

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Los Altos Hills, California is one of the richest towns in America. With a median home price of almost eight million dollars it doesn't have a lot of violent crime. Insider trading and tax fraud, probably a great deal, but murders, no. That's why I was surprised when I read the cache description.

I'm a geocacher. That's the hobby where people wear T-shirts that say "I use million dollar satellites to find Tupperware in the woods." Geocachers hide containers, some smaller than a thimble, others as large as a coffin. One I found WAS a coffin. They post the GPS coordinates on the geocaching website and other geocachers try to find the cache using GPS receivers or smart phones. When they do, they sign the log book or sheet inside, replace the cache as it was for others to find, then go online and post a Found log on the website. What's the point, you ask? I said it was a hobby. If the concept is too difficult for you, look it up in a dictionary. Or Wikipedia, since you probably don't even know where the dictionary is in your house if you even have one. I lost track of mine long ago.

I don't do a lot of geocaching these days since I run a successful private investigator business in neighboring Los Altos. Los Altos, as you might guess, is in the flat part of the valley, lower down than Los Altos Hills. It's the poor part of Silicon Valley, at least on the west side, where homes go for only three or four million dollars. I said I run the business, but the truth is my partner Maeva spends more time running it than I do now, even though I founded it. It's still called the Cliff Knowles Agency. I spend almost as much time with my young kids, a late-in-life blessing, since my wife is still working as an FBI agent.

I have a geocaching notification program that tells me when a new cache appears within a ten mile radius of my home. When I saw the notification of a new one to the northwest in the middle of Los Altos Hills I was a little surprised. Geocaches can't be hidden on private property without the permission of the owner and the tech billionaires who live up there don't want strangers rummaging through their manicured landscaping. Even so, Los

Altos Hills has a network of trails and paths running between or through the estates and those are popular places for geocaches, but those have been mostly filled for years. New caches have to be at least a tenth of a mile from existing ones so parks and trails can fill up pretty fast. When I clicked the link it took me to the cache page. Most cache pages contain a short one- or two-paragraph description of the geocache container or perhaps something about the location. To be frank, most are not very well written, often containing spelling and grammar errors. The first thing I noticed about this one was that it didn't fit that mold. It was lengthy and well-written. I'll share it with you.

Cold Case

Hidden by BereavedGrandkid

Difficulty 1.5

Terrain 1.5

This majestic mansion was built in 1965 for Luigi "Lou" Minelli, a wealthy landowner who made his fortune growing apricots and plums for Libby's during the post-war boom. At that time nearly the entire west side of what is now Silicon Valley was covered with fruit trees, including apricots, plums, pears, cherries, citrus, almonds and walnuts. In the springtime the heady aroma of blossoms overwhelmed the senses. The area then was known as Valley of Heart's Delight.

There was a very large Italian community in the valley, especially among the fruit growers. Minelli and his wife Rina were prominent in that community and in the Catholic church. Lou and Rina had humble beginnings. He emigrated from Italy alone as a teenager in the 1930's and started out picking fruit and later working in the Libby's cannery "cutting 'cots". He served in the navy in the Pacific during World War II. When a Japanese plane bombed his ship, he received a severe leg wound and a medical discharge. He returned to the cannery where he was immediately made a line supervisor as there were few men of working age available at that time and he could not stand for long periods on the cutting line.

There he met Rina a young girl also from Italy. They married. When Rina's parents were killed in a car accident, she received a modest civil judgment against the other driver. This was enough for them to buy a small orchard in Sunnyvale. They worked hard and made a decent living, but were not wealthy. When the adjacent farmer died, neither his wife nor his children wanted to continue running that orchard. Lou and Rina bought it. Two years later they acquired another piece of land in Los Altos next to the railroad tracks. In 1964 Southern Pacific abandoned its tracks which were soon turned into Foothill Expressway. The Los Altos parcel was rezoned to commercial, what is now part of Loyola Corners. Its value skyrocketed. The Minellis sold that orchard for four times what they had paid for it and built this grand Italianate home. They continued to run the Sunnyvale orchard until the Libby's cannery shut down in 1981. The Sunnyvale orchard is now all single family homes.

The Minellis had two children, a son and a daughter. The son, Lou, Jr., who had taken ROTC in college, entered into active duty in 1968 as a second lieutenant and was deployed to Vietnam. In his second month there he was killed. He was unmarried. After the death of Lou and Rina, their daughter Linda inherited the house and lived there with her husband John Klein and three children. John died in 1997. The children had all moved out of the area, so Linda lived there alone until September 2001 when she was found murdered in her bedroom. The case has never been solved.

The house has been sold several times since then. The current owners are aware of the cache and gave permission for its placement, but be considerate and do not disturb the neighbors or the landscaping. The cache is magnetic.

This was not the first history cache I'd seen. In fact, they are fairly common and are one of the many fun aspects of geocaching. You learn a lot of local history while geocaching. But this one struck me as unusual for several reasons. Its length, for

one thing, also for its inside knowledge. How did the cache owner know all this? I clicked on the CO's name and went to his cache page. It turned out to be a her, not a him. At least I think it was female because the avatar was a girl-like cartoon. There were no photos in the gallery and the CO had only found a few caches, all nearby. None of the logs she'd posted told me anything about her, assuming it was a woman. There was no personal description on the profile page, but from the writing, I was sure she wasn't a young girl. The weird geocaching name BereavedGrandkid suggested to me that she might be the granddaughter of Linda Klein. Had she become a geocacher solely for the purpose of placing this cache and stirring up interest in the case? This was her first and only hide. She may have made those first few finds just to get a feel for the sport and learn what she needed to do in order to get her cache published.

"Did you see that notification for the Cold Case cache?" my wife Ellen asked when she saw me staring at my laptop. She's a geocacher, too.

"I just read it. It's nicely written."

"Do you remember that case? You lived here then."

"I have a vague memory of it. It was on the local news. I can sort of picture the house from the TV coverage. It was a pretty violent killing, I think. A brutal beating as I recall."

"We should pick it up. No one's found it. We could get the FTF." FTF is geolingo for First to Find.

"What? Right now? It's ten o'clock. It's too dark and Hilda's off. We'd have to take the kids."

"It's on the street, not one of the paths. We could park right there and kids could stay in the car."

"They're both asleep. We shouldn't wake them just for a FTF." Ellen cared about these meaningless geocaching accomplishments more than I did. Sometimes it irritated me.

"You're right. You should go, though. It could be found by the morning. I can stay home with the kids." Ellen said this with unctuous sincerity, but I knew what it really meant. She was pointing out that one of us could get the FTF if the other one stayed home with the kids. Decoded the message was "Why don't you stay home with the kids, so I can go get the FTF."

“That’s okay. It’s not a big deal to me. You go ahead if you want. I’ll stay with the kids.”

Ellen beamed and I could see the sparkle in her eye at the thought of another FTF, but then her expression changed. “That’s sweet. You’re a doll. But it’s more fun going with you. Let’s get it together in the morning. Hilda’s always right on time and I’m working a late shift. That FISUR I mentioned. So I have the morning free.” FISUR is the FBI acronym for physical surveillance. Why it’s FISUR and not PHYSUR I have no idea, other than the fact it’s the government. Some accountant probably figured it’s one letter shorter and saves a nanosecond of manpower every time it’s typed.

The next morning we were both up early and done with our breakfast and ablutions by the time Hilda arrived. So as soon as she came through the door we gave her a quick status check on the kids and were in the car.

It wasn’t far to the cache location, but it was the commute direction and Foothill Expressway was jammed. When we got there we parked right in front of the cache location on Titicaca Court. There was a fire hydrant there in a sort of alcove carved out of a magnificent hedge providing clearance around the hydrant. Ellen hopped out and started probing the fireplug with her fingers. The cache description had said it was magnetic, so it wasn’t difficult to find. In seconds she had it in her hand. It was a small flat circular metal tin like a pillbox. A tiny neodymium magnet was taped inside, a standard geocaching technique.

“You want to sign it first?” Ellen asked, as I walked around the car. She was holding out a blank log sheet, which meant whoever signed it first was entitled to the FTF. I knew better than to accept.

“No, you made the find. Go ahead.”

She grinned and didn’t hesitate. She signed “Ellenwheelz” and handed me the cache as she kissed my cheek. Letting her get the FTF makes easy brownie points for me. I followed with “CliffNotes” underneath.

The hedge was over ten feet tall and totally blocked our view of the house from that position. Since the cache page made

such a big deal about it, we both wanted to see the house. We walked twenty feet over to the wrought iron gate guarding the driveway. Through the gate we could see the structure. At two stories it was tall, with very tall, narrow windows set in a sandstone façade. Counting windows on the second floor I figured it must have at least five bedrooms. Fluted columns bookended the front porch and doorway and stone quoins at the corners gave it a substantive Old World look. The front yard was beautifully landscaped with a lot of plantings and religious statuary. It was a lovely property, but not exceptional by Los Altos Hills standards. Across the street was an equally large, newer home in a faux Chinese style featuring stone lions guarding its gate.

“Not your typical murder scene,” Ellen commented.

“I’m not sure there is such a thing.”

“Lately it’s been pretty typical on the streets of East San Jose or on the freeways in the East Bay. There’s one almost every night on the news.”

“Let’s go ahead and pick up those other three caches,” I suggested.

“Sure.”

We drove to a nearby path entrance and parked. Although many of the homes and estates in the town were gated and obscured from the streets, many also had a public trail easement running through the back yard. The trails were mostly narrow and somewhat overgrown, designated as paths, not trails, but they provided a peek into the back yards of these properties. At one spot through the trees we could see a huge swimming pool shaped like something torn from a Picasso painting. It had a built-in hot tub and a stone barbecue arrangement larger than our entire kitchen. It actually included a large rotating spit. Did they roast whole pigs for dinner?

The first cache we found was a fake birdhouse. Those rarely go missing because muggles (non-geocachers) usually respect them and leave them alone. The next two on the trail were also hangers, soda bottle preforms. We returned to the car with four finds for the day and a pleasant three-mile walk. I dropped Ellen at home and went on to work.

I had texted Maeva that I’d be late coming in, so there were no surprises when I rolled in at ten. She was on the phone and so

was Ashley, my niece/receptionist. I went to my computer to log my geocaching finds. Ellen always logs hers using her phone when she finds them. There's an app for that. It's more considerate on brand new caches so that other geocachers who might want to try for the FTF will be alerted right away that someone has already found it. I like to wait until I get to a real computer with a keyboard so I can write a decent log. There were only four caches to log this time, but sometimes I find as many as a dozen and it's difficult to remember the details of all of them. That's why I like to log right away while they're fresh in my mind.

"Morning, Cliff," Ashley said to me as I entered my office. She'd just hung up the phone. I waved acknowledgment and closed my door.

I opened up the browser and logged onto the cache page of Cold Case. I praised the cache page for its detail and nice writing and gave it a favorite point. Geocachers can award one favorite point for every ten caches they find, so when a cache earns a fav, that's a sign the finder puts it in the top ten percent. I logged the other three caches and then looked at my work email.

There was nothing pressing. I had cleared the morning for MCLE. That's Mandatory Continuing Legal Education. I'm a lawyer in addition to being a private investigator and retired FBI agent. I don't practice law per se, but I like to keep my bar status as active for professional reasons, mainly to ensure I can claim attorney-client privilege when necessary. The California bar, like other states, requires lawyers to receive training every few years to stay current. Some of it must be with live instruction, but a lot of it can be fulfilled using recorded lectures from certified instructors. I'd ordered the latest downloads and sat down to listen. One was on Labor and Employment Law and the other was on Civil Procedure.

The bar association has no way of knowing whether you've really listened. All you have to do is to certify that you have, but most lawyers are pretty honest about it, at least in a technical sense. Personally, I play solitaire on my computer as the lecture goes on. It actually helps keep me awake. I don't pick up much law since ninety percent of it is the same as it was three years ago when I last did my MCLE, but I do pick up a few tidbits now and then or reminders of things I'd learned in law school thirty years ago. My

win percentage with solitaire also improves during this training period.

Ashley knocked on my office door an hour later. She could look through the window in the wall separating us and see that I was playing solitaire. I killed the lecture as she came in.

“Cliff, a woman wants to make an appointment with you and Maeva as soon as possible. She won’t say what it’s about. She’s holding.”

“She named both of us?”

“Yes. She said she wants to hire you. She wouldn’t give me her real name but said you’d know who she was.”

“How do you know it wasn’t her real name?”

“Bereaved Grandkid? I think I can be pretty sure on that.”

“Oh. I see. Is she local? I can use a break from this MCLE. If she can come in right away I can see her this morning, but get her real name first. Tell her we won’t see her unless she gives it.”

“Okay. I can see you need a break. It must be grueling. You can play the red seven on the black eight, by the way.” She walked out before I could dredge up a snappy comeback.

I waited until I saw Ashley finish the phone conversation and then I walked out into the main area which doubles as Maeva’s office.

“Is she coming?” I asked, standing at Ashley’s desk.

“She said she’ll be here in thirty minutes.”

“What’s her name? Her real name.”

“Bella Klein.”

I called over Maeva’s partition, “do you know a Bella Klein?”

“No. What’s going on?” Maeva stood, showing a shock of red hair, the side without the purple stripe. Six years ago she dropped out of Stanford Law School when she realized she wasn’t cut out for that life. I hired her as an assistant and later made her a partner. I’ve never regretted it.

I asked her into my office and we both sat down. I told her the story of the geocache that morning. I was sure that my log on the cache had somehow triggered the phone call.

“Did she ask for me by name, too?”

“Yes, that’s what Ashley said.”

“You think this is about that old murder case?”

“It seems unlikely, but if it’s not, I have no idea what else it could be.”

“I thought we weren’t going to take any more criminal cases. We agreed. That’s what I instructed Ashley.”

“I know. Maybe this is something else.”

“I’m really busy. I have all those overflow fire insurance cases.”

The previous summer there had been a major fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains twenty miles south of us. Dozens of homes were burnt down and there were many other types of fire damage, such as charred cars, smoke damage, horses and pets that were lost. The insurance companies all have their own regular investigators, but the work flow was too much for them to handle. All the private investigators in the area were getting the overflow work. For us, meaning Maeva, it was mostly paperwork – checking invoices, photos, and other records proving the value of various items and verifying their loss. I’ve stayed away from that, but it paid the bills and Maeva didn’t have an FBI pension like me, so she accepted the work.

“I know. Just sit in on the interview. She did ask for you. Then you can get back to computing the depreciated value of a five-year-old Ford F-150 or whatever it is you’re doing over there.”

“Close. An eleven-year-old John Deere 410E backhoe loader. It was crushed and burned. It’s insured for fire but not for ‘acts of God’ which I’m told applies to falling trees caused by tornado-like winds. I’m supposed to figure out whether it was burning first or crushed first. If it was in whole, workable condition when it caught fire, it’s worth maybe fifteen or twenty grand. If it was already crushed beyond repair when it caught fire, it wasn’t worth anything for insurance purposes.”

“Christ. Insurance companies. They’d deny the claim based on that?”

“Probably.”

“Did the tree fall because it was burning? If so, that was fire damage, too.”

“Smart. I didn’t think of that. I’ll report that investigation showed all the damage was caused by the fire. The client won’t like it but what the heck. I’ve got another case of theirs that I’m

sure is a fraudulent claim for over fifty grand. I'll return them together. They'll be happy."

"What the heck". That was strong language from Maeva, a Minnesota farm girl. The client, of course, was the insurance company, not the backhoe owner.

"Okay, so see you when this Bella comes in. I'll send you a link to the cache page so you can read up on the history of the house in case that's it."

"Okay."

We both returned to our desks. I sent her the link, but a few minutes later she came back into my office. "I can't access it, Cliff. It's a premium member only cache. I don't have a paid geocaching account."

"You can read it on my computer. Come back here." She moved around to my side of the desk and watched over my shoulder as I logged onto the cache page again. The Civil Procedure lecture was still droning in the background.

When she finished reading the page, she closed the tab. The solitaire site returned to the main window. "You can play the red seven on the black eight."

"Everyone's a smart ass. I'm doing mandatory legal training."

"If you say so." She walked out and returned to her backhoe case.

Fifteen minutes later Bella walked in and approached Ashley's desk. My door was closed, but I saw them through the partition window. She was short and sturdy. I knew she was twenty-five years old because I'd checked her out in Lexis-Nexis while I was waiting. She had black, shoulder-length hair hanging loosely. Her maroon sleeveless top framed the tattoos on her right shoulder. I couldn't see them well enough from where I was to determine what they depicted, but there were two of them. She had a strong Roman nose and wore a wedding ring along with a diamond engagement ring on her left hand. Distressed jeans completed the picture.

I saw Maeva stand up and look over her partition at Bella, then rush around and give her a hug. They obviously did know each other. From the laughter and astonished looks on Maeva's face, it was evident she'd been totally – and pleasantly – surprised.

They started jabbering and I began to get a bit irked at being kept waiting. I stood and walked to my office door. I opened it and stood there for a full thirty seconds before either of them noticed me. They were talking about other women they both knew. I cleared my throat.

“Oh, Cliff,” Maeva said. “This is Bella. When you gave me her name I didn’t realize it was her. I never knew her last name and it’s been years.”

“Please come in and have a seat.”

Both women came in. Bella shook my hand and then sat. Maeva sat, too.

“Mr. Knowles, I’m so privileged to meet you. I’ve heard so much about you.”

“I’m flattered, I’m sure. From whom?”

“Well, not whom. I should say I’ve read so much about you and seen you on the news. When I saw Maeva with you on the television I recognized her. I began to read up on you both. You did a great job on that case up in gold country. I saw that one on TV, but I didn’t know about the other cases until I read your Wikipedia entry.”

“So how do you know Maeva?”

“We were in an a capella singing group at Stanford. She’s a contralto. I’m a soprano. We stood at different ends, but we all knew each other. I was only a freshman but Bella was a graduate student.”

“I dropped out of the group after three months,” Maeva said. “I didn’t have time for extra-curricular activities with all the law school reading. Then I dropped out of Stanford. We haven’t seen each other for six years.”

“I see. It’s almost lunch time. You two should catch up over lunch.” This was a hint that now was the time for business. Maeva picked up on it. Bella didn’t.

“Great idea. Maeva, do you remember Mei-hua? She – “

“Uh, yeah, but let’s save that for lunch,” Maeva interrupted. “I’m really curious what brought you to us today.”

“Oh, sure. Well, like I said, I saw you guys on TV and recognized Maeva, so I followed that case online. You guys helped the police catch a murderer. That gave me an idea. I figured you

might be able to solve my grandmother's case. Her murder, I mean."

"Bella, I'm so sorry," Maeva interjected. "We don't take criminal cases."

"I know. I called about a month ago and your receptionist told me that. She wouldn't make me an appointment. I asked to talk to you and you were out of town. At least that's what she said. So that's when I got another idea."

"The geocache," I said.

"Yes! You figured it out. I knew you would."

"How'd you know I'd read that and get interested?"

"Your Wikipedia entry. It talks about how some of your cases involved geocaching. I read up on it and got my own account. I thought if I could get the story in front of you, you'd be willing to consider it at least. Your geocaching name was in one of the articles. I checked your finds on your profile and saw that you find almost everything that comes up in this area. When I saw your online log today I knew it was you. Thank you for the kind words, by the way. But even if you didn't take the bait, I thought maybe it would become a case of interest in the press or something, or with the city."

I could see that Maeva was torn. She wanted to help her friend, but she didn't want to take a case on a pro bono basis, especially a hopeless one. I was sure she also didn't want to seem like a money-grubber by asking Bella if she could pay our rates. I decided to take that heat for her.

"Bella, it's an interesting case, but it's almost twenty years old. Your best bet is to interest the police in reopening it as a cold case. If we were to take the case, you'd be paying us a lot for just getting up to speed, and it's unlikely we'd find anything new or actionable after all this time."

"Oh, I can afford it. My husband and I are both managers at Google. We talked it over. And I'm a trust fund baby. Grandpa and Grandma Klein left me over two ..."

I cut her off. "That's alright. You don't have to prove your worth. I'm just pointing out that you'd probably be wasting your money. I'm afraid we can't reduce our rates just because you're an old friend of Maeva's. I'm sure she'd do it for free for you, but we have bills to pay. And people."

Maeva sent me a silent thank you with her eyes.

“Oh, that’s fine,” Bella continued. “I understand. I don’t expect a discount.”

“Why don’t we do this,” I said. “I’ll see if I can get the police to allow me access to the case file and physical evidence. If I can get that, I’ll assess whether there’s a viable way to proceed. I may be able to get them to reopen it and start working it if I see something for them to follow up on. If not, well, at that point we can talk about what if anything we can do and how much it will cost.”

“That would be great. Do you take Google Pay? Or Venmo? I can write you a check. I remembered to put my checkbook in my purse.”

“Slow down. Ashley will have you sign some papers when we’re done. We’ll need you to leave a deposit with us for expenses. She’ll help you with that.”

Maeva said, “Bella, you’re a manager at Google now? That’s terrific. But I thought you were in art or something? Do they hire artists?”

“I was an art history major. Specializing in the Italian Renaissance. I don’t use that exactly, but I know Italian. I did two years study abroad there. I work on the integration team for Italian interfaces. Most of my team is in Italy.”

“Okay,” I said, “why don’t you two finish that at lunch.”

They both stood up and left. I watched Bella stop at Ashley’s desk and do the paperwork as Maeva and she gabbed. I returned to my Civil Procedure recording.

Chapter 2

The women took a long lunch. At least that's what I assumed, because Maeva didn't get back until almost two. Bella had to get back to work so Maeva returned alone. She came directly into my office. I'd finished my MCLE and had finished lunch myself.

"I had Bella go over everything she knew about the murder," she told me as she plopped down on a chair. "She really didn't know much about it beyond what her parents had told her. She was seven when it happened. She really loved her grandmother and cried for a long time when she found out she'd died. She remembers the funeral, but her parents never told her that she'd been murdered. Not then. She just thought Grandma Klein had gotten sick and died like old people did. Later she learned more about it from relatives and questioned her parents about it. Then they told her it had been a violent murder. She'd been beaten to death. Her parents didn't like to talk about it so she never got much detail from them."

"Where do her parents live?"

"The Sacramento area. That's where Bella grew up. Her father grew up in the Los Altos Hills house. He loved skiing and got work on the ski patrol up at Tahoe after high school. He never went to college. He married young and with his wife opened a ski shop in Sacramento. Grandma Klein provided the money to get started. They still operate the store."

"Are they still around? Cooperative in this investigation idea?"

"Yes to the first, not so much to the second. Bella said they don't want to reopen that ugly period, but they'll probably cooperate if pressed. She doesn't think they know much that would help."

"Any other relatives?"

"Her father has a sister who lives in Los Angeles. She helped Bella put together the timeline that's on the cache page. She's encouraging Bella, but she was living in L.A. at the time of the killing and doesn't really know anything about it except what the police told her. Bella has a younger sister, but she's living in

Europe. We didn't really get into Bella's mother's family. They're from the Redding area I think she said."

"Los Altos Hills contracts with Los Altos for police services, doesn't it? Your husband's a detective there. Can he reopen the case?"

"I asked Bella and she said that the sheriff's office is the one that's handling the murder investigation. I have the name of the detective. Sergeant Wilbanks. She talked to him a couple of years ago. He asked her for a saliva sample for DNA testing. That's what got her interested in the case. She couldn't figure out why. How could she be a suspect? She was seven years old and living in Sacramento at the time."

"Interesting. They must have some DNA evidence, but you're right. Why eliminate a little kid?"

"Do you want me to do anything at this point? I'm under deadline on these fire cases and this doesn't seem urgent."

"No, let me talk to this Wilbanks guy. I don't know him, but I still know a few people over at the SO, including the sheriff. If I need you, I'll let you know."

After handling some other matters, I called the sheriff's office and asked to talk to Detective Wilbanks. He wasn't in so I left a message on his voice mail. He called me back an hour later. I told him who I was and why I was calling, then asked if we could meet. He was reluctant at first, but when I told him I could talk to Ern to clear it if he wanted, he asked me if I knew the sheriff. Ernest Dooley was elected sheriff the previous fall. He'd been in the department for over twenty years. He and I were on the same task force once when I was in the Bureau. I didn't know him well, but I knew that only his friends called him Ern. He never went by Ernie and only by Ernest publicly. Wilbanks agreed to meet with me the next day.

"You Knowles?" he asked me the next day when he entered the sheriff's office lobby waiting area where he'd kept me cooling my heels for twenty minutes.

"That's me." I'd already provided identification to the desk officer.

“Barry Wilbanks. Glad to meet you. Now that I see you in the flesh I recognize you from the news.” He extended a meaty hand. He wasn’t particularly tall, an inch or two under six feet. He had the physique of a former jock who’d put on the usual extra fat layer of middle age. I’d expected a uniform, but he wore plain clothes which in his case meant polyester slacks and a short-sleeved dress shirt with no tie. Half-lens reading glasses hung on his chest from a lanyard. His leather belt was heavy-duty and his holster was visible but empty. He must have left his gun back at his desk along with whatever jacket he wore. He led me inside through a metal detector.

The Santa Clara County SO is located just off North First Street next to the light rail car maintenance yard. I’d been there many times, so I knew where we’d go. The detective bureau is on the second floor. We went up to his desk where he had cadged a guest chair for me. He motioned for me to sit and asked if I’d like coffee. From experience, I knew better than to accept.

“I saw that you’re a lawyer, not just a PI.”

“Right.”

“I was in court the other day on a hit and run. The doctor testified that the victim could lie on only one side. The judge said ‘So you mean he wouldn’t make a good lawyer.’”

“You know what Anton Chekhov said about doctors and lawyers?”

He looked at me, waiting for the punch line.

“He said the only difference is that lawyers will merely rob you. Doctors will kill you, too.”

“Good one. I’ll use it. Okay, so you’ve been hired on this Klein case?” He tapped a banker’s box sitting on his desk. The name Linda Klein was written on the end along with a case number and date.

“Right. At least so far as to take a look and see if there’s anything worth pursuing. I’m sure you guys have done a thorough job.”

“We follow every lead. You’re not going to find anything we missed.” I could tell he was on the defensive. “The granddaughter hired you?”

“Correct. Bella. I’m sure you’re right about your work. She’s not complaining about you or anything. In fact, it was when

you contacted her for the DNA swab that got her interested. She wanted me to work with you. She's hoping you'll reopen the case."

"The case is already open. We don't close unsolved murder cases. But once we've run down all the leads, they get put on the back burner. We have a tickler system to check them every few years, but what happens is whenever a new detective comes on, he gets assigned a bunch of the cold cases to review. A new set of eyes. You know. Then they go cold again unless something triggers more investigation. Maybe the cases should stay with the original detectives, but with retirements and transfers, they really can't."

"You don't have a cold case squad?"

"No."

"So what caused you to take Bella's DNA?"

"I'd just made detective, so I got a bunch of these old cases like I said. I looked through this case file and saw that the victim had blood and skin under her nails. Probably skin from the arm, they said. She must have raked the killer pretty bad. There'd been a struggle. Anyway, we had hers and the killer's DNA but no suspects to compare with. All we knew from that was that it was a male and apparently not a blood relative of hers although they weren't all that certain about that relative stuff back then. I figured DNA testing has advanced a lot so why not retest it. I figured the only people with a financial motive were her children and grandchildren, maybe some other relatives, who'd inherit or maybe get insurance. I didn't really suspect them, but I figured if I could get a swab from them, I could eliminate them positively. I checked and realized the granddaughter was local, the only relative who was, and if I could get her DNA I could eliminate not only the victim's blood relatives but also all her in-laws. Not that I suspected them either."

"And did you? Eliminate them, I mean."

"Yes. I got the victim's, killer's, and Bella's DNA all fully sequenced. The killer's DNA didn't match Bella at all. Zilch. The lab people told me that means it wasn't from Bella's mother or any other relative on that side, or the victim's husband's family either, since they would all be related to Bella and show up strongly in her DNA. They even compared her DNA to her grandmother's to make sure she or her father weren't adopted. She's definitely

Linda's granddaughter by blood. That's more than we knew before, although it didn't get us any closer to identifying the killer."

"You didn't have any other relatives tested?"

"No. No need. They weren't local and they'd been eliminated. Besides, the DNA evidence showed me something else that made that irrelevant."

"What?"

"The killer was a black guy."

"Really? They can tell that now?"

"Well, I don't really understand this DNA shit. I never took biology. But the report says the killer's DNA had an African haplotype on the Y chromosome whatever that means. From what I can tell that means the killer was black or part black. All the Kleins and Minellis are about as white as they come. Even the Italian side is from northern Italy and light complected. That whole neighborhood is as white as a KKK rally except maybe for a few Chinese billionaires."

"You must have followed that up."

"It had already been run through CODIS, of course. That's the federal DNA system. No matches. They'd alert us if a hit ever showed up. I reread everything, all the interviews with neighbors and so on, but no one remembered anyone suspicious in the area and I can pretty much guarantee you that someone would have mentioned if a strange black man had been visiting or anything. Bella didn't remember any African-American friends or visitors to her grandmother, but she was just a kid who didn't live there."

"So did you do anything else?" I tried to say it in a way that didn't sound accusatory.

"What else could I do? I examined the crime scene photographs and medical stuff. It looked to me like the detectives had already followed up all the logical leads. I had other cold cases and by the time I got back the DNA reports I'd been given active cases. I had to prioritize."

"Sure. I understand. Tell me something. Why did the SO pull the case? I thought Los Altos P.D. did the policing for the hills."

"The MOU between Los Altos and Los Altos Hills only covers patrol and emergency response. Los Altos is too small to

have a homicide squad. They've only had two murders in the last twenty years, if I remember right. Major felonies like homicide are handled by us."

I knew MOU stood for Memorandum of Understanding, a legal term for a contract between government agencies. When I'd been in the FBI I'd had to review and approve MOUs between the Bureau and the police for some joint task force cases. The explanation made sense.

"Can I get a look at the file and physical evidence?"

"I got approval from Sheriff Dooley for you to review the file here, but you can't take anything – originals, I mean. A lot of the details have never been made public and it has to stay that way so if we ever get a tip or confession we know it's the right guy, not someone who made shit up. But you can have copies if you agree to keep the details private."

"I'm not new to this rodeo. You can count on my discretion."

"Right. As for the physical evidence, I can't give you access unless you explain what you want it for. Then maybe you can see it. I'll need approval."

"No problem. The crime scene photos and forensic reports will probably tell me everything I need to know about that. What about fingerprints? I assume you got some."

"Of course family prints were there and many unidentified, but the only ones we really cared about were the bloody ones. There were two of them, not the victim's."

"Wow! That's a bit of luck. If the guy ever gets picked up ..."

"Not so fast. They didn't show human prints. They showed a textured pattern we matched to rubber gloves, the type you use to wash the dishes. A common brand."

"Mm. Not much use then. I assume you never found the gloves."

"Right. It tells us one thing, though. Whoever it was came there to commit a crime. It wasn't a crime of sudden passion. Either someone was there to kill her, beat her up, or maybe was caught in a burglary. Since he didn't use a weapon, I'm guessing it was the latter."

"Makes sense to me."

“Okay, so I have other work I have to do. We’ve got a room set up where you can read through the file. If you need copies of anything, mark it with one of these.” He handed me a pad of small Post-Its. “You can’t remove anything from the file, but the squad clerk will be right outside the room. Give him the file when you’re done and he’ll make copies for you.” He handed me the box. It was surprisingly heavy.

The room they gave me was an interrogation room, but I’d pretty much expected that. I spent the next two hours reading through the files in the box and typing notes into my laptop. Police investigative files are perhaps the world’s most inefficient method of conveying useful information. There were hundreds of pages of reports, printouts, and photos, but in the end it amounted to little more than proof that a male had beaten an elderly woman to death and nobody saw anything. The family couldn’t be sure if anything was missing. Her purse was found on a table with cash and credit cards inside. Her jewelry was upstairs and undisturbed. The body had been found in the kitchen near the back door. It had stayed there at least three days before a worried friend came over and ended up going around through the back door, knowing that Linda kept a key hidden there. They didn’t even know if it had been in late afternoon, that is, daylight, or at night, since the medical examiner could only narrow it down to a twelve hour time frame. There were no useful footprints or fingerprints. No one knew of any enemies or disputes she’d been in. Her home didn’t have security cameras. In short, there was almost nothing to go on.

I waited for the clerk to make the copies I’d marked and thought about it. The only thing to go on was the DNA. The killer’s DNA was under the victim’s fingernails. A full sequence had been done. I’d heard about cold cases being solved by finding relatives through online DNA genealogy databases. This seemed like the only possible approach.

When I got my copy of the file I walked back over to Wilbanks’s desk. He was still there. I thanked him for letting me see it.

“Barry, I was wondering if you considered tracking the killer through any DNA websites. You’ve probably heard about it.”

“Yeah, I know what it is. Our lawyers said we can’t use it. Any match we get through that wouldn’t be admissible. The whole ID would be tainted from the privacy violation.”

“Really? I don’t see that. There’s no law on that yet. The people who upload their DNA to those sites do so in order to identify relatives. Their privacy isn’t being violated. They make it public voluntarily.”

“Some do, some don’t. Some have other reasons, like checking for congenital health problems. But most have to opt in to allow police to use it. The default is for no police access. Some DNA companies don’t cooperate at all without a court order. They think it’s a privacy violation or they’re worried about liability.”

“Maybe. Even if it is, it would only be a violation of some distant cousin’s privacy, not the killer’s. I’m sure the killer wouldn’t upload his own DNA. The killer wouldn’t have standing to object if we identified him through a search of his fourth cousin’s DNA.”

“I’m no lawyer.”

“I am.”

“Bully for you. Our District Attorney and County Counsel both say we can’t do it. End of story.”

“Okay, okay. I get it.” I looked down at the box and put a startled look on my face. “Shoot. The clerk missed one. I’ll be right back.” I turned around and took the box back over to the room where I’d been. I stood with my back to Wilbanks so he couldn’t see what I was doing. I slipped another Post-It onto a random page then reached in to pull out a small envelope I remembered seeing. Inside was a small USB stick. That stick had the DNA sequences on it. I walked back to the clerk and handed him the marked page, still blocking the view towards Wilbanks. As the clerk stood and left to make a copy, I opened my laptop, booted it up, and copied the DNA files. The clerk returned and handed me the page. I walked back over to Wilbanks with a shrug like “what can you do, good help is hard to find.” He wasn’t paying attention since his phone had rung sometime while my back was turned. He returned a look and pointed at the phone. I assumed he was trying to convey that he’d be on it awhile. That was fine with me.

I found my own way out. Wilbanks watched me from his desk and gave me a small wave as I exited to the main stairway.

Chapter 3

When I got back to my office I called Maeva in. She was happy for the break.

“So how’d it go?” she asked.

“Fine.” I gave her the short version of the visit with Wilbanks.

“So you took a copy of the DNA sequences? He let you do that?”

“He said I could have copies of anything in the box, just not the physical evidence.”

“Anything? Or just documents?”

“I don’t think he put any restrictions on it. Anything in the box.”

“You told him you were taking the DNA right after he told you the County Counsel said it couldn’t be uploaded? You did tell him what you were taking, right?”

“He didn’t ask. It’s legal, I’m telling you. It will be okay. Police are doing it all over the country.”

“So he doesn’t know. Geez, Cliff, you’re pushing the envelope on this one. I don’t like getting in the crosshairs of the police. We’ve both got our licenses to worry about. And how are you going to use it? The lawyer said you’ll taint the whole case. They won’t prosecute with that.”

“I won’t have to use it. And what case? For all we know the killer is dead or in jail for life.”

“If he was in jail for life his DNA would be in CODIS.”

CODIS stands for Combined DNA Index System, the database managed by the FBI. Various different databases, actually. Missing persons, for example, are separate from convicted criminals and both are separate from the DNA samples from crime scenes. It’s an excellent system, but not perfect. Not all convicted criminals have their DNA in there, either because of state law, police policy, or because they were jailed before CODIS existed, among other reasons. The sheriff’s office had already uploaded the killer’s DNA there according to Wilbanks.

“Look, right now the SO has nothing. If I can identify him, at least they’ll have something to go on. The lawyers can fight out the admissibility in court later. They have nothing to lose at this point. And anyway, our client just wants the case solved. She didn’t ask us to get it prosecuted.”

“I don’t think she’d be happy if you identified the killer and at the same time made it impossible to prosecute him.”

“Don’t be so negative.”

“It’s your funeral.”

“How touching.”

She grinned and returned to her fire cases.

It was time for me to study up on DNA. I was aware that anyone could submit their spit to any of several testing companies and find blood relatives, hidden genetic health conditions, and ancestry information. I went online and began reading. As I read, I found that the different DNA sites have different policies. The one that police have been using on cold cases is one called GEDmatch.

GEDmatch is different in form and purpose from other providers in the field. They don’t sequence the DNA like 23andMe, Family Tree DNA, My Heritage, Ancestry.com or various others. GEDmatch instead is a database where anyone can upload their DNA sequence obtained from any of those sources in order to find genealogy information. The aim was especially to help adoptees find their DNA relatives. Anyone who uploads their DNA there is warned that it’s totally public. It only works if it’s public. An enterprising police officer working a cold case first got the idea to use it to find a serial murderer, the Golden State Killer. He uploaded the killer’s DNA, found some matches of distant cousins of the killer, then with the help of a professional genealogy company, traced the family trees of those cousins back up to where they converged and then back down to find people descended from the converging lines.

For legal reasons, GEDmatch now requires users to give consent for police to access. It also requires police to identify themselves to search so that it can conceal matches from those who do not consent. I’m not police and I was doing this without police knowledge, so I wasn’t concerned. I had a plan anyway.

I created a new email address, made a GEDmatch account, and used it to upload the killer’s DNA sequence. It was simpler

than I had thought. I had to read through a bunch of stuff, but after clicking and consenting I reached a point where I could search for relatives. I clicked on the One-to-Many option. That compares my sample to everyone in the database. It displays a list of those who match over a specified cutoff length.

All humans have a great deal of identical DNA, but everyone also has a large number of what are called “snips.” SNP’s or single nucleotide polymorphisms are one-letter differences in various genes. Think of them as misspellings. DNA is made up of the nucleic acids cytosine [C], guanine [G], adenine [A] or thymine [T]. Most people may have an A in a particular point in a common gene, but a few people could have a G or a C there. This happens in thousands of places in our genes and each combination is unique. Unless you have an identical twin, no one else has the same exact combination of snips you have. The more of these snips that match, the closer one person is related to another.

So the website listed dozens of relatives of the killer in a massive spreadsheet. Now what?

I had to start reading more about this stuff. The spreadsheet listed the closest relatives at the top, I knew that. But it didn’t say how closely they were related in regular English terms I could understand. It was just a bunch of numbers. For all I knew, the match at the top was my killer.

I learned that the chart’s key numbers were the ones in the Total cM and Gen columns. Genetic distance is measured in centimorgans. Don’t ask me to explain it. All I gathered was that it was a quantitative measure of the two DNA samples similarity. The Gen number was easier for me to understand. That was short for generations. It gave an estimate for how many generations separated the two samples. A 1.0 would be father and son, a 2.0 a first cousin and so on, but it’s only an estimate, not a guarantee. Genes are passed on too randomly for that to be exact. The match at the top of the chart was a 3.7. I gritted my teeth when I finally figured that out. There were no close relatives in the database. I might have to go back in time four or five generations to find the common ancestor, and that’s the closest one.

Then I noticed another feature. Some of the entries had links to family tree files. The third name on my list was one of those. I clicked on it. This led to an ancestry chart going back all

the way to the Revolutionary War. Nice! That would save a lot of work. But I still didn't know how to pursue this.

Maybe a closer relative had used one of the other DNA sites. I found that I could upload the DNA for free to MyHeritage. I went through a similar process creating an account there and uploaded the killer's DNA there. A different set of individual names came up when I searched for matches. Most used generic male or female icons, but a few people had photos or personalized icons. I could actually see pictures of the killer's relatives. Some were black and some were white. I was getting excited. They had centimorgan numbers like GEDmatch. Some had family trees I could access for a small fee. None of the relatives was any closer to the killer than at GEDmatch.

I needed professional help. I wasn't a professional genealogist. It would take me ages to get up to speed and with my hourly rate, it would be way too expensive. More importantly, I didn't want to have to do it. There are people who do this for a living. They have access to all sorts of records that I don't and more skill and experience. I searched online for professional genealogists. After some comparison shopping I settled on one in the area with good ratings and reviews, a woman in Oakland. I wasn't going to hire her without the client's authorization, but I wanted to get a quote to give Bella. I dialed the number on the website.

"Hello." It was a mature woman's voice.

"Hello. Is this Family Finders?"

"Yes it is. Sorry. I work from my home and most calls on this line are personal so I don't answer with the professional name. I'm Flora Jackson. May I help you?"

"Yes. I'm an attorney and private investigator. My name is Cliff Knowles. I represent a client who is looking for his birth relatives, especially his parents or siblings if he has any. He's adopted. He wants to remain anonymous for now. I have his DNA sequence and I've uploaded it to a couple of different sites. I've identified some relatives, but they're all distant. Are you able to track down his parents from that?"

"Probably. Did you upload to GEDmatch?"

"Yes."

“If you give me the kit number I can tell you in a minute whether it’s likely I can find his parents.”

“Right now?”

“Yes. You can read it to me over the phone.”

I read it to her. It took longer than a minute for her to come back on, but it was still surprisingly fast.

“Yes, it looks promising, but it could be expensive. The closest ancestors are going to be back four generations or so. If I’m lucky I can find some completed family trees, but it could involve some travel – such as going to various archives, graveyards, and so forth.”

I asked her how expensive. She worked by the hour. Her rates were lower than mine by quite a bit, and she knew what she was doing, which I didn’t. I pressed her for an estimate. She was reluctant to give one since she couldn’t tell how much work would be involved. She finally gave me a rough range. I told her I’d have to check with my client before I could authorize her to proceed.

“I have to warn you, Mr. Knowles, that it’s likely I can narrow it down to a particular set of ancestors, but as I said, they’ll be four or five generations back, great-great-grandparents or whatever. I can probably trace down from there and find all the descendants, but it could be a fairly large number of possible parents, dozens even. The only way to identify the specific parents is through DNA testing unless someone in the family admits to giving up the child for adoption or knows who did. People don’t always cooperate in that. I can usually narrow it down to three or four possibilities, but there are no guarantees.”

“I understand. That’s what I expected. I’ll be in touch.”

“Alright. I look forward to hearing from you.”

I called Bella with the news, both good and bad. I told her I didn’t see any unturned stones that the detectives missed. I’d continue to study the documents from the file more thoroughly before pronouncing it a dead end, but it didn’t look good in that direction. The good news, of course, was the genealogy search. I gave her Flora Jackson’s rates and total cost estimate and explained what I had in mind. She didn’t really understand the DNA science, but the basic concept of tracing back in time from several different relatives until they met in one ancestral pair and then tracing all the descendants from there to the present was clear

to her. I explained that I'd pretended to be representing an adoptee, not her, to protect what we're doing. Bella was cool with that, but it meant she couldn't meet Jackson personally. She authorized me to hire Jackson.

I called Jackson back and told her to go ahead, but I instructed her not to do any travel without prior approval and to provide a weekly hours report so that my client could judge costs. She thanked me and sent me a contract to sign. She said she'd need a name for my client for her files, but it could be a false name if he wanted to stay anonymous. This caught me off guard, so I just gave her the first name that popped into my head: Cole Case. Okay, so I'm pretty unimaginative sometimes. From that point on, the killer would be Cole.

Chapter 4

I got home early because Ellen was working that late surveillance. I sent Hilda home and fixed dinner for the kids. It was the next morning before I saw Ellen. She'd gotten in late after I was asleep. I was eating breakfast with Tommy when she came out of the bedroom in her robe and slippers.

"How'd it go last night?" I asked.

"Bo-o-o-ring. We watched the subject for eight hours. He got in his car at his house, drove to the corner liquor store, and drove back home. That's a short surveillance log. How's your serial killer case coming?"

"He's not a serial killer. Not that we know of. The only cereal killer around here is right there." I looked at Tommy, who was chowing down on a prodigious helping of Cheerios.

"Funny." Her half-lidded scowl didn't back up the word.

"Anyway, it's going fine. I hired a genealogist to track him from DNA."

"Like GSK?" She was referring to the Golden State Killer.

"Yes, only I didn't tell her that. I pretended I was representing an adoptee looking for his birth parents.

"Why didn't you tell her?"

"I wasn't sure she'd want to get involved with a homicide case."

"There's a firm back in Maryland or some place that works with police on cold cases. Why didn't you use them?"

"I'd have to get the SO involved."

"And?"

I took a bite of my own breakfast – an English muffin slathered in jam. I tried to think of how best to phrase my response as I slowly chewed to buy time. She could tell I was stalling.

"Sweetie, you're doing this behind their back, aren't you?" She rolled her eyes and headed for the coffee pot.

"I wouldn't put it that way. It's legal. They just don't need to know how I work."

She just shook her head. She was all too familiar with how I worked. "Just be careful."

I almost replied "I always am," but she'd know that was untrue. I just said, "Of course."

The next two days were taken up with other work. I even helped Maeva with some of the fire insurance cases. One of the cases was from a man who may have been burning trash outside around the time the fire started. He lost his house. There was no direct evidence he started the fire, but when it became clear the arson investigators were taking a look at him for criminal negligence, I told Maeva to back out of the case. She agreed and told the insurance companies we don't do criminal cases.

That policy of ours is flexible. We really want to avoid two things: helping provide a guilty criminal with a defense, and getting tied up with subpoenas and unpaid testimony or other legal obligations. Bella's case didn't raise either of those possibilities, not if my plan worked as I hoped.

Flora Jackson called me on the third day.

"Mr. Knowles, it's Flora Jackson. I have something for you."

"That's great. What did you find?"

"I need to show it to you. Can you come by here any time soon?"

"You can't just email a report? Or explain it on the phone?"

"Not really. I'd offer to come to you, but I have a cast on my foot and can't drive right now. Public transit would be nearly impossible and I don't want to charge Cole for a taxi or Lyft round trip."

"I'm sorry to hear it. How'd you injure it?"

"I dropped a dumbbell on it at the gym. I'm such a klutz."

"A dumbbell hurt you when you injured yourself. There's a joke in there somewhere but I'm too polite to make it."

Flora laughed. "Yet you just did. You're an evil one."

"Guilty as charged. I'm sorry. I couldn't resist. Anyway, I can come by this afternoon if that will work."

"Perfect."

She gave me her address. It was in the Rockridge section of Oakland. I knew the area from my FBI days. It's considered trendy and upscale but not posh. It's a very old neighborhood, originally

working class, and not outrageously priced by Bay Area standards. Rockridge was very diverse, with a mix of black, white, and Latino residents. Oakland has had its race relations problems over the years, but it's been pretty mellow in the last decade. Many high-tech firms have moved in downtown, gentrifying the city and pushing rents up, which has caused its own problems. I told her I'd be there at two.

When I got there I'd expected an older home, but was surprised to find a cantilevered modernistic house on a steep hill. The street was narrow and winding and parking was not allowed. I could just squeeze my car into her driveway. The garage was the only part of the house at street level. I had to walk up one flight through the terraced front yard to her front door. I rang and she let me in.

I don't know what I was expecting her to look like, but it wasn't what I saw before me. She was tall and svelte with café au lait skin and a very short afro. Her smile was dazzling white, a mile wide, and could easily compete with Julia Roberts. The crinkles at the corners of her eyes told me she wasn't much younger than me and that she laughed a lot. I liked her immediately. She was using crutches, so it took her a while to answer the door and to navigate back into her office, which was a converted bedroom.

"I must apologize, Mr. Knowles. The living room is more comfortable, but I need to show you some things on the computer. And please forgive the shorts. The cast makes my regular clothes difficult."

"Please, call me Cliff. No need to apologize. Can I help you with anything?" I had no objection to the shorts since her legs were worth looking at.

"No, no. Just take a seat. Call me Flora." She was sitting in the desk chair, but she had one positioned for me next to her. On the side table she'd laid out some cookies. I could smell coffee somewhere in another room. "Help yourself to the coffee. It's in the kitchen. I'm afraid I'm not going to get up."

“Thank you, no, but maybe later.”

“The Mormon Temple nearby has an excellent genealogy collection. Books you can’t get anywhere else. Plus all the census records and online stuff, but I can get those here at home. I found some interesting stuff.”

She looked at me, but I had nothing to say and waited for her to go on. She did.

“Cole is descended from three old families, the Fullers, Mozingos, and the Sullivans. Let me show you something.” She clicked on an icon and brought up the image of a tattered document.

Alexander Fuller / a Molatto Carpenter
To Nash & McNair

1763				
Sept. 9	2 1/2 Bush Salt			
Oct. 13	2 1/2 yards Cotton	1/4		
Nov. 14	1 lb Powder		5.4	
	4 " Shot		2.8	
Dec. 27	1 lb Coffee		2	
	2 Sugar		2	
	1 pr Worn Shoes		10	
	1 pr. Scissors		1.4	
31	3 1/2 yards Bearskin	12/	2.2	
	1/2 yard Shalloon		1.8	
	2 Coy Butte	1/3	3.4	
	1 oz White Brd Thrd		1	
	2 White Hair	8	1.4	
	1 oz Silver Thread		1	
1764	6 yards Cheek	3/6	1.1	
Jan. 2	2 1/2 yards Duroy	3/6	3.9	
	1/2 yard Mustin	6/4	0.2	
	1 1/2 yards Saw Laff	2/4	0.6	
	1/2 bush Salt		8	
	2 yards Tape		1	
9	2 Mins Thread		4	
	1 pr Mens Shoes		12	
31	2 Sugar			
31	1 lb Tobacco			

"It's hard to read," I said, perhaps needlessly.

"I'll save you the trouble. It says 'Alexander Fuller, a molatto carpenter to Nash and McNair'. The date is 1763 at the top. There's a second page that continues until 1765. It's a store

ledger. Nash and McNair was a well-known merchant in North Carolina before the Revolutionary War. They extended him credit and this shows his purchases and how much he owed. It's an interesting slice of life picture for that time and place.

"Fuller had a son also named Alexander. The son married an Irish immigrant named Jane Elder. In later census records some of their children, he had ten of them, are listed as white. I couldn't find census records for all of them, although I might still be able to do so. Charles Fuller, one of his sons, married Isabel, last name unknown, who was listed as Negro in a later census. He had five sons and two daughters. One of those sons married a woman named Sullivan, I believe, but I can't find an official record or even unofficial family genealogy chart to establish that.

"I believe this marriage took place because Cole has DNA relatives named Sullivan and Fuller. I can place Charles Sullivan and his six daughters in the same time and area of North Carolina as Alexander Fuller, Jr. and his sons. The Sullivans are all white according to census records. Charles and Isabel's children are listed as Negro. Census records stopped listing race for a period, but race is a useful trait for tracing ancestry. The point is, in order for me to proceed, it would be helpful to know Cole's race. I know you said he wanted to remain anonymous, but can you tell me if he's black or white?"

I was not prepared for the question. I knew Wilbanks had told me he was black, but what if he was wrong? He hadn't sounded sure. Jackson had just told me about a mixed race man in early America with white grandchildren. I hadn't even known that census records back then included race, but it made sense. The census was for political districting and negroes were three-fifths of a person according to the constitution if I remembered right.

"Black. Very light skin, though." I'd hesitated too long. Flora picked up on it. If he was really my client I'd almost certainly know his race. If I told her the wrong race, she might not go down the correct descendant tree.

"Lighter than me?" Her cocked eyebrow conveyed suspicion.

"Yes, uh, I think. It's hard to tell in different lighting. I only saw him briefly across the office. My associate did his intake interview. Can I see that document up close?" I was hoping I could

derail her. She scooted her chair aside and I leaned in closer to the screen.

The ledger was fascinating when you studied it. The things Alexander Fuller had bought cast light on the life of 1763 North Carolina: butter, sugar, coffee, cotton, muslin, shalloon, tools.

“What’s shalloon?” I asked.

“A fabric. There are several types of fabric listed. It was a general store, sort of the department store of the day. He bought diapers and two boys’ hats on the second page. That was 1765.”

“You seem to know a lot about it.”

“I love history. I majored in it in college. American History. And of course I learn a lot more doing this kind of work.”

“So you’re sure Cole is descended from this Alexander Fuller?”

“Yes. Many of the DNA relatives can be traced to him. I just can’t be sure through which of his grandchildren Cole is descended. I think it’s probably through Charles and Isabel. But he’s also descended from some Sullivans and Mozingos and many more. We’re talking six or seven generations back, maybe more. A person alive today would have one hundred twenty-eight ancestors seven generations back. Half would be on the mother’s side, half on the father’s. I’d have to travel around and examine graveyards and archives for all the others. I want to track the Mozingo connection down, too. It sounds African and you said he has an African haplotype.”

I was already lost. “I see.” I lied. “I’m confused, though. Why is this store extending credit to a slave? Wouldn’t it be to his master?”

“What makes you think Alexander Fuller was a slave?”

“Well, he was black in the South before the Emancipation Proclamation.”

“He was ‘molatto’ according to the ledger, not black, and anyway, there were plenty of free blacks in the South at that time. He obviously practiced a trade in his own name, which wouldn’t have been the case if he were a slave. His son, also named Alexander, married a white woman, which wouldn’t have been allowed to a black slave. This Alexander Fuller is actually fairly well known in the genealogy literature of the time. He was on the

tax rolls. He owned land, too, and sold it later and moved to Missouri.”

“I had this vision of Simon Legree and floggings.”

“Don’t get me wrong. There was slavery then and it was often horrific, but many black people even in the south led lives very much like white people. The constitution didn’t make blacks, or ‘Negroes’ or mulattos three-fifths of a person. It made *slaves* three-fifths of a person. Free blacks were mostly treated like normal citizens back then. Intermarriage wasn’t rare. Indentured servants, both black and white, could sue for their freedom in court and normally won if they had served their period of indenture. It really wasn’t until much later, when cotton replaced tobacco as the primary southern crop, that the color barrier got drawn so starkly. A great many African Americans today never had a slave as an ancestor, at least not one in America. Some black slaves in England or Europe emigrated to America to be free. Fuller might have been one.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know. History was never my best subject.”

“Now it’s my turn to say no need to apologize. Very few people, black or white, are familiar with this era. Now I have a question for you. What company sequenced his DNA? All you gave me was his kit number from GEDMatch. They don’t sequence.”

Another question I couldn’t answer. I knew who sequenced it – the state crime lab – but I couldn’t tell her. “23andMe, I think.”

“Good, then you can examine the ethnic makeup. What percent is sub-Saharan African, do you know? That should tell us whether his ancestors are mostly black or mostly white.”

“I don’t know. He never provided that information to us. I can probably get that information from him. I don’t think he knew it would be important. I do know he had an African haplotype.”

“Male or female?”

I hesitated too long again. She bailed me out.

“The male one is on the Y chromosome, the female one is the mitochondrial DNA. A lot of people think it’s on the X chromosome, but only the mitochondria passes strictly along the female line.”

“Male; I know he said the Y chromosome.” This much I knew, but I had only a vague idea what mitochondria was. Something small in every cell, but not part of a chromosome.

“That’s good. That helps me. That means he’s descended along a direct male line from Alexander Fuller or some other male of African descent. If so, his birth father could be named Fuller. That could be his original surname, too. Of course, if he was illegitimate, which is likely, he might have been given his mother’s surname or a phony surname provided by the mother as the father’s. There are four generations in there where the name could have been changed that way. And a Fuller female could have married another black male with the haplotype. But at least it allows me to eliminate tracing the descendants of Fuller females who married white men.”

“Okay, good. So what’s the next step?”

“Get me that 23andMe ethnic data when you get a chance. In the meantime I’ll check the ancestries of some of his other DNA matches to try to find any descended from African-Americans. Also, what’s Cole’s date of birth?”

Yet another question I couldn’t answer. I was prepared for this one, though. “He doesn’t know. Not exactly. His parents never told him he was adopted. He discovered it only when he found he wasn’t a DNA match with his cousins on either side. The parents are deceased now, so he can’t ask them. They may not even have known. They celebrated his birthday on Groundhog Day, February 2. He’ll be forty-five next year, he thinks. He may have been adopted at age two or three.”

I realized this could throw Flora off if she was going through census and recent birth records, but I didn’t expect her to narrow it down that far. I’d have to do the final one or two generations. I just wanted her to give me a list of possible candidates. The age forty-five now was a pure stab in the dark, but made the suspect twenty-seven at the time of the crime.

“Where did he grow up?”

I was expecting this one, too. “He says they moved around a lot when he was young, mostly California and nearby states. By his teens he lived in the Bay Area.”

“You aren’t making it easy. I’d like to meet Cole. He doesn’t have to give me his real name. I think I could get a lot of

useful information from him in a personal interview. No offense, but you don't seem to know as much about your client as I expected."

"I'll ... I'll have to ask him if he's willing."

She eyed me suspiciously. I decided that if we kept talking she'd smell the proverbial rodent, so it was time to leave. I stood.

"I'll send you that 23andMe ancestry data when I get a chance. This has been really helpful to me, a learning experience. I'll be better prepared if I ever get another adoptee case like this. I'm sorry I'm not as well-prepared as I should have been."

She started to stand, but I told her not to since the cast made that difficult. I thanked her profusely and showed myself out.

In the car I thought about the visit. I had been unprepared. Flora Jackson betrayed signs of distrusting me. I couldn't blame her. Still, she was going to continue to research the genealogy so no harm had been done. I'd have to do some more work to get up to speed before our next meeting, though.

While I was here in Oakland I wanted to pick up another geocache. This case had made me curious and I'd found that there were other murder history caches around. The Black Dahlia (GC4BXT0) in Oakland is located in a nearby cemetery containing the grave of a famous murder victim. Elizabeth Short was murdered in Los Angeles in 1947. The gruesome nature of the crime made it tabloid fare at the time and the subject of numerous books and movies since. Its notoriety is enhanced by the fact the murder, like Linda Klein's, remains unsolved. It's a multicache, so I only knew that it started in the cemetery, but it might actually be outside since caches usually are not allowed inside. Often cemetery-based caches require trips to a gravesite to obtain numbers that are used to calculate coordinates nearby but outside the cemetery grounds.

I located the cache easily after following the directions on the page and gave it a favorite point. I know many people find cemeteries creepy, but I've always liked them. Most are beautifully maintained, peaceful and quiet. You pick up some fascinating little tidbits just walking through, reading inscriptions, dates, and names.

Back at the office I looked into 23andMe. They didn't allow you to upload a DNA sequence from another site. They required a spit sample. That was a problem. However, my Google

search showed that MyHeritage.com allowed you to obtain ethnicity data. I had already uploaded Cole's DNA there, but only looked for relatives, not ethnicity data. I had to buy the premium membership, which was necessary to get ethnicity data. When I got the results, I was shocked.

It said the killer was 96.6% European and only 1.2% sub-Saharan African. The rest was Asian/Native American or unassigned. That meant he was a white guy with an African haplotype. It also meant the Sheriff's Office was looking for a black guy when they should be looking for a white guy. Not that they were looking. Who knew what they put in various records? The next guy to pick up the file might think the subject had definitely been identified as black.

The good news was that this information could help Flora in her search. If I understood her right, it meant that the killer's father and all his paternal side male ancestors descended directly from an African male even though they must have been white in appearance for many generations. It didn't mean his mother had no African in her, but following the male line down from Fuller or any other African-American male going way back would be the logical way to go. I didn't think she'd care that the data came from MyHeritage instead of 23andMe, but I wasn't sure. I just pasted the raw numbers into an email without specifying the source. Before I clicked Send, though, I decided to check some other options.

It turns out that GEDmatch also has some ethnicity programs available, but they're apparently experimental, either by amateurs, or by academic researchers who aren't necessarily trying to meet the goals of the consumer. I ran those on Cole's kit. Flora could do that herself, and probably already had. The results were hard to interpret and varied a lot. I didn't have much faith in those. I had to pick one since they couldn't all be right. In any event, none of them put his African component over 3%. He was white. I decided to stick with MyHeritage for now. I mentioned to her in the email that I'd checked those other sites, too. I still had a problem, though. I'd told her he looked like a light-skinned black person. Someone with 97% European heritage wouldn't look black, even light-skinned. I edited the numbers and said he'd been 5% African, lowering the European element accordingly. This was

close enough to the GEDmatch numbers so that it would be plausible if she had those numbers, and I hoped it was high enough so that a person with this little African heritage could still look part black. I clicked Send.

Chapter 5

It was another five days before I heard from Flora. The case had actually slipped out of my mind until I saw the email in my Inbox. It was her required weekly status report along with an invoice. She said she was making excellent progress and should have some good news within a day or two. I was expecting something more definite, but I could wait another day. She didn't take credit cards, but she took PayPal so I paid her right away. I didn't want her holding up the results waiting for a check.

Sure enough, the next day Ashley buzzed me and said Flora Jackson was holding for me on line one.

"Hello, Flora."

"Hello, Cliff. Thank you for the prompt payment."

"You're welcome. Your email said you had good news."

"I do. But I have some questions for you first."

By this time Maeva was in my office. She'd heard Ashley announce Flora Jackson's name and was curious about the case. I'd kept her apprised. She walked over to my desk and put her finger over the speaker button mouthing a request as to whether it was okay. I pushed her hand away, but pressed the button myself.

"Flora, my associate Maeva Hanssen just joined me. As I told you, she did the initial intake. You're on speaker."

There was an awkward silence for a few seconds, then, "Hello, Maeva."

"Hi. Cliff has been telling me about your good work."

"Well, this is going to be a bit uncomfortable. Maeva, Cliff told me that he didn't see your client – A.K.A. Cole – up close. He said you did. I have to ask you, did you see him or not?"

Maeva glared at me. She had no idea this was coming and certainly had no answer ready. "Well," Nothing followed beyond Maeva's hostile body language. Her arms were so akimbo I thought she'd bruise her hips. I was trying to formulate an acceptable explanation, but my white lies suddenly seemed big and black. My mouth felt like I'd filled it with a gallon of talcum powder. I was afraid Flora wouldn't give us her results, ones I'd already paid for.

Jackson waited a full minute before continuing. "That's what I thought. Neither of you has seen this Cole person, have

you? The DNA data you sent is for a white man, one with an African haplotype. What's going on? Whose DNA is this?"

I was never a very good liar. I finally summoned the courage and oral lubrication to speak. "Okay, you're right. We didn't see him. I shouldn't have told you that Maeva did the intake. I had to improvise when you asked me his race. I hadn't expected to be asked that."

"Go on."

What was she expecting? "Why are you asking, Flora? Is there a problem. You've done the research. Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. I have my own civil liability to worry about. Does this person even know that his genealogy is being researched? And I've examined his DNA results. Does he know that?"

"It's all legal, I promise. I'm an attorney and ..."

"Not helping."

"Okay, look. Here's the deal. The DNA sequence is from the man who killed a woman decades ago. The police have stopped working the case. We've been hired by a relative of the victim to identify the killer. The police know we're working the case and are cooperating."

"They gave you a copy of the DNA results?"

"They gave me copies of anything I asked for except the physical evidence itself. I can't get the actual DNA sample, only the digital sequence. I swear it's all legal."

"I thought it was something like that. After you were here, I knew something was off. I did a little research on you. You've been involved in a number of murder cases."

I noticed she'd said "been involved," not "solved." I'd been a suspect more than once. "Yes, that's true, Flora, but..."

"Let me finish. I realized you must be trying to identify a killer through DNA. Like the Golden State Killer case. I'm right, aren't I?"

"You're right. I'm sorry I didn't come straight out with it but I was afraid you wouldn't want to get involved. The firm that helps police with cold cases won't do the same for a private individual. This is important to my client. Whether or not we can use the results in court, the main thing is to get closure."

"You're saying they can't be used in court?"

“No, I’m not saying that. I think it’s legal to search public data and use the results in court, but I think once we know who the killer is, we can prove the case another way. It should never come up. I don’t want this to be a test case. Are you going to withhold your results? I’ve already paid for the first week.”

“You’ll get your results. I just wanted to be sure I knew what I was getting into. No more lies or you’re on your own.”

“No more lies. I got it. My word on it.” I motioned for Maeva to sit down. The black cloud floating over her head faded away.

“Okay, so that data was very helpful. You’re looking for a white male descended directly from an African male along the male line at least five generations back, maybe as much as eight or nine. That’s quite unusual, although maybe not as much as people might think.”

“So it’s a Fuller?”

“Possibly. But I found something else interesting. The Mozingo line I mentioned is also descended from an African man in colonial America. You should read *The Fiddler on Pantico Run* by Joe Mozingo. The author, a white man, provides a factual account of an African slave named Edward Mozingo in colonial Jamestown, Virginia. Edward won his freedom in a court case. He married a white woman and they spawned both black and white family trees. Many of his white descendants even joined the KKK and claim the name is Basque or Italian. It’s not. They’re all descended from a black slave. Anyway, a few generations down the two lines intermarried, Fuller women marrying Mozingo males and vice versa. Both lines have produced white males who must carry the African Y haplotypes. I have no way of knowing if it’s the same one as Cole.”

“So how is this good news? It sounds like we’ve got more possibilities than before.”

“Not at all. I’m not done. I’ve been able to pare down the results. There were a lot of offspring from both lines back before the days of birth control, but I could eliminate every thread that was broken by a woman, since she couldn’t pass on the Y haplotype, or where the family was listed as black in a recent census. The DNA would show up with a higher percent African in your sample.

“Anyway, we’re only talking about the male line. I can say with a fairly high degree of certainty that Cole – your killer – is the son or grandson either of Clarence and Candace Fuller of Eureka, California, or Flaco and Delilah Mozingo of Redding, California. I knew the age you gave me had to be fake, so I didn’t know what generation to look at.”

“That’s wonderful,” I exclaimed. “That’s exactly what we needed.”

Maeva jumped in. “I have some questions. I thought mixed race African-Americans were the product of white masters raping black slave women, not black men marrying white women.”

“Both happened. White owners probably took advantage of slave women a lot more often than black men marrying white women. Thomas Jefferson, for example. I’m sure there was plenty of rape, but I’m not sure every sexual encounter with a master and slave female was non-consensual back then. There’s ample evidence of some long-lasting love relationships. Some free blacks owned African slaves themselves, too, which was normal in Africa. Of course the unequal power balance puts a big question mark on the notion of consent. It’s very complex and cannot be summarized or squeezed into one category.”

“Okay. So why are you helping us now that you know the truth of what we’re doing? A minute ago you were talking about your fear of civil liability.”

I cringed at that remark. Why remind her of a reason not to help? Flora didn’t mind.

“I’m willing to take the chance. I’ve been probing into family histories for thirty years, including many people’s histories who didn’t know I was doing it. That’s the nature of genealogy. I’ve turned up plenty of skeletons in closets – drunkards, thieves, black ancestors of white people, too. Some people were sure they were descended from a king or an Indian chief, but turned out to be descended from a bunch of Welsh coal miners. Most people just accept it. No one’s ever sued me. Some don’t like the results, but they don’t blame me. It is public information they can check themselves.”

“Then why the remark about liability?”

“I was just trying to flush you guys out and get the real story. I’m actually happy you’re doing what you’re doing. My

older sister was raped and killed when I was only seven. She was walking to a birthday party. That case has never been solved, either. If I had one of those Batman spotlights, I'd shine it on the clouds and yell, 'Get 'em Cliff and Maeva.'"

"That's terrible," I said. "I'm so sorry about your sister. So do you have addresses or other identifying data on the two couples you named?" I wanted to get back on track and didn't know any smooth way to segue.

"I have the obituaries of both Fullers and of Delilah Mozingo. Pictures of the gravesites of all four from FindAGrave, too. You're the private eyes, so I assumed you would take it from there. Both couples had two sons. I don't know if the sons had sons. They could still be producing children. I'll send it all to you. Of course, what you need is DNA samples to compare. I don't know how you're going to get those and I don't want to know."

"You're the best, Flora. Thank you."

Chapter 6

When the call was over Maeva gave me a tongue-lashing for putting her on the spot like that. I couldn't blame her. But her mood swiftly lightened when I pointed out that we had leads to go on that will take us out into the field. I could see she was ready to get out of the office.

"I'll call Bella," she said with the enthusiasm of a kid on her way to the circus. "Maybe she'll know of some connection between her grandmother and any Fullers or Mozingos."

"Or Redding or Eureka. But let's wait until we see what she's got for us. Maybe there'll be first names we can run by her, too. You told me her mother's family is from Redding, too. I don't know why they'd have any connection with the Klein side, but it seems like a pretty big coincidence."

I could see her champing at the bit, but she agreed. Five minutes later Flora's email came in. The obituaries were what we had to go on. She'd sent screen shots. I forwarded it all to Maeva so we could both read everything at the same time.

Clarence Fuller, age 62, of Fairhaven, California was laid to rest at Ocean View cemetery yesterday. He was an airplane mechanic employed by Eureka Municipal Airport for thirty-four years. He is survived by his wife Candace, two sons, a daughter, and three grandchildren.

Candace Fuller, age 78, of Fairhaven, California was laid to rest at Ocean View cemetery last Tuesday next to her late husband Clarence. She is survived by two sons, a daughter, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Delilah Mozingo, 84, widow of Flaco Mozingo, passed away Tuesday after a long illness. Delilah was the beloved mother of Chip Mozingo of Redding California, T.J. Mozingo of Carson City, Nevada, and four grandchildren. Delilah was an active member of the Redding Benevolent Society and was known for her exquisite crochet work. She will be dearly missed. In lieu of flowers the family requests that donations be made to the Redding Benevolent Society.

There will be no public service. She will be interred at Redding Memorial Park.

The Fuller obituaries were from the Fairhaven Gazette, a small weekly shopper. I guessed that they provided a free obituary for local residents. Fairhaven was a small town just outside Eureka near the airport. Flora's email said there was none in the main paper, the *Times Standard*. Delilah's obituary had appeared in a Redding paper that no longer existed. It provided a bit more to go on, but I wish they'd included the full legal names of the sons.

The dates were not in the obituaries themselves, but Flora provided the dates of publication from the links. The women's were recent – within the last eight years. Clarence died eighteen years ago. There's no information on Flaco in his widow's obituary, but his gravestone is in one of the photos. He's buried in a different cemetery in Redding, St. Joseph's. His date of death was fifteen years ago and he was seventy-one at the time.

I did the mental math. Actually, I used a spreadsheet. It's less error-prone. The murder was eighteen years ago. Clarence was alive, but apparently on his deathbed since he died a month later. He can't be ruled out completely, but I made him a low priority. His sons would probably have been middle aged and his grandsons probably in their teens or twenties so they were all candidates. The same situation for Flaco Mazingo, although he died three years after the murder, so he was presumably still around and healthy enough to have done it. His sons and grandsons were probably in the same age groups as Fuller's.

Just as I finished the calculations, Maeva came bounding into my office like Animaniacs on speed. "So I'm thinking we can eliminate Clarence or Flaco, but their sons and grandsons would fit."

"I think so too, although we can't totally eliminate Clarence or Flaco. They're both in the same general age group as Linda was. They might have known each other somehow."

"Clarence died a month later and he lived hundreds of miles away. He was probably too sick."

"Was he? How do you know? Maybe he died in a car accident, healthy as a horse."

“Horses aren’t very healthy. They’re dropping like flies down at Santa Anita.”

I let my irritation show, even though I knew she was just needling me. She grinned, knowing she’d scored a point. “It’s an expression. Besides, I don’t see flies dropping all over the place. They seem pretty lively to me.”

“So this is a contest to see who can use the most inappropriate animal metaphor?”

I shook my head and grinned back. “Back on point. It could have been a plane accident. He was an aircraft mechanic. He might have had his own small plane, or access to one, which would allow him to fly back and forth from the Bay Area easily.”

“Well, okay ... I guess you’re right. That should be easy enough to check. Still, it just doesn’t seem likely to me. Anyway, we should nail down the names of the sons and grandsons if we can. Then we need to locate them and formulate a plan.”

Maeva handed me some printouts. “Here’s Chip Mozingo. Real name Charles. From LinkedIn. He owns and operates two 7-11s in Redding, assuming his profile is up-to-date. I looked up the store addresses. Those are on the other sheet. His interests include skiing.”

“Skiing - that’s a possible connection to the Kleins.”

“I noticed, but it’s Bella’s parents who own the ski shop. I don’t know if Linda skied.”

“Fair point. So did you find out who T.J. is?”

“Not yet, but Mozingo is not a common name. It shouldn’t be hard. I haven’t done the Fullers’ either. That’s a common surname and we don’t have first names or where they live.”

“Why don’t we split up the families. You take the Mozingos. See if you can find out more about the family through social media or records. I’ll do the same on the Fullers. We may have to travel to Eureka or Redding.”

“Or Carson City.”

“Or Carson City, or places we don’t yet know about. We’ll need Bella to approve the expenses if we have to travel.”

“I’m on it.” She bounded out of the room with as much enthusiasm as she came in with.

By the end of the day Maeva had work and home addresses for Chip and T.J., legal name Timothy John Mozingo, and the names of their wives. T.J. was listed as a program manager in the Nevada Department of Transportation. Chip was currently fifty-eight and T.J. fifty-five. So at the time of the murders, they would have been forty and thirty-seven. She didn't have the names or ages of the children, but it looked plausible that they could have been teens or even early twenties at the time of the killing.

I hadn't had as much luck with the Fullers. For a few bucks you can get ages, addresses, and family members for almost anyone these days. Data aggregators are very efficient and make our job much easier and faster. Unfortunately, Clarence died eighteen years ago, so there wasn't that much on him. His wife Candace, however, showed up in lots of data bases. I used Lexis-Nexis, and it showed her children's names as Kimberly, Brian, and Anthony.

Kimberly was now named Smith. With some database digging I was able to determine she was now sixty-five. She had two daughters and now had one granddaughter. Obviously the daughters couldn't be the murderer since he was male. Even if Kimberly had had a son he wouldn't have had the Y haplotype since she inherited an X, not a Y, chromosome from her father. The killer had to be descended directly through the male line from an African male.

Brian was sixty-three and Anthony fifty-nine. This put them squarely in the target range for the killer, just like the Mozingos, and would include any male children, possibly teens at the time of the killing. In fact, Anthony's wife was only forty-four. He could possibly still be fathering children. I didn't have names or ages of any of Brian's or Anthony's children, however.

Maeva and I compared notes at the end of the day. It was clear to both of us that we had our work cut out for us. There were at least half a dozen males who could be the killer if Flora was right about the Fuller-Mozingo connection. If she was wrong, the number could be hundreds.

Chapter 7

The next day I called Flora to discuss these names. She could have used these same online sources and provided me these names. I wasn't sure why she hadn't.

"Hello, Cliff."

"Oh, hello. You must have my number in your contacts."

"I do. Shouldn't I?"

"Of course you should. I just ... I was taken by surprise when you called me by name. Anyway, I have some questions for you."

"Shoot. Oops. Maybe I shouldn't say that to an FBI agent." She chuckled.

"My wife's the FBI agent. I'm retired."

"I'm just tired."

The banter was something new. She'd been all business before. "So I have names of the children of the Fullers and Mazingos. It wasn't hard to find the right ones in several on-line databases. Why didn't you carry it down another generation or even two?"

"You told me your client was looking for his birth parents. I'm a genealogist, not a genetics expert. I've had to learn some about genetics because of my work, but mostly I work with records, very old records. Birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates are the most reliable. Other sources like family bibles, censuses, gravestones, and obituaries are useful, but not always accurate. Publicly uploaded family trees are even worse. Much of those are based primarily on memories of family members, especially very old members. You'd be surprised how many errors appear in all of those. Most records for people living today are taken from government records and online vendors who harvest data from their users or customers. They're mostly reliable, but often conflicting."

"Okay, I get that, but I don't see why you didn't go with what was available."

"Look, your client is looking for his birth mother. I mean, that's what I thought when I started researching. It's the same for identifying this Cole, too. These sources don't give you DNA

information, only records and self-reporting which is also often fake. Now let me ask you a question.”

“I give up. Don’t shoot!”

A chortle on the other end of the line told me she’d appreciated it.

“How do you know any of the people you’ve tracked down, or the ones I’ve tracked down for that matter, aren’t adopted?”

I hadn’t thought of that. I silently thought for a moment.

“Cliff, you need the actual birth certificates or in some cases adoption papers to be sure who the birth parents are. Or DNA. And infidelity is as old as the hills. Some of the Mozingo men or Fuller men may have hooked up with some women besides the wives I’ve found.”

“Or the wives may have strayed,” I replied. “I don’t think infidelity is an exclusively male practice.”

This time she paused for a moment. I realized our reactions may have betrayed a certain sexist bias in favor of our own sex. I think she was realizing the same thing.

“True enough,” she answered. “You can come up with other scenarios. Some of the children listed in the censuses may have been from other marriages. A Fuller male may show up in the 1870 census as twenty years old with no wife. Ten years later he shows up as thirty years old with a wife, Mary, and a five-year old son. Maybe that’s his biological son, but maybe Mary was previously married and widowed when the boy was one year old. That happened a lot back then, especially out west. People died young. There were no birth certificates. Widows and widowers with young children often remarried.”

“Well, things have improved,” I offered.

“Have they? Sperm banks have been around since the 1950s. What if one of those men contributed their sperm?”

“Okay, I hadn’t thought about that.”

“You aren’t trying to get Cole into the DAR. You don’t need to prove his lineage. You just want to identify him. I told you I was reasonably sure one of those Fuller or Mozingo males was your killer or fathered your killer, and I am, but those are really only leads. You have to do the detective work. As I said before, you need to get DNA. It doesn’t have to be from the killer, at least

not at first. If you get a match on a cousin, uncle, or even sister or aunt, that will probably narrow it down to one or two people.”

“Right, right. Okay, this helps a lot. Thanks. How’s your foot, by the way?”

“I’m still gimpy. Another week at least before I get the cast off.”

“Good luck with that.”

“Don’t say break a leg.”

I laughed. “I promise. Say, did you ever find the Sullivan connection?”

“No. None of Cole’s DNA matches on the Sullivan side matched at all with the Mozingo/Fuller side. I suspect Cole is descended from some Sullivans on his mother’s side. They’re four generations back or more. It would take at least another week of work to try to trace that down to today.”

“All right. Good work. I’ll be in touch.”

My next order of business was talking to Bella again. We had some names now. Maybe one of them would ring a bell with her. I sent her an email with all the names we had so far and asked if any might have been connected to her grandmother. I also asked her if she would authorize travel to any of the cities to try to obtain DNA samples. When I didn’t get a reply after two hours, I gave myself a dope slap and texted her to look at her email. She’s a millennial. She doesn’t use email, she texts. Ten minutes later I had a reply.

Bella wanted to meet again and I thought that was a good idea. She said she could come in at three since it would be midnight in Italy and her team would be out for the night, although apparently it wasn’t unusual for them to be up working almost until then. Maeva joined us when she arrived.

Bella got right down to business after the initial pleasantries. “So I don’t know of any of these people. Fuller, Mozingo, Sullivan, Chip, Flaco. Flaco? Really? I’d’ve remembered that one. Why do you think it’s one of these people?”

“Well, it’s only at the lead stage,” I said. “We’re by no means sure. But we’re never going to make identification without a DNA match. We have to start somewhere. The Fullers and Mozingos are our best bets. They’re white males with African haplotypes, or so we think.”

“I don’t get what’s so important about these haplotypes. What are they, anyway?”

Maeva answered before I could. “They’re DNA pieces that travel either straight down the male line or straight down the female line. In this case, the male one, from father to son, to son and so on with no females breaking the line.”

“But why is that important? I’ve got eight great-grandparents, sixteen the generation before that. If I understand you, only one man and one woman in a generation can provide haplotypes. What about the DNA of the others?”

“It’s important for another reason – two actually. First of all, there’s one other thing that travels straight down the male line: the surname. It’s much easier to identify someone if you know his name. Second, in this case the killer – we’re calling him Cole now, by the way, as in Cole Case – has a unique genetic makeup. He’s a white man with an African male haplotype. White men descended from African men aren’t common in this country, at least those still retaining the African haplotype. Flora has identified two African males from pre-revolutionary times related to Cole, but no others. Either one could have been the source of the haplotype. If they were, then the killer should be named Fuller or Mazingo. Most Mazingo and Fuller descendants live back east, in Virginia or North Carolina. Flora has identified these as the only ones in Northern California. Or at least the only ones she could find.”

“But none of them live in the Bay Area.”

I replied, “True, but we don’t know where they were eighteen years ago. They could have been here.”

“How are you going to get their DNA?”

It was a good question, but I didn’t want to answer. I had several contingency plans for that. “Leave that to us.” I could see her pull back like she’d been insulted, or maybe defied. She was used to being in charge. After a moment she relaxed her shoulders but said nothing. She probably thought it was better to not know that kind of thing.

“So is it a go?” Maeva asked.

“Okay, one of you can go to Eureka and Redding to get DNA samples. Just go to one first and get a sample and if it matches, you don’t have to go to the other city.”

I looked at Maeva and she nodded at me, signifying she'd want me to agree. I knew she'd want to be the one to go. "Okay," I said. "We'll keep expenses down."

We spent another twenty minutes firming up the details and providing her with copies of the gravestone photos, obituaries, and family trees Flora had provided. After Bella left, Maeva and I worked out a plan of action and checked our calendars.

Chapter 8

REDDING

Four days later

I didn't think Maeva should do the job alone. It wasn't a one-person job. I knew I'd have to eat the travel costs for myself, but it was necessary for me to go. The Redding Airport is a former army airfield and it still shows remnants of that military look. It underwent a major expansion and modernization in 2014, but it was still a puddle jump compared to San Francisco and San Jose airports.

We rented two cars. We had the addresses of Chip Mzingo's home and both 7-11 stores he owned. We weren't interested in the stores for now. I sent Maeva over to the residence. First, I wanted to check out the cemetery where Delilah was buried: Redding Memorial Park. It's a large cemetery with the main entrance on Continental Street. The impressive twin gates are anchored by three engraved stone pillars. I drove in and first stopped at the main office to look up the exact location of the grave. Then I proceeded to that spot. The headstone was modest, but I already knew that from the photo Flora had sent me from FindaGrave.com.

On the grave was what I had expected: a light blue ceramic vase for holding flowers. I'd seen it in the picture. It apparently hadn't been changed since the photo was uploaded years ago. The vase had held flowers in the photo but now it was empty and covered with spider webs. I took it. I'd wondered if there would be another murder case cache here. If there had been, I would have picked it up, but when I checked there were none. I headed over to one of the 7-11 stores. The first one I checked had a 2019 Dodge Challenger in front. I'd checked car registrations for Charles Mzingo and he and his wife Sheila had a Lexus SUV and a Toyota sedan jointly registered in their names. The Dodge was registered only in his name. Women don't drive muscle cars. Maeva had already texted me that the Lexus was parked in their driveway. I figured Sheila was home and Chip was working. Maeva had managed to dig up the names of their children: Michael and Lindsey. Lindsey was female. They were both in their thirties.

I went inside to get a look at Chip, both to confirm it was his car and to see if he looked like his photo. There was only one employee visible and he wasn't Chip. He was blond, fair, and blue eyed like Chip, but he was too young. Besides, I'd seen Chip's LinkedIn photo and this wasn't he. It could be Michael, though.

I wandered around the store a bit to look like a customer. Over the display of chewing tobacco hung a sign reading "Confucius say: many man smoke but Fu Manchu." You couldn't get away with a sign like that in the Bay Area. You'd be picketed out of business by the Asian Civil Liberties Association. I bought a Coke and left.

I joined Maeva a couple of blocks from the residence. We couldn't set up a stakeout on the residence. It was a one-story ranch style house in a slightly upscale suburban neighborhood. I realized we wouldn't be able to sit in our cars in this neighborhood for any length of time. Not only would we be obvious, but it was over ninety degrees on this summer day, actually mild for Redding. We'd broil.

"Did you get it?" she asked.

"Yep. It's in the trunk."

"No sign of Chip so far."

So we took turns driving by the house, but not too often. Every two hours. The other one of us would set up at the strip mall on the main street that Chip would have to pass by coming from the stores.

This went on until 6:30 and it grew old long before that. I decided to cruise by the store again. I went to the one where I had seen the Challenger first, but it was gone. I tried the other store, but it wasn't there, either. I returned to the area of the house. Still no Chip. I met Maeva at the strip mall.

"Chip's MIA," I told her. "He might be out drinking or at his bowling league all night or anything."

"I saw her come out and get the mail from the mailbox. Middle-aged white woman, considerably overweight."

"Yeah, meets the description. Let's do it. It might work out better without him there." I went into the trunk and pulled out a blue vase a bit fatter and taller than the one I'd taken from Delilah's grave. Maeva got in my car and we drove over to the Mozingo house.

Sheila answered the doorbell. I made sure to hold the vase so that the name I'd had painted on it by a craftsperson at the wine and art festival the previous weekend was visible. The name was Delilah.

"Hello, Mrs. Mozingo? I'm Cliff and this is my niece May."

"Yes?" She smiled, not showing any suspicion.

"I've brought something for your husband. Is he in?" I held up the vase.

"No. I can take it. It's lovely. But Delilah's been dead for years. May I ask why this ... gift?"

"My mother – May's grandmother – knew Delilah in the Benevolent Society."

"Oh, yes. I see. What was her name?"

"Oh, she's still with us, but quite old. Edith. Anyway, she ... pardon me, but could we come in for a minute. It's very hot out here and I don't want you to lose all your air conditioning."

"Please do. I'm sorry. I should have asked, but I'm in the middle of fixing dinner."

"We'll be quick," I assured her.

Maeva extended her hand and shook Sheila's as she stepped in.

"Would you like to sit down?" Sheila asked.

"Yes, thank you," I said. "I have a bad knee." I sat, placing the vase on the living room table.

"Actually," Maeva said. "Could I use your bathroom?"

"Um, yes. It's right down the hall. First door on the right."

Maeva headed down the hall and entered the bathroom. Sheila Mozingo was a stout fiftyish woman with a florid complexion and dark brown eyes. Her hair was steel-gray with a lot of white in it, pulled into a bun. She was dressed in polyester slacks, a loose-fitting peasant blouse and flip-flops. She had a stick-on bandage on her left hand.

"I'm sorry to bother you at dinnertime. I thought your husband would be home by now. You see, I take my mother to the cemetery – Redding Memorial – every month or two. She likes to visit the graves of some of her friends and family. She likes to bring flowers. Maybe you've seen some on Delilah's grave."

“Um, perhaps.” I could tell she had no idea what was on Delilah’s grave. I doubt Chip visited it, either, but that was all for the good.

“Well, the last time we were there she noticed that the vase that’s usually on Delilah’s grave was gone. There was no place for her flowers. Perhaps it got broken or someone took it. Anyway, she wanted to replace it, so she had this one made. But she didn’t think it was her place to put it on the grave. She thought Charles would be the appropriate one. Some people are very sensitive about who puts what on the graves of their loved ones.”

“Of course. How thoughtful. I’ll be sure to let Chip know.”

Suddenly we heard a dog barking loudly from the direction of the hall. Sheila and I both turned to the hallway. Maeva hurried out with a ratty little Pekinese nipping at her heels.

Sheila stood up. “I’m sorry, I thought he was asleep in the bedroom.”

“My fault entirely,” Maeva said. “I must have turned the wrong way out of the bathroom.” She pushed her hair behind her ear. Our signal.

I stood. “Well, that’s why I stopped by. I’m so sorry I missed your husband. I’m sure my mother will enjoy seeing that vase on Delilah’s grave. Oh, I was curious about one thing. I didn’t see a grave for Delilah’s husband there. I thought that was odd. Do you know why he wasn’t buried there?”

“Oh, they were separated for years. He was Catholic. She wasn’t. I think he was buried over at St. Joseph’s.”

“I see. Well, thank you very much.” I moved to the door and Maeva did too. Sheila moved with us and shook our hands as we left. I could tell she was ready to give us the bum’s rush. She didn’t ask any more questions, not even my last name or that of May or ‘Edith.’

We got back in the car and drove to the strip mall where we’d left Maeva’s rental.

“Did you get ‘em?” I asked.

“No. It was the guest bathroom. There were no toothbrushes there.” She pulled out of her purse a package of assorted new toothbrushes in most of the popular brands. The plan had been for her to take the toothbrushes from the bathroom, replacing them with new ones. “I had to go in that one to start.

When I got out I could see you had her attention, so I tried to go back into the bedroom area where the master bathroom must be, but that rat of a dog started yapping.”

“You gave me the signal. You must have gotten something.”

“In the guest bathroom I raided the wastebasket under the sink. There was a used Kleenex, a used Band-Aid, and a tangle of gray hair, like someone pulled it out of a comb. There could be roots with good DNA.”

“You used gloves?”

“Of course.” She pulled three separate baggies from her purse. She pulled out a pen and some masking tape and marked the bags with the address and date.

“All right. Not as much as I’d hoped, but we may get lucky. How long was the hair?”

“Long. It was hers, I’m sure. The Band-Aid, too, I’ll bet. Did you see the one on her hand?”

“I did. Well, if Michael is the killer, her DNA will be in his. The match will be unmistakable. That’s something. If there’s no match with her, we can eliminate him, but not Chip or T.J. Good work in there. I’m sorry you had to get the gross duty.”

“No biggie. I used gloves. I just hope it tells us something. We can’t even be sure it’s hers. It could be a guest’s. Do you want to stay around and try to get Chip’s or Michael’s DNA? Our plane doesn’t leave until tomorrow morning.”

“We might as well. We can’t use the same ruse again. Maybe we can spot Chip smoking in the back of the store and get a butt. Where does Michael live again? Local?”

“DMV Records show his parents’ address as his official address. Maybe he’s there. It might be his snot we got.”

“Nice rhyme.”

“I try. Anyway, he’s in the merchant marine, I think from social media, so he’s probably sailing somewhere. I don’t know how permanent that is. From some of his posts, he spends time working at his parents’ store. He might have his own place somewhere. I don’t think we’re going to find it today driving around. Lindsey lives back east somewhere.”

“Okay, so Chip is our target. You take the north store and I’ll take the south one.”

We drove off in our separate rental cars. When I got to the south store I didn't see either the Dodge Challenger or the Lexus. I texted Maeva. She texted back after a while and said she couldn't see either one there. She was going to stay for an hour or so.

I didn't have any idea where else Chip would be. I didn't want to drive around aimlessly so I decided to drive around aimfully, if that's a word. It was still light. I'd look up some geocaches. I made my way to Kitsune (GC6TWCN), one I'd seen on the map near the cemetery. It was situated near a beautiful stream. It had several favorite points, and I could see why. Then I went after Stop In The Name of Cache (GC7QPTR), an evil hide, apparently. I never did find it.

It was after seven and I was getting hungry. I called Maeva to see if she wanted to get dinner. She said she was planning to buy some snack foods in the 7-11 and see if she could wheedle some scoop on Chip from one of his employees.

"You're wasting your per diem. The client will be buying the meal. Don't settle for ramen and a Slurpee. I passed a nice-looking restaurant a few minutes ago. Go in and chat up the clerk if you want, but meet me in twenty minutes for an actual meal. The Market Street Steakhouse."

"Where's it located?"

"Market Street. Are you really a detective?" She texted me a tongue sticking-out-at-me emoji and said she'd meet me there.

Twenty-five minutes later we were sitting in the restaurant.

"Any luck?" I asked.

"No. The clerk on duty said he's only worked there about two months. The manager is some Mexican guy. The owner almost never comes there. That's about all I got."

"Yeah, I saw his car at the other one earlier, but not this evening. We can make another pass by the house after dinner and see if he made it home, but I think we're done here."

"I feel bad about spending all this money, Bella's money, for not much return."

"Don't. She and her husband are both managers at Google. I'm sure they're doing fine. And she told us she was a trust fund baby. Besides, how do you know it's for little return? If the DNA match comes back with a half identical on that bandage, then

we've done it. We'll know to go after Michael. I think that was him in the store I checked out earlier."

She was studying the menu. She ordered the most expensive steak on it plus a side salad. So much for going easy on Bella's pocketbook.

"You wouldn't give a hoot if it was a corporate client, would you?" I continued.

"No, I suppose not. But Bella's a friend. Speaking of which, I know she's only paying for one room. You can share a room with me if you want. You shouldn't have to pay for your own."

Maeva is a very good-looking young woman. I'm a not especially good-looking older man slash boss. Maeva had worked with me long enough to know I was a faithful husband and a gentleman, at least when it came to the hanky-panky issue. Not such a gentleman in other contexts. I appreciated the trust her offer indicated, but I had plenty of money and it just wasn't appropriate. Besides, she deserved her privacy as did I. Ellen has to put up with my occasional snoring, but she made that bargain long ago. Maeva didn't.

"No, that's all right. I ordered us two rooms."

She nodded acknowledgment as her mouth was full of bread. She never brought it up again. The food came and was delicious. I had a beer with mine. Maeva rarely drinks alcohol, so she ordered a sparkling fruit drink. Then a sundae for dessert. I don't know where she puts it all.

After dinner we drove back past both stores without luck and met near Chip's house. I made one pass and confirmed the Dodge was in the driveway next to the Lexus. Neither one of us had laid eyes on him so we decided to keep cruising by until it got dark, but we really didn't have a plan B. We couldn't make another run at the toothbrushes. Unless he came out and smoked a cigarette or drank a beer and left the bottle on his front porch, there wasn't anything else to try. Night fell and we gave up.

We got up early and made a pass by the house and stores in the morning but never saw Chip or his son. We had to catch our flight, so that was it for the trip. We'd just have to wait to see what the lab results showed.

Chapter 9

I found a lab that handles forensic work for trial attorneys. I called and said I was an attorney defending a client and had some evidentiary samples I needed to be tested for DNA. Maybe the subterfuge wasn't necessary, but I wasn't sure how they'd treat the request if I'd told them the full story. I called and was transferred to Keiko, a forensic biologist. She seemed to consider it a normal enough request.

"How long will it take to get the result?" I inquired.

"What kind of samples are we talking about?"

"A bandage, a wad of hair, and a Kleenex."

"Are they all from the same person?"

"Probably, but I don't know for sure."

"Those will have very small amounts of DNA. The hair may not have any testable roots at all. We'll have to PCR them all separately. Say three weeks."

"PCR?"

"Polymerase chain reaction. We grow a small sample into a large sample in a test tube, basically. We can't sequence a sample until it gets big enough, and we need extra. Sometimes we have to sequence a sample two or three times, especially if it's contaminated."

I asked about their rates and was taken aback at how expensive it was. Still, it was the only way.

"Did you want to have these samples compared to your client's? That's another five hundred for each comparison. That includes a sworn affidavit valid in California courts. Testimony is extra. We'll quote rates on that, too, once you get the results."

"How about you just send me the full sequences. I can upload them to GEDmatch myself. My client's DNA is already there. If it looks like I'll need evidence in court, I'll let you know."

"That will work if you just want to see if it's a close match, but it's not admissible in court."

"I know."

"Has anyone else handled the samples?"

"Only with gloves. I think they'll only have the users' DNA on them."

“Okay. Mail us the samples. You should have results in three weeks.”

During the next three weeks we went about our usual work routine. The only thing I did on the case was the result of good fortune. 23andMe had a special offer. For a limited time they allowed new users to upload their DNA. I went ahead and uploaded Cole’s and checked out his DNA relatives. There were some additional matches that hadn’t appeared on GEDmatch or My Heritage, but none were closer than “Third to Distant” cousin. I’ve learned from forums and elsewhere that could be as distant as seventh or eighth cousins. None of the names looked familiar.

What did interest me was the ethnic ancestry data. They seemed to have a more detailed breakdown than the other sites. The killer was mostly English and Irish with some German, as expected from a white American. The African percentage was smaller according to 23andMe, just under one percent. There was no Italian component, which added to my conviction that it wasn’t a relative of Linda’s who’d killed her. There was also a small, less than six percent, Iberian component and some Native American.

23andMe provided a traits report. Cole’s DNA report indicated he was probably fair-skinned and had blue or green eyes. I wondered whether Detective Wilbanks had this description information. He thought it was a black guy because of the African haplotype. I wanted to call him, but I didn’t want to let on that I’d copied the DNA sequence. It took me a few minutes to plan the call. When I got through to him he was in a bad mood.

“Wilbanks.”

“Barry, Cliff Knowles here.”

“Who?”

“Cliff Knowles, the private investigator on the Linda Klein case.”

“Oh, right. Yeah, so what is it?”

“I’ve been talking to a genetics expert. She tells me that an African haplotype doesn’t necessarily mean the man was black. She said some white men are descended from early African

settlers. I was just wondering whether you had the DNA analyzed for full ethnic ancestry. They can tell how much African and European DNA is in there.”

“I didn’t request that.”

“Well, it’s up to you, of course, but I thought it might open up some new leads or ways of thinking about it if you knew you were looking for a white male instead of a black male.”

“Why? Did you find something in the file that wasn’t followed up on?”

“No, not at all.”

“White, black, purple. It doesn’t matter. We did everything right.”

“I’m not criticizing. I saw your department did an excellent job.”

“Okay then. Anything else?” His tone made clear he was looking for a no answer.

“No. Just let me know if you do get that ethnic ancestry analysis done. Thanks for your time.”

“Goodbye.”

If Wilbanks didn’t follow up and get ancestry or trait reports, it didn’t really matter to me, since I already knew what they’d show, but it would make it easier for me if he did and told me the results. Then I would have a legitimate reason for how I got that information. The main reason I wanted to get him thinking along those lines, though, was so that his mind would open up about the possibility of a white male. In my experience, when detectives get a suspect in their sights, they become very fixated on facts or theory that point directly to him and refuse to accept contrary evidence. If he’s sure it’s a black male, he won’t be receptive to the idea of a white perpetrator if I ever come up with one. My plan is dependent on him having an open mind later.

The results from the lab came in via email. There was a link to download the full DNA sequence from the bandage. The text of the message said that they recovered usable DNA from all three items – the hair, the bandage, and the tissue. All three came from the same person, a female.

I forwarded the email to Maeva and ten seconds later she came rushing into my office. She was obviously more excited

about the case than she let on. “So that must be Sheila’s DNA. You gonna upload it to GEDmatch?”

“Keep your knickers on. I haven’t even finished downloading it yet.”

She came around behind me and watched the progress bar show that the file was downloaded. It took me a minute or two to log onto GEDmatch and upload the new file. Fortunately, I didn’t have to create a new account. I could use the same account and manage both kit numbers.

Once the file was uploaded I selected One-to-One Autosomal Comparison. The autosome is the entire genome other than the sex chromosomes. Since Sheila had a female X chromosome and Cole had a Y, that comparison would be meaningless. But if she was his mother, then she’d jump to the top spot on the list of DNA matches. I would show a Generation number of 1.0.

I clicked the Show results button. The page loaded twenty-two paired bands of color. The top of each pair consisted of yellows, reds and green. It represented Cole’s DNA. The bottom band of each pair was solid black. That meant there was no match if I understood correctly.

I clicked the back button and got to the main menu. This time I chose One-to-Many. This is the one with the list of all DNA relatives. Sheila didn’t show up at all. Cole was not Sheila’s son.

Maeva grumbled in my ear, “Geez, I was hoping we had it. We’ll have to start over. That rules out Chip’s son, but it doesn’t rule out Chip. So what’s next? Eureka?”

“So it seems. Unless you have a better idea. She already gave us authority.”

“I’m curious. Why don’t you do a One-to-Many search on Sheila. Let’s see if we recognize any of her relatives.”

“What’s the point?” I said, but went ahead and started the necessary clicks since it was an easy enough thing to do, even if it was meaningless.

“No point. Just curious.”

The data display came on the screen. It was a random-looking list of names. No Mozings, no Fullers, no Sullivans, No Kleins or Minellis. No names that looked familiar to either of us.

“Strike one.” Maeva said and returned to her cubicle.

Chapter 10

EUREKA

Five days later

We arrived Sunday evening and rented a van. My plan for this one was simpler. Brian Fuller and Anthony Fuller both lived in town. Brian was a registered nurse, and Anthony was an airplane mechanic just like his dad had been. Kimberley, Clarence's daughter, no longer lived in the area, but I wasn't concerned about her.

My plan was to do a trash cover. That's a standard investigative technique: collect trash and sift through it for evidence. I'd checked and found that the weekly trash pickup for Brian's house was on Monday morning. So that meant they'd put their trash out on the curb Sunday night. We could snag it and hope to find something in it that would clearly have his DNA on it.

Maeva and I rode together since that looked less suspicious than two solo drivers. I thought we would need two people, though, to go through the trash quickly and return it. I made the final turn down Brian's street around one A.M. and a sinking feeling pierced my gut. There were only one or two trash cans out at the street for the forty houses in the two-block stretch where he lived. There was none in front of his house. Some people keep their cans in the driveway, but not Brian. It must be behind the gate I saw to his side yard, the one that had the Beware of Dog sign on it.

Maeva raised her eyebrows at me. "I thought you checked. Trash pickup is Monday, you said. Do they pick it up late? Maybe everyone puts it out late in the day."

"I did check. It's Monday." I drove down a few blocks to get out of sight of Brian's house. By that time Maeva had pulled up on her phone the website for Waste Management, the local garbage company. I saw her stretch the screen display to read the small print. She centered some bit of text. Without saying a word she turned the phone toward me. "What?"

"Read it."

I read it. It took me a minute to figure out what was so important and then I spotted it in the pickup schedule section. *Pickup days are delayed one on national and state holidays.* “Labor Day! Tomorrow’s Labor Day. Hell, I didn’t think of that.”

“It’s after midnight. Today is Labor Day. So he’s not going to put it out until tomorrow night. Do we stay over another night?”

“I don’t know. It’s late. Let’s just go to bed and talk about it in the morning.”

I drove us back to our motel. I didn’t want to run up the client’s bill unnecessarily, but I didn’t want to waste the trip, either. After agreeing to meet for breakfast at nine, we retired for the night, frustrated.

The next morning over eggs, hash browns, and coffee we talked over our options. We could try the same graveyard vase ploy we’d used with the Mozingos, but it had some problems. For starters, we could only use it on one of the brothers. Otherwise they’d eventually figure out something was wrong. We didn’t know which, if either, of the brothers cared about a vase on their father’s grave. I didn’t have one made up in advance like I had for Delilah Mazingo. We might be able to find something in town, but we didn’t have a ready explanation for why we were giving it to them. With Delilah, we’d known she was active in the benevolent society and had a vase. We didn’t know who would have any motive to give Clarence’s son something like that. We abandoned that idea for now.

Maeva was first to come up with an alternative. “Why don’t we go by both houses. Maybe we’ll see something. It’s Labor Day. Maybe they’re going to take a son or grandson to a baseball game or something like that. We might get lucky and pick up a soda cup or a straw.”

Not having any better idea, I agreed. When we got to Brian’s house we saw his pickup truck on the street turning into his driveway. I’d run his registered vehicles before leaving Los Altos and knew the plate number. We slowly cruised by his house as the automatic garage door opened and he drove inside. He stepped out wearing tennis clothes, carrying a racket, and sweating heavily. That sweaty headband would be perfect for our purposes, but we watched it disappear into the house along with the rest of him as

the garage door closed. If only he'd gone in his front door we could have run up and taken a swab of the doorknob.

We drove around the neighborhood a few times but didn't see anything there that would help us so we tooled over to Anthony's. Anthony, it turned out, lived in a large apartment building, three stories tall. Trash would almost certainly be dumped into a common dumpster, maybe through chutes on the inside of a hallway. There was no chance of doing a trash cover here.

Once more I drove off to find a discreet place to sit and make a plan. I found a shady spot and parked. "I guess we do the trash cover on Brian tonight," I said.

"I guess." Maeva seemed lost in thought. Her eyes were focused on something past my shoulder. I turned to look where she was looking, at the far side of the street. There were several ordinary houses, single-family dwellings as the real estate people say. I didn't see anything noteworthy. I heard Maeva's door open and turned back to look at her, but she was hurrying around the front of the van. She crossed the street and walked over to the front yard of one of the houses. Next to the driveway was a mailbox on a post. The red flag was up. Maeva opened it and pulled out an envelope. I could see that it was one of those red Netflix envelopes to return a DVD. She replaced it and came back to the van.

"We can go," she announced.

"Go? Where?"

"Home. I know how to get our samples. Just start driving. I'll explain it."

She talked and I listened. She had figured out the whole thing in a matter of minutes. We'd have to look at the details when we got home, but I could see it should work.

"Maeva, that's brilliant."

She preened like a peacock. "We can still make our original flight. We have an hour to spare. Do you want to grab a geocache before we leave?"

Now that she had proved her worth she was letting me know that she was willing to deign to allow me a bit of leisure time. "Sure, why not. I don't have any finds in Eureka."

I took a look on my phone for some nearby caches. One that had quite a few favorite points wasn't far away. I drove us

over to a small island in Humboldt Bay. There's a marina there. My geocaching app led us over to a statue of a fisherman. The figure was of a wizened, bearded fellow, covered in rain gear and bent over a fishing net while standing at the bow of a small wooden boat. The statue was cast in metal, although I wasn't sure what kind. The weathering and bird droppings made it hard to see the original color.

Maeva ran over to it first. She has a competitive streak, so even though she doesn't care about geocaching, she wanted to beat me to it. It took us longer than I care to describe. It was tricky to find but I'm the one that came up with it finally. My experience paid off. It was a molded container, a custom job. The cache owner had taken a mold of a cluster of barnacles on the bottom of a real boat somewhere and molded a clay replica which he then fired to harden. He'd hollowed out the interior to make room for the cache log sheet. It had been painted to make a perfect color match with the surface of the fishing boat so that it looked like part of the sculpture. A magnet held it in place. It was ingenious.

Four hours later we were back in the office in Los Altos.

Chapter 11

Since it was Maeva's idea, I let her run with it. She had to consult with a printer. The local Kinko's did the job. First she had to choose the right stationery. Five by eight glossy card stock was the choice since most people wouldn't have that size envelope around the house and because people couldn't easily fold it to fit in another envelope. Next she found envelopes that seal by licking, not with a clasp or with those peel-off stickum closures. That was surprisingly hard. Then she had to design a professional-looking flyer for a free car giveaway. She had ten printed up. That was the minimum order and in any event we might need to do this several times.

When it was all done it looked good. It claimed that Maserati of San Francisco was giving away a \$250,000 car to one lucky contestant. All that was needed to enter was to fill in the enclosed application that asked for nothing but name, address, email, and phone number. We worked on the legal disclaimer verbiage in small print at the bottom to make it look legitimate.

She added loose stamps for the recipient to use on the return envelope. The required postage could have been made up of a single denomination stamp, but she intentionally chose a combination of several stamps to make the right postage. The more saliva the better.

When it was done she mailed off the flyers to Charles and Timothy Mozingo and Brian and Anthony Fuller. Then it was sit and wait. Chip was the first to respond, which made sense since he loved muscle cars. Brian and Anthony Fuller replied a few days later. Timothy never responded. I sent the return envelopes and stamps off for all three to the lab to recover DNA from the saliva.

Brian Fuller's lab result came back first. It had taken longer than I thought because it turned out the lab had to PCR the envelope and each stamp separately then sequence each one separately. They pointed out that the person who licked the envelope might have had others, such as his children, help licking the other stamps. I realized then that that meant the lab fees were going to be quadruple what I'd expected. I should have been more clear in my instructions. When Maeva found out, she was livid.

“Bella’s going to kill me! I should have just put the postage on the envelopes myself. This is costing a lot more than what we told her. I thought multiple stamps would help.”

“Relax. It’s still cheaper than our travel costs would have been.”

“So what are the results?”

“It was a male’s DNA. I assume it was Brian’s. I’m uploading it to GEDmatch now.”

“Were all four the same person?”

“I don’t know. I’m going to have to upload all four.”

Maeva patiently sat by as I created new accounts for Brian-En, Brain-st1, Brian-st2, and Brian-st3. The “en” and “st” indicated envelope and stamp. Then I uploaded each sequence from the lab. Once that was done, I logged in as Cole and did a one-to-many comparison. There, near the top of the list of DNA relatives, were the four Brian accounts. Brian was definitely a DNA relative, but not a super close one. The male haplotype was different from Cole’s, too.

I checked the numbers. There was a 167 centimorgan DNA match between Cole and Brian. That put them somewhere roughly in the third cousin range, maybe farther. Unless Brian had his third cousin lick his stamps for him, that eliminated him as a suspect. It also eliminated his father, his brother, and any children he might have had.

“Do all four match each other?” Maeva asked.

I could tell just by looking at the one-to-many page that they must. They all matched Cole by exactly the same amount. To humor her, though, I did some one-to-one matches with those samples and they came back as perfect 100% matches with each other.

Maeva almost barked in my ear. “Call the lab. Have them cancel Anthony’s sequencing if they haven’t already done it. This means neither Anthony nor his sons could have done the deed.”

She was right. This eliminated both Fuller brothers. I should have thought to do them one at a time to save money. Fortunately the lab hadn’t done Anthony yet and I was able to cancel that one. The lab said they’d already expanded the samples with PCR, but hadn’t sequenced it. They agreed to hold the DNA in cold storage for ninety days without charge in case I changed

my mind, but then I'd have to pay to have it sequenced or they'd throw it away.

"Crap!" Maeva exclaimed after we digested the results. "We've been spending Bella's money like water and gotten nothing for it. All this does is confirm what Flora told us is that the killer is related to the Fullers, but it's distant."

Charles Mozingo's result was the next to arrive. I say Charles since that's whom we sent it to but it turned out that Chip didn't return the entry form, but Michael Mozingo did. I checked the record searches we'd done and I realized my error. Apparently Michael at the age of thirty still lived at home with his parents, drove a car registered in their name, probably for insurance reasons, worked in his parents' 7-11 store when he wasn't out on a cargo ship, and wasn't married. What a winner.

"No biggie," Maeva said when I'd told her. "His result will eliminate everyone there if it comes back like Brian Fuller's, it will eliminate that whole Mozingo clan, too. But then where'd we be?"

She needn't have worried. It didn't come back like the Fullers'. It was a much closer match. Michael matched Cole by 1,998 centimorgans and shared the same Y haplotype. I checked several online sources. The sources varied a bit, but it seems that that range is typical for several relationships, including grandparent-grandchild, uncle-nephew, and half brothers, but not enough for parent child.

Cole wasn't Chip or Michael, nor any hypothetical child of Michael. So who was he?

Chapter 12

We presented the results to Bella in another meeting. She wasn't upset about the costs at all. "That's terrific! You're getting close. We're going to find this sucker. So what do you want to do next?"

I looked at Maeva. We'd already considered this question. The answer wasn't easy. She answered Bella.

"We're going to have to do some more research on the history of the Mazingo family. The most obvious candidate in the family is Timothy. He lives in Carson City, Nevada. According to statistics, he should match Michael by about the right amount and vice versa, but we don't have his DNA. We tried the Maserati giveaway on him and he didn't reply."

"How old is he?"

"Fifty-five."

"That's gotta be him. He would be, what ... thirty-seven at the time of the killing."

"Not so fast. We can't rule out the grandfather, Flaco. He was sixty-eight at the time of the crime. He might have known your grandmother somehow. He's been dead for fifteen years, so there's no way to get his DNA now."

"Are you sure? Maybe he left behind some personal article, like clothing or something we could get from a relative."

"I'd be astounded. That's got to be a very long shot."

"So how do you eliminate him?"

I jumped into the conversation. "By finding the actual killer. If we can get a perfect match with Timothy, or possibly Timothy's son, then Flaco is eliminated."

"How many sons does Timothy have?"

"I don't know. We haven't researched that yet. They'd be first cousins to Michael, so a little more distant DNA-wise than the match we found, although I don't think that science is very solid. The numbers I found on the Internet included first cousins by some measures. It's not like an exact consistent amount of DNA is passed on with each generation."

"You said it could be a half-brother to Michael, too. Did Chip have any prior marriages? How old is Michael, anyway?"

“He’s thirty now. He would have been twelve at the time of the crime.”

“Did he have an older brother from a different mom?” Bella was sharp. She was quick to pick up on the complexities.

“It’s theoretically possible. Chip was twenty-eight when Michael was born, but we haven’t seen any evidence of an older child. That’s why we need to do more investigation of the family. Is there anything you can do to help us? Do you have any better information on who your grandmother knew.”

“I don’t know. I can ask my aunt. She wants me to keep going on this. I don’t think my dad wants to help, but maybe my mom will. It wasn’t as traumatic for her since Linda wasn’t her mom. But I’m confused. All these people are in northern California or Nevada. Do you have any connection here to the Bay Area?”

“We haven’t seen any.”

“I think Aunt May would be the most cooperative. It’s probably better you talk to her directly so you ask the right questions. When I told her I was hiring you guys, she said she’d be willing to meet with you.”

I knew an in person interview would be much better than the phone, but there was a three hundred mile gap to account for. “She’s in L.A., isn’t she? Is she coming up here?”

“No, It’s okay. I’ll pay for the air fare for one of you to go down. She works right in the airport. She’s a ticket agent for Southwest. You can be down and back in three hours. She can even get you a half-price ticket, which makes it cheap for me.”

“LAX?”

“Right.”

“Okay, if I’m going to be asking about your grandmother, I need to know your family’s names. You’ve always referred to your parents as that – your parents, or your mom and dad. Give me names and a sentence or two about them.”

“Oh, okay. Their names are Oscar and Jazmin Klein. They own a ski shop up near Sacramento.”

I started to write Jasmine for her mother’s name, but there was something about the way she pronounced it, like it started with a Y sound, that made me ask for the spelling.

“J-A-Z-M-I-N. It’s Hungarian, some family name from way back. My father’s two sisters are May – the one in L.A. – and

Marianne. Marianne died from some infection while she was serving in the Peace Corps in Africa.”

“How old was May when your grandmother was killed?”

“I’m not sure. You should ask her. She’s a lot younger than my dad. Our family had been living in Sacramento for years when it happened. I was seven. I think May’d only been out of the house for a few years. She was the last person to live there with Grandma. Marianne died before it happened.”

“How often did you see your grandmother?”

“Not very often. We’d go there for Fourth of July most years. They always had a ginormous party with all the family and neighbors. Lots of fireworks. At Thanksgiving and Christmas we were always so busy at the ski shop that we couldn’t go down. They had this huge pool. I loved to go there. Grandma was a great cook and she always asked me about my school activities and knew how I was doing. She was a devoted grandma. I loved her so much. She even drove up to Sacramento once to watch me when I was in a school play. That was a big deal because she didn’t drive much. Grandpa always did the driving. That’s over a hundred miles each way.”

“What can you tell me about the killing? I’ve read the police report and articles in the case file, but I’d like to hear it from your perspective.”

“What can I tell you? I was living in Sacramento and just a kid. When I came home from school my parents just told me that the police had notified them she’d been killed. My Dad had to drive down and identify her. I know she was beaten up pretty bad, but I only learned that later. My dad didn’t like to talk about it. He was really shaken up and I think he wanted to protect me. My mom did most of the work taking care of the funeral stuff and getting the house cleaned up. She handled the sale of the house.”

“Did you ever overhear your parents talk about their suspicions? Maybe they speculated about who might have done it.”

“No, I’m sorry, I didn’t. Like I said, they didn’t like to talk about it. It was so brutal and bloody. I wanted to put that in the geocache description to spur interest, but the reviewer wouldn’t publish it until I took that part out.”

“Yeah, there’s a certain fascination with gory murders, but the website is picky about staying family friendly. I think that’s

enough for now. Your aunt grew up and lived in the house. She should be the best source about your grandmother's associations."

She gave me the contact information for her aunt and we ended the conversation. I immediately emailed May, explained who I was, and asked her to call me when she had time to talk. I said I wanted to arrange an in-person meeting. I was just getting ready to go home for the day when she called. She told me she had been expecting the contact and proposed a day to meet the following week. She asked me if I preferred to fly from San Jose or San Francisco. I told her San Jose. She told me she'd book me on the 10:20 AM flight from San Jose with a return the same day on the 1:10 PM return. That would give us about an hour. I wouldn't have to leave the airport. She told me she'd get me a discount ticket and preferred boarding. That's a pretty big perk on Southwest.

I don't like flying Southwest. They operate differently from other airlines. They don't have reserved seating or business class. You have to check in on their website beginning twenty-four hours before the flight time. You get assigned to a boarding group, A, B, or C and given a number within that group, on a first-come-first served basis. Unless you check in within the first hour or so, you're going to end up in group B or C, which means taking a middle seat with no legroom and no room in the overhead bin. However, they do have preferred boarding for people with disabilities, soldiers in uniform, and a few other special categories. I wasn't sure which one she was going to assign me to, but I wasn't going to argue. I hope it wasn't the soldiers in uniform one. I never even served in the military, although I've been shot at by hostile forces in the service of my country when I was in the FBI.

In any event, this was the cheapest way for Bella and she'd gone to some trouble to arrange it with May, so I agreed. At least Southwest had frequent flights between San Jose and L.A. so it would save me time hanging around airports.

It was a smooth flight to L.A. I didn't have any luggage except a briefcase and laptop, so I planned to head directly to the Southwest ticket agent counter. To my surprise, May met me in the

boarding area as I deplaned. May was fortyish and attractive in her Southwest uniform. Her makeup was artfully done. She'd verified I was on the flight and arranged for her break to coincide with my arrival. She explained that meeting me on this side of the security checkpoint would mean I wouldn't have to go through that again when I left. She led me back into an employee area where there was a quiet break room.

"May, thanks for meeting me," I began.

"No. Thank YOU for doing this. I want to find my mom's killer every bit as much as Bella, if not more. Bella tells me you're making progress."

"Well, I think so, but we aren't there yet. Did she tell you about the Mozingo connection?"

"Yes. I wracked my brain for any connection with that name, but I can't think of any."

"Well, let's go through what contacts, especially men, that you can recall."

"I've made a list. Here."

She pulled a sheet of paper from her purse and handed it to me. This woman was serious and well-organized. I had expected to have to lead her through various hypothetical situations to trip her memory, like repairmen, neighbors, former work associates. Instead, she'd done that for me. I read through her notes and it was more than just a list of names. She'd described the connection and even made some insightful commentary on most.

"'Gentleman companion.' What's that mean exactly?"

"After Dad died, Mom didn't really date per se, but she would sometimes have a friend accompany her for special events like weddings or funerals. That guy was someone from her church whose wife had died. He was a good ten years older than her, maybe more, and pretty feeble. I can't see him having any motive to kill her or being physically able. I'm not sure if he was even still alive when Mom was killed."

We went over a few more names, but her written comments were already pretty thorough. I hadn't needed to fly down for this. The people listed were mainly Linda's "lady friends."

"I'm sorry I don't know more men's names. I was only two years out of college and working as a flight attendant then. I had my own apartment. I was all wrapped up in my exciting life of

flying around the country and flirting with pilots and all that. I really didn't pay much attention to Mom and didn't visit much those last two or three years."

"What's your gut feeling? Who do you think did it? Don't be shy about naming someone. I know you're reluctant to cast suspicion on anyone who might be innocent. In this case we have DNA, so anyone who's innocent can easily be eliminated."

She was anything but reluctant. "I think it was a burglary. I know there was no sign of a break in, but Mom was so trusting. She felt safe because Los Altos Hills is such an exclusive community. She'd open the door for anyone."

"Were there any dubious characters, bad actors, around the neighborhood?"

"Not that I know of."

"What about your boyfriends?"

This question surprised her. It was obvious from her expression.

"My boyfriends? I ..." She stopped. She seemed vexed.

"Don't take offense. I don't know if you even brought boyfriends there when you were living there. Or after. Maybe they saw how wealthy your parents were."

"When I was in high school my dates would pick me up there sometimes. I hadn't really considered them. You think I might have brought Mom's killer into the house?"

Now I could see she was lapsing into a guilt trip.

"I'm not saying that. Not at all. I'm just trying to cover all the bases. Did you have a bad breakup with anyone? Maybe someone seeking revenge?"

"No. I didn't even have a steady boyfriend except my junior year. Kenny. He was a year older and went off to the Ivy League as soon as he graduated. I never saw him after that. It was one of those typical things where we swore we'd stay true to each other, but a month after he left for back east, he told me he'd met someone else. I was fine with that because there was a guy I had my eye on by then. I think Kenny went onto Wall Street and made a bundle. Here, I'll write his name down on the list."

I handed the paper back to her. She wrote the name.

"I went away to college – down here at U.C.L.A. I never brought any of my college boyfriends up to the Bay Area. There

was no nasty breakup there, either, and anyway, nobody knew my parents were rich. I made a point to dress in jeans and T-shirts and look like everyone else.” After a pause she went on. “I brought something else.” She went to a cupboard and pulled out two photo albums. “I thought these might be useful.”

The albums had a number of snapshots of the family. The first few dozen pages were of May’s childhood years. Her brother Oscar and sister Marianne were both quite a bit older than May. The pictures made them look like they were having fun, like they were a normal, happy family. If you thought cabin cruisers and water skiing and huge birthday parties with clowns was normal, that is. Even when they were kids it was obvious the house was the site of large parties. I didn’t see the point of asking who all the playmates from thirty-five years ago were.

I didn’t really get interested until the latter half of the second album. The pictures were mostly of adults, although there were kids, too. It was a good view of the faces of all the family members. It gave me a feel for the case.

The pictures were labeled, but only by event, not with all the names. I pointed to one family gathering shot and asked her to name everyone in it. I recognized May, although she was probably only around thirteen or fourteen. She was gangly and pimply and not very attractive, although, of course, I didn’t say anything about that.

“That’s me. That’s Mom and Dad. Marianne. Oscar. Jaz. Bella.”

I didn’t recognize Bella, but then she was an infant. “This must be summertime. Bella told me they were always busy with the ski shop in the fall and winter.”

“True. This is labeled ‘4th of July’ but it’s probably the day before or after the big bash. On the Fourth it’s always a madhouse. There would have been a lot more people in the picture.”

“So who took the picture?”

“Good question. It was probably Aunt Lizzie. She would usually come and stay with us over the Fourth.”

“Who’s Aunt Lizzie?”

“My dad’s sister. She had her own place in The City.”

I knew she was referring to San Francisco. “Did Lizzie have a husband or kids?”

May laughed. “No. She was lesbian and that was before gays could adopt. I don’t think she had any interest in kids, anyway. We didn’t know she was gay then. She hadn’t come out. We just thought she was a tomboy with no interest in guys.”

I kept flipping through the pages, but it was almost all immediate family. I came to another group photo dated five years after the one with Bella as an infant. It was labeled as “Mom’s birthday.” If I’d done the math right, Linda Klein was going to be dead three years after this picture was taken. May was a cute college coed by this point. She was wearing the blue and gold colors of UCLA. There were faces I didn’t recognize so I asked her to name them,

“You know me and Mom. Marianne isn’t here. She was in the Peace Corps then. And That’s Mrs. Hickox, a neighbor. Her husband. Oscar and Jaz. Grandma in the chair. Oscar must have fetched her from the rest home. She was ancient. She died a few months after this party.”

“She was your father’s mother?” I was having trouble keeping all the relationships straight. This would make her Linda’s mother-in-law.

“That’s right. Oh, and that’s Bella there, behind that guy. You can barely make out her face.”

“Who is that guy?”

“That’s Jaz’s brother Jan. He’d been staying with them for the weekend I think. I guess they decided to bring them along. His wife is the redhead, Cynthia, and their son is the kid with the harmonica next to Bella.”

The boy looked to be about twelve. “Was that normal, for Jaz to bring her brother’s family to Oscar’s mother’s?”

“No. I think that was the only time, but I’ve visited Oscar’s family and met him before. I like to ski, too and I’d stay at their house with my college roommate. They’d rent us skis free and we’d go up to Tahoe. Jan and his wife would be there sometimes. They came to the wedding, too, of course – Oscar’s and Jaz’s. Jaz is close to her brother, I think.”

“Do you have any other photos of them?”

“Only what’s in the album. Do you suspect them?”

“They’re from Redding, aren’t they?”

“I think so, yes. Is that important?”

“The Mozingos are in Redding. I don’t like coincidences. Or, rather, as an investigator I do like coincidences, because they usually turn out to be valid leads. I just don’t like to characterize them as pure chance, since they rarely are. What’s Jan’s last name?”

“Nagy. That’s Jazmin’s maiden name.”

I started flipping through the remaining pages faster looking for more of Jan and his family. I didn’t find any. I pulled out my phone and flipped back to the page with the Nagy family in it. I took a picture of it.

“Do you remember the Nagy boy’s name?”

She looked up at the ceiling trying to pull it out of her memory. “Corbin or Cory, something like that.”

“How close were Oscar and Jazmin to your mom?”

“Oscar was ... well, Oscar. He didn’t care much about anything except skiing, but he was good to Mom. He helped her a lot after Dad died, but I have to say Jaz did a lot more. She’s a saint. Some people don’t get along well with their mother-in-law, but that’s not how it was with Jaz. They were simpatico. Even before Dad died they had a bond. They’d be giggling and laughing in the kitchen while the men were out watching a game on TV. Of course, they lived up in Sacramento and didn’t see Mom all that much, but they were on the phone a lot, I know, Jaz and Mom. Sometimes I’d be trying to call Mom and couldn’t get through for hours, so I’d finally leave a voice mail. When she called back, she’d apologize and tell me she’d been on the horn with Jaz. That’s what she called it, on the horn.”

“Bella told me you’re married. How does your husband feel about this murder investigation?”

“Yes, I’m married. I finally caught one of those pilots I mentioned. It’s been ten years now. He thinks I should just let it go, and I’ve never really pursued it myself, but I’m cheering Bella on. And you, of course. And Maeva, I guess it is. Bella says she knew her at Stanford.”

“So they say, but only briefly, I understand. Maeva dropped out quickly. It was Maeva’s idea to get the DNA samples by sending the envelopes, by the way.”

“I hope I can meet her someday.”

“I’m sure she’d love meeting you.”

“Well, you need to get to the gate soon. Your preferred boarding pass won’t help if you aren’t there when they call it.”

“Say no more. I think we’ve covered everything I can think of for now. Thank you again for your time and effort on this. I can see you’ve done some real work on this.”

“Anything I can do, just call or email.”

“Okay, bye.”

“Go get ‘im, Cliff.”

Chapter 13

I checked at the gate and the boarding was delayed. I had about fifteen minutes. On a whim I decided to check for any geocaches in the airport. Physical geocaches aren't allowed in airports, in my experience, although perhaps there are exceptions out in small rural airfields. But there are other kinds of geocaches. LAX has a virtual Geocache called, appropriately, Los Angeles International Airport.

In 2017 four thousand geocache owners were given permission to create virtual caches. This one required the user to "create art" within the airport using recognizable airport backdrop so the cache owner can be assured you were really there. I took a photo of my left hand in the shape of a dog like you do playing shadow games with little kids. It showed some corridor art collage in the backdrop. I posted it with my log. It wasn't my first virtual cache, but they're rare, so I suppose it was something out of the ordinary. Ellen would be envious.

Back at the office I went over the interview with Maeva. Her reaction was immediate: "We have to check out the Nagys. There's got to be some connection there. This is our first Redding-Los Altos Hills connection."

"I agree. You're better at the social media stuff. See if you can find some common thread connecting the Mozingos with the Nagys. I'll have Flora do a genealogy workup on Jazmin."

"Is that wise? Bella might not be so thrilled we're looking at her mother."

"Not at her mother. At her uncle's family. She may hate her uncle and cousin for all we know. I didn't care much for mine."

"Tread carefully there, Cliff. Bella said her mother was the one more likely to cooperate, but if she finds out you're investigating her brother, that could blow the whole thing up in our face. May said they're close."

"Point taken. I'll let Flora know not to contact anyone by email, just to use records."

Later that day I called Flora and explained what I needed. She understood and said she'd see what she could do, but it would be difficult without a starting point. I gave her all I had, such as the fact the name Jazmin was Hungarian and was a family name

according to May, but she wanted the names of grandparents, dates of birth, places where ancestors had lived and that sort of thing, none of which I had. I told her we were working on social media and may be able to come up with more.

I also told her the DNA results had pinpointed Michael Mozingo as a near match for Cole. She understood the significance of the centimorgan numbers. She hadn't known the true names or ages of Flaco Mozingo's children or grandchildren, only what was in the obituary, so I filled her in on what we had learned. Chip was Charles and T.J. was Timothy. Michael was the person whose DNA had been the close match.

"If I were you," she said, "I'd concentrate on Timothy and maybe his son if he has one. They'd be in the right range DNA-wise. If you strike out there, then you need to start looking at Chip's history. He may have sowed a few wild oats out there. Michael could have a half-brother you don't know about."

I told her I appreciated her advice, but it was nothing I hadn't figured out already. The problem with Timothy as a suspect is that he lived in Carson City, Nevada. In 2001 when Linda Klein was killed, he would have been in his late thirties and probably already established in his career there. The connection was with Redding, not Carson City. Still, he was a prime suspect based on DNA alone and had to be eliminated or confirmed.

Maeva was not having much luck with the Nagy social media so we went for a paid aggregator. We determined that Jan's real name was Janos and he was a retired correction officer in the California prison system. He was married, and had one child, Corbett.

We made the same search with Corbett and saw that he was still living in the Redding area and was a manager at a metals recycling plant. I broke out Excel once more and determined that Corbett would have been fifteen at the time of the murder, not even old enough to drive, but not impossible as a suspect, at least if he had Mozingo DNA in him. Maybe I could get Bella to tell me if he was adopted. As Maeva had warned, I'd have to play it carefully.

"So which is it, Cliff, Carson City or *Return to Redding*?" Maeva put air quotes around the last three words as though it was the name of an epic film.

"Let's talk to Bella first."

“Ooo...kay. How about you do the talking. I want to stay friends with her.”

“You didn’t even recognize her before. You haven’t seen her in years and probably won’t ever after this case.”

“Says you. I’ve gotten to know her better now. She’s really nice.”

“Fine. I’ll do the talking. It’s got to be done by someone.”

The next day we met with Bella again. I didn’t explain in advance why we needed to meet. I began talking about the possibility of having to travel to Carson City or back to Redding, or both. She immediately said to do what we had to do. She understood it was one of the Mozingos.

“You’re hot on their trail,” she said like a voiceover actor from an old western. “Do what you have to. You think it’s Timothy?”

“He’s the prime candidate from the DNA standpoint, for sure.”

“What other standpoint is there?”

“Location. We can’t connect him to Los Altos Hills or anywhere in the Bay Area. So far as we can tell, he was living and working in Nevada at the time of the killing.”

“So what are you thinking?”

“The Redding Mozingos look more promising from that perspective.”

“Why? Redding isn’t much closer.”

“I’ve been working on your grandmother’s social contacts. Maybe someone there has a Redding connection. Let me show you something.” I texted her the photo I’d taken of May’s album. “Expand that photo and tell me what you remember about the people in it.”

Bella opened up the photo. Almost immediately she focused in on the Nagys. “You suspect Uncle Jan?”

“I didn’t say I suspect him or anyone. Should I?”

“He’s from Redding. That’s what you’re getting at isn’t it?”

“Obviously he’s not a Mozingo. But I can’t get past the coincidence of him being from Redding. Can you tell me anything at all about him that might be useful?”

“Yeah, I can! He’s innocent. He’s a super sweet guy. There’s no way he’d do anything to hurt Grandma. He hardly knew her. He came over to that party with us this one time in the picture, but I think that’s the only time. He loaned money to my parents one time when the ski shop was in trouble. He was in law enforcement, too.”

I didn’t consider corrections to be law enforcement exactly, but I’d worked with prison officials a few times when I was in the FBI and they were generally good people with the same kind of world view as cops. I decided to drop him as a subject for the moment, as I could see Bella didn’t like the way the conversation was going.

“How about Corbett? What can you tell me about him?”

“You’ve been checking on my family?” She was getting more irate.

“Don’t get mad. May brought out her album and showed this to me. She told me his name. I’m just following up. You wanted me to talk to her.”

This seemed to mollify her for the moment. After a few beats she replied. “He was kind of a jerk when I was a little kid. We’d go skiing together, the two families, and he’d throw snowballs at me sometimes, hard, icy ones. And in the summer we went to the community pool together once. He kept splashing me in the face. But he was no juvenile delinquent or anything. Besides he was just a kid. He was nice to me when we both got older.”

She looked down at her hands and actually started counting on her fingers. “He would have been only fifteen when it happened, I think. And he was a small kid. I don’t think he could overpower Grandma. She was pretty hefty and not that old.”

“Alright, I’m not accusing him, either. Just one more question: are any of the Nagy men – your uncle or your cousin – adopted?”

“Adopted? You really think they could be Mozingos?” She rolled her eyes. With an exasperated expression she replied, “No, I’m sure they’re not adopted.”

I didn't want to challenge her, but I sat silent to give her a chance to think about it. I wasn't sure she would have any way to know. Just because her mother never said anything about it, that didn't mean it hadn't happened. Maybe her mother and uncle were both adopted. They might not even know it.

"My mom would have told me," Bella added after a minute. I could tell she was beginning to question her own statement. How would she know? "Wait a minute! I'm sure they're not adopted. Corbett was born with twelve fingers. He showed me the little nubs where the rudimentary extra pinkies had been. They were cut off right after he was born. He said his grandpa Nagy had the same thing. It's passed down the male line but skips some generations. At least that's what he said."

"Okay, that's good. That's very good." I decided to leave it at that. I wasn't sure she was right that it removed the possibility of adoption, but if she was right that both Corbett and his paternal grandfather had it, it was strong evidence.

"Just go to Carson City and get a DNA sample from T.J. Mozingo. He's your killer, I'll bet."

Chapter 14

CARSON CITY, NEVADA

Maeva and I arrived the day before garbage pickup day just as we'd done before, hoping to bag some trash from Timothy Mozingo's house. We drove by the house in mid-afternoon and the trash cans weren't out yet. They probably put them out in the evening for an early morning pickup. I was gratified to see that this time there were several houses on the block that already had their trash cans out, so it looked like the pickup day was going to be tomorrow as scheduled.

With nothing to do there, we drove by the state building where Timothy worked. The state building was on Stewart Street in a huge red brick building. We drove into the parking lot and stepped out. It was blustery cold even though it was still September. Carson City is in high desert, elevation over four thousand feet, and from the parking lot you can see the tops of the Sierras, snow-capped year round. We got back in the car. Neither one of us was dressed for the chill.

Maeva called the listed number for the Department of Transportation and asked for Timothy Mozingo. She was put through and he answered right away. She apologized, saying she'd misdialed, and hung up. So we knew he was at work. We started cruising the lot looking for his car.

It had been trickier getting his car license number and description from Nevada DMV. My California private eye license gave me limited access to the California DMV, but not Nevada. I'd had to use another online source that sells that kind of information. He drove an older Volvo SUV. His LinkedIn profile had identified him as a program manager. I hadn't paid much attention the first time around, but when I refreshed my knowledge, I noticed that the program he managed was highway safety. Maybe that explained why he hadn't bothered to reply to the Maserati drawing ploy. He drove a safe car, not a sporty one.

It took some time, but we eventually spotted his car among all the others in the enormous lot. It was in an official parking only area, and the aisle was completely full anyway, so we couldn't park and watch right there. We noted the space and then decided to

get a snack. The plan was to watch him in the lot and follow him. He might toss a cigarette butt or Kleenex as he came out of the building. We figured he'd probably be there at least until five, but agreed to come back around four thirty.

Maeva asked me if I wanted to grab a geocache, but I said no. I didn't want to get distracted and lose track of time. We hit the nearest coffee shop and split a scone with our coffee, then headed back to the lot. Timothy's car was still there.

We were still cruising through when Maeva almost yelled, "Cliff! That's him. I'm pretty sure."

I looked where she pointed. Her eyesight is better than mine by a lot, so I wasn't sure but it did look like it could be him. All we had to go on was the LinkedIn photo and one other picture Maeva had found online. It was only a little after four thirty. I drove to the end of the aisle and idled. I didn't know which way he would exit. There were driveways on both ends of the lot. As luck would have it, he walked straight to his car, backed out, and headed away from me. That made it easy for me to follow without suspicion.

"I didn't see him drop anything," Maeva said.

"Me neither."

"Let's follow him."

I thought this was obvious, but said nothing. He was alone. He drove to the Brown Bear Lounge a couple of blocks away and went in. Like every bar in Nevada, it had a section of slots and a keno board.

"Maybe he's going to play the slots or grab a drink," Maeva said.

"Could be. You want to take this?"

"Sure." She pulled a mirror from her purse and checked herself. She added some lipstick and ran a comb through her hair, all in less than a minute.

She went in first, but I followed a discreet distance behind. It didn't take long before we spotted T.J. at the bar. He was mid-fifties, paunchy, and nearly bald, much balder than the photo had shown. He wore glasses with thick black frames and a cheap sport coat and slacks. He'd been wearing a tie when he'd come out of the state building, but it was off now. He must have removed it while he was driving over. The bartender was getting his order.

A cheap-looking woman four stools over was giving T.J. the eye and he was returning it. Maeva sat down right next to him, between him and the woman. This took him by surprise. The prostitute, too. Her hot glare at Maeva could have melted all those Sierra snow caps. The bartender said something to the prostitute at the end and then came back with a shot glass for Timothy and poured a whiskey. Maeva piped up and asked for a white wine.

"I'm sorry but I think you should leave," the bartender said. Maeva was taken aback and stuttered an unintelligible reply. T.J. seemed discomfited, too.

I realized what was happening. Prostitutes have their territories, just like drug dealers. Apparently this stretch of bar was hers. The bartender kept competition out and trouble down, no doubt for a cut of the proceeds or at least some healthy tips.

I quickly went and sat down next to the prostitute between her and Maeva and asked if I could buy her a drink. I pulled out my wallet and made sure she could see my platinum cards and a healthy stock of bills. I threw a fifty on the bar. "What say we have some fun."

"Sure, cowboy." She threw a glance at the bartender, who nodded. He brought over a shot glass, a bottle of expensive scotch, and a Coke chaser. He poured her the scotch in a shot glass.

"What'll you have?" the bartender asked me.

I ordered one of the IPA beers I saw advertised. He walked over to Maeva, who had been watching me, still nonplussed, and said, "Okay, white wine you said? Sauvignon blanc okay?"

"Right, that's fine," she answered genuinely confused. When the bartender moved away to get the drinks she turned to T.J. and asked, "Geez, what got into him?"

Timothy had figured out what I had. He was free to hook up with Maeva now that the local had her john. The prossie couldn't do us both, at least not at the same time. "Don't worry about it. Let me buy you this drink," he said.

The bartender returned with Maeva's wine and my beer. He took the fifty and returned with the change, which I left on the bar. I stole a glance over at Maeva and T.J. as I took a draught of the beer. It was obvious to me that he was happy with his option. As I said earlier, Maeva is a very good-looking young woman.

My new-found friend, on the other hand, was pushing forty and needed an industrial-scale paint roller to apply her makeup. Her massive breasts were a recent addition, I was sure. She threw back her scotch and then took a drink from the Coke chaser. I'd seen this before, too. Despite the label on the bottle, the scotch had been a cheap brand, or possibly not even scotch, and she hadn't downed it. The chaser was for her to spit it out. That's why she'd ordered Coke; it had to be close to the color of the scotch, and the glass not very full to start with. She knocked on the bar for a refill. My fifty was going to disappear fast, and this was just the prelims to the big payday.

I checked Maeva again. She was making good time with Timmy boy. I heard her order another drink, the same whiskey he was drinking. The bartender brought her a glass and filled both hers and his. She got out a handkerchief to dab at her eye as though something was in it. Suddenly she pointed across the room into the casino area and gasped loudly, "Omigod! Did you see that?"

T.J. turned to look and Maeva expertly swapped shot glasses with him, using the hankie to handle his. He turned back to see her standing and still staring into the casino area. He looked back toward the slots again. Maeva dumped the whiskey on the floor and slipped the shot glass into her purse. Then she turned and quickly strode out the door.

"Hey, what the ...?" Timothy said when he turned back. Maeva was already to the door.

Meanwhile, my buxom companion asked me what all the fuss was. I'd leaned over to block her view. I'm a big guy and that wasn't hard to do. Without saying a word, I scooped my change off the bar, left a ten for the bartender, more to pay for the shot glass than as a tip, and went out after Maeva. We both hurried to the car and jumped in. No one came out looking for us. We'd paid for our drinks. Or at least I had. T.J. would have to settle for Silicone Sal. I drove out as fast as I could and headed for our hotel.

Maeva was laughing hysterically. "That was so fun! I can't believe I did that."

"I'm impressed. I didn't know you had it in you." I pulled into the parking garage and stopped.

"It's not even five o'clock. We have our DNA. Hang on. Don't move the car." She reached into a side pocket of her purse

and pulled out some latex gloves which she put on. Next she pulled out the shot glass and set it on the dash on the same hankie she'd used to grab it. She pulled out a sealable plastic bag and put the shot glass into it. After sealing the bag, she pulled out a second bag and sealed the first one in that. Better safe than sorry.

"Good work in there," I said.

"Back at you. You rescued me. Did you hear the bartender? He wasn't going to serve me. What did you say to him?"

"You were poaching."

Maeva had to process that before the light bulb went on. "You mean she ... and he was ...? So you" She broke out in more hysterical laughter. "Wait'll I tell Ellen."

"I fail to see the humor."

"I'm kidding. We can keep that one to ourselves. I saw a wedding ring on his hand and asked him if he was married. You know what that jerk said? 'Marriage is a three-ring circus – engagement ring, wedding ring, suffering'."

"Which might explain why he was there."

"Hey, do you want to get some geocaches while you're here?"

I looked at my watch. "No, there are several six thirty flights, I think, and a seven o'clock American flight we can make. We haven't checked into the hotel yet. Maybe we can get away with canceling that without a penalty. At least we can save Bella one billing day by not staying over. Save me some, too. I'm paying for my own room."

"Okay, sure. You want me to change the flight reservations?" She pulled out her phone.

"Right, do that. See if you can get us on one of those. Cancel the hotel reservation, too."

Maeva was much better than I am at that stuff. She uses her phone like it's an organ she was born with. I would never have been able to figure out how to do all that on a cell phone. I'm handy enough with a keyboard, mouse, and big screen on my desktop, but on a smart phone I'd probably end up accidentally buying a stuffed moose or something. The driving time to the Reno airport is about thirty minutes, but I made it in twenty-two. Maeva had managed to get us on a six thirty flight.

We were in the air by seven. “So the head of the highway safety program gets lubricated before driving home from work,” Maeva said as we settled in. “Seems like a joke in there somewhere.”

“No joke, and this one I really don’t see the humor in. Drunk drivers kill people.” The law enforcement professional in me couldn’t help but raise its head.

“Maybe your girlfriend will get him right to the down and dirty and he won’t have time to get too potted.”

“Perhaps using the words ‘your girlfriend’ wouldn’t be the best way to write this one up.”

“Lighten up, Cliff. I’m just kidding. So do you think we have our killer?”

“No way to know until we get the test results. The fact that he’s willing to cheat on his wife with a pro suggests he’s no straight arrow. I’m hopeful.”

“Me too. I don’t know how else to investigate if it’s not him. It would mean one of these Mozingo men has a bastard boy running around out there.”

“That or Flaco. Don’t forget about him.”

“Flaco, right. Either way, what do we do?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“Very eloquent.”

Chapter 15

It was another ten days of waiting, ten days of hell for Bella. She was so sure Timothy was going to be the killer. The DNA distance was right and he would have been in his late thirties at the time and physically strong enough.

I was less sanguine. He had no criminal record, had a solid job in Nevada at the time, and no connection to Linda Minelli Klein that we knew of. When I got the email from the lab with the fully sequenced DNA, I called Bella and asked her if I should go ahead and upload it to GEDmatch. She told me to wait. She wanted to be there when I did it.

Two hours later Bella and Maeva gathered around behind my desk as I uploaded the DNA sequence. The match with Cole was 1,745 centimorgans, not quite as close as Michael's match. That meant about a 2.0 generation distance. Timothy showed up as a close relative on the one-to-many chart, but he wasn't Cole Case. Bella muttered a few curses. "So what now?" she said after she regained her composure.

I turned my chair around to face Bella and Maeva. "Okay, let's look at the remaining possibilities. The killer is two steps from Michael and two steps from T.J. That's helpful. That means Flaco wasn't the killer. The match would have been much closer, over three thousand centimorgans. Same with T.J.'s own sons. He doesn't have any in his marriage, only daughters, but even if he'd had a kid out of marriage, that son would be a closer match to his father. This also eliminates for sure Chip. He would have been a closer match to both Michael and to T.J."

"That's a lot of people we know didn't do it," Bella whined. "That doesn't tell us who did."

"True. But there's only one kinship status that fits that I can see." I paused for dramatic effect, waiting for Bella to ask. Maeva gave me a scowl that said not to keep Bella in suspense. "A nephew to Timothy and half-brother to Michael."

Bella stopped to think. "You're saying Chip has a son from an earlier marriage."

"I'm saying he has another son from a different woman than Michael's mother. He's probably quite a bit older than

Michael. We can look for an earlier marriage but it could be illegitimate. At least that puts us back in Redding.”

Bella didn't say anything at first, but I could tell she was disturbed. This brought back the possibility of her uncle or cousin being somehow involved. Finally she said, “Okay, you warned me that you'd have to research the Mazingo family better. If you need to go back to Redding, go ahead.”

REDDING

When we got to Redding we headed directly for the county library. I dropped Maeva off there. Her job was to try to find a high school yearbook that included Chip Mazingo. Maybe we could find some indication of who his girlfriend was back then, or a buddy who could tell us that. His son Michael was born when Chip was twenty-eight and had been married six years. Chances are any earlier living offspring would have been prior to the marriage, although he might have had an affair during marriage. If we also assume he spent at least a year engaged to his current wife, that would mean he was likely twenty-one or younger when this son was born. A high school or college girlfriend could be the mother.

While Maeva was doing that, I wanted to concentrate on the Nagys. Bella's uncle was too close to Bella's mom, so I didn't want to approach him, at least not at first. I was more interested in Corbett. He would have been fifteen at the time of the murder and, assuming he wasn't adopted and the biologic son of Chip Mazingo, would be a lot closer to the age of Chip's as yet hypothetical first son.

I'd checked out that thing Bella had told me about Corbett having twelve fingers. It's called polydactyly and is surprisingly common. It's recessive and doesn't express itself every generation. Among white people, it's about four times more frequent among boys than girls. It's normally insignificant medically. The extra fingers are usually nubs growing from one of the joints of the pinkie fingers; doctors just tie or snip them off right after birth. For parents who don't know about it, though, it can be frightening, raising the specter of a child with birth defects.

I read a blog post by someone whose son was born with these nubs, actually half-fingers growing from the middle joint of each little finger. His head had also been a bit squashed when he emerged, which is also common and medically insignificant. She'd been very upset. The doctor told her not to worry about it, but that didn't entirely calm her concerns. Then a half hour later a nurse came in to check on her and the mother asked how her baby was doing. The baby was in the other room by this point. The nurse replied, "Oh don't worry about his head. Most babies are like that and look funny at first. As long as they're born with ten fingers and ten toes, that's all that matters, right?" Needless to say this panicked the mother and sent her into a crying jag. Her husband chewed out the nurse royally, who slinked away mortified. The nubs were removed surgically and the boy was a perfectly normal child.

If it's true that Corbett had polydactyly and so did grandpa Nagy, then that was strong evidence he wasn't adopted, but for all I knew Chip or Flaco or their male ancestors had polydactyly, too. For now, I wasn't concerned about that. I wanted to get a feel for Corbett. I knew he managed a metal recycling plant. The name of his company had been on his LinkedIn page, so it had been easy enough to look up the address. I headed over there.

It was a private company and open to the public to bring in metals. It would be a perfect place to fence stolen copper wire. I knew that places like this were usually close to the line of illegality. I parked in the customer area and walked into the office.

The woman at the counter was busy with a customer holding a cardboard box of circuit boards. That's when I noticed there were bins of chips and circuit boards around the lobby area with prices listed on signs. Apparently the company stripped off the chips and sold the used ones, then melted down the circuit boards for the precious metals in the circuitry. I knew gold, silver and other valuable metals were used to manufacture chips. Some of the bins had larger, new-looking whole circuit boards. While I waited, I browsed through the ones on display. I noticed two or three marked "HP SGI."

I knew SGI had been a Silicon Valley company that made high-end graphics stations and supercomputers; the first ones were used by Pixar studios for animation. They later went bankrupt and

became acquired by Hewlett-Packard. I was pretty sure HP was still selling versions of these supercomputers with the HP label.

The woman and customer were at a scale. While she was weighing the circuit boards a tall, pot-bellied man emerged from the office area behind. He had an enormous blond beard and long, curly hair like the lead singer for Twisted Sister. His forearms were covered in tattoos. He could have been anywhere from thirty to fifty.

“Where’s Corbett?” he growled at the woman.

“He’s outside talking to the truck driver.”

“When he’s done, tell him to get his lazy ass in here.”

“Sure, Ev.” The man went back into the office area.

The woman finished weighing the circuit boards. They agreed on a weight and a price and she went to a register. She rang up the transaction but didn’t hand him any money or a check. Instead he signed something and she gave him a receipt. Maybe he got paid by check at the end of the month or something.

I was the only other one in the office. When she’d finished up with him, she asked if she could help me.

“Do you buy copper wire?”

“Yep. How much you got?”

“I don’t have it with me. I was just checking. I also can get circuit boards in quantity. I wanted to find out what you pay for those.”

She reached under the counter and handed me a price sheet. It had a date at the top. “This is for this week only. Prices change. We put out a new sheet every week. It’s on our website.”

“You strip off the chips and recover the metals from the boards here on site?”

“Yeah. The refinery’s in back. Why?”

“Just curious. I notice that you have some whole circuit boards here, ones I don’t recognize. I was just wondering why the chips hadn’t been stripped off.”

“Every day Corbett, he’s the e-waste manager, looks through the e-waste that comes in and pulls out anything he thinks has resale value. What you see is what we got. So do you have anything with you?” She was eyeing a customer who’d just walked in with what sounded like silverware clinking in a bag.

“No, but that’s good info. Is Corbett here? I might want to talk to him about a volume deal.”

“He’s outside. He’s still talking to the truck driver.”

“Okay, thanks.”

I walked out to the parking lot. At the far end of the lot near the warehouse area I could see a box truck with the Hewlett-Packard name emblazoned on the side. A man in his early thirties was standing and talking to the driver of the box truck who was seated in the cab. They were laughing and from the two cupped hands gesture Corbett was making, the subject was some woman’s figure. I approached. Corbett saw me and stopped talking to the driver. The truck engine started up and Corbett started walking toward me.

“Hi, are you Corbett?”

“That’s me.”

“Hi. I’m Cliff. The girl inside said you were the e-waste manager.”

“I am. Can I help you?”

Corbett was just under six feet and built like a wrestler, with wide shoulders, muscular arms and lats. He wore a short-sleeved shirt which revealed a series of tattoos that included the Oakland Raiders logo and a parrot among other things. His baseball cap covered what appeared to be a thick shock of blond hair. Bella had described him as a small kid, but he had obviously filled out in later years. Bella would have known this if she’d been in recent contact with him. I made a mental note to ask when was the last time she had seen him.

“Yeah, I work for a small circuit board foundry south of here. We’re looking into switching our metals recycler. You handle circuit boards in bulk?”

“Absolutely. What quantities are we talking?”

I had no idea what would be expected, so I had to wing it. “A few hundred pounds a month.”

“Oh. That is small. We handle much bigger accounts than that.”

“The thing is, security is important. The boards we handle are proprietary. We’d need you to sign an agreement that you strip all the chips off and melt down the boards. The older boards shouldn’t be resold on the market. They’re not reliable. If they get

installed in a system and fail, it'll destroy our reputation and cause liability issues."

"Sure, I understand. We do that with other companies. But for those quantities, I can't offer you any better price. I see you have our price sheet in hand already. That's what we'd pay for your electronic scrap. Unless you use some process with unusual quantities of gold or silver."

"No, just the standard tech."

"Right, well, I hope we get your business. What's the name of your company?"

"DGM." I pulled initials out of the air. "So how'd you get into this business?"

"After high school I went into the army. We had electronic equipment to scrap in huge quantities, mostly low-level radio stuff but some of it was very sensitive like frequency-skipping radio, military GPS and coding devices. That was my job. When I got out, I came back here and applied. My buddy's dad owned the place so I had an in. They didn't know much about electronic waste. They mostly did heavy metals like copper and lead, some gold and silver."

"So you're from around here, then."

"Shasta High. So you think you'll be bringing us your business?"

"Not sure. I'm not the decision-maker. But I have your rate list. I'll give it to our sales manager."

"Can I have your card? Cliff, was it?"

Oops. I hadn't prepared for that. "Cliff, yeah. I'm all out. I'll call you." I held up the price sheet which had his contact information on it. He could tell I wasn't going to be bringing in any business.

He stuck his hand out to shake, a sure sign he wanted me to go. The feeling was mutual. I shook and headed back to the office. I walked in and took some pictures of those HP-SGI boards. If he was selling old boards that he'd contracted to destroy, he was committing fraud. I'd have something to hold over his head. I got back in the car and drove to a nearby parking spot to text Maeva.

"He attended Shasta High" I texted.

"Michael?"

"Corbett"

"I found Chip Enterprise High Class of 1979"

"Good I'm coming to meet you"

Twenty minutes later I was in the main library sitting next to Maeva. She had the 1978, 1979, and 1980 Enterprise High yearbooks laid out at a table. Several pages of each were marked with small Post-Its. There were patrons nearby, but we didn't have to talk. The pictures told me what she had learned. Chip had been on the football team both years, but did not appear to be a star. A photo montage from one of the proms showed him dancing with a brunette wearing heavy eyeliner and eye shadow that made her look like a raccoon. They were, as their mothers would say, a cute couple. She didn't look like Sheila to me and I was quite sure she was too tall to be Sheila, but she was wearing high heels. Maeva pointed to another bookmark and I flipped there. She'd drawn an arrow to the photo of a girl. It was definitely the same one in the prom photo. This one had her name underneath. It was in the normal class listing section where every student has a portrait shot with his or her name underneath: Courtney Beaton. She was one class behind Chip. It must have taken a lot of tedious work to find her without knowing her name. I whispered "Good work" to Maeva and signaled for her to follow me.

We adjourned to the lobby area, leaving the yearbooks still on the table. "Courtney is definitely a lead to go on, but she'd be fifty-something now and probably with a married name. She'll be hard to find. Did you find anything else ... maybe a buddy of his?"

"You saw all the shots of him. I couldn't find any more than that. No buddies that I could tell. Probably some of the football team, but it doesn't even show his position. It just lists his name among all the others."

"Okay. Let's keep looking. Maybe we'll find another photo or two."

We went back inside. The photos she'd shown me were from 1979, Chip's senior year. She took the 1978 book and I took the 1980 one. Maybe he'd come to Courtney's senior ball, even though he'd graduated. I think he was in college by that point, but you can't rule anything out.

Maeva found another photo of him in the '78 book. He was on the football team that year, too. That didn't help us. I made the next breakthrough. I spotted a picture of Courtney Beaton with

someone else on the senior ball page. Her date was much taller than she, and she was a tall girl. I looked for more pictures of him and found him the first place I looked, the basketball team page. His name was Lucas Bettencourt.

“Here’s someone who might help us,” I said to Maeva as I pointed his picture out.

“How?”

I flipped back to the senior ball page and showed her the photo of him with Courtney. “You think he’d be willing to dish on his ex-girlfriend’s ex-boyfriend?”

“Gotcha. Could be. Hey, didn’t I see a Bettencourt’s Imports billboard somewhere around here? Or a sign?”

“Really? It’s not that common a name. We can check that out.” I pulled out my phone and searched for the name. Sure enough, a foreign car dealership nearby came up with that name. A few more searches and I verified that Luke Bettencourt was the owner, or at least was quoted as the source of the sales pitch, “Treat yourself. You deserve it.”

We continued to search through the yearbooks, but we didn’t find anything else of value. I had several more ideas for leads, but this latest nugget gave me an inspiration. I told Maeva what I had in mind, and she agreed it could work. We returned the yearbooks to the desk and left the library.

First we drove by Chip’s house to check out my hunch. Sure enough, there in the driveway was the Lexus. The license plate holder said “Bettencourt’s” on top and “Imports” on the bottom of the frame. I made note of the model, color, and number of the license plate. There was a parking sticker on the bumper to a local country club. Apparently Chip and Lucas weren’t mortal enemies. They both owned local businesses and patronized each other. They might be friends, I’d have to tread carefully.

Our next stop was going to be the car dealership, but I made a detour. I’m not sure why, but I felt a need to go back to the cemetery where Delilah’s grave was. We drove in there and parked near the grave. I walked over there while Maeva sat in the car. The blue vase I had given to Sheila was there, but empty. This made me feel good in a way, the fact that it was there, but also a bit sad that it was empty. I didn’t like the feeling of having used a dead person’s memory in that way. We drove back to the cemetery

office. The man in the office had flowers for sale. I bought a bunch and returned to the grave where I placed them in the vase.

"You're a softie, Cliff," Maeva said, but in a kindly, approving way, not teasing.

I grunted in response. Then I drove to Bettencourt's Imports. It was a typical car dealership, with a lot of gleaming new cars parked out front and a showroom encased in walls of glass. The dealership handled Toyota, Lexus, and Hyundai cars as well as used imports of several brands.

I walked in by myself. We'd decided it wasn't credible that two of us would be sent on this lead. Maeva was to enter a few minutes later just to get the feel for the place. I approached the heavy-set middle-aged woman sitting at a counter. She appeared to be the receptionist. She asked me if she could help me.

"I'd like to talk to Luke Bettencourt, please."

"What's this about?"

"It's a legal matter. I'm a private investigator." I showed her my P.I. license. She hesitated and scowled, so I continued, "Don't worry, the dealership isn't involved. I'm just trying to track down a car that was purchased here. The driver may be able to help in an insurance matter."

The scowl disappeared. "I see. Do you have the VIN?"

"No, but I have a good description of the vehicle and I believe it was purchased here recently."

"Let me see if Mr. Bettencourt is available." She punched a button on her phone. When someone answered, she said to the person on the other end, "There's someone out front wants to see you. It's an insurance investigator. ... Yes ... He says we're not involved ... okay." She then turned back to me. "He'll see you. Just wait here. He'll come out."

I thanked her and stood to the side in case someone else came up to the counter. Thirty seconds later Luke Bettencourt came striding out from a hallway. I say striding because he was very tall, at least six feet five, and took long strides as though in a rush. He walked right up to me. I wouldn't have recognized him from the yearbook photo if I hadn't already known it was he. He'd put on a lot of weight and he was bald on top except for a little island of dark brown right in front. I could see the resemblance now, though.

“Hello, I’m Luke Bettencourt. What’s this about?” He didn’t offer his hand or wait for me to give my name.

“Hello. My name is Cliff Knowles. I’m a private investigator working on a car accident case for an insurance claim. I’m trying to identify the owner of a Lexus that was purchased here.”

He looked around the showroom where there were several customers checking out the cars. “Why don’t you come into my office.” I followed him back down the hall and into an office marked Private.

“Thank you for seeing me. This doesn’t involve the dealership. I’m just trying to locate an important witness. The car was a recent model Lexus RX, white in color. The license plate frame said Bettencourt Imports.”

“Do you have the VIN?”

“No.”

“The plate? You can get the VIN from DMV. We don’t have a record of what license number is issued. We go by the VIN.”

“No license plate, I’m afraid. As I said, it’s a recent model white RX350, probably a 2019 according to other witnesses. There can’t be that many sold.”

“That’s a popular model and color. We’ve probably sold eight or ten in the last two years exactly like that and dozens of other Lexus models. We don’t have any indexing by color. I can’t just go searching through all our old receipts. I’m afraid I can’t help you.”

“It had a sticker on the bumper for the Riverview Country Club according to a witness.”

This gave him pause. I could see the mental wheels turning. I was pretty sure he’d figured out whose car I meant. He was probably a member of the same club.

“Who did you say you worked for again?”

“I’m a private investigator.” I pulled out my license again and handed it to him along with a business card. “I’m not permitted to reveal which insurance company hired me. There are several involved. It was a big accident. All I can say is that my contact said to go ahead and talk to Luke Bettencourt. We refer a lot of repair work over there. He’ll help you out.”

He glanced at the license and handed it back, but kept the card. "Do you have any more information on the car ... or the driver?"

I still didn't know whether he would try to protect Chip Mazingo or not. I didn't want to demonize Chip if he was a friend. "Witnesses said he was a middle-aged man, blond hair. The accident took place near the intersection of Harpole and Churn Creek." The Mazingos lived on Harpole but near the other end. I could see he was getting interested now. Maybe he knew where Chip lived, maybe not.

"And you say he left the scene of an accident?" Bettencourt didn't need this information to search his records. Now he was trying to decide whether or not he'd be getting Chip in trouble if he cooperated.

"Well, I didn't say that. At least I'm not saying he was a hit and run driver. His car was not actually in the collision. He swerved around one of the cars and probably saw the collision happen. He drove away but he may not have realized he was needed as a witness. I don't think he'd be in any trouble or anything like that. There's not even any lawsuit filed. The insurance companies are just trying to sort out fault for the claims."

"I think I know the car in question. I have to tell you, though, that I know the owner. I've known him a long time and he's been a good customer. I don't want to get him involved in a lawsuit."

"Is he a close friend? I don't want to put you in a bind."

"No, I wouldn't say that. Confidentially, I don't much like him, but he's a good customer, or has been. We sold him a Toyota, too."

"We just want to take a statement for settling the claims. He's more likely to be brought into a lawsuit if we can't sort this out in the claim stage. As you no doubt know, if it goes to court and you haven't identified him, your records would be subpoenaed and investigators would have to talk to a lot of your customers, not just him, and he'd probably be subpoenaed."

"You won't tell him you got his name from me?"

"Absolutely not."

"Okay, that has to be Chip Mazingo's car you're talking about. He lives over that way somewhere and he's a club member."

He's the only member with that car. I know all the Lexuses there. I'll get you his contact information." He turned to the desktop computer on the wing of his desk and brought up some screen. He jotted down something on a notepad and handed it to me. It was Chip's legal name and address. Of course, I already knew this.

"Thank you, this is very helpful. As long as I'm here, can I get your personal assessment of Mr. Mozingo? You said you didn't much like him. Before I talk to him I'd like to know if he's hostile or even violent."

"No, no nothing like that. Hostile maybe, like anyone might be who doesn't want to get dragged into a nasty insurance dispute."

"Then why don't you like him? Is he honest? Trustworthy? It could affect my investigation to know whether to trust what he says."

"I wouldn't call him dishonest, at least not untruthful, but I wouldn't trust him a hundred percent either."

"Why not?"

"It goes back a long way. It's personal. I knew him in high school. He treated his girlfriends like dirt. He'd cheat on them and then eventually dump them. I don't like guys who do that. But he's married now and settled down so far as I know. He's cordial enough."

"That's funny you say that. I know exactly what you mean. My daughter's best friend had a boyfriend like that. He treated her so badly. She'd be crying in my daughter's ear every week. He got her pregnant and then denied it was his. She had to give it up for adoption. It really put my daughter off of boys for a long time. I didn't know the guy, but I hated him for that. The girl was devastated."

"No kidding? That is coincidental."

I waited for him to come out with the rest of it. *Come on, Luke, who did he knock up? You can tell me.* But he didn't say more.

"Coincidental? How so?"

He looked at me with a new sharpness. He was beginning to suspect I wasn't here for a car accident case. "You have the information you came for. Remember, I didn't give you that

information. In fact, copy that onto something else. I want that paper back. He might recognize my handwriting.”

I thought this was overkill, but I pulled out a business card and wrote Chip’s name and address on the card, pretending to copy it from the slip Luke had given me. I could have done it from memory. I handed him back his slip. “Mum’s the word,” I said and made a zipping motion across my lips. Maybe this would restore his trust. I might need it again.

He stood and this time extended his hand. I stood, shook hands, and thanked him for the information. When I came out into the lobby area, Maeva was there looking at a sporty Toyota. A salesman was hovering, asking if he could answer any questions, and obviously hoping to get a sale. I started to head to the door and expected she’d follow, but she motioned me over to her. I stepped over there and the salesman approached, too, smelling blood. He probably thought I was her sugar daddy.

“Can we get some privacy here?” Maeva barked at the salesman. He backed away, smiling.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“That’s her. That’s Courtney.” She was nodding toward the woman at the desk. I hadn’t recognized her from her yearbook photo, either, but I could see some resemblance now.

“Are you sure?”

“Pretty sure.” Maeva’s ability to recognize faces was better than mine. Her eyesight’s a lot better than mine, too.

I wasn’t far off in age from Courtney and Chip. I decided to try another ploy. I told Maeva to call me with a loud shriek when I gave her the signal. I walked over to the woman at the counter again. No one was within earshot. Maeva held back and kept looking at cars, keeping one eye on me.

“Did you get what you needed?” She asked me. Her tone was friendlier now that she’d seen the boss take me back to his office.

“Yes, thank you. Say, did you by any chance go to Enterprise High?”

“Yes, I did. You, too?”

“Yep. I thought you looked familiar. Courtney, right? Courtney Beeman?”

“Beaton. Well, Beaton then, Courtney Branch now. I’m sorry I don’t recognize you. What was your name again? Cliff ...”

I gave Maeva the signal with a hand below counter level so Courtney couldn’t see it. Maeva screamed, “Omigod! Cliff, you have to see this!” She was so loud several people at the other end of the showroom turned to look. She was pointing out the window. I looked over with a worried expression. Then I turned back to Courtney and said, “Sorry, I’d better go see what this is about.”

I hurried over to Maeva. I whispered to her, “Good. Now take my elbow and drag me outside like you simply must have me look at something right this instant.”

She did as I’d asked. When we got outside, I told her to make sweeping gestures along the street as though she’d seen something exciting go past fast. She did. I threw up my hands to keep the act going and then we walked over to our car and drove off. A few blocks away I found a spot to park and talk.

“You were right. That was Courtney. And I got pretty good confirmation from Bettencourt that Chip fathered another child back in high school.” I explained the whole conversation to her.

“That’s suggestive, but not proof.”

“I agree.”

“So you think Courtney might be Cole’s mother?”

“There’s a good chance. We’re going to have to come up with some way to get her DNA. The website’ll light up like a Christmas tree if she’s his mother.”

Maeva held up a plastic baggie. Inside was a pencil. “Tada!”

“Are you kidding me? You got her DNA?”

“I waited until she went to the copier and I snuck over and grabbed it. I had to use my bare hand, but I only grabbed it by the eraser.”

“We can cut that end off before sending it to the lab to be safe. Great work. Again. So you suspected her, too?”

“Well, any girlfriend from that time frame is a potential Cole’s mother. Hey, I’m getting pretty good at this screaming Mimi bit, don’t you think? Maybe I should get an agent.” She threw me a grin.

“Jennifer Lawrence is shaking in her boots.”

“She wears boots?”

“In *The Hunger Games* she did.”

“You into Young Adult lit nowadays?”

“Ellen wanted to see it.”

“Uh huh.”

“Well, don’t quit your day job. I don’t think there’s much of a market for elfin redheaded screamers in Hollywood these days.”

“Wasn’t planning to. So tell me this. If we get this sequenced are we going to upload it to GEDmatch? If the police or even a defense attorney ever tests the defendant’s DNA, they’re going to find the Fullers and Mozingos, and now Courtney’s, DNA all over that site. I know you created fake email addresses for each one, but they can all be traced back to us. Won’t that raise all kinds of legal issues?”

“Once we get a match and can confirm it’s Cole, I plan to delete all of them. You can withdraw your sequence from all of those sites. I’m more concerned about potential civil liability for us for privacy violation than any admissibility issues in the criminal case, if there ever is one. The killer hasn’t been convicted of any felony, or even arrested, in this country any time. His DNA would be taken and loaded into CODIS where it would match the SO sample. The SO would be notified. I don’t think the public is at risk or there’d have been a hit by now.”

“You’re worried about civil liability. Wonderful. Okay, so we have one girlfriend’s DNA. What’s next? You still want to check out the Nagys some more?”

“I don’t know. Corbett said he went to Shasta High, not Enterprise. That’s the other side of town. He was only fifteen when Linda Klein was killed. If high school then was like mine, rival schools didn’t mix socially much. And he’s three years older than Michael Mozingo. Chip Mozingo and Jan Nagy might know each other, I suppose. I still don’t see a connection, but how else do we explain anyone up here outside the Nagys having a connection to Linda Klein?”

“This half-brother that you posit must have been adopted or raised in foster care. He could have been adopted by a family in the Enterprise High area.”

“Not necessarily. He could have been raised by his own biological mother, either in a single-mother situation or as a step-

child if she married someone else. Still, you're right that could be anywhere, including the Enterprise High district."

"Speculation isn't getting us anywhere. As for the Nagys, I say we simply ask them about it. You've always taught me that a straightforward interview is the most effective technique. They probably already know about Bella's hiring us. I don't think it will come as a shock."

Maeva was right; I had always told her that. "You've sold me. Let's do it."

We had Jan and Cynthia Nagy's address, which wasn't in Redding. It was in Red Bluff, about thirty miles south. I headed for the highway. As we were driving, we discussed our approach. There wasn't going to be any strategy or tricks, just a simple interview. I would be lead. We were both aware that Bella was touchy about upsetting her family, so we intended to be tactful and certainly not accusatory.

We parked in front of the Nagy residence and went to the door. It was lunchtime on a weekday. We hadn't called in advance, so it would be a cold call interview if we were lucky enough someone was even home. The house bore a certain rustic charm. Rattan chairs graced the wood patio. Succulents dotted the yard, waiting to punish the unwary nighttime trespasser.

I knocked. A man came to the door and opened it. He was mid-fifties with buzz cut grizzled gray hair and the shoulders of a longshoreman. Metaphorically speaking, that is. He was actually a retired prison guard and looked like he could handle himself taking care of business with some tough characters. He wore jeans and a Ski Tahoe T-shirt. The resemblance between him and Corbett was striking. It dispelled any doubts I might have had about Corbett being adopted.

"Yes?" he said a bit gruffly.

"Mr. Nagy? My name is Cliff Knowles. I'm a private investigator. Your niece Bella has hired me and my associate, Maeva Hanssen. I was wondering if you could spare some time to talk to us."

"Bella hired you? What's this about?"

"Perhaps it would be best if we could come in and sit down."

“By all means.” He stepped aside and we entered. He directed us to a sofa in the living room where we sat. He took a chair across from us.

“Bella has hired us to investigate the murder of her grandmother. You weren’t aware of this?”

“No, this is the first I’ve heard. That’s Oscar’s mother then? That must be fifteen years ago.”

“Yes, Linda Klein. Eighteen years, actually.”

“Why you instead of the police, and why now?”

“Good questions. The sheriff’s detective contacted Bella a year or so ago and asked for a DNA sample. Apparently they have some sort of tickler going to review cold cases. He thought it would be a good idea to eliminate all the relatives from consideration. They have the killer’s DNA to compare with and the victim’s. The killer didn’t match either one, so he uploaded the killer’s DNA in CODIS and made the case inactive again when it came back negative. That got Bella thinking about the case again and she decided to hire us. CODIS is the FBI system ...”

“I know what CODIS is. I was a corrections officer at Pelican Bay. We’d get CODIS hits on our esteemed guests all the time.”

“Right, very good. So we’re ...”

“You’re here to get my DNA.”

I found his interruptions impolite, but it made it easier to get to the point. He didn’t need any sugar coating. “Actually, we’re not here for that. We don’t suspect you. You’re Bella’s blood relative so her negative DNA test clears you. We have some leads on other suspects from the Redding area but we can’t place them anywhere down in the Bay Area. You’re from Redding originally, is that right?”

“Right. I was a deputy sheriff in Shasta county working jail duty, but we moved to Crescent City when I got the prison job in Pelican Bay. Cyn hated it because of the constant rain, so we ended up keeping the family home in Redding. She moved back. I worked four-by-ten shifts, and shared an apartment with another officer near the prison, then commuted to Redding for the other three days. The state’s on the same retirement system as the county, so I got my twenty and moved down to this area. So

you've got suspects? That's great news. Anything I can do to help, just let me know."

"That's why we're here. I understand you visited the Klein home at least once."

"Only once. It was summertime. We used to go on holidays with Oscar and Jaz. We'd drive down and stay overnight with them in Sacramento, then the next day drive up to Tahoe for a day of waterskiing and then back down to Sacramento. That weekend it turned out the roads were closed to Tahoe so we decided to all drive down to the Bay Area for Oscar's mom's birthday, I think it was. It was something to do. She had a fancy place and it sounded fun."

"Did you bring anyone else with you? Anyone from the Redding area?"

"No. It was just the two families. Our son Corbett was with us and of course Bella was there. I think Oscar's sister was there, too, but she didn't come with us." I showed him the picture on my phone that I'd gotten from May. "Yes, that's it. That's us." He counted the people with his finger. "That's Oscar's mom there and Oscar's sister. She was a stewardess. There are neighbors and others I didn't know, but they're not in the picture."

"Did you ever visit that house again?"

"No, never. I don't even remember where it was. Oscar drove us. I'd have to ask him or Jaz for the address."

"Can you think of anyone who might have learned about that house from you or anyone in your family? Did you ever show family slides or something?"

"No. We never had any pictures of that place. The one in your phone is the first one I've seen of that event. Of course after she was killed we used to talk about it. Oscar was really devastated. He had a guilt trip that he didn't spend much time with her when she was alive. He was sort of a ski bum, but I don't mean that in a bad way. It was his passion and his livelihood. Have you talked to Jaz? She grew up in Redding. She'd be your best source."

"She's on the list. Do you know anyone named Mozingo?"

"Mozingo? No. I think I'd remember. Well, there were thousands of prisoners who passed through our system and there could have been a Mozingo. I mean I didn't personally know any Mozingos. Is that who you suspect?"

“No, not really. But there are some Mozingos who may have a DNA connection to the killer. We think maybe the killer was the child of a Mozingo, probably out of wedlock. Maybe adopted. It’s just a possibility we’re checking out.”

“Someone in Redding named Mozingo?”

“We don’t have any reason to think any Mozingo was personally implicated. I can’t really say why. It’s just a lead.”

“No, like I said, I don’t know any Mozingos.”

“How about a woman, a teenager back then, named Courtney Beaton? Or Branch.”

“No, I’m afraid not. No Courtneys, no Beatons. No Branches, either.”

“Do you know any families you associated with who had adopted children? Or foster children? Or maybe a single mother who was never married?”

His responses had been immediate up to this point. He took some time to ponder this one. Finally he replied, “No, not that I recall. But Cynthia would know better. She’s the one who knew Corbett’s friends and the other mothers.”

“Is she here?”

“No, she works. Hang on. Let me text her.” He got up and walked into some other room to get his phone. He returned with it in hand, texting. “She usually replies pretty quick. Can I get you guys something while we wait? Coffee? Beer?”

“Beer sounds good,” I replied.

“Tea for me, if you have it. Otherwise, just ice water,” Maeva added.

“Beer and tea coming up.” He disappeared into the kitchen. He returned surprisingly fast. The beer could easily be explained by pulling a cold one from the fridge, but teakettles take a long time to heat up and the tea itself a while to steep. He must have had one of those Keurigs that heat the water almost instantly. Maeva’s tea consisted of a cup of steaming water with the teabag tag hanging over the edge. He handed me the beer, then with his free hand pulled out coasters for both of us. “Sugar or cream?” he asked Maeva.

“Sugar, thank you.”

He came back out with a saucer, spoon and a sugar bowl for Maeva and a beer for himself. He sat again and we lapsed into

casual conversation as we drank our potables. He ranted about all the rain in Crescent City again for a bit and how much nicer it was in Red Bluff. Personally, I thought the regular hundred-plus degree summer days were no great improvement, but if you grew up in the environment, it felt like home.

“So how’d you get into P.I. work?” he asked me.

“I was in the FBI. After retirement I needed to do something.”

“You know Bevan Gilligan?”

“No. Is he an FBI agent?”

“Was. In the Eureka office. He’d come to the prison for interviews. I know his bosses were in San Francisco. I think he’s still there.”

“Right. Eureka is a Resident Agency out of San Francisco. I didn’t work up there and didn’t know those guys. I’ve been retired awhile now. Maybe he came in after I left.”

“Maybe. Hey, have you talked to Corbett? He might know if any of his classmates were adopted. I know in my high school there was a girl adopted from Korea. Everybody knew it.”

Fortunately, I didn’t have to answer that. I didn’t want to explain that I’d talked to Corbett under a false cover. Nagy’s phone clicked, signaling a text. He read it.

“Cynthia says the only one she remembers is Howard Mackie. I forgot about him. He was Corbett’s friend back in junior high. He was Chinese. His parents, the Mackies, are white, so obviously he was adopted.”

“Ask her about the names Mozingo, and Courtney Beaton,” Maeva said.

Nagy asked her for the spellings and then texted them to his wife. She replied no.

“She’s asking why I’m asking. ”

“Don’t try to explain it over a text,” I replied. “Wait until she comes home. I tell you what. You’re right about Corbett. I should talk to him. I have his business address, that metal recycling place. I think we’ll go there next.”

“You want me to call him and tell him you’re coming? I’m sure he’ll want to cooperate.”

“No, I’d rather you don’t. I’ve found it works better if the interviewees don’t have time to worry about us. People can get all

worked up wondering, or want to do it on the phone. In fact, we should get going if we want to get there before closing.”

“No problem. Here’s his number if you miss him at work.” He brought up his contact list and showed Corbett’s entry. Maeva snapped a picture with her phone. I would never have thought to do that.

I took one more slug of beer, but I was only about two-thirds through the bottle. It was a waste, but I wanted to get out of there before he posed any more awkward questions, so I stood. Maeva had already finished her tea somehow. She must have scalded her tongue. We shook Nagy’s hand and thanked him as we left.

We got outside and Maeva asked me for the keys. “I barely had more than half that beer,” I protested.

“My turn.”

“Fine.” I handed her the keys.

She drove us back to Redding. I gave her directions to the metal recycling plant. On the way I explained that I had posed as a customer when I spoke to Corbett earlier. I’d only texted her that I found out his high school. I hadn’t mentioned the rest of it.

“So now you’re going to come clean with him?”

“I think we have to. He’ll be in touch with his parents sooner or later. Better that we broach the subject ourselves. He may be pissed at me impersonating a client, but maybe he won’t tell his parents that part. If he talks to his dad right now and hears about us, they’ll probably both be ticked. I want to keep Jan Nagy on our side at least.”

“I was surprised he was so cooperative.”

“Me too. I don’t think he realized we were focused on whoever he or his wife or family may have told about the house. He seemed to think we were just asking in general who might have heard second or third-hand about their visit.”

“If Cynthia gabbed to one of her friends about this lavish place they visited and that woman passed it on, even accidentally, to the wrong person Maybe that’s the connection.”

“It would have to be more than that,” I said. “Someone would have to get an address and how to get in. There’s a wrought-iron gate. Idle gossip isn’t going to do it.”

“You think Janos was lying – or mistaken – about who was there. Maybe someone else was there. Who took the picture, anyway?”

“According to May it was her gay aunt, John Klein’s sister, Lizzie, although I think she was guessing. Anyway, that’s just one event. There were parties and scads of guests over the years. Many people knew about that house and that a widow lady was living there alone.”

“I know, but any of them connected to Redding or Mozingo?”

“That’s what we’re trying to find out.”

“What about this Mackie kid? The DNA didn’t show Chinese did it?”

“No, it didn’t, just a small trace of Asian/American Indian, and if he was in the same class as Corbett, he’d be too young.”

When we got ten minutes out from the recycling plant I called it to see if Nagy was still there. The woman who answered asked me who I was and I gave her my name and said I had been in earlier.

“Oh, yeah. Corbett said to tell him if you called. Hang on. I’ll get him.”

“No, wait. I’m getting another call on the other line. I have to take that. Just tell him I’ll be coming back there in a few minutes.”

“Okay.”

“He’s there,” I told Maeva.

I directed her the rest of the way and we pulled into the customer lot.

Chapter 16

We both entered the office. The air conditioning was on full blast and the cool air was a pleasant change from the outside air which was still over ninety-five degrees. The woman yelled back into a hallway area to alert Corbett we were there. He came out quickly and ushered us back into an office area. He already had a standard contract out, ready for me to sign. He walked around behind his desk and gestured for us to sit. Two folding chairs that looked like they had been turned in as scrap metal awaited us. We remained standing.

“Corbett, this is my associate Maeva Hanssen. I gave you my real name before, but I wasn’t honest with you. I apologize for that. I’m a private investigator. Your cousin Bella hired us.”

He stood mute for several seconds. “Bella hired you to investigate me?”

“No, not at all. She doesn’t even know we’re interviewing you. She hired us to find out who killed her grandmother, your uncle Oscar’s mother. Our investigation has led us here. We’re hoping you can help us.” I nodded to Maeva and she pulled a small notepad and pen from the fanny pack she wore.

His eyes widened. I’d expected him to be upset at my misrepresentation, but he seemed more nervous than angry. He’d still been standing, but now he sat down. We did the same.

“I ... but I don’t know anything about that.” I’d hoped for something more along the lines of “How can I help,” but remained silent, waiting for our next move.

“I have a few questions you can help us with. Do you know anyone named Mozingo?”

He seemed to relax a little bit at this. He leaned back a little and stroked his chin as though giving it deep thought. “No, not that I can think of. We have hundreds of customers every year. I could search our records.”

“No, that won’t be necessary. How about a woman named Courtney, Courtney Beaton, or possibly Courtney Branch?”

“Our part-time bookkeeper is named Courtney, but not those last names. She’s only twenty-five or so. Hey, shouldn’t this be the job of the police? They investigated that years ago.”

“They still have an open case, but it’s a cold case. I’m working in conjunction with them.”

“Why are you coming to me, anyway?”

“We believe the killer is from Redding, or has some connection here. You’re one of the few people we know who is from Redding and has been to that house. You and your parents.”

Corbett sat up straight again and looked down nervously at his hands. I noticed the little finger of one hand twitching. He placed his hands in his lap, blocked from our sight by the desk. I decided to remain silent until he spoke, a standard interviewing technique.

He cleared his throat and looked up again and said, “I don’t know anything about that. I’d help if I could but ...” he shrugged as though that finished the sentence.

I was sure he knew something. I’ve seen or read a lot of crime stories on television, movies, or books where the detective can tell the suspect is lying by his body language. I’ve mostly felt that was BS. I’ve interviewed dozens of crooks during my FBI days, and many of them, most of them in fact, could lie as smoothly as a politician, not a tic or a stutter. Unless I had definite proof of that, I couldn’t tell they were lying. But that holds more for practiced con men, salesmen and the like. The ordinary honest person does sometimes betray nervousness in physical ways. That’s why lie detectors work – sometimes. But that doesn’t always mean they’re lying.

“Do you know anyone who was adopted?”

“No, no one.” He blurted this out in a voice too loud.

Why would he lie about that? Mackie couldn’t be the killer. It was time to find out. “What about Howard Mackie?”

The color drained from his face like a vampire had just exsanguinated him. Sweat beads burst from his forehead like a leaking sprinkler system. He began to shudder. It was the most extreme reaction I’d ever seen. Okay, so it’s not always BS. Body language can be an obvious tell sometimes.

“Bull’s-eye. What is it, Corbett? You’re shaking like a no-tell motel vibrator bed.”

“I don’t know anything. Get out. GET OUT!” He stood and reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a gun, a .45 revolver.

His hand was shaking so badly he couldn't have hit much, but we were only three feet away. Even in that state, he couldn't miss.

I put my hands up to shoulder height. "Whoa, calm down, Nagy. We're not here to threaten you. It's just a simple question." I was directly across from him. Maeva was more at the corner of the desk. I don't know how she did it, but suddenly she was standing right next to him pressing a .32 revolver to his temple.

"DROP IT, NAGY. NOW!" Her voice cracked, but she sounded serious as hell. He put the gun on the desktop. I grabbed it.

"For God's sake, keep your voice down," he croaked.

As though on cue, a woman's voice yelled down the hall, "What's going on? Are you okay, Corbett?"

He cleared his throat and called back more or less normally, "I'm fine, Lisa. It's nothing. I'll be out in a minute."

In a softer voice I said, "No more bullshit, Nagy. I said Mackie's name and you about dropped a load in your pants."

"Okay, I'm sorry about the gun. I'm sorry, all right? I shouldn't have done that. Mackie's my boss. He owns this place. Not Harold, his father. James Mackie. I told you before that the father of one of my classmates owned the business. If anyone here heard what you said, that you were investigating him for murder because of me, I could be fired. I panicked."

"Try again. The truth this time. You know something about the murder."

"Jesus. I was a teenager back then, fifteen, I think. I couldn't even drive. Harold was even younger than me. I barely even remember that place. I didn't have anything to do with it." Sweat was still pouring off him in bucketfuls.

Maeva was standing directly behind him now, with the gun pointed at the back of his head. She stayed silent, letting me keep the lead. "I'm waiting," I said. "That's not an answer to my question. What do you know about the murder? You're hiding something."

A sudden calm came over Nagy. Some color returned to his cheeks. "I'm not saying any more. So are you going to shoot me?" He smiled.

“You pulled the gun on me, remember? Maybe we should just call the police in and have them sort it out. This gun is registered to you, I’ll bet.”

“Go ahead, call them. Your ‘associate’ pulled her gun on me in my place of business and kept me covered while you rifled my desk and took my gun, which is a perfectly legal registered firearm. Who do you think they’re going to believe?”

“Whom,” Maeva said, the first time she’d spoken since arriving.

“What?”

“‘Whom do you think they’re going to believe’, not who.”

“You’re the grammar police, too?” Nagy sputtered.

I wasn’t sure why Maeva chose to yank his chain. Maybe it was just to show him we weren’t impressed or intimidated by his threat.

I repeated my question. “What do you know about the murder, Nagy? It’s all going to come out. The sooner you tell, the better for you.”

“Get out or shoot me. I’m calling the police now.” He picked up the phone.

“Play it your way, Nagy. I smell blood, and it’s going to be yours. We’ll leave, but I have several nice photos of all those HP boards out front marked for sale. I know the security director of Hewlett-Packard. When he finds out you aren’t melting down the boards, he’ll pull their business. The boards are probably faulty or out of date. If one of those gets installed in one of their supercomputers and it fails, they could be liable for hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of dollars unless they could prove it wasn’t installed by them. They won’t take that chance. They could even sue you.”

He put the phone down and took a long time to reply. “Hold on, you can’t do that. HP is half our business now. We just bought another smelter to handle the volume. Mackie had to take out a loan. We’re barely covering costs right now. We’d go broke. I’d be out of a job.” His words sounded like he was desperate, but his demeanor didn’t sell it.

I pulled up the photo of the boards on my phone to show him I wasn’t bluffing.

He dropped his voice to the barely audible level. "Okay, look. Jesus. You're right. I do know something. I didn't have anything to do with it, not on purpose, but I may have an idea who did it."

"Okay, out with it."

His whispered, "Be quiet. Not here. I think Lisa can hear us. Anyway, I have to look some things up, get some dates and names at home. I'll meet you after work, wherever you want."

"The Home Depot parking lot down the street. Six o'clock sharp okay?" I remembered the store because there had been a gaggle of Latino men, probably all illegal aliens, at the driveway entrance looking for work. A couple of them held signs. One of those read "Honest man. Will take anything." That struck me as a mixed message.

"Sure. I'll be there. I know what your car looks like. Now I gotta get out there. Lisa's going to wonder after all that yelling."

"Okay, we're leaving, but be there or you're out of business."

"What about my gun?"

I didn't want to carry his gun away. That would be stealing, although I could probably justify it as self-defense if the police believed me; but he could call them and say I stole it. It would be our word against his and we did enter his office armed.

"All right. I'm giving it back, but I'm taking the ammo. I don't want to get shot in the back. I'll leave that in the parking lot when we go, out of sight from the office. You can go out and retrieve it. Do you have any more in your desk?"

"Same drawer where the gun was."

"Maeva, get the bullets."

Maeva tapped Nagy on the shoulder and told him to move away from the desk. She still held her gun pointed at his head. He backed up slowly. She tucked her gun into her fanny pack. She moved around and reached into the still-open drawer. She pulled out a box of .45 caliber cartridges. She looked around inside to make sure there weren't any more loose ones, then went through the other drawers. That was all of it. She came around to my side. I was still holding Nagy at gunpoint with his own gun. I unloaded his weapon and put the shells in my pocket. Then I put the gun

down on his desk. He stayed back and made no attempt to pick it up.

With a jerk of my head I signaled Maeva to leave. She started toward the door and I followed her, keeping my eye on Nagy. He stayed standing, not moving a muscle. When we got out to the parking lot there was no one around. I told Maeva to put the ammo on the ground. I handed her the loose shells I had and she put those next to the box. We got in the car and backed out. I saw Corbett walking out, nothing in his hand, presumably to pick up the ammo. We drove off.

“You brought your gun?! Why?” I said as we drove away. “How’d you get through TSA?”

“You dangled me like bait last time. I’m a woman, Cliff. I can’t take care of myself physically the way you can, and you don’t have to the way women do. I always carry something when I’m in an unfamiliar situation with men I don’t know and trust.”

“Something? A gun? Through TSA?”

“It’s a starter pistol. Metal, but non-functional. The barrel is plugged. It just makes a noise. It was in my checked baggage with a note wired to it saying what it was. It’s legal. Look it up.”

“You bluffed him with a toy gun? Jesus.”

“It’s not a toy. And you’re welcome.”

“Okay, okay it worked out. This time.”

“You think he was telling the truth? Will he show?”

“Yes, no, and no.”

“There were only two questions.”

“Yes and no to the first one, no to the second. He was telling the truth about knowing something, but I don’t believe he had to go check names and dates like he said. He’s cooking something up, maybe a story, maybe an ambush.”

“An ambush? Now it’s my turn to freak out.”

“I plan to stand right under the security camera in the parking lot. Nothing’s going to happen there. It will still be light. I want you to video it, too, at least the beginning as he approaches us, so he knows he’s being saved in the cloud. You have your toy gun and I’ll have my hand in my pocket so he’ll think I’m armed, too.”

“Fine. So what could it be – the thing he knows? Something about Harold Mackie? He’s Chinese. He can’t be the killer.”

“No way to know until he tells us. It could be a bluff just to get us out.”

Chapter 17

We arrived at the shopping center a half hour early. It was still over eighty, but I wore a windbreaker to hide the gun I didn't have. Since it was Daylight Savings Time it was still plenty sunny. Nagy showed up early, too, about ten minutes after we did. I stood with my gun hand in my jacket pocket, Maeva with hers in her fanny pack. Nagy parked, got out of his car and walked towards us. I pointed up at the camera a few feet away. Understanding, he showed us his hands, fingers splayed, before letting them swing normally as he walked.

"I'm not armed," he said as he came up to us.

"Good to know," I replied.

"Okay, you really can't tell Mackie about this. Or HP. I *will* lose my job. My wife had to quit her job – she's got a medical condition – and now she's pregnant."

"Another medical condition." I shouldn't have said it. It was flip. I regretted it immediately, but he didn't seem to take offense.

"Right. I don't know how we're going to make it as it is. If I lose my job, we'll be on the street. So I understand what you're doing. I want the right thing for Bella, too."

"That's not what you came here to tell us. You know something. What?"

He looked around. There were people coming to and from the store entrance, but none in earshot. "Okay, so I *might* know something. Now don't get all judgy. I was a kid." He stopped to compose himself and I was tempted to snap at him to get on with it, but I held my tongue. "I was there at the lady's house, the mansion as I thought of it. I was totally blown away. Everything was fancy, gaudy, expensive-looking. Opulent. The fancy rugs, the artwork in these gold-plated frames. She had silver, too: masses of sterling silverware, tableware. I knew it must be worth a fortune." He stopped to get a read on my reaction.

"Go on," I said, betraying no emotion.

"Okay, so I did a stupid thing. I swear, it was the only time I did anything like that. I took one of the spoons and put it in my pocket. I knew Harold's dad bought stuff like that. Him and me,

once we found a gold earring under the bleachers at the school. We turned it in to his dad and he gave us ten bucks.”

“I get it. You took it. Who’d you tell?”

“I never turned it in for the money. Not to Mr. Mackie. I was showing it around the school to a few guys I know, bragging, you know, trying to be cool. A couple days later, maybe a week, this big kid came up to me after school as I was walking home. I didn’t recognize him. He didn’t go to my school, I’m sure of that. I was by myself. He told me he heard about what I did, the spoon, and asked if he could see it. I still had it in my backpack, so I showed him. I thought he was going to take it from me, but he was a big dude and I didn’t think I had any choice.

“He said he’d give me twenty bucks for it if I told him where the house was. I didn’t want to, but he grabbed my arm and squeezed hard. He was a lot bigger than me – maybe six three. I was scared, so I told him the name of the street. It was a funny name. I used to joke about it when I told my friends – Titicaca – which I know now is a famous lake down in Mexico or someplace, but back then, you know, we were just kids and I’d never heard of it. Just, like ‘titty’ and ‘caca’ were hilarious to us. He already knew that name, so he must have picked that up from whoever told him. I didn’t know the address, but it was a short street, like a court, and it was the only house with an iron gate. I didn’t tell him the city, either, because I really didn’t remember it. I just said it was near San Francisco. I figured he couldn’t find it with that. He gave me the twenty and took the spoon. I never told anyone.”

“So this was just a few days after your visit there?”

“More like two weeks, but, yeah, that’s right.”

“She wasn’t killed for another three years. You’re saying you think it’s this guy?”

“Like I said, I *might* know something. Maybe it’s irrelevant, but after it happened I worried that maybe I’d set it up that way, without meaning to.”

“Did you ever find out who that guy was? His name?”

“Not then. I didn’t see him around at all for years. But then years later I was driving on 99 in Chico and got pulled over for speeding. The cop – that was the guy. I didn’t recognize him at first, with his sunglasses and uniform, but when he saw my driver’s license he started sorta chuckling like, and removed his

sunglasses so I could see his face. I recognized him then. I saw his name tag. It said Buxbaum. He was a patrolman with Chico P.D. He said something like 'You've grown up, Nagy.' I pretended I didn't know him. I didn't really think he had done the murder, but just in case, I didn't want him to think I could implicate him. I just said 'Do I know you?' He chuckled again and said that he'd let me go without a ticket if I didn't tell anyone. He repeated that real ominous, like 'Keep your mouth shut.' That's what made me think maybe it really was him."

"Did he say keep your mouth shut about the spoon thing or about the ticket?"

"He just said if I kept my mouth shut he'd let me go with a warning. That's all. It could be either, I guess, but why would a cop ever say that just for giving someone a warning instead of a ticket? You think anyone would call up the department and complain about a cop not ticketing him?"

"Did you ever see or hear from him again?"

"No, never. That's it. That's the whole thing."

I looked at Maeve. She was scowling. I could tell she was feeling the same thing I was. Something about the story didn't compute. He had it down pat, and it felt too rehearsed. I nodded to give her the go-ahead.

"You're lying, Nagy," she said with steel in her voice. "What aren't you telling us?"

"It's the truth. I swear."

"You started sweating bullets when we mentioned Mackie. Why?"

"Mr. Mackie is my boss. He's the owner. I was afraid you were going to go in and tell him I'm a murder suspect. I just told you, my wife's pregnant and lost her job ..."

"You lied when we asked you if you knew anyone who was adopted. Why?"

"I didn't think about it. I didn't remember about Harold. He's a doctor now down in the Bay Area. I haven't seen him in years. He doesn't get along with his parents so he never comes up to Redding. When I heard his name, then I realized I'd answered you wrong. I knew you'd think I'd lied. Why is it important anyway, that someone is adopted?"

“The sheriff’s department has DNA samples of the killer. If you’re lying, it will be easy enough to find out once we get a DNA sample of this Buxbaum guy. If you want to change your story and tell us the truth, now is the time.”

I gritted my teeth when Maeva said this. I didn’t want anyone I didn’t trust knowing we were pursuing the DNA angle. At least she hadn’t said we have the sample, only the sheriff, and she hadn’t mentioned about the Mazingo connection.

“I did tell you the truth. In fact, that’s great. They should be able to get a DNA sample from a fellow cop, right? In a murder investigation? His department will make him do it. You can confirm it, if it really is him, I mean.”

I was afraid Maeva was going to give away something more about what we knew, so I took over again. “Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to check out your story. If it checks out, I’ll keep mum about the circuit boards. If it doesn’t, well better start working on your resume.”

“You aren’t going to talk to Mr. Mackie are you? I’m in a little hot water with him right now and anything like this could ... well, he could send me packing. Or my parents; don’t tell them. They’d be devastated.”

“Not if your story checks out. If it doesn’t, all bets are off. We did talk to your dad earlier today, before we first talked to you. He may call you. Obviously we didn’t say anything about what you just told us.”

“Thanks for the heads up on that. Okay then. That’s it. I told you the truth. I’m leaving. Now just leave me alone. Leave the whole case alone. Let the sheriff’s detectives handle it.”

He turned and walked away. There was no point in going after him. He hadn’t been aggressive and I didn’t want the security camera to record us looking like we were pursuing or threatening him. We knew where to find him if we needed to later. We watched as he drove away.

“Wow! Talk about your major development,” Maeva said. “Are you going to tell Bella?”

“Good question. What do you think?”

“I think it would be a bad idea. She didn’t like the idea of us investigating her uncle or cousin. If we tell her, it’s bad either way it goes. If he’s telling the truth and Buxbaum is our guy, then

she knows cousin Corbett is a thief and helped kill her grandmother. If it's all BS, which I think it is, she'll know he's a liar and didn't cooperate in the investigation. If we don't tell her and the story doesn't check out, we can move on without puncturing her balloon about Corbett. If it does check out, we'll have to tell her."

"I agree. For now. We have plenty to work on. Courtney's DNA, Buxbaum, Harold Mackie. I still want to confirm he's Chinese. The name isn't."

We found a restaurant and ordered dinner. While we were waiting, Maeva did some searches on her phone. She eventually came up with a website for Dr. Harold Mackie's practice in Fremont, California. He was an orthopedic surgeon. His photo was there and he was Chinese for sure. He had degrees from Sacramento State and U.C. Davis Medical School, which made sense for someone from Redding. At least Nagy was truthful about that.

Maeva put away two pork chops with fries and a Caesar salad, washed down with a strawberry shake. I settled for a large chili bowl and cornbread, with a beer, of course.

"I don't believe him," Maeva said between slurps of her shake. "But part of it makes sense. We needed to find the connection between Redding and Los Altos Hills and this does it. Redding kid sees this ritzy house, steals some silver, talks about it and a local punk extorts the street name and description. It takes him a few years to track down the name and find it. He didn't have the city, the address, and probably not even the correct name of the street. Maybe he searched Titty Kaka like boobs and K's or something phonetic. Even Titicaca correctly spelled would have gotten a bunch of links to South America."

"Nagy said it was in Mexico."

"I know. But that gives it a ring of credibility. Why intentionally say something you knew was false if you're trying to convince us?"

"It would be possible once you found the street, but it's a tiny cul-de-sac. Only three houses on it. And it was a court, not a street, road, or avenue. That would make it harder to find online without that. Remember, she was killed back in 2001, and Buxbaum, if the story is true, would have heard the story three

years before that, 1998. There was no Google Maps then. Search engines weren't very developed and mapping, well, I think Mapquest was there but how good was it? He might have needed to use paper maps. Would he have had access to a computer? Did that explain the three year delay?"

"Now the big question: Are we going to try to get Buxbaum's DNA?"

"Chico's not far, but not this trip. He's law enforcement, assuming he's still with the department. We don't even know that. We need to think this through. Let's follow through on our leads first and see if we can prove Nagy's telling lies. It's a lot dicier in terms of the legal issues with DNA if a cop is forced to give it, which he would if arrested."

"You're the boss."

When we got back in Los Altos the next day, we sent Courtney Branch's DNA sample off to the lab. I also started checking out Buxbaum. I didn't have a first name. I put Buxbaum and Chico police into Google but got nothing on the first two pages. I tried Yahoo! and Dogpile with no better luck. If he existed, he might have left the force long ago. He might have been on a different force, or Nagy might have remembered the name wrong. Or maybe he's there and I just can't find him. I went back to Google and started following all the links, even down to page five.

Maeva checked out Harold Mackie a bit more. We got a credit report for him and verified his previous addresses in Redding. He's definitely the one who was Corbett's friend. He got four and half stars as a Yelp rating. They were mostly fives, but somebody gave him a one. Her back operation didn't go well, it seems. I understood why doctors needed malpractice insurance.

"Any luck with Buxbaum?" she asked as she trudged into my office.

"Nothing yet. You?"

"Harold Mackie checks out. He's a well-respected surgeon. Been in practice for years. But if Corbett's telling the truth, he could verify it, at least the part about Corbett blabbing all over

school about the stolen spoon. They were supposedly close friends then. We could interview him.”

“No. We promised Nagy we wouldn’t contact James Mackie, his boss. I’m pretty sure if we talked to Harold, he’d tell his father. Or maybe his mother. Is she still alive?”

“I pulled up some records on the metal recycling business. The president is James Mackie, age 59, Vice President Dolores Mackie, age 60, Treasurer, Evelyn Mackie, age 36. Their credit rating was recently downgraded to Poor. Nagy’s not named but the report said there are between 10 and 15 employees. Presumably he’s one of them.”

“That much checks out. So Harold has an older sister in the business. I wonder why they adopted him if they already had a child.”

“Come on, Cliff, what kind of question is that? Maybe she’s adopted too. Maybe they wanted a girl and a boy. Maybe they wanted a sibling for her and couldn’t have another child.”

“I didn’t mean anything by it. I understand. My first wife and I ...” I left off there. I couldn’t finish the sentence. We’d tried for years to conceive, but couldn’t. After she was killed in a car crash I remarried and Ellen and I were blessed with two when I was in my fifties. A boy and a girl. I very much understood. Maeva knew all this.

“Things still don’t stack up for me. What about the crime scene? There was nothing missing, according to the reports. If this was a robbery for the silver and gold, then why not? And no forced entry.”

“Maybe they didn’t expect anyone to be there and were going to break in, but when Klein answered the bell, they forced their way in and got unexpected resistance, scratched face and all that. When she died they decided to hightail it out of there and didn’t want any loot as evidence.”

“Plausible, I guess. Would she have answered the door? To a teenage stranger? If Buxbaum was ‘a big kid,’ not an adult, like Nagy said, he’d be only a few years older than him, maybe seventeen, eighteen at the time of the crime.”

I thought that was a good point. “I see where you’re going. Bella’s parents would probably know that sort of thing better than Bella. We may have to interview them. Maybe she was particularly

vulnerable at that time. Maybe something marked her as a target, some incident.”

“They were interviewed by the sheriff’s detectives. I don’t remember anything like that in the reports. We’d better get Bella’s permission if we do. She didn’t think her father would cooperate. He doesn’t want to dredge up all that pain.”

“Yeah, but she said her mother probably would, and May said that Jazmin was the one who was more attentive to Linda’s needs. She’d probably be more able to answer that kind of question.”

“Bella’s coming in after work. She wants a report of what happened in Redding. We can ask her permission then. What are you going to tell her about Corbett and Buxbaum?”

“I’ll be vague. Leave it to me.”

When Bella arrived, she was all full of anticipation like a puppy when its master comes home. She didn’t lick my face, though. Instead she gave Maeva a quick hug and then said to me, “Have you nailed the bastard?” She was grinning, almost salivating, and obviously figured we must have made some progress. Maybe she’d picked up some hint from Maeva when they exchanged emails setting up her appointment.

“We’re getting closer, for sure. We’ve identified Chip Mozingo’s high school girlfriend and obtained a DNA sample from her. It’s on its way to the lab. If she’s Cole’s mother, we’ll soon know it.”

“Did you interview her?”

“No. Well, a short pretext interview to verify she was the one in the yearbook. Maeva snatched a pencil from her desk.”

“So if it’s her, the killer’s mother, what then? Did she raise the child alone?”

“We actually have a name of someone who’s a possible. He has a different name from hers, both her maiden and married name, so if he’s the one, then he must have been given up for adoption. Of course, we haven’t done the DNA test yet, so it’s too early to get excited about them.”

“So who is this guy? What’s his name?”

"I don't want to give you a name yet. Frankly, I have serious doubts. Not only that but he's a policeman. We need to be cautious about investigating him."

"A dirty cop! I should have known."

I took instant umbrage to this, but tried not to show it. I've known hundreds of police officers, sheriff's deputies, and highway patrolman and 99.999% are good, honest people who put their lives on the line for the public. The news likes to highlight the rare bad apples.

"Let's not jump to conclusions. I said we have a name, someone who is supposed to be a policeman. So far, we haven't been able to verify there is such a person. In other words, it's just a name, not a body. Not yet."

"All right, all right. If this is the guy, how did he come to be at my grandmother's house? Do you have any theory on that?"

"Sort of. It would be for a robbery just like you suspected. But we're wondering why your grandmother would let in a teenager she didn't know. There was no sign of forced entry. Did she leave her doors unlocked?"

"We'll never know, I guess."

"Well, maybe not, but I'd like to find out more. I think your parents would know her habits. They also might know more people who came and went from that house than you. Even if we find a DNA match, there's still a need to be able to prove the person was there. Wouldn't you want to know who introduced him ... if that's the right word ... to your grandmother's house?"

"Of course. But I told you before, my dad never likes to talk about this."

"You said your mom probably would. And May said Jaz took care of Linda's need more than your dad."

"That's true. Okay, you can talk to them. I want to call them first and set it up. Should we do it on a conference call. I could call right now."

"No. I think it's better if we do an in person interview."

"You want to do another trip? To Sacramento?"

"It's driving distance. No per diem costs."

"When? I'd have to clear my schedule if it's during the week."

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to be there. It might bias your parents’ answers.”

“What do you mean? If I’m there I think they’ll cooperate because they don’t want to disappoint me. If it’s just you, they might not.”

“Perhaps, but if you’re there, they might answer the way they think you want them to rather than tell the truth, especially if it’s something you don’t want to hear.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. That’s the point. I just want the unvarnished truth. Maybe they suspect someone, like a friend of yours, for example, but don’t want to say that to you.”

“Oh. I see. All right. But I still want to call them. I really think you’ll have a hard time getting them to agree to see you if I don’t.”

As it happened, it wasn’t difficult at all. Bella did call them and her parents were almost enthusiastic to help. I say almost. We made arrangements to meet in Sacramento a few days later.

Chapter 18

SACRAMENTO

Oscar and Jazmin Klein owned and operated a ski shop on the outskirts of Sacramento. Both were fit and tan and skied as often as they could during the season, but of course that was the shop's busiest time of the year. Oscar exuded a sort of Alpine blondness as though he were Swiss, but I knew from Bella that the family name came from the Hamburg area. He wore a white cable knit sweater even though it was predicted to reach eighty later. The air conditioning was cranked up to counteract it. Jazmin was darker, but compensated by being able to speak Hungarian and discuss the Alps with authority since she had wintered there with her grandparents on several occasions as a child. These attributes benefitted the business and were trotted out quite unashamedly.

The interview took place at nine in the morning, before the shop opened for business. They couldn't shut it down, even in late September. The ski season was already starting, if not in the form of snowable peaks, in the form of gearing up and early Christmas shopping. In any event it meant a very early rise and long drive. Los Altos is two hours from Sacramento even starting before rush hour. The interview really only required one of us, but neither Maeva nor I could agree to stay back. We were both too invested in the case by this point.

Oscar asked what we had found out. I explained that we had reason to believe it was a burglary gone bad. The burglar entered through the back door and was confronted. He probably got in a fight right there and fled after beating the victim. I asked if they knew whether anything had been taken. Jazmin wasn't certain, but thought some of the silver set was missing. She knew her mother-in-law had a very large set of sterling silver. She wasn't as familiar with Linda's jewelry but said some of that could be missing, including a gold ring.

I told them that I thought the burglar wasn't local and probably didn't know Linda's habits. I said I thought they must have believed the house was unoccupied.

"How did he come to choose that house to rob, do you think?" Jazmin asked.

“We don’t know for sure. That’s why we’re here in part. We don’t understand why Linda Klein would open the door to a stranger, someone who would have been around eighteen or nineteen at the time.”

“She would have opened the door to anyone,” Oscar replied. “She was very trusting. Solicitors would come by. She was always polite even when they were obnoxious. She would never close the door in their face, which meant she spent some long stretches listening to sales pitches or charity harangues on occasion.”

“But her body wasn’t found near the front door. It was found near the back door. It seems more likely the robber entered that way and encountered her unexpectedly. Did she leave the back door unlocked during the day?”

“No, no she didn’t” Jazmin said. “She kept it locked unless she went out in the back yard for some reason. She had a gardener and really had little interest in that. She used to say she’d done all the pruning and plant tending she ever wanted to. Remember, she grew up helping her parents with their orchards, even after they built the Los Altos Hills house.”

“She did keep a key to the back door under a flowerpot, though,” Oscar added. “I think any self-respecting housebreaker wouldn’t have much difficulty discovering it.”

“That’s right, she did,” Jazmin confirmed.

“Very well. But it’s very rare to break into a house knowing the owner is present. If the robber was planning to attack the homeowner during the robbery, he would have come equipped with a weapon and would have continued the robbery even after the killing. I think the robber must have thought she was gone. Do you know if there was some indication that she was out of town? Newspapers stacked up on the porch, for example?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Jazmin replied.

“Her car,” Oscar said.

“You mean the Cadillac?” Jazmin added.

“Sure, you remember. She lost her license after that seizure and it took her forever to sell it. I think it finally disappeared only a few weeks before her death. She was taking cabs or friends would drive her.”

Maeva asked, "So you think if someone was casing the place from time to time they might have seen that the car wasn't in the driveway that day and assumed she was out? Did she park it where it was visible from the street?"

"That's right," Jazmin said. "She did. The driveway was long and curved. She parked it right near the front gate because she didn't like backing it down the driveway, or backing it in when she arrived home. She wasn't good about backing around a curve."

"I have a theory," I said. "I think someone familiar with the house, or who at least had seen the inside, talked about it to the wrong people, maybe described how rich it was. Someone decided it was a good target for a burglary."

"Do you have some suspect in mind?" Oscar asked.

"Well, I think it's someone from out of the Bay Area. Maybe farther north."

"Here? In Sacramento? You suspect us?"

"No, no, no. Not at all. I've been to Redding and ..."

"Redding?!" Oscar almost exploded and looked at Jazmin. "Corbett. I knew it."

Jazmin crossed her arms over her chest in a classic huff pose. "Don't you dare! He was just a kid, a good kid. Jan raised him better than that. He's never been in trouble."

"What about the spoon?" Oscar shot back.

"Now don't go spreading tales. He put it back. He's no thief." Jazmin said and stood and pointed a finger at Oscar.

"What spoon?" I asked.

Oscar replied, "Corbett is Jaz's nephew. His family lived in Redding then; still does. Jaz caught him stealing a spoon when they visited Mom's home. It was at a birthday party."

Jazmin interrupted, "And I told him to put it back. I made sure he did. He apologized and promised never to do it again." She looked at me pleadingly as though I was the judge or jury in a criminal trial.

"I haven't accused anyone," I said. "It's possible that Corbett or some other family member may have been careless in how they talked about the house. We're trying to nail down the connection. Maybe that's totally wrong."

"I think it's time you left," Jazmin said.

“No, hold on,” Oscar said, holding out an arm with his palm out like a traffic cop.

I ignored Jazmin and looked Oscar dead in the eye. “Now I have a question for you. A minute ago you said ‘I knew it.’ Did you suspect Corbett back at the time? I’ve read all the police reports. Your interview write-up didn’t say anything about that.”

It was Jazmin who answered. “We agreed that the spoon incident was irrelevant, that Corbett was a good kid. And he is.”

“I wouldn’t use the word ‘agreed.’ You told me not to say anything about it.”

“Corbett would never kill anyone.” She turned her still-accusatory finger from Oscar to me. “Now get out!”

I tried to stop the argument. “Whoa. I don’t think Corbett killed Mrs. Klein. That’s not what I’m saying.”

Oscar leaned over to me and said, “Perhaps you should go, but you need to go up there and talk to Corbett. If someone had loose lips, I’ll bet he’s the one.”

Maeva was standing now and pulled at my elbow to get me on my feet. I stood. We both thanked them for their time and left. The interview had achieved both its intended goals and unintended but perhaps foreseeable negative consequences. I hoped Bella wouldn’t be too mad. It was pretty obvious to me that she shared her mother’s view of her cousin Corbett. Oscar, on the other hand, seems to have harbored suspicions all along. At least he was now on the side of further investigation.

We got back to the car and decided that we needed to hash over our next step. I drove to a coffee shop downtown. I had earlier spotted a cool geocache nearby which may have influenced my decision as to location. It’s a virtual cache, one of the rare ones dating back to 2002, very early in the history of geocaching. It requires the finder to answer the question in the title of the geocache: “Really, What is Justice?” The location is the plaza of the federal courthouse where the finder must browse through the statuary, inscriptions, and so forth to find the answer. It’s a beautiful building in the modern style with a gently curving facade. It’s much nicer than the ones in San Francisco and San Jose. I browbeat Maeva into helping me find the right information from the artwork and inscriptions and we soon had the answer in hand. I gave it a favorite point.

That's two virtuals from this case, a new one and an old one. Virtuals were allowed back in the early days of geocaching, but then the rules prohibited them except for that special 2017 case like the LAX one. The old ones were grandfathered in. One benefit they have is that they last. There is no physical cache to be replaced or maintained when it goes missing or gets broken or full of rain or other junk.

As I was logging this cache I noticed a five-star puzzle cache very close. Usually caches can't be closer than a tenth of a mile, but virtuals are an exception. The puzzle cache had only a few solvers, but nearly all of them gave it a favorite point, so I decided to take a look. I knew immediately what I had to do to solve it. It was called Fed Second. I thought Maeva would enjoy it, too, so I showed her the cache description which was in the form of a story:

My wife and I attended a dinner party recently thrown by our friends the Robisons at 143 Federal Street, apt. 352. They live in a large condominium complex that has several of their relatives (other Robison families) in it because their grandparents owned the original land that was developed into that tract. The party was very large and the hosts fed the children early but did not serve the adults dinner until after 9:00 p.m. I hate being fed second; I was starved and grumpy at being made to wait that long. Afterward my wife and I argued about whether the adults should have been fed second or fed at the same time as the kids. According to my notes it went something like this:

Me: "It was irresponsible to make us all wait so long for the food. The hors d'oeuvres weren't enough, and half the people were getting plastered while waiting. Did you see Mrs. Schofield and that fellow Hendrickson?"

Wife: "Yes, but why so much emphasis? Their behavior wasn't the hosts' fault."

Me: "Hendrickson kept ringing the dinner bell. I don't think it was meant as a joke."

Wife: "Well, it's hard cooking for so many people at once. You

have to do it in shifts. At least that fellow, C.F. Sadler, I think his name was, helped out in the kitchen or we would've eaten even later."

Me: "Well, I had to make small talk with Old Man Robison, the one who lives in unit 632. What a drunken bore!"

Wife: "That was Rod and he's almost eighty. He was wetting his whistle pretty good, I grant you."

Me: "At least he wasn't guzzling the punch like McFadden."

Wife: "It looked to me like you had more than your share of the punch. You seemed awfully chummy with that divorcee - the Robison daughter with all the cleavage who lives in unit 632 with the old man."

Me: "The one with the lacy black bra? Don't be silly. I wasn't looking at her cleavage, I was just admiring her pendant. It was that engineer from 2528 who was all over her."

Wife: "I noticed. Cleavage Robison from 632 had quite a following."

Me: "I was talking to the engineer from 2528 most of the time, when my stomach wasn't growling too loud to hear. If you're going to talk about flirting, what about you and the tennis pro?"

Wife: "That was Chip Robison from unit 633. I was just getting some free tips on my game."

Me: "On how to swing? You were making eyes at McFadden, too."

Wife: "Now you're being ridiculous. You were as drunk as any of them. I took a video of you "admiring the pendant." I could use it as Exhibit A in any divorce proceeding."

Me: Very funny. I took one of you and Chip. That could be Exhibit C.

“Fed 2d. Federal Reporter, Second series!” she laughed. “That’s really clever. But would anyone besides a lawyer get it?”

“That’s why it’s a level five difficulty. There’s a public law library in the building. Shall we solve it?”

“Now I can’t resist.”

We went into the library and went directly to the Federal Reporters. I pulled volume 143 of the second series, referred to by attorneys as Fed Second, from the shelf and opened up to page 352. That was the first page of the appellate opinion on *Northern Pac. Ry. Co. v. Robison*. Once I saw the case name, I knew we were on the right track. It was Maeva who figured out the next step. Each of the fifteen lines represented a digit of the coordinates. She noticed that key words in each line appeared only in the footnotes. The name Hendrickson appeared only in footnote three. The word emphasis appeared in footnote eight. Since any nearby coordinates would have to begin North 38 degrees, the code was broken. We finished decoding the story. The final coordinates pointed to a spot in the corner of a nearby parking garage. Parking garage caches are nearly always on the top level since that’s where you can get a good satellite signal. Sure enough, Maeva retrieved the magnetic cache from under the fire extinguisher box up there. The geocaching triumph under our belt, we went to get coffee.

While sitting in the coffee shop sipping our coffees and debating our next step, my phone rang. It was Corbett. I put it on speaker so Maeva could hear. No one else was sitting near enough to be bothered.

“Hello.”

“What the hell did you do, man?” he began. “My aunt called and said you told them I was responsible for the murder of Oscar’s mom.”

“Hold it. I never mentioned your name. Oscar is the one who did that. It sounded to me like you were already on his radar for this. I haven’t told them or Bella that I talked to you.”

“I’m telling you it’s this Buxbaum guy. The cop. You said they have the killer’s DNA. Have them test it against the cop’s.”

“Hold on. You have some explaining to do. I can’t find any record of a cop or former cop named Buxbaum on the Chico P.D.”

This brought him up short. "Maybe I got the name wrong. It was something like that. Try Buxley. Big tall guy, blond hair cut short, blue eyes."

"And your aunt Jazmin said she caught you stealing that spoon you mentioned and made you put it back."

"Yeah, she caught me, and I did put it back, but later I went back and stole one again. She didn't know about that second one. I told you the truth."

I didn't realize what she was doing at first, but Maeva called the Chico police while I was still talking to Corbett. When she got them on the line, she tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to her phone, which she put on speaker. I stopped talking to Corbett and listened.

"Chico police. How may I direct your call?"

"Hello. I'd like to speak to officer Buxbaum's commander."

"We don't have an officer Buxbaum."

"It might be Buxley or something like that. Big tall gentleman, blond hair."

"That sounds like officer Buxton. Could that be it?"

"Yes, I'm sure that's it."

"What's this about? Citizen complaints are handled by ..."

"No, no. Nothing like that. I wanted to tell his commander how much I appreciated Officer Buxton's assistance with my disabled car the other day."

"One moment, I have to put you on hold."

Maeva hung up while on hold.

"Did you hear that, Corbett?" I said. I'd been holding my phone close to Maeva's so he could tell what we were doing on the other phone.

"Yes! That's the guy! Buxton. Check him out. Get his DNA. You'll see I'm telling the truth."

I signed off with Corbett. Now we had yet another name. Buxton. This changed everything. We now had a real, living actual human being identified who might be the killer. It had been a long road getting here with a lot of people, a lot of names, along the way. I went over the list mentally: Bella and her aunt May, Detective Wilbanks, Flora Jackson, Clarence and Fuller, Brian and Anthony Fuller, Flaco Mozingo and his sons Chip and T.J., Sheila

Mozingo, the Nagys, Howard Mackie, Courtney Beaton. Could this really be the end of the road?

I realized the answer was no, not yet. Nagy could be lying or mistaken. Even if Buxton was the killer, how would we get his DNA without him knowing it? He's a cop and likely to be more suspicious than the Fullers and Mozingos had been. We didn't really know anything about him yet. We needed to investigate him. And we still didn't have the lab results on Courtney Beaton Branch. If she turned out to be his mother, then what was the story behind that? Did he know she was his birth mother? Did she know where her son was, who he had become? Would we want to let either one of them know about the other?

"Earth to Cliff."

I realized Maeva had been talking and I had been lost in thought. "Sorry, I was thinking."

"Something useful, I hope."

"This isn't over. We still have a long row to hoe."

"We're row-hoers now?"

"You're the farm girl."

"Dairy farm. We didn't hoe rows. The cows ate the grass."

"Would you rather I said we had a long teat to pull?"

"Gross. We use machines now. I'd like to see you get milk from a cow by hand. I could use a good laugh."

"No milk? You're saying your cows are milk duds?"

"I said a good laugh, not a bad groan. Haven't you heard? Puns are the lowest form of humor."

"A good pun is its own reword."

"That one's not bad. I haven't heard it before."

"Agricultural metaphor parsing isn't getting us anywhere. You were saying something while I was spacing out. What was it?"

"I was asking if you wanted to drive up to Chico today? We're more than halfway there. We can come up with a plan to get Buxton's DNA en route."

"No. We're not ready. Besides that would mean staying overnight and Bella hasn't authorized the travel. Our regular work is piling up, too. You haven't finished the fire insurance claims."

"Don't remind me. That albatross will be hanging around my neck till the day I die."

“Better a bird than a cow.”

“Don’t let’s start that again.”

Neither of us could think of anything else productive to do in Sacramento. We ended up agreeing to drive back to Los Altos and catch up on our work in addition to doing more background on Buxton.

Chapter 19

It was four days later when the lab results came in on Courtney Beaton Branch. The lab had recovered useable DNA on three different people. I guess she wasn't the only user of that pencil Maeva had lifted. The lab hadn't done any matching. As usual, Keiko had just sent me the sequenced DNA. Two were female, one male.

I didn't wait for Maeva or Bella. I uploaded the two female sequences to GEDmatch. One of them didn't match Cole Case at all. The other came in at a whopping 3,413 centimorgans. Courtney was the killer's mother. Courtney was tall, fair, and "big boned" as the usual euphemism has it. Buxton was reportedly of a similar stature. It made sense. This was one more hint bolstering Corbett's story.

Maeva had found an old newspaper article on Buxton. Sergeant James Buxton was the subject of a photograph at the Chico Safety Fair three years earlier giving a presentation on how to prevent a carjacking. He was in uniform in the photo and matched what we'd expected physically: tall, beefy, and fair. His hair was in a buzz cut in the photo, so you couldn't really see the color, but he looked very much like he could be Courtney's son.

Maeva had also dug up the personal information we'd need, including address, date of birth, and credit rating. He was married with three kids. He was four years older than Corbett Nagy. That put him at age nineteen at the time of the killing, sixteen when he approached Corbett and bought the spoon and the street. All his residence addresses, past and current, were in Chico. This posed a problem. Even if the DNA proved he did it, how did he get the information from Corbett in Redding back when he was sixteen? The two towns are seventy miles apart. Proving a murder case on DNA alone is very difficult even when the victim and suspect know each other. Here we didn't even have that. Of course, we weren't prosecutors and officially our job was only to identify him, but we all knew that Bella would not be satisfied just to know the name. She wanted justice ... or vengeance. My plan was to get Cole Case prosecuted and that meant finding the Chico – Redding link.

That was a puzzle to solve later, only if Buxton's DNA matched. We tried the Maserati drawing trick again. We still had some entry forms. But Buxton never returned his. His wife may have thrown it right in the recycling, or maybe he wasn't a car guy. Anyway, strike one.

After two weeks of brainstorming, we gave up on finding a fancy plan. In the end we decided to try to pick something from his garbage we could use, and if not, follow him around during his off hours and hope to grab something he discarded. I checked the day of the week the garbage was picked up on his street. It was Friday morning, so we'd drive up on a Thursday and bag the trash late at night.

CHICO

We drove two cars the whole way because we thought we'd need at least that many to do a discreet surveillance on a cop. I drove our surveillance van and Maeva drove a sedan. We also brought along in the van a small motorcycle to provide a variety of vehicles. Maeva knew how to ride.

We each drove by his house once in the late afternoon to get a feeling for the neighborhood and get a visual on his car. His trash toters weren't at the curb. We assumed they were behind a fence in a side yard. As Maeva had completed her pass, she noticed a pickup truck drive up and park in front of Buxton's house. A man got out carrying a six-pack and went up to the door. She called me and said she was pretty sure he was a fellow cop. I made a second pass and saw the truck and at the same time saw an SUV park across the street. Another man, small, dark and wiry, got out with a grocery bag. It looked full, with two kinds of chips sticking out the top. We switched vehicles again and I told Maeva to park a few houses away and walk by. By the time she got there, two more men were on the porch carrying beer or food. As she walked past, she picked up some of their conversation.

"What did you see?" I asked when she rendezvoused.

"Two more guys, also cops, I think. I could hear them talking."

"Yeah? And?"

“ ‘The effing Niners are gonna see what a real QB can do. Rodgers will teach them another lesson.’ I cleaned up the effing part. The other guy said something like ‘Yeah, screw them.’ ”

“Hmm.”

This was bad news. I’d hadn’t figured in the part about Thursday Night Football. The San Francisco 49ers were playing the Green Bay Packers. You might think folks in Chico, being in northern California, would be 49ers fans, but the words spoke for themselves. I remembered that the Packers’ quarterback, Aaron Rodgers, was from Chico and went to Cal. It’s well-known that Rodgers burned with resentment that the 49ers passed him over on the NFL. Apparently these guys knew the story and were bigger Aaron Rodgers fans than 49ers fans. Some of them may have gone to high school with him.

Whatever the loyalties, it meant that there was a house full of males eating and drinking and the garbage was going to be full of stuff that could belong to any of them. We talked it over and made the decision to come back anyway. We did at 1:30 AM and our worst fears were realized. The trash toter was out front. When we opened the trash bag a powerful, nostril-scorching scent arose. Loose food, especially guacamole, chopped onion, and sriracha dip, covered everything. There were dozens of beer cans, paper plates, and a few cigar butts covering the regular household garbage. We gave up and went to our hotel.

We didn’t know what time Buxton left for work, or even if he worked on Fridays, so we had to get there early just in case. That meant we had to make do with just five hours of sleep. I set up in back of the van. We had a periscope and camera mount inside camouflaged as a vent. A curtain separating the back from the front meant I was not visible to a passerby. I was three houses down from Buxton’s parked at the border between two houses so that each would think I was connected to the other house.

Maeva was in the other car at the end of the block. She was visible to the neighbors, but she put on her earphones to look like she was absorbed in music, a podcast, or possibly a phone call. She actually wasn’t listening to anything, just waiting for me to call out the subject leaving. It was deadly boring for us both. Buxton left his house at 7:30. We’d been out on the street for over an hour, a fairly short time as surveillances go. I called out the description of

the car, a silver Honda Accord. The zoom lens on my periscope made a positive identification possible. Fortunately, he headed Maeva's direction and drove at a reasonable speed. In many other surveillance scenarios I've done, neither has been true.

I didn't catch up right away. Maeva was calling out directions to me over the hands-free phone in her car. I kept getting stopped at red lights. She was getting nervous that Buxton would notice her and harangued me to come take point. I finally did so for the last two blocks before reaching the police station. She peeled off at that point. I watched as he pulled into the fenced off keycard-controlled area of the lot. I pulled into the public parking area. I took a quick look around to confirm no one was watching me, and then pulled out binoculars to watch him get out of his car, or "exit the vehicle" as cops always say. That's not just on television. They really talk that way when in cop mode, such as writing reports or testifying. I've always wondered if they talk to their wife and kids that way. "OK, Billy, here's the school. Exit the vehicle."

At least I got a better look at him. I hadn't run his driver's license because police officers' licenses are blocked for security reasons. You need special justification to access their records and it can't be done discreetly. The officer will find out if someone tries. I didn't qualify as someone with appropriate access. When I was in the FBI and shopping for cars, dealers would run my license before letting me test drive, and they'd come out grinning, saying something like "I guess you're safe to go," indicating that they had gotten a redacted DMV search result. The bottom line is that I hadn't seen a recent picture of him other than the one in the article. He was in uniform in that one. I snapped a few photos of him as he walked from his car toward the back entrance of the police building in his civilian clothes. It was hard to tell how tall he was from that distance, but he was well over six feet judging by the height of the car.

I took off again to meet up with Maeva. We agreed that it was both fruitless and unwise to sit outside the police station all day waiting for him, and equally so to follow him if we see him go out on patrol. There would probably be a bunch of patrol cars coming and going at shift change and we'd be lucky even to tell which car he was in. He might be on desk duty. We knew this was going to be a long haul operation.

I called Bella to see if she wanted us to continue. It would be indefinite and could become very expensive. She was not a happy camper when I reached her.

“My mom says you accused her family of telling the robber about Grandma’s house.” Her tone was angry.

“No, we didn’t. All we did was mention that we had a suspect with a Redding connection and Oscar brought up Corbett’s name. We needed to know if they knew of anyone besides your family from Redding who knew or visited your grandmother.”

“Corbett would never do anything like that. Or my aunt or uncle, either.”

“People sometimes say too much. One of them might have been talking about this lavish house, all the gold and silver, and accidentally put ideas in someone’s head.”

“That’s ridiculous. How would they even know where it was unless someone gave them an address? And it’s hundreds of miles away. There are hundreds of ritzy houses closer to Redding. Besides, my DNA didn’t match the killer at all. That eliminates all the Nagys.”

“From being the killer, yes, not from making loose talk.”

“He was just a kid when he visited that house. That was years before the killing, too. Go talk to Corbett. You have my permission to cross-examine him if you want. He’ll tell you he had nothing to do with it.”

It was time to let the cat out of the bag. “Bella, I didn’t want to tell you this until we confirmed Buxton’s DNA, but I did talk to Corbett. He said he thinks he may have been the one who caused the killing – by accident. He’s the one who said it’s Buxton, the Chico cop we’re looking at.”

“What!? And you’re just telling me now?”

“I told you before I didn’t want to identify the source because if it turned out the information was wrong, Buxton wasn’t connected, then I didn’t want to leave you with a suspicion of Corbett. He said he wasn’t sure, but he said a big kid shook him down for information about the house. He’d been bragging about how he stole a silver spoon there and how the house was full of silver and gold. Your parents confirmed that they caught him stealing a spoon. I was trying to treat it as a hypothetical when I

talked to you so I wouldn't have to name Corbett, but this investigation is based on factual information."

There was a long silence after I said this. Obviously this shook Bella's world. Hiring a detective is like uploading your DNA to one of those databases in a way. You don't know what secrets you're going to uncover. It's not always what you want to hear and you can't purge it from your memory afterward.

"Corbett. I would never have believed it. Tell me exactly what he said. The whole story."

I gave her the long version, the stealing, his friend Harold Mackie, the plan to turn it in to Mackie's dad at the metal recycling place, the bragging at school, being approached by a big kid he didn't know, the street name Titicaca, and eventually being pulled over in Chico years later and recognizing the officer as the one.

"It was an accident, I'm sure," she said too emphatically, as though that would convince me. "I remember him laughing about the street name at the party, but kind of shocked, too. When you said it, it came back to me. I thought that was nasty using bad words. When you're five caca is scandalous – and funny."

"Maybe he's wrong about Buxton. Maybe his indiscretion had nothing to do with it."

"Let's hope so. I ... I ... never thought ... well maybe it wasn't such a good idea to stir this up again."

"If you want to call it off, we'll walk away and say no more. It's up to you."

"No. Corbett was an idiot, but he's no killer. I still want to nail the bastard who killed her. You made a lot of progress. I'll pay for you to keep going there. Get his DNA and let's hopefully put an end to this."

"Okay. We're on it."

During the day we continued to make periodic passes or stationary set-ups at the residence. If we could find Mrs. Buxton out with the kids, maybe we could get a sample from a child. Assuming they weren't adopted, any of his kids' DNA would identify him as Cole Case.

We followed her to the grocery store in the late morning. She had a young boy with her, maybe four years old. We never saw a chance to get his DNA on that occasion. In the afternoon she

picked up her other two children, a boy and a girl, from school. Once again, we got nothing. We considered going back to the police station to catch Buxton coming off shift, but decided it would be too risky. A surveillance on a police station wouldn't end well.

We set up on the residence again around 4:00PM on the assumption he worked an eight to four shift. He showed up about a half hour later. And went inside. I was still inside the van with Maeva on the outside. The weather was nice, so she was on her motorcycle this time. If she had to take lead again, at least this time she'd have a different vehicle. Her car was parked on the street two blocks away.

A little after five I heard the footsteps of someone right outside the van. They hadn't come from Buxton's house or that direction, or I would have seen them. They must have approached from the sidewalk on the opposite side. I could tell they were walking around the van, trying to see inside. I didn't move. I was sure I wasn't visible to whoever it was. I felt the van move a bit as the person leaned against it briefly. After a minute or so I heard the footsteps fade away. I swiveled the periscope to the direction of the sound and saw the back of a man wearing shorts, T-shirt, and flip flops walking up the driveway of the house directly behind my van. I knew I'd have to park elsewhere next time.

Ten minutes later James Buxton came out of his house. I started taking more photos of him. The ones I had from the police lot weren't that good. These were going to be much better, as he was facing the van. In fact, he kept facing the van as he walked all the way across the street. He came up to the back of the van and took a photo of it. The T-shirt man must have called him and asked him to look into it. Police aren't supposed to use motor vehicle records for personal matters, but they do it all the time. I knew he was going to run my plate. I also knew why he wore a long, loose unbuttoned shirt over his T-shirt. He was carrying a gun.

I knew he couldn't hear me breathing, but I automatically began breathing very softly. I double-checked the curtain hiding the interior rear from the driver's area. I wasn't visible. The van was registered to a shell company I set up, CK Services. There was nothing on the sides to identify it, no signage, although I sometimes used magnetic signs. A simple license plate search

would tell him the company name and a business park address in the Bay Area. He might be a bit suspicious, but unless he followed it up with a Corporations Department web search, it wouldn't identify me as an individual and even that would only show my name as company president, not as a private investigator. He'd have to do another search to get that information. In other words, it was light cover, but it could be penetrated easily if he was persistent enough. I didn't like it. If I was successful in getting his DNA, and he was Cole, it was essential he not know how and where he was identified. I was sure Corbett wouldn't talk. My plan depended on the killer not knowing about me. Finally I saw him walk away, returning to his house. I could breathe normally again.

I waited ten minutes and then slipped up front and drove away. I met up with Maeva and explained the situation. She took the lead, cruising down that street two or three times on the motorcycle, spaced ten minutes apart, then switched to the sedan spaced farther apart, which we thought was less likely to draw notice. It began getting dark and we decided this was unproductive and too much of a security risk.

Chapter 20

The breakthrough came on Saturday. Buxton took his oldest son to play in a soccer game. I sent Maeva out to get the biggest bottle of Gatorade she could find and some plastic cups. She came back and went along the sideline of Buxton's team offering drinks to all the parents and any players not in the game. Buxton accepted. Maeva stood by while he drank it, and when he set the empty down next to his chair and stood up to cheer his son, she grabbed it. We headed home, triumphant.

The lab results came back four days later. It was faster than usual because it was a larger, cleaner sample than the others. I uploaded it to GEDmatch. It was a perfect match. We had our killer. I called Bella to come over. I didn't say anything. I just led her to my computer and had her run the one-to-one comparison herself. By now she knew how it worked. When it came up all red she gasped and then started crying. Maeva and I were standing behind her watching her reaction. She stood and gave Maeva a hug, then me. I must say, it felt good to finally give her some satisfaction. It hadn't been easy or cheap.

"I'm going to call the sheriff's office," Bella said after regaining her composure. "Now that we know who it is we can finally get them off their asses."

"Bella, you can't do that," I warned. "The prosecutors here won't use DNA evidence obtained from genealogy sites. They think there are legal problems. I have a plan on how to do this."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to call in on the sheriff's anonymous tip line. I have a story planned. I'll use voice-altering software. I don't want anyone later examining the recording to be able to identify me. I plan to give them sufficient probable cause to search Buxton's house, maybe even get some DNA from him directly, or if not, seize a toothbrush or something with DNA on it. Once they get the hit, they'll pursue the case to the end."

"What about the connection to Redding?"

"Wilbanks doesn't know about that, and we can't tell him or it'll lead back to the DNA search. I'm going to remove all the DNA sequences from all the websites I've used. There will be no trace after today. Buxton isn't going to tell him about Corbett

Nagy, not unless he grows a conscience and confesses. Nagy isn't going to come forward. There could still be a problem, though since we have no other evidence of how and why he ended up in Los Altos Hills."

"Yeah, you said that before. What's your plan for that?"

"My story is going to be that Buxton got drunk and confessed to a fellow cop that he once killed someone. He will have said to the buddy that he got information from a kid in Redding about a rich relative, an old lady who lived alone. It shouldn't be hard for them to trace that to Corbett. They'll probably reinterview you at that point. You may have to lead them to Corbett yourself if they get stuck."

"I'm not going to lie to the police."

"Of course not. Whatever you do, don't do that."

"What about Corbett? What if he tells the truth about you, about the investigation?"

"That's the beauty of it. He doesn't know about the DNA matching we did. We only told him the police have the DNA of the killer. Even if he gives them my name and the sheriff comes back to me, I can truthfully say that I interviewed your parents and found out about the stolen silver spoon, and interviewed Corbett who told me the story we now know as true. Buxton somehow heard about the house and threatened him to get the location."

"That's what I don't get," Bella said when I'd finished. "How did he hear about it? Corbett was twelve years old at that point living in Redding. Where was Buxton living then?"

"Chico so far as I know. He was sixteen at that time, presumably living with his parents – adoptive parents."

"So? How did he hear?"

"He must have had some friend or relative in Redding who told him the story. He was old enough to drive, so he must have driven up there one day and confronted Corbett."

We continued talking for almost an hour but after the initial elation wore off, a sort of apprehension set in. We all wondered whether the sheriff's office would act on the anonymous call. What would we do if they dismissed it as a crank call? Bella thanked us and left.

I made sure to back up all the DNA sequences on a separate USB thumb drive, then logged onto each of the websites I'd used

to find DNA relatives, including GEDmatch. I deleted every single upload that I'd made. If anyone checked any of those sites, they'd find no record of Cole Case or any of the others.

I drafted my statement for the tip line call and reread it a few times. Then I logged into the voice altering software on my laptop, plugged in the headset, and read it aloud:

I'M CALLING TO REPORT INFORMATION I HAVE ABOUT A MURDER THAT TOOK PLACE ON TITICACA STREET IN LOS ALTOS. THE KILLER IS JAMES BUXTON, A CHICO COP. HE GOT DRUNK AND TOLD ME HOW HE KILLED THE OLD WOMAN THERE MAYBE 20 YEARS AGO. HE SAID THE HOUSE HAD A LOT OF SILVERWARE AND GOLD JEWELRY THAT HE MEANT TO STEAL. HE THOUGHT NO ONE WAS HOME BECAUSE THE CAR THAT WAS USUALLY THERE WAS GONE, BUT WHEN HE ENTERED THE BACK DOOR SHE CONFRONTED HIM AND FOUGHT WITH HIM. HE BEAT HER TO DEATH.

I wanted to put in enough real, non-public information so that it wouldn't be dismissed as a crank call, but some small mistakes so that it wouldn't be obviously made by someone with access to inside information. The murder was in Los Altos Hills, not Los Altos, a mistake commonly made by people not familiar with the distinction. It was eighteen years ago, not twenty. I listened to it and was satisfied. I didn't think it sounded like me at all, but I had Maeva listen to it, too, because I never thought recordings of me sounded like me. She said it didn't sound anything like me.

I had a prepaid cell phone that I'd picked up for such uses, a so-called "burner" phone, but I didn't want to call from my office. I wasn't sure if they could trace the location of the call from cell phone tower data. So I brought the laptop with me and drove to Oakland, a forty minute drive, to make the call. When the female answered I began playing the recording into the burner phone. The woman started to ask me questions and then realized it was a recording and stopped talking. When it was over, she asked me to play it again. I did, then I hung up.

The ball was now in motion.

Chapter 21

Eighteen excruciating days passed without a word from the sheriff's office. I didn't dare call Wilbanks to ask if there had been developments. He'd suspect me of being the anonymous caller and grill me on it. I didn't want to lie. That might be considered obstruction of justice. I could always claim attorney-client privilege, but the effect would be almost the same. Ashley was under instructions to tell Wilbanks if he called that I was not currently working on the case and all matters should be referred to Bella.

It didn't come to that. His first contact was with Bella. She called me to tell me that the detective had called to tell her they had a viable suspect for the killing of her grandmother. She asked him who it was, but he wouldn't name the person. He wasn't very forthcoming on the phone, she said, and I wasn't able to get a clear idea of the conversation. She was nervous but assured me that she hadn't said anything about my investigation or the anonymous call. I asked her if she had told the truth on the phone and she said yes. She asked me to call him in the hopes I could get him to open up.

I was reluctant, but I agreed. I had to find out more, but I needed to stay on the right side of the line. I called him thirty minutes later. Fortunately he didn't ask me flat out if I'd made the anonymous call.

"So Bella called me and said you told her you had a 'viable suspect'. What does that mean?"

"We've identified the killer." Wilbanks didn't sound enthusiastic as I might have expected.

"Fantastic. Congratulations. Is he still alive? Can you prosecute?"

"He's alive and no."

"How's that?"

"We're dealing with some issues."

"What kind of issues? How do you know it's the guy?"

"It's complicated. It doesn't make any sense."

"Is it something my client can help with?"

"I don't think so. We're still working on it."

"You've got me confused here. What's going on?"

“We got this anonymous phone call saying this guy – he’s on the force in Chico – got drunk and confessed that he beat this old woman to death twenty years ago. The caller even had the street name and the fact it was the back door. He said the house was targeted because the car wasn’t in front like usual. I had to do a lot of research, but I confirmed that the deceased sold her only car three weeks before her death. That wasn’t even in the police reports. So it looked like a pretty good lead, someone with inside knowledge. I called the police chief in Chico and explained the situation. I’d hoped he’d help me get DNA evidence from the officer, secretly. But he backed up his officer and said there was no way that it was him. He said he was a good cop with an unblemished record. When I explained the evidence he said it was BS. He said the officer didn’t even drink. He said he could produce at least five members of the force who hung out with him socially who’d confirm that.”

I got a sinking feeling in my gut when I heard this. I’d screwed up. It hadn’t occurred to me that he’d be a non-drinker, not after that beer-infused football night. I guess all those empties could be from the other guys.

“Uh, they could be lying,” I said. “Come on, we both know the blue wall is real. Some ...” I started to say ‘cops’ but decided he might not like the term coming from me. “... people will cover for their buddies.”

“All of them, and the chief, too? I don’t think so.”

“Hold on, you said you’ve identified the killer. If it’s not him ...”

“It’s him.”

“Now I’m more confused.”

“I tried to get his chief to let me come up there and test the guy’s coffee mug or something for DNA. He refused. Then I asked him not to tell the officer about my inquiry until I was done with the investigation. He refused again and said he was going to inform the officer that he’d been named in the murder by an anonymous caller.”

“Oh. And did he?”

“Yeah. And here’s the funny thing. The suspect officer called me an hour later and said he completely understood why I had to follow up. He said he’d never been to Los Altos Hills in his

life or even the South Bay. He volunteered to give fingerprints and take a DNA test if it would help eliminate him. I hadn't even told him we had DNA, although his chief might have."

"He volunteered?"

"He volunteered. I went up to Chico and took a swab personally. And he's a match. A 100% match. He's the killer."

"What? Why would he volunteer if he knew he was going to be a match?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out. We didn't have probable cause to get a warrant for it. Not with just an anonymous phone call about someone with no obvious connection to the family or the location. If he just ignored the whole thing, that might have been the end of it. The Chief of Detectives here thought it was a crank call when he heard about what the Chico chief told me. I'm sure I couldn't get authorization from the sheriff to go up with a team and follow him around in order to get DNA, especially since it's a police department and the suspect already knew we were investigating."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I'm talking it over with my chief and the D.A. We don't know what to do. The D.A. said he won't prosecute just based on the DNA match. The match is admissible since it was based on a voluntary submission, not a surreptitious taking like the Golden State Killer, but it's not enough. He made me do a retest of the DNA using a different fingernail scraping and a different crime lab, but it came back the same – a 100% match."

"Have you told the officer he's a match?"

"No, but I told the chief up at Chico P.D. He was floored. He agreed not to tell the officer yet. He said he was willing to ask him to come in and question him about his whereabouts back then. I gave him the dates and details of the crime. The chief said the suspect probably wouldn't answer me if I came up to do the interview because he'd know he hadn't been cleared by the DNA, but he thought he'd answer him because it would be a legitimate inquiry by his employer."

"And has that happened yet?"

"The suspect said he was in the military at that time. He joined right out of high school. He said he'd never been assigned to the Bay Area. He was only in the army for one enlistment. He

was in the MPs. When he got out he applied for the police, took some junior college courses in criminal justice, and got in at Chico P.D. a year later.”

“Did the caller say when he got this information? Maybe he was in the military with him. Maybe that confession took place years ago. He might have been a heavy drinker back then.”

“Maybe, but you really think the caller remembered all those details for eighteen years?”

“Good point. It sounds like the caller might really have been an accomplice who remembered all the details from first-hand experience. Maybe he finally got a conscience and decided to help the family get closure or something.”

“By pinning it on another guy? There’s not going to be any closure if we can’t prosecute. The family’s just going to be furious if we tell them we know who did it but can’t prosecute, especially if he’s a police officer. They’ll think it’s a cover-up, a whitewash.”

He was right about this. Things weren’t going according to plan.

“I know you told Bella you have a suspect. Have you told Oscar and Jazmin?”

“I called them first and left a message on their voice mail. Then I called Bella. As soon as they call back I’ll tell them. I’ll ask them if they knew the guy or had ever heard of him. Maybe he has been to the house.”

“Bella said you didn’t give her the name.”

“I’m not going to. Or to you, either. She’s too young to know who her grandmother knew back then. Her parents might, so I’m going to ask them if they recognize the name, but to not reveal the name to anyone else.”

“I’d like to know. They might tell me the name.”

“I’ll bet you would, but I’m going to ask them to not tell you and I hope you don’t ask. It’s time for you to leave this to us. If we make the case inactive again you can have another go. I’ve put a flag on the case file to not let you have another look at it. It’s an active case now.”

“I’m Bella’s representative, her attorney even. It’s normal for the victim’s family to have an attorney follow with the police.”

“And I’ll keep you informed of our progress.”

“See if you can track down his locations in the military. And maybe you can follow up on that gold and silver thing. Maybe he has some connection with people who buy gold and silver.”

“I know how to do my job.”

“Right. Okay, please keep in touch.

“Good bye.”

I was flummoxed by this development. I told Maeva about the call. She didn't know why Buxton would volunteer to take a DNA test without even being asked. The only thing we could figure was that he must have thought there was sufficient probable cause to get a warrant forcing him to give the sample, so if he volunteered before the request was made, his attorney would be able to argue that he must be innocent, i.e. a guilty man would never volunteered to provide incriminating evidence.

I had no way to determine where Buxton was stationed in the army eighteen years earlier, and I didn't think Wilbanks would be able to find out, either. Even if he determined somehow that Buxton was never stationed around here, that didn't mean he never passed through the area. A lot of military flights leave from the area. Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield is the busiest Air Force terminal in the country. He could have been on a flight in or out of there at any point. It's only about an hour and a half away from Los Altos Hills. Alibis are hard to prove even when they're recent. Unless there's solid video evidence, the police usually aren't going to believe it. It's too easy to get people to lie for you. Here, in addition to the time delay, we don't even know what day the murder took place.

We were still right where I had warned Bella. The DNA proved Buxton was the killer, but without a connection to the crime scene or victim, an old case like this with a sympathetic defendant and spotless record wasn't prosecutable. Since Wilbanks hadn't told me the name of his suspect, I couldn't very well go off investigating, trying to nail down the connection. I hadn't told Oscar and Jazmin about the DNA testing, so they couldn't spill those beans to Wilbanks, but they might say something about me being there and mentioning Redding. I hoped that would lead him to Corbett Nagy and that Nagy would come clean with Wilbanks and give him the same story that led me to Buxton. It didn't explain where Buxton heard about the house, but it was one step

closer. Maybe Buxton would confess if it got to that stage. Maybe Wilbanks could find some record of Buxton selling gold or silver. If he was burglarizing back then, he'd probably done it other times. Jazmin had said that she couldn't tell if any silver or jewelry was missing, so there was no way to confirm or deny that part, but if Wilbanks asked about it, my guess was that Oscar would drop a dime on Corbett.

All we could do at this point was sit and wait.

Chapter 22

We didn't have to wait very long. Four days later I got a call from Jazmin Nagy. She didn't overtly gloat, but I could hear a note of triumph in her voice. "Mr. Knowles, I called to give you some good news. The sheriff's office has found the killer. Corbett's innocent. You can discontinue that line of investigation. I'm sure Bella will be delighted."

"Really? What did they say to you?"

"They asked us, Oscar and me, if we knew a man. I can't give you the name. He told me not to. He said the man's DNA matched the killer's, but he hasn't found the connection to Linda. He thinks it was a burglary like you said. We didn't recognize the name."

"What was the breakthrough?"

"An anonymous phone call named the killer. Maybe all your investigation stirred something up. Someone came forward. I really think you deserve the credit."

"Did he say where the suspect was located?"

"Oh, he's not a suspect. He said the DNA was 100% match. He's the killer for sure. And no, he didn't say. I was worried at first that it would be Redding, because he said the man wasn't from the Bay Area, but when I asked him where, he told me he couldn't say. He'd only given us the man's last name and didn't want to give out more information that would identify him until they were ready to prosecute."

"How do you know it wasn't Redding?"

"Oscar asked him. The detective said it wasn't Redding, but he couldn't tell us where."

I thanked Oscar silently. "I see. Well, that's great news. Did he say anything else?"

"He asked about the silver set and gold jewelry Linda had. Of course we'd covered that back when it happened, but thanks to you I could tell him that nothing was missing at all."

"Oh? How's that?"

"After you left, Oscar and I had a little disagreement about that incident with Corbett and the spoon. You remember?"

"Yes."

“Well, I remembered that we still had her silver set. It was left to Oscar in her will. We never sold it. We hoped to give it to Bella someday, but she doesn’t want it, at least not now. They don’t entertain. It’s a huge set – full settings for twenty people. Everything – tableware, goblets, serving dishes, bowls, platters, and so on. It’s worth a fortune. We keep it in our attic because we really can’t use it either. So I pulled it down and went through it. Linda still had the original receipt with it from Neiman Marcus with a pamphlet describing the contents. I counted it all out piece by piece. Everything’s there. Not a thing missing. Not even a spoon. Oscar apologized for suspecting Corbett when I showed him. He checked it all himself after I told him. He also told me his mother didn’t own any gold jewelry. She was allergic to gold, at least against her skin. It caused a rash. There was gold gilt paint on some of the picture frames, but those weren’t missing.”

“That is good news. I’m sorry if I seemed to cast any suspicion on him with my interview.”

“You meant well. The main thing is they found Linda’s killer. When do you think he’ll go to trial?”

“I have no idea. It’s hard to prosecute a case that old. I spoke briefly to detective Wilbanks, but he didn’t give me the name of the suspect. He said they couldn’t prosecute based on DNA alone. The D.A. says they still need more evidence.”

“That’s ridiculous! Lawyers!”

At least she spared me another lawyer joke. “I know. Now I have a question for you. Did you mention our interview – the one I did with you and Oscar?”

“We told him you had been here investigating and that you had a theory, that you thought it was a burglar, but that was all.”

“Okay, that’s fine. Thank you for calling and letting me know.”

After the call, my initial reaction was good. At least no one had said anything about me having tracked things to Redding or to Corbett. Wilbanks knew nothing about the Mozingos or Fullers. There was nothing to give away the fact I’d used DNA matching. The only ones who knew besides me were Bella, Flora Jackson, and, of course, Maeva. Even Ellen and Ashley didn’t know. We hadn’t done anything illegal beyond some very petty theft – the vase, the pencil, the used Band Aid, the shot glass. The plastic cup

Buxton had used was one we had bought. We'd replaced the vase and paid for the shot glass. I'd be glad to reimburse for the pencil and used bandage if it came to that. But I didn't want the case tainted with the DNA issue. Even the genealogical DNA searches were legal, even if the D.A. wasn't willing to prosecute using them.

Maeva brought me down to earth by asking me about the spoon. She pointed out that if Jazmin was telling the truth about the silver, then that meant Corbett had lied. This raised a nagging doubt in my mind. I'd noticed it, too. Why lie by incriminating yourself? Jazmin had made him replace the spoon and apparently he had.

An unsettling idea began percolating in my brain. I logged onto our usual site for checking criminal records and entered Corbett Nagy's name. We'd done this earlier and found nothing of a criminal nature, or so I thought. When it came up, I realized I hadn't paid that close attention. There were no felonies or misdemeanors, but there were two speeding tickets in the last five years, which is how far back traffic records are kept. One of those was in Chico. He'd paid the fine. No big deal. But who was the officer who ticketed him – Buxton? He told us that Buxton had let him go with a warning. Why lie about that? Maybe it was a different officer. There was a badge number of the ticketing officer in the record, but no name. This was starting to gnaw at me. I really wanted to know Buxton's badge number, but I didn't dare start poking around the department. Wilbanks and the Chico police would wonder how I got Buxton's name and why I was seeking his badge number.

I hadn't realized that Maeva was still in my office watching me. When I looked up from my computer, she asked me what I was doing. I pointed out this ticket to her. She didn't say anything, but I could tell this raised her investigator's antenna another notch.

"Do you think Corbett could be involved in the burglary? More than he told us?" I asked.

"His story has checked out so far. I thought there was something hinky about him at first, but he can't have faked Buxton's DNA. And if he was involved, why point us to the killer? He must know that there would be a possibility of the killer turning on him, naming him."

“Unless the killer didn’t know him, his name.”

“Exactly. That’s what he says, that it was a random meeting on the highway that brought them back together. But that still doesn’t make sense. Buxton found him the first time when he got the spoon and the street name of the target house, so he knew who he was originally. And he may have memorized it later when he stopped Nagy for speeding. So if the heat came on him, he could name Corbett to try to get a good plea deal, even if Corbett was telling the truth and was not involved. Why would Corbett give us the name?”

“I threatened to go to his boss or to HP about those circuit boards.”

“Why didn’t you go to HP? If it was fraud ...”

“Nah. HP can take care of themselves. They’ve got security people and lawyers up the wazoo. I promised him I wouldn’t. We want him to play nice with us. So far he has. I’m not even sure they were doing anything illegal or in violation of contract. It was mostly a bluff.”

“Then why did he cooperate and talk to you? People complain to bosses all the time about their employees. Did he really think he’d get fired if you went to Mackie? For that matter, why did you threaten him? Why did you think he even knew anything? All we had was a photo showing that he once visited the house three years before the murder when he was a twelve-year-old kid.”

“You had to be there. You were at the library that time. He lied about Mackie too. I asked him if he knew anyone who was adopted and he said no. He turned white as a marshmallow when I asked him about Mackie. I almost felt like sticking a skewer in him and roasting him over a fire.”

“That’s one witness we haven’t talked to: Harold Mackie. He’s local.”

“The good doctor. He hasn’t lived in Redding for decades. Why do you think he would know anything?”

“He was Corbett’s best friend, wasn’t he? Don’t you think Corbett confided in him? Wasn’t he going to fence the spoon at Mackie’s father’s place?”

“The spoon he didn’t steal? And which he said he didn’t turn in for money after all?”

“What’s the harm in talking to him?”

“Probably nothing. At least it’s something we can do. If he wants to know why we’re contacting him, we can say talking to the Nagys led us to Corbett who mentioned him and the metal recycling business. We don’t have to say anything about knowing he’s adopted or the DNA. It won’t seem suspicious if Wilbanks finds out about us interviewing him.”

“So let’s do it. Do you want to call him or shall I?”

“Give him a call and see if he’ll talk to us. No, make it talk to just you, not us. If it’s only one person and female, it will seem less ominous. Make it vague, like his name came up, but nothing about a murder. Save that for when you’re face to face and get a read on him.”

“Okay, thanks. A solo interview. I’ve been second banana this whole case.”

“And a very good one.”

“No pun about how I’ve been appealing?”

“No, I must be slipping.”

“There you go. I knew you had it in you.”

Maeva called the listed office number for Dr. Mackie. The receptionist wouldn’t put her through to the doctor, which was understandable. When Maeva asked to be able to leave a voicemail for him, the receptionist declined, but said she could take a message. Maeva left a message asking him to call her. She said she was an investigator working on a criminal case in which his name came up. She hoped that would pique his interest.

Several days passed and there was no return call. We debated trying to track him down somewhere, but decided it wasn’t worth the effort. It wouldn’t help anything unless the sheriff’s office could make the connection to Redding.

I was put out that Wilbanks hadn’t called me again. After another week I called Bella to see what had been shared with her. She told me that Wilbanks hadn’t been dealing with her, but with her father, the next of kin to the victim, which is standard police procedure. She’s been getting her information mostly from her mother. She was actually relieved because she was afraid she might say something about my DNA work.

I had to get Wilbanks on the Redding track. I called him again. He dodged my calls for a few days, but I hounded him until he finally returned one.

“Barry, I was hoping you’d share with me what progress you’ve made on this Klein case.”

“I’m working with Oscar Klein. He’s the son.”

“I know. Mrs. Klein called me. She said she thought my investigation probably triggered the anonymous caller to come forward. She said I should take credit.”

“You take credit?” he scoffed. “Sure, go ahead. Maybe you can get a tip from your client. It won’t help getting the case prosecuted.”

“How’s that going?”

“It’s not. Nothing’s going to change unless we can put the suspect in the Bay Area in 2001.”

“Has the military been able to confirm where he was in 2001?”

“Their records say he was enlisted at that time serving as military police in Hawaii. It’s likely he had periods of leave when he could have flown back to California, so it’s not a solid alibi. Beyond that they can’t say. They’re working on it. Army records going back eighteen years?”

“Have you interviewed him?”

“No. I tried, but the suspect says our lab must have screwed up. He’s not cooperating any more. His chief is taking his side.”

“You know, I think my investigation must have triggered something. The timing is too coincidental. Based on Bella’s call to me, the tipster must have called soon after I came back from Redding. I mean, after eighteen years, why now?” This was a risky move on my part. I held my breath waiting for his next question. If he was sharp he’d ask me if I knew anything about the anonymous call. I’d either have to admit I’d made it or try to evade the question. I wouldn’t lie. Either way, he’d know it was me.

“Redding? What were you doing in Redding?”

I breathed a sigh of relief. This was the reaction I’d been hoping for. “I’ve been going around interviewing family members. I’d seen a family photo of a birthday party at Linda Klein’s house. One of the families there was Jazmin’s brother’s family, the

Nagys. Janos, her brother, is a retired prison guard. Corbett is his son. I interviewed both of them.”

“And what did they tell you?”

“That’s attorney work product, I’m afraid. I can’t tell you that. But I did find something curious. I did a criminal check on all of them, just a standard thing I always do before an interview in a criminal case, and at first I thought there was nothing there of significance. Later, after you told me about the officer being in Chico, that rang a bell. I went back and looked again and noticed that Corbett, Jazmin’s nephew, had a fairly recent traffic ticket in Chico. I pulled the record. It doesn’t give the name of the citing officer, but it does show his badge number. You haven’t told me the name of your suspect, but if it turned out to be the same guy ...”

“What? You think the officer recognized this Nagy guy from years ago and suddenly got drunk and confessed to someone, to the anonymous caller?”

“Or made the anonymous call himself, knowing he couldn’t be placed at the scene of the crime. Maybe he just wanted to give the family peace of mind knowing the killer had been identified.”

“What have you been smoking? That makes absolutely no sense. Tell me what you found out in Redding. You know something you’re hiding. What is it?”

“I’ll email you the traffic citation I found. Check the officer’s badge number. If it’s not your suspect, it’s probably someone who works with him. And don’t tell the family you heard this from me.” I hung up. I hadn’t lied, but it was a dangerous course I’d set him on. The whole story could come out, including the DNA search, especially if he pressed Bella.

Chapter 23

Another two days went by. Maeva and I had pretty much caught up on all our regular work by then. It wasn't a busy season. We weren't getting any more fire insurance claims and the hiring season at the big client firms was over. A slowdown had brought hiring to a complete halt in some companies and actually led to layoffs in another. So it was good timing when Wilbanks called me back. I was ready to get back into the case.

"Cliff, it's Barry Wilbanks."

This was the first time he'd used my first name. My buddy. He wanted something.

"Hi, Barry, what's up?"

"Thanks for the tip on the traffic ticket. It was written by the suspect. I couldn't get him to talk to me about it. He has an attorney now. His lawyer says he has no memory of the ticket, that it must have been one of hundreds of ordinary tickets he's written over the last few years. He says it's meaningless."

"Sure, you're welcome."

"You got to tell me what you learned up in Redding. I tried to talk to the brother, Janos Nagy. I figured being an ex-correctional officer he'd cooperate. He told me Corbett was innocent and basically to go to hell. He had some unkind words for you, too. Very unkind, involving animals, diseases and some unlikely bodily ..."

"Okay, okay, I get it. He cooperated with me. I don't think it dawned on him then that I was exploring the possibility that he or his wife or Corbett had let slip something about the Klein house and how full of valuables it was with only an old lady living alone."

"He said his sister, Jazmin, called him and said you were trying to frame Corbett."

"Obviously I wasn't trying to frame anybody. I was interviewing family members. You can check. I thought if it was a burglary, someone who had been there must have seen all the artwork, the silverware, the Persian rugs. It was a treasure trove from what the family told me. So I started with the family. It was Oscar's sister May who gave me the picture with the Nagys in it. I just added them to the list of people to interview."

“There were dozens of people who had visited that house over the years – friends, neighbors, relatives. Maybe hundreds. Why focus on the Nagys? What made them likely candidates?”

He was getting uncomfortably close. I’d focused on the Nagys because the DNA results put me up in Redding where Michael Mozingo’s DNA hit paydirt. Still, I thought I was on safe ground. I did learn of Corbett’s visit to the Klein house from May and ordinary investigation techniques, and I bluffed him into telling me about Buxton. I learned about Buxton directly from interviewing him, not from DNA. I just used that later to confirm Corbett was telling the truth.

“Corbett talked to me. Did you interview him?”

“I tried to. He said he’d heard from Jazmin that I had identified the killer through DNA. He said I had my killer and I didn’t need anything from him. He hung up on me. That’s why you need to tell me what he told you.”

My shoulders fell on hearing this. I’d counted on Corbett telling Wilbanks the same story he’d told me, connecting the dots with Buxton.

“I got him to talk by threatening to talk to his boss, a guy named Mackie. He was afraid he’d lose his job if his boss found out he was being investigated in a murder case.”

“Why? He wasn’t a suspect. He’s not one now. Why would his boss object to him cooperating with a murder investigation? I talked to the owner, Jim Mackie, before I contacted Corbett because Corbett wasn’t returning my calls. He said he was happy to arrange an interview with Corbett. And he did.”

I was getting confused. Why would Corbett be so paranoid about me talking to his boss when I was there? Why had he rolled over so easily when I threatened to tell his boss? Why did he tell me about the stolen spoon that he put back, for that matter. It wasn’t making sense. “Did Corbett seem upset you’d contacted Mackie?”

“No. He didn’t seem nervous on the phone. Maybe he was. I would have preferred to do an in-person interview, but I couldn’t get travel authorization to Redding just for that. We didn’t have any connection to the Chico suspect other than one speeding ticket. I know there’s got to be more to it than that and you know what it is. Please, I’m asking you as a fellow peace officer. This case is

going to be put back in limbo if we can't find the connection. It's up to you whether it lives or dies. I contacted Redding P.D., too, and the detective there said they knew the business. They suspected it was fencing stolen copper and gold jewelry – melting it down – but they've never been able to prove it.”

I had to make a decision. I decided to go one step farther and let the chips fall where they may. I was confident I was on solid legal grounds, but I didn't want this to be a test case on the DNA searching.

“Okay, I'll tell you, but please don't tell Bella or the Nagys if you can avoid it. They think Corbett is innocent and don't want me pointing you to him. He told me and Maeva, my partner, that when he visited the house back in 1998 he was blown away by all the glitz – the gold and silver especially. He was a good friend with the Mackie kid, Harold – he's a doctor here in the Bay Area now – whose father ran this metal recycling plant. He'd visited it. He knew how to fence stolen silverware, basically, and stole a silver spoon. That incident was confirmed later by Oscar and Jazmin Klein, only they say the spoon got put back. They claim they have the original whole silver set.”

“What does this have to do with Buxton?”

“That's where it gets squirrely. Corbett told me that he kept the spoon and bragged to his friends at school about it, showing off the spoon. He said that a few days later a big kid, tall and blond, someone he didn't know, came up to him and sort of threatened him or extorted him into selling him the spoon and telling where he got it. Corbett says he didn't think any more about it until three years later when Linda Klein was killed. He didn't know for sure that it had any connection with the guy who took the spoon, but he suspected it. He still didn't know who that guy was, he says, but told me that years later Buxton stopped him for speeding and he recognized him. He said Buxton recognized him, too, then let him go with a warning and made some kind of smirking remark suggesting that he was letting him go in exchange for keeping quiet.”

“You already knew Buxton's name?”

“Yeah, Corbett told me.”

“I have to ask. Did you make that anonymous phone call?”

“Yes. I was hoping you could put it all together with Corbett or maybe Buxton would confess once you confronted him. I wanted to stay anonymous and not involve the family in the prosecution.”

“Your story, Corbett’s story, doesn’t make sense. Buxton did write him a speeding ticket, but he didn’t let him off with a warning. Why lie? And if he put the spoon back ...”

“I know, I know. It has holes, but there could be valid explanations. Maybe Buxton stopped him twice. The first time is when they recognized each other and Buxton let him go. The second time is the one we saw on his driving record. Maybe he did steal the spoon and Linda Klein ordered another one from Neiman Marcus to match the set when she saw one missing. Maybe Jazmin Klein is lying about the set being complete to protect her nephew, and there really is a spoon missing. Maybe she ordered the replacement spoon.”

“How did Buxton hear about the spoon? How old were they, anyway? Corbett must have been a kid.”

“Corbett was twelve when he visited the Klein home. That was the only time, so that’s when he supposedly stole the spoon and then started bragging about it. He’d have been fifteen when Klein was killed.”

“Buxton was in the army, still a teenager, I’m pretty sure.”

“Yeah, nineteen when Klein was killed. Certainly big and strong enough to beat her up. He was sixteen when the spoon thing happened.”

“Old enough to drive from Chico to Redding.”

“Right.”

“So I ask again, how did he hear about the spoon and the house?”

“I wish I knew. Corbett said he didn’t know, but claimed he talked about it a lot back then and some of the kids were into shoplifting and petty thievery. He thinks the word just spread by the more unsavory elements.”

“Was Corbett in the army, do you know?”

“Yes! He was. I forgot about that. At least that’s what he told me. Hold on, I can run his credit report to verify that.”

“No, don’t! It’s illegal for me to use credit report information in a criminal case. If you run it, don’t tell me the results.”

“Right. I forgot. Our lawmakers at work. Any sleazeball can buy your credit report to try to con you or steal your identity, but the police can’t to solve a murder.”

“Your right to ‘privacy’ and to being ripped off by crooks.”

“Anyway, maybe that’s it. I hadn’t thought of that. They could have met in the army. We’ll have to check the service dates. They’re three and a half years apart in age, and I think they both went in right out of high school, so Buxton might have been out before Nagy went in.”

“I can check that through CID.” CID is the Criminal Investigation Division of the U.S. Army.

“Okay. I’ll leave that to you.”

“If I can’t get Corbett to tell me that same story, you may have to testify.”

“How? It’s hearsay and attorney work product.”

“You’ve already told me the story. You’ve waived any privilege. At least I think so. I’m no lawyer.”

“No, you’re right, but it’s still hearsay. Not only that, but I made the anonymous call, and it was false. I’d be useless as a witness. No one would believe me and it could ruin me professionally, even set me up for a civil slander suit. I’m sure it’s Buxton, but I can’t prove it. Please don’t tell anyone else in your department. Besides, even if you get Nagy to confirm the story, he only knows who he told about the spoon. He doesn’t know who killed her.”

“That part we got covered. Buxton’s DNA is admissible. He gave it voluntarily. Corbett’s story just gives us motive and a bit of the opportunity part. We still need to place him at the crime scene.”

Another week went by with no further word from anyone. Not from Bella, not Wilbanks, not Corbett, not Harold Mackie. We were wondering whether we should close our file and send Bella a

final bill. Surprisingly, the next call on the case came from Oscar Klein. Other than the short interview in Sacramento, this was the first time I'd spoken to him.

He told me that the sheriff's detective had told him that they were optimistic about getting prosecution on Buxton. Oscar wanted to thank me for helping find his mother's killer. He said it was hard on him to relive that time, but he wanted to see justice done now.

I asked him if the detective had told him how they connected Buxton to the house or to his mother. He told me that he'd been right about Corbett. Jazmin was heartbroken to learn that her nephew had played a role in it, even inadvertently. He said the detective told him that Corbett had made a statement through a lawyer saying he had told his friends about the ritzy house he visited, Linda Klein's house, and that another kid asked him a lot of questions about the house including the street name. Later he saw that man, by then a police officer in Chico, who stopped him for speeding.

I was relieved to hear this, but a bit surprised that I got the word from Oscar Klein, not Wilbanks. I thought I'd been taken into the detective's confidence, the inner circle, as it were. I was also a bit surprised Oscar would call me at all, but I got the impression he was relishing the ability to tell his wife "I told you so" about Corbett, albeit indirectly in a call to me. He probably waited until she was within earshot to call me. You can't rub it in if they can't hear you.

I walked over to Maeve's desk. She was working on yet another insurance claim. "I've got news on the Klein case. Oscar just called me."

"Oscar? Really? What did he want?"

"The SO has finally put together a case against Buxton. Corbett lawyered up, but put out a statement through his lawyer pretty much identical to what he told us."

"So are they going to prosecute?"

"Oscar seems to think so. Until we hear from Wilbanks or the D.A., I can't say for sure."

"I'll call Bella and see if she got the word."

Maeve did call Bella and it turned out we had a very happy client. The Assistant District Attorney had just called her to tell her

they had obtained an indictment against Buxton. The two women went out together after work to celebrate. I heard that Bella got plastered and cried her eyes out over her grandmother's death when she wasn't grinning vengefully over the thought of finally getting the killer behind bars. I knew Maeva had stuck to diet sodas.

We closed our case at that point. We didn't want to have our presence come up anywhere in the trial record. The D.A. and SO could handle it from here. Maeva wanted to attend the trial, but I told her no. We submitted our final bill to Bella. She was surprised at how much it had cost, but paid it with a smile and a big thank you.

We moved on to our regular corporate work and didn't think about it again.

PART TWO

Chapter 24

One year later:

“Cliff, call for you on line one. It’s Bella Klein,” Ashley announced one afternoon.

I took the call, expecting to hear that Buxton had finally reached a plea agreement with the prosecutor. The case had been stalled in pre-trial motions and proceedings until now. The wheels of justice grind slowly, as we all know, so the delay wasn’t unusually long for a murder case. The defense has to have a chance to go through all the prosecution evidence in advance and then do its own investigation. But the DNA was unbeatable, so it was just a matter of time before Buxton realized he should take the best deal he could get.

“Cliff, they dropped the case.”

“What!? Are you serious?”

“My dad just called me. The D.A. told him they couldn’t prosecute.”

“Why not?”

“Buxton has a rock solid alibi they said.”

In California, defendants in a criminal trial who intend to offer an alibi defense are required to give the prosecution advance notice so that the police can investigate the witnesses and other evidence, such as phone and travel records. Apparently that was part of what was taking so long on this case.

“How is that possible? His DNA was a perfect match.”

“That’s what everybody is asking.”

“I don’t believe it. The alibi must be faked somehow. How could he possibly prove he wasn’t there? It was a two or three day period eighteen years ago.”

“I know. Right? It’s got to be someone bribed who’s lying for him, don’t you think?”

“I’ll call Wilbanks and see what I can find out.”

I couldn’t get through when I called, but to his credit, he did call me back two hours later. He explained that Buxton was an

army M.P. in Hawaii during the whole month Linda Klein was killed. When I argued that he could have flown over to California on leave, Wilbanks brought up a fact we'd all overlooked.

"What day was it she was killed?" he asked.

"Mid-September, as I recall."

"Right. Her body was found on the morning of the fourteenth, probably two days after she died based on the medical reports. They think she died on the twelfth."

"Okay. So?"

"What year was it?"

"2001."

"What happened around that time?"

It took me an embarrassingly long time to get it. "Nine-eleven. The World Trade Center."

"And?"

"And what? Isn't that enough?"

"The Pentagon. The Pentagon was attacked, too."

The light was beginning to dawn. "Oh, right."

"His entire base was put on lockdown like nearly all military bases. All leave was cancelled as of the eleventh. His M.P. unit was split into two groups. Half of them were sent to Washington to help with security at the Pentagon site. Buxton was left behind. He and the others who were left were pulling double duty, twenty-hour days. Patrol activity was high and they arrested anyone who looked cross-eyed on the base. He was doing jail duty, too. That whole time frame is burned in his memory and the memories of his fellow M.P.s. He has at least eight guys who'll swear he was there the whole time. Paperwork, too. We found intake sheets on several arrestees on the twelfth and thirteenth with Buxton's signature on them. We even checked them for fingerprints. His were on them. The base commander, now a retired general, swears no one left that base except on official orders, even married officers living off base. He was there."

"What the hell?"

"You're really articulate today. Just what have you gotten me into?"

"Me? You're going to blame me?"

"You made the anonymous call."

“Because Corbett Nagy pointed the finger at Buxton. Have you talked to him since?”

“He won’t take my calls. His lawyer says he told me what he knew. I have a sworn written statement from him; that’s it. The lawyer says that’s all I need, that Nagy can be prosecuted for perjury if it’s false, so I should rely on it.”

“I’ve never seen that statement. Can I get a copy?”

“It’s an internal ... well, hell, you’ve seen the rest of the file. I guess I can show it to you for the purpose of verifying whether he’s telling me the same story he told you.”

“Exactly why I’m asking.”

“Okay, I’ve got the signed copy in the file, but I also have a digital copy. I’ll email it over to you. If there’s anything in there that doesn’t jibe with your memory, let me know.”

“Okay, I will. What are you going to do now?”

“Hell if I know. The D.A. is livid and so is the sheriff. This is the first time in ten years that they’ve had to dismiss an indictment on murder after it’s been in prosecution for a year. Buxton’s attorney says he’s going to file suit against me and the county. He’s going to ask for fifty million. If I get deposed, I’m going to have to name you as the anonymous caller.”

“Hold on, what’s the whole point of an anonymous tip line? It only works if the callers can remain anonymous.”

“Yeah, you’re right. You should have denied it when I asked you if you were the caller. You’d be in the clear.”

I cursed a blue streak silently. I’d not only put myself and my family at risk, but Maeva, too. “Claim informant privilege. There’s a Ninth Circuit case ...”

“Spare me the legal lecture. I’ll do what my counsel tells me if it comes to that. The county’ll have to pay any judgment against me. I’m safe. It’s your ass on the line now.”

“Just send me the written statement from Nagy.”

I didn’t know what to do. The first thing I knew I had to do was tell Maeva and Ellen, but after that I was at a loss. Ellen was at work, so that could wait until I got home. I walked over to Maeva’s cubicle. She’d finished all those insurance cases last month and was light on work. That might help because I thought we were going to need to get cracking, if only we could figure out what to crack.

I explained to her about Bella's call and about my follow up with Wilbanks. Her mouth was agape by the time I finished. She repeated all the same questions Bella and I had asked – how is it possible, how could he prove where he was? The answers didn't change.

"Do you think Buxton got his commander and army buddies to cover for him?"

"Not from what Wilbanks told me. There was documentary evidence, too. Even if that was a faked alibi, a jury would believe a dozen decorated soldiers who served in 9-11 over a scientist testifying about DNA, especially here where there are no eyewitnesses, no motive, and no way to ever put him in Los Altos Hills at the time. Plus he's a police officer with a perfect record. It's not prosecutable."

"It's Nagy. Corbett Nagy. I told you I thought he was squirrely."

"Squirrely' doesn't cut it. I don't know what to do."

"Let me see that written statement when it comes in. He's playing us somehow."

Wilbanks was good to his word. By the time I got back to my desk the email was in my inbox. I forwarded a copy to Maeva and then opened it.

I, Corbett Nagy, am a citizen of California and under the laws of California do solemnly swear under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct. I am the nephew of Oscar and Jazmin Klein of Sacramento, California. When I was twelve years old, during 1998, I visited the Kleins along with my parents. We all went to a party at the home of Linda Klein, Oscar's mother, who lived in Los Altos Hills, California. I remember it was on Titicaca Street, but do not remember the address.

During this visit I stole a silver spoon, but my mother caught me and made me put it back. I was amazed at how lavish the house was. Later when I got back home and was at school, I told some of my friends about the visit. I described the house as full of rich furnishings, silverware and jewelry, and bragged about stealing the silver spoon.

One day around this time a tall blond-haired boy older and bigger than me asked me about this visit and the house. He asked what kind of silver and gold were in it and acted in a threatening manner. I felt intimidated and told him the street name and said it was in the Bay Area, but I did not give him the address because I didn't know it.

Three years later I learned from my family that Mrs. Klein, Oscar's mother, had been killed. I did not suspect the boy who had intimidated me of this crime at that time and I did not have any direct evidence to implicate him. Although it did occur to me that it could have been him at times later, I thought the chances were too remote to notify the police.

Within the last four or five years I was driving through Chico, California and was stopped by a Chico police officer named Buxton for speeding. When I saw him, I was startled at how much he looked like the teenager who had forced me to describe the Klein house back in 1998. When the authorities came to me investigating the case recently, I provided them the name of that officer through my attorney.

Signed Corbett Nagy

I read this over three times. Several things jumped out at me. Maeva noticed them, too. She and I made a list of discrepancies. First and foremost was the way he backed off his description of the encounter with Buxton in Chico. He'd told us Buxton had let him off with a warning, which we now knew was untrue. He'd also told us he recognized Buxton, or Buxbaum as he called him then, at the time of the ticket, and on the phone he sounded awfully sure Buxton was the killer. He seemed sure the DNA would match and prove he was telling the truth. But in the affidavit he only said he was startled at how much Buxton looked like the kid who had extorted the name from him. That's much weaker. He didn't say it was the same person, only that he looked like that boy. He didn't say anything in the affidavit about the tall boy grabbing his arm and threatening him. He didn't claim that after being caught and putting the spoon back, he had gone and

stolen another one. If Jaz was right, he hadn't stolen another one, so why had he told us that he had?

"He didn't name us," Maeva said.

She was right. He could have said that when private investigators contacted him about the case he gave us the name, but he had only mentioned "the authorities," which really isn't us. He, or his lawyer, didn't want to inject our names into the case. I appreciated that since I didn't want them in there, either, but why did it matter to him?

"Why do you think that is?"

"He wanted us to think Buxton was the killer, but I think he, or his lawyer, was worried about liability when they drafted that. Libel, slander, false arrest. He could get sued for naming someone as a killer if it was never proven in court. I think he wanted us to take the heat for that. Or maybe it was fear that the Chico police would come after him. If Buxton was a corrupt killer, he or one of his cop buddies might try to silence him. I don't believe it myself, but he might think that. If he names us, then he knows that we'll say he was sure it was Buxton who had intimidated him and sure the DNA would match, which is tantamount to saying he knew Buxton killed Linda Klein. Now he can deny to Wilbanks ever saying that to us."

"That doesn't track. Sure, the cautious phrasing might be partly due to that fear of liability, but then why give a statement at all? A good defense lawyer would have just said to keep his mouth shut and say nothing. Corbett didn't care if Linda Klein's killer was caught after all these years. He didn't even know her. She wasn't his blood relative. He could have stayed mum."

"What's your theory?"

"He wanted us to go after Buxton. He still does. I think he's afraid of criminal liability, not civil. Maybe he participated in the crime somehow. Buxton might have taken him along, even on threat of harm, to help him find the house. Maybe Nagy agreed to help him fence the goods at the metal place. He hired a criminal defense attorney, not a civil attorney."

"Well, come on, if the police come questioning you in a murder case, of course you're going to hire a criminal defense attorney."

“Maybe, but I think Nagy knows something more about the crime and he’s hiding behind this cryptic statement to avoid questioning.”

“Well, what about Buxton’s alibi?” Maeva asked.

“Yeah. That’s a puzzler. He must have faked it somehow.”

“There’s someone else we never talked to who might help. Someone I was supposed to talk to but never did.”

I didn’t know what she was talking about.

“Harold Mackie. He never returned my calls.”

“Right, Corbett’s friend. You think he might know something?”

“Maybe. It’s worth a shot. Maybe he can give us confidence that Corbett is reliable – or not. He’s no longer in touch with the family or Corbett. Maybe he’ll spill some dirt. Has the D.A. announced publicly that the charges are being dropped?”

“I don’t think so. They just told the family. It will probably be announced by the end of the day.”

“Call Wilbanks back. Ask him to hold off a couple of days.”

“Why?”

“Just do it. I’ll be at my desk.”

I called Wilbanks and relayed the request. He wasn’t happy about it since I couldn’t explain why, but he told me the D.A. wasn’t going to announce it until the court hearing the following day. He hasn’t even told the defense lawyer. I thanked him and went to tell Maeva. When I got to her desk she was on the phone. As I listened to her end of the conversation, I understood why.

She was saying, “...very important. Please tell him that if he doesn’t return my call an innocent man could be convicted of murder. Tell him it concerns Corbett Nagy. This is urgent. ... Yes, that’s right. C-O-R-B-E-T-T N-A-G-Y. He knows who that is.” She gave the woman on the other end her own name and number and hung up.

I went into our file drawer and pulled out the case file. It was thick, mostly with travel receipts and other administrative stuff. I had to read through it to refresh my recollection. There I saw another loose end: Buxton’s family. We never investigated him after we confirmed him through the DNA. We left that all to the sheriff’s office. We didn’t want Buxton to know who we were

or of our involvement at all. Today's revelations made it obvious why. I knew he had to be adopted. He was Courtney Branch's biological child, but he was now a Buxton. Was he raised by the Buxtons from infancy? Or was he adopted later? Was he a foster child when he was a teenager, when he allegedly extorted information from Corbett? I couldn't see how that explained anything, but it seemed like something we should follow up on.

I'd been studying it for almost an hour when Maeva came in and told me that Dr. Mackie had called her back. He agreed to meet with her that evening at his office in Fremont. I asked her if she wanted me to come along. I had promised her she could have that interview solo, but that was a year ago. Today's developments made me think backup wouldn't hurt. We just didn't know what was going on and she would be asking some pointed questions about a close childhood friend. It would be a closed environment in Mackie's control, probably with no one else around. She agreed to have me along, but asked me to let her take lead. I agreed.

Chapter 25

We didn't have much time since rush hour traffic had already turned a fifteen-minute drive into almost an hour, but we made it there by 5:30. His office was in a banal glass and concrete medical offices building. The door to the lobby area was open. We entered and began walking down the hallways looking for his office. It turned out to be on the second floor, which I thought was slightly ironic for an orthopedic surgeon. Why not make it as difficult as possible for people with bad backs and knees. You couldn't find a five-story walkup? Okay, okay, there was an elevator.

The door to his individual office waiting room was locked. We peeked through the glass slot and didn't see anyone. Maeva knocked loudly on the door. After a few seconds a Chinese male came to the door and opened it. Dr. Mackie let us in.

"Miss Hanssen?"

"Yes, Dr. Mackie. Thanks for agreeing to see us. This is my associate Cliff Knowles."

He shook hands with both of us. "Come in."

We entered. I thought he'd direct us to a private office area, but he motioned to the chairs in the waiting room. We sat. He sat facing us. He was medium height and a bit pudgy, wearing black framed glasses. Maeva would later describe him as "kind of cute in a nerdy way."

"My receptionist said you needed to see me about a man being wrongly accused of murder, and it has something to do with Corbett Nagy."

Maeva replied, "Yes, at least that's possible. You were good friends with Corbett back when you were teenagers. Is that right?"

He didn't answer immediately. "Yes, I suppose that's right, although really that was mostly when we were younger, sixth and seventh grade. Not really in high school." I could see he was being very literal, very technical in his answers. That often suggested to me a person was hiding something.

"Do you follow the local news? In particular I'm referring to a murder case, a policeman named Buxton who was charged with murder last year? In Santa Clara County."

“No, I don’t watch the local news on television. I read the Wall Street Journal. That’s the only newspaper I read.”

“Okay, so back when you hung out with Corbett, he went with his family to a party here in the Bay Area. It was at the home of his uncle’s mother, a woman named Linda Klein, living in Los Altos Hills. Do you remember him talking about that?”

He took his time on this one, too. “Well, I ... I’m not sure. Can you give me any more information?”

“She was very wealthy and the house had a lot of sterling silver and gold gilt picture frames. He stole a spoon and intended to turn it in to your father’s metal business. He told the police that he bragged to his friends about stealing it.”

“Ah, that. Yes, I remember that incident, vaguely. I never saw the spoon. I think he said he got caught and couldn’t take it with him. I didn’t realize it was in Los Altos Hills. That would have meant nothing to me back then.”

“Right, that’s it. It was on Titicaca Court. He said he used to joke about the name.”

This brought a barely perceptible smile to Mackie’s lips. “Yes, I remember that, now that you remind me. I told him it was a lake in Peru, but he thought the name was really funny. What does this have to do with a murder?”

Maeva then laid out the history of the investigation from the standpoint of the sheriff’s office, omitting any mention of our efforts to trace the DNA through genealogy. She said the woman in that house, Linda Klein, had been murdered in 2001, that we were hired by the victim’s granddaughter, and that we were following the case on her behalf, but nothing more about our own investigation. She said the sheriff’s office had DNA from under the fingernails of the victim and went on to describe the anonymous call from a tipster about a Chico police officer being the killer. They connected him to the house finally through Corbett. Corbett gave the police a sworn statement that an older teen had threatened him into giving him the location of the house; then years later, he was stopped by a Chico officer for speeding and recognized him as that same teen, now much older, of course. The officer was contacted by the Santa Clara County sheriff’s office detective and had volunteered to take a DNA test. It matched the killer. He was charged with homicide last year.

Mackie remained silent throughout the account, asking no questions, just absorbing it. After giving it a minute to sink in, Maeva asked him, "What do you remember about that?"

Mackie's eyes darted from Maeva to me and back. "I remember Corbett talking about that house and the spoon. I'm confused about the timeline, though. You said she was killed in 2001? I was fifteen then. I didn't hang out with Corbett by then. I never heard anything about this murder until right now."

"We're trying to figure out if Corbett is telling the truth. He's given different accounts of what happened. We're just trying to clear up the discrepancies."

"You said the officer matched the DNA. That should be the end of it. He's been charged. Why are you even going farther into it? Shouldn't the police be doing any clarifying?"

"What I haven't told you is that the police officer has an airtight alibi. He was locked down on a military base in Hawaii at the time of the killing. It was right after 9-11 and records show he was there. He may be innocent, despite the DNA evidence. Corbett may have given us false evidence."

"How can ..." but then he stopped. "Can you give me a description of the officer?"

Maeva caught my eye for a moment before replying. "Six three, blond hair, powerful build, born 1983, I believe."

Mackie stewed for a minute. "And his name again, Buxton, was it?"

"Yes, do you recognize the name?"

"No, I've never heard of him before. I don't know anyone from Chico, either. Can you tell me this – do you know if he was adopted?"

I sat up ramrod straight at this. Maeva's eyes grew huge. "Yes, we think he was. Why did you ask?"

Mackie shook his head, obviously troubled. He shifted his weight back and forth in the chair and dropped his eyes to the floor before making eye contact with Maeva again. "The trial is to be in Santa Clara County?"

"Yes, if it goes to trial. He may make a plea bargain."

"But if he has an airtight alibi, like you said ..."

“Well, that’s why we’re following up. If he’s innocent, and you know something, it’s important you come forward. The charges can be dropped.”

He looked down again and sat silent for a long minute. “Why are you really here?”

“Pardon?” Maeva replied uneasily.

“You said you were representing the Klein granddaughter. Corbett said this man was the killer, the DNA says he’s the killer, and you’re trying to find evidence to free him? I don’t think so. Does your client want you to find evidence to free this man?”

Maeva’s face showed she didn’t have an answer. I intervened.

“We’re trying to find the killer, plain and simple. If it’s this defendant, fine. If it’s someone else, fine. We hope you can help us by telling us whether we can trust what Corbett has told the sheriff’s investigator and us.”

“You’re hoping I can tell you I remember this man, or something Corbett said or did that pins this crime squarely on this man. I can’t. I never heard of him or the murder until you came here. I think you’re worried the charges are going to be dropped. Do you know something about that?”

He had me there. “It is very possible the charges will be dropped soon. But even if they are, they can be reinstated with new evidence, such as proof his alibi is false. Double jeopardy doesn’t attach until the jury is impaneled.”

“You’ve misled me. You aren’t here to help get an innocent man freed from an unjust prosecution. You’re here to try to keep active a prosecution of a man the authorities now believe is innocent. That’s the exact opposite.”

He was smart, that’s for sure. “Dr. Mackie, when’s the last time you talked to Corbett?”

“I haven’t talked to Corbett in at least ten years.”

“Even though he works in your parents’ business? Why not?”

“That’s personal.”

“You don’t think well of him, do you? And your parents, you’ve severed ties with them, too. Why? Are they running a dirty shop there? Corbett and your parents take in silverware and other precious metals with no questions asked. Is that it?”

“My parents are honest people. My family business is not your business. I think this Buxton you’re trying to pin a murder on is innocent. I’m not going to help you with that. Please leave.”

Maeva stood, but I stayed seated. “We’ll leave, but I have another question for you. Why did you ask if the cop was adopted? You know something about him, don’t you? Even if you didn’t know his name, you know something you’re not telling us. What is it?”

“Please go now. I’m not asking again.” He stood and I saw he was holding a scalpel in one hand.

“There’s no need for that,” I said as calmly as I could. “We haven’t threatened you. All right, Maeva, let’s go.” I stood and we walked slowly to the front door. Mackie didn’t follow us.

Outside, I breathed a sigh of relief. That could have turned very ugly. I could tell Maeva was shaken, too. We sat in the car for a minute just getting our adrenaline levels back to normal. The question Mackie asked about whether Buxton was adopted was clearly a key, but what did it mean? Were they in some kind of foster home or homeless child home together? We didn’t know when either Mackie or Buxton were adopted, at what age. If Buxton was released tomorrow, I sure didn’t want to be interviewing him or his family. I didn’t want him to know anything about me or Maeva. Libel and slander and false prosecution are all intentional torts. My insurance doesn’t cover that and they’re not dischargeable in bankruptcy. He could literally take everything we had if he won a lawsuit against us.

I also didn’t want to try interviewing Mackie’s parents, at least not yet. It looked like Corbett was already feeling he’s on the hot seat since he hired a lawyer and isn’t talking, and he’s going to be under even more when the D.A. drops the charges. I was sure his employers must know about it by now. The Redding connection was in the legal papers, although Corbett wasn’t named, so the papers up there must have covered it. I doubted they would want to talk about it, and especially about Harold’s adoption.

I discussed this with Maeva as we drove back to Los Altos, rush hour traffic still bumper-to-bumper. She pointed out that Buxton was three years older than Mackie in addition to the geographical separation, so it didn’t seem likely they knew each

other as children. She thought Mackie had seemed truthful when he said he hadn't heard about the case or about Buxton before today. I did, too.

"That interview changed when we confirmed Buxton was adopted."

"True. Why do you think it was?"

"He's a scientist, a doctor. I'd expect him to put 100% faith in the DNA results and figure the alibi had to be faked. But he didn't. He said he thought the Chico cop was innocent. When he heard about the adoption he realized there was a way the DNA results might not identify the killer."

"And that is?"

"Twins. Identical twins." She said it with a smug assurance.

When I heard this I felt like Saul. At that instant scales fell from my eyes. Where I was blind, I could now see. I should have figured this out earlier.

"Damn! Why didn't I see that? So Corbett knows who the real killer is, someone with the same DNA. But wouldn't identical twins be adopted by the same couple? Do agencies separate them?"

"Maybe they didn't. Maybe it's actually Buxton's brother, another Buxton, that is. Buxton could be protecting his brother by not revealing that he has one. Maybe the bad Buxton separated from the family years ago, but the twin connection is still strong enough that Officer Buxton won't betray bad Buxton."

"I don't buy that. The brother must still be alive, and too many people would know that he had a twin. His chief and co-workers would know, people they both went to school with there in Chico, lots of others. Besides, how would Corbett know about the bad brother? How did they connect as teenagers if both twins were in Chico?"

"Yeah, we're still missing that connection."

"Maybe they did get separated and Corbett knew the killer under another name. The other twin was adopted by some family in Redding, someone Corbett knew. He'd also know that Buxton would not be able to name him because Buxton doesn't know him, never knew him. That makes more sense."

"How do you mean?"

"Nagy must have recognized Buxton as the twin of the killer years ago when he got that ticket, but he never said anything

then. When we confronted him, he figured out that we wanted the police to catch the killer, and that we wanted to stay anonymous. So did he. Once he heard that the police had the killer's DNA, he got an idea and pretended to be cooperative. He decided to name Buxton, a little piece of knowledge he'd kept in his back pocket for years. He believed, wrongly, that once the police had the DNA match, they'd convict Buxton and the real killer would be forever in the clear. He didn't figure that the DNA wouldn't be enough. He didn't expect us to tell the sheriff's office about his connection to Buxton, either. And he was right, for a while. It wasn't until the case got stalled that I turned Wilbanks onto the Chico ticket to connect Buxton and Nagy."

"If you're right, that means Nagy was in on it. Why protect the real killer unless he's protecting himself, too?"

"Right. We need to find the twin or at least confirm there is one."

"I know where to start," Maeva said. "Courtney Branch."

"She would know. But will she talk to us?"

Chapter 26

It was late when we got back to the office and there was an emergency at home: the television didn't work. I rushed home and became a hero to my kids by replugging the HDMI cable from the cable box to the TV. Somehow it had become dislodged. I stayed up late stewing about the case and talking to Ellen about it. I wasn't looking forward to it, but I had to tell Bella.

When I got into the office the next morning, as it turned out I didn't have to call Bella. She was on the line with Maeva already. Maeva put her on speaker when I walked in. Bella was not happy. The District Attorney had just announced that all charges were dropped against Officer Buxton. She didn't accuse us of bad faith exactly, but she was making some pointed remarks about how she'd paid us tens of thousands of dollars and we'd come up with the wrong man. We'd just gotten her entire family riled up and now bitterly disappointed.

Maeva could have pointed out that Bella's complaints applied equally to herself. It was Bella's idea to reopen this can of worms. But Maeva was too gracious to do that. She let Bella vent without putting up a defense. When Bella ran out of steam, I announced that I was listening in on speaker and apologized for the way it turned out. Then I told her we had some good news. I described our interview with Mackie and our theory about an identical twin.

"I didn't authorize that," she barked. "You sent me your final bill."

"Yes, but you called us to tell us ... oh, never mind. Fine, the interview with Dr. Mackie is gratis. But I think we're onto something. Do you want us to pursue it?"

"What exactly did you have in mind?"

"If we're right, it should be easy. We can have Wilbanks publicize a picture of Buxton in Redding, preferably as a teen as well as an adult if he can get a shot, and ask the public to come forward if they know this man. They wouldn't name Buxton, of course, just use the photo. If there's an identical twin around town there, someone should come forward. That wouldn't cost you anything. If he won't do that, then we'd have to do it on our own, travel to Redding and talk to Courtney Branch."

“Okay, I feel like I have to do something. I got everyone all wrapped up in this. Talk to Detective Wilbanks and see if he’ll do that. I don’t know if more investigation up there by you is going to be productive, though.”

“All right. I’ll get back to you after I’ve spoken to Wilbanks.”

After hanging up with Bella I called Wilbanks’s direct line. Instead of him, though, a woman answered. When I asked for Barry she said that he was no longer assigned to detectives. He was now on patrol duty. I asked who was now handling the Klein murder case. She transferred me to the Undersheriff for Investigations, a woman named Miller. I told her I was a private investigator working for Bella Klein and wanted to talk to the detective now handling the case. She said in emphatic terms that she knew who I was and that the case was now closed.

“But I think I know what caused the confusion. I’m pretty sure there’s an identical twin out there, probably someone known to Corbett Nagy. If you publicize a photo in Redding I’ll bet someone will come forward and identify him.”

“Not gonna happen. The county got served papers on a fifty million dollar lawsuit this morning. The D.A. and County Counsel are all over this office for making them look bad and putting the county in jeopardy. Heads are already rolling, including Detective Wilbanks’s.”

“But you can find the real killer ...”

“I understand your position, Mr. Knowles. The family wants the killer found, but this case is radioactive now. No one’s going to touch it. It’s all about the civil suit now. We should never have followed up on that anonymous call. That was Pandora’s Box. Where’s your office?”

“Los Altos. Why?”

“Just making sure. I thought the caller might be you, but it came in from an East Bay location. If we ever find out who made that call ...”

“Right. Not guilty, your honor.”

“Sorry. Everyone’s pointing fingers right now. I know you were in law enforcement, too. The FBI has taken its share of arrows lately. You understand.”

“No problem. Okay, I’ll tell Bella Klein your decision. I don’t think she’ll like it, though.”

“For what it’s worth, her parents want the whole thing to disappear. Bella will probably come around to that way of thinking after a bit.”

“Sure. Okay then. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Apparently Barry Wilbanks had gotten reassigned for following up on my call and he still took the bullet for me. He hadn’t told his boss I’d made the call, at least not yet. He must not have put anything in the file about that, either. A good detective protects his sources, even the ones he’s mad at. If he gets a personal lawyer, though, that may change. And he already told me that if he gets deposed, which he almost certainly will eventually, he’ll have to name me if he’s asked. My relief didn’t last long. We needed to find the killer before that happened.

I told Maeva how the call went. I could see a touch of fear for a second. If she got pulled into a lawsuit of that size she’d be in huge trouble financially and toast professionally. So would I. But her expression changed to one of determination a second later.

“We’ll just have to go to Redding and find the killer ourselves. I’ll call Bella.”

She called Bella to give her the bad news about the sheriff’s office dropping the case. Bella had just finished talking to Corbett. She said that Corbett told her he had told the police the truth, but that was all he could say under strict orders from his lawyer. She believed him. She said she felt he was the victim in all this, and that Buxton was the killer and somehow faked his alibi. She was sorry she’d ever started it and told us to discontinue. She wasn’t going to authorize any further investigation. She thanked us for our efforts and said what sounded like a final farewell.

“So what now, boss?” Maeva said when the call was over.

“What now, partner? Your ass is on the line just as much as mine.”

“We have to protect ourselves. That lawsuit will kill us. We have to go up and interview Courtney at the very least, even if we’re not getting paid. If we can confirm there was a twin born, they’ll have to reopen the criminal case and the pressure on the civil suit will get weaker. It could look like Buxton knew he had a

brother and was protecting him. He could be on the wrong end of an obstruction case.”

“I don’t want to get Buxton in any more trouble. I really did jump the gun when I made that call. I should have waited until I could verify Corbett’s story. You were right to be hinky.”

“We were both taken in, partner. You were smart to use a burner phone and drive all the way to Oakland just to make the anonymous call. I thought that was ridiculously paranoid at the time. So are you game to go tell a mom her son is a murderer?”

“I’m in.”

REDDING

It took us several days to figure out an approach to Courtney. We didn’t want to just walk into the car dealership and tell her the news in the lobby. We could hardly say she had a son who had been freed after being wrongly charged with murder, only to be asked to help us put her other son in jail for that same murder. What mother would help prove her son to be a murderer, even a son she’d never known?

Before we left, Maeva had uploaded Courtney’s DNA sequence to one of the websites again. The accounts were still active, but just without any sequences since we’d deleted them. Maeva reviewed the health data it revealed. It turned out that Courtney had a gene associated with a condition called Congenital Anosmia. People with the condition had no sense of smell. However, the penetrance of the gene wasn’t very high, meaning that many people with the gene, most in fact, didn’t have symptoms and didn’t know they had the gene. Chances were, however, that she or someone in her family had the condition, that is, was symptomatic. Maeva remembered that Courtney had live flowers in a vase on the counter. That had given her an idea.

Maeva and I walked into the dealership together. I started looking at the cars, examining the price sheets and so on. Maeva moseyed slowly over to the area near Courtney. She waited until no one else was around, then walked up to the counter and admired the flowers in the vase.

“These are pretty,” she said to Courtney.

“They’re gardenias. Go ahead. Take a big whiff. They smell wonderful.”

“Oh, I can’t smell anything. I never have been able to.”

“Really! What a shame. My father was like that.” Courtney bent closer to Maeva and whispered, “He used to fart around others because he didn’t realize how bad it smelled.”

“It’s not his fault. It’s congenital. Not everyone is affected, but if your father had it, you could be a carrier. It’s called Congenital Anosmia. Have you had your genes tested at one of those DNA sites?”

“No.”

“Maybe you should. The anomaly can be accompanied with more serious symptoms that are hard to diagnose.”

“Like what?”

“Neural defects that can lead to early dementia.”

“I don’t want to know if I’m going to become more demented than I am now. I can’t even remember what I had for breakfast.”

Maeva laughed. “Oh, if you can smell, you’re not at risk. But if you’re a carrier, your children might be. It can be prevented with early treatment if they know they have the gene. Do you have any children?”

Courtney hesitated a moment. “I have a daughter.”

“No sons? The males are at greater risk, like your father. It’s important they get tested before age forty. The treatment is very effective and not difficult. I’ve been through it. It’s real cheap to join one of those DNA sites right now. I have a coupon you can use. I don’t need it.”

“Oh, well, I ... Why don’t you leave the coupon with me and I’ll think about it.”

“It’s digital. I don’t have a piece of paper to give you. I’d have to sign in and then get a code that’s good only for a day, then I include that code along with DNA sample. It’s just a tube of spit. We could do it together if you want. Really, I don’t mind. It’s important to save someone. I’ve seen what happens in my own family. I want to help others. Maybe you don’t have the gene. It would set your mind at ease to find out.”

“Can other people, like relatives, see your DNA, and contact you?”

“Not if you don’t want. There are privacy options. But you really should make it public. You could use a separate email that doesn’t identify you but let’s people contact you. The whole point would be to let others, like cousins or other relatives, who might also have the condition get in touch. You’d be doing a public service to warn them if you do have the gene. You want to save them from dementia don’t you?”

“Of course, but, well, why don’t you leave me your email. I’ll look into this and get back to you.”

“Sure. But do it soon. I think the free period is over in a couple of days. What’s your name and email.”

Courtney gave Maeva the requested information.

After browsing through the cars a bit more to look like real customers, we left. We’d decided to give Courtney twenty-four hours to call Maeva back. If she didn’t, Maeva would contact her and try higher pressure. If that didn’t work, we’d have to approach her directly. Fortunately, Courtney took the bait. She emailed Maeva that evening and asked if she could come over during her lunch break the next day and help her get tested with the free coupon. Maeva agreed.

Maeva used some of the lab materials we already had from our regular forensic lab, namely, a vial and stopper for the saliva and some packaging. The preprinted mailing labels and packaging looked legitimate because it was. Maeva brought along a submission card for her to fill in. The plan was to submit it to our own lab to be sequenced and then upload the sequencing to GEDMatch.com. Maeva would tell her that was the public DNA site the lab was associated with. We counted on the fact Courtney wouldn’t be sophisticated about these sites and would just accept it.

They met at the diner down the street from the car dealership. After the usual greeting, Maeva presented her with the packaging. “This set came with my own set as an extra and the coupon code. You can supply the sample in this tube. I have the card for you to fill in. You can use whatever name you want. They don’t care. You just have to have a valid email address there so

they can send you the results. Have you gotten a separate one for this?"

"Yes, I created a new one. It's the same as my regular one but with a capital 'B' after it."

"Good. Use that. If some DNA relative contacts you, they won't know your real identity unless you tell them. That's up to you."

Maeva waited while Courtney filled in the form. Courtney took the tube and preaddressed mailer into the rest room and returned a few minutes later with the unsealed box in hand. She handed it to Maeva for Maeva to enter the coupon code. She'd left the billing information portion blank. Maeva faked going to a website and entering some data, then looking at her phone as though a confirmation code had been given. She then wrote something on the card in the mailer box. Instead of a code, Maeva actually filled in the billing section with our account information, then quickly sealed up the box.

"Do you want to mail it yourself, or shall I?" Maeva asked, handing it back to her.

"There's a mailbox on the corner. I'll drop it off."

"Great. That's really generous of you to share your information. You could be saving someone from early dementia. When you get the results, I'd be glad to help you interpret them. I've done a lot of research on this syndrome."

"That's so generous of you, Maeva. If I need help, I will."

They parted ways. Maeva watched as Courtney dropped the mailer kit into the mailbox and got in her car. Stage one was now complete. We'd have to wait until the results came back to Courtney before we could implement stage two. The medical information Maeva had given was completely false, of course. It had been made up just to motivate Courtney into submitting her DNA to a public site. Congenital Anosmia is a real condition, but sufferers are not at increased risk for early dementia, at least not that we knew of, and Maeva hadn't even had her own DNA sequenced. Maeva had told her that since she could smell the gardenias, she was not at risk personally, so we didn't feel we'd made her worry about herself. She might be worrying needlessly about the sons she gave up, but we'd allay that fear in stage two. We'd chosen this approach because Courtney really did have the

condition, so if she checked the results herself, it would look real. It would reduce the chances of her suspecting Maeva.

It took two weeks. Maeva kept checking the logical DNA sites but Courtney's email never appeared among the new members. She should have received her sequenced DNA by then, so we were getting a little worried. Finally an email came in to Maeva at the email she had created for her correspondence with Courtney. Courtney said she had received the sequenced DNA, but didn't know how to interpret it, or what to do next. It was obvious Courtney wasn't very sophisticated about computers or DNA. Maeva offered to help. She said she knew a site that would provide that particular genetic analysis. She said that if Courtney sent her the sequence, Maeva would upload it to that site using her own email so that Courtney would stay anonymous, then Maeva would let her know if she came back positive for that gene. Courtney agreed and sent the digital sequence. Maeva uploaded it to several different sites and used her own email to shield Courtney. Of course, we had already uploaded Courtney's DNA that we'd gotten from the pencil a year ago, but we deleted that so that now the only DNA of hers accessible online was the new sequence she had sent to Maeva.

Maeva waited a couple of days to reply to Courtney and told her that she did have the gene, which we already knew, but that she was asymptomatic, which we also already knew. Maeva told her there was no risk to her of early dementia, at least not from this gene since she had a good sense of smell. Maeva thanked her again for allowing the DNA to go online so that any DNA relatives could get checked and maybe treated for the condition.

We gave it another week after that in order to look legitimate, then started the final plan. Maeva called Courtney and told her she'd been contacted by a man claiming to be her son. He said he had been adopted and had been searching for his birth mother for a long time. Maeva told her that she didn't know how to reply to the man.

“Courtney. I’m so sorry. This isn’t my business, but this is why we uploaded your DNA. Do you have a son that you gave up?”

Courtney gasped at the news. “Yes. I was young and couldn’t ... well, it’s the old story: a teenager, father not around.”

“He does have the gene that puts him at risk. I don’t know if he’s symptomatic, but he should be notified. I should let him know to get tested, but I haven’t replied. What do you want me to tell him?”

“Does he say where he lives?”

“Chico.”

“Oh. So close. Does he say anything about ... a brother?”

Yes! Maeva gave a silent fist pump. “A brother? No. Did you have two?”

“Twin boys. I thought they would be adopted and raised together. They promised me that.”

“Maybe they were. Are they identical twins?”

“Yes.”

“That means the other one also has the gene and could be at risk. How old would they be now?”

“Let’s see ... thirty-six.”

“It’s important they get tested before age forty. I’m sorry this has caused you worry, but this is actually good news. Thanks to you, these men can get the help they need. Why don’t we do this: I’ll reply to him that I am the intermediary managing your DNA and need to verify some things. I’ll ask his age, if he has a good sense of smell, and if he has any brothers. When I get his response, I’ll let you know. Did you want him to be able to find you?”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to think about it. Why don’t you go ahead with what you just said. Don’t give him an answer on that. I think it would be heartbreaking to have a reunion – is that the right word? – with just one of them.”

“All right, I’ll do that.”

“Thank you, Maeva. I’m sorry to put you to so much work.”

“Really, it’s nothing. It’s just answering a few emails. It makes me feel so good helping others with the condition. You’re doing me a favor by letting me do this.”

“Okay. Please let me know as soon as you hear.”

“I will. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

Maeva had waved me over to hear her side of the call before dialing, so I pretty much knew what had happened. She stood after the call ended and put her hand up for a high five. I never much liked that gesture, but this time I gladly smacked her palm.

“You were right ... again,” I said. “Identical twins.”

“So now we have to find the other one.”

“We’re right on course. How long do you want to wait before the next step?”

“I’ll email her tomorrow. This fictitious son is pretty anxious and will probably reply right away to my email.”

“Okay. Be sure to tell her this Chico son has a good sense of smell and is not at risk.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know the plan. It’s my plan.”

The following day this email conversation took place:

Maeva: Courtney, I got an email from James, your son. He has a normal sense of smell and so is not at risk. This is the good news. He’s thirty-six years old, so I’m sure he’s the one. The bad news is that he doesn’t have a brother. He was very curious as to why I asked. He wants to know if he has a brother now that I’ve planted the idea in his head. We need to find out ourselves. Just because James isn’t symptomatic, that doesn’t mean his brother isn’t. He could still be at risk. Can you tell me anything about the adoption process that would help us locate him? What agency did you go through? Maybe we can get them to tell us where he is. Probably not, but they might pass on the information about this gene and let him know to get tested.

Courtney: I didn’t use an agency. I heard about this local attorney who handles private adoptions. His

name is Charles Fogarty in Red Bluff. He said he had a list of people who wanted to adopt. He told me he knew a good couple who would take twin boys. He must have lied. He said they would not agree to meet with me or have me in their boys' lives. I had to give up all rights, which was fine with me then. What did James say about meeting me?

Maeva: When I told him you weren't sure about meeting him, I think he was disappointed or maybe angry. He seemed more interested in finding his brother, if he had one. I didn't tell him he had an identical twin.

Courtney: I was afraid of something like this. I don't want the guilt. I'm sorry, but I don't want to be put in touch with them. I think Mr. Fogarty must be dead. He was in his sixties when they were born. If you want to pursue this other boy, don't mention me. I don't want any part of it. I'm sorry. You're the crusader, not me.

Maeva: I understand. I won't contact you any more on this. They will never know your name or location from me. Just remember that you did a good thing. You helped to make sure these men were not at risk for dementia. Thank you for your help.

This was turning out just the way we planned it, but we still had a long way to go. We'd verified that there was a twin brother out there somewhere, and that this Fogarty person arranged the adoption, but the question remained how to locate the other brother. I felt bad about dredging up some painful memories for Courtney, but at least she never had to know her son was a murderer.

I spent the next month trying to track down Fogarty's records. I was able to easily verify from the state bar website that he was deceased, but not when that happened or who might have received his records. I called around to various lawyers in the Red

Bluff area. I had no luck with the first few, but eventually a senior partner in one of the family law firms took my call. He'd known Fogarty. He told me Fogarty was a sole practitioner and had died eight years ago.

I explained that I was an attorney with a client who was trying to track down a child she had given up for adoption through Fogarty's office. I asked if he knew what had happened to his files. He told me that the probate judge had ordered the active cases in his files be turned over to other lawyers practicing in the area, parceled out equally. There weren't many of those, maybe three or four, as Fogarty had been a drunk toward the end and was quite old. The other files had been ordered destroyed to protect client privacy.

I explained that I had located one of two identical twins but not the other and wondered if it was possible they were separated and adopted by two different families.

The attorney whistled. "We would never agree to that, but if it was Fogarty, yeah, he would try to separate them."

"Why?"

"Were they healthy white babies?"

"Yes."

"Boys?"

"Yes."

He whistled. "He could charge double. Healthy white boys are the children most in demand. Those of us in family law don't like to view them as products on a shelf, but the reality is that that's what most adopting parents want. Lawyers like Fogarty, like us for that matter, keep lists of couples or single people, too, who want to adopt. They contact us and want to be on our waiting list. They often contact various agencies and other law firms, too, to get on as many lists as possible. We vet them as best we can. Adoption agencies have very long waiting lists and often restrictions. The couples who contact us are usually impatient, even desperate.

"When some woman contacts us and says she's pregnant and wants to give up the baby, we interview her and learn what we can about the baby, such as race, sex, health problems, religion. Some of the mothers will only give up the child to another Catholic family or Jewish one, or Chinese speakers, and so on. Some want a family with another sibling in it."

“Sure, I get it.”

“We try to match the child’s interests with the mother’s and with the adopting family as best we can. We’ll contact some couple on our list that we think will fit well. If we know in advance it’s twins, then it may not be important to have another sibling, for example. They’d be placed together.”

“Right.”

“But the adopting family typically pays all the expenses of the mother throughout her pregnancy and delivery – medical, often housing and food. The firm is involved as a middleman to ensure the mother goes to her doctor’s appointments, isn’t abusing drugs, and so on. This costs money. I don’t know this for sure, but I think if Fogarty knew that the woman was carrying white male twins, he’d contact two different families and charge them both for the mother’s expenses and his. He’d probably pad the bill, too.”

“That’s outrageous.”

“It is, and it’s unethical. On the other hand, you end up with two couples with a baby instead of just one. It’s not entirely a bad outcome. The children won’t know they’re separated twins.”

“So how do I find the other twin?”

“Fogarty would probably contact families as widely separated from each other as possible so that they don’t end up in the same school or day care. Where was the first twin located?”

“Chico.”

“Okay, that’s south of here. The other one would probably be placed north. I doubt he had any clients out of state.”

“Redding?”

“Yeah, that’s a good bet. Or here in Red Bluff. Have you tried DNA testing? There’s a website called GEDMatch.com where ...”

“Yes, I know all about them. We’ve tried that. He’s not on it. I’ve uploaded the mother’s DNA to several sites but haven’t found him.”

“Too bad. A lot of adoptees don’t even know they were adopted and wouldn’t be looking on those sites.”

“What would happen if the lawyer, say Fogarty, didn’t have two couples wanting to adopt, or who no longer could for some reason?”

“He’d probably contact other firms that do private adoptions to see if they had any. We’d insist on knowing the whole history of the child and mother, which would mean revealing that it’s twins. He wouldn’t contact us because of that, but other firms might not be so particular. I don’t know any other attorneys in this area that would go along with separating twins, but he might know of some attorneys elsewhere. There’s a directory of qualified family law attorneys in the state. Most don’t handle adoptions, only divorce and other marital matters, but I think he could find someone.”

“Any other advice on how to find him?”

“Not really. You could hire a good private investigator, but that costs a lot and isn’t likely to be successful. They can be a waste of money.”

“All right. Thanks for your help.”

“My pleasure. Good luck.”

He’d been talking to me lawyer-to-lawyer. Sometimes that helps to get a perspective of how people view you. Investigators are “a waste of money.” And that’s for a good one. In this case I was beginning to think he’d hit the nail on the head. I’d spent a lot of money, both my client’s and my own, and so far wasn’t all that much closer to finding Cole Case.

I rehashed the conversation to Maeva. She thought trying to track down Fogarty’s former clients would be a waste of time. After more discussion, we agreed we had to go back to Redding. The only explanation that made sense is that Corbett must have known the real twin, the killer, and somehow, by chance, had been stopped for speeding by the other one and recognized him. When we came stirring things up, he directed us to the wrong one intentionally. That meant he didn’t want us to find the killer. That means the killer must still pose a threat to him or is close to him in some way. That also meant the killer’s probably still in Redding and still in touch with Corbett. We needed to go back there and identify his contacts, both back in school and now.

Chapter 27

REDDING

Our first stop was the county library. We'd been here before, but now we were armed with additional information. We knew the age, sex, and most important, the appearance, of the other twin. We'd only seen photos of James Buxton as a thirty-five-year-old officer in uniform, but we felt we'd recognize him in a yearbook photo of his senior year.

Now that we knew his exact age, we realized Cole should be three years ahead of Corbett in school. Chances were he went to the same school, Shasta High. It's a four-year high school, so Corbett's freshman year would have been his senior year. That was our best bet because he would be the most mature. But he would be in earlier yearbooks, too. The library had only one copy of each year. I gave Maeva what would be his senior year one to review and I took the one a year earlier.

It was grueling work, not so much because of the volume, but because of the uncertainty. We went through the sections with individual photos, organized by class and listed alphabetically. Maeva tagged several senior boys who were blond in their photos. She couldn't tell for sure, nor could I, but neither of us thought any of them looked enough like Buxton to be the twin. I did the same in mine with the same results.

"What if Cole skipped a year or was held back?"

"Or Corbett did? Yeah, we could be off a year either way. I'll check the seniors in my book and you check the juniors in yours.

We both spent the next half hour examining and reexamining every photo in those classes. Again, there were a few vaguely possible, but none of them were convincing. We compared all the ones we'd found and culled the three that were the best fit on facial resemblance alone. One we could throw out because he had a brother a year ahead, a brother who looked too much like him to be unrelated. Another we eliminated because we found him in the sports section on the wrestling team lightweight class (one hundred fifteen pounds and under). He was too small. The third looked the least like Buxton.

“Are you sure Corbett went to this high school?” Maeva asked.

“That’s what he said. He should be in the freshman class in your book. Check that page.”

“Okay. Yeah he’s here on the M and N page. And here’s Harold Mackie.”

“Hey! The Mackies adopted him. What if they had an adopted child we don’t know about, maybe even one who is now deceased? Check your book for any Mackie boy in the senior and junior classes. I’ll check mine.”

“We have a name. Just use the index. That’ll tell us of any Mackies.” After a few seconds she called back to me, “I checked. Harold Mackie is the only one.”

I thought it was pointless to check mine if there was no other Mackie in Maeva’s book, but I flipped to the index in mine just to be sure. Evelyn Mackie was listed on two pages. We already knew about her. She was the treasurer of the metal recycling business. The one thing we knew about Cole Case was that he was male, but I flipped to those two pages out of curiosity.

The first one was the end of the seniors section on a page with no photos; it was titled “Camera Shy.” If she was a senior in my book, that meant she’d already graduated by the time Maeva’s book was printed and wouldn’t appear at all which explains why she wasn’t in the index. I flipped to the other referenced page. It was page 32 in the sports section. When I opened to that page it was a photo spread of the two basketball teams, the men’s on the left and women’s on the right. I scanned the photo captions on the women’s side and couldn’t find Evelyn Mackie listed in any of them.

Then I noticed I was looking at page 33, not 32. What the hell? Was the index a typo? Maybe she was the manager of the men’s team or something. I scanned the captions on page 32, the men’s team side. Nothing in any of the varsity basketball team photos. There was a group photo of the junior varsity team sitting in the bleachers. There in the caption was the name, Ev Mackie, fourth from the left in the top row. A tall blond boy stood in that position. There was no doubt. The resemblance to Buxton was unmistakable. There was the killer.

The scene flashed back through my memory. At the recycling plant a huge bearded man with tattoos had told the woman at the desk to have Corbett get his ass in his office. He was a boss, the owner's son. She had called him Ev. I would have assumed his name was Everett if I'd bothered to think about it at all. But Evelyn can be a man's name in Britain, although I'd never heard of an American man with the name. Evelyn Waugh, the novelist, was a man married to a woman also named Evelyn. Talk about confusing.

I slid the book over to Maeva and tapped the photo of the men's junior varsity team. She looked at me curiously but began to read the picture caption. She spotted the name and looked up at the photo and counted over on the top row. When she stopped on Ev Mackie, her eyes got wider than I thought possible. That song began playing itself in my head:

My gal's a corker, she's a New Yorker
I buy her everything to keep her in style
She's got a pair of eyes just like two lemon pies.

"Cole Case."

Those two words from Maeva's mouth told me everything. She had confirmed what I was already sure of. We had just identified Linda Klein's killer.

"Damn! I saw him over a year ago and didn't put two and two together." I told Maeva about the scene where the hairy ape called Ev had come out and gone back in to his office. She had been at the library at that time researching Chip Mozingo.

Maeva was bubbling with excitement. "Cliff, this explains everything. Corbett didn't dare turn his boss in for murder. He works directly under Ev Mackie. At a minimum, his job depends on keeping mum. He may have been more involved in the murder than he let on, too. He intentionally sent us to Buxton hoping to get the case permanently closed."

"Right. It also explains the treatment we got from Harold Mackie. I believe he didn't know about the murder before we interviewed him, but must have figured it was his brother who did it once we described the part about Corbett and the spoon. That's why he asked about the physical description and the adoption. But he couldn't bring himself to turn in his own family. Even if he

didn't know about the murder before, he must have known Ev was dirty in some way, or capable of committing a murder. The whole family business might be dodgy. It's probably why he's estranged from them. I'll bet he remembers Ev browbeating Corbett for the information on the Klein house. It's why he was sure Buxton was innocent."

"Yeah, but does Ev know Buxton exists? Corbett might have told him about the cop who ticketed him. If so, would he let his own twin go down for his murder?"

"Good question. And what about the reverse? Does Buxton know about Ev? That's less likely."

"More important, though, is what do we do with this information? The D.A. won't touch it. It's 'radioactive' you said."

"I'll think of something."

Chapter 28

We flew back to Los Altos and caught up on our regular business. At home I told my wife about the breakthrough we made, about identifying Evelyn Mackie as the killer but not being able to pursue it.

“Does your client know?” she asked.

“No. We haven’t told her. First of all, she told us to drop the case. It also suggests that her cousin, whom she likes and trusts, was lying to us and probably more involved in the crime than she wants to believe. Why burst her bubble?”

“What’s the name of the detective who got busted to patrol over this?”

“Wilbanks. But they won’t even give him my messages now. I’m *persona non grata*.”

“I can help,” Ellen said. “I’ll call and say I need to talk to him. I’ll say I’m an FBI agent who needs to talk to him about one of his previous cases. They’ll put me through. If he’s out on patrol, he’ll get the message and call me back.”

Ellen still used her maiden name, Kennedy, as her professional name in the Bureau. Her personal one, too, for that matter. She knew they wouldn’t block her call based on the name Knowles as they would mine.

“He didn’t name me as the anonymous tipster that started the investigation. I owe him. Maybe he can get some sort of redemption if he can get the actual killer.”

It didn’t take long. Later the next day I got a call at work from Wilbanks.

“Knowles?”

“Speaking.”

“Barry Wilbanks here. Hey, your wife called and told me. An identical twin. That right?”

“It is. He’s Corbett’s boss, the treasurer of the metal recycling business.”

“Shit. How in the world did he know who the other twin was?”

“Sheer coincidence, probably. He was stopped by Buxton for speeding and recognized him. Buxton and Evelyn Mackie don’t look like each other now because Mackie’s got a huge beard and

wild hair concealing much of his face, but Corbett's known him at least since junior high when he palled around with Harold. He must have tucked away that piece of info for future use."

"How in hell are we supposed to go after him now? The case is toxic downtown."

"I've heard, but I have an idea. I owe you for keeping my name out of the case. Are you allowed to work on this case at all now?"

"Allowed? No. But what's your idea?"

I told him my idea. He said he could do his part, but he'd have to be careful to avoid scrutiny from the brass.

REDDING

One week later

I sat in the interview room with the Redding detective, a man named Sanchez. He was explaining to me what they knew about the suspected fencing operation. He said that they had an informant, a druggie, who fed his habit with burglaries. He mostly stole copper wire he stole from construction sites, but he'd done some residential burglaries, too, and taken jewelry.

The snitch, who went by Snake, had been caught for the umpteenth time and was finally looking at hard time for another conviction. He gave up Ev Mackie as his fence in hopes of getting a lighter sentence, but the prosecutor couldn't use his testimony. He was a drug addict and a convicted perjurer, too. He was now in prison. Sanchez said the way we could use him was as a way in to Mackie. He had a cell phone number for Evelyn Mackie, whom he called Big E, a number not affiliated with the business.

The metal business required people turning in copper wire for recycling to provide a thumbprint and a photo ID. It also held up payment for three days. These are requirements under the California Business and Professions Code to reduce metal theft. I was going to be posing as someone who wanted to avoid those requirements. Big E didn't require any of that, and in exchange for overlooking those pesky requirements, paid about twenty percent less than the going rate.

According to Snake, Big E had a side business as a salvager and demolition firm who tore down buildings to clear properties for new construction. He would wrap the stolen wire or other metals into that business. He could then sell it to his parent's recycling business as a legitimate operation, wire he'd torn out of buildings he was demolishing. Snake didn't think they knew their son was fencing the stuff. Big E always warned Snake not to ever show up at the recycling plant or talk to anyone else there about it. Snake didn't know who Corbett was. He'd never been to the plant.

After we'd gone over the details of the operation, we were ready. My undercover name was Kurt. I called the number Snake had given the P.D. Ev answered on the third ring.

"Yeah?"

"Big E?"

"Who is this?"

"My name's Kurt. I'm a friend of Snake."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. He said you could help me get paid for some stuff I got."

"Stuff. What kind of stuff?"

"Copper wire."

"We have a recycling plant. It's legit. You can just walk in with it, you know. Why call me?"

"I know. It's just, ... I need the money now. I can't wait three days."

"Uh huh. Where do you know Snake from?"

"I just got out of county lockup. He and I were cellmates before he got shipped off to Folsom."

"He's in Folsom now? That would explain why I haven't heard from him lately."

"Sure. So can you help me out?"

"This 'stuff' you have is legitimate, isn't it? I don't accept stolen property."

"Sure, of course."

"So where did you get it?"

"I helped my cousin tear out an old work shed he had, to put in a barbecue. He gave me the wire in part payment."

"I'm bending a rule if I pay you right away. I could get fined."

“I know.”

“So I can’t pay full price. You understand that, right?”

“Right.”

“How many pounds you have?”

“Maybe forty.”

“Musta been a pretty big shed.”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, did Snake tell you our meeting spot?”

“No.”

“Okay, I’ll text you the location. This phone number you’re using have text?”

“Yeah. That’s fine.”

“Okay, see you there in half an hour.”

After the call was over Sanchez was pleased with the result as a first step, but made clear that it wasn’t enough to prosecute on. No doubt Mackie knew the copper was stolen, but he was smart enough to create deniability by asking if it was legitimate. He didn’t know me and knew that the phone call could be recorded, which, of course, it had been.

Sanchez and his department had a stash of recovered copper wire they could use as bait for this operation. It was all loot they couldn’t identify the owner to. I took a few pre-selected coils to the address Mackie had texted me, a small shop in an industrial area. I was wired for sound, but not video. I didn’t have any police backup. It wasn’t considered necessary since this did not involve drugs or violent crime. Mackie had no reason to use violence on me. The sign on the front said Mackie Salvage. It was open so I walked in.

Mackie was standing next to an industrial scale similar to the one in the metal recycling place. I was dressed in my work grubbies – stained jeans, frayed flannel shirt, work boots. I hadn’t shaved for a couple of days. The shirt was something Sanchez had for me. It already stank. He thought it was necessary to sell the scenario.

Mackie didn’t say a word when I walked in. He obviously knew who I was already. He just motioned to put the coils on the scale. I walked over to them and let them down onto the scales. The weight was forty-two point something pounds. He reached down and pulled one of the coils off.

“This one’s aluminum, not copper.”

I had known this already, but it was planned that I play dumb. “Oh, is it? I don’t know much about wire.”

Mackie grunted disgustedly but didn’t say any more. He just looked at the reading on the scale for the copper and punched some numbers into his phone calculator. Then he weighed the aluminum coil separately and repeated the process. When he was done, he reached into his wallet and pulled out some bills. I held out my hand, but he didn’t give me the money.

“First, some I.D.”

“Hey, if I wanted to show I.D. I would have gone to the plant.”

“I’m not going to record it. I just need to see it. I need to know who I’m dealing with.”

We were prepared for this. I had some fake identity papers I’d used from time to time in my business. One was a social security card for a Kurt Delaney.

“I don’t have a driver’s license. It got taken for a DUI.” I showed him the social security card. He took it from my hand and studied it, then looked at my face hard as though trying to memorize it. He handed the card back, then handed me the money.

“So, your cousin have any more sheds?”

This was what we wanted. He was asking for more stolen metal.

“Uh, yeah. Well, no sheds, but we have a business of, like, bidding on abandoned storage units. You know, like on the show Storage Wars. Sometimes we come up with jewelry or ... you know, other stuff.”

““Other stuff” huh? I’m not a fence. I don’t want any electronics, or shit like that. Bring me legit metal and I can handle it. Silverware is good. Real silver, especially, but I take plate and stainless steel, brass.”

“Okay, good. Got it. I can bring you more.”

That ended the transaction. I walked out and he walked out behind me. My van was parked across the street from his place. It was a generic-looking white van. He couldn’t see my license plate from the doorway, only the side. I’d slathered some mud on the plate before making the meet, so even if he did see it, half the characters were unreadable. He watched as I got in and drove off.

Back at the police station Sanchez listened to the tape with me. I could tell he was disappointed.

"That's good. That's good. We're getting there," he said unconvincingly.

"Not enough?"

"Not yet. Not with this. But he bit. He's just being too careful. He keeps making you say it's not stolen. That's his defense. He thought it was obtained legitimately."

"It's obvious it's stolen from the way I acted."

"Well, first, it's not actually stolen. I gave it to you. And the D.A. isn't going to touch it unless there's something that proves he knew it was stolen. You can't just say he must have known."

"The D.A. doesn't have to touch it. We don't need to prosecute him for possession of stolen property or anything else up here. We just need to get enough to arrest him and get his DNA in the system. CODIS will tag him for the murder case. You can ship him down to Santa Clara County."

"I know. But we don't have it."

I was disappointed, but I knew he was right. California has a law that says DNA is like fingerprints or photographs, in essence, just a way to identify people. If a person is arrested for a felony, then his DNA can be obtained through a cheek swab and retained irrespective of whether he is ever prosecuted or convicted. That's always been the case for prints and mug shots. The law was challenged by civil libertarian groups and in a controversial 4-3 decision the California Supreme Court held the law constitutional, but only if there was probable cause for an arrest for a felony. Possession of a small dollar amount such as the copper I gave him wasn't a felony and we didn't even have probable cause that he had the requisite criminal intent. If he was arrested based on what we had and the DNA was then used to identify him in the Klein case, it would be the fruit of the poisonous tree and couldn't be used at trial. We needed more.

I told him I understood and agreed. We'd hoped to get lucky but Mackie had sufficient street smarts not to say the words that would get him arrested. We had to move on to a more aggressive approach. We didn't want to push too fast, though. I

had to bring him more metal on occasion, but not go running back every day. I also couldn't stay in Redding long-term.

I flew back to the Bay Area and resumed my normal routine. Barry Wilbanks called me up and asked how it was going. I knew he was in touch with Sanchez. He'd set the whole thing up. But he wanted my take on it, too. I told him it was on track, but was going to take some time. He told me that the civil case was progressing pretty fast. Buxton's lawyers were already requesting discovery in the form of documents. So far he hadn't been scheduled for a deposition.

A week later I flew up to Redding again. This time Sanchez had some silver goblets that had been recovered but never claimed. I met with Mackie again and got paid for them. I could hardly get him to say anything. It was like last time. He tested the silver by rubbing it with something, pointed to the scales, and paid me cash. I left with even less evidence than the first time.

It was back to Los Altos, and once more Wilbanks called. This time he said he was scheduled for a deposition in four days. He reminded me that if he was asked if he knew who had made the anonymous call naming Buxton, he'd have to name me. That would mean I'd be a defendant in a multi-million dollar lawsuit. Maeva, too.

I called Sanchez to see if we could move up the final trap scenario, but he said we couldn't; he was negotiating with the local utility. We needed their cooperation. His captain was also getting tired of the operation since it wasn't producing anything. I knew that undercover operations of this nature usually took months, even years, in the FBI, but Redding wasn't the FBI. They had a limited budget and manpower.

There was nothing I could do but wait. Four days later I hadn't heard from Wilbanks, so at the end of the day I called him.

"Hello."

"Barry, it's Cliff."

"Yeah, I thought you'd call."

"So, how'd the deposition go?" He knew that what I really wanted to ask was "Did you name me?"

"It didn't. I had to go to the hospital. My son broke his arm at school. It's been rescheduled for next month."

"Oh. That was a lucky break."

“What? Are you trying to be funny?” He sounded angry.

“Oh, no. I didn’t mean it that way. I’m sorry about your son. Is he going to be okay?”

“It really hurt, poor kid. It’s not a joke. But yeah, it was a lucky break for you. For me, too, I guess. You’ve got another month to make this work.”

“Does your department know about this yet?”

“No. It’s strictly off the books. I could get busted if it came out. Even fired. I’m counting on you to keep this strictly between you and Redding.”

“It’s fine. Okay? I know what I’m doing. You haven’t done anything except put me in touch with Sanchez and explaining about needing Mackie’s DNA to get into CODIS.”

After hanging up, I called Sanchez again. He didn’t care about my civil suit predicament. He didn’t understand the implications the civil case held for the criminal case, and I couldn’t tell him. If I got named in the civil case and deposed, and assuming Buxton’s lawyer was any good, I’d probably have to explain about how I got his DNA and about all the matching I’d been doing with others – the Fullers, the Mozingos, even Courtney Branch. That would result in the criminal case against Mackie becoming unprosecutable. The local D.A. didn’t want a test case on the legality. I’d never told Wilbanks about copying the killer’s DNA sequence and doing the genealogy work, so he’d never told Sanchez. Sanchez also didn’t know that I was the anonymous caller. Wilbanks had kept that from him. So he just didn’t see the rush. He was still working with the local electric company.

Maeva was getting nervous, too. I couldn’t blame her. I’d been fortunate financially and could stand a civil lawsuit better than she could. With my FBI pension, Ellen’s salary, and my investments, it didn’t matter a great deal if I was put out of business. She was young and dependent on the business staying solvent.

Chapter 29

Three weeks later I got the call. Sanchez had made the arrangements with the electric utility. They were getting ready to hook up power to a multi-building industrial complex ten miles

away. They were willing to give the police access to the construction grounds the night before. They would have several reels of copper overhead transmission wire on site for us, cable they actually planned to use for the installation. We were to stage a burglary if I could get Mackie to agree to help me. The value of the copper was in the tens of thousands, certainly enough monetary value to provide probably cause for felony charges.

The site was guarded by a professional guard service – normally one armed guard for that night because of the copper on site. But we'd made arrangements to have him replaced by an officer wearing a guard's uniform. He'd play along with the scenario. The plan was not to let the copper leave the grounds. We just wanted Mackie to be present and assist with getting it into my van. Once that happened, the police would close in, arrest us both and take Mackie to the station where they would take his prints, a mug shot, and DNA.

Two days before the trap was to be sprung I called Mackie on the recorded line.

"Big E? It's Kurt."

"Yeah."

"I need your help."

"Help? I'm not your buddy. Why are you calling me?"

"Big money. Maybe thirty grand."

"Your cousin have another big shed?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"Hey, I only buy clean metal. Legit."

"I know, I know. But I need help."

"You don't seem to get it. You're an idiot talking like this. You sound like a snitch trying to entrap me into some kind of illegal operation."

"Who said anything about illegal? It's a storage unit, like I told you before. Someone left a bunch of copper wire in one that I bought at auction. Dumb shit forgot to put in a valid credit card number when the old one expired. He missed two payments and the unit auctioned it off. I got lucky."

"I thought you said it was your cousin's shed."

"No, you said that."

"Then you said 'Yeah'."

“Uh, okay, yeah, you’re right. But I meant it’s me and my cousin’s business buying these storage units. So it’s his too.”

“So you have your cousin to help you. Why do you need me?”

“Now who’s the idiot? Forget the cousin. How much do you make when I sell to you? Twenty percent? Fifteen? Help me with this, half is yours, and I’ll sell you my half at the usual rate. You’ll clear twenty grand. Maybe more.”

“What kind of wire are you talking about?”

“Copper overhead wire. Big reels. I can’t lift them. They’re like a hundred fifty pounds each. And bulky, awkward shape.”

“Copper? Overhead wire is usually aluminum. Is it insulated?”

“I don’t think so. No, it’s definitely not.”

“It must be grounding wire.”

“Look, I don’t know about wire. It’s bright shiny copper.”

“Okay, I’ll help you carry some reels of copper wire from the storage unit you bought. Fifty percent for me and I buy your half at the usual rate. When did you want to do this?”

“This Thursday night. Let’s meet at midnight. It’s out of town.”

“Christ. Okay, come to my shop. I’ll need some equipment. It’ll be cold. I’ll need gloves and a ski mask, right? For the cold.”

“Right. Okay. See you then.”

After the call was over, Sanchez shook his head and laughed. It was forecast to be sixty-two degrees at midnight. “Ski mask and gloves for the cold. Right. He knows what’s going down, but he’s slick. He knows he might be recorded. He probably recorded it himself so he can use it in his defense if he gets caught. We can’t move on just this. There’s nothing illegal about helping someone move his property out of his own storage unit. We have to catch him in the act.”

“Sure. You think he suspects me ... Kurt, I mean.”

“He’s paranoid. He suspects everyone. He thinks you’re an ex-con. How honest can you be?”

“I have a question. Why didn’t you use Snake to do this? He was cooperating for a lighter sentence and Mackie already knew him.”

"He was willing to talk, but he wasn't willing to wear a wire or set him up face-to-face. He was afraid of Mackie."

"Why? He doesn't have a record of violence, does he?"

"No. No record for anything. He's careful. But Snake said he's mean and he's big. He's threatened Snake and reportedly carries a gun. Besides, Snake was too stupid to carry it off."

"You're telling me this now?"

"You'll be okay. You're a pro and you're almost as big as he is. It's just a copper theft and you're going to tell him the guard has been bribed to let you take the stuff for a cut. There's not going to be any gunplay."

"Unless he decides to resist arrest and draws on you."

"He's too smart for that. He'll be outgunned. He knows if he tries it, he'll end up Swiss cheese. He knows he probably wouldn't even get jail time. He's a first-time offender."

"What about before we get there?"

"You'll have backup. We've got your van wired for sound and a tracking unit. Officers will be following you out of sight and listening to every word."

"Shouldn't I be wired, too? So they can hear when we're out of the van?"

"Too risky. Snake said he frisked him once. Thoroughly, too, but that was only after Snake told him the stuff he had was stolen. Mackie cursed him out and stripped him down looking for a wire. When he found Snake was clean, then he dealt with the loot. He told him never to say anything like that, like something was stolen. This operation is like that. It's obviously a burglary. He's probably going to search you. But he won't find the unit in the van. It's built right into the stock radio. There's nothing to see."

I stayed in Redding for those two days. I tested the radio communications in the van. They worked well, even for a tail car well out of sight. The P.D. had done a good job on the electronics. I got a dolly for the van, not because we were going to move the copper, but so that it would look authentic to Mackie when he got in the van. I also brought my nine millimeter Sig Sauer. If Mackie carries, I'm carrying. It would seem almost suspicious if I didn't carry. Mackie would expect it.

At the appointed time, I drove my van to Mackie's shop. He told me to come inside. I did. As Sanchez had predicted, he frisked me. He would have found a wire if I'd had one on me. He had no problem with the gun.

The shop had a back door. He led me out that way. In the back parking area he had a heavy-duty van. He told me to get in.

"I've got my van out front. I've got equipment. Let's take mine. I know where we're going."

"You can direct me."

"But my stuff ... a dolly"

"I've got all that here. If you want my help, I'm driving. Period."

I had a decision to make. If I agreed, I'd be without a tail car and any backup. I should be okay at the site, but they wouldn't have advance warning of our arrival. If I refused, the whole operation would be lost and he would never trust me again. I really had no choice. I figured I could direct him past the tail car and they'd pick us up visually. At least they'd be able to warn the team at the site what we'd be driving.

"Yeah, okay. Whatever." I got in.

He drove us to the parking lot entrance. I told him to make a left. He turned right. I was beginning to get nervous. "Hey, where you going? It's the other way."

"I gotta make a stop first."

Mackie drove us out away from the industrial area and into a housing tract. He turned into a cul-de-sac and stopped, letting the van idle. He texted someone and in a few seconds a man came out of the house across the street. At first I didn't recognize him. It was dark and there was no streetlight. Then I realized who it was: Corbett Nagy. This was pucker time. I slipped my hand onto the butt of my gun, but my jacket concealed the action from Mackie, who was looking the other way, across the street, as Nagy approached.

Nagy got in the back seat on the driver's side. I had to make an instant decision. He was either going to tell Mackie who I was, or he wasn't. I wanted to know which while the van was parked and I could escape. If he told after we got moving, they could drive me wherever they wanted and do whatever they wanted to me.

I turned to face Nagy and said, "Hi. I'm Kurt." I didn't extend my hand to shake since it was still on the butt of my gun.

Nagy said nothing for a few seconds. His expression told me he recognized me. He started to sweat immediately. He looked over at Mackie, but Mackie was looking forward, putting the van in gear. Then Nagy replied, "Hi, Kurt. Just call me C-Note." He reached over the seat to shake. I relaxed my grip on my gun and shook his hand. It looked like Corbett was going to play along.

We got moving. Mackie made a U-turn and left the cul-de-sac. I tried to keep an eye on Nagy behind me, but I couldn't keep turning around. What I did see worried me. He was sweating even more and fidgeting. He was clearly in a crisis mode, trying to decide what to do.

Finally he spoke. "Ev, we're going to unload a storage shed, right? Some wire this guy owns."

Mackie replied, "What are you talking about? We're not wired. I frisked him. He's clean. You don't have to talk like that. You're carrying a ski mask, for Chrissakes."

"I don't know. I don't have a good feeling about this. It could be a set-up."

"Relax." Then to me Mackie said, "Now the deal has changed. It's going to be a three-man job so it's a three-way split."

"What? No way. Fifty-fifty. That was the deal."

"We'll talk about that later. Let's see how much we get."

"No way... Fifty-fifty, I'm telling you. We don't need this guy. It's a two-man job. You and me. Drop him off. No offense C-Note, but we really don't need you."

"Fine with me," Nagy said. "Drop me off here, Big-E. I can walk back."

"Not gonna happen. I want my own man for backup. You wanna keep your job, you do what I tell you. Now let's get this done."

I looked at Corbett again and it was clear he knew it was going to be a takedown. He wanted no part of it, but Mackie had a grip on him through his employment. I was hoping I could still find a way to peel him off later. It could get nasty at the arrest site if we showed up unexpectedly with three men in a different vehicle from what they expected.

"Now head out east on 44. It's the other side of I-5," I said.

“We have another stop. I have to switch license plates.”

He kept driving back toward where his shop was. I wondered why he hadn't already switched plates before we left. When we pulled into the metal recycling plant, I realized why. There were a couple of old vehicles there waiting to be stripped of wiring and batteries. He pulled up next to one of them. With a remote control he closed the mechanized gate behind us.

“C-Note, get out and put the plate on. It already has the magnets on it.”

Nagy got out and grabbed the license plates off the back of the derelict van. The plates had already been removed, then replaced using only magnets, not screws. Nagy put the old van's plates over Mackie's. He moved around to the driver's side and I thought he was going to get back in, but he didn't. He just stood there looking back and forth at Mackie and me.

“Get in. What are you waiting for?” Mackie demanded.

“Look, we can't do this. It's a set-up, I'm telling you.”

“You chicken shit. You never had the nerve. You think you're some kind of choir boy?”

“It's not that. He's not who he says.” He looked right at me. “He's that private eye I told you about. The one last year asking about the old lady down in the Bay Area.”

The jig was up as they say in the movies. The old movies at least. I opened my door and jumped out, hand on my gun. Mackie leaped from the driver's side and came around the front of the cab with his gun in hand. I drew mine and yelled “Halt!”

He stopped and ducked low, taking cover behind the engine compartment. He was at a disadvantage since he was right-handed and would have to lean out to his left to get a clean shot at me, or else shoot left-handed. I retreated to the van Corbett has just pulled the plate from and took cover behind it.

Mackie yelled at Corbett to flank me. He ran back toward the gate area and took cover behind the other car waiting to be stripped. I couldn't tell if he was armed. It was dark, with only a quarter moon obscured by fleeting clouds for light.

“It's over, Mackie,” I called. “The police are on their way. Put down your gun and walk toward me with your hands up.”

I was answered with a loud gunshot and a shattered windshield raining shards over my head. I moved farther back and

looked over at the gate. Corbett was there, between me and my exit. The shot had come from Mackie, not him, so I wasn't sure whether he presented a threat. I decided to chance it and ran toward the gate. I ran right past Nagy's position, dodging and weaving. He didn't shoot at me, but Mackie did, kicking up dirt right next to me.

"You can't get out that way," Corbett called to me as I passed him. I didn't know whether he was trying to help me or threaten me.

I looked at the gate and realized he was right. The gate was eight-foot-tall chain link topped by razor wire. It was also closed and only opened using a remote, not manually. The whole property was enclosed the same way. I rolled to my left and took cover behind a pile of wooden pallets. As I got up to a kneeling position a shot splintered the wood of one of the pallets, driving a shard into my cheek. I dropped back to the ground, lying flat on my stomach.

I realized I could see Nagy from where I was, and he could see me. He had a clean shot and hadn't taken it. I aimed my gun at him. He tucked his gun in his waistband and raised his hands shoulder high, splaying his fingers. He was surprisingly calm.

The next thing I knew, a volley of ten or twenty rounds went off, riddling the pallets. Another splinter hit me, piercing my thigh. So Mackie had a submachine gun of some kind. I was outgunned and trapped. I looked over at Nagy again with desperation and saw he was pantomiming something.

"Put the gun down," he called over to me. "He'll kill you if you don't."

Another burst of automatic fire inches over my position convinced me. I put my gun down, showed Corbett my hands and yelled back to him, "Okay. Tell him I give up."

Nagy stood and yelled to Mackie, "I've got him. Stop shooting Ev."

After a moment of silence to be sure more bullets weren't flying, Nagy walked over to me and picked up my gun. He told me to stand. I did. He walked me back to Mackie's van. Mackie was standing there with an automatic weapon in his hands, depressed for safety.

"Good job, C-Note. Inside." A jerk of the gun indicated he meant for me to enter the back building of the complex. Nagy

walked behind me with my own gun in my back, Mackie behind him.

I walked into the building through the door Mackie was holding open. He grabbed my arm and walked me like a toddler over to a series of large machines. Inside the nearest machine was something that looked like a cauldron.

“Fire up the smelter,” he said to Nagy.

“What are you going to do?” Corbett replied.

“What does it look like?”

Corbett turned some switches and I heard the roar of a gas fire much like my own home furnace. I could tell he was uneasy.

“The police are going to be here any second,” I told Mackie, hoping it was true. The fact was, I didn’t think they had anticipated the vehicle switch and were still waiting for the tracker on my van to move or the mike inside to pick up voices.

“Yada, yada,” Mackie replied.

“When they get here, they’re going to see all the bullet holes from your AR,” I continued.

He was unfazed. “This is my property. You entered it with a gun and threatened me. I used my own legal weapon to defend myself against an armed intruder.”

“Okay, fine, it’s your word against mine. Two against one. Just let me go and we’ll let the lawyers argue it out in court.”

“Oh no, Dickshit Tracy, it’s not that easy. You’re trying to pin a murder on me.”

“If I turn up dead, they’re going to arrest you and your DNA will hit in the FBI database for the Klein killer.”

“So we have to make sure you don’t turn up dead. You don’t turn up at all. That’s the nice thing about smelters, the slag that doesn’t burn off can be skimmed off and discarded anywhere.”

“Jesus, Ev! You can’t kill him!” Corbett shouted. He reached over to the controls on the smelter to turn it off, but Mackie smacked his hand hard with the rifle.

I seized the momentary distraction. I broke free of Mackie’s grasp and yanked him with all my strength. He was off balance and went sprawling on the floor, still holding the rifle. I fell to my knees at the same time. I punched him hard once in his eye, knocking his head back against the cement floor. He groaned

but didn't pass out. I didn't have much leverage from my kneeling position.

He tried to move the gun to a firing position, but Corbett grabbed it and started wrestling Mackie for it. I scrambled to my feet and thought about joining the grabfest, but a volley of shots rang out, deafening me, and presumably both of them. The shots all hit the ceiling, doing no harm to any of us. The good news was that it also emptied the magazine. Automatic fire has that nasty downside.

"Shit. That's useless," Mackie muttered, which was stupid of him, since now I knew he didn't have another magazine handy.

I spotted my gun tucked in Mackie's waistband in back as he struggled with Corbett. I grabbed Mackie from behind with my right arm while my left hand found the butt of my gun. I yanked it free as Mackie spun to face me. He'd managed to pull the rifle from Corbett's grasp using his weight advantage. The rifle was empty, but it still was a formidable club and the barrel was still hot enough to produce second- or third-degree burns.

So was the smelter cauldron. It had reached almost a thousand degrees Celsius before Corbett had shut it off, but it was still around eight hundred. It could still cause a wicked burn, as I found out when my elbow grazed against it as I squeezed by Mackie.

Mackie pounced on Nagy and took him to the floor. I didn't stay around to see who would win that bout. Whoever it was would end up with Nagy's handgun. I got outside and looked around. The gate straight ahead was out of the question as Nagy had pointed out. I dashed to the left, farther into the yard. There I saw a tall hoist or crane of some kind.

The moon helped with visibility, but it was still dark with long shadows. I tripped over something as I ran and went sprawling on the asphalt just as a shot rang out. I heard the thunk of impact directly in front of me. The shot had passed over my head and hit a stack of car batteries. I was never so glad for falling.

I rolled right and crawled behind the batteries. These were a lot more substantial than the wooden pallets I'd used as shelter before. I took up a firing position facing where the shot had come from. I couldn't see anyone there at first. After several seconds I could hear someone moving slowly. I was able to pinpoint the

direction after turning my head back and forth several times. When I concentrated on that direction I could see a knee and lower leg sticking out from behind a large machine of some kind – a backup generator, perhaps.

I took aim and fired one round. I heard the ping of metal and a grunt of pain. That must mean I'd missed the leg but hit metal nearby and the ricochet caught him somewhere. I still didn't know who the someone was. I took the opportunity to move again. I made it to shelter behind the crane, but I didn't dare climb up on top. I'd be too exposed.

That's when I heard Corbett's voice coming from the left. That meant it was Mackie who had the gun. Corbett yelled, "Let him go, Ev. He's no threat. We haven't done anything illegal tonight. You're in the clear for the woman. They already arrested someone else for the murder. He's got your DNA. They can't prove it was you."

"What kind of crap is that?" Mackie called back.

I wanted to hear this, so I didn't fire when I saw Nagy run across an open space to where Mackie was hiding. In simple terms Corbett told Mackie about Buxton stopping him for speeding, about recognizing him as Mackie's identical twin, and about setting me on Buxton's trail. Mackie didn't interrupt during the whole monologue.

When Nagy finished, Mackie said, "You're telling me I have a twin brother? We were separated? And you're telling me this only now?"

"Exactly. I didn't want him to know about you. I thought maybe the day would come when the murder came up again and I could use it this way. It worked. They arrested him, not you. They have DNA from when she scratched you."

"Shut up. It was no murder. It was self-defense. I thought the house was empty. You told me if the Cadillac wasn't there that no one would be home. It was pitch dark and she came at me scratching and screaming like a banshee. I just smacked her a couple of times to fend her off. I didn't mean to hurt her. I didn't even take anything. You're the one who screwed up."

"Don't put this on me. I didn't know you were going to rip off the place. I just talked about it being full of gold and silver. I said she had a fancy Caddy parked right in front, but I never said

she wouldn't be home if the Caddy wasn't there. I was just talking about how rich she was. I was just trying to get out of the headlock you had me in. Go ahead. Ask Harold. He'll back me up. He saw and heard the whole thing."

"I can't believe you didn't tell me I had a twin brother."

His voice cracked as he said this. I think he was actually stifling a sob. I'd heard enough. I didn't need to stick around any longer. I began climbing up onto the top of the hoist as silently as I could. Mackie and Nagy continued talking.

"I was trying to protect you. I was doing you a favor."

"Do my folks know? About my brother?"

"No. I didn't tell anyone. Maybe the lawyer told them when you were adopted, but I doubt it. I thought they'd be crushed to learn they'd been responsible for separating you from your twin."

I kept crawling along the crane arm to the end. It was almost exactly the same height as the razor wire topping the fence. If I jumped I could clear the fence, but I couldn't see what was on the other side. There was a building from a neighboring business just the other side blocking the moonlight. I'd land hard next to the building on top of whatever was there in the pitch dark. I reached for my cell phone to use its flashlight and realized it was no longer in my jacket pocket. It had fallen out somewhere. The argument was still going on behind me.

"Harold's an ungrateful prick. I protected the little wimp from the school bullies and what does he do? He goes off to med school and leaves the family behind. Like he's better than us. If I'd had a real brother ... someone like me"

"Maybe if you hadn't bullied him yourself, he would have stayed. You were mean back then."

"It was just big brother shit – teasing. All brothers do that kinda stuff."

I leaped. I cleared the razor wire and descended into the void.

Chapter 30

CONSTRUCTION SITE

Sanchez spoke into his phone. “Where are they?” Radios were still used for patrol traffic, but not for covert operations. Cell phones, which aren’t on the public airwaves, have obviated the need for radio.

“They haven’t moved,” the Bravo team leader replied.

“Something’s wrong. They’ve been there too long. They should be here by now. Do a drive by to confirm the van is there. Maybe the tracker failed.”

“Roger that.”

Five minutes later Bravo Team called back that Cliff’s van was still at Mackie’s office location, but that Mackie’s van was no longer there. Sanchez turned to the SWAT sergeant.

“He’s in trouble. Mackie must have made him switch vans. But they should have been here a half hour ago. They haven’t even driven by for a look. I’m going to have to break off to go looking.”

“What about us? They could show up here.”

“Yeah, stay here. If they do show up you’ll need your whole team in position.”

“What are you going to do if you find them?”

“I’m not planning to arrest. We don’t have probable cause yet. It’ll screw up the whole case. The DNA will be unusable. I just want to make sure Knowles is okay. We’ll just follow them if we spot them.”

Sanchez called his watch commander on the telephone and told him his plan to go looking for Cliff. He said he was taking one officer, a woman named Liz Orman, with him to search, but leaving behind the SWAT team. He requested and received assistance from patrol units in locating the van.

The watch commander sent a message to all units to be on the lookout for Mackie’s van. The license number was given, but they had no way of knowing it now bore another plate. Police cars now have the ability to receive such messages without broadcasting anything over the air where it could be intercepted. It’s essentially a group text that appears on the car’s dash radio display.

Sanchez and Orman were out no more than five minutes when they heard a call on the radio to respond to a 911 call about a shooting. The address given was the metal recycling plant. They acknowledged and headed directly there. Another car, a one-man marked patrol unit, arrived at the same time. A tall man was standing at the open gate waiting for them.

All three officers got out of their cars and approached with right hands on their weapons, left hands holding flashlights. "Did you call 9-1-1?" Sanchez asked.

"Yes, officer. Thank you for getting here so quickly. My name's Mackie. I work here. My parents own the place and I'm an officer of the company. We were just attacked by a man with a gun. He shot at me. The bullet missed me, but the ricochet got my leg." He lifted his pant leg. Sanchez and Orman shined their lights on the leg. A nasty black and red lump marked where the bullet had hit, but it wasn't bleeding.

"Where is he now?" Sanchez demanded.

"I don't know. He was over in the back part of the property where we store some of our recycle materials. Then he was gone. I think he's still armed. He might be hiding back there, but it's too dangerous to search."

"Is there anyone else here?"

"Yeah, one of my employees, Corbett. He's back in the office. He has a gun, too. It's legal. It's registered."

"Can you describe the shooter?"

"Yeah. His name is Kurt. I forget his last name. Delaney, I think. He's a big guy, late fifties maybe. He said he had a bunch of copper wire he wanted to recycle, large reels, but needed help getting it all from his storage unit. I got Corbett to help move the reels. We stopped off here to get equipment and fire up the smelter, and the guy pulled a gun on us. I think he was trying to rip off gold or silver. We sometimes have ingots on the premises."

"Do you have a weapon?"

"No."

By this time two more marked patrol units arrived, bringing the total to five officers.

Sanchez turned to Orman. "Take Mr. Mackie to the car and take a full statement."

Orman followed the direction. Once Mackie was out of earshot, Sanchez assembled the other officers and explained that Kurt was Cliff's undercover name and that he must be in trouble. Sanchez had realized when he heard Corbett's name that Cliff's cover had been blown at least with Nagy. He didn't know whether Nagy told Mackie who he was, but Mackie was out of earshot, so there was no harm in using Cliff's name. He instructed the other officers to spread out in the recycle yard and call to Cliff using his real name. He could be lying shot, he told them, so they should search thoroughly. They disbursed through the property calling Cliff's name.

Sanchez phoned Cliff's cell. It rang and rang, then went to voice mail. Then he headed for the office. When he got there, he called out Nagy's name identifying himself as police. He instructed Nagy to come out with his hands up. Moments later Corbett emerged, hands in the air, empty.

"Where's your gun?" Sanchez demanded.

"Inside. It's been fired. I have a license."

Sanchez directed Corbett to come forward, then frisked him. He found no weapons. "Okay, tell me what happened."

"I have a lawyer. He told me not to say anything."

"You got a lawyer tonight after being shot at?"

"No. From before. I was a witness in a case. I can't talk to the police. Sorry."

"Where's Knowles? Don't lie. You know who he is."

"On advice of counsel I decline to answer any questions."

"Is he hurt?"

"On advice of counsel ..."

"Come on, Nagy. He could be hurt. Did he get shot?"

"On advice of counsel I decline to answer any questions."

"Hell. Go on out to the unmarked unit by the gate and wait there." Sanchez radioed Orman that Nagy was coming out unarmed and to keep him there. Nagy headed for the front gate.

Sanchez called Cliff's cell phone again. Once again it rang to voice mail, but a minute later one of the officers came running over to the office with something in his hand. It was Cliff's cell phone.

"I heard it ringing. Over by a stack of batteries. No one there. No one answering my calls." He handed it to Sanchez.

“Okay, keep looking.”

Chapter 31

Cliff

I landed feet first on what turned out to be a small hedge. My legs went right through the foliage. A stiff stem or branch went up one pants leg, scraping the skin and drawing blood. It hurt like hell, especially when I tried to stand from the semi-squatting position I ended up in. At least it was better than breaking an ankle on landing.

I had to extricate myself from the plants, so I let my body down sideways, the shrub still up by pant leg. I rolled away from the hedge, scraping the leg painfully again as the branch came out. My right elbow touched the ground momentarily and a spear of pain shot through me. It was the burn where I had grazed the smelter.

After I caught my breath I stood. I found I was okay, good enough at least to move relatively normally. My elbow was throbbing, but my feet and legs weren't seriously injured. I was next to a large building on a walkway. I heard Mackie and Nagy still arguing. I didn't think they'd heard me jump. The hedge had muffled the sound when I landed. I carefully hurried to the front edge of the building in the direction of the street. The coast looked clear, so I inched out to the sidewalk.

I reached for my phone out of habit and once again realized I'd lost it. At least I still had my gun. I wanted to put as much distance between me and Mackie as I could. I started to jog, but the pain to my leg and my elbow forced me to stop and walk. I was afraid they could come out the gate onto the sidewalk and spot me, so as soon as I got two buildings down, I cut across the street. There was no streetlight there, and I tried to stay in the shadows from the moonlight.

On the far side was an open area. A small creek ran through town on that side of the road and trees grew thickly on both sides. I stepped between the trees, eased down the bank, and began following the creek. There was no way they could see me there. It was very slow going without a flashlight. A trickle of moonlight and the occasional streetlight was all I had for visibility. I had to test every step before putting my weight on it.

After ten minutes I realized my pants leg was sticking badly to my calf. I stopped and felt my pants. My leg was bleeding worse than I thought and it continued to ache like the devil. I sat on the bank and pressed a hand against the wound. I was safe here for the moment and needed to staunch the bleeding.

I heard sirens pass by above me. The police must have been alerted to the shooting. There was no way I could get up the bank and out onto the street in time for them to see me. I considered going back to the metal plant now that the police had arrived, but I didn't know what the story was there. Mackie and Nagy may have closed the place up and left by now. It would take me at least ten minutes to get back there, and the police might have gone by then. They might not even be going to the plant. It could be any random call.

I was also worried that the responding officers hadn't been briefed by Sanchez about our operations. This was not a location in our original plan. We were supposed to have gone direct from Mackie's salvage business office to the construction site with the copper reels. Mackie could be telling them I had pulled a gun on them and forced them to go there. The officers might believe him if Sanchez wasn't there.

I considered my options. For now, I needed to concentrate on stopping the bleeding. A cold breeze came whipping through the trees and wrung a shiver from me. The adrenaline high was gone, and it had left me totally drained. I was tired, sleepy, and cold. My right hand was throbbing, too. I'd probably broken my fingers when I punched Mackie. I knew it wasn't safe to fall asleep, especially while I was bleeding, but I needed to rest. I'd just catch my breath for a few minutes. I leaned back against the bank and closed my eyes.

Sanchez called his team in after fifteen minutes of searching for Cliff. He instructed one of the officers to use his radio to call in a search and rescue team.

He still didn't know whether Nagy had told Mackie who "Kurt" really was. Nagy wasn't talking, but Mackie was, or, at least, had been. Maybe he could get Mackie to trip up. He asked

Mackie to step out of the car and show him the location in the yard where he had been shot.

Mackie led him to the area and showed where he had been crouching, taking cover behind the generator. He pointed to where Cliff had been and then turned and pointed out the dent in the sheet metal wall behind him, where the bullet had ricocheted. He then produced a surprise from his jeans pocket.

“Here’s the bullet. It fell straight down after it hit my leg. I guess the wall took most of the energy out of it. I picked it up to save it. The guy was trying to kill me, I’m telling you.”

“Did you shoot at him?”

“Well, yeah. Of course. In self-defense. I had Corbett’s gun for awhile. Things were crazy.

This wasn’t going the way it was supposed to and it didn’t look good for Knowles or the department. His black eye made clear he had been punched. The recordings all supported Mackie’s version of events. Knowles, undercover as Kurt Delaney, had told Mackie he owned the copper reels, that he’d bought them at a storage locker auction. Mackie had repeatedly said that he didn’t deal in stolen metal. The whole operation had hinged on Mackie showing up at the construction site with a ski mask on and taking the reels of copper, or threatening the undercover officer there. Either would be a felony and they could take his DNA.

So far it looked more like a civil suit against the department. Corbett Nagy could tell the truth, but he was mum for now. Of course Knowles would tell him how it had really gone down. He was sure Mackie had forced Knowles to come here to the metal plant, but he didn’t know why. If they’d gotten their hands on the copper, it might make sense, but not before. What were they going to do with the smelter? What *had* they done with it? Is that where Knowles had disappeared to?

“Show me inside,” he commanded.

Mackie led him into the warehouse area. “Be careful of the smelter. It’s still hot.”

“Why did you fire it up?” He looked at the smelter. The temperature gauge read 1300° C. He directed Mackie to turn it off, which he did.

“It takes a while to get hot. I wanted to get it started before we picked up the metal. Kurt said the storage unit was close by.”

“You run this thing in the middle of the night?”

“Not usually, no, but he said this was a big load and he wanted to get paid right away.”

“It’s illegal to pay for copper same day.”

“I know. It’s a misdemeanor. I shouldn’t have agreed, but I didn’t do it, all right? He never produced any metal and I never paid him. No harm, no foul.”

“Show me where he was when you last saw him.”

Mackie pointed toward the stack of batteries. They walked over there but the flashlight revealed nothing of interest. Sanchez then noticed the crane a few feet away. The officers had already searched this area and Knowles wasn’t here, but that looked like a logical way to escape. Sanchez walked over to the crane, then climbed up on top. He walked to the end and peered over the fence. It was pitch black on the other side. The beam of the flashlight illuminated a tiny circle of paved walkway.

“What’s that building?,” he asked, pointing.

“A tire warehouse, I think.”

Sanchez heard the sound of the search and rescue unit arriving. He got down and directed Mackie back to wait in a squad car. He directed the searchers to spread out around the outside of the facility since the interior had already been searched. He told them to check the area by the tire warehouse first. The team headed there with heavy-duty spotlights.

Minutes later the team leader called him to come look. There was a crushed bush and specks of fresh blood on the walkway by the building. They followed the trail out to the street and along the sidewalk for several yards. Then the blood specks stopped. The good news was that the bleeding appeared to have slowed or stopped. The bad news was they didn’t know which way Cliff had gone.

I woke up to the sound of my voice being called. For a moment I didn’t know where I was. I’d fallen asleep. How long had I been out? I was shivering cold and groggy. I checked my leg. My jeans were plastered to my calf with blood, but there didn’t seem to be any active bleeding.

I put my hands down on the bank to help push myself up, but a shard of pain went up from my right hand from the broken fingers. Using my left hand I was able to struggle to my feet.

“Down here,” I called hoarsely.

I heard another call of my name, so I repeated it, but a plane flew overhead just at that moment. After a few more seconds, I heard the voices more faintly. They were farther away. I realized they hadn’t heard me. I’d been too hoarse.

I tried to climb up the bank, but the soil was loose, and I slipped. I swung my arm out to keep my balance and my elbow hit a bush. The pain from the hand was nothing compared to the pure agony of the burn. I gasped and sat down to keep from passing out. I could no longer hear the voices.

The moon was no longer overhead. The only light was a faint trickle from a streetlamp half a block away. I stayed sitting for another several minutes until I’d recovered from the pain. I could just barely see enough to walk by the creek bed. I continued downstream until I saw what looked like an easier way up to the street.

This time I was careful to use only my left hand to grab another bush and help pull myself up the slope. When I reached the street level I could feel liquid running down my leg. The movement had broken open the wound on my leg. I stepped out from the trees onto the sidewalk. There was no one around.

I began trudging back toward the metal recycling plant. People had been calling my name, my real name, so rescuers must be there. Ten minutes later I was within hailing distance of the cluster of police cars. I yelled for help and two officers and a paramedic came running.

They assisted me into an ambulance. Sanchez got in with me as we rode to the hospital. He told me what Mackie had been saying about me attacking them. I told him the real version.

He looked troubled. “The problem is, it’s just your word against Mackie’s. We have no recording of what went on there. He provided a bullet he says came from your gun. You say you did shoot at him?”

“Yes, but only after he fired at me with an automatic weapon.”

“He has an automatic weapon? That’s a felony. If we can find it with his prints on it, we’ve got our probable cause for an arrest. We don’t need to prove the conspiracy to steal the copper.”

“Is the scene secure?”

“Yes, they’re taping it all off and locking it now. In the morning the crime scene team will search it.”

I described to him where to find the rounds from the automatic weapon, but I knew that wasn’t enough. You can’t tell just from a bullet that it came from an automatic weapon. You have to match it to the weapon using rifling and examine the weapon to prove it’s an automatic. They needed to find the weapon. Mackie had time before he called 9-1-1 to stash the rifle.

We arrived at the hospital and I was treated for my wounds. They kept me overnight. I woke up the next morning and Ellen and Maeva were by my bedside. Sanchez must have called them. It was already after ten.

They both gave me awkward hugs since I had to be careful of both my hand and my elbow and I was semi-lying down. Then Ellen proceeded to chew me out for putting myself in such danger. I looked to Maeva for support but she stood side by side with Ellen. A few words like “idiot,” “testosterone poisoning,” and the like were thrown at me.

When they were done berating me, Sanchez came in. “The forensic team has searched the place and haven’t found the rifle,” he announced after some initial speedy recovery and well-wishing type small talk. “We don’t have probable cause yet. Our only hope is for you to testify and hope that your word is enough to convince a judge.”

I knew that wouldn’t work. Even if my word was enough to convince a judge, I would be subject to cross-examination when the case went to trial and there would be no way to avoid revealing the genetic genealogy database searching. The district attorney wouldn’t prosecute for the murder case.

“Hold on,” Ellen said. “The doctors said Cliff could leave today. Why don’t you let us make one more pass at the site. Maybe with his help we can figure out where the rifle is. Cliff, are you feeling up to it?”

“I think so. I’m actually feeling pretty strong now. I just have to be careful.” I lifted my bandaged hand and stuck my leg out showing the long scabbed-over scrape.

“I can let FBI in,” Sanchez replied, “since she’s a peace officer, and you as a percipient witness, but the young lady ...”

“That’s Maeva Hanssen,” I interrupted, “and she’s no lady, she’s my partner.” Maeva grinned.

Ellen smacked me on my shoulder. “Old joke.” Turning to Sanchez she said, “Let her in. She’s a licensed P.I. and married to a police officer. We’ll all stay with you and follow your directions. You can bring along some officers to watch us and maintain chain of custody on any evidence. It never hurts to have another set of eyes.” She stepped closer and looked down on Sanchez since she was two inches taller than he was.

He didn’t cower, but he did look cowed. “I’ll arrange it. Let me know when he’s ready to leave.”

The nurse brought in a tray of food for me at that point. I shooed everyone out. I needed to use the bathroom and have breakfast before I could do anything. Fifteen minutes later I was ready to meet the world again. Ellen reappeared with my clothes. She had taken them to a coin laundry while I was sleeping so they were clean.

At the plant a uniformed officer was standing guard to protect the scene. He let us all in. I walked Sanchez through the whole timeline of events as best I could remember them. There were holes in the wooden pallets from the automatic weapon fire. They’d been circled and tagged by the forensic team. No doubt they’d been photographed already. Sanchez told me they’d dug several out from the pallets and the dirt.

When we got to the warehouse/smelter area there were still two forensic team members there. They described everywhere they’d searched and it looked like Mackie must have dumped the rifle before the police arrived.

Maeva was standing next to the smelter. One of the crime scene workers called to her to watch out, the smelter was still hot. The woman told us it takes hours for it to cool down. Maeva held her hand near it for a moment as though it was a stove.

“It’s not that hot. It’s been cooling all night.” She grabbed a heavy glove lying on a table next to the smelter, put it on, and opened the chamber. A wave of hot air wafted out. I could feel it from five feet away. “It’s no worse than an oven. Maybe two fifty inside.” She reached in and pulled out the sliding rack on which the cauldron sat. “There’s something in there.”

Sanchez moved closer. Shielding his face from the heat he peered down into the cauldron. “It looks like a gun, an AR-15. It’s badly deformed from the heat, but not totally melted down. Something else, too. I think it’s a license plate.”

“Oh, I forgot,” I said. “He switched plates. He took one off a car in the yard and put it on the van using magnets. That’s probably what it is.”

“The car is here for salvage. He should have turned in the plates, but that’s not a felony to remove them and melt them down. We need the gun. If we can prove that’s an automatic, that’s our felony.”

I looked around and found what I was looking for – a pair of long metal tongs. I’d known they had to be there somewhere to extract the melted metal. The cauldron hung from two heavy arms attached to its sides, so it could be tilted. Sanchez and Ellen used heavy gloves to tilt it and I pulled out the deformed items using the tongs. I dropped them on the concrete floor and spread the pieces apart.

Sanchez peered at the heap more closely. It didn’t give off as much heat now. “It’s an AR-style weapon,” he said, “but that’s not illegal if it’s single action. I don’t know if we can prove it’s been modified to be automatic. After it cools, we’ll have to have a gunsmith examine it. The barrel is all deformed, so we can’t shoot a test round through it to test against the ones we found by the pallets. And we can’t prove this was his, either, unless the serial number is legible and we can trace it to him.”

“So you’re saying we still don’t have a felony?”

“Right. Probable cause for some misdemeanors only. We could arrest him but we can’t take DNA.”

“How long before you can get a gunsmith here?”

“I don’t know. Let me check.” Sanchez got on the radio and called to all units and requested anyone who was a qualified

gunsmith to report to his location. He got one response. One of the officers, Sergeant Cheng, at the site with the copper responded.

“Cheng was an ATF agent for a couple of years,” Sanchez explained. “He had to move back because of his parents’ health. He’s been on the department for ten years or so.”

Cheng arrived within ten minutes. It took him only three seconds to examine the remains of the gun to declare it as modified with a bump stock.

“I’ll swear to it if you need me to,” he declared authoritatively. “That’s illegal in California,”

“Is it a felony?” I asked.

“It’s a wobbler. Penal Code 32900.”

My heart sank. A wobbler is a crime that can be prosecuted either as a misdemeanor or a felony at the prosecutor’s discretion. I didn’t know whether probable cause for a wobbler counted as probable cause for a felony for purposes of the California Supreme Court ruling on DNA. Sanchez’s shoulders slumped when he heard this.

“We have no choice,” Sanchez said, drawing himself up to his full height and straightening his shoulders. “We can’t wait around for Mackie to commit a felony. He’s managed to stay below our radar for thirty-odd years. We have to arrest now and let the lawyers fight it out in court. Follow me.”

We all marched out to the front of the site where the patrol cars were grouped. We watched as Sanchez walked up to the car where Mackie was sitting in the back seat.

“Evelyn Mackie, get out of the car,” he demanded. Mackie complied. “You’re under arrest for the possession of an illegal weapon and for assault with a deadly weapon. Put your hands behind your back.”

Sanchez cuffed him, then went through the Miranda warnings and told the uniformed officer to transport him to jail. Mackie said nothing.

Ellen, Maeva and I all looked at each other. The elation from a moment of victory wasn’t there. The arrest could lead to a murder conviction through a DNA match in CODIS, or it could forever doom such a conviction if the collection of the DNA was excluded as illegal.

“Let’s go,” I said.

THREE MONTHS LATER

I sat in the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office waiting for Wilbanks. Redding police had booked Mackie for the weapons and assault charges and arrested Corbett Nagy for aiding and abetting those same charges. Neither was talking. The DNA had been taken and submitted to the FBI's CODIS system. I hoped Wilbanks would have news for me today on whether they got a hit for the Klein murder.

Wilbanks was back on detective duty, having served his penance on patrol. Officially he wasn't working the Klein case, but unofficially he'd been keeping in touch with Redding P.D. He came into the lobby where we exchanged greetings, then led me upstairs to his old desk.

"Okay, so I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?"

"You pick."

"Okay, so we'll do good news. CODIS got a hit on Mackie's DNA. In fact, it got two hits: the Klein murder DNA, from the victim's fingernails, and Buxton's arrest DNA. Buxton has been notified that he's a 100% match with Mackie. They're identical twins. He had no idea he had a twin brother. He's decided to drop his civil suit against us now that he realizes we had good reason to believe he was the murderer. He's even grateful that our work turned up his twin."

"That's a relief. I haven't heard anything on the TV news about it."

"No, it's not public yet, but Redding called Chico to tell Buxton and his chief."

"So your department must have been notified of the hits officially."

"Yes. That's helped me get out of hot water somewhat. They also were able to identify the gun as Mackie's through records, so they have him cold on the possession charges."

"So what's the bad news?"

"My D.A. isn't willing to prosecute Mackie for the Klein murder."

"Why not?"

"Mackie's defense lawyer is trying to strike a deal with the D.A. up in Redding. He says Mackie will plead guilty to the gun possession if it's charged and sentenced only as a misdemeanor and the assault charges are dropped altogether, but only on the condition his DNA is expunged from the records, including CODIS. The D.A. is leaning toward agreeing. The judge doesn't know anything about the Klein murder case, of course, and she's made clear to the D.A. that for a first-time offender she doesn't think felony charges are warranted. Under the law she has the power to reduce it to a misdemeanor at sentencing. The case law is mixed on whether she can order the DNA expunged."

"What about the assault charges? They could charge attempted murder as well as assault with a deadly weapon."

"They only have your word on that. They'd have to put you on the stand at trial. At the preliminary hearing they put Sanchez on the stand to report what you described happened. Hearsay is allowed there, but at trial it'd have to be you."

"That's not a good idea. I'd have to, well, I may have crossed a line or two."

"Yeah, I know. Sanchez knows, too. We don't want to go there. The Redding D.A. has figured that out, too, which is why he may have to drop those charges. Now that the CODIS hit has popped up on the Klein murder, though, he's willing to play ball if we can figure out how to do it. He'll stall for now at least."

"What about the conspiracy to steal the copper?"

"The evidence isn't there without a wire recording, and it's probably entrapment anyway. I know it doesn't seem fair ..."

"I get it. As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, 'this is a court of law, not a court of justice.' What about Corbett, then? He was trying to stop Mackie from shooting me. He could have shot me himself, and didn't. I don't think he wanted any part of it, other than ripping off the copper and even that I think he was coerced under threat of losing his job. Why not grant him immunity if he'll testify against Mackie?"

"That's a possibility, but we don't know if he will. The charges against him are weak. They can't really tie him to the

illegal weapon and you said he tried to stop Mackie from shooting you. That's not aiding and abetting; that's more like heroism. Charges against him will probably be dropped anyway, even without his cooperation. He's probably worried about the murder case. Immunity for the Redding stuff isn't going to protect him against the Klein murder."

"So get the local D.A. to grant him immunity for that, too."

"That's a tough sell. Corbett may have been a major instigator. We don't know. Granting immunity isn't the right call morally or PR-wise. There's another problem, too."

"What?"

"The DNA. Even if it's not expunged, and it's legally admissible, it still only proves that he's one of two brothers who could have done it. For all we know there's an identical triplet out there. Corbett's original statement only mentioned Buxton, not Mackie."

"I've gone over that statement. His lawyer was good. Everything he says in it is factually true, though misleading. He only said that he was surprised at how much Buxton looked like the boy who had made him give him the address of the house. That's true. Buxton did look like Mackie, at least how Mackie looked before he grew the beard and long hair. Nagy must have been astounded when he saw him. He just didn't say that he knew it wasn't the same person. Leaving something out isn't lying."

"Right, so we don't have a perjury charge on him, either. The D.A. got badly burned on the case with Buxton once. With DNA matching two people, he says they can't prove beyond a reasonable doubt."

"So is that the end of it, then?"

"Unless we can pull a miracle out of our asses, it looks like it. What about you? And Bella?"

"She's furious with us and refused to pay our final invoice. She thinks we set up Corbett with that copper theft scenario and is crying entrapment."

"Even though you successfully identified her grandmother's killer?"

"Yeah. It's the old saw, be careful what you wish for."

"Pandora's Box. She opened it."

“She doesn’t see it that way. And Buxton? He’s happy about finding out he’s related to a murderer?”

“Go figure. Apparently Mackie feels the same way about Buxton. They’ve been comparing their early lives and going over ‘what if’ scenarios according to the Chico chief. Twins are literally blood brothers for life even if they never knew each other before and have totally different values.”

I had a hard time getting my head around it all. Maeva would be happy she’s not facing a civil lawsuit, but she’s still sorry about losing Bella’s friendship. I said my goodbyes and returned to the office. I briefed Maeva on the meeting and went home early.

Chapter 33

The next morning as I emerged from the bathroom Ellen greeted me with an announcement that another geocache notification had arrived in her inbox. This one was another story cache, and in addition, a puzzle cache like Fed Second. She wanted my help solving it. Here's the cache page:

Black Adder [GCG705](#)

Difficulty: ***

N 37° 18.888' W 122° 06.666'

Geocache Description:

The cache is not at the posted coordinates, but is within three miles of there. To get the true coordinates you must solve the puzzle below.

Weary from a long and fruitless quest for the newest puzzle cache, I walked into the nearest store, GPS receiver in hand, and rested heavily against the display cases. Strange and not entirely pleasant odors struck my senses as I surveyed the tiny shop. It was a pet store, but not like any I had ever seen. Every case was filled with wriggling, scaly creatures - lizards and snakes of every size and description. I realized with a start that the case on which I leaned was occupied by a cobra of impressive girth, and it eyed me with obvious menace. I had accidentally covered the skull and cross bones warning sign with my body. I jumped back, heart racing.

"Ken I hep you, mon?" intoned a voice from my rear. It was a deep, lyrical voice with an accent I could not quite place - Louisiana Creole, perhaps, or possibly rural Alabaman, but with a touch of some Caribbean dialect. I turned and was even more startled than before. The man who faced me was unlike anyone - or should I say, anything - on this earth. His skin was the blackest ebony I could imagine, and every square inch of it showing from his loose clothing had small, blue-black semicircles tattooed in regular rows like the scales on a snake. His head was totally hairless, whether shaved or naturally I could not tell. He was tall and lean, almost to the point of emaciation, and his tongue flickered in and

out as he spoke. I almost gasped as I noticed that his tongue had been surgically split at the end to resemble a snake's, and his eyelids had likewise been altered to remove the lashes. He was the closest thing one could imagine to a human serpent.

I was stunned into speechlessness, but he noticed my GPS receiver and laptop and casually remarked, "I see dat you be geocachin. An interestin' hobby is dat."

"Y- yes, it is," I managed to stammer. "I have been unable to make heads or tails of these coordinates that have been posted for the latest puzzle cache. There are just two numbers, but they don't seem to fit any system of coordinates I know. I just came in here to rest a bit. But what is this place? I thought it was just an ordinary pet store."

"No, mon," he laughed, "ordinary it is not. Dis is the most complete collection of snakes and reptiles you will see outside a museum of natural history. I am devoted to dem. I have not got no fancy Ph.D. but I know these beautiful animals like I was one of them. I know dey spirits and dey power." Then added under his breath, "And dey evil." His tongue slithered in and out once more. He extended his hand. "My name be Heterodon Platirhinos, but dey call me Black Adder." He pointed to a nearby cage containing a rather sinister-looking black snake that was making a hissing sound as it appeared to be preparing to strike at me.

I took the proffered limb and shook it gingerly, then read the sign on the cage:

Black Adder (Heterodon Platirhinos)

also known as, Eastern Hognose Snake, Puff Adder, Blow Viper

"Uh, pleased to meet you. I didn't mean to disturb you. I'm really not a customer, so I should not impose on your hospitality any further." I tried to sound friendly as I started to back slowly out the door, a cold panic creeping up my spine.

"Be you not afraid, mon. We be harmless here, tho we may look odd to the likes of you." He smiled. "Minnie and me, we be doin' the geocachin' some time, too." He held up a well-worn Garmin eTrex and hooked his thumb in the direction of the back of the store. I craned my neck around a display to see what he was pointing at, and yet another surprise met my eyes. There was a short and enormously fat woman sitting on a small sofa in the office area, knitting. "Minnie, she be my exact opposite in everythin' but we git by some fine. Dey say opposites attract."

Indeed, she seemed to be his opposite in every conceivable way. Where he was tall and black, she was short and pale. He was thin and snake-like in his build, while she was rotund. He was friendly and talkative, but she scowled and said nothing, even though she could not have missed overhearing the conversation. As I mused over the remarkable disparity between the two, the man gently pulled the printout of the cache page from my hand and examined it. The numbers read:

4241878 7961969

"Have you tried UTM?" he asked.

Brought back to reality, I answered, "Yes, but these numbers don't make a valid set of UTM coordinates in either order. I've even tried viewing them as degree and minutes coordinates, like 42 degrees north, and so on. I didn't know what to do with the 61 minutes in the longitude, so I tried treating 60 minutes as one degree so that second number was 79 plus 1 or 80 degrees, 1.969 minutes, but that ended up with a cache in Lake Erie. This cache was posted here in Silicon Valley, so it can't be back there. I just don't know what to make of it."

The man's eyes suddenly rolled back in his head and he pulled a small gourd from his pocket. He muttered some indescribable syllables into the hollow of the gourd and waved his other hand rapidly around over our heads as he crumbled some dried herb into powder and let it fall. An overpowering stench filled the air and I nearly staggered. Then just as suddenly, he returned to normal and calmly stated, "I know the longitude." He wrote a number on my sheet. "And Minnie, she be knowin' the latitude." Without saying a word, Minnie got up, walked over to me, wrote another number on my paper, and returned to her knitting.

The voodoo incantations sent chills through my entire body. This had to be total hokum, but it seemed too real to ignore. My mind reeled; I had to get out as fast as I could. As I headed for the door, a thought struck me and I asked the man, "Wasn't there a TV show called Black Adder about a man who could travel through time? It starred some actor named Atkinson, first name started with an R."

The reply came with surprising fury, "That Atkinson is a total fake! You cannot trust him. I am the real Black Adder." He flew into a fit of rage and began flailing his arms. I turned and ran. When I finally caught my breath I was alone on the deserted street. I examined the numbers the strange couple had written on my sheet. Knowing their voodoo could not be real, I almost threw the whole sheet out, but some inner voice told me not to

disrespect anyone's gods, no matter how incredible. I programmed in the numbers and made my way to that location.

With astonishment I found the cache tucked neatly in place.

I began reading and my head swam. I hadn't even had my morning coffee yet. I told her I'd take a look at it later and proceeded to the kitchen and that blessed fluid. She kissed me goodbye and headed off to work. I finished my breakfast and played with the kids for a while. Hilda arrived shortly thereafter and I headed to the office.

"Take a look at this," Maeva said as she handed me the local paper. We still subscribed to the dead tree version.

It was an article about the arrest of Evelyn Mackie. Somehow it must have leaked to the press about the connection to the Klein case. I suspected Wilbanks. The article contained a photograph of Mackie when he was on the basketball team, the same photo I saw in his yearbook. Next to it was a very similar photo of Buxton on his high school basketball team. They looked almost identical – like the twins they were. Buxton was on the varsity in Chico, Mackie on the JV team in Redding.

The headline read "TWINS SEPARATED AT BIRTH." The subheader in smaller print said "One is a decorated police officer, the other an alleged criminal. Is one a murderer?" The text of the article went on to give a summary of the arrest of Mackie for gun possession and assault, followed by a summary of Buxton's arrest, prosecution, and exoneration for the Klein murder. A reader would have to be dense not to pick up on the implication that Mackie was the murderer and his twin had been falsely charged based on DNA. Corbett Nagy's name was mentioned briefly as having been arrested with Mackie, but there was no mention of the connection to the Klein family. I had no doubt that would be revealed as reporters dug into the story.

A local defense lawyer provided legal analysis saying it would be impossible to prosecute either one now because the evidence is based on DNA and they both have identical DNA. I knew that a competent prosecutor wouldn't see it that way, but it would be a difficult case.

As I was reading, the phone rang. I ignored it as it was Ashley's job to answer it. A few moments later she buzzed me on the intercom and said a Mr. Mackie was calling for me. Mackie? Calling for me? I couldn't believe it, but I had to see if it was true. I picked up the receiver and pushed the blinking button .

"Cliff Knowles."

"Mr. Knowles. This is Harold Mackie. Do you remember me?"

"Yes, of course, Dr. Mackie. How may I help you?"

"I just read that Corbett has been arrested. Is that true?"

"Yes. I was there."

"Is he a suspect in the murder of that Klein woman?"

"Why don't we talk about your brother Evelyn instead of Corbett. You knew that Officer Buxton was Ev's twin, didn't you? And you didn't tell me."

"I ... I didn't know, not for sure. The description ... I thought maybe. But we never knew about any twin, any sibling at all for either of us. You ... well, the police, not you, had already accused one man wrongfully."

"The DNA match under the murder victim's nails matches Evelyn's DNA one hundred per cent. Buxton was a teenager living in Chico while your brother was browbeating ... or maybe just beating ... Corbett into giving him the details on the Klein house. Admit it. You're a scientist. You know Ev is guilty."

"I'm not going to say anything against him. He's still my brother. He didn't always treat me right and wasn't much of a model to look up to, but he was a good big brother. I was small and a nerd in school. I got picked on a few times by bigger kids. Ev found me crying and took care of them with his fists. No one touched me after that. But I'm worried about Corbett. He's no murderer. Whatever he did, he was forced to do. I know this for a fact."

"What was it he did?"

"I'll deny this on the stand, but Ev made him give him the street name of the house after he heard about the silver there. He put Corbett in a headlock. I saw it. I even told Corbett to tell him; Ev was just going to hurt him worse if he didn't. You told me the robbery – the killing – happened three years later. I don't know about that. I wasn't close friends with Corbett by then, but I know

he's a decent guy and didn't want to give Ev the location. I don't believe he went with Ev."

"You have to tell the police."

"No, I don't. If I do, if I sell out my brother, my parents will never forgive me. We'll be estranged forever. Our relationship is a bit strained, only because I wouldn't join the family business. They know Ev is something of a loose cannon and wanted me to run the business when they're gone, but we still get together for holidays sometimes and they're proud of me. It would break their hearts if I turned on Ev."

"If you come forward with this story, I think the D.A. will give Corbett immunity and he can be the one to testify against Ev. No one will have to know you told the police."

"I don't believe that. It would come out eventually. Besides, my parents would fire Corbett if he did that. In their hearts they would know that Ev was guilty, but I don't think they'd let themselves believe it. They couldn't forgive Corbett. They like him, but blood is blood."

"Ironical you say that, since blood is not blood in your family."

"Don't you dare! It doesn't matter whether or not we're adopted. We're a family. Look, I'm just calling to tell you Corbett is innocent of the murder. I don't know about this incident in Redding."

"I was there. Ev shot at me with an automatic rifle."

"You?! You were the person alluded to in the news – the one who was shot at? They just called it the assault victim."

"That's me."

"Did Corbett shoot at you, too?"

"No. He tried to stop your brother."

"See! That's what I mean. He's under Ev's thumb, but he's basically a decent guy."

"That's why you have to come forward."

"I won't. I've told you what I know. I won't tell the police and I'll deny it or take the fifth if they subpoena me. I just hope you can see that Corbett isn't prosecuted."

I tried to argue with him some more, but it was to no avail. He eventually hung up on me. I sat frustrated for a few minutes, then decided it was pointless to fret over what I couldn't change.

Maeva and I were free from the threat of a lawsuit and at least we knew who the real killer was. It was time to cut our losses and move on.

I decided to take a look at that puzzle cache again to take my mind off the case. I read through it once and realized it was not difficult. Three stars of difficulty for a puzzle is on the low end. I read it through a second time. The solution struck me. Of course! How simple.

Chapter 34

A week later I received an email from Wilbanks. The Redding D.A. had accepted the deal from Mackie on the gun charge, with slight modification. He would still charge it as a felony, but agreed not to object to the judge reducing it to a misdemeanor. The assault charges were to be dropped. Mackie would be given probation as a first-time offender. The charges against Corbett would be dropped.

The big question was what was to happen to the DNA sample. The judge would probably order it expunged, but the D.A., could appeal that order. That was the one modification from the proposed plea deal that the D.A. had insisted on. The sentencing hearing was tomorrow. It would probably end up in the appellate courts and take years to fully resolve the DNA question.

Now my mind was embroiled in the case again. I had succeeded in putting it behind me until the email came in. There was one loose end I realized I needed to tie up. I'd deleted all the DNA sequences from GEDmatch.com, 23andMe, and all the other public companies that did the sequencing or ran genealogy websites, but I hadn't had them deleted from the private forensic lab I'd used. It was time to get rid of the last bit of evidence of my DNA matching methods.

I called up Keiko, the forensic biologist at the lab I'd been using.

"Mr. Knowles. Good to hear from you. You have more business for us?"

"Hi, Keiko. No, I'm afraid the case is over. You still maintain all the sequences I had you do, don't you?"

"Yes, of course. The sequences, but not the samples. You want them deleted, I assume?"

"Yes."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"Was your client found innocent?"

"Well, it's complicated. The real murderer was identified, but it turns out he was an identical twin, separated at birth from his brother. His twin was wrongly charged and now the prosecutor won't prosecute either one. The DNA is useless."

“You’re talking about the Buxton case? That’s yours? He’s your client?”

“Well, it’s that case, but he’s not my client. I represent, uh, represented, the family of the victim. You heard about the case, then?” I hadn’t thought they would know about it since the lab was in the Midwest.

“Are you kidding? Every DNA lab in the country is buzzing about it. Reddit is going crazy, too.”

“Well, it’s over. With two people matching the DNA, you can’t prove which is the killer.”

“Where’d you hear that?”

“What do you mean? It’s a fifty-fifty chance forensically. That’s not beyond a reasonable doubt. We don’t have any eyewitnesses, fingerprints or other evidence. It all relies on the DNA.”

“What’s the matter with you? It’s not fifty-fifty. You can identify which twin it was from DNA.”

“What? I thought ...”

“It’s not easy, and it’s expensive, but it can be done. There’s a technique called massive parallel sequencing. It requires a lot more lab time and experience than the normal sequencing techniques. It’s already been proven in criminal cases. There was one in Germany where it proved which of two twins was the rapist.”

“Seriously? I had no idea. I thought identical was identical.”

“Everyone, even a twin, has a few mutations that occur during gestation and growth. Most are meaningless and aren’t even within the functioning genes, but they are unique. Just like twins don’t have identical fingerprints, they don’t have identical mutations.”

“My god. Wait. Can you do this? The parallel sequencing thing?”

“Yes, but not using the sequences we did for you. We don’t have the original samples, only the digital sequences. We’d need fresh samples. But the state crime lab should be able to do it easily.”

“Thank you, Keiko, thank you. This could make all the difference.”

“So you want the killer prosecuted. I thought you were a defense lawyer. You still want the sequences we have deleted?”

“Yes. And everything is attorney-client and attorney work product privileged. Don’t provide any information about my work to anyone without a court order.”

“You got it. Good luck.”

I called up Sanchez in Redding and explained what Keiko had just told me. He was flabbergasted as I had been. I asked if he could put off the sentencing. He said he would try. As soon as I hung up with him, I called Wilbanks and went through the same explanation, including what Harold Mackie had told me. He agreed to take it to the local D.A.

Two hours later I hadn’t heard from Sanchez, but Wilbanks called me back. The D.A. wasn’t sure about prosecution yet, but agreed to get a court order to obtain both Ev Mackie’s and Buxton’s DNA samples to do massive parallel sequencing. He said that if the test proved Mackie matched the killer’s DNA and Buxton didn’t he’d be willing to prosecute under the following condition: Corbett would have to testify against Mackie. The D.A. would be willing to grant him immunity based on what Harold Mackie said, even though he only said it to me. Wilbanks assured him of my integrity and truthfulness on that score.

More importantly, the D.A. agreed to contact the prosecutor in Redding and ask him to hold off on the sentencing and to back off from the agreement until the new DNA test was done. An hour later I heard back from Sanchez that the two prosecutors had agreed and the defense lawyers for both Mackie and Nagy had been notified that the deal was off.

I didn’t hear more that day and went to bed still wondering what was going to happen. It wasn’t until eleven the next morning that I got a call from Sanchez. He said the judge had been angered at first that the plea agreement had fallen apart and demanded a meeting of counsel in chambers. When the prosecution explained that the case and the plea deal were related to an alleged murder in the Bay Area and that the D.A. here was seeking an order for Mackie’s DNA sample, she changed her tune. She said that wasn’t pertinent to the charges before her on the weapons and assault, but that she’d reconsider her position on expunging the DNA. The defense protested hotly, but to no avail.

An hour later Wilbanks called me to say the court orders for the DNA of both Buxton and Mackie had been issued. He also told me that the district attorney had contacted Corbett Nagy's attorney and offered him immunity in exchange for his testimony against Evelyn Mackie.

That was all it took. By the end of the day, Corbett had agreed to testify in exchange for immunity, Mackie's lawyer had been informed of that, and Mackie agreed to plead guilty to second degree murder on the Klein case with a recommendation for a reduced sentence from the D.A. and the dropping of all charges in Redding. He wanted to be sentenced as a first-time offender on the murder. The prosecutors in both counties got together and agreed and the deal was done. Sentencing in Redding was postponed pending Mackie's plea in Santa Clara County.

It took another month for the new charges to be filed on the Klein case and for the plea and sentencing, but in the end the new DNA samples were not taken and Corbett didn't have to testify. Charges against him were dismissed in Redding and he was never charged in Santa Clara County on the Klein case.

Before sentencing Mackie gave his allocution, admitting to the crime and exonerating Corbett Nagy. He claimed youthful bad judgment led him astray and he hadn't meant to hurt the victim. Buxton appeared at the sentencing hearing and plead for mercy for his twin, attesting to his eighteen years of productive crime-free contribution to society. In the end, the judge followed the plea agreement and Mackie was sentenced to five years.

Chapter 35

I thought the case was behind us, but three months later Maeva received a call from Bella. It seems there had been a family meeting in Sacramento. Bella explained that Corbett had formally apologized to the other family members for his role in Klein's death. He said he had been showing off to Harold, talking about this mansion he'd been to and all the silver and gold when Ev had overheard them.

Ev had always been a troubled kid, partly for being adopted and partly for having been named Evelyn, which was long a source of merciless teasing, at least until he grew big enough to teach any teasers to watch their mouths. His mother, we learned, had been British and had a favorite uncle named Evelyn, hence the name. He'd put Corbett in a headlock and forced him to give him the location - at least the street name and description of the house. Ev had made him confirm some details three years later, again through physical intimidation, but Corbett had not believed Mackie could find the place. It was several days later when Ev came to him again and told him to keep his mouth shut about that whole business. Then he learned from his family about Mrs. Klein's death. He had suspected Mackie had done it, but didn't want to believe it. He said nothing to anyone about it, which he now admitted was cowardly.

Years later, when Maeva and I came investigating the case again, Corbett had panicked. He was worried not only about being charged in connection with the murder, but also for his job. His chance encounter with Buxton had provided him with an opportunity to send me on the wrong track. He apologized for that, too.

His family forgave him, and, surprisingly, so did the Mackies. With Ev going to prison, they had promoted him to general manager. They were too old to run the business and he was the best qualified, they said. They told him they always knew Ev was the bad seed in the family, but they couldn't turn their backs on him. At least they could give him an honest living.

Best of all, from our perspective, was that Bella forgave us, if that's the right word, for the family drama and anguish that ensued from our investigation. She and Maeva became friends

again. In the end the case had cost us more than we'd been paid, but it was a lesson learned.

I went home that evening and told Ellen about Bella's call. She was pleased, of course. She was also distracted, looking at her computer. I realized she was looking at that geocache puzzle Black Adder.

"You still haven't solved that?" I asked.

"No, I haven't. It's driving me nuts. You mean you have? And didn't tell me?"

"I've been busy. I forgot to mention it."

"Well, are you going to tell me how to solve it or are you planning to sleep on the couch?"

"It's simple."

"That's your help? 'It's simple'? You *are* aiming for the couch."

"What is he – the store owner?"

"The Black Adder."

"Right. An adder. And what do adders do?"

"Bite? Slither?"

"Add."

"Add? What ... oh, Jeez." She whipped out her phone, brought up the calculator app and added the two numbers together. The number 12203847 appeared on the screen. "That looks like a west coordinate. What about the north?"

"The adder's wife wrote something, too. What was she?"

"Fat? Pale?"

"The exact opposite of her husband."

"The exact opposite of an adder is ... a subtractor? You kidding me?" She subtracted the smaller number from the larger one and got another result: 3720091. "That's real close."

"Like I said, it's simple."

"You're so smart."

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