

Rachel Chance sifts through layers of deception to find a clever murderer. Her Greyhound Abby plays a vital role as the danger mounts. An unexpected ally comes to Rachel's aid, but will it be enough to bring a killer to justice?

**A Greyt Deception:
A Rachel Chance and Will Keller Mystery**

By Randall Wisheart

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The book cover features a close-up of a woman's face with striking blue eyes and freckles. Her hair is a deep, wavy brown. In the background, a brick building with a red door and a chimney is visible. A tan-colored dog with a black collar stands in the foreground, looking to the left. The title 'A Greyt Deception' is written in a large, white, serif font across the top half of the cover.

A Greyt Deception

A Rachel Chance and Will Keller Mystery

Randall Wisheart

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Chapter One

The tension in the room was palpable. Rachel Chance looked around the auditorium in the Levi and Catharine Coffin Visitor's Center. Nearly twenty volunteers were squeezed into the center section, eight rows deep, facing a screen where the words "Welcome to The First Annual Freedom Festival" were projected. Rachel held her breath as her friend, Sarah Perkins, leaped to her feet. Sarah, a former basketball star and shot putter in high school, still looked like she could throw a shot—or a person—a country mile.

"You insufferable jerk," screamed Sarah. She held papers in her hand and waved them menacingly at Anthony Jenkins, her piercing brown eyes glaring. Her voice shook. "How dare you—" All forty eyes were riveted on Anthony Jenkins and Sarah Perkins.

"How dare I what, Sarah?" Jenkins smirked as he talked. His aloofness in front of the auditorium could not be hidden. Hands behind his back, he reminded Rachel of a peacock towering over Christine Chase, who had been convening the meeting before Jenkins barged in. "How dare I pull out of your little book project?" Jenkins looked directly at Sarah, his head cocked, his green eyes mocking her.

"You... You..." Sarah stammered. She squeezed the papers in her hand. Her teeth were nearly chattering, her lips flaring. "You son, son, son of a..." She threw the papers toward Jenkins. The people in front of Sarah crouched down and sheltered their heads with their hands; they were visibly relieved it was only paper showering down on them.

Jenkins looked intentionally at the last paper floating several feet in front of him. "Speechless, are we?" Anthony Jenkins smiled coldly. "I think we're done here." He looked directly at Sarah, then at everyone else in the small auditorium, most of them cowering from Sarah's

anger. He was the only person not intimidated by Sarah's impressive physical presence.

Rachel Chance had put her auburn hair in a ponytail and heard it swish as she turned her head to look at her friend Stephen.

"Should have brought popcorn," whispered Stephen. "This is better than a movie." Rachel tried to silence him with a glare.

"I've got twenty bucks that says Jenkins doesn't make it past the Amazon warrior. Here he comes." Stephen counted down. "Three. Two. One..."

Sarah gaped at Jenkins as he stepped into the aisle. He stopped, then slowly and deliberately removed a handkerchief from his pocket with one hand, his eyeglasses with the other. He promptly cleaned his glasses and put them back on. He looked up the aisle at Sarah. "So, what was it you were trying to say, Sarah?"

Rachel held her breath, waiting for Sarah to react to the taunt. Yes, Rachel had seen a number of emotional confrontations in her former life as a social worker, but her more recent job managing properties and selling houses had been very calm by comparison. *Whew. Attending a boring closing sounds pretty good right about now*, she thought.

Rachel had come to this meeting with her friend, Stephen Townsend. The focus of the meeting was organizing the tours of houses that had once been part of the Underground Railroad and rehearsing a skit showing how one family had escaped from slavery. They had expected a boring repetition of details about their roles in the skit they had agreed to do with their Greyhounds. Then Anthony Jenkins happened. Rachel replayed the last few minutes in her mind:

Christine Chase, dressed casually in dark slacks and a tan top, came across as formal and distant. She had reddish-blond hair that was

layered with side cut bangs, just a little gray showing that seemed to project she had no need to appear younger than she was. She'd gone through the logistics efficiently but was taken aback by a question. She acknowledged a tall woman with short gray hair who was waving her hand in the air. "Yes, Lillian."

"Does anyone know why Anthony Jenkins isn't here? His house is still part of the tour, right? He promised us he would clean out that hidden underground room with the trap door that had been part of the Underground Railroad. Visitors will love seeing that."

As if on cue, Anthony Jenkins walked into the room. He was tall and slender with dark wavy hair. He strode confidently toward the front of the auditorium, a black leather briefcase slung over his shoulder. "I guess we know who thinks he's the most important person in the room," mumbled Stephen.

Christine paused, as though waiting for Jenkins to apologize for his late arrival. Taking a seat in the front row, he looked at her, a coy smile on his face, daring her to chastise him.

"Um. Hello, Anthony," Christine said tentatively. "We're just about to go over the tour logistics." Jenkins remained silent, so Christine faced the audience and continued. "We have four houses on the tour. I've done some more research at the county historical museum and have a few things to add to the information sheets we're preparing for each house."

Rachel glanced at Sarah. She was sitting stiff as a board, her arms folded firmly against her chest, her right heel rapidly tapping the floor. Rachel couldn't help but think of a hurricane about to make landfall—and she was directly in its path.

“Anthony,” said Christine, “I found some very interesting records about your house that suggests—”

“No,” said Anthony firmly. He stood and took a step forward, turning slightly so he could see both Christine and the group. He was wearing khakis and a black short-sleeved polo shirt. He had the kind of looks that would cause most women to take a close look at him and like what they saw.

Christine stared at Anthony, her mouth hanging open. “Anthony, I don’t—”

“I have already written the information about my house. You will either use my information sheet with no additions or my house will not be on the tour.” Anthony’s deep voice was mesmerizing and resonated throughout the small auditorium.

Rachel glanced at Sarah. Her foot had stopped tapping. Her eyes were fixated angrily on Jenkins who continued to speak matter-of-factly.

Anthony took the briefcase off his shoulder and set it beside him. He smiled and looked at Christine, then out toward the group. He took a deep breath through his nostrils as if savoring being the center of attention. “I am a journalist and college professor. My work has been published on a national scale.” He paused as though waiting for applause. “My research skills are far superior to those of anyone involved with this project. I will not have a document written by someone with inferior skills represent my house,” said Jenkins.

Christine stood in disbelief and gazed around the room looking for support, but everyone seemed to be staring at the ground. She dropped into a chair behind the table.

Sarah leaned forward. Rachel put her hand on her friend's arm, but she shook it off and stood. "Anthony Jenkins, that has to be one of the most rude and arrogant things I have ever heard," said Sarah.

"Yeah, and she's a high school special education teacher," said Stephen. "Imagine what she's heard from her students."

Several people chuckled. Those that raised their heads were smiling. It was as though the group had breathed a collective sigh of relief. Rachel looked at Christine and saw a glimmer of a smile cross her lips.

Jenkins looked at Stephen with one eyebrow raised. Irritated, he contemplated whether to respond or not. He simply smiled and said, "Quite so."

Jenkins looked around the audience making eye contact with several. After a moment, he picked up his briefcase and stood still, waiting to make sure he was still the center of attention. He put the briefcase on the table directly in front of Christine. He opened it and took his time going through several sheets of paper before finally taking out a single sheet. He looked it over and nodded appreciatively. He turned toward Christine and handed her the paper. "This is the..." he paused, "...professional...write-up for the tour of my house. Let me know your decision. If you decide to use my house—with my professional write-up—simply zip me an email."

Christine stared at the paper and then at Jenkins. Her mouth was open, but no words came out.

Jenkins picked up his briefcase, almost bumping it into Christine's face and slung it over his shoulder. "I'm very busy. Please let me know by Monday. I'll make sure my house is ready for the tours." Jenkins nodded toward Christine as though she had just agreed to his

conditions. He started up the aisle toward the exit. Christine simply watched him silently.

Rachel's attention was jerked back to the present. Sarah was standing and staring at Jenkins. Still seated, Rachel again reached over to touch her arm, but again Sarah shook it off. As Jenkins passed the row where Sarah was standing, he looked toward her, and a smile crept across his face.

"You... You..." Sarah stammered.

Rachel stood and put her arm around Sarah, effectively holding her in place. Then Rachel turned and looked down at Stephen, her eyes pleading for help.

"I'm not getting in the way of an irresistible force and an immovable object," mumbled Stephen. "There wouldn't be enough of me left to scrape off the floor."

Rachel sent a glare Stephen's way, then turned and tightened her hold on Sarah's arm.

Jenkins paused in front of Sarah and Rachel, one hand resting on the briefcase, the other resting on his hip. He took one more step up the aisle so he wouldn't have to look up at Sarah. He shook his head and spoke softly, as if trying to reason with a child. "As I told you over the phone this morning, I got a much better offer and no longer have time for your little writing project about your ancestors."

Sarah gasped. "Little writing project?"

Rachel was mesmerized as Sarah shook her head back and forth, her shoulder length curls, brown with ginger highlights, waving a warning that Jenkins ignored.

“Actually, now that I think about it, I suggest you stop working on that project altogether. You simply don’t have enough primary source research to support your stories about your so-called ancestors.” Jenkins took another step toward the door.

Sarah’s mouth was open, gaping at Jenkins. She was frozen in place and looked as though someone had just struck her. Suddenly, Sarah shrugged away Rachel’s arm and stepped into the aisle to confront Jenkins. Sarah spoke quietly, but that just made her words all the more frightening. “You won’t get away with this.”

Jenkins waved his hand, dismissing her and kept walking. He pulled open the exit door and left the auditorium. Almost as one—as if they were watching a tennis match—the eyes of the group shifted from the back of the auditorium to the front.

Rachel stepped beside her friend. She touched Sarah’s arm, guiding her back to her seat, keeping her arm on her as she sat. Sarah slumped into her seat but crossed her arms and glared at the front of the room where Anthony Jenkins had been standing, her eyes still burning with anger.

Christine Chase struggled to regain her composure. She stood and addressed the group. “I’m... uhh... I’m sure Anthony’s notes will be...will be just fine. Now...who’s scheduled to be at his house?” She looked at her notes on the table, and one of the volunteers raised her hand tentatively. “That’s right. Lillian. I’ll forward that email to you later today. Now, if there are no more questions?”

“Not enough primary source research,” muttered Sarah. She jumped up and hurried toward the exit. As she reached the door, she turned and said, “I swear I could kill that man.” She stalked out of the auditorium.

All eyes followed Sarah but then turned back to the front where Christine Chase had now fully regained her composure. Taking a step back, she looked around the room. She stood straight, her hands clasped in front of her. “Let’s continue, shall we?” Christine methodically reviewed the list of jobs and responsibilities for the week making sure each event was covered, including back up plans in case anyone got sick and couldn’t fulfill their obligation. “That takes care of each event for the week,” said Christine. “Charles, any last-minute instructions for our actors and interpreters?”

Charley stood to address the group, but Rachel glanced toward the exit door, concerned about her friend Sarah. Rachel couldn’t get over the look she had seen in her eyes. If Anthony Jenkins wasn’t worried about Sarah, he should be.

Chapter Two

“The goal, you see, is to deceive,” said Charley Thompson, his eyes twinkling. The small group that had agreed to portray historical characters during the house tours was standing in the open space in the front of the auditorium. The group was clustered close together, hanging on Charley’s every word while Charley continued, comfortably perched on the table, legs crossed, his chin resting on his right hand, his hand tapping the side of his nose. Rachel and Stephen stood apart in the back watching. “And to achieve your goal of deception, you must disappear into your character,” said Charley as he looked directly at Rachel. He winked. Rachel knew Charley loved to say things like that to get people to think as he so often had as a history teacher at Glen Falls High School.

Rachel forced a smile and watched Charley as she remembered the conversation with Stephen about the skit:

“It will be fun,” Stephen had said. “Everyone will love our Greyhounds! Abby and Monroe will be the stars of the show. We’ll include notes in the program about how early settlers in the Midwest would sometimes bring Greyhounds to help with hunting and keep jackrabbits, raccoons, and other animals at bay. Remember, the whole point is to let more people see our Greyhounds, so they’ll consider adopting one themselves.”

Rachel had not been enthusiastic. “You love acting. I hate being on stage. Why can’t you just take both Abby and Monroe onstage and I’ll watch?”

“Remember, I have a speaking part. We just need you to wear a costume and keep Abby and Monroe calm. Unless you’d rather switch, and you do the speaking part?”

“No way,” Rachel had insisted. Then after a moment said, “Fine. I’ll do it.”

And that had been that.

Charley’s voice brought Rachel back to the present. “But you will deceive...” Charley jumped to his feet and waved his hand toward the empty seats, “...with the full cooperation of your audience, or in this case, the visitors who want to learn more about some of the people from this region who were alive during the time when fugitives escaping slavery passed this way.” Charley paused and looked up, his sharp features reminding Rachel of her vision of a tall, slender, and very intense Sherlock Holmes arriving at a brilliant deduction. “Of course, for the fugitives, deception was a necessity for survival.” Charley stroked his chin and smiled. “Yes, I should work that into the notes.” He nodded, mentally filing away the note about deception. “Let’s review the plan for both actors and interpreters. Actors, we will rehearse the skit after I’ve met with the interpreters.”

A tall man raised his hand. “I have a question.”

“Yes,” said Charley.

“What about costumes?”

“Good question, James. Costumes are being stored here. You can try them on as soon as we’ve finished rehearsing.”

Charley looked around. “Any other questions?” He looked at each person before continuing. “Very well. Interpreters, twelve of you are assigned to the Coffin house. Remember, you’ll be helping visitors interpret a particular room. You’ll be assigned a room inside the Coffin house and stay there to talk about that room per your script. Two-hour shifts. If you’re assigned to one of the houses on the Underground Railroad House Tour, follow the script. The owners of the houses have

graciously allowed us to borrow their homes for the day, so keep to the plan. That means talking about the history of the house and the people who may have hidden fugitives there.”

Charley looked pointedly at Rachel, a silent reminder she had agreed to fill in if Lillian was unable to be the interpreter at the Jenkins house.

Rachel mouthed, “Got it.”

Charley continued: “Interpreters, during the day on Saturday and Sunday when you aren’t in a room, you will be roamers, if you will. You should move about the grounds and be in and out of the Visitor’s Center. Don’t bunch up. Familiarize yourselves with the overview of all exhibits as you never know what questions visitors might ask.”

A short woman with white hair standing in the front of the group spoke. She reminded Rachel of her grandmother, slight of build but a person who commanded attention when she spoke. She held a small pad of paper in one hand, a silver pen in the other. “What about when we’re outside?”

“When you’re outside, you should take turns visiting the barn and the tables set up outside the kitchen of the Coffin House. Stagger your lunch times and interact with visitors while you’re eating.”

The woman nodded and wrote some notes on her pad.

“Charles,” said Christine, “we should remind them to stay in character.”

“Yes, Christine. Very important. Everyone, please remember to refer to other actors by name using the name of their historical figure and talk to visitors about Levi and Catharine Coffin as well as any other historical figure who will come to life on Saturday. Each of you should

have reviewed the script that will allow you to tell a story from *The Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*.”

“But not all the stories are specific to the house, right?” asked one of the volunteers.

“That is correct. Some of the best stories that were passed down by Levi Coffin happened when he and Catharine moved to Cincinnati. You will stay in character and say something like: ‘When I was visiting my friend Levi Coffin at his dry goods store last week, he told me a sad story of a fugitive named Jane.’ Or something similar. Stay in character. Tell the story.”

Stephen raised his hand. “Charley, Rachel and I need to go outside and check on our Greyhounds. When do you need us back for the skit?”

“I’d like to hear each interpreter talk about the room or house they’ll be in. That will take twenty minutes.” Charley peered at Stephen over his reading glasses. “Exactly twenty minutes.”

Stephen sprang up and yanked Rachel’s arm. “Got it. See you in twenty.”

Rachel and Stephen dashed outside. Rachel looked at Stephen who was smiling. “I’m going to run to the diner across the street and get a coffee to go. Want one?”

“No,” said Rachel. “And don’t think I’m going to forget how you abandoned me back there when I was trying to help Sarah.”

Stephen grinned and waved Rachel’s criticism away. “You did just fine without me.”

“Hmph. Fine. But how do you know I won’t slip away to avoid being in the skit?”

“Because of Charley.” Stephen pulled his keys out of his pocket and tossed them to Rachel. He took a few steps toward the parking lot but then added over his shoulder, “You don’t want to let him down, do you?”

Rachel shook her head and walked toward Stephen’s SUV. Abby’s head was sticking out the back window on the passenger side and Monroe was looking at her from the window behind the driver’s side. She patted Abby’s head. “That’s a good girl,” she said.

The Greyhounds scrambled to the back of the SUV, noses pressed against the window. “Back it up, you two.” Rachel carefully opened the back and put up one arm to hold them in as she attached their leads with her other hand. “Ok. Now we’re ready.” They jumped out: first the fawn Abby and then the larger, reddish Monroe. They immediately pulled away, noses searching for new sniffs. Rachel quickly reached back to shut the hatch.

Rachel marched with Abby and Monroe away from the Visitor’s Center. Just across the parking lot was the historic Levi and Catharine Coffin House, a well-preserved two-story red brick home in the Federalist style built in about 1839. There was no front porch with columns. No trim. Not even shutters for the windows. The Quakers liked their houses simple, not showy. So, this red brick house had plain doors and plain windows. The history of this simple house was impressive, though. Reportedly more than a thousand fugitives from slavery passed through the house on their way north.

Rachel led Abby and Monroe behind the house and near the barn that was behind it. She turned at the sound of a car approaching and saw a black Honda Pilot pulling into the parking lot. “Look, Greyhounds! It’s Will,” said Rachel.

Rachel looked at Will Keller as he got out of the SUV and walked toward them smiling. He was just under six feet and slender with dark hair and some of the most intense eyes Rachel had ever seen. Rachel smiled and waved. She was still surprised he had traded in his beloved Toyota Camry for the spacious Honda Pilot but pleased because it had plenty of room for people and a Greyhound. Abby tugged at her lead as soon as she saw Will. Monroe hid behind Rachel as he always did when a new person approached. “Don’t worry, Abby. He’s coming right over to see you.”

“Hi Rachel.” Abby lunged toward Will, and he stooped down to give her a hug. “I know. You want to be greeted, too, don’t you girl?” He rubbed Abby’s ears just the way she liked. She leaned into Will.

“Thanks for coming,” said Rachel. “We wanted to make sure there was someone *not* taking part in the skit available to watch Abby and Monroe in case Charley needed our undivided attention for a bit.”

He gave Abby’s ears one last rub and stood. “How did this Freedom Festival get started?” asked Will. He reached over to pet Monroe, but the Greyhound pulled away and got closer to Rachel. “That’s okay. Maybe later.”

“This is the first year for it,” Rachel said, petting Monroe. “My friend Sarah Perkins actually brought up the idea of planning a spring festival to bring attention to the importance of freedom by showcasing the many former slaves, like her ancestors, who escaped and made their way north to freedom.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” said Will.

Rachel nodded. “I agree. We’ll have tours of not just the Coffin House but also some local historic homes, especially some that were part of the Underground Railroad.”

“That sounds great, but I’m not sure how much of a draw that will be,” said Will. Monroe tentatively approached Will, who reached out his hand. Monroe sniffed then came closer so Will could pet him.

“Exactly,” responded Rachel. “That’s why they added other events: a 10K run and walk, a golf tournament, even a hot dog eating contest.”

“A hot dog eating contest? Seriously?”

“Yes, and other events happen during the week through next weekend.”

“Of course, there’s also the skit about a family helping out on the Underground Railroad.” Will smiled as he spoke.

“Don’t remind me.”

“You won’t have to worry. All eyes will be on Abby and Monroe.” Will reached down to pet Monroe again, but again the Greyhound backed away. “Assuming he doesn’t pull one of his stubborn moments and refuse to go on stage.” Will looked toward the Visitor’s Center where Charley and the group of volunteers had just walked outside. It was very easy to hear precisely what Charley was saying even though he was fifty feet away.

“Now, let’s hear you project your voices for the times when you’ll be outside next weekend. Using your scripts is fine today but not next week,” said Charley.

“Same Charley Thompson I remember from high school,” said Will.

“Yep,” said Rachel. “He’s working with the group who’ll be portraying historical figures during the tours at the Coffin house and the houses that were used as stations on the Underground Railroad.

Practice for the skit is coming up in about ten minutes and Stephen had better be back from his coffee run.”

“Local people posing as historical figures? That sounds cool,” said Will.

“Hope so. Everyone’s wearing period costumes and they have a biography to study. There will be a Levi Coffin, of course. Can’t leave out the Quaker who wrote down stories of how he helped fugitives trying to escape from slavery.”

Will nodded toward Charley who was checking with individuals as they reviewed their scripts. “He looks like he’s having fun over there working with actors.”

“Definitely in his element.” Rachel looked down as Monroe pressed himself against her leg. Here,” said Rachel as she handed Abby’s lead to Will. “You take Abby. Monroe is being shy and stubborn again. Let’s take a lap around the barn.”

Will took Abby’s lead and followed Rachel.

“You know he used to be an actor as well as a history teacher, right?” Rachel asked.

“Charley? Yeah. Didn’t he even go to New York to act at one point?”

“That’s right,” said Rachel as she glimpsed at her cell phone wondering what was taking Stephen so long. “After college he went to New York and landed small roles in some off-Broadway productions. Then, for many years he played the lead in a number of local theater productions. He has often said he decided to come back to Glen Falls and focus on making a life rather than stay in New York and make a living.”

“That sounds like something Charley would say,” said Will.

“I’ve seen him a few roles. He was exceptional as the stage manager in *Our Town*. Rachel smiled. “Did I ever tell you about the time I saw him improvise on stage?”

“No. How did that go?”

“This time he had a small cameo role. He was just supposed to hang a picture on stage and then immediately exit. The problem was that the actress who was scheduled to come on stage next had costume problems.”

“Uh oh.”

“Yeah. Could have been a disaster, but Charley took charge without missing a beat. He stepped back and stared at the picture, put his hand on his chin, and after a few moments walked up to adjust it. Then he looked at the picture from another angle and made another adjustment. He did that four times. Then he turned to the audience and said, ‘Looks good to me. What do you think?’ The audience cracked up! When the actress finally made her appearance on stage, as far as the audience could tell, that was exactly the way the script had been written.”

“Too funny,” said Will. He slowed as they walked by the open barn door. He looked at the circa 1840 wagon surrounded by bales of hay. “Oh, cool barn.”

Rachel took a step back and peered into the barn. “It is, isn’t it?”

“And a funny story.” Will shook his head. “Man. Charley really is the perfect person to help the volunteers learn how to improvise during the tours.”

Rachel led them to a picnic table where they had a view of the Visitor's Center. "Let's stop here. We're probably close enough to watch Charley work."

"Sounds good," said Will. He reached out his hand to Monroe and this time Monroe moved toward Will to be petted. "I guess we're switching dogs." Rachel shook her head and took Abby's lead as she gave Monroe's lead to Will.

Rachel and Will settled the Greyhounds near the picnic table outside the visitor's center. Charley seemed at ease standing in front of the group that had been reviewing their roles. "Listen up, people," said Charley. The volunteers stood in a semi-circle, and everyone stopped talking as soon as Charley spoke. "The most important thing is to stay in character. Here's what we'll do. I'll put you into groups of three. I will give you a scenario and you will start talking to each other in character. Any questions?"

There was another pause as Charley scanned the group. "Here's the first scenario. You have just learned that Levi Coffin has been asked to appear before a Grand Jury where he will be asked whether he is harboring any runaway slaves. How will your character respond to this news? You have one minute to think; then you'll start chatting with your group. In character at all times." He looked at his watch. "Another five minutes and those of you who are in the skit will gather around the picnic table. We'll work on projecting your voice when you say your lines outside this weekend."

Rachel pulled out her cell phone and checked the time. "Stephen has about two minutes before he's officially late." She looked over as Stephen jogged through the parking lot holding a Styrofoam cup.

"Sorry. Am I late?" Monroe pulled Will toward Stephen.

“When’s the last time you weren’t late, Stephen?” Rachel asked. “I’m thinking when we were in seventh grade, and you wanted to be first in line for the new Star Wars movie.”

“That is not even remotely true. I’m sure it was ninth or tenth grade.” Stephen winked at Will, then took Monroe’s lead in his free hand and put his coffee on the picnic table.

Stephen knelt and hugged Abby around the neck. “You’re such a good girl.” He looked up at Rachel. “How’s my temperamental Monroe doing?”

“About the same as always. Predictable at being unpredictable. First, he shied away from Will, then he went with him easily,” Rachel shrugged.

Abby moved toward Stephen and nudged him with her head. She wanted her share of attention. “She’s come a long way since you adopted her. How long has it been? A year?”

“Almost eleven months.” Rachel reached down to pet Abby. “You’ve become quite the social butterfly now that you’ve gotten comfortable in your new home.”

There was a loud noise in the distance and Monroe recoiled and whimpered, cowering behind Stephen. “He was a real spook when we got him.”

“A spook?” Will looked first at Steve then at Rachel.

“It’s a Greyhound term,” said Rachel. “Some Greyhounds are really shy around people, even scared of anyone who isn’t their person... their owner.”

“But they’re not shy around other Greyhounds?” asked Will.

“Almost never,” said Stephen. “Remember Greyhounds raised on the track are around other Greyhounds constantly.”

“They just love being around each other,” said Rachel. “That’s why so many people adopt two Greyhounds rather than just one. Almost all Greyhounds prefer the companionship of another Greyhound.”

They turned as a white sedan pulled into the parking lot. Rachel’s friend Sarah got out of the vehicle and walked toward them.

Rachel handed Abby’s leash to Will. “I’m going to see if she needs to talk. Will, you’re in charge of Abby.” She turned toward Stephen. “You can catch Will up on what happened with Sarah and Jenkins this morning.”

* * *

Rachel met Sarah near the doors to the visitor’s center. “You came back. Do you need to talk?” Rachel waited for Sarah to gather herself. Sarah was a picture of contrasts. She towered over Rachel with forearms as large as Rachel’s thighs, but the tears dripping from the corner of her eyes made her look vulnerable. Rachel waited as Sarah wiped some tears from her face. “Can you calm down and tell me about it?”

Sarah glared at Rachel, her eyes blazing. “This is me calming down. I had to drive away to get myself together. I won’t stand for this.”

Rachel decided to stay silent, afraid anything she said would be the wrong thing.

“He called me this morning, and I still can’t believe it. He can’t just back out like this,” said Sarah. “We had a deal.” Sarah’s voice was filled with emotion.

“Jenkins.” Rachel let the name hang between them.

Sarah took a deep breath. “This is so important to me. This is the book I’ve always wanted someone to write to honor my ancestors.”

Rachel nodded. “I remember. You shared your research with Anthony Jenkins because he’s a professor from East Central State Community College, and he had published books before.”

“He said another writing project was taking priority, and he had no time for this project.”

“I’m so sorry,” said Rachel.

“I spent months working with him, and now he says it’s not worth writing about? This is not acceptable.” Sarah’s voice rose as she emphasized each word.

“Can’t you find someone else to help you write the book? Or write it yourself?”

Sarah glared at Rachel. “I know my own limitations. I’m a high school special education teacher. I can’t write a book. And as far as working with someone else?” Sarah shook her head. “It’s just that we spent months on this already. How far would this set me back?”

Rachel turned when she heard Charley’s voice.

“Everyone in the skit, over here now. We’ll review the schedule then work on the part involving the Greyhounds,” said Charley.

Rachel turned back toward Sarah. “I should go over there. But if you need anything...”

Sarah’s eyes turned dark. “What I need is for that jerk to do what he promised to do. Tell the story of my ancestors. That’s what matters.”

Sarah shook her head. “Sorry. I should go let Charley know I’ll still work as an interpreter.”

Rachel watched her friend walk away. She couldn’t get the look in Sarah’s eyes out of her mind. The anger. The determination. “I almost feel sorry for Anthony Jenkins,” whispered Rachel as she turned to rejoin Will and Stephen.

Chapter Three

Terrence Marker pulled into a short circular drive. Anthony Jenkins's house was on the right. It was a two-story brick house built in the 1830s with white pillars on both sides of the front door. Eight windows faced the front, two windows on each side of the front door, each with a window directly above it. All the windows were framed with black shutters. The house had originally been square, but various rounds of modernizing had led to room additions extending into a backyard framed by farmland.

Marker parked in the driveway beside the house. He wondered what Jenkins wanted. The invitation had been vague—something about needing his research skills for a project he was working on. He was especially curious that Jenkins had invited him to his home on a Saturday afternoon rather than simply meeting at East Central State Community College where they both worked.

Terence Marker unsnapped his seat belt and got out of his car. He followed a path that led to the front door. After knocking, he turned to look at the grounds. The lawn was well kept and there were beds of emerging day lilies on both sides of the porch that would be blooming in a few weeks.

Marker spun around as he heard the door opening. Jenkins towered over Marker. He was a few inches over six feet tall making him nearly a foot taller than Marker, which made Marker even more self-conscious about his height than usual. Jenkins was wearing a black Brooks Brothers short-sleeved shirt and khaki slacks.

“Hello, Terrence,” said Jenkins. “Thanks for meeting me at home on a Saturday.” Jenkins stepped aside and waved Marker into the house.

As they entered, Marker noticed there was a formal dining room on the right and a narrow staircase leading upstairs with dark wood steps and a red runner. Marker looked down the hallway and could see into the kitchen through a partially closed door.

“Come this way. Let’s meet in here.” Jenkins walked into a small room on the left that he used for a home office. Two windows faced the front yard and there were two more windows on either side of a fireplace facing the doorway allowing for plenty of sunlight. A desk was situated in front of the windows on the left with a laptop positioned exactly in the middle of a cherry desk.

Marker hesitated when he saw a twenty-gallon aquarium with a screen lid situated against the wall on the far side of the desk. Marker could see leaves, a small branch, and cypress mulch on the bottom of the tank as well as a heating lamp attached to the side. He gave it a wide berth. Pictures on the walls were prints of nature settings, flowers, and a canyon. *No pictures of family*, thought Marker. *Two pictures of white lilies and one huge picture that looked like the north rim of the Grand Canyon. This guy must be a dud.*

Jenkins led Marker to the other side of the room where there were two beige wingback chairs in front of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Marker was confused by what he saw in the corner. He pointed. “That looks like a trap door leading to the basement. Why’s it open?”

“According to legend, this house used to be a stop on the Underground Railroad. When I had the carpet removed, I found this trap door leading to a small underground hiding space. I can imagine a past owner stashing a runaway slave there then scooting a piece of furniture over it. No one would ever know the room was there.” Jenkins sat on one of the chairs and waved Marker toward the other one. He waited only a beat before speaking. “It seems that you left your last

position under—shall we say unfortunate circumstances,” said Jenkins. He took a flash drive out of his shirt pocket and held it in the air looking at it.

Guess he’s not much for small talk, thought Marker. He held the gaze of Jenkins and willed himself to show no emotion although he could feel anger burning through his chest. He thought he had covered his tracks. He decided to wait and see what Jenkins knew.

“So many people have so many secrets.” Jenkins smiled and then crossed the room to the desk and put the flash drive in the top right-hand drawer. “But no need to talk about that, is there?” He stopped by the tank. “Did you see my leopard gecko?”

Marker glanced over at the aquarium. He could see Jenkins was waiting for a reaction. “I don’t like lizards.”

Jenkins smiled. “He’ll only grow to seven or eight, maybe eleven inches at most. Life expectancy is six to ten years, but some live to be twenty. I feed him crickets and worms.” He looked at Marker’s worried expression. “Don’t worry. Geckos can’t climb glass walls.” Jenkins glanced fondly at the tank. “He loves to hide, thus the branches, leaves, and mulch.” Jenkins walked back across the room and returned to his chair. “The only thing I care about is that you have some research skills that I need and a reason to fly under the radar.”

“Since when do you need help with research?” asked Marker. “Word on campus is that you’re the go-to person if someone needs help with research, personal or professional.” Jenkins smiled. Thus, Marker knew that he had touched his enormous ego.

“I suppose,” said Jenkins with false modesty. “But the truth is that I need someone even better than I am this time. Apparently, that is you.”

“Keep going.” Marker tried to remain calm, but his left eye began twitching. He hated when it did that.

“I’ve checked with a couple of people you helped. Clearly you know how to do searches that are beyond my expertise.” He looked directly at Marker. “You can get into databases that are helpful to people looking to... disappear.”

Marker mentally reviewed how he had helped people create new identities and tried to figure out where the leak had come from. *The man who needed to leave his debt—and family—behind. Nope. He was focused only on getting away. The young woman who was trying to get out from under a drug dealer. No way. She was busy building a new life for herself.* Marker interrupted his memories. “What exactly are you getting at?” Marker asked. His eye started twitching again.

Jenkins settled into the chair, propped his elbows on the arms, and interlocked his steepled fingers. “I need help finding my wife.”

“You lost your wife?” Marker couldn’t resist the dig.

Jenkins ignored the comment. “It was one of those whirlwind romances.”

Marker studied the face of Jenkins. *What a crock*, he thought. *Who do you think you’re talking to, buddy?* “You don’t say.”

“I met her in my last job at Southeast Community College in Columbus, Indiana. I was single. She was single. We just hit it off. I thought things were going well. Then after we’d been married less than a year, she suddenly disappeared.”

Marker watched as Jenkins paused and wiped at his cheek. *So now I’m supposed to think you’re shedding a tear for your wife? This just keeps getting better and better. Maybe there’s an opportunity here.*

“Anyway. I obviously didn’t know her as well as I thought I did. When she left, she took a good deal of our money. My money. She just disappeared without a word.”

Now that’s interesting. Must be more to that story. “What did the police say?” asked Marker.

“Well, naturally I was embarrassed. I have a certain reputation with women you see.”

Marker forced back the temptation to roll his eyes. “You didn’t call the police? Even about the missing money?”

“No,” said Jenkins. “I actually thought that if I found her, I could talk to her, and she’d come back to me.” Jenkins stopped talking and leaned back in the chair.

Marker took a long look at Jenkins. He had the distinct impression Jenkins had been trying this story on for size and was now waiting to see if he was buying it. “I assume you still don’t want to go to the police?”

Jenkins nodded. “That’s right.”

“And you want me to find your wife so you can talk to her.” Marker said it as a statement not a question.

“I do.”

Marker leaned forward, his eye still twitching. “Tell me more.”

“Her name is Angelica Jenkins. Her maiden name is Cantrell. Angelica Cantrell. She was a hostess at one of the nicest restaurants in Columbus called Masterson’s. It’s not Ruth’s Chris or St. Elmo’s, but you can get a good steak there.”

“That’s where you met her?” asked Marker.

“Yes. A group of us from the college were having a dinner meeting at the restaurant. I arrived early and decided to wait in the lobby rather than be seated by myself. She came over and we started chatting.” Jenkins shrugged. “I asked for her number and called her the next day. The rest, as they say, is history.”

This just gets better and better, thought Marker. “So, you got serious pretty quickly?”

“Very. We dated a few months then drove to Niagara Falls and got married there.”

“No friends and family?”

“Angelica is adopted. Her foster parents have died, and she never was interested in finding her birth parents. She had just moved to Columbus, so she really didn’t have any close friends.”

Marker kept his face impassive, but his eye still twitched a little. *There’s something off here*. “What about your family? Surely you wanted to invite your family to a wedding?”

“Well, that’s where it gets a little complicated.”

I’ll bet it does. It always gets complicated when you’re lying. Marker waited. His eye had stopped twitching for now.

“You see, there was a bit of a dispute in my family between my brother and me. Too complicated to explain and not relevant. Suffice it to say that it would have been very awkward for me to invite my family. Eloping just seemed the best solution for us.”

Yeah, right. Marker waited for a few moments, contemplating what he had just heard. He knew Jenkins was lying about something, but he wasn’t sure what. No matter. If he took this job, he’d find out. He always found out.

“Do you have any leads at all? Places she’s lived before? Friends? Other jobs?”

Jenkins shook his head. “Unfortunately, we’d known each other for such a short period of time, that I really hadn’t found out much about her past. Other than she was adopted.”

Marker waited a moment then decided to be direct. “Do you think she could have been after your money? That the relationship was a deception?”

Jenkins winced.

Marker thought the wince looked fake. He was pretty sure Jenkins had been expecting the question.

“Not at first. But then I looked into the adoption agency Angelica said she had gone through.” Jenkins paused. “This is rather difficult.”

Marker didn’t say anything. He was intent on studying Jenkins.

“When I looked them up online,” Jenkins continued, “I couldn’t find them.”

“What do you mean couldn’t find them?”

Jenkins walked back to the aquarium and picked up a misting bottle. He sprayed mist into the tank. “He needs mist daily to keep up the humidity and a heating gradient in addition to the heat lamp that I turn off at night.” He put down the bottle.

Marker stared at the tank. *If he picks that slimy lizard up, I’m outta here*, he thought.

Jenkins peered into the tank as he answered Marker. “I mean they don’t exist. She made a big deal out of saying she was a Wisconsin girl, loved the summers and didn’t care about the cold winters. She talked

about her foster parents in Milwaukee who were huge Green Bay Packers fans. But there was no adoption agency with the name she gave me in all of Wisconsin. Or Michigan. Or Minnesota.”

“What about the foster parents? Did she give you their names?”

“Sure. George and Edith Cantrell. She said they had both died about ten years ago.”

“I’m guessing you looked up obituaries?” asked Marker.

“I did. And not just in Wisconsin. I expanded the search to the entire Midwest. No obituaries. No property in their name. No Cantrells with those first names that would have been the right age.”

“She lied to you about her entire existence.”

Jenkins took one last look into the tank and then walked back to his chair. “Which is where you come in.” Suddenly the eyes of Jenkins lit up and he spoke with more energy. “I did some research into your... career... at The University of Kentucky before you came to Glen Falls. I’d heard some rumors and made some discreet inquiries of a friend.” Jenkins stopped.

Marker’s eye started twitching again. He held the gaze of Jenkins until Jenkins continued.

“One of the rumors suggested you helped someone disappear with a new identity including a new birth certificate.” Jenkins paused. “Another rumor suggested that you helped someone ‘find’ a truckload of computers that suddenly disappeared from an inventory list and could be sold on the black market.” Jenkins paused again. “I’m not sure how to take your silence. Should I infer that I have been misinformed? Perhaps the skills needed to carry off such things belong to someone else and not you?”

“I’m still listening.”

Jenkins smiled. “The rumors also suggested that you had made a good deal of money from some of the—let’s call them—transactions.”

Marker made a decision: *if this clown knew this much and came to me rather than the authorities, it was time to find out what he wanted.* “Is it about time to get to the part about what exactly you want and what you’d be willing to pay?”

Jenkins returned to his original pose of elbows on the arms of the chair, fingers interlocked. “I need to find Angelica. I know my limitations. I’m stumped. She has my money, and I want it. I’ll pay you \$10,000 if you find her for me.”

Marker raised an eyebrow. “That seems quite generous for a finder’s fee. She must have taken quite a lot of money from you.”

“The amount is not the point. Besides, I think if I could just talk to her, we could smooth things over.”

There’s a lot more to this than some missing money. He is hiding something, and it must be big. Marker smiled. “I think we have an agreement. I just need you to review what you have already done and give me any information you have on Angelica Jenkins or Angelica Cantrell.”

“The information’s in a file. Do you have a private email I can send it to?”

Marker gave Jenkins a Gmail address. He watched as Jenkins walked back to the desk, took out the flash drive, and attached a file to an email. *I will be doing some research all right,* thought Marker, *but it will be about Anthony Jenkins and his family as well. Something about this story isn’t adding up.*

“Could I bother you for a glass of water?”

Jenkins shrugged his shoulders. “Just a minute.”

As soon as Jenkins left the room, Marker took two steps toward the desk, then stopped when he noticed some movement from the tank. He saw two reptilian eyes staring at him and jumped backward. *No way I’m getting close to that thing*, he thought. He pivoted toward the window on the right of the fireplace and unlocked it. He quickly returned to his seat.

Jenkins handed Marker a coffee mug half-filled with water. Marker took a swig and cleared his throat. “Thanks.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes,” said Marker, handing the mug back to Jenkins and standing up. “How soon do you need this information and how are you paying me?”

“The information as soon as you can get it. Days not weeks. And I’ll pay you in cash. Two thousand now and another eight when you produce.”

“Works for me.”

Jenkins walked back to the desk one more time and opened the left-hand drawer. He pulled out an envelope and held it out for Marker.

Marker walked across the room and took the envelope.

Jenkins nodded. “That’s it then. I’ll see you out.”

Jenkins left the room and Marker followed him into the hallway, staying as far away from the tank as he could. Marker took note of his surroundings as Jenkins showed him out. *No alarm panel by the front door. Perfect. Just what I need to know.*

Marker was already making plans as he walked to his car and drove away.

* * *

Marker pulled into a parking spot in front of his apartment and waited. It was a residential neighborhood with houses built in the 1920s. All two-story, some red brick and some bungalows, most of them painted white. The neighbors were either young couples who needed a starter home or renters like him. Everyone ignored each other, just the way he liked it. He climbed the stairs to his apartment. He lived in one of the upstairs units of a two-story house that had been converted into four apartments. It had one bedroom and a living area that included a table Marker used for his meals and a small kitchen at the end of the living area. When he walked in, he immediately packed a bag, and went to bed early and fully clothed—black pants, black t-shirt, and black sweatshirt. He set his alarm for midnight and slept comfortably until the alarm went off.

He awoke instantly. He shut off the alarm and sat up in bed. He could feel the familiar adrenaline rush. Taking a few deep breaths, he willed himself to calm down and silently rehearsed the plan. Satisfied, he reached down to pick up the bag he had already packed with everything he needed: a laptop and a few other tools just in case. He was ready.

Marker opened his door and listened. Hearing nothing, he grabbed his packed bag, and walked down the stairs to his silver Nissan Altima. He placed his bag in the back seat and then got in the front.

Marker pointed his car back toward Anthony Jenkins's house in the country on State Road 35. He listened to his favorite Billy Ray Cyrus song, "Holding on To a Dream," as he drove—and planned. The nearest house was at least a quarter mile away and set back from the road.

Traffic was minimal. Yes, returning tonight without being seen would be easy. Marker smiled and turned the volume up as he hummed along with Billy Ray Cyrus.

The farm before the Jenkins house had a long lane leading to the farmhouse. Marker pulled in, drove about thirty yards, then parked. He was certain no one would be awake at this time of night, but if they were, he'd claim car trouble.

He got out of his car, took the bag out of the back seat, and walked the quarter mile to the Jenkins house. He carefully walked around the house looking for security cameras. Finding none, he tried the window first and smiled as he realized this was going to be even easier than he thought it would be. *Thanks for not updating the windows, sucker. And for not checking to see if they're locked.*

After lifting the window, he stopped to listen. Hearing nothing, he dropped the crowbar in the mulch and carefully put his bag through the window, setting it on the floor inside. Then he climbed into the house, landing next to the fireplace. He shuffled to the far side of the room, staying as far away from the aquarium as he could, then walked behind the desk.

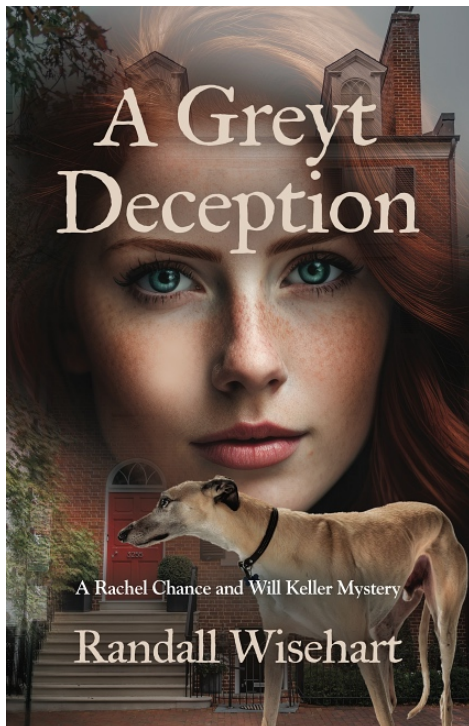
He opened the right-hand drawer and pulled out the flash drive. He stopped to listen again. Still no sounds. He took his laptop computer out of the bag and pushed the power button. As soon as it powered up, he inserted the flash drive. *Over a hundred files. Might as well copy them all.* It only took a few seconds. Marker put the flash drive back in the drawer.

“Let's see what you've been doing, Anthony Jenkins,” he whispered to himself. He started by opening each folder and scanning the contents. He quickly found the files about his own activities. Mostly

rumors. Jenkins had been bluffing. There was nothing here to worry about.

He found the file named “Angelica.” That could wait until later, so he opened more files. One file was a draft of what seemed to be a script for a podcast promoting a book. Curious, Marker read more. “Well, well, well. This has nothing to do with Angelica, but it looks like it could be a blockbuster. You have something here you think could make you rich and famous.”

He looked around the study. He didn’t think Jenkins would notice anyone had been here. He smiled wryly. *I know how to cover my tracks. Whatever secrets you have, I’ll have them as well soon enough.* And with that, he returned his laptop to the bag and looked once more at the aquarium. “Let this be our secret, buddy,” he whispered, then retraced his steps across the room. He climbed out the window, gently dropping the bag to the ground outside first. He carefully closed the window, picked up the bag, and snuck back to his car in the chilly darkness.



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