybody else mails their hair in except Bannock?” Gavin asked.

“We have a couple of other wig stores that do the same thing. I have to admit, though, Bannock seemed to be more protective of his hair.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Our turn-around time for making wigs is about four to six weeks. One time Bannock came in for his wigs a week early and, unfortunately, one of the wigs wasn’t ready. He made a big fuss. Threatened us with a lawyer. After that, we made sure his wigs were always ready a week early.”

She reached over to the printer and grabbed the paper that the machine spit out. Mitchell then handed the papers to Gavin.

“From the last six years,” she said.

Gavin smiled. “Thank you, Miss Mitchell. If you can think of anything else, please call me.” He handed her his business card.

* * *

Giorgio’s wasn’t anything like what Gavin expected. The building was sandwiched between two other buildings, one being a clothes shop and the other a coffee shop. Gavin found the store front amusing as Costner frowned. Giorgio’s display window was decorated with silver mod chains dangling about with pictures of hair styles.

“You know if I was just walking by here, I’d think this was a hardware store or something,” Costner said. “Never would think of it as a hair salon.”

"Guess they're the cutting edge," Gavin said. "I have a feeling grandma won't be thought of in this place."

They were met by a short pudgy well-dressed man who stood at the counter browsing through his appointment book. A red-haired middle-aged woman stood before him in front of the counter as she waited.

"Let me see, dear. Now, you'll be on vacation next week, correct?"

"Yes."

He marked it on his appointment book. "Okay, I'll see you the same time the following week."

"Armand, thank you so much," she said softly. "Oh, can you put my friend on the mailing list?"

"Of course. I have her down," he said. "I'll send her those coupons this afternoon."

"Thank you, Armand, you're such a good friend," she praised.

"Well, you have a safe and fun cruise. And take plenty of pictures, Darling."

"I will. Tootles." She put on her sunshades, then waved at him as she left.

Armand then turned his attention to Gavin and Costner.

"Welcome to Giorgio's. May I help you, gentlemen?" he asked.

Gavin pulled out his badge. "Detective Reece, my partner Detective Costner. We need to ask you some questions."

Armand quickly changed his happy-go-lucky posture to surprise and concern.

"Armand Dupree. Is there a problem? Do you need to see our business permits? I told Rodney we should have them displayed in full view, but he said it took from the décor."

"It has nothing to do with your permits. We need to ask you about Chris Bannock. We were told you're his hair stylist. Is that true?" Gavin glanced around.

"Well, matter of speaking, we do his wigs. He wouldn't let us touch his hair. I'd love to get a hold of it, though. It's thick and wavy. He looks like a shaggy dog letting it all grow out," Armand said, crossing his arm while his free hand touched his face. "Did he do something?"

"We aren't sure," Gavin said. "Tell us more about his wigs."

"Well, they come to us in terrible shape. Well, really not terrible shape, just not done up. Have to admit, he has the best quality of hair. I mean, it's well-conditioned when we get it. Would you care for a cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you. You said *we*. Who is *we*?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Rodney, Rodney Green, is my partner." Gavin just smiled as he wrote the names down. "We own Giorgio's. Like I said, Mr. Bannock's wigs are well-conditioned. He claims he tells his clients to condition their hair before they donate."

"Have you ever seen his clients?"

"Well, his clients have been known to bring in their wigs for cleaning and styling. They do have to be taken care of, you know."

"What about who donate their hair? Do they come in here?" Gavin glanced around the salon.

"I don't think so," Armand said.

Gavin pulled out the pictures he had of the victims and handed them to Armand. He pulled his glasses down from the top of his head to view the pictures.

"Do any of these people look familiar?" Gavin asked. "Have you heard of Bertie Johnson, Elizabeth Lowell, or Lucy Smite?"

"No, they aren't my clients. They could be Rodney's, though."

"Is Rodney here?" Gavin inquired.

"Yes, but he's doing a perm."

"Could we talk with him?"

Armand shrugged. "Can you wait until he finishes the perm? It shouldn't be too long."

"Tell me more about Mr. Bannock," Gavin said.

"What's there to tell? He's handsome enough. His manners need a little work. He seems to be friendlier toward Rodney. I don't know why; I'm much more handsome than Rodney." He frowned.

"When he brings in the wigs, does he tell you anything about the donors?"

"No. He just tells us what kind of styles he wants, then leaves. He doesn't talk much to me; however, Rodney ..." Just then another well-dressed man about the same age as Armand Dupree, but more of an athletic build, came from the back with a woman. "Rodney, these men need to talk with you. They're asking questions about Mr. Bannock."

"Will you take care of Mrs. Williams?" Rodney said softly.

Armand walked away with the woman as Rodney Green smiled at them.

"You gentlemen wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes, we were inquiring about Mr. Chris Bannock. What can you tell us about him?" Gavin asked.

"Not much. We style his wigs," Green answered.

"Do any of his clients come in to get their wigs done?"

"If you mean get their wigs maintained, the answer is yes."

Gavin showed Rodney Green the photos. He viewed them closely and shook his head.

"I'm sorry; I've never seen these people." He handed the photos back.

"Is there any way we could get a list of the customers that are Bannock's clients?"

"I don't see why not." He walked over to his reception desk and began combing through his appointment book. "If you don't mind me asking, is Mr. Bannock into some sort of trouble?"

"We're not sure. That's what we're trying to determine," Gavin said.

Green quickly scribbled down some names on a piece of paper, then handed it to Gavin.

"These are the only ones that I know are Bannock's wig clients," he said.

"How do you know these people are Bannock's clients?"

"Because they've told me, plus, I give them a little discount if they're his clients."

"Why would you give them a discount?" Gavin asked.

"Bannock's clients are cancer patients. Money becomes tight once you have that disease. I do all I can to help them." Green's cell phone rang and quickly he held up one finger and answered. His answer was short as he turned off the phone and turned his attention back to them.

"Have you ever heard of Bertie Johnson, Lucy Smite or Elizabeth Lowell?" Gavin asked.

"I'm sorry, I've never heard of them. They aren't my clients. Have you asked Armand? They might be his."

"He didn't know them either," Gavin said, stuffing the list into his jacket pocket.

Devil's Concubine

“Sorry. I wish I could be more help, but as you can see, my next client just came in. Excuse me. If you have anymore questions, please feel free to call me.” He handed Gavin a business card.

Gavin glanced at the card as Costner read over his shoulder.

“Just between you and me, I preferred the other salons. This one sort of gives me the creeps,” Costner said.

Chapter 11

"I think Bannock did it," Costner said. "Everything leads back to him."

Richmond leaned back in his chair while Gavin looked up from the computer screen.

"Oh, how do you think everything leads to Bannock?" Richmond asked.

"Well, Bannock has the crooked records, not to mention he uses aliases to throw us off guard. He deals in hair, which is probably our victims'. It all leads back to Bannock."

Richmond laughed, tossing his pen onto his cluttered desk. "You wouldn't be able to convict a gnat with that information. What do you think, Gavin?"

"I don't think he did it," he answered.

"What?" Richmond asked, surprised. "That wasn't what I was hoping to hear."

"What did you expect? I was going to agree?" Gavin punched some keys on the computer.

"Matter of fact, yes," Richmond said. "I mean, I know what we have isn't enough, but it is suspicious enough for us to dig deeper."

Gavin shook his head. "What about Bertie Johnson?"

"What about her?" Richmond asked, jerking out of his chair to stretch. "She's probably innocent in this mess of Bannock's."

"I don't think so," Gavin said. "I think she's playing a key role in Bannock's scheme. That's why I'd like to talk to her."

"Where are we going to find her? The address is bogus and nobody has ever seen Bertie Johnson," Costner said.

"Except for Bannock," Richmond said. "And if you think we should start listening to someone who's a liar, I'm turning in my badge."

Costner laughed. "You retire next week."

Richmond rolled his eyes. "It was a joke."

"Oh."

"Look, Bannock may be the only person to have seen her, but she's been donating her hair for some time. It was recently--in the past couple of years--that she's had Bannock turn in her hair," Gavin explained.

"If we find Johnson, maybe we find more on Bannock," Richmond said, returning to his desk as Costner smiled at Gavin.

"Where do we begin?"

"Well, we can treat Bertie Johnson as a missing person. Start with those papers we got from Mitchell. Run her name through Social Security," Gavin instructed. "Surely something will pop up."

"You don't mind if we pick this up in the morning, do you?" Costner asked.

"What?"

"It's eight o'clock. I don't know about you, but I'm a little tired, and I want to see my kids before they go to bed," Costner said.

"Yeah, I'd like to see Maureen before she goes to bed," Richmond commented. "She's been a little on the put-out side with me, and I don't know why. But I do know coming home at a decent time seems to help a little."

Gavin wasn't happy that Costner and Richmond wanted to call it a night; he wasn't happy, but he understood.

"You know, you should think about calling it a night yourself. I mean, I know you don't have kids, but I bet Denise

Carla Landreth

would be glad to see you,” Costner commented as Richmond glanced at him.

“Come on, kid, I’ll buy you a drink on the way home,” Richmond said.

* * *

He pulled the wig over the foam head, then ran his fingers through the long, damp ash blonde hair. He took a handful and held it up to his nose. Oh, how he loved the smell of freshly washed hair. He reached for the moisturizing mousse and squirted a quarter size of the mousse into his palm. He started at the roots to the tips. He carefully began combing out the hair. With each stroke he felt a certain satisfaction until he’d finished the whole head of hair. He reached for the scissors, but the clock on the wall chimed, causing him to lay them down quickly.

He walked over to the phone, grabbing his date book. He grinned as he dialed and waited for her to answer the phone.

“Hello?” she said softly.

“Hello, I’m Dave McMillan, and I’m taking a survey for hair care products . . .”

* * *

Nothing had changed between him and Denise since her return from her trip two days earlier. She still didn’t say much, and he slept on the couch. However, today she had left a message for him that it was important for Gavin to come home. They had some things to talk about.

He sat in his car for a moment and stared at the apartment. Through the sheer curtains of the living room, Gavin saw her shadow walk across the room before she went to the window and looked out.

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Gavin walked into the small apartment. By now Denise was sitting in the oversize chair that was too big for the apartment. She was nursing a glass of vodka on the rocks, her favorite drink when she was serious. He tossed his keys into a glass bowl on a table in the foyer. He found it odd that his mail was piled separately next to hers. Quickly he skimmed through it before he tossed it all onto the table and took off his jacket. He looked at Denise as she sipped her drink.

"For once you made it," she said.

"You said it was urgent that we talk."

As Gavin entered the room he noticed beside the doorway were two pieces of luggage. He frowned and looked at her.

"What's this? You going away again?" he inquired.

"No," she said softly. "They're yours."

Gavin was confused. "Mine?"

She stood and refreshed her drink. "I'm calling it quits," she said.

"You're calling it quits. When did you decide this?"

She didn't answer as she sipped her vodka.

"Denise, when did you decide this?" he asked again, this time with more authority.

She shook her head. "It's been over for some time."

"You agreed to working this out. I don't understand."

Denise quietly stared away before she said firmly, "You'd do anything for her, wouldn't you?"

"Who?" he asked, confused.

She whirled around. "Don't act like you don't know who I'm talking about."

"Denise, I don't know what you're talking about." Puzzled, he watched her down her drink.

"Lilly! It's Lilly. It's always been about Lilly," she yelled at him.

“What’s Lilly got to do with this?”

“She has everything to do with this,” Denise said. “I see how things are between you two. What did you think I was, blind?”

“Nothing is going on between me and Lilly, if that’s what you’re suggesting. I’ve been up front about my relationship with Lilly. She’s a close friend and nothing more.”

“Really?” she said, refreshing her drink again.

“Yeah, really. You’re a piece of work, you know that? Accuse me of not being faithful. What about you and that boss of yours? Think I really believe he was just interested in you stepping up the ranks of that firm you’re in?”

“He was until you started your business with Lilly--”

“You’re blaming Lilly for *your* affair with *your* boss?” Gavin asked, stunned.

“Lilly was always a problem. The first time I saw you two together at the lake, I knew.”

“Knew what? I’ve never cheated on you,” he repeated.

“You liar. At least I’m being honest with you. The least you can do is be honest with me.”

“I *am* being honest. I’ll admit, there have been times, but I never--”

“I know,” she said firmly.

“You know what?” he asked, puzzled.

Denise shook her head and walked past him with a smug look.

“I know about the baby,” she revealed.

Gavin was baffled by Denise’s revelation. As far as he knew, nobody knew about Lilly’s pregnancy.

“That’s why you took her to the clinic,” she said, “to abort your child. Keep your little affair a secret.”

“It’s not what you think,” he began.

"Why else would you take her to have an abortion unless you're the father?" she retorted. "I certainly can't think of any other reason."

"I did take her to have an abortion, but it wasn't mine," he told her.

Denise walked past him over to her desk. She opened a drawer, pulled out a large brown envelope, and threw it at him.

Dumbfounded, Gavin opened the envelope and pulled out a stack of photos. He began sifting through them, shocked they were of him and Lilly. He knew by just glancing at them that some could be construed as if there was something going on between them.

"You had me followed?" he demanded, but she didn't answer.

"What did you expect?" she said, flaring mad. "After what I saw; the way you looked at her."

"This proves nothing." He dropped them onto the coffee table. "All I see are two people talking, eating, nothing more. You're just trying to find an easy way out of this relationship. So you blame Lilly."

She huffed, grabbing another picture that wasn't in the envelope; one that Gavin wished hadn't been taken. It was of him and Lilly the other night; the night he kissed her, there in a picture.

"At least I made it clear I was cheating. I didn't try to hide it," she said.

Gavin hung his head. "It's not what you think."

She grabbed her glass of vodka and walked over to him. "Please lock up when you leave. You can get the rest of your stuff this weekend." She walked out of the room.

* * *

Gavin came into the office after a restless night. Costner greeted him nervously, which was unusual for the young bright-eyed detective.

“Hey, where have you been?” Costner asked.

“Good morning to you, too, Costner.” He paused, pointing to the break room. “Coffee.”

“It’s nearly ten o’clock. Richmond is looking for you, and he isn’t in a good mood.” Costner followed him.

“Why’s that?”

“I don’t know. There was an envelope on his desk. I’m guessing from the crime lab. Anyway, later he snapped at me, demanding to know where you were. When I told him I didn’t know, he went ballistic,” Costner explained.

“Don’t worry about it. He’s just having a bad day like the rest of us.” Gavin reached for the styrofoam cup when it was suddenly knocked out of his hand.

“You son-of-a-bitch,” Richmond said.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I trusted you,” Richmond said angrily. “I let you in my home.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about what you did to Lilly.” His voice became louder.

Suddenly Richmond grabbed Gavin by the collar.

“I’m talking about the baby,” he gritted his teeth. “You took advantage of Lilly, then to cover it up you took her to have an abortion!”

Before Gavin could answer, a scuffle began as Richmond shoved him against the snack machine. Gavin tried to push back as Costner wedged himself between the two. Finally with the help of a uniform, Richmond was pulled back.

"I don't know where you got your information, but it was wrong," Gavin said. "If you weren't so busy trying to dictate Lilly's life, she wouldn't have turned to me when she was in trouble."

"The only reason she was in trouble was because you got her that way."

"I didn't do anything and if we did, it would be none of your business," he argued.

Richmond started toward him but stopped when Captain Wolf came in.

"Is there a problem?" Captain Wolf questioned firmly.

Gavin glanced at Richmond, waiting for him to answer.

"No, Captain, just a little disagreement," Gavin said.

"See that you tone it down," Captain Wolf instructed. "I need to see you two in my office. See that you straighten yourselves before coming," he said, walking away.

Gavin shook his head and went to the men's room. He waited for the officer to leave the room. He began thinking who could have told Richmond. He went over to the sink and turned on the water to clean up as he thought about it. As soon as the cold water hit his face, he knew who told. He snapped up, looking at himself in the mirror. There was only one person who knew--Denise.

The restroom door opened with Costner coming in.

"Are you all right? What just happened back there?" Costner asked as Gavin looked at his mirrored image.

"This isn't the time to ask," he answered. "Besides, it's personal."

"Look, Gavin, I know I'm the last person you'd talk to, but if you do need someone ... "

"Thanks, Costner, but I don't think you'd understand."

Gavin saw in the mirror Costner's disappointment as he hung his head.

"Costner, how about a drink later?"

Costner smiled. "Sure."

"I'll be out in a minute," Gavin told Costner.

Costner nodded and left as Gavin reached into his pocket for his cell phone. He quickly opened his phone book, and Lilly's name popped up. He sighed, then punched her name.

* * *

Captain Wolf sat in his chair at his desk rocking slowly, staring at them. Richmond stood by the window with his arms crossed. Gavin had situated himself near the door.

"I'm sorry, Richmond," Wolf said.

"I'm supposed to retire in a few days. I don't understand."

"This came from the brass. Look, I tried, but with four guys overseas, two on desk duty, and two still recovering from being hurt on the job, I'm short-handed."

"How long?" he asked.

"At least a month," Wolf said. "It's just until I get some guys in."

"What if I just quit?" Richmond said sternly.

"Then you lose your benefits," Wolf informed him. "At least you get to stay here in Robbery-Homicide and not over in Sex Crimes or Narcotics."

"I think I'd rather be over there," Richmond glanced over to Gavin.

"I don't know what's going on between you two and don't want to know. But you two better work it out because you'll have to work together. Now go out there and solve some crimes," Captain Wolf instructed.

Gavin was the first out the door, followed by a disgruntled Richmond. Costner watched them take a seat quietly. Gavin hated the anger between them. Richmond had always been his best friend and had confided in him about numerous things, some most people wouldn't discuss. He also hated that Richmond wasn't getting to retire as scheduled; if anybody needed the retirement, it was him. Gavin swallowed his pride.

"I'm sorry, Richmond. I know you were looking forward to retiring," Gavin said.

Richmond may have paused for a moment in writing but went straight back to work without looking at Gavin.

"You're a hard man to find." Quinlan approached Gavin's desk. "In fact, all of you are." She glanced around. "I got something for you. I got the evidence back on that trace dirt. It's horse manure."

"Horse manure?" Gavin exclaimed.

"Not fresh," she said. "You find me a barn and we might can match it."

"Thanks, Quinlan," Gavin replied.

"There's more. Upon a closer examination of nail scrapings we found one tiny fiber. Carpet, navy blue, almost black."

"Trunk of a car?" Gavin suggested.

"Possibly." Her pager went off. Quinlan quickly pulled it out and looked at it. "Got to go, guys. If I have anything more, I'll call you."

Gavin took the file as Quinlan walked away. Costner stood and held up a piece of paper.

"Hey, Gavin, I ran a search for taser guns bought by Bannock or Johnson. Bannock bought a taser gun three years ago," Costner said.

"That should be enough for an arrest warrant." Richmond picked up the phone.

"Maybe for the taser to see if it matches, but not for an arrest," Gavin said.

"Care to explain?"

"We don't have enough," he said. "He may have a taser gun, but anybody can have a taser gun."

"You don't think we have enough?" Richmond questioned. "We have plenty. He owns a taser, wigs made of real hair, and is the only person who's ever seen Bertie Johnson aka Chris Bannock."

"Even if we could prove Bannock is Johnson, we still don't have enough and you know it," Gavin said.

"I say we do." Richmond began dialing as Gavin walked over to the phone and placed his fingers on the phone hook, disconnecting Richmond's call.

"I believe I'm the lead in this case, and I say we don't have enough. Now if you want to take it up with the Captain, you can. In the meantime, I'm going to find hard evidence to link Bannock as our killer."

Gavin stared at him as Richmond hesitated to hang up the phone.

"Costner, see if Bannock owns a car, one with a dark interior," Gavin ordered. "Did anything come up on Bertie Johnson?"

"I ran the name through the system. Nothing, of course, so I ran it through our other channels. There are four Bertie Johnsons. None of them would be a donor."

"Why's that?" Richmond asked.

"Well, two are in their eighties; one is seventy-four, and a new-born."

"So the name is an alias," Gavin said.

"It has to be. I ran the name under deceased names. Bertie must have been a favorite name about seventy to eighty years

ago,” Costner said. “But Social Security doesn’t have their numbers being used.”

“What a wonder,” Richmond said sarcastically.

“Check and see if Bannock ever had a relative by that name.”

“A long distant aunt,” Costner said. “That would make sense if he was using an alias.”

“We also need to check on those wigs. I want CSU to go over every one of those wigs with a fine tooth comb. Surely there’s something.”

“But they already went over them. They had no follicles--”

“Do it again.”

“What am I supposed to tell them to look for?” Costner asked.

“I don’t know, anything; hair care products, anything,” Gavin said. “Have we got information on that Doctor Evans yet?”

“Yes, he didn’t know any of the other victims, and we checked.” He paused. “Do you really want me to recheck the wigs?”

“Just humor me, Costner. What about Lucy Smite and Elizabeth Lowell?” Gavin looked to Richmond for an answer.

“We were able to locate Lucy Smite. She’s Asian, and she’s attractive, as Bannock said. Elizabeth Lowell moves around a lot. We’re still working on her exact whereabouts,” Richmond said.

“Let me know when you do,” Gavin said.

“Yes, sir.” Costner got on the phone as Gavin walked away.

He felt Richmond follow him into the break room.

“If you came in here to start on me again--” Gavin said.

"I want to know why you think I dictate Lilly's life?" Richmond questioned.

"Let's not get into this now. We're supposed to be working," Gavin said.

"I want to know," Richmond demanded.

"Will it make you stop being a jackass?" he questioned, but saw on Richmond's face he wasn't going to let it go until he got the answer he needed.

"All of your kids are into law. Danny, Michael, Josh, all fine police officers. Lilly goes to college, not the academy, and you weren't happy. You thought she'd become a detective like you or work in dispatch like Maureen. When she came home and told you she wanted to be a teacher, you patted her on the head and said she'd change her mind," Gavin said.

"Then when she didn't change her mind, you made it your mission to find someone who was in law. Someone you thought would be perfect for her. Lilly was way too nice; she should have told the lot of you to go to hell, it's her life, but no," Gavin argued.

"Do you know how many times I went and bailed her out of your little schemes? Too many to count, except for this last one. Just when I thought maybe Richmond may have found the right guy for his daughter, it turns out he's married with four kids and one on the way. By the time Lilly discovered she was pregnant, it was too late. She asked for my help, and I helped her. For a veteran detective, you sure didn't do your research. Lilly is happy with what she does now--working with kids," Gavin explained.

Richmond shook his head. "She likes kids so much she has an abortion? Is that what you're telling me?"

"What I'm telling you is she thought if she had the baby, the only people who would suffer from this mess would be the

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other children involved. Lilly did what she thought was right, and I supported her on that. Now, I don't know about you, but I have a case to solve."

Chapter 12

He sat at the outdoor café and watched as the women walked past him. Their hair flowed as if they were teasing him. But as tempting as it was to have all this hair flaunting itself in front of him, he was only interested in one.

For the past thirty minutes she'd been in Molly's boutique; her and the older woman. He glanced at his watch as the waiter came up to him with a water pitcher.

"More water?" he asked.

Not saying anything, he shoved the glass toward him.

"Would you like to order something?"

Still not saying anything, he shook his head and waved him off. He sat up when the two women came out and walked across the street over to where he was sitting at the café. He pushed his baseball cap down and took a big sip of his water.

The hostess smiled and showed the two ladies to a table near him. He watched as they sat down. The younger one pushed her golden brown hair behind her ear. By her expression and mannerisms she seemed a little upset while the older one seemed to be a pillar of a friend to listen.

The annoying waiter came by, eyeing him as he walked over to the ladies with two menus. He did his pleasant introductions before discussing the day's specials, then walked away from the ladies. As the waiter strolled by, he waved at him. The waiter put on a fake smile and walked over.

"Yes, sir," the waiter addressed.

He picked up his menu and smiled.

"I'd like to order now," he answered.

* * *

Gavin sat at his desk reading over papers when Mr. Borge appeared at his desk. He still looked as lost as he did when he came in before for Bethany's things.

"Mr. Borge, can I help you?" he asked.

"I don't know. I came by this morning for my wife's jewelry, a bracelet to be precise. Your detective sent me down to some place where they hold things, and they told me they didn't have anything," he explained.

"Are you sure your wife was wearing the bracelet?" Gavin asked.

"Beth always wore that bracelet. She never took it off."

Gavin moved papers on his desk and brought out a notepad as Costner and Richmond came into the room. Noting Mr. Borge's presence, they came over to listen.

"Mr. Borge, why don't you have a seat and tell me more about this bracelet."

Mr. Borge took a seat next to Gavin's desk.

"Well, it's a gold charm bracelet. I always complained, the thing rattled constantly."

"Gold charm bracelet," Gavin repeated as he wrote it down. "And you're sure she was wearing it?"

"She never took it off. Even when she went into the hospital, she never took it off," he said.

"What kind of charms were on this bracelet?" he inquired.

"All sorts," he said, then proceeded to describe them. "Two little booties, peace sign, clover sign, uh ... diamond horseshoe, little locket with her mother's hair, American flag, uh ... " Borge rubbed his temple as he tried to recall.

"Take your time, Mr. Borge."

"Would you like some water, Mr. Borge?" Costner asked.

Still busy thinking, Borge nodded. Costner went to get him some water.

“Uh, crown, a cross, uh ... a heart, graduation cap with class 90 on it, and a Pisces sign.”

“Anything else?” Gavin asked.

“She had a New York Yankees emblem. She was a big fan of theirs. You’d think from Texas she would have been a Rangers fan, but she wasn’t.”

Costner returned with the water. Borge thanked him and took a sip. It was always hard to deal with grieving family, but ones that are wanting their loved one’s personal affects makes it even harder, especially if who are investigating the death don’t have it.

“I’m going to see if we can find her bracelet, Mr. Borge. When I do, I’ll let you know. In the meantime, if you think of anything else...”

“Yes, of course. I just want the bracelet back. I think my daughter would like to have that when she’s older,” Borge said, standing.

“Mr. Borge, can I ask you something? Did your wife ever need or purchase a wig?” Gavin asked.

Borge looked at him strangely and shook his head. “No. She had her own beautiful hair. Why would she want a wig?”

“She had issues with her looks; maybe her hair was also one of them?” he said.

He shook his head. “No.”

“Was she ever a cancer patient?” he asked.

“No. Why are you asking if Beth wore a wig?”

“We just found some business cards in her car. One of them was for wigs. We were just wondering why,” Gavin said, “especially since she had no reason for one.”

"I'm sorry. I have no idea why she would have that in her car."

"If you can think of anything else--"

"I know where to find you. Don't worry, Detective, I'm beginning to understand how this all works now."

Borge left as Richmond moved closer with a low voice.

"What's this about a bracelet?" he asked.

"Bethany Borge wore a charm bracelet, which we don't have."

"So where is it?" Costner asked.

Richmond shook his head and rolled his eyes.

"My guess, Costner, with the killer," Gavin said.

"A trophy from our victim? I guess taking her hair isn't enough," Richmond commented.

"That might help us," Gavin said, opening the other victims' files. "Maybe our other victims had jewelry also."

Gavin opened each of the files and read them.

"Let's see, Jeannie Burke was reported missing wearing her class ring, silver hoop earrings, and cross necklace." He flipped the page. "She was found with all the items." Gavin picked up another file. "Barb Nielsen, reported missing--only had her wedding ring and diamond studs. Items were on the victim when found." Gavin put down the file and picked up the last file. "Bill Crummel, tie pin and found with his tie pin." Gavin sighed.

"It was a good thought," Richmond said.

"Maybe Mr. Borge is wrong. Maybe his wife took off the bracelet and laid it somewhere," Costner said.

"How well do you know your wife, Costner?" Gavin asked.

"Well enough. Why?"

"So you'd know if she took off her wedding band, right?" he asked.

"Of course. She always wears it all the time ... oh," Costner said.

"Borge knew his wife so well, he knew she never took off that bracelet. Either our killer is graduating to more than just hair or he's getting sloppy."

"I don't know." Richmond shook his head. "I'd know if my wife wasn't wearing her wedding ring, but any other sort of jewelry, I wouldn't know if it was missing or just put up."

"Are you kidding?" Gavin said. "You're telling me that if Maureen wore a piece of jewelry all the time besides her wedding band, you wouldn't remember, especially if it rattled?"

"Honestly, Maureen's jewelry chest has so many trinkets, I couldn't tell you what she had."

"I have to agree with Richmond on this. Tiffany's jewelry box looks more like a treasure chest. A wedding ring is one thing, but a bracelet ..." Costner said.

"I think this bracelet plays a part in Bethany's death somehow," Gavin said firmly. "In the meantime, we'll run the wigs, check to see what kind of vehicle Bannock owns, and if he has a lonely old Aunt Bertie somewhere."

* * *

Gavin had made it clear before that he didn't like Boland, but since she didn't refund his money and he still had at least two more sessions left, he thought he'd better use it.

After his blowup with Richmond, Denise's breakup, the fact Lilly had refused to answer his calls made him want to talk to someone. Boland was the lucky person.

She sat at her desk as he sat on the sofa. She had gone over the rules again, this time as a private client, not as a couple.

"So how do you feel now that your relationship with Denise is over?" she inquired.

"You know, last night I laid in bed in the hotel and wondered where it all went wrong," he said.

"And?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was me, but this morning I was relieved it was over. No more waking up to tension and sarcastic remarks. You know, Denise blamed me of infidelity when the truth was it was her."

"You?" she asked interested.

"Yeah, Denise blames Lilly for our strained relationship."

"You never mentioned you have a woman friend," she said, crossing her hands.

"It's my partner's daughter, Lilly. You'd like her; she likes to listen, like you," he said, adjusting himself on the sofa.

Boland smiled. "How long have you known her?"

"I've known Lilly since I became partners with her father about twelve years ago."

"Tell me about Lilly," she said as she sat back in her desk chair.

"She's always been a friend from the day I met her. In fact, if it wasn't for her, my partner would have probably asked for a transfer and vice versa." He made a soft laugh at the thought. "You know, she's the reason I met Denise? At the time, Lilly was looking for an apartment. Richmond was supposed to go with her, but he had to be in court that entire week. I don't know what it was, but I didn't like the idea she'd be looking at apartments alone. Single women and apartments are breeding grounds for crimes. Denise was a secretary for the realtor. We did a little flirting. Later, Lilly set us up on a date." He then shook his head, smiling as he reminisced.

"What?" Boland inquired.

“It’s ironic. The same realtor’s office that Denise was working at is the same place she was having the affair with her boss and now made partner.”

“That is ironic. Tell me more about Lilly.” Boland relaxed in her chair.

“She’s kind and big-hearted. Great with kids, cares about everyone. Sometimes I think people take advantage of that. Talking to her is easy. I think it’s because she comes from a family of law enforcement people, so we know how to communicate. She’s the reason for this counseling. She wanted the relationship between me and Denise to work because I wanted the relationship to work.”

“Not many friends are like that. Lilly must really care about your happiness,” Boland said.

“She does.”

“I’m curious, though; despite this bond of friendship you share with Lilly, why did Denise want to blame her for the breakup between you two?” Boland asked.

“She claims I have feelings for Lilly that go beyond friendship. According to her, I acted upon them.”

“She accused you of an affair,” she said. “Did you?”

“No.” He shook his head.

Boland sat up in her chair with interest. “So why would Denise make such an accusation if it’s not true?”

He was hesitant to say, but he knew he’d opened the door to this conversation and knew Boland would bring it up again and again if he didn’t answer.

“I took Lilly to have an abortion. I refused to tell Denise who the father was. She automatically assumed it was mine. I told her it wasn’t. She didn’t believe me.”

Boland cleared her throat as she stood and walked over for a glass of water.

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“Why did you refuse to tell Denise who the father of Lilly’s unborn child was? Did you not know?” she asked, confused.

“Because it was none of her business,” he said. “And yes, I knew who the father was.”

“I see,” she said.

There was a moment of uneasy quietness as he thought back to that moment.

“Lilly was ashamed of what had happened. I wasn’t going to hurt her more by being the town crier,” he said. “Besides, Lilly didn’t want anyone to know. Coming to me was hard enough for her.”

“So you were protecting Lilly.” Boland returned to her seat.

“Yes, something wrong with that?”

“No. I just find it interesting you feel the need to protect her, your friend.”

“I care about her. Isn’t that what you do when you care about people? You want to protect them.” He sighed, thinking.

“What?” she asked after that moment.

“Perhaps I do care more for Lilly than I realized.”

Chapter 13

Costner quickly met Gavin as soon as he sat down at his desk.

“What have you got, Costner?” he asked.

“Well, Bannock hasn’t got a long lost aunt by the name of Bertie Johnson. I checked around for old horse stables. Do you know how many stables are around here?”

“I’m sure there’s plenty,” he said. “And the results?”

“I made a list. There are a couple that are real interesting.” Costner pointed to the sheet of paper before he handed it to Gavin.

“Very good. Anything else?”

“The CSU team wasn’t happy about running the wigs again, but they were going to test the hair care products, as you requested.”

Gavin picked up his messages and quickly went through them. Disappointed none were from Lilly, he tossed them onto his desk.

“Where’s Richmond?”

“I don’t know. He was here earlier. You want me to find him?” Costner asked, returning to his desk.

Gavin was checking his phone for any messages from Lilly, but there were none.

“No, that’s okay. I’m sure he’s lurking about somewhere,” he said.

“What do you want us to do about that list of stables?”

“Why don’t we go check them out? Maybe we can find something.”

Devil's Concubine

* * *

This was the last stable on the list. They had searched all the other stables, even talked with the owners. But so far nobody knew of Bannock, and nobody had heard of Bertie Johnson. Some of the owners still had rental records and were more than willing to hand them over.

Ike Swenson, the owner of Donaldson Farms, met Gavin and Costner at the worn-down stables.

"So who rents this out?" Gavin asked.

"All sorts. The stable itself is still in pretty good condition," Swenson said. "My wife and I used the stable as a type of banquet hall. Wedding receptions, dances, all sorts of parties."

"You mean people had wedding receptions here?" Costner asked, surprised.

"Yeah, believe it or not. It's not all that bad. There are wood floors, electricity, fans for air, even bathrooms, but the time when people went country has sort of cooled its heels in the last year or two."

"Any activity recently?"

"No, it's been a while. About three or four years," Swenson answered.

Gavin pulled out the picture of Bannock.

"Did you ever rent to this guy?"

Swenson took the picture and examined it.

"I don't remember seeing this guy. Doesn't mean he didn't rent, though." Swenson reached into his Chevy pickup and pulled out an old ledger. "What's the name?"

"Bannock," Gavin said as Swenson went through the ledger.

"Sorry, no Bannock. Like I said, it's been a while since I rented the place."

"May I see that?" Gavin pointed at the ledger.

Swenson handed over the ledger.

"Could someone use this place and you not know it?" he asked as he searched the names.

"They could. I don't come out here much anymore, not since my wife passed. She loved this place," Swenson explained.

"Could we have a look around?" Gavin asked.

"Sure," Swenson said.

"Could I also keep this ledger? I'll return it as soon as we're through."

"Keep it as long as you want. I have no use for it."

Gavin and Costner searched the outside of the stables before going in. Costner sneezed as he entered the old dusty building as Gavin pushed a few cob-webs from the door entrance.

It may have been abandoned for years as Swenson had said, but it was still in fairly good condition.

"I can't believe people had parties in this place," Costner complained.

"Why? It's seems like a sound structure and, cleaned up, probably made a nice place at one time," Gavin said as he searched around. "People purchase these things and turn them into fine homes every day."

"A barn as a home? I don't think so," Costner said. "Looking for anything in particular besides the obvious?"

"A sign somebody has been here recently would be nice."

"Here you go, Gavin." Costner pointed to some fecal droppings. "Looks like the only things partying here are rats," he said.

"I think, if you look closer, that's from a squirrel," Gavin said.

Devil's Concubine

"Still, it looks like this is the only action here."

* * *

When Gavin and Costner returned to the office, Richmond was sitting at his desk, waiting.

"Where have you two been all afternoon?" Richmond asked.

Gavin set the ledgers on his desk.

"Checking out old stables. Costner has a renewed feeling for his home now," he joked.

"Find anything?"

"No, but we did get some old ledgers," Costner said. "Don't know what good that'll do. We didn't see anything at the stables to indicate Bannock is our killer."

"Maybe Bertie Johnson's name is in the ledgers," Gavin said. "What about you? Where have you been?"

"It was personal," Richmond answered.

"'95 Taurus with dark interior," Costner blurted out as he was reading a piece of paper.

"What?" Richmond said.

"Bannock owns a '95 Taurus with dark interior," Costner informed them.

"That gets a warrant to search his car," Richmond said, picking up the phone, but stopped and glanced over to Gavin. "Of course, if you think we should hold off?"

Gavin sighed. "Get the warrant."

* * *

That evening Gavin sat on the bed with the television on. He nursed his beer as he flipped through the channels, but, finally bored, tossed the control beside him. He glanced over at his cell phone.

He'd left several messages with Lilly, but got no response. He knew, if he called again, he still wouldn't get an answer, but he knew he had to try. So he called again.

As he heard the ringing, he figured he'd get the answering machine and he was prepared to tell the machine, again why he was calling. But he was surprised when the phone was picked up by Lilly.

"Lilly," he said.

"Gavin," she said. "What time is it?"

"I'm sorry it's late," he said. "I've been trying to talk to you all day."

"I know, and I'm sorry. It's just . . . it's just I didn't go to work today."

"Yeah, I know. I went by to talk to you and well they told me you had left."

"It wasn't a good day. Denise thought it best that my parents be told by letter about the abortion, then she had to tell my workplace that I had an affair. It wasn't a good day."

"I'm sorry, I tried to tell you before--"

"Gavin, I think it best that we don't talk to each other for awhile. You know, until things cool down," she said.

"Wait a minute, can't we talk about this?" he asked.

"Gavin, don't make this hard. I've had a hard enough day. Some time away from each other is what we need." Her voice cracked.

"Lilly, I didn't know Denise would do anything like this. I didn't mean for you to get hurt. You have to understand that. If I knew what Denise was going to do, I would have stopped her."

"I have to go."

"Lilly, wait, when can I see you?"

"I have to go, Gavin." Lilly quickly hung up.

Devil's Concubine

Gavin snapped his phone shut. He picked up the remote control and began flipping through the television channels again.

Chapter 14

Gavin refilled his coffee mug and went back to his desk. He'd been waiting for the report on Bannock's car, which, according to the guys in the shop, wouldn't take long. Gavin swiveled his chair around so that he could gaze out the window. The rain had been drizzling all morning, so it was almost depressing. He heard a loud plop of books fall onto his desk as he rotated back to his desk.

"Well, did you find anything?" he asked.

"No. I have one more ledger to go through. I don't even know why you made me read through them," Costner complained. "Not only was it boring, but I don't think Bertie Johnson or Chris Bannock rented any of these stables. Richmond back?"

"No, he's down there waiting for the results of Bannock's car."

"You don't think Bannock's car will be a match, do you?" Costner sat on the edge of Gavin's desk.

"I won't be surprised if the car isn't a complete match," Gavin said.

Gavin picked up his tablet he'd been writing various notes on and stared at it as Costner returned to his desk, picked up the last ledger from his desk and began reading. "Hey, sorry we couldn't have that drink last night."

"It's no problem, Costner. We can do it some other time. How's the kid?" Gavin inquired.

"The fever finally came down about midnight," Costner said. "How about you? Did you ever get hold of Lilly?"

"Yep, and she doesn't want to talk to me. Of course, I can't blame her. I wouldn't want to talk to someone who basically ruined my life."

"Lilly will come around. She seems like the type of person who wouldn't hold a grudge."

Richmond came into the office smiling, with a file in his hand.

"Bannock's car is a possible match," Richmond said as he laid the file in front of Gavin, who quickly picked it up and began reading it.

"It's not a complete match," Gavin said. "According to this, it's similar. Court isn't going to listen to that, and I bet the DA refuses to use it."

"Read on down, Sherlock. CSU found traces of blood and they're running it as we speak," Richmond said. "Ten bucks it's one of our victims."

"I think you're going to be disappointed," Gavin said.

"We'll see," Richmond said in an upbeat mood as he went to get himself some coffee.

"Gavin," Costner addressed shyly.

"What, Costner?" Gavin didn't look up from the file, but did after Costner didn't answer him. "What is it, Costner?"

"Bannock is in this ledger," he said.

Gavin walked over and looked at the entry that Costner pointed at.

"Which ledger is this?" he asked.

"Watson Stables."

"Watson Stables was the one that was condemned," Gavin said.

"What was condemned?" Richmond stood behind them.

"Watson Stables."

Carla Landreth

"Let me guess; our Mr. Bannock is in the ledger," Richmond said. "Boy, am I loving this. I assume you're going to send out a CSU team?"

"Yes, I am."

The telephone rang on Richmond's desk. He quickly picked it up.

"Detective Richmond ... yeah ... really? But it is human? That's all I need. Thank you." He hung up. "Your Mr. Bannock is looking more guilty. The blood was too degradable to get any DNA, but they were able to determine it was human blood."

Gavin hated to admit he was wrong, but maybe this time he was. But why was that little gut feeling telling him this was all wrong?

* * *

Watson Stables was crawling with CSU. Gavin got out of his vehicle along with Costner and Richmond. They met Quinlan getting out of her vehicle, which surprised Gavin.

"We don't have a dead body," Gavin said.

"You never know," she said. "Besides, Richmond told me to come out here."

Gavin glanced over to Richmond, who shrugged. "We might find another stiff."

The stables were like a bee hive crawling with CSU. Gavin met forensic Detective Michael Warrick, a graying man who seemed bothered to be there.

"There isn't anything here," he said.

"Did you check each of the stalls?" Gavin asked as he looked around.

"Yes--"

"Hey, Warrick, we may have found something," a young CSU called from a stall that was in the back.

Richmond quickly rushed to the stall before Gavin got there. Quinlan came over and glanced around the stall. There were some bloody ropes hanging from the rafters, and a big butcher knife was stabbed into the wall. The dirt was darker than other dirt in the stable.

"It's blood," she said.

"I guess we've found the killing room." Richmond bent down and picked up a funny looking doll. "Wonder what this is for?"

"It's a voodoo doll," Costner said. "You can pick them up a dime a dozen in New Orleans. Tiffany picked one up."

"So this is a cult thing," Richmond remarked.

"*This* might be a cult thing." Gavin motioned his hand at the ground. "But I don't see Bannock in this," Gavin said.

"You don't want to admit it, but Bannock is this," Richmond said. "Look, the same kind of ropes used on our victims. Am I right, Quinlan?"

"I only do dead bodies, but they're similar, if that's what you wanted to know," she said.

"We'll know soon enough." Warrick wagged his head for his team to begin processing.

"I think we ought to go back to the office. See if we can't find some real evidence," Gavin said as he walked away. "If you find something, let me know."

Costner caught up with him.

"Gavin, you know Richmond could be right this time," he said. "Plenty is pointing at Bannock."

"You know what, Costner? It doesn't add up. I don't care how it looks. It doesn't add up."

* * *

Boland handed him the water, then returned to her desk.

"I was surprised you called," she said.

"I've paid for this month and, since you don't have a refund policy, I'm going to use it. Besides, these two little sessions are probably what I need."

She smiled. "Okay. When I last spoke to you, you were relieved that you and Denise were no longer a couple and that Lilly played a big part in your life."

"She does," he said. "But, she isn't wanting to talk to me. Don't blame her."

"Lilly is hurt, but I think from what I gather from you, Lilly is quite understanding. I don't see her upset with you for very long. My question is, how do you feel since I last saw you?"

"I'm fine with the breakup. I'm just not fine with Lilly being hurt."

Boland began slowly rocking in her chair, staring at him.

"Do your feelings for Lilly go beyond friendship?" she asked.

Gavin was surprised by her question. She lightly smiled as she waited for a reply.

"No," he said firmly, but the long pause afterwards made him think about his answer. "However, here lately I may have thought of Lilly in a more romantic way."

"How so?" Boland asked.

"I don't know, it's just there. Maybe it's being around her so much--I don't know. Is that possible to not know?" he asked her.

She shrugged, not responding to his question.

"Something has happened between you two to question those feelings. What do you think it could have been?" Boland asked.

"I kissed her," he said frankly.

"Kissed her?" Boland asked, surprised.

"Is there an echo in here?" he said, a little irritated. "Yeah, I kissed her."

"I see. Was this before you and Denise--"

"Busted up? Yeah. I wish I could say it was innocent, but it wasn't."

"So you intently kissed Lilly because you wanted to," Boland said.

"Yeah, something wrong with that?"

"No. But you need to ask yourself if it wasn't wrong, then why are you getting agitated?"

"I'm getting agitated with you because you repeat basically what I've just told you," he said, sitting up in his chair, getting defensive.

"I apologize. I'll try not to do it," she said softly. "What do you feel when you're with Lilly? What are your emotions?"

He relaxed in his chair. "When I'm with Lilly . . . when I'm with Lilly, I feel safe, complete, and compassion. I can talk to Lilly about anything and not be judged and vice versa. Trust, complete trust, between us, except now."

"How long have you had safe, complete, compassion and trust for Lilly?" She waited for an answer. "Since you can't answer right away, I'm guessing for a long time."

He sighed, shaking his head. "I can't be in love with Lilly."

"Why not?" she asked.

"She's sort of like the forbidden fruit," he said. "It's there; don't touch it."

"If I can recall, Adam ate the forbidden fruit," she answered.

"I'm assuming that's your idea of humor," Gavin replied.

"You seem to find me humorous when you're afraid," she replied.

"Afraid of what?"

“Being in love, real love. The kind that makes you think about all your choices you make in life,” she said.

“I’ve been in love before. Let’s get that straight. I’ve been in love plenty of times.”

“Then maybe you’re afraid you’ve crossed the line with your partner’s daughter. A partner whom you’ve come to respect and feel, if you stepped over that line, you’d lose. Probably the only real friend you’ve had in a long time.”

He frowned. “I have plenty of friends.”

“But none like your partner. If I’m right, your partner covers your back. You have to have complete trust with one another. You’ve been in life or death situations that have probably brought you closer. Now you’ve fallen in love with your partner’s daughter. In your mind, it’s a betrayal,” she explained.

Gavin sat there quietly, not answering for a minute.

“So what do I do?” he finally asked.

“Be honest, not only with Lilly, but with your partner,” she said.

“That’s it? Be honest?” he asked, confused. “What kind of advice is that?”

“The best I can give you. Look, Mr. Reece, you’ve suppressed your feelings for a long time. I’ll have to warn you, with this kind of honesty, you still could lose your partner and Lilly.”

The bell on her desk rang, and she turned off the small tape recorder that lay on her desk.

* * *

Upon returning to the office, Richmond sat at his desk. His eyes glanced up at Gavin as he walked in.

“Anything?” Gavin asked.

"Not yet," Richmond said. "The kid's been looking for you, though."

"Costner?"

"Yeah, what other kid is there?" Richmond said sourly.

"What did he want?"

"I don't know, he didn't tell me. Said to let you know he was looking for you. The last I saw him, he was in the break room," Richmond said, reading some papers.

"We need to talk," Gavin said.

Richmond looked up from his reading and took off his glasses.

"About what?"

"Lilly."

"If that's all, you can stop right there." Richmond raised his hand.

"I'm not backing down," he said.

"Lilly is off limits," Richmond said firmly.

"Lilly can make up her own mind about us. But this is between you and me. I want you to understand I value our friendship, and I'd never do anything to betray it. With that said, I can't stop my feelings for Lilly, and I have no intentions of stuffing them away for your sake."

Costner came into the room waving a piece of paper.

"Results are back."

"It's about time," Richmond said, getting up from his desk.

Standing by his desk with anticipation, Richmond waited for Costner to rattle off what they had. Gavin, however, was surprised to see the ADA Charlene Middleton standing nearby. She listened intently as Costner talked.

"Positive for blood on the ropes; however, compared to the victims, it didn't match. The knife had blood, but it wasn't human," he told them.

“What about the ground?” Richmond inquired, handing the file to Gavin.

“The blood on the ground was too contaminated to determine if it was human or animal,” Gavin said.

“What other evidence do you have?” Middleton asked.

“Bannock is the only person who’s seen our mystery woman, Bertie Johnson. All our victims had Bannock’s wig business cards. Bannock has a car with navy blue interior with blood, which is too degradable to determine the blood type or DNA. Last but not least, we have a ledger from a stable with Bannock’s name,” Richmond answered.

“You haven’t found the woman?” Middleton asked.

“No and we’ve checked,” Richmond said.

“What made you look at his car?” she asked.

“Borge had a tiny dark carpet fiber from a vehicle under her nail scrapings. Bannock owns a car with dark carpet,” Richmond answered with delight.

“And the ledger?” Middleton crossed her arms.

“Dirt under Borge’s nails was from a stable. A check on unused stables led us to the ledgers, which led us to Watson Stables.”

She took in a deep breath. “So why don’t you have Bannock in custody?”

“Our lead detective doesn’t think we have enough evidence,” Richmond said.

“We don’t,” Gavin said. “What we have is coincidences. Nothing solid.”

“Let’s not forget the taser gun,” Richmond announced.

She shot a glance at them.

“What’s this about a taser?” she asked.

Devil's Concubine

"Bannock owns a taser gun. Taser gun is what was used on all of the victims. We suspect he uses the taser to knock out his victims," Richmond continued.

"Just because he owns a taser doesn't make him the killer," Gavin said.

Middleton looked at Richmond, then over to Gavin.

"Arrest him," she said.

"You can't arrest him. You don't have enough solid evidence," Gavin said.

"Too much adds up," she said. "Arrest him."

"And while we're at it, we'll bring out the rubber hoses," Gavin remarked.

"If it'll get a confession," she said. "Pick him up. I'll get the warrant."

She was gone as quickly as she had come. Richmond turned to Gavin with a smug look.

"I guess you need to pick him up," Richmond said, leaving.

Costner stopped Gavin while waiting for Richmond to completely disappear before he spoke.

"Look, I didn't want to say anything in front of Richmond, but Lilly called. She wanted to talk to you. I told her you'd call her back as soon as you got in," Costner said.

* * *

While Gavin waited for Costner in the car, he made a quick phone call to Lilly. She picked up on the first ring.

"Gavin," she said.

"Yeah, you wanted me to call you. Everything okay?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine," she said. "I wanted to talk to you about us."

Carla Landreth

He saw Costner come out of the station and start toward the car.

“Yeah, when?”

“Tomorrow night at seven?” she asked.

“Where?” he quickly asked before Costner got in.

“At the Pub?”

“Seven at the pub. I’ll be there.” He flipped his phone closed.

“Got the warrant,” Costner said, as he shut the door to the car.

Chapter 15

For the last hour and a half Bannock sat in the small interrogation room, fiddling nervously with his fingers. Gavin, Middleton, Costner, and Richmond stood behind the two-way mirror watching him.

"Is there a reason why you haven't gone in there to question him?" Middleton asked.

"We're watching him," Gavin said.

"Watching him do what--pick his nose?" she asked.

"A guilty man knowing he's been caught will fall asleep," he said.

"You're waiting for him to fall asleep?" Middleton asked.

"An innocent man will be edgy." Gavin pointed as Bannock jumped when an officer came in and gave him water. "But they still might know something."

"In this business, timing is everything," Richmond interjected.

"I don't care how you get the confession," she said firmly. "Just get me one."

"I'm not brow-beating someone into a confession," Gavin replied.

"You don't have to. Just do some squeezing. I know you've done it before," she said.

"When the suspect was actually guilty," he replied.

"Detective," Middleton sharply addressed Gavin. "Either you go in there or I'll send in somebody else. It's up to you."

Gavin took one of his heavy deep breaths and walked out with Richmond and Costner behind him.

He walked into the interrogation room, causing Bannock to jump.

“Whatever you think I did, I didn’t do it.”

“How come you’re the only person who’s ever met Bertie Johnson?” Gavin asked.

“What?” Bannock asked, confused.

“Bertie Johnson.” Gavin dropped the file onto the stainless steel table.

“I already told you I only met her a few times. Now where’s my lawyer?” he demanded.

“He’s in court. We’ve alerted him, and he’ll be here as soon as possible,” Gavin said, taking a seat in front of him. “Look, the DA said if you cooperate with us now, she’ll take the death penalty off the table.”

“Death penalty?” Bannock asked, shocked.

“But if you wait for your lawyer, all deals are off,” he said.

“I didn’t do anything,” Bannock said firmly.

“Yes, you did. You killed Bethany Borge.” Gavin pulled out the picture of Borge and slammed the picture onto the table, then shoved it in front of him. “A wife, mother of two. She has pretty hair.”

“I don’t know this Bethany Borge.” He shoved the picture back without looking. “I didn’t kill anyone.”

“Where’s your taser?” Gavin returned to the file looking through papers.

“I don’t have a taser.”

“Really?” Gavin held up a receipt. “According to Popa’s Gun Shop, you purchased one seven years ago. About the time the first victim Barb Nielsen was found.”

“Like I said, I don’t own a taser.”

"Doesn't matter, we'll find it. CSU is going through your home and store as we speak. Come to think of it, that's about the time Bertie Johnson came into your life."

"How come you haven't processed me?" Bannock questioned.

"Oh, the computer is down. So everyone is being backed up," Gavin answered. "Don't worry, you'll get processed. Do you own a horse?"

"What?"

"A horse. Do you own a horse or did you ever own one?"

"Do I look like a horse person to you?" Bannock became agitated.

"Then why did your name show up in a ledger showing you rented the Watson Stables?" Gavin read from a copy of the ledger.

"I don't know, but I never rented any stables. I have no use for them."

"Unless you want to kill someone there," Gavin commented.

"How many times do I have to tell you, I didn't kill anyone," Bannock repeated. "I'm not saying another word until my lawyer gets here."

Gavin closed the file. "Fair enough. Want anything to drink while you wait?"

"Soda would be nice," Bannock answered.

Gavin nodded and walked out. Richmond was following him when Middleton came out of the adjoining room.

"What are you doing?" she asked angrily.

Gavin walked into the break room over to the soda machine. He slipped a few coins into the coin slot without saying a word.

“Are you going to answer me?” she demanded. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Exactly what you want. Getting a confession,” he answered.

“Really? That’s not what I’m seeing.”

“What do you see?” Gavin asked.

“Someone who’s stalling,” she retorted.

“Relax, counselor, Detective Reece knows what he’s doing,” Richmond defended.

“He’d better. Because if his lawyer gets wind we haven’t processed him before questioning--”

“Don’t worry, you’ll get your little confession sooner or later,” Gavin stated.

Four hours later Bannock hadn’t confessed to any sort of crime. Instead, Gavin was only getting a headache and Bannock a full bladder. Also, by now, Bannock had opted to wait for his lawyer, ceasing any further questioning.

“Why haven’t you processed him?” Middleton demanded.

“It’s busy,” he answered, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

“Really? I checked—there’s no rush on criminals,” she said.

“No, but, if you took the time to check, all computers have been down,” Richmond informed her. “That makes everything creep along.”

“If his lawyer--”

“You’re more worried about his lawyer than your suspect’s rights?” Gavin argued. “Why don’t you admit it? You had enough to bring him in for questioning, but nothing more. If you would have left me alone to run this investigation instead of your knee jerk reaction to arrest the man--”

“It wasn’t a knee jerk reaction and you know it,” Middleton argued.

"Really? Degraded blood samples, wigs that we can't prove came from any of the victims, car fibers that could match our victim, but not a positive match. A taser we haven't found after an extensive search. Now you want a confession from all of this so-called evidence. It isn't going to happen."

"I have to agree. If this man was going to confess, he would have done it by now or at least slipped up somewhere in the questioning," Richmond said.

"Bannock's lawyer is here," Costner pointed out.

Franklin Pierce came into the squad room with his usual disgruntled mood. He walked up to Middleton with his poker face and began talking.

"How long have you had my client?" he demanded. "I hope you didn't question him without his lawyer, because if you did, I will--"

"Relax, he refused to talk until you got here," Gavin said. "We took great care of him."

Gavin showed Middleton and Pierce into the interrogation room. Richmond and Costner stood by and listened.

"Well, it's about time," Bannock said.

"Sorry," Pierce replied, taking a seat beside Bannock. "You didn't answer anything, did you? They didn't threaten you or anything like that?"

"Unless you count the death penalty a threat," Bannock said.

He turned his attention to Middleton. "Death penalty, Counselor? What are the charges?"

"He's being charged with Bethany Borge's murder," Middleton answered, taking her seat across from them.

"With what evidence?"

"A ledger showing your client rented from Watson Stables. Rope was found at the stables, the same rope used on Bethany

Borge to restrain her. The interior of his car matches fibers found on Bethany Borge,” she said.

“I didn’t kill anyone. This is a setup,” Bannock argued as Pierce waved his hand to shush Bannock.

“My client is invoking his right not to speak at this moment. I want to see your so-called evidence.”

“Fine,” Middleton said. “But you know he’s staying in County lockup until he’s arraigned in the morning.”

“You have your job, Counselor, I have mine. Now may I have a moment alone with my client?”

Middleton came out into the hall meeting up with Richmond and Gavin.

“You sure put on a horse and pony show,” Richmond said.

“No show. We have enough to prove he’s responsible for Borge’s death. I’ll re-amend the charges in the morning to include Jeannie Burke, Barb Nielson, and Bill Crummel,” she informed them.

“Wait a minute. On what evidence?” Gavin challenged.

“The evidence you have,” she said. “Look, all the victims were tasered, roped, scalped, throat cut. The jury will eat this up.”

“You have no solid evidence,” Costner chimed in. “You barely got it with Borge.”

“Hey, Gavin, tell your new partner not to get so emotional. It doesn’t help our case.” Middleton walked away.

“Back off, Middleton,” Richmond said. “You aren’t going to get a conviction with what you have.”

“I’ve convicted with a lot less,” she said. “Now gather all of your stuff and have it in my office first thing in the morning.”

She left with a smugness which enraged Gavin.

“Well, are you happy, Richmond?” Gavin asked.

"I didn't know she was going to become a shark and twist some of the evidence."

"Everybody knows Middleton is a shark," Costner said. "My father-in-law has had a few arguments with her at some functions, and she doesn't play nice."

"It doesn't matter now," Gavin said. "According to her, she has her killer."

"We aren't just going to let her do this, are we?" Costner asked, surprised. "We need to still work this case. You know and I know Bannock isn't the killer."

"Doesn't matter what we think kid; the ADA has spoken," Richmond said.

"Look, I didn't join this profession to put innocent people away," Costner complained.

"Neither did we, but sometimes--"

"But sometimes what?" he interrupted Richmond. "Sometimes when we're mad at our partner, we decide to call the ADA in and screw everything up because you're mad at him? If this is the way this system works, then I don't want any part of it." Costner stomped off, leaving Richmond and Gavin alone.

"It seems your partner is going to be a pretty good partner," Richmond said.

"Because he's right or because he stood up to you?" Gavin asked.

"Both."

Chapter 16

Despite it being late at night, nine o'clock to be precise, Gavin slowly dropped each item of evidence into the cardboard box as he carefully examined them. He looked up at the squad room. The second shift was on and busy. He saw Richmond sitting at his desk, typing on the computer while Costner sat at his desk playing with his handcuffs, in deep thought.

The telephone rang on Gavin's desk. Richmond and Costner both looked at the black phone with dread. Gavin made a gloomy sigh, then picked it up on the third ring.

"Detective Reece ... Where?" Gavin scribbled down the location of their new case, then hung up. "We've been summoned by Quinlan. She specially requested that we handle this case."

"The S Loop?" Richmond complained as he got out of the car, examining the area.

"Isn't this where prostitutes hang out?" Costner asked.

"Some of them," Gavin answered as they worked their way through the crowd of on looking prostitutes. The scene was close to an underpass blocked off with crime scene tape.

"Great, she called us out here to investigate a working girl's murder," Richmond mumbled as he walked under the yellow tape.

"It doesn't matter what kind of murder it is, it's still a murder," Gavin replied.

Devil's Concubine

Gavin was the first to meet Quinlan while slipping on his gloves. She was bent over the body. She raised up and shook her head with a grim look.

"What have you got?" he asked.

"Yeah, why did you ask for us to come out here for a prostitute?" Richmond inquired, glancing around.

"I thought you'd want this one since this victim was also scalped," she said.

As if they had been hit by a brick, they looked at her with shocked expressions.

"That's impossible," Richmond said.

Gavin moved closer to the victim. He squatted beside the body and began his own examination. She laid face up arms sprawled out, consistent with a dump. Her pink tee and pale blue shorts were blood-soaked. He got his penlight from his left jacket pocket. Upon a closer look he saw rope marks on her wrists. He swept the pen light to her ankles and found the same marks.

"Time of death?" Gavin asked.

"Three or four hours, tops," Quinlan answered.

"Great. Middleton is going to be pissed when she hears this," Richmond complained, moving over to Gavin. "That knocks out Bannock. Unless you think it's a copy cat?"

"Hardly." With his penlight he showed Richmond. "Throat sliced, rope marks around wrists and ankles."

"Damn," Richmond whispered. "No ID, I guess."

"Just like the others," Quinlan answered, removing her gloves. "Don't you have a guy in custody for this?"

"We've had Bannock all afternoon. He didn't do this," Gavin said as he checked her legs for any marks.

"Richmond," Captain Wolf called as he approached the scene.

“Great, the brass is wanting in on this one,” Richmond mumbled. “Captain, our victim here--”

“You need to go to the hospital. Your daughter was in an accident.”

Gavin stood as Richmond whirled his head up with the news.

“Is it bad?” he asked.

“Serious enough that I’ve already had a squad car pick up Maureen to take her to the hospital,” Wolf said.

“What kind of accident?” Gavin asked.

“Car,” Wolf told them. “I’ll finish up here with Costner. Reece will drive you.”

“I can drive myself,” Richmond said in a semi-daze.

“No, your partner will drive you. That’s an order.” Wolf walked over to the body.

* * *

The emergency waiting room was full of people. An ordinary person wouldn’t have found a loved one quite as fast as Richmond did if it hadn’t been for the uniforms standing beside Maureen.

“Have you seen the doctor? What’s going on?” he asked Maureen, concerned.

“I don’t know,” she cried. “I don’t think they’ve brought her in yet.”

“Do you two know anything?” He looked to the uniform cops as they shook their heads.

“I’ll find someone.” Richmond walked up to the nurses’ station. “Excuse me. Where’s Lilly Richmond?”

“Sorry, who?”

“Lilly Richmond.”

The nurse searched some papers and called out to a nurse, then picked up the ringing phone. Richmond, becoming impatient, disconnected her call with the tap of his finger.

"My daughter," he demanded.

"It'll be just a minute. If you haven't noticed, we have a busy night here," she said, hanging up the phone.

"What I notice is nobody is in charge here," Richmond accused.

"Look, sir, I know you're a upset, but you don't have to take that tone with me."

"I'll take any tone when it comes to my daughter!"

The two began to argue. Quickly Gavin stepped in.

"All right, enough." He grabbed Richmond and pulled him aside. "Are you crazy? You're going to get thrown out if you keep it up. Go to Maureen. I'll see what I can find out. Maureen needs you."

"Fine, but you better find my little girl." Richmond stomped off, taking Maureen to a seat.

Gavin turned to the nurse. "I'm sorry. It's his daughter."

"No worry, I get it all the time," she said kindly. A nurse brought up a chart and whispered in her ear. "Lilly Richmond is with the doctor. It might be best if you bring her parents to the back where it's a little less chaotic," she suggested.

Gavin nodded and brought Richmond and Maureen to the back where the room was almost void of anyone. He didn't like the feeling of this room. It made him uneasy as they sat there. Two uniformed police officers, Officer Emily Danvers, and Officer Dan Gonzo came into the room.

"Detective Richmond?" Officer Danvers addressed him.

"Yes. I assume you're the two working my daughter's case?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Gonzo said.

“What happened?” Gavin asked.

“From what we can tell, your daughter ran into the sign post of the post office. A witness said he saw your daughter speeding away, then run straight into the post.”

“That doesn’t sound like Lilly,” Richmond said.

“What did our daughter say?” Maureen asked.

“Well, I’m afraid she was unconscious when we got there,” Gonzo said. “We hate to ask this, but has your daughter been upset recently?”

“Why would you ask such--wait a minute,” Richmond said.

“Are you trying to say my daughter did this on purpose?”

“What we know is that the witness said your daughter was driving at a unsafe speed and went straight for the post. He didn’t see anyone else. Tox screen came back negative,” Officer Danvers informed them.

“My daughter hasn’t been the happiest girl around here lately, but she wouldn’t try to kill herself. How dare you insinuate such a thing,” Richmond answered in an offended way.

“Richmond, they have to ask,” Gavin reasoned.

“Shut up, Gavin,” Richmond said. “The reason Lilly hasn’t been happy is because of you and that crazy ex-girlfriend of yours.”

“David, stop it. It’s not Gavin’s fault,” Maureen said.

“Oh, Maureen, when are you going to wise up about this situation?”

“How dare you talk to me that way, David! I do know the situation. Lilly told me everything. Gavin didn’t do anything wrong. In fact, she begged Gavin to keep it a secret because of the way you’d react. And she was right.”

“We’re just trying to find out what happened to your daughter,” Officer Danvers told him.

"We don't know what to tell you. We do know Lilly had been upset, but not enough to end it all," Maureen said.

"You do understand we have to talk to her before you," Officer Gonzo said. "Just procedure."

Richmond walked away, disgusted.

"Yes, of course," Maureen said, then joined Richmond on the little sofa.

A few moments later Captain Wolf came into the room with Costner. Gavin met them before Richmond, who by now had his wife in his arms as they waited for any news.

"Have you heard anything?" Captain Wolf inquired.

"Nope. The two suits said a witness saw her at high speed in her car run straight into the post office sign pole. Other than that, nothing else," Gavin said in a low voice.

"How's Richmond holding up?"

"A little snappy," Gavin said. "They also insinuated Lilly could have done this on purpose. But I can tell you, there's no way she would do this to herself."

"Are you sure, Detective?" Wolf questioned, which caught Gavin off guard.

"I'm positive. Lilly would have come to me if there were problems. She always comes to me when she has problems."

"Okay then. If you're sure."

The door opened, and a tall, older gentleman with graying hair emerged. He had on a blue surgical smock and a chart in his hand.

"Lilly Richmond family," he called and was stunned to see all of them standing there.

Richmond and Maureen quickly jumped.

"We're her parents," Richmond said.

"Doctor Caruso. I'm sorry we didn't get to you sooner. Your daughter was brought in unconscious, so I had to take the

time to assess your daughter for any internal bleeding. There was none. No broken bones, just a nasty head injury that required some stitches. Now we're concerned that she was knocked out, so we'll be keeping her overnight."

"Is she going to be okay?" Maureen questioned.

"She'll be fine. She woke up and had no blurred vision or anything like that. You can see her whenever we get her settled into a room. She'll be fine, but again we're keeping her overnight just for observation."

"Hey, Doc, we need to interview--" Officer Danvers was suddenly cut off.

"Officers, Captain Wolf. I need to speak to you two alone," Wolf said, pointing to the door.

Richmond and Maureen were relieved as well as Gavin. Costner pulled Gavin aside.

"I got everything you'd want on the dead girl," he said.

"Good, Costner." He then sighed, glancing back at Richmond. "I guess we're not needed here. Lilly will be fine, and we do have a case to work on."

"Captain said we can work on it in the morning," Costner said as the two officers walked out of the room.

"Gavin." Captain Wolf motioned him over. "Gonzo and Danvers are going to give you the accident report. You're to interview Lilly and find out what's happened."

"What about brass? You pulling two uniforms off a case might not set well with them."

"Don't worry about it. Your partner here called in a favor." Captain Wolf glanced over to Costner. "Find out what happened and make your report. Now I'm going to call it a night after I talk with Richmond."

"I don't know what to say, Costner," Gavin said surprised.

"Thank you is enough."

“Why? Why would you do this after all the flap I’ve been giving you?”

“One thing my new partner has taught me to do is find the truth. After we wrapped up our dead DOA, we swung by the accident. Just to take a look. If she was trying to kill herself, then why would a brick be on the passenger side of the car?”

“There was a brick?”

“Yeah. And those two uniforms were more than sure Lilly was either drunk or tried to kill herself. They cared less about the brick. After being brushed off, I knew I had to do something.”

“They said something about a witness,” Gavin said.

“If they’re relying on the eyewitness of the man who had just come out of The Yellow Rose titty bar, then they haven’t got much. The man was last seen sleeping off his nightly round of drinking in the back of a squad car.”

“Good work, Detective.”

“Thank you. You better go talk with Lilly before Richmond.”

* * *

Gavin slowly opened the door to the room. It was dark except for the light above the bed. The nurse who was beside Lilly’s bed came up to Gavin.

“She may be a little groggy. We gave her something for the pain. So make it short.”

Gavin walked over to the bed. Lilly lay there with cuts and bruises on her face. He quietly pulled up a chair beside the bed.

She must have heard him because she slowly opened her eyes.

“Gavin?” she said softly.

"Yeah, it's me. Doctor said you're going to be okay. You'll have a bad headache for a while."

"Are my parents here?"

"They're in the waiting room," he told her.

"I bet my father is acting terrible toward everybody right about now," she said, closing her eyes.

"He's your father, he's supposed to worry," he said. "Lilly, can you tell me what happened?"

She turned her head and thought about it.

"For the past few days I've been getting somebody else's mail besides mine. I took it to the post office and dropped it in the mailbox," she explained.

"Then what did you do?"

She paused, closing her eyes.

"There was a man," she said softly.

"Yeah, a man witnessed you running into the post," Gavin said.

"No, there was a man outside the post office," she said.

"Yes, Lilly, he saw you have the wreck," Gavin repeated. "He'd been to The Yellow Rose Strip Club."

"No, the man. He was trying to give me money."

"What?"

"The man ... the man tried to give me money. I was coming out when he was standing by the doors. I was nearly to the car when he called me." She tried to sit up, but Gavin quickly made her stay down.

"No, don't get up. What did the man say to you?"

"He said I dropped some money," she said. "But I didn't. Because I left my purse in the car."

"Then what happened?" Gavin asked.

"The man insisted that I dropped my money, but I didn't. So I got into my car and locked the doors immediately. The

man scared me. I started the car and he startled me by banging on the passenger side of the car. I refused to roll down the window. He got even madder. I put the car in gear and, before I knew it, the passenger window glass just shattered. I guess I accelerated, because that was the last thing I remember," she explained.

"Can you remember what the man looked like?" Gavin asked.

"I couldn't see his face. He had a baseball cap pulled down low over it. I couldn't see his face. I'm sorry." She began to cry.

"There's nothing to apologize for," he said, taking her hand. "We're going to get this guy. Don't worry about it. Why don't you get some sleep?"

She closed her eyes and eventually fell asleep.

Chapter 17

Gavin remembered hearing about a case a few weeks ago with a similar MO as Lilly's. Detective Lauris handed over the file of Amanda Filmore.

According to the report, the assailant was wearing his cap low, unable to be identified. He tried to lure Filmore with the money trick just like he tried with Lilly. Her window was bashed in, but not with a brick. No prints on Filmore's car. The cashier at Allsup's, the only witness for Filmore, wasn't much help either. She had less description because of it being dark. The drunk in Lilly's case didn't see anymore except for Lilly running into the pole. Finding this man would be impossible, he thought.

He called Filmore to come in and work with a sketch artist. He'd also be sending an artist to the hospital. In the meantime he and Costner were down at the Medical Examiner's Office.

"Gavin," Quinlan said as he and Costner came into the room. "How's Lilly?"

"She's going to be okay," he said. "They were only keeping her overnight. Did you get to our girl?"

"As soon as I got her back," she said, picking up a file from a nearby table. "She was tortured and killed, the same as Borge."

"How about ID?" Costner inquired.

"Ran her prints. Your victim is Elizabeth Lowell," she said.

"What?" Gavin grabbed the file from her as the phone on the wall rang. "Are you sure?"

She walked over to the phone and quickly picked it up. "She was in the system. Arrested a few years back for DUI," she told them, then spoke into the receiver.

"Elizabeth Lowell was the woman Richmond was trying to locate," Costner said. "Do you think it's a coincidence?"

"No. We may have been looking at this wrong. If Lowell is dead, how do we know Bertie Johnson didn't fall to the same fate and we just haven't found her?" Gavin said.

"I'll have a uniform put on Lucy Smite," Costner said, pulling out his cell and began dialing.

"It also means Bannock isn't our killer. Someone is sure going through a lot of trouble to gaslight us."

Quinlan returned with her hand on her hip.

"Well, that was ADA Middleton. She isn't a happy person. When I told her the time of death of your victim here, she acted as though what I told her didn't matter."

"We aren't fans of hers, either. She's too busy wanting to build an astounding resume whether they're guilty or not," Gavin told her. "Was Lowell a working girl?"

"Not that I could tell. She was clean. I did find some animal hairs on the front of her shorts and shirt. My guess, a pet."

"Dog or cat perhaps?" Gavin cocked an eyebrow.

She nodded as Costner closed his phone.

"Any personal affects?" Costner inquired.

"A silver belly ring and a gold cheap blue stone ring." She handed him the bags.

"Do you have a recent address?" Costner asked.

"Only the one on file, and it's old," she said.

Gavin's cell phone began ringing. He quickly stepped away and answered it.

"Detective Reece," he answered.

* * *

Gavin and Costner sat in Captain Wolf's office while Assistant District Attorney Middleton ranted.

"Do you know how embarrassing it was in court today?" she asked.

"I'm sure it was," Gavin said. "But, did you think you had an airtight case? We tried to warn you, but you were too busy trying to impress your boss."

"I want a new investigator on this case," she demanded from Captain Wolf.

"Are you serious?" Captain Wolf looked at her, almost ready to laugh. "Listen, you can't come into my house and order me about. Detective Reece and Detective Costner are two of my best detectives. They have control of this case. It's not their fault you wouldn't listen."

"I'm sure I can go over your head if you aren't willing to comply with my wishes," she said.

Captain Wolf stood from his chair with an intense stare. Gavin had seen this stare before, one that showed he didn't tolerate bullies. Middleton was acting like a bully, and she was about to find out what kind of Captain this precinct had.

"Listen to me, Miss Middleton, and listen to me good. I won't put new investigators on this case because you wouldn't listen and made an ass of yourself. You can go to whomever you wish to try to get them removed, but I can tell you that if you mess with me and my house, I'll make sure *you* are removed from this case. Don't think for one minute that I won't have you removed. I do know the DA personally, and I think he'd be terribly upset if he knew you were bullying your way. Now the best thing for you to do is to walk right out of here and let my detectives do their job. We'll call you when we have something," Captain Wolf told her.

Devil's Concubine

Everyone stood quietly as Middleton jerked up her briefcase that sat in a chair and walked out of the office, slamming the door.

"I guess you showed her," Costner said.

Wolf shook his head and sat back down in his chair. "I don't know how long I can keep you on this case. You need to wrap this up, and quick," he said.

Gavin glanced over to Costner as they walked out of Wolf's office and returned to their desks. Gavin picked up the pile of pink slips on his desk as Costner riffled through his.

"Got an address on--" Costner began, only to be interrupted by Richmond walking into the office.

"What did I miss?"

"Shouldn't you be at the hospital?" Costner asked, frowning.

"They sent her home this morning. Now what did I miss?" he inquired again.

"Our latest victim is our missing Elizabeth Lowell," Gavin informed him.

"What?"

"Yeah, and we seem to have tracked down where she lives. You want to go?" he asked.

"Yeah, you know I do."

Costner walked out, leaving Gavin and Richmond alone. Richmond quickly turned his attention to Gavin.

"Lilly told me you came by this morning," Richmond said.

"Richmond, if you're going to start in about my feelings or whatever toward Lilly--"

He held up his hand. "I've already been warned to butt out of my daughter's personal life by her and her mother. I was told you were investigating her case. Is that true?"

"I am."

“You have to tell me what’s going on,” he said. “I’m her father, and I want to know who did this.”

“You know I can’t tell you. It’s an ongoing case,” Gavin reminded him.

“I know that, but you could just let me know if you’re closer to catching the jerk who did this,” Richmond said. “Gavin, please.”

Gavin thought about it for a moment. He knew he shouldn’t tell Richmond anything. But he knew if he didn’t give Richmond a little something, he’d go off and do something stupid. It wouldn’t be the first time Richmond had interfered with a case and it had nearly cost him his job.

“You have to promise you won’t interfere. Whatever I tell you, you can’t play wild west and chase down people. Because if you do--”

“I promise I won’t interfere,” Richmond said.

“I don’t have much to work with except for a few weeks ago there was a similar case. He lures women by telling them they dropped some money in hopes he can bait them into God knows what,” he explained.

“So do you have any idea who this man is?”

“No, he disguises himself well.”

“Are you guys coming?” Costner hollered across the room.

“We’re on our way,” Gavin told him. “Richmond, I’ll get who did this to Lilly. I can promise you that.”

“I believe you will.”

* * *

The landlord, Max DeLuca, hadn’t seen Elizabeth Lowell in three days. In fact, DeLuca recalled the last time he saw her, she was going out on her nightly walk sometime around seven with her little dog Rags. He never recalled seeing her return, but

then again his favorite game show was on television, and he wouldn't have paid any attention to the tenants during that time.

Lowell's small one-room apartment was frugally decorated with second-hand furniture. Her business suit she wore to work lay haphazardly on the floor. Her name appeared on the name tag along with Watt's Department Store. No sign of Rags, except for a bowl of half-eaten dog food and a bowl of water. Her bed was turned down and dishes sat in the sink. Only one family photo sat beside the sofa. It was of her and her parents, both dead, according to records.

Gavin went to the bathroom and searched around. He found a box of condoms in one drawer and enough hair care products to choke a horse in another, but nothing screaming out who would have wanted to harm her. He had CSU bag all of the hair care products when Costner called out for him.

Costner held up a date book.

"Looks like she was a busy woman. Lunch with her friend Idell twice a week, dates and times when she paid bills, when she saw the doctor, even her workout schedule. This woman had everything planned out."

"Planned out enough so her killer knew her schedule," Gavin said. "Bag it. We may get lucky with our killer in the book."

"Wouldn't that be nice?" he asked. "You know, find the killer in the book."

"Wonder where the dog is at?" Gavin asked.

"Don't know," Costner said. "Wonder if he grabbed her when she was on her walking trail or when she came out of the building?"

"Does it make a difference?" Richmond asked.

"I guess not. But it could tell us what happened to Rags," Costner said.

"If she had a routine walking trail and she was attacked there, then Rags could still be out on the trail somewhere," Gavin suggested. "We need to find her friend Idell."

* * *

Watt's Department Store was having a huge sale. Several of the clerks were just too busy to talk except for Mason, who was quick to point out Idell. She was another sales clerk who worked in the juniors department on odd-numbered days. They were in luck--it was an odd day.

Idell was young, younger than what Gavin suspected, definitely much younger than Elizabeth Lowell.

"Are you sure she's dead?" Idell asked, taking a seat in the break room.

"Yes. We hate to ask this, but can you recall the last time you saw Elizabeth?" Gavin asked.

"A few days ago . . . uh . . . three days. We had lunch together. She seemed fine."

"What did you two talk about?" Gavin asked.

"Normal things. You know, how it's hard to go out with anyone decent. But nothing unusual," she said.

"Did she ever say she thought someone was following her?"

"She never said anything to me. But then again, Lizzie was always getting all sorts of attention from the guys."

"Were there any particular guys who may have been a little too friendly?"

"Look around and pick one," she said. "Everybody adored Lizzie. I always thought she was silly when she worried about her looks."

"She worried about her looks?" Gavin perked up with that. "What was she worried about?"

"Besides getting old, she worried about wrinkles especially around the eyes. She got special hair care products. I don't know what it was. She said it had a secret ingredient that was proven to soften her hair and make it grow strong and shiny."

"Did she tell you what it was or where she got it?" he asked.

"No. She wasn't too keen on telling me what or where she got the stuff," Idell said. "We weren't best friends, you know, just co-workers who shared lunch and did some talking."

"Did she have any best friends you knew about?" Gavin questioned.

"They never came around here."

"Elizabeth went on a walk in the evenings. Do you know anything about that?" he asked.

"Yes, she goes to the park, the new one. She had to switch because of Rags--oh my God, Rags! Is he okay?"

"We're unsure. Rags wasn't at the apartment. Did she always take Rags with her when she went walking?" he asked.

"Always. He was company to her."

"You said she switched parks. When was this?" he asked.

She thought about it, then said, "About three months ago. That's when Rags bit a man."

"Rags bit a man?" Costner asked surprised. "That little dog?"

"He really just nipped him. It was a one-time deal," she said. "Rags is a nervous dog, and the old park has plenty of homeless men. Not sure what really happened, but Lizzie said Rags only nipped him because he was startled. There aren't very many homeless in the new park. I heard the mayor was cracking down on that." She lowered her voice.

"I guess Miss Lowell never told you who Rags nipped?" Gavin asked.

“No. Which was odd, because Lizzie got a bill scribbled on a piece of paper for money.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, she said it was nothing, then tossed it in the trash. She said if the man wanted money, he’d have to do like the rest of the world and get a lawyer.”

“Do you remember seeing the bill?” he asked.

“Well, when she tossed it into the trash, I later looked at it. It was on a sales receipt of some sort. There was no heading that I could tell, but you know the column and stuff is what made me think it was a sales receipt. The amount of fifty dollars was scribbled on it, and she was told to bring it to the cardboard box on the left. It was real spooky.”

“Do you know anything about Miss Lowell donating her hair for charity?”

“Yes, she did that once a year, but she didn’t elaborate on where or why she did it.”

* * *

Gavin flipped a page of her date book and began reading each appointment. It was so repetitious that even he could have found where Elizabeth would be after studying her appointment book for one week. She was an easy mark.

Costner picked up his ringing phone after the third ring.

“Detective Costner,” he answered. “We’re on our way.” He hung up. “Guess who they found? Rags. He was wandering around in the park with some homeless people.”

“I guess he didn’t like the homeless at the old park,” Richmond said as the sketch artist came up to Gavin.

“Costner, take Richmond with you and check out the dog,” Gavin instructed.

"He doesn't need a babysitter to see about the dog," Richmond complained.

"He does today." Gavin waited for Richmond and Costner to leave the room before he focused his attention to the artist. "What have you got?"

"Sorry, they couldn't describe him. This man is working real hard not to be seen," said the artist. "Cap down over his eyes, bringing a jacket collar up around his neck hiding his jaw line, not to mention picking his victims at night."

"Thanks." Gavin reached for the computer and began punching keys. He thought maybe there had been a case in sex crimes that would have the same MO. It was a thought he didn't want to think about, but it was a thought he had to consider.

* * *

The rainstorm that the weathermen had talked about on the radio was blowing in when he drove up to Lilly's house. The porch light was on as if waiting for him.

He ran up the steps, rang the doorbell, then waited. After a short moment he rang the doorbell again and waited. Moments later Lilly opened the door. She stood in the doorway in her striped pajamas, looking pale.

"Gavin," she said softly as she unlatched the screen door. "I was wondering when you'd get here."

"I promised I'd come by and check on you after my shift. Besides, where else am I going to go besides my hotel room," he said, coming into the foyer.

"So it's official. Denise kicked you out," Lilly said as she slowly eased herself onto the sofa.

"Yep, I guess I'll have to look for an apartment pretty soon."

"This couch folds out into a bed," she said. "You're always welcome to use it."

"I may have to. The cost of a hotel isn't exactly cheap," he answered. "How was your day?"

"Not exactly a great day," she said. "I didn't realize how useless television is during the day."

"Surely they still have a few soap operas on," he joked.

"Unless you're watching them every day, soap operas are confusing. I tried to watch a few talk shows; sorry, not into beauty tips or teen girls having sex at thirteen. What about your day?"

"About the same, I guess," he answered. "I'm still working on your case, of course, with not much luck. Then there's the Assistant District Attorney Middleton trying to get me and Costner thrown off a case because we arrested a man she wanted arrested."

"The Scalping Case," she said, nodding. "Saw it in the paper this morning."

A small alarm clock went off. Lilly turned off the alarm before trying to get herself off the couch.

"Medicine time. Mother thinks I can't take medicine without an alarm clock," she said, trying to get off the sofa.

"Tell me where it is and I'll get it." Gavin stood.

"In the kitchen on the counter," she instructed.

He went to the kitchen, got the meds, and came back holding the bottle in his hand with a puzzled look on his face.

"Are these the ones?" he asked.

"Yes, if they were on the counter. Why?"

"You're supposed to take this with a meal," he said, cocking an eye at her.

She shrugged. "If you notice, I'm not drinking, I'm not driving or operating heavy machinery, and I don't plan to do so."

"It's dangerous." He placed the bottle on the fireplace mantel and reached for the phone.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Calling for take out. You aren't taking this on an empty stomach. You can get ulcers from meds when you don't take them properly. Besides, you're pale from hunger," he said, then spoke into the phone.

Twenty minutes later dinner was served by Pat's Pizza. Lilly only ate one and half slices of pizza and half of her soda. Gavin was hungry and ate heartily.

The low rumbling thunder seemed to be getting deeper as the wind whipped harder outside. Gavin, fearing a power outage might happen, lit the cinnamon candle that sat on the end table by the sofa. He was skimming the TV guide when he noticed Lilly's favorite movie was on.

"Your favorite movie is on tonight," he said. "Out of Africa. I'll stay and watch it with you if you like."

"That would be nice."

As soon as Lilly answered, the power went out, and a loud clap of thunder jolted the house.

"It looks like Out of Africa is out," he joked, but quickly noticed Lilly was shaking. "Lilly, what's wrong?"

"Storms scare me. They always have. The rain, I can handle, but it's the thunder that scares me. Thunder means lightning is somewhere."

He moved beside her.

"It's going to be okay," he assured her. "Besides you have me here. We'll just keep each other company until the storm passes."

The thunder clapped again, this time causing Lilly to jump. He put his arms around her. She shivered and moved toward him. "Take some deep breaths," he instructed.

His hands came up to frame her face tenderly. His heart was thudding as the little voice in his head dared him to kiss her. With Lilly looking up at him, he leaned in and kissed her on the forehead. But as he withdrew, her eyes slid open, staring up at him. He stared down into her eyes as he lowered his head again, this time giving her a passionate kiss on the lips.

It started out slow, soft, and sensual, but soon became more hungry. Their kiss was suddenly interrupted by Lilly softly pushing him away.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I just don't know about this--us. How do I know this is real?"

"It is," he told her.

"You keep saying that, but what if this is a rebound thing? How do you know it's not a rebound thing?"

"Lilly, this isn't a rebound thing. My feelings for you are genuine," he told her.

"I don't know. I've been told feelings were real before and they weren't."

"You know what I think? You're afraid," he said.

"What?"

"Afraid," he repeated. "I think you're afraid. I think you're afraid to take that jump and find out who catches you this time," he said.

"Maybe I am, but I do have a good reason," she said. "I jumped into a relationship last time not afraid and got hurt. Frankly, I don't want to go down that road again."

"Here it is I thought it was me who was afraid when it was you. Lilly, I know what you've been through. Are you

forgetting I was there with you? I'm not like the other men in your life. I've been with you and stuck by you."

"Then you understand." She stood. "I'm going to bed. Blankets and pillow are in the hall closet if you want to stay."

Lilly walked out of the room, leaving Gavin to wonder how he was going to get Lilly to see what he saw.

Later that night while sleeping on the pull out, he was awakened by the harsh sound of hail hitting the roof. He opened his eyes and saw Lilly standing beside the sofa in only her blue oversize pajama top.

She appeared childlike as she stood there glancing up at the ceiling, then down at him.

"I can't sleep," she said.

Like an unspoken language between them, Gavin peeled back the covers and invited her in. Lilly crawled in and snuggled close to him.

Chapter 18

Gavin was in the office early that morning before Richmond or Costner. He sat at his desk and watched the rain, which he thought was starting to get annoying. He remembered telling Lilly this morning he probably wouldn't see her for a couple of days and how she responded by not saying anything. He wanted to see her, but knowing she had to make a decision on her own about them, he felt it best she had to think about it on her own. He'd already laid out his cards and told her how he felt. Now it would be up to her.

"That was the filthiest little dog I'd seen," Costner said. "I hope the vet can clean him up."

"What are you talking about, Costner?" Gavin asked, whirling his chair around.

"Rags. He's a real cute dog. The vet said he was in good health, just all nasty. The vet was going to clean him up. I can take him home this evening when I get off my shift."

"What?"

"I'm taking Rags home to the family," Costner said. "The vet said since the owner had no family to take the dog, it would be up for adoption. Well, at my house we've been talking about getting a pet, and I thought Rags would be the perfect dog."

"Boy, that was an awful storm last night." Richmond came in, taking off his jacket. "I don't think I got much sleep. What are we talking about?"

"Costner has a new bundle of joy on the way," Gavin said.

"Tiffany's pregnant?" he asked.

"Oh, no, we're getting Rags."

Richmond glanced over to Gavin and smiled.

"A dog. Well, congratulations." Richmond then sat down.

A desk clerk came up to Gavin with a couple of files, then walked off. He skimmed through them, picking up the file from the vet's office.

"Well, let's see what Rags had on him. Report is in." He opened the file and began reading aloud. "Rags had dirt, a type of green fungus on his front paws, and a red substance that turned out to be marinara sauce. Rags must have lived it up out there, drinking nasty pond water and spaghetti sauce from a can. Oh, Costner, you're going to love this. The new member of your family has fleas."

"Doesn't sound like Rags is going to help us," Richmond commented.

"All right, Elizabeth went missing, what, three days ago? Our killer is getting better and quicker at his game. We know Elizabeth was probably taken from the park. Now there are five ways out of that park." Gavin reached for a map as the other two gathered to watch. "Looking at this, there are two high traffic areas. One on the north end and one on the south end. It's popular and easy to come in and out from these entrances. The other three have hardly any traffic, and one of the three is farther than any of the entrances, but it's closer to a farm-to-market highway."

"So, our killer would have taken Lowell from the less traveled routes," Richmond said.

"Two on the east end and one on the west side. What time did Lowell do her walk?"

"According to the landlord, she left around six-thirty every night," Costner said.

"Give her thirty minutes to get to the new park, that's about seven. It's still daylight, getting dusk, by this time." Gavin

began calculating. "From her home to the new park she would have had to take a taxi."

"I'll call the taxi service and see if any delivered Miss Lowell out that way." Richmond picked up the phone.

"I guess I'm new at this, but exactly what are you thinking, Gavin?" Costner asked.

"Well, we need to determine if she was taken from the park or just before the park. If a taxi driver can identify Lowell as one of his rides, then we know she made it into the park."

Richmond got off the phone.

"They're going to fax us a list of cabs that went to the park between six-thirty and seven," Richmond said.

"Did you find anything more about those wigs?" Gavin asked as he saw a file from sex crimes laying on his desk.

"No, and I put a rush on it," Costner told them.

"Tell them to step it up. Richmond, has CSU called about the things we took from Lowell's apartment?"

"No, but I'll go down there and see if I can't get a rush on things," Richmond said, then looked at Costner. "Hey, kid, why don't you come down and I'll show you how to get things moving a little faster around here."

"Okay, sure."

As soon as they left, Gavin picked up the file and opened it. There had been one case about three years ago that had the same MO as Lilly's and Filmore's cases. It was sent to sex crimes because the alleged victim, Sandy Carpentaria, thought the man was trying to buy her.

He used the money trick and kept his face covered and collar up. Gavin hated this, a possible rapist on the prowl, and he had nothing to stop the son-of-a-bitch. He wondered, however, how many actual rape cases involved the same MO, so he went through the file looking. No papers were included of

that kind. He called sex crimes and asked. What he heard next would be shocking.

"Sorry, Reece, no actual rapes with that MO. To be honest, we thought the woman was a mental case. We never found anyone who saw this supposed attack, and we never could get a description of the man. We sat on that case for weeks thinking maybe we'd have another victim. It never happened. After a while we shoved it under the stack and moved on to other cases," Detective Mason told him.

"The assailant never tried to get her again?" Gavin inquired.

"Carpentaria never came back," Mason said.

"Not even to check on her case?" Gavin inquired.

"Nope. We went to her apartment to check on her. She had moved without a forwarding address. When we tried to locate her whereabouts, we discovered our victim told all sorts of lies to people. That's why we thought she was a mental case and we shoved it under the stack."

"Thanks, Mason." Gavin hung up, feeling uneasy about this case. In fact, the case seemed a little on the bizarre side, he thought. The fax machine next to the window beeped, then began churning out papers. Gavin went over and saw that it was the papers from the taxi service. He picked up the papers and began looking them over.

At six twenty-four, taxis had made drop-offs and by seven o'clock, three more. It was nearly eight o'clock before five taxis were called to the park to pick up. Gavin thought about it--seven taxis made drop-offs, but only five picked up.

He called the taxi service and requested that the drivers be sent to the station for further questioning. By that time Richmond and Costner had returned.

"The kid's got something," Richmond said.

“Bull semen,” Costner said, holding up a file.

Gavin and Richmond both frowned at him.

“Don’t look at me like that. It’s bull semen on the wigs.”

“What?” Richmond frowned at his coffee, then set it down.

“Those wigs that Gavin had me check. Well, CSU found bull semen.”

“What have we got? A case of illegal bull semen?” Richmond joked.

“Some of the higher-end salons use bull semen,” Costner said. “Tiffany bought some hair care products one time and it had goat’s milk in it with an expiration date. The stuff was expensive: a hundred dollars for a six-ounce bottle.”

“Did it work?” Richmond inquired.

“I couldn’t tell, but she swore up and down it did.”

“We retrieved a bunch of hair care products from Lowell’s apartment. See if any of them had bull semen as an ingredient,” Gavin said. “Then we can cross match to see if any of the other victims used the same hair care products. Also find out where Bannock gets his.”

“Bull semen! Whatever happened to just soap and water?” Richmond complained.

“Some of those--”

“The man fornicates with the wigs,” Gavin interrupted, “exactly what Roy said. Damn it! He knew.”

“Crazy Roy?” Richmond said.

“Yeah, remember? He said, referring to Bannock, that the man fornicates with the wigs. The bull semen is an ingredient.”

“Roy read the bottle and automatically assumed fornicating with semen,” Costner said out loud.

“I guess we better look closer at Roy,” Richmond said.

“You mean listen to him,” Gavin corrected.

* * *

Devil's Concubine

He sat alone eating his lunch, watching all the young high school girls with long hair gathered around the student area of the college. Ah, he loved college orientation days, so many young and beautiful girls with their mesmerizing hair. Young and innocent; unaware of the dangers that lurked in this big bold world they were about to enter. Perfect for him. Young girl soup. A few young males with long hair also caught his attention but, they weren't what he was looking for; at least not now.

The teacher called for the kids to get in a line and stick together as she went over her head count, making sure all students were accounted for.

"Okay, students, at eleven-thirty we're going to have lunch at the college park. Unless it starts to rain again, then we'll eat in the college cafeteria. At that time you can relax and enjoy yourself before we get back on the bus when we'll go to the movies. Please, let's all stick together during this tour and turn off your phones!" she instructed.

The students began to follow the teacher, giggling and paying no attention to their surroundings. This was going to be easy. He just had to decide which one he wanted--the short dumpy one with soft blonde hair or the tall, dark mysterious brunette. In either case, they were going to make fine specimens.

* * *

Gavin rotated his head, working a kink out of his neck, and suddenly realized he was alone. Costner had taken an early lunch, and Richmond was out checking on hair care products.

He leaned back in his chair to relax when he spied the soda he'd bought earlier was sweating on his papers. He quickly picked it up, grabbed a tissue from his top drawer, and wiped up

the mess. A desk clerk brought over some messages and handed them to him. He glanced through them before finding one that belonged to Richmond reminding him to pick up supper tonight.

Gavin walked over and placed it on his desk, but instead of walking away, picked up the picture of Lilly that sat on her father's desk.

He began thinking of Lilly and last night. Her soft, warm skin against his, the soft floral fragrance of her hair, the way she breathed while sleeping in his arms only brought him closer to her. How could one feel so satisfied without sex? He did. He sighed and walked back over to his desk.

"Gavin," the desk clerk called out. "Mr. Borge to see you."

"Mr. Borge?" He paused. "Send him on back."

Kevin Borge came over to his desk and took the chair Gavin offered him. He glanced around the nearly empty room with some worry.

"You caught me on my lunch break," he said.

"Detective Reece, you told me if I thought of anything else--" Borge said.

"Yes, did you remember something?"

"Not really; it was something that happened. I mean, my daughter said something--I mean, she's just a kid, but--I think she may have seen or heard something. You know how kids are. This is probably nothing," Borge nervously began to ramble.

"Mr. Borge, why don't you take a deep breath and start at the beginning, and let me decide if this is important or not," Gavin told him.

"Two days ago, we got a package in the mail. My daughter, Cassie, thought it was the package for her mommy. I didn't know what she was talking about. I just thought the kid was confused. I figured she thought Mommy had sent her a package, but Cassie said the package was for Mommy," he explained.

"Was the package for Bethany?" he asked.

"No, it was from my uncle who lives in Japan. It was a condolence gift for Cassie. I was going to just let it go, but then . . . last night Cassie came to my room with a calendar that she and her mother made together. She showed me this date." Borge took out the pink paper calendar dressed up in glitter and gave it to Gavin.

Gavin examined the date circled in blue crayon. It was three weeks before Bethany Borge went missing.

"Cassie said Mommy ordered some makeup on that day over the phone," he said.

"Did she?"

"I checked our credit cards and bank statements to see if she'd purchased anything on that day. Nothing."

"Mr. Borge, I know this is hard, but--"

"My daughter wouldn't lie about this, Detective," Borge quickly interjected.

"I'm sure she wouldn't, but if your daughter misses her mother as much as you do, she could be hoping that her mother is sending her something. I've seen it many times in cases involving children where the child--"

"Look, I brought it to you because I thought it was suspicious. Now I want you to check it out," he said forcibly.

Gavin hated dealing with the grieving family, especially those still grasping for answers.

"Mr. Borge, I know this is a lot to have to take on, but have you talked to anybody about losing your wife?" he asked.

"What? You think talking about it is going to make me feel better?" He was sarcastic in his answer. "Well, it's not. Now, I brought you something I thought was important, and I expect you to follow up on it."

"I will, but I also want you to seek some help, Mr. Borge. Your kids need you more than ever." Gavin reached into his desk and pulled out an old business card of Boland's and handed it to him. "This woman is real good, and I think she can help you and your family."

"Only if you promise to follow up on what I've told you," he said.

Gavin wasn't in the habit of making deals with family, but he knew the Borge family was in trouble. His duties were to bring people to justice, but he also felt his duty to the family was to help them cope.

"That's my job, Mr. Borge, and I promise I'll follow up on every bit of information that comes through here. Now go home, take care of your family."

Mr. Borge left quietly as Gavin rubbed his eyes trying to prevent a headache from occurring. This was becoming a stressful day. He reached over to the phone and pushed some buttons. Perhaps, he thought, it was time for him to talk, too.

* * *

"I thought I could handle this," he said. "But I see I need to talk about things."

"What changed your mind?" she inquired.

"I have this case, and this man lost his wife brutally. They have two children, and they're all having a hard time dealing with her death. They want answers and I can't give them to him. By the way, I gave him your business card; I hope you don't mind."

"I'm glad you did. If he's in trouble, as you say he is, then he needs my help," she said. "I'm curious. Is this about the family that's left behind or more about you?" she posed the question.

He thought about it, "Honestly, it's about me. I think if Lilly rejects me, I'll end up like Mr. Borge--lost."

Boland watched him attentively from her desk. "With your given history, it's understandable. Something has happened. What? What has made you start seeing things as this man?"

"Lilly was attacked, and it resulted in a serious car wreck. Those first few moments they don't tell you anything, it's hard. I was the first to see Lilly. I interviewed her about what happened. Then I left so her parents could see her. Later that night I couldn't sleep and some way, some how, I ended up back at the hospital in her room. I sat in a chair beside her bed for the rest of the night. When she woke up she thought I had been waiting for her to wake up. I was worried, really worried about her." He turned to her. "This is all rebound stuff, isn't it?"

"Do you think it's rebound stuff?" she questioned.

"I thought so at first, but here lately as I examine our friendship, I see it's not a rebound thing. I think Denise was right. I think I've been in love with Lilly all this time. I just didn't want to admit it. What do you think?"

"Looking at you, I see a man who's in love with a woman and I think is afraid to tell her," she said.

Like solving his cases, he realized what he needed to do; why Lilly recoiled from him emotionally. He made an inaudible noise and shook his head.

"That's what I didn't tell her," he said.

As soon as he got out of Boland's office, he called Lilly. Since she didn't answer the phone, he figured she was asleep. He left her a message, ending it with those words he needed to say to her.

Chapter 19

“Bannock is refusing to talk to us now,” Richmond said, covering the phone receiver. “We have to go through his lawyer. Costner has the taxi driver in questioning.” He wagged his head. “Yes, I’m still here.”

Before Gavin could get to him, Costner was returning with a file.

“Where’s the taxi driver?” he asked.

“Oh, he got impatient. So I showed him a picture of Miss Lowell. He remembered Miss Lowell real well. Rags barked the whole time in the cab. He dropped Lowell at the north end of the park at six thirty-five.”

“Five taxis returned for pick up. Did any of them pick up Lowell?” Gavin questioned.

“I asked all the drivers who did pick up and none of them picked up Lowell,” he said. “With that, I decided to send some uniforms out to the park. See if any of the homeless saw Lowell on her walk.”

“Do me a favor. Borge came in here with this calendar.” Gavin handed him the pink calendar. “His daughter told him that Mommy ordered some makeup. Could you check into it?”

Costner nodded as Richmond got off the phone.

“Okay, I checked with the lab. Miss Lowell had this one unmarked bottle of what they believe is hair gel. It contained bull semen. Now since Bannock is refusing to talk to us, I took the liberty to call that salon that he has to style the wigs. They don’t carry anything that repulsive, according to Armand the co-owner. I’m having a uniform take a picture over and see if they had ever seen Lowell in their salon,” Richmond told him.

“Wonder if any of the other victims had an unmarked bottle of gel?”

“I’m on it,” Richmond said.

Captain Wolf’s door jerked open and he began yelling. “Which one of you jackasses leaked information to the press?” he demanded.

They looked at each other surprised, shrugging, and shaking their heads.

“I just got a call from the newspaper. According to the editor, who’s giving me heads up, someone from this office is leaking information about this case and, since you three are the only ones working it--”

“It didn’t come from us,” Richmond said.

“But I can guess who.” Gavin slammed his fist onto his desk. “All she had to do was not jump the gun.”

“ADA Middleton did this?” Costner asked, surprised.

“No, but her actions did. It was Bannock. He was falsely accused, and he’s going to make sure this department pays for the mistake,” Gavin said, “even if it means leaking the information.”

“Well, your time to solve this case has been shortened. The editor is holding the story for one day. After that, every nut case is going to be putting in their two cents worth, which will slow down this investigation. I’m going to the DA. I’ve had enough of the meddling Middleton.” Wolf went back into his office, slamming the door.

“Sounds like this case is on everybody’s nerves,” Quinlan said behind them. She then held up a big manila envelope. “Got some interesting results back on Lowell’s jewelry.”

Gavin then whirled his entire body around to match his head. “What kind of results?”

“Navy blue fiber embedded in the ring. I compared it to the fiber found on Borge. It’s a match. However, the fiber, I’m sure, didn’t come from Bannock’s car. Bannock’s car is fairly new. The fiber we have is faded a little. So your car is older and probably has been re-carpeted. I found out this carpet wasn’t manufactured until 1988.”

“So we’re looking for a car that was before 88 with this navy blue upholstery?”

She nodded. “That’s what it looks like.”

“This case is starting to get into my craw,” Richmond complained. “We know it’s not Bannock, but some of the evidence suggests otherwise. I feel like we’re running in circles.”

Gavin picked up the jewelry and examined it.

“We’re closer in a way, Richmond,” Costner said. “Think about it. We now know to look for an older model car.”

Gavin looked over the blue stone ring when he saw an impression from the light. Curious, he put the ring under the light and saw a small cross had been embedded into the stone, one that was barely noticeable.

“This ring has a tiny cross in it,” he said. “You can just barely see it.”

“Don’t you wish it could be about religion?” Richmond said. “This case would go faster.”

“Even a sexual predator would make this case go faster.” Gavin returned the ring and the belly piercing into the envelope and closed it. “There’s only one thing we can do; go back over our evidence and see what we missed.”

They had placed another dry erase board this time in a conference room, beside the existing one. Starting from the beginning, Gavin began with the victims, working from what they had and knew. Gavin used red marker for evidence, black

for names, and blue for places. Maps of where the victims had lived and later were found were hanging on the wall.

They stared at the board and contemplated. Richmond yawned, which caused Costner to follow.

"Why would you scalp someone?" Gavin asked, examining the board.

"Because you're a nut case?" Richmond said.

"What if this is sexual?" Gavin suggested.

"None of the victims were raped," Costner said, frowning.

"He gets a sexual gratification taking their hair. He violates the body like a rapist would violate another human being, but in this case it's hair."

"You think he gets his rocks off with somebody else's hair?" Richmond asked. "Why not just get a wig? Wouldn't that be easier?"

"But not as fulfilling as the thrill of the hunt," Gavin explained.

"It may be sexual, but it still doesn't tell us who it is." Costner rubbed his eyes.

Gavin walked over to the board and made a new column with Bannock's name.

"All our victims had Bannock's business card. The only victims Bannock knows are the missing Bertie Johnson and our dead Elizabeth Lowell. We've found no evidence he knew the others." He pointed at Bannock's name.

"Bannock used only one hair salon, Giorgio's, to style his wigs. But according to the owners, they have never had any contact with any of our victims. He has a car with navy blue interior but the fibers we have found on Borge and Lowell are from an older car and possibly a replacement upholstery." Gavin scribbled on the board.

“Records show Bannock owns a taser, but after searching his apartment and workplace, no taser was ever found,” Gavin explained as he wrote everything on the board, then stepped back.

“Bannock isn’t our killer,” Richmond said. “We’ve established that.”

“Yes, and we just established something else,” Gavin said. “Whoever is our killer knows Bannock. He worked hard to make it look like him, but then gets one more victim while we have Bannock in custody.”

“All that proves is he isn’t finished killing,” Richmond said.

“Or he didn’t know we had Bannock,” Costner said.

“Both,” Gavin said. “And if we don’t find him before the paper prints their story, he’ll slip away.”

There was a knock on the door before the desk clerk walked in and handed Costner a sheet of paper.

“Bethany Borge made four phone calls on the day circled on her daughter’s calendar,” Costner said. “None of them to a business that sells makeup.”

“The kid was probably imagining that,” Richmond said.

“What about that mystery hair gel? Found anything on it yet?”

“Well, Bannock’s lawyer said Bannock doesn’t stock hair gel and never has. It goes back to that hair salon. That’s the only place those wigs go to,” Richmond said. “Which they claim they don’t use anything with bull semen.”

“Somebody is lying to us,” Gavin mumbled, still staring at the board, then circled Giorgio’s. “They style the wigs. I think we need to see about their products.”

“We’ll need a warrant,” Richmond commented.

“See what you can do.”

Devil's Concubine

* * *

By nine o'clock that night, Gavin walked into his hotel room exhausted. He untied his tie, throwing it across the room to a chair before falling onto the bed and staring at the ceiling. He closed his eyes, but not for long, as his cell phone began ringing. Not even looking at the caller ID, Gavin answered.

"Reece," he said, but got no response. "Reece." He repeated.

"Gavin," she said.

With the sound of her voice, he shot up.

"Lilly?"

He thought she'd lost connection when she didn't answer immediately.

"Lil--"

"I didn't want to be the reason you left Denise and I certainly didn't want to be blamed for breaking you up," she said. "Now I see it didn't matter if I was the reason or not. I look back and I see you never loved her. Last night when I came to you in the night, I thought it would be a mistake. But sleeping beside you, your arms around me, it felt right." She paused. "Even though you told me you loved me, you also asked me something today. Despite you loving me, what do I want? Do you really want to know what I want?"

"Yes," he said.

"I love y--" Suddenly the call was dropped.

"Lilly? Lilly?" He looked at his phone and saw it was dead.

"Damn," he mumbled, slinging his phone onto the bed.

Quickly he knew what he had to do. Go to her.

* * *

The battery of storms had started up again with high winds and rumbling thunder, indicating it would be a turbulent night. Gavin had always been a cautious driver, but tonight he'd thrown caution to the wind. He knew he ran two stop signs and turned on a red light. He heard a few honks as he passed a few people, but he didn't care.

By the time he reached Lilly's, the rain was pouring. He got out of his car, making a mad dash through the heavy rain to her front door.

Soaking wet, he started to ring her door bell when he saw her standing in the foyer with the phone.

She was unaware he was at the door watching her pace in her pale blue men's shirt. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear trying to dial the phone again. She turned around and saw him at the door.

Quickly she set the phone on the hall table as she rushed to the door, unlocking it and opening it. They briefly stared at each other. He hadn't stepped through the door before her arms were wrapped around his neck, his around her waist. Their lips met in a hot, searing, passionate kiss.

* * *

As they lay in bed with the window cracked open, Gavin could smell the fresh rain and hear the rain drizzle off the roof. Lilly lay in his arms as he stroked her shoulder smelling the fresh scent of her hair. Gavin grinned mischievously as Lilly began lightly kissing his chest, pressing herself against him.

"Aren't you tired?" he asked.

"No," she said, then looked at him. "I guess you are?"

He brushed her hair. "No, just need time to recharge, that's all. We're not like you female species. We can't just go when you can."

"Hmm, we seem to be powerful in that way." Her fingers walked up his chest teasingly.

He made a light throaty laugh. "Yes, you seem to be powerful in that way." He gently wrestled her as she playfully squealed.

He stared into her eyes and was about to kiss her when the telephone beside the bed began ringing.

"You going to answer that?" he asked as she pecked kisses along his chest.

"Un-uh," she mumbled.

"It could be important, you know," he said.

She stopped and looked at him. "It's probably someone trying to sell me stuff. Besides, the machine can pick it up."

"You're being very--" He stopped and thought about what she'd just said. "Who would sell stuff at this hour of the night?"

"People who need money," she answered. "I know these past couple of days the phone rings constantly. Someone keeps trying to sell me stuff."

"What kind of stuff?" he asked, gently flipping over onto his side of the bed.

"Anything, really." She lay her head on his chest and traced her fingers on his skin. "Somebody tried to sell me pool services yesterday. I don't even have a pool."

"What about cosmetics?"

"They're the worst, along with credit cards. I always wondered how they find us. You know my number is unlisted and I still get calls."

He lay there thinking about what Borge said about the young daughter claiming her mother bought makeup. Maybe she did, but the call came to her.

"Are you okay?" she asked, looking at him.

Carla Landreth

“Yes,” he said. “Speaking of services. Perhaps I could interest you in some of my ...”

* * *

Gavin came in the next morning smiling. As he sat down, he saw that Costner sat in a daze with a strong cup of coffee in front of him. Richmond stood nearby watching him, amused, shaking his head.

“What’s wrong, Costner?”

“Rough night,” Richmond remarked.

“Rags barked all night,” Costner said. “All night. How can a little dog have so much to bark about? He didn’t bark during the day, but at night... it was awful. Tiffany has threatened to throw me into the garage if I don’t do something with him.”

“Send him to doggie school,” Gavin said in a upbeat mood, which caught their attention quickly. “I heard it works.”

“Are those the same clothes you wore yesterday?” Richmond asked suspiciously.

Gavin glanced down and was unaware he hadn’t changed clothes. In fact, he left Lilly’s house going straight to work, not stopping to pick up fresh clothes.

“I guess so,” he said. “Costner, you said that Bethany Borge didn’t order any makeup, but what if she did buy makeup over the phone?”

“I’m lost,” Costner said.

Richmond sat on his desk, staring at him suspiciously.

“What if whoever sold Bethany the makeup called her? We’ve been looking at her outgoing calls, not incoming.”

“A telemarketer,” Costner said, coming out of his dog-induced coma.

Gavin’s phone rang on his desk. By the end of the first ring Gavin had answered.

"Reece ... yes ... they did? Okay. Make a search grid. See if you can find anything else, then get back with me." He hung up. "That was uniforms. They found Lowell's driver's license on the west side of the park."

"West end? Isn't that the one that's close to the farm-to-market road?" Costner questioned.

Gavin moved over to the map of the new park.

"The very one. They said they found the license right at the mouth of the trail that leads to the parking lot," Gavin replied. "This confirms that Lowell was taken from the park. They're setting up a perimeter for any other evidence. Car tracks would be out since it's rained."

"Don't you think you need to freshen up a bit?" Richmond questioned, crossing his arms with a strong stare.

"You're right. I guess I'm lucky I keep a clean shirt and tie in the back of my car."

"What about a shower?" Richmond questioned.

"Took one this morning; just didn't have time to get a change of clothes. Oh, by the way, I want to swing by Giorgio's today."

"You thought of something?" Costner asked.

"No, but curious. I guess we still have nothing about Bertie Johnson, do we?" he complained.

"It keeps coming to a dead end. I went statewide and came up empty, but I could go national."

"Too many." Gavin thought for a moment. "Let's just assume for now that Bertie Johnson is an alias. Bannock said that he met her a few times, didn't he?"

"I think so," Costner replied.

"She brought her hair. The hair comes in an envelope. Wonder if Bannock still has the envelope that the hair came in?"

“We aren’t going to get DNA from that,” Richmond said, still staring.

“No, but we could get prints from the envelope.”

“If he still has it,” Costner replied.

“Check with the wig company and see if they have any of the envelopes. Also get Bannock back in here with an artist and see if we can get a sketch of Johnson.”

“Bannock won’t come in,” Richmond said, still watching Gavin.

“He will if he thinks this will prove his innocence.”

* * *

Armand Dupree stood, shocked, as the police took a look around searching for any unmarked hair care products.

“As I said before, we carry nothing but one brand. Last I heard they’re environmental. Everything is organic.” Armand touched his lips. “Bull semen? How disgusting.”

“But it’s organic,” Costner said.

Gavin cocked an eye at him. “Has anyone come in here trying to sell you any unmarked hair care products?”

“No. I dare them to try it. Rodney would have them out in the streets quickly.”

“Rodney Green? Where is he today?” Gavin asked.

“Oh, he went to pick up a client of ours, Mrs. Ferry. She’s old and can’t drive. It’s just one of many perks we offer our clients.” A girlie squeak came out of his mouth when an officer knocked over a few bottles of shampoo. “Could you please tell them to not be so brutish about it?”

“Guys, be a little more careful,” Gavin warned, focusing his attention back to Armand, who by now had two little old ladies beside him.

"What's going on here? Why are you picking on him?" one of the ladies asked.

"We aren't picking on Mr. Dupree. We're just investigating, that's all," he said.

"Mr. Dupree or Mr. Green would never hurt a fly. Why don't you go find killers or rapists?" the other one complained. "There seems to be plenty of them running around."

"Ladies, if you'll be patient, we'll be through in just a moment."

Dupree wagged his head, took the complaining ladies by the shoulders, and shuffled them over to a seat, then returned for more questioning.

"I can assure you, you won't find anything here," Dupree told them.

"Do you own a car?"

Dupree frowned. "Yes, it's a new Cadillac Escalade."

"Color?"

"Silver."

"Interior?"

"Gray. Why do you want to know about my car?"

"Just a question I had to ask," Gavin said. "What about Mr. Green? His vehicle?"

"A red mint-condition 1957 Chevy Bellaire with white interior."

"No other vehicles?" Gavin asked.

"Well, yes, our business van. We just purchased it. Hunter green and dark interior."

"What did you have before that?" Gavin questioned as he wrote everything down.

"Well, nothing. We used—oh, thank God, Rodney." Dupree broke away from them, meeting Rodney Green at the door.

“What’s going on here?” he asked.

“They’re looking into some sort of scandal about hair care products that contain b-u-l-l s-e-m-e-n.” Dupree spelled it out as a little old lady stood next to them.

“Take Mrs. Ferry and get her prepped,” Green instructed Dupree.

Dupree nodded and took Mrs. Ferry as the two other ladies also followed Dupree.

“Do you have a warrant?” Green questioned.

“Yes, it’s a limited warrant.” Costner handed it to him. “Your partner has a copy.”

“We’re only looking for unmarked hair care products. The wigs we obtained from Mr. Bannock were styled with a hair care product that contained bull semen. He claims you’re the only ones who style the wigs. You understand we have to check this out.”

“Yes, of course, but you won’t find any such product here. We only carry the best. I travel great lengths to get this product. I’ve been assured they’re organic and haven’t been tested on animals. We care about our environment. You know you can still look great without destroying the environment,” he said.

Gavin put on his fake smile. “Dupree told us you recently purchased a mini-van to take your clients to and from the salon. What did you use before the mini-van?”

“Our own vehicles. However, I have to say Armand’s car was more popular than mine.”

“Pass up on a mint-condition ‘57 Bellaire?” a shocked Costner asked.

“Well, the clients liked coming in it, but leaving they didn’t like the top down so much,” Green explained. “Look, the van is more for traveling to hair conferences and picking up supplies. We do take it to the Happy Hills Retirement Home to pick up

Devil's Concubine

several elderly people at once. It's their day out when they come here."

"Detective Reece?" a uniform called.

Gavin stepped away to the officer. "We didn't find any unmarked hair care products."

He nodded and glanced around the salon with one quick sweep before returning to Costner and Green.

"We thank you for cooperating."

Chapter 20

“Borge received a telephone call from a pre-paid phone on the day in question,” Costner said as he pointed at the number.

Gavin stopped punching keys on the computer as he read the entry.

“Did you call it?” Richmond asked.

“No, was I supposed to?” Costner asked, confused.

“No,” Gavin replied. “I want you to get the other victims’ records and see if they come up with pre-paid numbers also,” he instructed, then went back to typing.

“You think our killer would be stupid enough to use the same pre-paid?” Richmond asked as he sipped his coffee.

“No, but if pre-paid were used about the time he killed, then we know how he’s getting his victims, and it’s a link we can use,” Gavin explained. “Has Bannock finished with that artist yet?”

“He and his lawyer are in the conference room right now. They should be finished soon. Now that Giorgio’s is out of the picture, where does that leave us?” Richmond inquired as he shoved his hand into his pocket.

“Who said they’ve been marked off the list?” Gavin smiled. “I know you’re getting old, Richmond, but hopefully you haven’t forgotten what you’ve told me.”

“What’s that?” Costner asked.

“Just because you don’t see anything on the surface doesn’t mean there isn’t anything there.”

“Okay, but you’ve had a warrant and still didn’t find anything,” he said.

"I had a limited warrant." Gavin punched the print key on his computer.

Across his desk the printer began printing out a piece of paper. He quickly got up, walked over to it, reviewed it, then handed it to Richmond, who was sitting on the edge of his desk with his coffee.

"What's this?"

"I want you to take that to a judge and see if you can get Armand Dupree's and Rodney Green's business and personal financials."

"Do we have enough for that?" Richmond put on some reading glasses, which caught the others off guard. He glanced up and saw they were staring at him. "Yes, it's come to this. I only need them for reading, and if any of you mutts say one thing--"

"Calm down, Richmond. I wear them for reading sometimes. I won't be the one to cast a stone; however, my partner here might accidentally say something."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," Costner said. "You should never make fun of someone with a handicap."

"Gee thanks, kid," Richmond replied.

"The warrant?" Gavin pointed.

Richmond, frowning, took off his glasses, grabbed his coat and walked out of the office.

"Gavin," Costner mumbled.

Bannock and his lawyer came out of the conference room. Bannock acted smug as he walked by, but his lawyer quickly kept pushing him along refusing to give him a chance to say anything. The artist came out and handed Gavin the sketch.

"That's the ugliest woman I've ever seen," the artist said. "In fact, are you sure Bertie Johnson isn't a tranny?"

"A tranny?" Costner asked, confused.

Carla Landreth

“A transsexual,” Gavin told him. “You’re going to have to learn the lingo, kid.”

Gavin stared at the picture of the masculine-looking woman.

“Costner, see if you can get a list of trannies with the name of Bertie Johnson.” He flipped the sketch around for Costner to view.

“He said she was ugly,” Costner said, examining the sketch.

“Yeah, so ugly we’ve been looking in the wrong place.”

“How far do you want me to go back?” Costner asked.

“Seven years. See if they ever picked up a Bertie Johnson.”

* * *

She was walking back to her car with her hands loaded with shopping bags. Her phone rang from her oversized purse. She paused for a moment and searched. The smell of jasmine faintly drifted his way as he watched her. She pulled out the pink glitter phone. By the time she answered it, whoever it was had hung up.

Frustrated, she shoved the phone back into her purse and made her way to her car. It was out near the tree at the edge of the store parking lot. She’d been busy all day with shopping.

First getting a new car and now with the extra money from the insurance, she was on a shopping spree. How nice, he thought. Her last rite would be shopping.

She came to her new white car and popped the trunk. She carefully put the packages inside, but wasn’t careful enough with her own surroundings. He made sure his hat was concealing his face as he walked up behind her. He tapped her on her shoulder. She turned around, only to be zapped

Devil's Concubine

unconscious. She fell into his arms. He shut her trunk with one hand and started to lift her when a man parked beside them.

"Damn," he mumbled.

Fearing he'd get caught, he quickly whirled her body onto the car with an embrace and began kissing her as if they were having a hot passionate moment.

The man got out and frowned. He heard the man grumble, "Jeez, can't you get a room?"

As soon as the man was out of sight, he picked her up put her in the passenger side of her new car, and buckled her in. Then he got into the driver's side and started the car. They would drive off together this time.

"Next time," he said to her, "I'll have to be more careful. See, I normally don't pick up strange women during the day, but then again, you aren't exactly a stranger, are you, my dear?"

* * *

By mid-morning Costner was working his way through each victim's telephone records while Gavin was going through pictures of trannies comparing them to the Bertie Johnson sketch.

"Hey, Gavin, that pre-paid number that's on Borge's phone records is also found on Lowell's records," Costner said.

"When?" Gavin's head shot up from the computer.

"Three weeks before we found her."

"What about the others?"

Costner just held up a stack as he continued searching. Gavin, realizing they didn't have all day, walked over and took Nielsen's and Crummel's phone records.

The two of them were working feverishly on the records when Richmond came in with a stack of papers.

He plopped the stack on Gavin's desk. "Green and Dupree's financials, and I've been told they're pretty thorough guys. Never been audited, always pay their taxes."

"So we got nothing there. What about credit cards?"

"The companies are faxing them over."

"Then go through them," Gavin said, not looking up from his work.

"What am I looking for?"

"Anything." Gavin stopped working to think. "Anything that looks suspicious."

Richmond returned to his desk as Gavin returned to the telephone records.

"Son-of-a-bitch, that same pre-paid number called Crummel one week before he went missing. The call lasted about seven minutes," Gavin announced. "How long did the call last with Borge?"

Costner picked up the phone record of Borge.

"Nearly six minutes."

"Lowell?" he asked.

Costner picked those phone records up from a different pile and read them.

"Eight minutes."

Gavin was now skimming through Nielsen's phone records, but wasn't finding the pre-paid number.

"Who are you working on?" Gavin asked.

"Burke," Costner answered. "But I haven't found that pre-paid number."

He got up from his desk and walked over to the dry board he'd set up in one of the conference rooms. Costner and Richmond followed him.

"Borge, Lowell, and Crummel got a call from that same pre-paid number, but Burke and Nielsen never received a call," Gavin wrote on the board.

"So the killer tossed the phone and got a new one," Richmond said.

Gavin stared at the board and shook his head.

"Impossible," Gavin said. "Look at the timeline of the deaths. Nielsen was the first victim, Crummel was the second, Burke was the third, Borge was the fourth, and Lowell was the fifth and final victim. If the killer had used the same number, it would have showed up with Nielsen first and most definitely with Burke."

"Did any of the numbers match up with Giorgio's?" Richmond inquired.

Costner quickly went back to his desk and returned with Burke's and Nielsen's phone records.

"What's their number?" he asked.

Gavin pulled the business card off the board and handed it to him.

Hoping this was their connection, Gavin held his breath as Costner took his time to search.

"No match," Costner said.

"Just when we think we have something to connect them, we don't," Richmond complained.

"Unless you count Bannock. Are we sure the ME is correct about Lowell's time of death?" Costner quizzed.

"She's positive," Gavin said.

"Well, all we can do is keep digging," Richmond said.

"Just for shits and giggles, let's see if Armand Dupree or Rodney Green ever purchased a taser," Gavin said.

Captain Wolf came into the room going straight to the multi-colored and marked up board, staring at it.

“Dare I ask how the case is coming?” he questioned.

“Well, we think our killer is using a pre-paid cell phone to make contact with his victims,” he said.

“You got a warrant for some barber’s financials? How do they figure into this case?” Captain Wolf asked.

“Well, the wigs had an unusual hair care product,” Costner said.

“Bull semen,” Gavin said. “The wigs are only styled by Giorgio’s, and there are only two people who work at Giorgio’s. We had a limited warrant for their salon, but came up empty, and financials don’t show us they purchased any sort of hair care products that contain bull semen.”

“One step forward and two steps back,” Wolf said, glancing at the clock. “With our time ticking, I was hoping for better results.”

“We’re trying.”

“Try harder. I can only hold back the wolves for so long before they make us their dinner, as they say,” Wolf said.

“We may have a link.” Richmond looked up from his paperwork. “On a business credit card, they bought a case of clear bottles.”

“Really? We didn’t see anything like that at the salon,” Costner said, answering his ringing phone on his desk.

“You got a warrant to search the salon?” Wolf questioned.

“But it was limited,” he answered. “Even then, we didn’t find any bottles.”

“Maybe they bought them for personal use?” Wolf suggested.

“Even if they did, we’d need a warrant, and no judge will give us a warrant with what we have,” Richmond said.

“Then find something else that could tie them besides the bottles,” Wolf replied.

"Records show Green and Dupree each have a taser," Costner said, hanging up his phone.

"And the plot thickens," Wolf said.

"Captain, your wife is on line one," the desk clerk called out.

"Try to get something by the end of the day. I'll see if I can't make a deal with our newspaper guy," Wolf said.

"Exactly what kind of deal could you make?" Costner asked.

Wolf glanced over to Gavin. "Fill him in." Then he walked away.

"Did I say something wrong?"

"No, kid, you didn't. Captain's wife is the editor of the newspaper," Gavin revealed.

"As they say, she has him by the balls in that marriage," Richmond replied.

"Poor Captain," Costner said.

"You mean poor us. If we don't get this case under control, Captain will be taking it out on us. Believe me, kid, a chewing from him can be fatal in itself," Richmond said.

"My question is, where in the hell is he getting this bull semen?" Gavin asked. "There's no paper trail of any sort leading to these two guys."

"You know, I was thinking about that," Costner said. "Maybe he raises his own bulls."

"Instead of milking cows, he's milking bulls?" Richmond frowned.

"Why not? It would explain why we haven't found any of their products with bull semen. Because they put it in themselves."

There was a moment of silence.

"Kid could be right," Gavin said.

"If that's so, then why haven't we found any indication they have bulls?" Richmond asked.

"Bannock used the stables," Costner said. "Maybe Bannock is the supplier?"

Just as Richmond was about to argue the situation, Gavin stopped him.

"Costner could be on to something. Green said he travels for the products they use. He could be stopping by somewhere collecting the goods for the stuff."

Richmond snorted. "You two little geniuses are forgetting one thing. Samples taken from Giorgio's products proved there was no bull semen. Unless these two guys have something on the side, we have nothing connecting them to these murders. Hell, we have more on Bannock."

While staring at the sketch of Bertie Johnson, Gavin was beginning to wonder.

"Unless Bertie Johnson is a bull?" he said.

"I know she's a little manly-looking, but don't you think that's a little harsh in name-calling?" Richmond asked.

"Bertie Johnson could be the supplier," Gavin said. "Bertie Johnson sure keeps coming up in this investigation, but nobody, not even sex crimes, has a record of a Bertie Johnson. All we have is this sketch that only Bannock can describe."

"What are you saying, Gavin? Bannock is our killer now?" Richmond asked, confused.

"What I'm saying is Bannock may not be the killer, but he may know where the bull semen comes from--Bertie Johnson. Costner, check all the stables and see if there isn't a Bertie Johnson as a client."

"But Bertie Johnson never showed up on any of the ledgers."

"Perhaps not as a renter, but what if there's someone who's being housed?"

"You mean a bull by the name of Bertie?" Richmond asked, shocked.

"Why not? There are a lot more strange names out there for animals than Bertie."

"But why would Bannock give us this description of a woman? And where's this hair coming from?" Richmond asked, frustrated.

"Then it's time to dig deeper into Bannock," Gavin commented.

"We have," Richmond said. "We dig any deeper ..."

Their heads whirled around as Captain Wolf's door suddenly jerked open.

"Reece, Costner," he quickly demanded.

"Here it comes," Richmond mumbled.

"In my office now."

The two went into his office as Wolf walked behind his desk.

"Forget the press, we have bigger problems. The Police Commissioner wants to bring in the FBI on your scalping case."

"No," Gavin said quickly. "You know what kind of crap we'll have to put up with. They have these little theories of who their killer is and, frankly, it's a load of crap."

"I have to agree, Captain," Costner said. "The FBI loves profiles too much."

"We let them come in and this case will go cold. That ADA Middleton has already muddled this case. Now we're going to let the Feds in to wreak more havoc."

"I said the Police Commissioner wants me to bring in the FBI. I didn't say I was, but if you don't get something soon, and I mean real soon, the press is the least of our worries. From now

on, give me any warrants you want. Even if you don't think you have enough. I know a few judges who can expedite things," Wolf said as he motioned for them to leave his office.

Gavin rubbed his face as Richmond sighed heavily.

"Now what?" Richmond asked.

Gavin glanced over to the board, then at the sketch.

"We've assumed Bannock is the only person to see Bertie Johnson."

"He is," Richmond said.

"The serpent can come in many forms and sometimes in pairs," Gavin said.

"What are you talking about?" Costner asked.

"I'm talking about Roy," he answered.

"The nut case?" Richmond asked, surprised.

"He's not a nut case, just a little strange." Gavin picked up the phone.

"I hope you know where he's at," Costner said. "It took forever to find him in the first place. Homeless people don't stay in their boxes too long before they move on."

"I made sure Roy stayed at the museum," Gavin said. "I'm sending a uniform over to pick him up."

* * *

Roy seemed happy as he sat at the stainless steel table in the interrogation room. He was finishing up his burger and fries when Gavin came in carrying an extra soda.

"Detective Reece," Roy greeted. "They said you wanted to see me."

"Yes, Roy. I have a picture I want you to see." Gavin shoved the sketch of Bertie Johnson in front of him.

Roy wiped his hands on his semi-clean clothes and studied it.

"Have you seen this woman before?" he asked.

"Ah, she's the other serpent," he said.

"Where have you seen this serpent?" Gavin inquired.

"When I worked with Bannock. She came by many times."

Gavin glanced over to Richmond. "Roy, do you know her name?"

"I didn't ask." He leaned in with a low voice. "I didn't want her to think I was interested."

"Smart move," Richmond mumbled.

"Do you know her name?" Gavin asked again.

"Birdie, you know tweet, tweet." He flapped his arms.

Gavin smiled, then said to Richmond, "Well, Bertie isn't a cow."

"I wouldn't say that," Roy replied. "She's ugly enough."

They softly laughed. "When you saw this woman and Bannock, what were they doing?"

"Fornicating with the wigs." Roy stuffed a few fries into his mouth.

"Fornicating with the wigs?" Richmond frowned.

"They stroked the wigs and laughed with each other. They were fornicating," he explained. "What else would you call it?"

"When you're through eating, the officer will take you back to the museum--Oh, wait." Gavin pulled two more pictures out of a file. He put them in front of Roy, who yawned. "How about these two men?"

"No, but that one looks familiar." He pointed to Green.

"You've seen him before?" Gavin quizzed.

"No. Never seen him before. Just looks familiar." Roy shrugged. "It's near my nap time. Can I go now?"

Gavin nodded as the officer and Roy walked out of the room.

“So Bertie Johnson exists,” Richmond said. “Too bad he couldn’t tell us anything about the other two.”

“I thought when he pointed at Green we had something,” Gavin said.

“Yeah, whisked my hopes.” Richmond started out the door when Costner stopped them.

“Hey, guys, I may have found something. Remember when that pre-paid number showed up on all of the victims except for Burke and Nielsen? Well, I was thinking. We were looking at their home line records, not even thinking that their cell phone records could house that pre-paid number. Guess what showed up in Burke and Nielsen’s records? That pre-paid number.”

“Okay, we have our first true connection,” Richmond said. “But it doesn’t show us who killed our victims.”

“Unless we call the number,” Costner suggested.

“That would be a mistake,” Richmond said.

“I don’t understand; why not?”

“If we call that number, how long do you think it’ll take before he tosses the phone? It’s our only connection,” Gavin asked, stressed.

“So if we catch the guy with the cell, it’s more ammo for the DA,” Richmond said.

“Finish looking for stables with Bertie Johnson--”

“I thought Roy just ruled out Bertie as a bull?” Richmond questioned.

“We still have to find where the semen came from. That’s a missing link. I’m going to finish going through trannies.”

Gavin was walking down the hall when he was surprised to see Lilly sitting by his desk. He glanced around to see if Richmond had come out of the interrogation room but he hadn’t. Lilly’s hair had been pulled back, and the rain that he

and half the rest of the force seemed to ignore had washed her mascara.

"Hey, you," he said, greeting her with a quick kiss on the cheek. "What are you doing here? Did you remember something about that man who attacked you?"

"I went by the hotel today and got your stuff. The hotel man was kind of weird, giving me this creepy smile. Well, anyway, I found your phone and I charged it for you." She took it out of her purse and handed it to him.

"You didn't have to do that--bring it down here."

"If I didn't bring it down here, then I wouldn't have seen you. As for remembering anything, no." She paused, glancing at his desk, then shook her head. "Unless you think his chiseled jaw line meant anything."

"A lot of people have that." He smiled.

"That's what I thought. I figured you needed your phone, so I thought I'd bring it by."

"Thank you, but if you had called, I could have come by and got it," he told her.

Lilly glanced at her watch, blushing. "I haven't had lunch yet. I think I'll go home and have a sandwich." She stood and started to leave, but Gavin gently grabbed her hand.

"I've already had a quick lunch, but I could stand some dessert."

Lilly cut her eyes. "I bet I can finish dessert; that is, if you come by." She slowly pulled her hand away from his and walked out, looking back at him, smiling.

"I'd wipe that off your face before Richmond gets in here," Costner said. "The last thing we need is another fight between you two."

Gavin stood and grabbed his jacket.

Carla Landreth

“Do me a favor, partner. Tell Richmond I’ve gone for lunch,” he said.

“But you just had lunch,” Costner said.

“Then tell him I went out for dessert,” Gavin replied.

Chapter 21

Gavin stood in front of Lilly, who was wearing nothing but an oversized men's shirt. She was working on his tie, smiling.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

She shrugged, "What do you think I'm thinking about?"

He laughed. "That you probably want dessert more often."

"Dessert, lunch, dinner, and snack time would be nice," she said, giving him a quick kiss.

"I like that idea." He embraced her before giving her a longer kiss, then looked into her eyes.

"I guess you have to go back?" she said.

"If I don't, I'll be unemployed. By the way, how did you come up with a chiseled look?"

"What?" She glanced at him, confused.

"The man who attacked you. You said his chin was chiseled. What made you think that?" he asked as she handed him a large glass of iced tea.

"I don't know. I guess when I saw an ugly picture of a woman on your desk. The chiseled chin looked so close to the man who attacked me. Talk about someone with a five o'clock shadow." She giggled.

When she said that, something clicked in his mind. He quickly put down the glass of tea and gave her another kiss.

"Baby, I've got to go."

"What about dinner?"

"I may be late," he said. "Take out?"

She nodded.

Gavin quickly left, going straight to the station, where Richmond and Costner were busy reading over papers.

“Well, you definitely took your sweet ass time,” Richmond said. “Did you bring us back anything?”

Gavin stopped and thought about what Richmond was referring to.

“Oh, the donuts. They didn’t have what you wanted, so I didn’t get any,” Gavin said.

“It took you nearly forty-five minutes to not bring back any donuts?” Richmond questioned.

“Yeah. I went to several places, and they didn’t have cherry-filled donuts.”

“Really? I know for a fact you can get cherry-filled donuts down the street,” Richmond said. “They keep them in stock.”

“Well, I didn’t go down there,” Gavin said. “Look, I may have something.”

“We get our donuts down there all the time,” Richmond complained.

“Would you forget about the damn donuts,” Gavin replied. “I was talking to Lilly and she said--”

“Lilly? So that’s where you’ve been,” Richmond accused.

“She was here earlier. Look, I was talking to her about the man who attacked her. She said she remembered he had a chiseled chin. When I asked what made her think of it, she said the picture on my desk.” Gavin held up the sketch of Bertie Johnson.

“So? That woman kind of reminds me of my mother-in-law. What’s your point?” Richmond grumbled.

Gavin stared at the picture.

“I’m not sure, but it means something,” Gavin said.

Costner popped off with something he just discovered from the stack of papers he was going through.

“Guys, I think I know why he dumps them,” Costner said.

The two looked at him a bit confused.

Devil's Concubine

"While you two have been making me run around, I thought I'd look into some other people who have also disappeared."

"We've been down that road," Richmond said. "Our victims are the only victims we have."

"Not necessarily. See? I looked at the missing people who suddenly disappear, their vehicle being found days later. I think the found victims are just the beginning."

"What did he just say?" Richmond asked Gavin.

"Go on, kid," Gavin said.

"Well, you know we've thought it wasn't religion. What if it was?"

"No, no. Gavin already proved this has nothing to do with religion," Richmond said.

Gavin sighed. "I hate to agree with Richmond, but I did prove that."

"But--"

"Listen, kid, you're beating a dead horse. Now move on," Richmond cut him off.

Wolf came out of the office and handed Gavin a search warrant.

"Full search of Giorgio's. Get on it now," Wolf instructed.

* * *

They walked into the salon with only two customers present. Mr. Dupree met them quickly with shock all over his face.

"Now what is it?" Dupree asked.

"A warrant to search this establishment," Gavin said, handing Dupree a copy of the warrant. "Here's your copy. Where's your partner?"

“Returning a client home. You’ve already searched this place. You aren’t going to find anything.”

“That’s up to us.”

“Where are the plastic bottles?” Costner asked.

“Bottles?”

“We have proof that you bought a box of bottles,” Costner said.

“You must mean the bottles we give away,” Dupree said, pointing to the back. “We buy the bottles, then send them off to be imprinted with our logo.”

Dupree went to the back, followed by Gavin and Costner. He took a bottle from a box and handed it to them.

“It’s a promotional thing. Highly popular with the young ones.”

“Detective,” a Crime Scene personnel called. “We’ve taken evidence of the vehicles except for the Bellaire.”

“I thought you said Mr. Green took people home in your car?” Gavin demanded.

“Normally they do, but its Mrs. Anderson’s birthday, and she wanted to ride in the convertible. I thought she was silly considering we spent the better part of the morning working on that hair,” Dupree explained.

“Do you own a taser gun?” Gavin inquired.

“Matter of fact, yes. I carry mine all the time for protection.”

“Could you please give it to us?” Costner asked, holding up a bag.

“What about my protection?” Dupree asked.

“Have you been attacked recently?”

“Well, no--”

“Then don’t worry about it. Does Green have a taser also?” Gavin asked.

"He did the last time I checked, but he only carries it in the car."

"What about your cell phone?" Costner pointed at Dupree's side where he had his in a fancy case.

"You want my cell phone?" Dupree asked, shocked. "Now, really, this is completely out of line."

"Cell phone," Gavin barked the order to another officer, who quickly took Dupree's and put it in an evidence bag.

"Does Green have a cell phone?" Gavin asked.

"Yes. He has it with him," Dupree answered.

Gavin caught a glimpse of a book on a podium and picked it up. Inside were lists of names, phone numbers, and addresses. He frowned.

"What's this?" he asked.

Dupree walked over and smiled.

"Well, it's a referral list. Some of our clients put their friends on our mailing list. We send out information on sales and specials. You'd be surprised how popular St. Patrick's Day specials are," Dupree explained.

"Bag it." He handed the book to the officer.

"Why don't you just take the whole shop?" Dupree suggested.

"Believe me, if I could, I would," Gavin said, then turned to an officer. "A couple of you stay here and wait for the partner."

Returning to the office, Gavin was carrying the leather-bound book he took from the salon. Wolf and Richmond stood beside each other.

"Well?" Wolf inquired.

"Dupree was the only one there, but I left two uniforms behind to get what we need," Gavin said.

"What did you bring back?" Wolf asked.

“Nothing; according to Dupree the bottles are sent off to be imprinted.”

“Going back over the financials to see if that’s true,” Costner said.

“We’ve got Dupree’s taser. Forensics are going to see if it matches any of the victims.”

“What’s that?” Wolf asked, pointing at the book.

“According to Dupree, a mailing list. Their clients refer other people like friends and family and they send out newsletters on specials and so forth,” Gavin explained. “I’m going through it.”

“Well, the Devil is here. Remember guys, no comment,” Wolf mumbled as everyone glanced up to see his wife coming into the office. “Hello, dear.”

“Hello, dear husband.” She kissed him on the cheek. “Have anything for me?”

“I told you when I got something you’d be the first to know.” He smiled.

“So your little search warrant wasn’t fruitful?”

“How did you know about that?” he inquired.

“Oh, I have a few friends. So, anything?” she asked again as she walked around spying their desks, which Gavin quickly covered the book with a file. She rolled her eyes. “You know I’ll find out sooner or later.”

“Well, then, my dear, it’ll be later. Now I must ask you to leave if you aren’t here for a personal reason,” Wolf said.

“I was wanting to know if you wanted to have dinner at Franco’s?” she asked, cutting her eyes at him.

“That’s fine. You know you could have called to ask me,” he said.

“I could have, but then I wouldn’t have gotten a feel to what’s going on here,” she said.

"Which is nothing, *yet*," he told her. "Six?"

"Six."

She slinked away, weaving herself between the desks. Wolf shook his head and called out, "I love you, dear."

Not looking back, she just gestured with a wave as she walked out. Wolf turned to them.

"I know I asked you all to close this case. I'm now demanding it. Franco's; I hate that place, and she knows it. She'll force me to eat all that Mexican food, and I'll have heartburn all night."

"Why did you tell her you'd have dinner at Franco's if it makes you sick?" Costner asked.

"Because, Costner, my life is already complicated without making it worse. Overtime, if you have to, boys." Wolf walked into his office, shutting the door.

"That's a weird marriage," Costner said.

"I thought she was quite warm this time," Richmond said.

"Unusual for a snake," Gavin said as he took off his jacket and sat at his desk. "Back to the case at hand."

Costner walked over to his desk and sat down, going over his messages. Richmond was reading over the personal phone records of Green and Dupree and their business. All the while Gavin was busy going through the referral book and glancing every now and again at the picture of Bertie Johnson, which was bugging him. He shrugged it off and went back to the book.

A few minutes later Gavin noticed a familiar name; in fact, two familiar names--Jeannie Burke and Barb Nielsen. With a sinking feeling he continued to search the book. He found Bill Crummel and Bethany Borge. If he found Elizabeth Lowell, he thought he'd have found how the victims had something in common.

Costner hung up the phone. "You aren't going to believe what I just found out about our Mr. Green. According to some people from his past, his mother was a fancy burlesque dancer back in the hey day of those kinds of things. Her stage name was, guess what? Bertie Johnson," Costner informed them.

"So where does that put us?" Richmond asked. "Rodney Green's mother has been dead for years."

"Is there any way we can get a picture of his mother when she was in her glory days?" Gavin asked.

"Already on it," Costner replied.

"Well, I'm not having much luck with these phone records. So far none of the numbers show up on our victims or vice versa," Richmond complained. "What about you, Gavin, anything?"

"I'm not sure yet," Gavin replied as he went back to reading the book.

He slowly ran his finger down the entries of the book when he found Elizabeth Lowell and somebody else's name that caught him off guard: Amanda Filmore. He took a deep breath and shrugged it off, but soon found a name that caused him to have a chill down his spine, one name that caused him to catch his breath--Lilly Richmond.

He glanced at Richmond who sat at his desk, then at Costner. He took a hard swallow and thought of what Lilly had told him. It was beginning to add up. He had no choice.

An hour later, Lilly came into the office with a uniform. She looked confused and scared as she was shuffled to a conference room. Richmond glanced over to Gavin.

"What's going on?" Richmond asked suspiciously.

"Just need to ask Lilly some questions," he answered as Captain Wolf came up to them.

"Did you get hold of Filmore?" Gavin asked Captain Wolf.

"It's not good. Amanda Filmore didn't come home today. In fact, her husband reported her missing just an hour ago," Wolf said. "I've already got uniforms searching for her new white Pontiac."

"Hey, Gavin," Costner addressed, holding a piece of paper. "What did you find?"

"I compared the others with the same missing MO, then cross matched them like you told me with the book. I found their names in the book."

"How many altogether?" Gavin looked at him.

Costner didn't answer immediately as Gavin gave him a questioning look.

"Fifteen, not including the victims we have," Costner said.

Gavin closed his eyes. That wasn't what he wanted to hear.

"Okay, Amanda Filmore is officially missing. Captain, can you get Amanda's picture on the news?" Gavin asked.

"Are you sure?" Wolf inquired.

"Amanda Filmore is a potential victim. We need to get it on the news that this woman went missing without giving too many details. Hopefully someone will see it and come forward if they saw something."

"Could someone please explain to me what's going on?" Richmond asked confused. "Why is my daughter here?"

"In the referral book that we got from Giorgio's, our victims from the scalping case appeared in the book. So did Amanda Filmore and Lilly. If I'm right, the person who tried to kidnap them is the same person who kidnapped and scalped Burke, Nielsen, Lowell, Borge, and Crummel," Gavin explained.

"When were you going to tell me, your friend, your partner?" Richmond demanded.

“There’s no need to panic,” Wolf said. “Gavin has it under control. The moment he realized what he had, he came to me, and we put things into action.”

“What else do you know?” he demanded.

“Remember when Costner thought he knew a connection between the victims was religious?” Gavin said. “Well, it may be. Costner, tell him.”

“All the victims who were dumped had something religious on them except for Nielsen. She knew the Lords’ Prayer. I think he dumps who have some sort of religious attachment, a way for these victims to be found.”

“What about other victims? You said something about that?” Richmond asked.

“We don’t know what he does with them. If he’s made them his victims,” Costner said. “I checked with their families; they said these people didn’t have cross necklaces, tie pins, or charms.”

“Okay, I don’t understand why you have Lilly down here?” Richmond said.

“Lilly knows more than she realizes,” Gavin said. “She was the one who told me about the pestering telemarketers, the chiseled look of Bertie Johnson.”

“You’re going by all of that? Come on, Gavin, I know you. You know more. What else?” Richmond demanded as he looked at the conference room.

“We think he contacted Lilly. We checked her records and a few weeks before she was attacked, our pre-paid number showed up.”

There was a moment of silence.

“What about Filmore?” he asked.

"The same. A couple of weeks before she was attacked, Filmore received a call from the same number," Gavin explained.

"So who do you think is our killer? Green or Dupree?" he asked.

"At this point we're not sure," Wolf said. "We're bringing in the men and questioning them."

Richmond made his usual frustrated sigh.

"We want to make sure we have him, not have the same mistake like we did with Bannock," Gavin said. "I'm going to talk with Lilly to see if she can recall anything else."

"She can't be alone," Richmond said.

"You can come in," Gavin said. "I'd expect you to be there."

"What about home?"

"That'll be up to Lilly, you know that," Gavin said as he walked away, going into the conference room.

"Gavin, Daddy, what's going on?" Lilly asked.

Gavin took a seat next to her.

"We believe the man who attacked you may be the person responsible for the murder of several others," Gavin said.

"He's a serial killer?" she asked. "So you have him?"

Gavin sighed and shook his head. "Not exactly. You see, the person is the same man who's been involved in our Scalping Case."

"Are you sure?" she asked with a hard swallow, then looked at her father.

"Listen, baby doll, you know Gavin and I will do everything in our power to protect you," Richmond assured her.

"Okay, why am I here?"

"Remember when you told me about the telemarketers? According to your phone records, you received a call on this

date.” Gavin pointed to a date on a calendar, and Lilly looked at it.

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember. I get so many calls. I usually just hang up,” she said.

“How about someone trying to sell you some hair care products?” Gavin asked.

She thought about it. “There was a man, but he wasn’t trying to sell me hair care products. He was doing a survey about hair care products. In exchange, you get free hair care products.”

“Survey? What were some of the questions?” Gavin asked.

“What type of hair did I have, like was it naturally curly or wavy or straight. The kind of stuff I used on my hair.” She shrugged.

“Does anything stick out of that survey that you thought odd?” Gavin asked.

Lilly sat there thinking. “Yeah, he hung up before I could ask when I’d receive my free products. I thought that was weird,” she said. “But he knew my name; said a friend had referred me. I asked my friends, but none of them knew anything about a survey.”

“Have you noticed anybody following you or anything like that since then?” Gavin asked.

“No, nothing.” Lilly shook her head.

“Honey, it’s important if you remember anything,” Richmond stated.

“Daddy, there’s nothing more. Have you asked the other woman who was assaulted like me? Maybe she could be more help?” Lilly suggested.

“There’s a problem with asking her,” Gavin said.

“Now don’t get alarmed,” Richmond quickly told her.

“What?”

Gavin glanced at Richmond before he fixed his eyes onto Lilly.

"The woman is missing," he told her. "We think the man who tried to take her earlier has probably taken her this time."

"What do you mean, taken her?"

"She's been missing since this morning," Gavin told her.

Lilly sat there trying to absorb what Gavin was telling her. She closed her eyes and shook her head.

"I'm getting confused. She's missing, and you're asking me about a telemarketer. Why?"

"We think the person who took the other woman is the person who's killing people for their hair."

"So, you think the man who attacked me is the man who has been killing people in your scalping case?"

"Yes," he answered.

"How safe am I?"

Gavin noted the fear in Lilly's voice.

"Uniform will be posted outside your apartment," Gavin said. "Nothing will happen to you. I promise. But we need you to think of anything that might jog your memory."

"I'm sorry, nothing is coming to mind," she said.

"Roy said Green looked familiar," Gavin said, digging through the file for Green's picture. He showed it to Lilly.

She shrugged. "I've never seen him before."

"Look closer. Anything about him?" Richmond instructed.

Lilly sighed and looked at the picture again. This time Gavin knew something was clicking in her mind.

"What is it?" Gavin asked.

"This man's chin," she said. "I've seen it before."

"Where?" Richmond questioned.

"That drawing of that woman I saw earlier on your desk," she said to Gavin. "Her chin looks like his."

Gavin quickly got out Bertie Johnson's picture and began comparing them.

"See what I mean?" Lilly said. "Must be a brother and sister thing."

"He doesn't have any siblings," Gavin said as he studied the pictures.

There was a tap on the door as Costner stuck his head into the room and made a motion for Gavin. Outside in the hall, Costner held up a picture.

"Found a picture of Bertie Johnson. She's young and looks a lot like her son, Green. Green hasn't returned, and Dupree has tried to call him. So I went ahead and had Dupree brought in. Got him in interrogation one."

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yeah, a company called Oh La La sells hair care products with bull semen and reports selling hair care products to a Bertie Johnson. Now I sent this picture of our young Bertie Johnson up to them and Mr. Denny, the owner of Oh La La, said this picture looks familiar, but not really her," Costner explained.

"That's because Rodney Green is Bertie Johnson," Gavin replied.

"Are you sure?" Costner asked, shocked.

"It's the only explanation. Lilly said the man who attacked her had the same chin as the mystery Bertie Johnson sketch. Then when she saw Green's picture, she thought they were siblings. Green doesn't have any siblings. I've got to talk to Dupree."

Dupree was still sitting nervously at the table as Gavin entered.

"Could someone please tell me what's going on here? First, you storm my salon business, then you bring me in like a

common criminal. Not to mention you have some sort of manhunt for Rodney. Are you going to explain or not?" Dupree questioned.

Gavin pulled out a picture and shoved it in front of him. "Does this woman look familiar?"

"It's Rodney's mother Della, when she was young. She was a burlesque dancer. Rodney doesn't talk about her much; in fact, he doesn't talk about her at all. She died many years ago when Rodney was young."

"What did she die of?" he asked.

"Cancer, I think. That's the reason he took an interest in people who needed wigs, because of his mother."

"Is that the reason he met Bannock?"

"He met Mr. Bannock one day at a salon convention. Mr. Bannock was in the wig business and, before I knew it, Rodney was doing business with him," Dupree explained.

"What about you? Aren't you involved as much as Rodney with Bannock?"

"Please, I went to Bannock's little shop, and I vowed I'd never go there ever again. It seemed so shady," Dupree rolled his wide eyes.

"What do you know about Oh La La?" Gavin asked.

"I've never heard of the place. What is it?"

Gavin shook his head and went on to the next question.

"Do you know where Rodney is?" Gavin asked.

"No, but I wish I did. He handles things much better than me. I've been calling him all afternoon, and he hasn't answered his phone," Dupree said calmly.

"Do you know where he might go if he's upset or wanted to get away?"

"He has a few special spots," he said with a pause. "Oh, I guess you wanted to know where."

“That would be helpful.”

“He likes going to the coffee shop down the street from the salon. They make a great latte. One time we had this awful tiff over a woman’s hair color; anyway he left work for a while. He said he went to see a friend. He never told me who, but I figured it was that Mr. Bannock. They’ve seemed to become close over the past year,” Dupree complained.

“Anywhere else?”

“No. Rodney is a private person. When he gets upset, he gets quiet.”

Gavin wrote everything down, but felt as if none of it would help them find Green.

“Green has a cell phone. Could you give me the number?”

Dupree took the piece of paper and wrote down the number. “It won’t do any good to call him. He isn’t answering.”

“Has Mr. Green been acting strange lately?”

“What do you mean, strange?” Dupree asked, cutting his eyes.

“I mean, forgetting things, coming in late, acting odd?” Gavin suggested.

Dupree sighed. “Well, he did mention he was upset with the traffic the other day, but nothing else comes to mind.”

“Do you two live together?” Gavin asked him.

“Oh, heavens no. We did for a little while, but Rodney has issues with roommates.”

“Issues?”

“Like he’s a neat freak. I believe in clean homes, but if everything wasn’t in the right order, he’d throw a fit. I opened the fridge, and all the labels were facing me and in a neat little row. Well, I accidentally moved a few things to make room for some stuff I bought, and he went ballistic. I won’t even mention how controlling he can be sometimes. Now don’t get me

wrong—he's a great business partner, a wizard when it comes to numbers, but as a roommate . . . I'll pass, thank you."

The door opened as Costner knocked while coming in. He made a motion for Gavin to come out in the hall. Gavin excused himself and went to the hall.

"What is it, Costner?"

"We may have a problem. Upon waiting for Green to return, some uniforms heard a phone ringing. It was Green's. The return number was Dupree."

"Dupree said he'd been trying to contact Green all afternoon. He gave me Green's number, but it doesn't match our pre-paid number," Gavin commented. "Put out an APB on Green's Bellaire."

"What about a search warrant for Green's home?" Costner asked.

"I don't know if we have enough."

Richmond came up to them. "Lilly is going home. Her mother is meeting her and staying with her until you get off."

"Richmond, if you think she'd be better staying with you--"

"She insisted on going home. I can't change her mind; too much like her old man," he said. "Now what has Dupree given us?"

"Nothing. He gave us a number, but it isn't the pre-paid number," Gavin said. "Dupree gave us some places he might go, but it's like a coffee shop or the library."

"I'm going to see if the Captain can get us a search warrant for his home," Costner said.

"Dupree commented that Della Green had cancer. Find out what you can about that," he asked Richmond as Captain Wolf walked up to them.

"Your little idea to place Amanda Filmore on the news worked. A man by the name of Chuck Daniels claims he saw a

woman fitting Amanda Filmore's description in the parking lot of the strip mall. He also saw her with a man. He's coming in," Wolf told them.

"We need a warrant for Green's home," Costner said.

"Do we have enough?" Wolf asked as he crossed his arms.

"If we get a positive ID on Green, we'll have enough for it," Gavin said.

"Keep leaning on Dupree," Wolf instructed. "I'll let you know as soon as Daniels gets here."

Gavin sighed as he went back into the interrogation room where Dupree was getting a little irritated.

"Do I need a lawyer?" he asked.

"You aren't under arrest, Mr. Dupree. We're questioning you about your partner," Gavin said.

"Does Rodney need a lawyer?" Dupree asked.

"I'm not sure, but he might want to have one on speed dial," Gavin said, taking a seat across from him. "Look, do you have any idea where Green could be? We need to find him."

"I've already answered that," Dupree replied. "No."

"We were going over your referral book. It was interesting. Who sends out the mailing for the potential customers?"

"Rodney does all that. He makes the flyers; he's a whiz with the computer. Anyway, he makes the flyers with the specials. I usually take them to the post office to be mailed."

"What if I told you some of the potential customers in that book are coming up dead?"

Dupree gasped. "I certainly hope you aren't claiming I or Rodney had anything to do with their deaths. I faint at the sight of blood, and Rodney wouldn't harm a fly. He can be brutish, but he isn't a murderer."

"You said he was a good business partner, and there's no dispute in that. We've gone over your business records with a

fine tooth comb, but just because he's a good partner doesn't mean he isn't capable of murder." Gavin stood. "You want me to bring you anything? Something to drink or eat?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I could go for some tea. Earl Grey, if you have it," Dupree said.

"I'll see what I can do."

Gavin walked out of the room and told the uniform to get Dupree a cup of tea, making sure it was Earl Grey. In the hall he met Costner with his sleeves rolled up and his tie undone just hanging around his neck.

"Daniels is here. Got him in the Captain's office." He handed Gavin the file with pictures.

Chuck Daniels was a pudgy middle-age mildly-mannered man. He sat in a chair holding his straw cowboy hat. He quickly stood when Gavin and Costner walked in. He kindly shook their hands, then sat back down.

"Mr. Daniels, you told my colleague that you saw this young woman." Gavin handed him a picture of Filmore.

"Yes, sir, I did. She and some man were making out in the parking lot. It was improper, and I let it be known they should take matters elsewhere instead of in public," he explained.

"She wasn't fighting back?"

"No, but the way he was kissing her, she must have been shocked."

"Why do you say that?" Gavin inquired.

"Well, she didn't have her arms wrapped around him. He was doing all the work, if you know what I mean."

Gavin and Costner began conferring with one another.

"Taser?" Costner questioned.

"It would explain why she wasn't engaging back with him. How about this guy?" Gavin showed him the picture of Green this time. "Is this the man who was kissing this woman?"

“Yes, sir, it sure is.”

“You’re sure she wasn’t responding to his advances?”
Gavin asked.

“I’m sure.”

“He’s getting brave now to snatch someone in broad daylight,” Costner said.

“Brave? Or just plain I don’t care anymore,” Gavin said, thinking. “Costner, you said that you thought this had a religious tone to it, and you proved it. What if the only reason he’s dumping the bodies is because of that purpose?”

“It’s possible.”

Gavin quickly left the office and went to the interrogation room where Dupree was seated with his tea.

“Tell me what you can about Green’s religious beliefs,”
Gavin said.

“He didn’t have any,” Dupree said. “He and his mother attended church regularly, but once she passed, he quit. Now that doesn’t mean he still didn’t believe in the Bible and such. Every Christmas we always went to St. Anthony’s to listen to the choir.”

“What about people who showed their openness about religion?”

“Well, he always admired people who showed their faith, which I found quite odd.”

“Why is that?” Costner asked.

“I find it odd for someone to admire such, but has little himself.”

“Was that because of his mother?” Gavin asked.

“I have no idea. But he told me once that people who are dying rely on their faith to help them through it.”

“Do you know anything about his mother?”

"Not really, only what Rodney told me about her. She was a dancer once. I know because one time we were watching *Dancing With the Stars*, and he pointed out some of the moves were wrong. That's when he told me his mother was a dancer. He was private about his mother."

"But you told us the reason he went into the wig business was because of his mother," Costner said.

"Yes, that's what he told me. According to him, his mother was badly treated when she had no hair from the cancer treatments. She lost her job as a dancer, her special friend left her because she wasn't pretty anymore. It was heart-wrenching to hear the story."

Costner tapped Gavin on the shoulder, indicating he wanted to talk out in the hall.

"I get the part why he dumps them now, because that way they can be found," Costner said. "Because they're being guided to the other world. I don't get why he's killing them in the first place."

Gavin went back to the dry erase board and stared at the photos of the victims, then said, "They were self-centered, at least to him. They focused on their looks, something that triggered this rage."

Just then Lilly and a uniform came up to him. Costner excused himself, leaving them alone.

"Are you going home?" he asked.

"Yes, mother said she'd stay with me until--"

"Maybe you should stay with your parents until we catch this guy," he told her.

"I'm fine. Besides, your boss is placing a uniform with me, so I'll be okay," she said.

"I'd prefer you stay with your parents with the uniform," he said.

“He’s not going to nab me with a uniformed officer outside my house,” Lilly told him.

“Arguing with you is fruitless, isn’t it?”

“Yep.”

“Fine, but I’d rather you reconsider, which I know you won’t.”

She gave him a quick kiss on his cheek and smiled at him.

“I’ll be fine. Don’t work too late.”

Lilly walked away.

“Call me as soon as you get home, and call me every--”

“Thirty minutes,” she said, smiling. “I know the drill. Later.”

Gavin watched Lilly walk out of the office. He knew he couldn’t control her in any way, but for a moment he wanted to keep her with him.

* * *

He waited in the dark in her apartment. He wondered what could be taking so long as time passed. Finally, he heard the key work its way into the front door lock. The light from the outside filtered through the door, presenting her shadow. He was waiting for her to shut the door, but saw there was another figure with her. He quickly ducked back into the dark living room. She flipped the switch to the hall light and took off her rain jacket.

“Officer Donnelly, are you sure you want to sit out there? I mean, if this maniac killer is on the loose, wouldn’t you better protect me in here than out there?” she said.

“I suppose, but Detective Reece said to be posted outside,” he answered.

“And if this man gets through my back door somehow, how will you know I’m in trouble?” she questioned.

"I see your point," he said. "I could secure the place, then sit on the couch and wait for Detective Reece."

She smiled, shutting the door and locking it. "Good. Would you like me to make some coffee?"

"If it's not too much trouble," Officer Donnelly said.

"It's not. You go secure, and I'll make the coffee."

She walked down the hall, leaving the officer to begin his search. He knew the first room would be the living room, and he knew that would be when he would attack, but he had to do it quietly. He knew an officer wasn't going to go quietly unless he surprised him. He waited against the wall near the doorway holding the taser in his hand ready to take the officer down.

He saw a hand reach into the room, tapping the wall for a light switch. When the hand couldn't find it, the officer stepped into the dark room, and that's when he made his move.

Officer Donnelly fell to the floor with a soft thud as he landed on the carpeted floor. He then heard her coming down the hall from the kitchen.

"Officer Donnelly, I hope you don't mind decaf," she said. "I don't drink much coffee, but since Gavin has been staying . . ."

He stepped out into the hall, meeting her. She sucked in a deep breath, holding the hot steaming cup of coffee.

"It seems Officer Donnelly is unable to talk at the moment, my dear," he told her.

She suddenly threw the steaming hot cup of coffee at his face. He screamed in pain as it hit him. He then heard her run down the hall to a room and lock the door. This angered him as he tried to see where she went.

* * *

"Anything?" Gavin asked Costner.

A frustrated Costner plopped the handful of papers onto his desk, then rubbed his face.

“Nothing. No property was ever owned by Della Green,” he replied.

“Did you try her maiden name?” he asked.

“It’s in the stack I haven’t got to yet,” Costner replied.

Captain Wolf suddenly jerked open his door, shoving his gun into his holster, and Gavin knew just by his expression something was wrong.

“We just got a 9-1-1 call from Lilly’s apartment,” Wolf informed. “The son-of-a-bitch somehow has gotten into her apartment.”

“What?” Gavin quickly joined him. “Did she say he was there?”

“All the operator heard was screaming and the banging of a door.”

* * *

He tried the bedroom door and grinned when it wouldn’t open due to being locked.

He slowly knocked on the door and said, “Knock, knock, I found you.”

He twisted the door knob several times before rapping the door again.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are. I won’t hurt you. I just want to talk.”

“Go away. I’ve already called the police!” she hollered from the other side.

He paused and knew he had to work quickly. First he began hitting the door with his fist, then he began kicking the door. Finally, he stepped back and kicked open the door.

She screamed as he stepped forward into the room.

"Don't come any closer," she warned.

He held up his hands. "I'm not here to hurt you," he said as he moved closer.

"I'm warning you," she warned, but when he didn't heed to her demand, she shot him. Un-phased by the first shot, she shot him again. He fell back against the wall, but still had enough strength to get up and stand.

"You don't understand," he said.

She then shot him again, this time causing him to fall to the floor. She waited for a moment before she moved closer to see if he was dead. When he didn't move or seem to be alive, she dropped the gun onto the floor and started to slowly go around him. As she reached the door, she was suddenly pulled down as one of her ankles was caught by a hand.

With a firm grip, he kept Lilly from getting away. She was crying as she screamed out, trying to get away from him. Then, unexpectedly, loud pops rang out in the room.

"Lilly," Gavin reached down and pulled a frightened Lilly from under Green.

Shaken and upset, Lilly buried her face in Gavin's chest as he tried to calm her down. Costner rushed over to Green, who lay still on the floor. Seconds later Captain Wolf was in the door way.

"He's dead," Costner said.

Captain Wolf wagged his head to get an upset Lilly out of the room. Gavin took Lilly out of the bedroom and into the hall where a uniform escorted Lilly out of the apartment.

"At least we don't have to worry about him anymore," Costner said as Gavin returned. "Closed case."

Gavin crouched down to examine Green.

"This case isn't closed. Amanda Filmore is still missing. If he hasn't killed her, she's out there somewhere waiting for someone to rescue her."

"All Green's dying did was end it for him," Wolf said.

"Quinlan said all the victims were tortured for some time before they were murdered. That means Filmore could still be alive," Gavin said.

They heard some commotion out in the hall, then saw Richmond stand in the doorway.

"I had to see it to believe it," Richmond said. "Looks like you got some good rounds in him."

"Gavin only shot him twice. Don't know about the other three," Costner said.

"CSU will straighten it out," Gavin said. "I'm going to talk with Lilly. Maybe she's calmed down by now."

Gavin walked to the squad car where Lilly was seated in the back. She stood and took a deep breath as the EMT brought out an injured Officer Donnelly.

"Is he going to be okay?" she asked.

"He'll be okay. Can you tell me what happened?" he asked.

"I went to fix Officer Donnelly a cup of coffee. When I came back with the coffee, that man stepped out into the hall from the living room. I threw the coffee at him and ran to my room, where I locked the door and hit one on my phone for 9-1-1. Then I got the hand gun out of my bedside table," she explained.

"Did he say anything?"

"I don't think so; he may have. Everything was happening so fast, Gavin," she told him as she began to shake again.

"It's okay," he assured her. "And when did you buy a gun?"

"I didn't." She lowered her voice. "Daddy bought it for me a few years ago. He didn't like me living alone. Thought something might happen to me. He took me to the range and taught me how to use it. I have a permit. I never used that thing until tonight."

Gavin saw Quinlan pull up and get out of the ME van.

"Your place is going to be a crime scene for a couple of days. You need to stay with your parents until then."

"What about you? Where are you going to stay?"

He brushed her hair and smiled. "I can stay at a hotel, don't worry about me. You go and get some rest. I'll see you later." He kissed her on the forehead as Richmond came up to them.

"Your mama is waiting at home for us," he said to Lilly.

She was hesitant, but after Gavin made a few quick nods she went with her father. Richmond helped her into his car. He watched the car drive out of sight when Costner came up to him.

"Captain said I'm supposed to take your piece," Costner said.

Gavin pulled his gun from his holster and handed it to Costner.

"I thought you'd be a lot happier about this," Costner said. "Green's dead. He can't hurt anybody else."

"We still have a missing woman--Amanda Filmore. If Quinlan is right, she could still be alive and, if so, I just killed the man who could tell us where she is," Gavin explained.

Costner shook his head. "We'll keep looking until we find her. Something's got to lead us to her."

A new red Mercedes pulled up to the scene. Assistant District Attorney Middleton popped out of it like one of those dancers popping out of a cake at a bachelor party.

"What the hell is she doing here?" Gavin complained.

“Here to get her five minutes of fame,” Costner said. “Look at her, she’s talking with the press.”

They watched her talk briefly, but then walk away. The expression on her face gave away she wasn’t happy as she walked toward them.

“She looks pissed,” Costner said.

Captain Wolf came out of Lilly’s apartment as he quickly met Middleton. They watched as Wolf and Middleton were engrossed in a deep conversation.

“Poor Captain. If Middleton isn’t on his ass, his wife is.” Costner pointed at Wolf’s wife as she got out of her car.

Gavin sighed and went back into Lilly’s apartment where Quinlan was zipping up the black body bag, and the place was crawling with forensics.

“Detective,” a uniform called him to the back door. “Looks like he entered through here. Hid in the dark living room and waited. We’ll dust for prints.”

“Is Lilly all right?” Quinlan asked.

“Just shook up. She went home with Richmond.”

She handed him a couple of clear evidence bags.

“Don’t know if any of this will help you find your missing woman. That’s what we found on him.”

Suddenly the evidence bags were taken from Gavin by Captain Wolf.

“What are you doing?” asked Gavin, shocked. “There may be something in one of those bags that could tell us where Filmore is.”

“It’s not our concern anymore,” Captain Wolf told them.

“What? It *is* our concern. Amanda Filmore is a missing woman.”

Devil's Concubine

"That's right, a missing woman. This case is officially closed. From now on, Missing Persons will be handling Filmore's case," Wolf told them.

* * *

Gavin stood at the board, staring at all the clues he'd written earlier, evidence that finally proved Green was their man.

He should have been thrilled he closed a case. Normally, he would, but this was one time he didn't feel that rush. As long as Filmore stayed missing, this case would never be over, at least not for Gavin.

As Gavin sat down, Detective Williams of Missing Persons Division walked past his desk. She acknowledged him as she went into Captain Wolf's office.

Costner made a face as he approached Gavin.

"Missing Person?" he asked.

"Yep," Gavin replied.

"Have you noticed that all people in Missing Persons look as if they've met an ugly stick?" Costner observed.

"Detective Williams isn't a beauty queen, but she's a good detective."

Costner sat on the edge of his desk. "You've worked with her before?"

"Worked on a couple of domestic cases that involved murder and missing persons."

"She may be a good detective, but if I was her I'd invest in some plastic surgery for that nose and chin," Costner said.

Gavin smiled. "Why don't you tell her that when you see her?"

He pointed toward the Captain's office. Detective Williams and Captain were coming out of his office together, coming toward them.

"Detective Reece, you remember Detective Williams of Missing Persons," Wolf said.

"Detective Reece, it's been awhile," she said.

"Yes, it has. Two years ago, the Finnerty case," he said as Costner cleared his throat for attention.

"Our newest member to Homicide, Detective Costner," Wolf introduced him.

Costner stood and held out his hand.

"Detective," she greeted him with a firm hand shake.

"Detective Williams needs to be brought up to speed on the Filmore case. I told her you two would fill her in." Wolf's demeanor quickly changed when he saw his wife come into the station house. "Detective Reece will answer all your questions. Excuse me." Wolf walked away.

Gavin handed Williams a manila file. "Your missing person is Amanda Filmore."

She frowned, looking up from the file.

"Wait a minute. We have a missing persons on this woman. How did you end up with this case?"

Gavin offered her a seat as he began to explain. "Amanda Filmore was attacked a couple of weeks ago. Then the attacker decided to target one of our own."

"So that's how it ended up in homicide, one of your own involved," she said.

"It started out that way. We were investigating a murder which turned into several murders. To make a long story short, we discovered a book the killer had held names and addresses of our victims and several missing persons."

Williams was quiet for a moment as she read the file, then closed it.

"You know she's probably dead," Williams said.

"She could be."

"Detective Reece," Quinlan called as she came into the station, rushing to his desk.

"Quinlan, Detective Will--"

"We may have a problem," she cut him off with urgency. "You had the back door dusted for prints. In the process we found a small amount of blood, a couple of fresh drops, to be exact, on the last step. Prints matched Green, but preliminaries suggest the blood wasn't a match."

"That's impossible! It has to be Green's," Costner said.

"Did Green have any other injuries besides gunshot wounds?" Gavin asked curiously.

"That's the odd part. No. The only injuries were that of gunshot wounds," she said. She handed Gavin a file. "You told me that Lilly threw coffee at Green. Well, if she threw the coffee as she said she did, then why didn't Green have coffee on him?"

"Maybe Lilly thought she hit him with the coffee," Gavin reasoned.

"Quinlan, I wasn't expecting to see you here," Wolf said upon his return.

"Quinlan was just bringing by some things on the Green case. You know, tying up loose ends," Gavin said, which surprised Quinlan as she cocked an eye at him.

"I assume everything is okay?"

"Its fine," she answered.

"Captain, are we sure this case is solved?" Costner asked.

"Costner, I know you're new at this, but when all of our hard evidence points to the suspect and, since we killed him at

the scene, you can assume the case is over,” Wolf explained. “Now, wrap it up and call it a night. Reece, tomorrow you and Costner will meet with IAB.”

“Why are we meeting with internal affairs?” Costner asked, confused.

“It’s routine when a suspect is killed by a detective. Don’t worry, Costner, they aren’t sending anyone to jail. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be calling it a night myself.”

* * *

As soon as Gavin was able to convince Williams to let him have the case for the next ten hours and got Quinlan to work up a DNA profile ASAP on the mystery blood, Gavin made sure Captain Wolf left for the night so he could work on the case and crack it before the next shift. Richmond came in as soon as he found out what Gavin thought.

“Are you sure we should do this?” a nervous Costner asked as he brought the box of evidence into the interrogation room. “I mean, Captain Wolf said this case is closed.”

“Listen, kid, if you don’t want to be a part of this, you can walk right out of here,” Richmond said. “I wouldn’t blame you since you’re young and new at this.”

“I want to find the killer as much as you do, but . . .”

“Costner, sometimes you know when a case isn’t closed. It’s a feeling you get. All good detectives know it.” Gavin turned from the clean dry erase board. “What do you get from this case?”

“Conflicting,” he answered.

“It’s simple; in or out?” Richmond firmly demanded.

“In, of course.”

“What did Lilly tell you?” Gavin asked Richmond.

"Not much more than what she told you. But she swears up and down the coffee did hit the man who attacked her."

"She was right," Costner said, holding up the picture of the crime scene. "According to the coffee pattern on the floor in the hall, you can see an outline of where the coffee hit the floor and the footsteps that led away."

"Prints on the back door belonged to Green," Gavin said.

"The fresh blood on the back step didn't match Green. However, Green never left the apartment, so it couldn't be his blood," Richmond said.

"Let's look at what we do have that points to Green," Gavin said. "We know that the cell phone that belonged to Green is the same number that called all our victims before they came up missing. All of the victims were on a mailing list for Giorgio's. He owns a taser, but we haven't been able to locate it yet. Bought bull semen products from Oh La La." He wrote on the dry erase board under Green's name in the positive list. "Now what we don't have."

"Doesn't have a car with navy blue interior," Costner said. "Doesn't have any connection to any property, especially with stables."

"I hate to say this, but we had more on Bannock," Richmond said.

"Except for when one person was murdered while he was in our custody, and he wasn't the one trying to get Lilly," Gavin said. "What did the search of Green's home turn up?"

Costner opened a file and began reading, "The home was clean as a whistle. The back room that was locked that Dupree told us about held nothing but his I Love Lucy memorabilia."

"You mean he had an entire room full of that stuff?" Richmond frowned.

“According to this, yes. He had some wigs in his home, but according to forensics, they wouldn’t be able to prove they came from the victims,” Costner said.

Gavin rolled up his sleeves. “Since it’s going to be a long night, anybody up for take-out?”

Four hours later, at two-thirty in the morning after several cups of coffee and Chinese takeout, Gavin, Richmond, and Costner were exhausted. They had tried every angle to figure out who they believed was the true killer. They had gone through all the evidence, the suspects, and autopsies of each of the victims; they found no other killer except for Green.

“Maybe we should just accept the fact Green is our killer,” Costner said as an officer brought in a thick file.

Gavin tossed the black marker onto the table and rubbed his face. “There’s something we’re missing. I just wish I knew what it was.”

“Gavin, we may have something,” Costner said. “The blood found at Lilly’s may not have matched Green, but whoever’s blood it is belongs to someone with similar DNA.”

“That’s impossible, Green doesn’t have any siblings,” Richmond said.

“Maybe he did and didn’t know it,” Gavin replied. “We have anything on Green’s father?”

“As I can recall, we never explored his father,” Richmond said.

“Why would we? I mean, everything was under Bertie Johnson, Green’s mother’s show name,” Costner commented.

“What about her maiden name?” Richmond asked.

“Nothing under Della Burude,” Costner replied.

“So the question is, who is Green’s father?”

Costner continued reading the file sent over from the medical examiner searching for Green's father. Then Costner made a light laugh.

"What is it?" Gavin asked.

"Green's father has the same last name as his little friend."

Gavin shot his head up, then walked around the table to Costner. "Which little friend?"

"Dupree," Costner said.

Gavin smiled as he went to the board and wrote Dupree's name with the list of suspects.

"It makes sense," Gavin began.

"What makes sense?" Costner asked.

"You aren't suggesting that Green and Dupree are brothers, are you? Because, honestly, I don't see that," Richmond said, drinking the last of his coffee.

"It's the only explanation," Gavin said.

"They can't be brothers. Weren't they, you know . . . a couple?" Costner asked, confused.

"Dupree was more than helpful when we questioned him, acted as if he didn't know what was going on."

"Are you sure about this, Gavin? I mean, Green's father could have nothing more in common with Dupree than just last names." Richmond poured himself another coffee.

"Think about it. He was the one who told us about the bottles being imprinted. The cell phone we thought was Green's was conveniently left at the salon. Green and Dupree both owned the same type of taser; however, Green repeatedly told us his was stolen. It could have been stolen by Dupree. Dupree told us that Green took care of the mailing list; however, Dupree got the privilege to put them in the mail," Gavin explained. "Costner, see if you can find out if Green and

Dupree share the same father. Also see if Armand Dupree owned any property and any other vehicles with dark interior.”

“You got it,” Costner replied, leaving the room.

“Richmond, I think we need to call Dupree,” Gavin said.

“I agree, but what are we going to have him come down here for? You know he’ll want to know,” Richmond said.

“The same bullshit we tell all our suspects who try to snowball us; we have some personal affects that they may want of their loved one.”

Richmond was smiling as he left the room, and Costner came in with a sheet of paper.

“I checked with car registration office. Dupree’s father owned a 1982 Buick. According to this, the car is still being registered in Louis Dupree’s name every year despite the fact Dupree’s father has been dead for twenty-one years.” Costner handed the paper to Gavin. “Waiting on property information.”

Like a tag team match, Costner walked out and Richmond returned.

“Dupree isn’t picking up his phone,” he said. “I’m sending over a couple of uniforms.”

“Excuse me, Detective Reece.” Officer Melanie Zola stood at the door holding out a file. “Detective Costner asked me to run Armand Dupree’s name.”

Gavin thanked the young woman and took the file from her. He smiled big as he glanced up from the file.

“What did you find out?” Richmond asked.

“According to this file, Armand Dupree’s father goes by the name Louis Dupree. What do you think the odds are that Green and Dupree share the same father?”

“The odds are pretty good,” Richmond said.

Devil's Concubine

Costner returned, excited. "Armand Dupree grew up on a farm about fifteen miles from here. Guess who still owns his property, considering he's dead?"

"Louis Dupree," Gavin said.

"There's where he takes his victims," Gavin said. "That's where Filmore is."

* * *

Gavin and a team of squad cars blaring red and blue lights drove down the dirt road to the opening with a cattle guard. They began traveling down the small winding path when Costner's cell phone began ringing.

"What the hell is that sound?" Richmond asked.

"CSU," Costner replied as he answered.

Richmond glanced over to Gavin. "A special ring tone? I don't want to know what ours might be."

"CSU found a collection of wigs in Dupree's home that had dried skin," Costner said. "Oh, and your ring tone, Richmond-- Dancing Queen."

"What?"

"Your wife said you can sing all the words to it. She said so at the hospital."

Gavin laughed. "All the years we've been partners, I didn't know you knew the lyrics to Dancing Queen."

"Okay, you know what? Let's focus on this case, okay?" Richmond said, flustered.

As they came up to a huge barn, the head lights flashed upon Louis Dupree's 1982 Buick. The moment they stepped out of the car, the smell drifted to them.

"Holy hell, that smell isn't what I think it is, is it?" Richmond frowned.

"Is that . . . ?" Costner quickly brought out his handkerchief and covered his nose.

"Decomp," Gavin said.

"That's what I thought. How come it's stronger than normal?" Richmond complained.

"You two check around back," he instructed the uniforms. "We'll go through the front.

With their guns drawn, Gavin led Richmond and Costner into the over-sized barn where the stench seemed worse. As they moved cautiously farther into the barn, they saw Amanda Filmore staked to the ground. They weren't sure if she was dead yet as they guardedly moved forward. They saw the table where various surgical instruments lay, all shiny and clean. A steel bowl held what appeared to be water, but upon further inspection was rubbing alcohol. A large black apron hung on a nail near the table. The men frowned at each other as they moved over to Filmore, who lay tied to the ground on a sheet of plastic.

Still holding his gun, Richmond kneeled and checked for a pulse on Filmore's taser-marked body.

"She's still alive," Richmond called out.

Gavin and Richmond pulled out their pocket knives and cut the ropes securely tied around her wrists and ankles.

"See Dupree anywhere?" Gavin asked as Costner looked around.

"I don't see him anywhere," Costner replied. "I'll call for an ambulance."

"What the hell is this place?" Richmond asked Gavin.

"My guess--the killing room," Gavin replied. "Plastic here was to wrap up her body."

"None of the victims we found were wrapped in plastic."

Devil's Concubine

Costner's phone rang as an officer quickly entered, holding a handkerchief to his nose.

"Detective Reece, you've got to come out here. You won't believe it."

"Costner, stay here with the victim," Gavin instructed.

Gavin and Richmond followed the officer to the back of the barn. They would be in disbelief at what they were about to witness next.

"It's a makeshift cemetery," the officer said, pointing his flashlight at the shallow graves.

"Holy Hell," Richmond remarked. "I don't even want to know how many are out there!"

"Our nightmare has just begun," Gavin said.

"I'll call the Captain and CSU," Richmond pulled out his phone.

"Gavin--" Costner stopped in his tracks at what they were looking at. "Are those graves?"

"Yes, Costner," Gavin said.

"I just got a call that Dupree is waiting for us back at the station," Costner said.

"I guess we better call the Captain," Richmond said.

* * *

Gavin, Richmond, Costner, and Captain Wolf observed Dupree through the two-way mirror. Dupree constantly primped himself as he sat waiting patiently for them.

"He just walked in here, said he wanted to confess," Costner said.

"Confess? What made him want to do that?" Richmond scratched his head.

“Who cares why he wanted to do it; he’s doing it,” Wolf replied. “It’s going to make our job much easier. You know what to do.”

Dupree smiled at them as Gavin, Richmond, and Costner entered the room carrying a thick file and a tape recorder. Gavin pressed the record button and began his interview.

“Detectives, I heard you were looking for me,” Dupree said.

“You do understand your rights?” Gavin asked.

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you explain everything to us?”

“Of course. Where would you like me to start?” Dupree asked. “Before we start, could I trouble you for some water? I feel I may be parched while telling you my confession.”

Gavin motioned for Costner to get Dupree a cup of water.

“Now why don’t you start by telling us how you know Rodney Green?” Gavin asked.

“Rodney and I are half-brothers. We never grew up together, but we did know each other existed. My wandering father used to take me with him when he came down to visit Aunt Della, but you’d have to be blind to not see that Aunt Della and my father were more.”

“Your father took you to see Della. How did your mother take it?”

Dupree laughed. “My mother, rest her soul, would believe anything my father told her. She believed Della Burude was my father’s long lost sister. So you see, Detective, Rodney and I sort of grew up together in a way.”

“So when did you start killing?” Gavin asked.

“Well, I never killed anyone. That’s the honest truth. Rodney did that. The sight of blood makes me queasy.” He

leaned in and held up his bandaged hand. "I nearly fainted leaving that woman's apartment this evening."

"You mean Lilly Richmond's apartment," Richmond said sternly.

"Yes. Like I said, I never did any of the killings. Rodney did that."

"So what role did you play?" Gavin asked.

"My role? Research, of course." Costner returned with a cup of water, from which Dupree quickly took a sip. "Thank you, young man. You see, it was my idea to use tasers. We used to hold them at gunpoint, but it was way too risky. We didn't want to hurt anybody else. We just wanted the women we had our sights on."

"And you thought a taser was less risky?" asked Gavin, confused.

"It was. I researched it. It'll disable the target, that's all."

"How did you target your victims?" Richmond asked.

"Oh, that was easy, too. You see, the mailing list was the perfect way to find our donors. For a long time we drove around and around until we'd finally settle on someone, but then I got the idea we should have a recommendation list and well, it was a big hit. From there Rodney would go through the list and visit them." He laughed.

"Visiting, of course, means watching them from afar. If it was hair we wanted, he'd learn their schedule, then learn how they took care of their hair by contacting them by phone offering them free products. You'd be amazed how many women are so willing to tell you anything for free products. It was also me who told him to use pre-paid cell phones. I saw that on television once. It was a mob show, and the FBI couldn't trace the call because it was a pre-paid," he explained.

“When did you and Rodney decide to begin this brotherly adventure?” Gavin asked.

“We started doing this when his mother died. Aunt Della was penniless and couldn’t afford a wig when she got cancer. Aunt Della was a beautiful woman, but the cancer just ravaged her, and well, I was like Rodney. I couldn’t stand to see her in that condition. So Rodney and I went out and found a woman who had the same hair color as Aunt Della. Emily Harper was her name. She used Breck hair products.”

“You killed Emily Harper because of her hair?” he asked.

“Well, we asked politely if she’d be interested in cutting her hair; she was rude with her answer. We soon learned how many women have to go without hair and wear ugly hats. That’s when Rodney and I decided we had a cause.”

Gavin glanced over to Richmond and sighed.

“Why did you dump Jeannie Burke, Barb Neilsen, Bill Crummel, Bethany Borge, Elizabeth Lowell?” Gavin placed a picture of each of the victims in front of him.

“That was Rodney’s thing. I’m not real sure why he started that. Something happened to him one day, then before I knew it, he was dumping certain donors. I told him it would get us caught, but he said these people weren’t lost souls and deserved to be found,” Dupree explained as he took a couple of sips of his water.

“You know you’ve told us how Rodney was the one who masterminded most of this, but you were the one who went back after Lilly Richmond and Amanda Filmore,” Gavin said.

“I didn’t go back; well, I did, but not the way you think. Rodney grabbed Miss Filmore. I was supposed to get Miss Richmond, but I didn’t know she was going to be a little hell cat. Rodney had to finish the job. She threw that hot coffee at me and, if you notice...” He unbuttoned his pale blue silk shirt

and showed the red marks on his chest. "Scalded me. So Rodney told me to leave, and he'd take care of her. We had to get them; they could tell what we looked like. And we've never left a live person behind."

"When did you decide to cut their throat?" Gavin asked.

"Rodney saw it as putting them out of their misery," he answered. "All I can think of now is who's going to make wigs for those poor women who need wigs and can't afford them. You know, we never intended on getting caught."

"Nobody ever does," Gavin said, standing and turning off the tape recorder.

ADA Middleton was standing behind the two way mirror with her arms crossed as Captain Wolf sighed with shock.

"In all my years in this business, something always comes along that sends chills down my spine," Wolf said.

"His lawyer will probably try the insanity plea," Middleton said.

"You don't think he's insane?" Costner asked.

"I think he knew exactly what he was doing. He seems to take pleasure in telling us the gory details. In either case, sane or not, he'll go away for a while," she said. "How many bodies so far?"

"Forty-two and counting," Costner replied.

"Quinlan said it would be weeks before she could identify any of them," Gavin said. "Some are old, some are fairly new, but they all have one thing in common--no hair."

"You said Nielsen was the only one to not have a religious symbol on her. Dupree told us who all the victims that Green dumped weren't lost souls because of their religious beliefs. So why did he dump her body?" Middleton asked.

"Nielsen knew the Lord's Prayer. My guess she began reciting it when Green was about to scalp her," Gavin said.

She made a heavy sigh and grabbed her briefcase. "Good job."

Middleton walked out of the office as the four men stood there for a moment glancing at each other.

"Once you guys make out your reports, why don't you take a couple of days off? You need it. I'd say goodnight to you, but it's six o'clock in the morning, and I know you all are exhausted. So go home and get some rest."

"We can't," Costner said. "Reece and I have to meet with IAB in a few hours."

"I'll take care of that. Go home, get some rest. By the way, good job." He walked out.

"Well, I for one can't wait to get home to Tiffany. A couple of days off will be nice to spend some time with my family. I know I have a new appreciation for hair now," Costner said as he threw his jacket over his shoulder.

"Yeah, it'll be nice to stroke Maureen's hair and thank God my family is safe, but first I'm going to get some sleep," Richmond said as he slipped on his jacket.

"What about you, Gavin?" Costner asked.

Gavin yawned and stretched. "Have to check into a motel first, then I plan to get caught up on my sleep before I do anything else."

"You don't have to check into a motel," Richmond said, rolling his eyes. "You can stay with us. Besides, if Lilly is anything like her mother, she's still awake waiting for you."

"You know, Richmond, I can sleep at a motel if you're uncomfortable with the idea of--"

"No, I insist, but I warn you, if I hear you make any obscene vulgar noises, I'll kick you out on your tin ear and you can stay at a motel. Clear?" Richmond firmly informed him.

Devil's Concubine

“Crystal,” Gavin answered, then smiled as he slipped on his jacket. “I won’t make any such noises; however, even though I can vouch for myself, what will you do if Lilly makes those obscene, vulgar noises?”

Richmond made inaudible mumbles and rubbed his face as Costner and Gavin laughed, walking ahead of him.

END



In a small Texas community, a woman is found murdered and scalped. Homicide Detective Gavin Reece believes the case to be cult related but soon realizes nothing is what it seems. Reece will uncover a killer's seven year slaughtering and discover the murderer is preying on one of their own. On a deadly collision course, Reece will do the unthinkable to catch a killer.

Devil's Concubine

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