



Ghost of You (Haunted Souls #24)

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Category: Romance

Description: When the skeletal remains of a murdered woman, rumored to have stolen a boatload of cash prior to her disappearance, are found in the Salem Towne Forest, Detective Jude Byrne wants the investigation assigned to the Cold Case Unit. Not only did he know the victim, Francesca Adams, but her husband, serial cheater, Oliver, who had a million reasons to want his wife dead.

Psychic Copeland Forbes had been working with Oliver for years to discover what happened to his missing wife. Unable to reach Francesca in each previous attempt, Cope is shocked when he has a vision of the murdered woman, bound with duct tape, screaming for help. Unable to get Francesca's horrific last moments out of his mind, Cope joins the search for her killer.

As suspects with alibis mount, the cold case team fear they will never solve Francesca's murder. When a long-hidden clue drops into their laps, the killer is revealed.

What happened to the stolen money? More importantly, who killed Francesca? Her controlling husband? A lover? A jealous coworker? Or someone cleverly hiding in plain sight?

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Francesca Adams, Frankie to her friends, stood under the hot sun feeling as though she could melt into a puddle at any second.

Not only was it ninety-five degrees in Salem, Massachusetts, but the parking lot asphalt radiated heat like an oven.

This was the kind of weather where you could fry an egg on the sidewalk, if you were so inclined.

Francesca wasn't. Even one egg could make the difference between a child going hungry or going to bed with a full belly.

One by one, a row of cars snaked down the block, the drivers pulled into the food pantry's parking lot where Francesca and the other volunteers put boxes of donated food into people's trunks.

With the pandemic still ongoing, guests were not allowed inside the food pantry to choose their own groceries.

Each box contained staples like cold cereal, bread, peanut butter, pasta, and jarred tomato sauce, along with toiletries.

There was also milk, fresh veggies to make salads, and fruit for dessert.

It was strawberry season in Massachusetts, so each family got delicious berries.

Lastly were bags of mini-sized candy bars.

Frankie felt that it wasn't just their responsibility to feed people's bodies, but their souls as well.

A little bit of chocolate went a long way.

Frankie had been working with Sea Witches food pantry for nearly ten years.

Streghe del mare , in Italian. Frankie's Duolingo lessons were already paying dividends.

When she'd started taking Italian lessons with the online app two years ago, she'd done it for fun.

A lark. Something to keep her busy in her limited downtime.

With Francesca's volunteer work with the food pantry, Salem Mercy Hospital, and her full-time job as a member of Salem's City Council, there was precious little free time. Until now.

Francesca's husband, Oliver, had planned a two week trip to Italy for her thirtieth birthday.

Oliver was a veterinarian with his practice located near downtown Salem.

His passion was animals and he also volunteered at the local no-kill shelter, helping to find furever homes for abandoned pets.

He didn't have a lot of free time either, but had somehow managed to pull this trip off for his wife.

The trip was a second honeymoon and as much as Frankie hated to think about it,

possibly a last hurrah.

Frankie was almost positive her husband had been cheating on her.

Oliver constantly accused her of being unfaithful to him, but she knew from experience that the person doing the accusing was usually the person cheating.

She was hoping the trip would bring them closer together, rather than the alternative.

They were going to spend time in Rome, visiting the Colosseum, the Sistine Chapel, and the Trevi Fountain.

All the while eating their body weight in pasta, pizza, and gelato.

Next, it was off to Sorrento and the island of Capri.

She'd finally get to visit Pompeii and stand in Mount Vesuvius's looming shadow.

Then it was off to Florence to see Michealangelo's David, before arriving at their last stop, Venice.

She and Oliver would take romantic gondola rides through the grand canal for three days before coming back home.

This trip would either repair their crumbling marriage or it would end in a blaze of glory.

The plane was scheduled to leave Logan Airport in Boston at seven that evening, which meant the car taking them to the airport would arrive around four, giving them enough time to fight city traffic and get through the TSA line in the international terminal.

The flight would land in Rome eight hours later, at three in the morning Boston time.

It would be 9 A.M. in the Eternal City. The plan was to sleep on the plane, drop their luggage at the hotel and spend the rest of the day walking around and eating.

The group tour they'd booked would start the next morning.

All Frankie had to do was get through the next two hours.

Pulling her mask away from her nose, she took a few breaths of air.

The worst of the pandemic seemed to be behind them, but the last thing she needed was to pop positive before the trip.

If that was the case, she wouldn't be allowed on the plane or into Italy.

"Get your head out of the clouds, girl!" Angela, Frankie's best friend, said, poking her in the ribs.

"We've got people to feed." Angie was a little bit of a thing.

Just barely over five feet tall, her dark eyes and hair made her look far more Sicilian than Francesca with her blond hair and blue eyes.

She took after her mother's northern Italian side of the family.

Putting her mask back in place, Frankie set a box of food in the trunk of a Toyota. "There are so many last minute things to do before we leave."

"Cry me a river!" Angela rolled her eyes dramatically. "You started packing two weeks ago. All you need to do is grab your bags and go."

Angie was right. She was always right. They'd been friends since middle school and had been through everything together.

Teenage angst. College admissions angst. Boyfriend angst. Husband angst. There had been a lot of angst, but there had been a lot of joy, laughter, and fun in both of their lives.

The one thing they could each count on was each other.

Frankie was hesitant to add Oliver to that list, but wouldn't mention that fact to Angie, who'd recently gone through a hellish divorce.

Angie had thought Dominic was the love of her life, when all he'd been was a leach, not wanting to work or help support them. Dom was a video game fanatic. If gamers got paid by the hour, he would have been a top earner.

Turning her mind back to the trip, all Frankie had to do when she got home was make sure her passport and ID were in her tote bag and she'd be good to go.

The one thing nagging at her was that Angie would be alone for the two weeks Frankie would be in Italy living La Dolce Vita with her husband. "I feel so bad leaving you here alone."

Angie shot Frankie an are-you-kidding-me look. "I've got other friends, silly. Plus a huge book order from Amazon is arriving today. I'll pick up wine and all sorts of goodies at the supermarket when we're done here and I'll be set for a weekend of literary debauchery."

There wasn't anything Frankie could do about Angie being alone while she was gone. "I'll send you pictures and grab some bottles of wine for you."

Angie laughed. “Forget the wine! Bring me home a hot Italian man.”

“How would that work? You don’t speak a word of Italian.” Frankie had tried to get Angie into Duolingo, but it had been a no go.

Angie laughed. “Oh, we won’t be talking to each other.” She waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

Getting her groove back was exactly what Angie needed. When Frankie got back from Italy, her first priority would be to set her bestie up with the perfect man. Oliver had a ton of single friends. Maybe they’d have a cookout and Angie could take her pick.

Satisfied with her plan, Frankie went back to loading boxes into trunks.

Ninety minutes stood between her and freedom.

There was a secret she’d been keeping from her husband.

One that had come as a complete surprise three days ago at a routine doctor’s appointment.

After five years of trying, Frankie was finally pregnant, which she knew would complicate things if their marriage was doomed.

Pasting on a fake smile, Frankie was determined to do her part to make sure they had the time of their lives in Italy. All she had to do now was pick the perfect time to share her surprise and hope her happy news brought she and Oliver closer together instead of breaking them apart for good.

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April, present day...

Jude Byrne's arms felt like they were going to snap off at the elbows. He and Cope had just returned from the local party store. He was loaded down with bags containing all kinds of paper dishware, decorations and whatnots for Lizbet's second birthday party.

"What the hell were we thinking letting a toddler loose in the store?" Jude asked, depositing the bags and slumping into his usual seat at the kitchen table.

Cope walked into the kitchen carrying the toddler in question. "It's her party, Jude. Lizbet should be able to pick out her own theme." Cope set Lizbet down and she ran off into the living room when she heard Wolf turn on the television.

"No arguments here, but LizzyB picked out ten themes!" Jude snorted. "We all know Finding Nemo is her favorite movie. All we had to do was chuck Nemo stuff in the shopping cart and call it a day. But, nooooo, you had to set our mini Godzilla loose on humanity."

"Lizbet is not a mini Godzilla!" Cope laughed.

"Oh, no?" Jude asked, sounding snarky. He reached for the bag in front of him, grabbing the first thing his hand landed on.

"Little Mermaid cake plates." He tossed them onto the table.

"Sleeping Beauty napkins. Toy Story gift bags. Nemo toys to go in the bags. Lilo &

Stitch cups. Princess table cloths. Snow White party hats.” Jude opened the package and strapped one to his forehead, making him look like a deranged unicorn.

Stop the insanity!” Jude shouted dramatically.

“Honey, you are the insanity.” Cope grabbed the items and the hat Jude was wearing and shoved them back into the bag.

“Not funny.” Jude wore a grumpy look. “I just want Lizbet to have a great time at her party. Make memories that will last a lifetime. Squeal when she sees my present. You know, all that kind of hippy dippy bullshit.”

Cope opened his mouth looking like he had a comeback loaded and ready to fire at Jude, but he shook his head and walked toward the laundry room with the party bags.

Jude knew the best place to hide things in their house was in the cabinets above the washer and dryer.

Jude could reach the storage spot easily, but Cope, who was half a foot shorter, had to stand on tiptoes just to reach the door knobs.

The kids couldn’t see the top of the dryer even if they stood on a stool with Lizbet on Wolf’s shoulders, like something out of an I Love Lucy episode.

The hiding place was safe until Wolf hit a major growth spurt.

When Cope walked back to the table he carried the party invitations and the books of stamps they’d picked up after the trip to the party store. He poked through the pens in the mug on the counter and came back to the table with two.

Jude didn’t like the look of this. Cope was going to ask him to pitch in with the

invitations. He had worse penmanship than doctors.

“I’ll write the invitations. You can address the envelopes and add the stamp.” Cope opened the first package of invitations and divvied them up.

“Who are we inviting?” Jude asked, scrolling through his list of contacts on his phone.

“I’ve got like two hundred names here.” Jude wasn’t kidding.

Between all their friends, other private detectives, Salem and Boston Police officers, parents from Wolf’s school and Lizbet’s preschool, the contacts were legion.

“Our friends , doofus!” Cope chuckled. “I don’t think the septic tank guy would come anyway and I damn sure wouldn’t want him to be the one scooping ice cream.”

Jude burst out laughing. “Hard pass.” Instead of addressing the envelopes, he pulled up pictures from the day Lizbet was born. “She was so tiny.” He turned his phone around to show Cope. Lizbet was swaddled in a pink blanket and wore a matching hat.

“That was the first picture I took of her when I met her in the maternity ward.” Cope blinked rapidly. Jude knew his husband was trying to keep from crying.

“This picture was waiting for me when I woke up after I died.” Jude snorted.

“You did not die!” Cope protested.

“Oh, yes I did! I was flatlined. Ronan and Fitz both told me I was touched by an angel. Well, Ronan did, Fitz said the devil didn’t want me and sent me back.

” The night Lizbet was born, Jude had been attacked by a serial killer who’d been stalking their prey at Salem Mercy Hospital.

In the aftermath of the near fatal attack, Cope had received a call from the Department of Youth and Family Services asking if he and Jude were able to foster an infant girl.

While Jude was recovering from his death with Ronan and Fitz by his side, Cope was in the maternity ward meeting Lizbet for the first time.

“That little girl pushed me to get better.

From that moment on, I did everything the doctors and nurses said.

The only thing that mattered was getting home to you, Wolf, and our daughter.

“Da!” Lizbet shouted from the living room.

Jude knew what that tone of Lizbet’s voice meant. Snacks and drinks on the double. “Coming Doodlebug!” He grabbed and peeled a banana, before slicing it into Lizbet-sized pieces. Next he cut up an apple for Wolf and got each child a juice pouch. “Okay, here’s the grub.”

“Nana!” Lizbet reached for one of the banana rounds. She offered Jude a big smile before taking a dainty bite.

“Thanks, Dad!” Wolf hugged Jude. “I can wait for Lizbet’s party. She’s gonna be so surprised when she sees her presents.”

“She sure is, buddy.” Jude poked each of the kids, making them giggle before heading back into the kitchen.

Taking a seat at the table, Jude got to work addressing the party invitations. “We need to talk about summer vacation. The kids get out in two months. What’s your plan for the kids and work?”

“I’m not sure. Kaye said she was willing to help out with the kids, but not full time. We’re gonna have to find a camp for Wolf. One that Aurora and Everly would enjoy too.”

“Isn’t it a little late for that? Is it gonna be like selling Halloween candy in August and all that’s left to buy in October are the things no one likes? I don’t want Wolf going to the Almond Joy of summer camps.”

Cope chuckled. “Registration doesn’t open until May fifteenth. They do it on purpose so that every kid has the opportunity to attend the camp they want. I printed out the list last night. We’ll get the big kids together and see which ones they like the best.”

“What are we gonna do with Lizbet?” Jude didn’t like the idea of splitting his kids up, but knew his daughter wouldn’t be old enough to attend the same camp as Wolf.

“Ten said there are going to be openings at the preschool Ezzie attends. They bring on more staff during the summer. I’ve got our name on the list. If we can get Lizzy B into that school, Ten and I can carpool the kids there.

We’ve started adding more reading times to the books for the summer months, but they’re going to be virtual, over Zoom.

We’ll alternate days so that when I have readings, Ten will have the kids and vice versa. ”

Jude frowned. “I don’t like the idea of you working so much during the summer. Yeah, we’re adults, but there should still be time for fun in the sun.”

“We have those two weeks in August coming up. Fitz booked us into this stunning hotel on the rocky coast of Rhode Island.”

“Since when did Fitzzy become the tour director?” Jude asked, feeling glum. He knew exactly what Cope’s answer would be.

“Uh, maybe it’s because you booked us into a no-tell motel last summer?” Cope rolled his eyes.

“In my defense, I was misled and the kids loved it there.” Jude didn’t have much of a defense.

The Four Star Motel hadn’t been much for looks or amenities, but they’d had fun and no one had any permanent scars.

He was about to ask about the hotel in Rhode Island, but his and Cope’s phones dinged with an alert.

Jude picked his up. His heart sank as he read the headline from one of the Boston news stations. “Skeletal remains found in Salem Towne Forest.” He quickly scanned the rest of the story, but at this early stage, there wasn’t much to tell.

“Oh, fuck,” Cope muttered under his breath.

“What?” Jude asked.

“I know who the remains belong to.” Cope shivered in the warm room.

Jude had a horrible feeling he did too. “Francesca Adams?”

Cope nodded. “I could see the tattered remains of her Sea Witches tee.”

Francesca Adams was a wife and member of the Salem City Council.

She and her husband, Ollie, had just come back from a two week trip of a lifetime to Italy.

Two days after they returned to Salem, Francesca had been reported missing, along with a million dollars from the city treasury.

Neither Francesca or the money had been seen since. Until today.

“I’ll never forget the day we met Oliver,” Cope said, shaking his head sadly.

“Oh, Jesus, I’d forgotten about that.” It had been a normal Thursday at West Side Magick.

Ronan and Fitz had been in their offices on the second floor, while Jude was picking up sandwiches from West Side Sweets.

He just moved away from the counter when a desperate looking man walked into the psychic shop.

The man was dressed in crusty-looking jeans and a red t-shirt, with pit stains that soaked his shirt nearly down to his waist. He’d bellowed for help.

Begging everyone to help him find his missing wife.

“I’ll never forget the wild look in his eyes. ”

“I’ll never forget the way Ollie howled with grief when Ten and I told him we couldn’t locate his wife. Or the way he’d tried to take his own life two days later.”

“It wasn’t your fault, Cope, not being able to locate Francesca or knowing what Oliver did later.” Since Jude was the one who’d brought the grieving man into the conference room while he gathered the others, he felt responsible for Oliver and had visited the man in the hospital several times.

“I know,” Cope said, blowing out a hard breath, “but, I wasn’t able to help him the other times either. None of us were.”

After Oliver had gotten out of the hospital, he’d sent an email to Cope apologizing for his behavior that day in the shop.

Every year after, on the anniversary of Frankie’s disappearance, Oliver came in for a reading.

Cope was never able to connect with her spirit, which always gave Oliver hope.

If Cope couldn’t communicate with Francesca’s ghost, that meant she was still alive.

“What do we do now? Nothing? Or should we call Ollie?” Jude felt both moves were wrong, but he wanted to hear what Cope had to say.

“We wait.” Cope sighed. “It’s not going to take long for the remains to be identified. All hell’s gonna break loose with the media coming to town and the spotlight will once again be on Oliver as a suspect, no matter how she died.”

Jude rifled his hands through his dark hair.

“Yeah, the investigation heating back up was my first thought too, but you mentioning the media is a good call.” All of the major Boston stations had come to town when Francesca first went missing.

When word of the missing money got out, that brought the cable news vans, along with national network coverage.

There was so much media in town that it felt like Halloween, only the kidnapper wasn't a teenager wearing a rubber mask, he was the real deal.

Jude knew the investigation was about to heat up. He didn't need Cope's gift to know that Oliver Adams was going to turn up at West Side Magick sooner, rather than later. When that happened, Jude would be ready.

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Just as Cope's gift had told him, the skeletal remains found deep in the Salem Towne Forest were those of Francesca Adams. She'd been preliminarily identified on site by scraps of her tattered clothing.

The Essex County Medical Examiner had confirmed the ID through dental records.

The ME had also stated cause of death was a gunshot wound, manner of death was homicide.

Cope hadn't slept well that night and based on his tossing and turning, neither had Jude. It was obvious both men knew what was coming next. The only question was which version of Oliver Adams they'd get, the rational, heartbroken man, or the panic-stricken murder suspect.

West Side Magick was quieter than usual when Cope walked through the door.

Carson was at the register, ringing up purchases from one of his best customers.

The woman offered Cope a sad look. He had no doubt all of Salem knew about Francesca's remains being found, and thanks to the local media reviving the story, knew what role Cope and Jude had played in the drama.

Settling into his reading room. Cope pulled up his email.

He'd asked Jude to send him all of the information he'd need for when Oliver paid a visit.

Sure enough, there was a message from Jude with several links, all leading to news articles written, starting with Francesca's disappearance and ending with stories filed in the last twenty-four hours.

Cope dug in. He'd been reading one of the more recent articles when the knock on his door came. "Come in."

Ten stuck his head in the door. "Oliver Adams is here. I put him in the conference room. The Boston media came with him. The news vans are camped out front. Carson's losing his mind.

He's worried that the media will be bad for business, but Fitz assured him the opposite is true.

We need to be on our toes and not give away any information the police haven't revealed to the public.

Come with me, Ronan wants all hands on deck. "

Nodding Cope followed Tennyson into the conference room. Oliver Adams sat with his arms wrapped around himself. The man looked as if he hadn't slept in the four years his wife had been missing. "Oliver," Cope began. "I'm so sorry for your loss."

"You're sorry!" Oliver exploded. "The cops said Francesca's body has been there all along. Four years my wife lay moldering in the woods, soaked in thunderstorms, buried by snow, her body ravaged by predators, scavengers, and God knows what else. Why the hell couldn't any of you have found her?"

Cope took a deep breath and readied himself to respond. Jude beat him to the punch.

"We want to help in any way we can, Oliver, but we can't do that if you're going to

shout down the walls.

” Jude got up from the table and grabbed a cold bottle of water from the fridge.

He brought it back to the distraught man.

“You know that what Cope and Tennyson do isn’t an exact science.

Neither of them had been able to communicate with Francesca and to the best of my knowledge no one else has either. ”

Salem only rivaled New Orleans with the number of psychics per capita. He knew that Oliver had visited other talent in town. Cope would have done the same thing if he were in the man’s shoes. “I’m still not able to communicate with her. How about you, Tennyson?”

Ten shook his head. “I’ve been reaching out to her spirit all morning.”

“Why isn’t she talking?” Oliver asked, sounding more in control of himself.

“There are a lot of reasons.” Cope locked eyes with Jude, silently begging him to keep Oliver as calm as possible. “Francesca may have already crossed over. She may not want to speak with us. She might not be able to speak with us.”

“What do you mean, might not be able to speak?” Oliver’s gaze bounced back and forth between Tennyson and Cope.

“When we die, we have to learn how to communicate with the world of the living,” Ten said. “If a death was sudden, unexpected, or violent, it sometimes takes longer for the spirit to recover from their death.”

“Spirits get depressed, just like we do,” Cope said. “Francesca might not be willing to discuss what happened to her or she might be too scared to relive it, both of which are completely understandable.”

Oliver sunk his head into his hands. “Cops showed up at my house yesterday to deliver the news that remains had been found. They wanted me to hear it from them before I heard about it online or in the media. I already knew. I’ve got a police scanner.

Over the last four years, I’ve learned the radio codes.

” He shrugged, sinking deeper into his seat.

“The cop was empathetic for all of ten seconds. After that, he says to come with him down to the station so I can answer more questions. I should have called my lawyer. I shouldn’t have spoken to them, but to be honest, I can’t get out of my own way.

All those years my wife was just missing meant there was a chance she would walk through the door.

Now, there’s no chance. No hope. All I’ve got to look forward to are more interrogations and possibly a prison cell. ”

Fitzgibbon opened his mouth to speak, but stopped when all three detective’s phones pinged.

Fitz pulled out his phone, tapping on the screen.

Seconds later he looked to Ronan and then Jude.

Both men nodded. “We’ve all been called into a meeting with Chief Cisco Jackson in

an hour.

I assume he's going to ask us to take this case. ”

Ronan and Jude nodded along. “I promise we're going to do everything in our power to solve your wife's murder, Oliver.” Ronan set his hand over his heart. “Just keep in mind that we're going to need to speak with you officially.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Oliver asked, with little fire in his voice. The man sounded tapped out, like he didn't have the energy for anything that was to come.

“In order to focus on the killer, we have to eliminate the usual suspects,” Jude said.

“You are one of them. So are Francesca's parents.

Your parents. Her friends, fellow volunteers and the people who served on the Salem City Council with her.

We're going to speak with all of these people.

The best thing you can do is cooperate. Let us do our job and eliminate you. ”

“I've done nothing but cooperate for the last four years.

My life is a mess. My vet practice had started to rebound, but now people are cancelling appointments like crazy.

I didn't kill my wife.” Oliver looked around the table at the detectives.

“You know how much she loved this community. All my wife did was volunteer, at the food bank, cuddling preemie babies at the hospital, running clothes and food

drives. When word of the missing money came out, Frankie went from hero to zero overnight. My wife doesn't deserve to have this unfounded claim laid against her. ”

“Do you know anything about the money?” Jude asked.

Oliver shook his head. “When it was discovered that the money was missing, the Salem Police analyzed every penny that came into or out of our accounts. I assume they're going to do it again. I have nothing to hide. If you want to speak to me further, contact my attorney, Reagan Pryce.”

“We will,” Fitz said.

Jude knew the attorney well. Reagan was the best defense lawyer in Salem, possibly in all of Massachusetts.

He'd been the first person Jude called when Ronan had been arrested for the murder of one of Ten's clients.

Thanks to the attorney and the kick ass investigative skills of himself and Fitz, they'd been able to solve the case and get Ronan off the hook.

Hiring Reagan was a smart move on Oliver's part.

Oliver turned his attention to Tennyson. “Can you try reaching out to Frankie?” His voice had taken on a desperate, begging tone.

“I've been doing that very thing ever since the news broke about remains being found in the forest. I was hoping being here with other psychics would boost our reach, so to speak, but I've not heard from her.”

“Neither have I,” Cope confirmed. “I promise that neither of us are going to give up

on Frankie.”

Ten nodded his agreement.

“So you’re saying that all I can do is what I’ve been doing for the last four years? Sitting around and waiting for that knock at the door, the handcuffs and the perp walk.”

“I wish there was more we could do for you, Oliver,” Ten said.

“What I can tell you is that Ronan, Jude and Fitz are the best in the business. They’re not going to railroad you.

They’ll do everything in their power to find the killer, but you need to be patient and let them work.

I’m sure that’s the last thing you want to hear right now. ”

“Yeah, I hear you. How will I know if the three of you have been given the case?” Oliver asked, getting to his feet.

“We’ll call Reagan Pryce and set up a time to meet,” Fitz said, gently.

“One piece of advice I’d like to offer is not to speak to the media.

They’re going to shout all kinds of questions at you.

They’ll park their news vans in front of your house.

Ignore them. Don’t say a word. I guarantee that will be one of the first things Reagan will tell you as well. ”

“Thank you, Captain Fitzgibbon.” Oliver dropped his head, his eyes were glued to the floor.

“One more piece of advice,” Jude began, “make sure you’ve got someone on standby to take care of pets.

Give someone the key to your house so it can be locked up after you’re arrested or after a search warrant has been served.

I’m not saying you’ll need to put these things in motion, but it’s better to be prepared, just in case. ”

Without saying another word, Oliver nodded and left the room.

Cope could hear the frenzy of reporters shouting questions. “Is there something you can do about the media being camped on our doorstep?”

“I’ll ask Cisco to post officers here and at Oliver’s house.” Fitz got to his feet. “We’ll text to let you know what happens in this meeting with Cisco.”

“No,” Cope said, standing up himself. “I’m coming with you. If you’re going to work this case, I want in on it. Oliver came to me when Frankie first went missing. He came to me today. I can’t walk away now. Don’t make me.” His eyes were on Jude.

“It’s not my decision,” Fitz said, “but come along. You can plead your own case.”

“You may want to mention Cisco’s pending adoption. If there is any news you can report, that will give you a leg up.” Jude waggled his eyebrows.

“Are you telling me to offer the chief of police a bribe?” Cope asked, sounding incredulous.

“Of course not,” Jude deadpanned. “You’re offering your friend the benefit of your supernatural expertise. Free of charge.”

“Let’s roll,” Fitz opened the conference room door and walked out of the room.

Cope would do anything he had to in order to work this murder investigation with Jude and the others. Oliver Adams deserved the best investigative team Salem had in order to solve his wife’s murder. Cope knew he was the best. All he had to do now was prove it.

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Jude's stomach dipped as he walked into Cisco Jackson's office. It wasn't like him to feel anxious over being assigned a case, but this wasn't just any case. He felt like he personally owed it to Francesca to find her killer. Getting personally involved was not a good thing.

He noticed the look of surprise on Cisco's face when he saw Cope walk into the office and shut the door.

Jude wasn't sure if he should explain Cope's presence or let things play out.

If Cisco wanted to tell them that he wasn't giving them the Adams case, then Cisco didn't need to know why Cope had come with them to this meeting.

His gut was telling him that would not be the case.

"You know why I asked to see you," Cisco said, steepling his fingers together.

"We assume it has to do with the Francesca Adams case." Jude pulled out his notebook and prepared to scribble Cisco's instructions.

"Indeed it does." Cisco looked back and forth between the three detectives, seeming to ignore Cope for the moment. "I'm putting my neck out giving this case to you. It's technically a cold case, but I would ordinarily assign an investigation like this to homicide detectives."

"Why are you handing the case to us?" Fitz asked.

“To be honest, it wasn’t my call.”

“Whose call was it?” Ronan looked like he had an idea, but didn’t voice it.

“Sarah Corning, the lieutenant governor. Former mayor of Salem.” Cisco grinned.

“Sarah was always the type who got emotionally involved in abduction and murder cases. She’d known Francesca for over a decade before she disappeared.

We all did. None of us would ever have guessed that a prominent member of the city council would abscond with a cool million bucks, leaving her husband, family, and her community high and dry. ”

“Even after the records showing Frankie had stolen the money came out, Corning was still on her side,” Ronan said. “We all thought it was a risky political move at the time, but seeing where she is now, I’d venture to say the risk was worth the reward.”

Cisco shrugged, obviously unwilling to commit either way.

“I’ve got the file for you.” He pointed to the table behind the detectives, where several evidence boxes sat.

The body is being autopsied today. The ME is expecting the three of you.

” Cisco’s attention finally turned to Cope.

“I’m assuming you want to be the cold case psychic? ”

Cope nodded. “I was the one Oliver came to when Frankie went missing. He visits the shop every year, rain or shine, on the anniversary of his wife’s disappearance. I’d like to offer my services if you think there’s anything I can do to help.”

“You’re emotionally involved in this case.” It wasn’t a question. Jude knew Cisco made the statement simply to feel Cope out.

“I am,” Cope agreed. “A woman is dead. Frankie was someone who would give the literal shirt off her back if you were in need. It’s time someone return that gesture to her.”

Cisco looked impressed. “And if you discover Oliver Adams killed his wife?”

“I bring the information to you, Chief, or to Captain Fitzgibbon, just like I would if I knew Jude committed a crime.” Cope offered a small smile.

Jude didn’t take the bait. He could hear the earnestness in Cope’s voice and didn’t want to do anything that would make Cisco kick Cope out of his office. Tennyson had helped solve murders more times that Jude could count. He had no doubt Cope could do the same.

“Tennyson gets sick in morgues. He says there’s so much death residue that he feels overwhelmed and anxious. Then he blows chunks. That gonna happen to you?” Cisco threw the question out like a gauntlet. The question was, would Cope pick it up.

“If it does, I’ve got a bottle of Scope in my backpack.

” Cope sounded determined to work this case no matter how uncomfortable it would make him.

“This case isn’t about my comfort or my abilities.

It’s about a woman who left her house one afternoon and never came home.

She deserves the absolute best the Salem Police Department has to offer. ”

“And you’re part of that best?” Cisco raised an eyebrow.

Cope nodded. “I am, Chief.”

Cisco reached into his desk and pulled something out. He tossed it to Cope, who bobbed it for a second before catching it. He held the police badge up for Jude to see. “Raise your right hand and repeat after me. I, Copeland Forbes,-”

Jude beamed with pride as Cope was sworn in as a temporary member of the cold case team. He should have pulled out his phone to record the moment, but there would be time for accolades later, once this case was solved and Francesca Adams’s killer was behind bars.

“I don’t have to tell you time is of the essence here.

Whoever killed Francesca has had four years to prepare for the eventuality of her body being discovered.

” Cisco turned to Cope once again. “I know you have a soft spot for Oliver Adams. That ended the second you accepted the badge attached to your belt loop. There’s no room for personal attachments here. Got it?”

“Yes, chief,” Cope agreed.

“Keep me updated, Fitz, and for fuck’s sake, stay out of the press.” Cisco’s eyes were on Ronan, who tended to be a bit of a media darling.

“Speaking of, chief,” Ronan began.

“Fuck me with a guillotine, Ronan. Don’t tell me you’ve already spoken to them?”

“We listen and we don’t judge.” Ronan offered his boss a so-there look.

“No, for your information I haven’t spoken to them, but they showed up at West Side Magick this morning as if Oliver Adams was the Pied Piper.

Can we get an officer down there to keep the crowd back.

Ten and the guys have readings today and as it’s nearly lunchtime, Cassie’s business is going to suffer if the lunch crowd can’t get near the building. ”

“You got it,” Cisco agreed quickly, looking relieved.

“It may be a good idea to post someone at the Adams’ residence too. We all know how ugly people get when they think there’s a murderer among them. Not to mention the amount of media that will be camped out on his front lawn.”

“Good call, Ronan. I’ll get right on it.” For once, Cisco didn’t sound sarcastic. “Call me if anything unusual comes up.”

With a nod, Fitzgibbon grabbed one of the case file boxes and headed out the door. “We’ll be in one of the conference rooms going over this information.”

Each of the detectives grabbed a box. Jude indicated Cope should do the same. “You’re gonna be great,” Jude said, as they filed out into the hallway.

“Damn straight, I am.”

Closing the conference room door behind him, Jude set his box down on the table in the correct order. His was box three of four.

“Where do we even start since this case is sort of backward?” Cope asked. “Do we

start at the beginning or with the discovery of the crime scene yesterday?”

“Let’s start at the beginning and go through everything chronologically.” Fitzgibbon popped the top off the first box. “If there’s anything you sense or feel, let me know. If you want to touch the evidence, put on a pair of gloves.

Cope nodded and started looking through the boxes.

Jude went against the grain and started with the crime scene photographs and the notes the officers had taken.

In the first several pictures it was nearly impossible to tell that there were skeletal remains in the photo.

The forest had grown up and around the bones.

Fiddleheads sprouted between Francesca’s ribs, while last year’s pine needles, now brown with age, covered everything else.

The last few shots were of the skull. A large bullet hole was punched through the back of her skull with a large exit wound in the center of her forehead, like a third eye.

“Who the hell found the remains?” Jude asked.

“Troop of boy scouts,” Fitz said.

“Were they out trying to get their serial killer merit badge?” Ronan asked.

“No, wilderness survival,” Fitz said, with no humor in his tone.

“One of the boys had volunteered to find firewood and tripped over the skull. He started screaming for help and the rest of the troop came running. Thankfully one of the troop leaders had a cell phone and was able to call 911. Usually they’re not allowed to bring technology into the woods, as it defeats the purpose of scouting to survive.

The leader’s wife is nine months pregnant and could deliver any day, so he took his phone, not wanting to miss the birth of his child.

Turned out to be a good thing he did. The hike out would have taken two hours and it would have been dark by the time help was called. ”

“It’s surprising no one had stumbled on the remains sooner,” Jude said. “Hunters are always the ones finding human remains.”

“Yeah, but the Salem Towne Forest is city property. There’s no hunting allowed on the grounds.

The part of the area where the body was discovered was off the beaten path.

There were no trails out that far,” Fitz said.

“Not to mention that the land abuts property belonging to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with no hunting allowed there either. It’s a miracle she was found at all. ”

Jude agreed with Fitzgibbon’s assessment.

Like Oliver said earlier that morning, up until the body was found, he had hope that Francesca would walk through the door.

Now, all hope was gone. It wasn't going to be an easy time for Oliver, trying to make final arrangements for his wife, all the while being questioned by the police as her possible killer.

"I know we're not supposed to be personally involved," Cope said, "but do any of you think Oliver did this?"

Fitzgibbon sighed. "I don't know. He was pretty shaken up this morning when he came to West Side Magick, but he's had years to perfect this act. I can't tell either way, which is good, that way we don't slant the evidence to fit our theory."

"What about you?" Ronan pointed to Cope. "I know you couldn't contact Frankie, but was Oliver giving you any signs that he was hiding something?"

"Everyone is hiding something, Ronan. Granted, not everyone's something is as serious as a murder, but everyone in this room is hiding something they don't want anyone else to know."

Fitz and Ronan wore worried looks. "Don't worry, I'm not going to expose any of those secrets, but ask yourselves if you were in Oliver's shoes, would you try to keep that thing hidden? I know I would." Cope's eyes moved from detective to detective.

Jude had never been happier that his husband couldn't read him.

Yeah, he had secrets of his own. Nothing that would compromise national security or his marriage vows, but he didn't exactly want his husband to know that when Cope went to bed early, Jude was downstairs playing Call of Duty and snacking on mini Snickers.

His own peccadillos aside, Jude wondered what Oliver Adams was hiding. Were his secrets harmless, like Jude's late night video game addiction? Or were they more

serious? Maybe involving the abduction and murder of his wife?

One way or another, Jude was going to find out.

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The atmosphere in the SUV was tense as Fitzgibbon drove to the Essex County Morgue.

Cope had devoured the Adams case file while they'd been in the office.

There were times when Jude had come home from work looking absolutely exhausted, when all he'd done all day was go over files.

Reading crime scene notes, interviews, witness statements, and viewing crime scene photos.

Cope understood exactly why Jude was a zombie at home.

His brain had reached critical mass, he'd taken all he could take, and his brain had shut down.

Cope had felt that way in relation to certain readings he'd facilitated.

Dark spirits came through more often than anyone knew.

When psychics made it to the big time and had their own shows, the spirits who wished they'd killed an entire classroom of kids aren't the ones highlighted in an episode.

He'd spoken with husbands who'd wanted to control their henpecked wives from beyond the grave, along with other husbands who were busting a gasket over the man or men their widow had chosen to move on with.

On those days, Cope would call himself brain dead. This day was a close second.

He'd read through all of the witness statements proclaiming that Frankie was the nicest woman on the planet and that they couldn't imagine her ever walking out on Ollie or the life they'd built together. Each interview was sunnier than the last, until the embezzlement had been discovered.

Cope had a vague memory of hearing money had been stolen.

At the time of the crime, Wolf was a toddler and once he'd learned how to walk, there was no stopping him.

Cope spent most of his time at home chasing after the baby.

There was little to no time left over to watch the news or read articles online.

Every second he was away from his son physically hurt him.

Diving into the details of how the money was stolen was eye-opening to say the least. Francesca had opened an account under her name and had begun transferring money into it over time.

Only a little bit at first, fifty or sixty dollars, but as time went on, the transfers got bigger and bolder.

The final transfer, made on the day after Frankie disappeared, was for a quarter of a million dollars.

With her flying the coop, there was no need to worry about transfers flagging in the bank or city accounts.

What was done was done. The cash had been transferred to a bank in the Cayman Islands, which was where the trail went cold.

Cope had worked with Frankie on a committee for the food pantry.

After he'd moved to Salem permanently, he needed a place to donate his stock dividends.

He never wanted to own stock in his father's natural gas company, but as per his usual, Buford didn't care what Cope wanted, so he donated it to charity, which was a perfect solution.

He'd always dropped his checks off with Frankie, who'd written the amount in a ledger and then wrote out a tax receipt.

Not once had Cope ever seen her eyes go wide at the amount of the checks, nor did she ever look bitter or jealous.

Francesca Adams would be the last person on earth Cope would think capable of stealing anything.

Part of the file included five years of Frankie and Ollie's bank statements prior to her disappearance.

So far as Cope could tell, there wasn't a penny out of place.

The only large sums of money that ever hit the account were birthday checks from Frankie's father in the amount of twenty-five hundred dollars and their annual tax return which was around three thousand dollars.

There was no sign of the missing money anywhere in their finances.

The last thing Cope had done was to read the witness statements made after the money was discovered to be missing.

Ambrose Watson, another member of the Salem City Council had been the one to discover the theft.

His statement about Frankie pulled no punches.

He accused her of being two-faced, selfish, only out for herself, with a ‘fuck you’ attitude toward anyone who disagreed with her.

The statements of Frankie’s character only got worse from there.

Friends stated they knew something was off about her.

Others stated things had mysteriously gone missing from their houses after Francesca came to visit.

Even more wanted her to get the death penalty for what she’d done to Ollie and the City of Salem.

The only person, aside from Frankie’s parents, who’d been solidly on Frankie’s side was Oliver, and he was still the prime suspect in her disappearance.

Former friends and neighbors were convinced that Frankie and Ollie were in the scheme together.

They were all prepared for the day when Ollie flew the coop to be with his wife and the stolen money. That day had never come.

“We’re almost there, Cope,” Jude said, breaking him out of his thoughts. “How are

you feeling?”

“I’m okay, just tired and heartsick.” Cope felt like he could sleep for a week.

“Every time I took Ten to a place like this he’d toss his cookies and then want fifteen tacos on the way home.

He said he could feel the evil soaked into the walls of the jails we’ve visited.

Morgues were only slightly better, the difference being that a lot of the spirits milling around wouldn’t accept that they were dead.

Over time, those spirits could get pretty pissy. ” Ronan grimaced at the thought.

“I’ve never had any kind of reaction like that, but I’ll let you know if being in there is too much for me.”

“The good news,” Fitzgibbon began, “if this can be called good news, is that the remains are skeletal. There’s nothing left but bones. Some of the autopsies we’ve all seen over the years would make your hair curl.”

Cope nodded. He didn’t want to know what Fitz and the others had seen. Even though Frankie was just bones, he’d known, liked, and respected this woman. All he could do was help to make sure her remains and her spirit were at rest.

Fitzgibbon pulled into the lot and parked the SUV. “Here we go. Cope if you need to leave the room, just go, there’s no need to be a hero. Got it?”

“Got it, Cap.” Cope was all business now. He’d seen Jude and Ronan morph into cop mode dozens of times, but this was the first time he’d experienced that from this side of the equation. “I’m here to do a job. My eye will be on the prize. One question

though?”

“Shoot,” Fitz said with a good natured grin.

“What do I do if spirits start talking to me? Do I just answer them in front of the medical examiner or do I pull the spirit out into the hall?”

“That would be best. The ME has to testify to anything he did, saw, or said during the autopsy. The last thing we need is for him to start telling tales of the probationary officer from the Salem Police Department who spoke to people who clearly were not there.”

“Ten came up with a solution to that problem,” Ronan said. “He would pull out his phone and make like he was talking to someone on the other end of the line. Worked like a charm. Give it a try.”

“That’s really clever. Thanks, Ronan.”

“No problem, rookie.” He wagged his eyebrows and hopped out of the SUV.

It was go time. Cope hadn’t felt nervous or scared until this moment.

Hearing that something he did or said could influence the criminal case, should one be brought, was humbling.

He wasn’t only doing this for the Salem Police station, but for Frankie herself.

Cope didn’t want to let either of them down.

The building which housed the morgue was several stories tall.

Not only did the county medical examiner have an office in the building, but so did several other state agencies.

Fitzgibbon held the door open for everyone to enter.

Cope followed Jude down the corridor to a bank of elevators.

When they were inside, Jude pressed the B button.

Of course the morgue was in the basement.

It was a bright, sunny day outside, but none of that feel-good sunshine reached inside the basement level. It was like Cope was trapped in a black hole. Jude stopped at one of the autopsy rooms and knocked on the door.

“Come in!” a voice hollered from inside.

When Jude pushed through the door, AC/DC blasted into the hall.

Cope couldn’t decide if it was badass or just plain creepy that the ME was listening to “Highway to Hell.”

“Hey, Cam, good to see you.” Jude bumped elbows with the doctor, who wore scrubs, an apron, a surgical cap, and a mask.

He also wore glasses that made his eyes look as big as baseballs.

Cope assumed they were for magnification.

“Cope this is Doctor Cameron Dobbs. Doc, this is my husband, Cope. He’s on a ride along with us today. ”

“Nice to meet you.” Cope didn’t offer his elbow for a bump. He was scared of what he might see if he touched the doctor who’d performed countless autopsies.

“Jude talks about you all the time. It’s nice to put a name with the face.” Doctor Dobbs smiled, making him look all the more cartoonish.

Cope wished he felt the same. With the surgical mask and the magnifiers the doctor wore, all Cope could see were his blue eyes. He wouldn’t be able to pick the man out of a lineup.

“You’re here to talk about Francesca Adams?” Dobbs asked.

“We are,” Fitzgibbon agreed. “Chief Jackson assigned the case to us.”

The doctor whistled. “That’s a pretty big feather in your cap.”

“Only if we solve this crime. What can you tell us about the remains?” Fitz asked, taking out his notebook.

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“Not very much, I’m afraid.” The doctor motioned them forward to an autopsy table covered by a crisp white sheet.

He pulled it down to what would have been the middle of Francesca’s torso.

“You can clearly see the gunshot wound to the head, as well as the exit.” He turned the skull over and Cope gasped, not at the size of the hole, but his gift had shown him what happened.

The shot came from behind Frankie at close range.

He couldn’t tell the make of gun or if it was a man or woman who fired it.

“You okay?” Jude whispered.

Cope nodded. He took a deep breath. Keeping a cool head was key. As much as he didn’t want to see anything else, he knew whatever his gift showed him could be vital to the case. When they got back to the car, he’d tell the detectives about his vision.

“There are no other marks of human violence on the bones,” the doctor was saying, when Cope tuned back in.

“Does that mean there’s other kinds of violence?” Cope asked, once again scared of the answer.

“There was a lot of animal predation,” the doc said, pointing to gouge marks on Frankie’s ribs.

“A coyote made these marks.” Moving to the other side of the table, he pointed to Frankie’s left shoulder.

“You can see where the arm was detached. It has not been found. Most likely it was carried off by a predator. Possibly a coyote or a black bear. Their numbers have started to rise in Massachusetts over the last few years.”

Cope reached his hand out, as if he were going to touch the remains, when he felt dizzy. Stumbling back a step, he backed into Jude who thankfully caught him.

“Are you okay?” Jude pulled Cope away from the autopsy table.

“She was pregnant,” Cope whispered. “I saw a vision of her cradling her baby bump and singing her daughter a song.”

“Let’s keep that to ourselves for now. Okay?” Jude wore a worried look.

Cope nodded. He followed Jude back to the table, where the doctor was about to remove the sheet from the lower half of the body.

“The one big surprise was that Mrs. Adams was pregnant. About seven weeks by the size of the fetus.”

“You found remains of the baby?” Cope asked, feeling like he was about to vomit.

The only thing worse than looking at the skeletal remains of a friend, would be to see the tiny bones of a baby who never drew its first breath.

The name Amelia came into Cope’s mind, no doubt what Frankie planned on naming her daughter.

“We did,” the doctor said. He pulled the sheet back to reveal a tiny, but intact skeleton.

“With the level of predation damage to the body it’s exceedingly rare for these remains to be intact.

There are no signs of violence on the body.

The baby died as a result of the gunshot wound to Frankie’s head.

I can tell you that based on measurements, and the pelvis, the baby was female. ”

“I don’t remember there being any mention of Frankie being pregnant when she disappeared, do you?” Jude asked Fitz.

“There was no mention of a baby anywhere in the case file. I have to think that people might have gone easier on her if they’d known she was going to be a mother.” Fitz shook his head and stared down at the child’s remains.

Ronan took a sharp breath. Cope knew he was thinking about Everly. “Is there anything else you can tell us that will help find the person who did this?”

“Not at this time. I received word from Cisco Jackson that he’s sending a cadet class from the local police academy to scour the area for more of the remains and for the bullet. It’s possible that it struck a tree and is still embedded there.”

“What about DNA,” Ronan asked.

“We’ve got a sample of Frankie’s DNA on file. We’ve identified her through dental records, so there was no need to try to sample Mrs. Adams’s DNA.”

“That’s great,” Ronan said. “But I was asking about the baby. Were you able to get a sample of her DNA?”

The doctor paused. His giant eyes blinked several times as if he were trying to figure out why Ronan would ask such a question. It was glaringly obvious who the child’s mother was.

Ronan took a step closer to Doctor Dobbs, as if he were about to tell the man a secret.

“We need to know if the father was Oliver Adams or someone else. Murders are committed over a lot less, but finding out your wife is pregnant with another man’s child could have been the catalyst that started the events in motion. ”

“Understood. I’ll try to get a sample of the child’s DNA as well. I’ll copy Captain Fitzgibbon on the results.”

“Much appreciated,” Fitzgibbon said. “Any other questions?” He’d asked the group, but Fitz’s eyes were on Cope.

“I’m good. Thank you,” Cope said. Without waiting for the others, he walked out of the autopsy suite and headed for the elevator where he braced his hands on his knees and took great gulps of air.

“Are you sick?” Jude asked, running up to Cope.

“No.” Cope stood up straight. “Just the thought of what Ameila went through. It was too much for me.”

“Who’s Amelia?” Ronan asked, looking as if he didn’t want to know the answer.

“Frankie’s baby. It was her grandmother’s name. She was so excited to name her

daughter after her beloved Nonna .”

“Were you able to connect with Francesca?” Ronan asked.

“No. I think we’ll have more luck when we go meet with Oliver. I have a feeling we’ll find Frankie with her loving husband.”

“Are you being sarcastic?” Fitz shot Cope a confused look.

“Yeah,” Cope agreed. “When we met with Oliver this morning, I couldn’t tell if he was genuinely upset about Frankie’s remains being found or if he was love bombing us so we’d think he was broken up. Seeing Oliver face to face will tell the tale.”

“Let’s go talk to him.” Ronan grinned. “Do you need to stop and eat something in order to refuel?”

“Yeah, I could go for a big greasy burger and fries.” Cope’s eyes lit up with anticipation.

“Me too,” Fitz agreed. “First food. Then we’ll go have a little chat with Oliver Adams.”

Cope followed the detectives back to the SUV.

He hoped for Frankie’s sake that Oliver wasn’t the one who’d murdered her.

He’d spoken to his fair share of spirits who weren’t able to let go of the love they had for the partners who killed them.

Was Frankie another in that long line? Or was her killer someone else?

A lover. A jealous coworker. A friend. A parent.

Cope didn't know the answer, but he wasn't going to rest until he did.

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After a huge lunch at Ronan's favorite local diner, Bub's Grub, they were on the road to Oliver Adams's house.

He and Ronan had argued over whether they should call ahead so Oliver would know they were coming.

Jude said yes, Ronan no. Fitz settled the matter.

No call. It wasn't a surprise they were going to see Oliver.

It was only a matter of when they'd show up to interview the grieving husband.

Fitzgibbon took left and right turns as Ronan called out the directions.

Cope would have known which house was Oliver's without the help of Google maps.

It was the one surrounded by members of the media.

News vans were parked as far down the street as the eye could see.

Also in the crowd were angry citizens with signs calling Oliver a killer and worse.

Jude noticed there were three vehicles in the driveway. One was a large red pickup truck, the second a gold BMW, which he knew belonged to Reagan Pryce, the other was a pint sized Chevy, which was attached to a charging station. "Who does the tree hugging hippie car belong to?"

“Angie Melton,” Cope said, sounding surprised. “That’s all I’m getting, is the name familiar to any of you.”

“After Frankie disappeared, the Salem Police interviewed a woman named Angie Sullivan. The woman was Frankie’s best friend. Could be that she’s remarried or went back to using her maiden name after a divorce,” Ronan suggested.

“I’ll get whatever I can from her as well,” Cope said.

As the detectives walked toward the front door, the crowd of media and onlookers parted like the Red Sea. It didn’t take long for the questions to start.

“Captain Fitzgibbon, are you here to arrest Oliver Adams for the murder of his wife?”

“What was Frankie’s cause of death?”

“What did you do with your share of the missing money, Captain Fitzgibbon?”

Fitzgibbon stopped in his tracks at the last question.

He turned to face the media, all of whom had their cameras, microphones, or smartphones pointed at Fitz.

“The Salem Police have no comment at this time, however, I will say that suggesting that I or any other members of the department were involved with the million dollar theft is not only wrong, it’s dangerous.

When there’s an arrest to report, we’ll hold a press conference, but for now, stay off the Adams’s property.

The SPD has more important things to do than be called out here for repeated

trespassing complaints from neighbors.

” Fitz swung his attention toward the sign-waving crowd of people.

“Mr. Adams is innocent until proven guilty. Take your vile signs and get the hell out of here. I’m assigning officers to this location who will start arresting people.

Understood?” Without waiting for an answer, Fitzgibbon headed for the front door.

After ringing the doorbell, a familiar face opened the door and ushered them inside a worn, but clean living room. Oliver Adams was nowhere to be seen. “It’s good to see you, Fitz,” Reagan Pryce said, shaking the captain’s hand. “Jude, Ronan, Cope.” The attorney nodded at each man in turn.

“We’re here to speak with your client,” Fitz said. “I don’t want to take him downtown if I don’t have to, which means the two of you need to cooperate with this investigation.”

Pryce smiled. He looked like a spider welcoming a fly into its web.

“I’m sure I don’t need to tell you that my client is suffering through a devastating loss.

As you so eloquently put it, Oliver is innocent until proven guilty.

I’ll give him some wiggle room to speak with you, but it’s a very short leash. Understood?”

“Understood,” Fitzgibbon practically growled.

“Follow me,” Pryce waved the detectives forward.

Jude took Cope's elbow to hold him back. "Get as much information as you can with your gift. Focus on Adams, but see what you can read from the friend. If Frankie shows up, use the code word fritter."

Cope raised a skeptical eyebrow at his husband. "If she's here, I'll do like Ronan said at the morgue and I'll pretend to get a call. What if I get information? How do you want me to let you know?"

Jude bent his head closer to Cope. He didn't want anyone to overhear what he was about to say.

"If you get something, ask Adams a question. Watch for his reaction. Read him. None of what your gift tells you is admissible in court, but we can use that information to make him think we know more than we do. Got it?"

Cope nodded.

Walking into the kitchen, Jude saw everyone was sitting at an elongated kitchen table which was covered with comfort casseroles, a fruit arrangement, and plates of cookies.

At least Oliver had some friends left. Pryce sat to Oliver's right, while a woman sat on his left.

She was beautiful, with her shoulder length dark hair and dark brown eyes.

Jude had never seen her before. He took the seat beside Fitz, while Cope took the chair at the head of the table beside the woman.

"You know Reagan and this is Frankie's best friend, Angie.

She's been here since we got the news that my wife had been found.

" He offered a nervous, but grateful look to the woman, who seemed mad enough to breathe fire.

Angie's body language said it all. She sat with her arms crossed, leaning as far away from Oliver as she could without falling out of the chair.

Fitzgibbon nodded to Angie. "We're here to talk about your wife's murder, Oliver."

Angie gasped. Tears streaked down her face. "Murdered? Oh, my poor Frankie." Her arms tightened around herself, as if she could somehow ward off any further bad news.

Oliver's eyes widened. "Frankie was murdered? No one would tell me anything. Not even the news stations knew how she died."

"We've just come from the medical examiner's office.

Frankie died from a single gunshot wound to the head.

" Fitzgibbon paused. He took out his phone and flipped through his photos before turning it around to show Oliver.

Jude saw it was one of the crime scene images with the disembodied skull and the grotesque bullet hole.

Jude's full attention was on the grieving widower.

His reaction didn't disappoint. He pushed back from the table as if it were on fire.

Oliver's mouth dropped open in apparent horror.

His entire body started to tremble as he shook his head as if to clear the visual of his wife's death from his mind.

Jude couldn't decide if this was an Oscar-worthy performance or actual grief.

Angie's reaction, however, left no doubt.

"Are you fucking kidding me? Coming into Frankie's house and showing an image like that to us.

You should all be ashamed of yourselves.

Haven't I suffered enough? First, my best friend goes missing and all you fuckers could do was insist she'd run off.

Oliver was initially a suspect, but was never charged.

There were no searches of the Salem Towne Forest when Frankie went missing.

You were so focused on the money and how Frankie must be off in Bora Bora living her best fucking life, when she was here all along!

Dead in the middle of the woods. Rotting and being eaten by God only knows what.

My best friend needed you to protect her, to help her, to find her, and you just sat around, eating fucking donuts and trying to follow the money trail.

Four years later, you haven't found a penny.

The only reason we have Frankie back is thanks to some boy scout troop, who are probably all scarred for life.

Brilliant police work! Bravo!” Angie’s eyes glowed with rage.

The table sat in stunned silence. Jude couldn’t disagree with anything Angie had said.

He wasn’t with the Salem Police at the time of Frankie’s disappearance, but the officer notes indicated that she’d taken off with the money.

A cursory search had been performed, around town, which had turned up nothing.

A snuffle caught Jude’s attention. Oliver was crying quietly into his hands.

“You’re right, Angie,” Fitzgibbon said. “The Salem Police dropped the ball. All we can do is follow the evidence and the evidence at that time led us to the conclusion that Frankie had taken the money and run. Her suitcase was missing, as was her purse and passport.”

The rage flared in Angie’s eyes again. “Yeah and when you couldn’t find her name on any flight manifest or rental car agreement, and didn’t see any transactions on her credit and debit cards, you dusted off your hands and called it a day.”

“That investigation is in the past,” Fitzgibbon said.

“Since we have now recovered Frankie’s remains, we have to start this investigation from scratch.

Shouting the house down over the way the Salem Police Department failed Frankie is not a productive way to spend our time.

We're here to speak with Oliver and his attorney.

It would be for the best if you left. We'll be in touch to interview you at a later time. ”

Angie's hands balled into fists. Wordlessly, she got up from the table and left the room. A few seconds later, the front door slammed shut.

It was obvious to Jude how much Angie loved Frankie, but Fitz was right.

That love, mixed with rage, had no place here and now.

They needed to get Oliver's account of what happened when Frankie disappeared on the record.

They'd speak to Angie later. She'd put on a convincing performance, but looks could be deceiving.

This way, she wouldn't know what questions Oliver was asked, and wouldn't know his answers.

Every "I" needed to be precisely dotted.

They couldn't fail Frankie a second time.

“Are you ready to talk about what happened on that last day, Oliver?” Fitz asked.

Oliver nodded and took a deep breath, obviously trying to pull himself together.

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“Tell us everything you remember.” Ronan had his notebook out and his pen poised and ready to go. Fitzgibbon set his phone to record and pushed it into the center of the table.

Oliver looked to Pryce, who nodded.

“We’d just come back from Italy. It was an incredible trip, but were jet lagged and exhausted.

There was no food in the house, so I offered to pick up sandwiches and some other necessities.

We had a quiet dinner and went to bed early.

Both of us had to be back at work the next day.

Everything was normal for the next three days.

On the morning my wife went missing, I kissed her on my way out the door and told her I’d pick up Thai food on the way home.

My day at the vet clinic was booked solid and I had two walk-in emergencies.

I’d barely had time to grab a bite for lunch, and I hadn’t checked my phone all day.

There weren’t any messages from my wife, which was odd.

We usually texted a couple of times a day.

I didn't think anything of it because I assumed she was just as busy as I'd been.

By the time I got home with the food, it was past seven.

Frankie's car was in the driveway, but she was not home.

No lights were turned on. The only thing out of place had been her suitcase.

It had been full of dirty clothes and souvenirs when we'd gotten home.

It was missing. I didn't think much of her not being home.

I assumed she'd gone for a quick drink with Angie to fill her in on the trip.

I texted her, waited a bit for her to come home, and I had dinner. ”

“You didn't call the police until nearly 11 P.M. that evening. Why?” Fitz asked.

“I assumed Frankie was out with her best friend who she hadn't seen in two weeks.

Angie and Frankie were closer than sisters.

Frankie was so busy on our trip that she didn't really text Angie much at all while we were gone.

They had a lot to catch up on.” Oliver wore a pained look.

“If I could do things all over again, I would have called you the minute I came home to an empty house. I have to live with that guilt for the rest of my life.”

“Do you own any firearms, Oliver?” Ronan asked, his tone all business.

Oliver’s pained look was replaced with shock. He turned to Reagan, who once again nodded. “I do, a couple of handguns. They’re locked in a gun safe beside my bed.”

“How long have you had them?” Jude asked. It would be easy to search the Massachusetts gun registry to find out this information. He’d asked simply to see if Oliver would lie.

“We’d bought the guns when we first got married.

We liked going to the shooting range together.

After each trip, we’d clean and store the guns in the back of the closet.

Not the most secure place to keep them.” Oliver shrugged.

“About six months or so before Frankie went missing, we’d decided to try for a baby.

She insisted we buy a locked gun safe, which I did.

I kept it in the closet, but moved the safe beside the bed after she was gone. ”

“Why?” Ronan asked.

“After the million dollars turned up missing, I was getting death threats. Bricks were thrown through my front window on several occasions. Awful words were painted on my garage door.”

Jude had seen photos of the damage done.

It was all in the case file, along with a note from one of the officers who thought Oliver had been the one to cause the damage himself in order to get the heat off of him.

None of the vandalism reports were investigated beyond taking a police report and staying on scene until the broken windows could be boarded up.

The Salem Police Department had abandoned Oliver once again.

“Did anyone have Ring cameras or anything like that?”

“Not at the time. After I was taken in by the cops for questioning about Frankie’s disappearance, all of the neighbors got them. The police kept me for forty-eight hours before releasing me. When I came home the entire neighborhood was wired. There were no more acts of vandalism after that.”

Jude could understand why. “You mentioned trying for a baby before Frankie went missing. How was that going?”

Oliver grimaced. “Not very well. The doctors told us to be patient, that it would be time to worry if a year had passed without Frankie conceiving. We had six months to keep trying before we went back to the doctor.”

“So, you’re saying that Frankie was never pregnant?” Fitzgibbon asked.

Oliver’s eyes darkened.

“Do not answer that question!” Pryce yanked Oliver out of his seat and marched him into the living room.

Jude could hear the men whispering together. When Oliver had been speaking about

trying for a baby, he'd worn a sorrowful look, which could have been because he'd never known his wife was pregnant or because he killed the baby when he killed Frankie.

"We're terminating this interview, Captain Fitzgibbon," Pryce said when he walked into the kitchen alone. "Do get in touch if there's anything else my client can tell you."

Fitzgibbon approached Pryce with his phone in his hand. "This is one of Frankie's autopsy pictures. Can you see what that tiny thing is in the center of the photo?"

Jude knew Fitz was showing the lawyer the skeletal remains of Frankie's child.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Pryce whispered. "Frankie was pregnant when she died?"

Fitzgibbon nodded. "We ordered the medical examiner to get a DNA profile on the child to see if Oliver is the father. Seems kind of suspicious to me that a woman could be eight weeks along and have her husband not know she was expecting."

"Are you suggesting the child might not be Oliver's?" Pryce's face was bright red, he looked like he was about to go nuclear on Fitzgibbon.

"I'm not suggesting anything. I'll wait for the facts to speak for themselves. If your client killed his wife and his unborn child, we're charging him with two counts of first degree murder. Life with no parole times two." Fitzgibbon headed for the door. "We'll be in touch."

Jude followed behind. Cope hadn't used the code word, which made him assume Frankie's spirit wasn't at the house. He'd been pretty quiet during the rest of the interview and Jude needed to know why.

Had Cope uncovered a clue that would help them solve Frankie's murder? Or was this case too hard for his husband to work?

Jude hoped it was the former and not the latter.

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Instead of heading back to the office, Fitzgibbon brought everyone home. He and Ronan were going to order pizza and would bring dinner to Cope and Jude's house. Lizbet and Wolf had come running out of Ronan's house when the detectives got out of the car. Everly and Aurora were right behind them.

Cope scooped up his son, while Jude held his arms out for Lizbet.

She smacked a kiss to his cheek and wrapped her arms around his neck, before tucking her head under his chin.

Lizbet had done that very thing for the last few months when Jude had a rough day.

She seemed to intuitively know when Jude needed a little pick me up.

When they got inside the house, Jude and Lizbet sat on the couch, while Cope and Wolf went into the kitchen. "How was school?"

"Kenny P. threw up during our math test. He puked so hard that he blasted half-chewed chicken nuggets on the kids sitting in front of him." Wolf made puking noises. "The math test was canceled!"

Cope snorted and started to laugh. He'd had a rough day, but for whatever reason the idea of barfed up chicken nuggets getting the kids out of a math test was hilarious. Once Cope got rolling he couldn't stop.

Jude and Lizbet walked into the kitchen. Lizbet laughed along with Cope and Wolf.

“Are you guys okay?”

“Barfed...nugs!” Cope managed, before laughing again.

“Someone blew chunks at school?” Jude asked, taking a seat at the table.

“Yup!” Wolf giggled. “Did anything funny happen at your work today?” His eyes moved back and forth between Jude and Cope.

“Nope,” Cope said, finally getting himself under control. “It was a boring day. I’m sure you had much more fun at school.” Before Cope could continue, the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Wolf shouted, taking off like a cork out of a bottle. “Hi, Uncle Ronan! Kenny P. barfed in school today!”

“So I heard! I’m glad you, Everly, and Aurora weren’t in the splash zone.” Ronan carried the pizza boxes toward the kitchen. “Ten’s right behind me with Ezra. He’s got the salad.”

“Ugh! Salad!” Wolf made barf noises and pretended to faint.

“I sure hope Lizbet isn’t a drama queen. We’ve got all we can take from Wolf.” Cope went to the cabinets and pulled out paper plates for the food. As he was getting juice boxes, he heard Fitz, Ten and the kids walk in.

Fifteen minutes later, the kids were settled in the living room with a movie and pizza, which left the adults to talk about their day without fear of being overheard.

“We didn’t get much of a chance to debrief, Cope,” Fitz said before taking a bite of his pizza.

Cope knew this was coming, not thanks to his gift, but because he knew Fitz didn't want to leave any stone unturned. "I didn't get a whole lot that you'll find helpful."

"Let us be the judge of that." Jude gave his husband's shoulder a squeeze.

"Okay, well, the neighbors on the lawn with signs are out for Oliver's blood.

It's a good thing you've stationed officers at the house.

Angie was equal parts anguished and angry, which makes sense, she and Frankie had been best friends since middle school.

Reagan Pryce had his eye on the prize. All he was concerned with was keeping Oliver out of jail and the legal fees rolling in.

Oliver had been nervous when we showed up.

When you started asking questions about the night Frankie disappeared, he calmed down a bit, but that nervousness turned to stone cold fear when you asked if his wife had ever been pregnant. "

"What kind of fear?" Ronan asked. "Was he afraid for himself? For someone else?"

Cope shook his head. "I'm not sure. It felt more like he was afraid that you knew something he didn't."

"Okay, that's interesting," Fitz said, reaching for the salad bowl. "When Pryce grabbed Oliver and practically dragged him out of the room, that made me think he had no idea there had been a baby. Attorney's don't like surprises. Did Oliver have any idea his wife was pregnant?"

“I couldn’t sense anything but his fear. It reminded me of those hot wings we had a few weeks back. The heat was so strong that I couldn’t taste anything else. All rational thought fled from Oliver’s mind and fear took over when Pryce took him away from us.”

“I didn’t think it was possible for this tragedy to get any worse.” Ten wore a sad look. “Frankie must have been so afraid for her child when she realized she was going to die.”

“She didn’t know it was coming,” Cope said, not sure he was ready for this part of the conversation.

Jude’s eyes widened. “What did you see, babe?”

“The last few seconds before the murder.” Cope pushed his plate away as the vision replayed in his mind.

“And you’re just mentioning this now ?” Ronan half-shouted.

“Take a breath,” Fitz commanded, flashing Ronan an angry look. “Tell me what happened.”

“My perspective was the killer’s. Francesca was walking ahead of me in the woods. I saw a hand come up with a gun pointed at the back of her head.”

“Can you describe the hand?” Fitz asked. “Could you tell if it was a man or a woman? Old or young? Any rings or bracelets?”

Cope thought what he’d seen wasn’t really relevant to the case, but now, after Fitzgibbon’s questions, he could see he’d been dead wrong. “There was no jewelry. I don’t know if it was a man or a woman, but the arm was raised perpendicular to the

back of Frankie's head."

"You mean it was pointed straight ahead? Not up or down?" Ronan asked.

"Right," Cope agreed. "Also, there wasn't enough detail on the hand for me to tell age either. That's all I saw, just a brief flash. I didn't say anything sooner because there was nothing helpful I can tell you."

"That's not true," Jude said. "You mentioned seeing the gun. Can you describe it at all?"

"It was black." Cope shrugged he didn't know anything about guns and he was about to start learning now.

"Was it a long gun, like a rifle or a shotgun? Or was it some kind of handgun?" Jude wore an anxious look.

Cope couldn't tell what Jude was anxious about. Was it that Cope had kept his mouth shut about the picture in his mind or because Cope didn't have a lot of detail about the gun. "It was a handgun."

"That's great," Jude said. "Was it all black, or was there any metal?"

"All black."

"Last question," Jude offered his husband a smile. "Did it have a barrel with bullets in it or did it have a clip that loaded through the handle of the gun?"

"It had a clip. I could see it when the gun was raised. It reminded me a lot of the gun Ronan carried when you would go on cheating spouse stakeouts."

Ronan's demeanor brightened. "That's really great, Cope. My personal weapon is a Beretta 9mm. We need to find out what were the makes and models of the guns Oliver and Frankie owned."

"And if he still has both of them," Fitz said, not sounding as optimistic as Ronan.

"I'm on that first thing in the morning. Do you want to have another go at Oliver Adams or do we head in a different direction?"

Fitz sighed. "We need to speak to Frankie's parents. Find out if they knew their daughter was pregnant and anything else they might not have told the cops the first time around."

"Why would Frankie's parents not say anything about her pregnancy?" Cope asked. "If the cops had known she was expecting, wouldn't that have made finding her a bigger priority?"

"If the baby belonged to someone other than her husband, Frankie might not have told anyone," Ronan said. "She might have sworn them to secrecy. It's possible she might not have even known she was expecting."

"Maybe," Fitz didn't look convinced. "Granted, I don't know anything about being pregnant, but at eight weeks, I have to imagine Frankie knew."

"I hate to be the wet blanket," Ten began, "but what if there was something wrong with the baby? Maybe the child wouldn't have survived to term or would have a lifelong disability? Frankie might have even been considering terminating the pregnancy."

"I don't think that was the case." Cope shut his eyes and recalled what little he'd seen in the morgue. "Frankie had already named the baby. She wouldn't have done that if

she hadn't planned on bringing the pregnancy to term."

"What exactly did you see when we were in the morgue?" Ronan asked.

"I didn't see anything. It was a feeling I got. I heard the names Ameila and Nonna whispered in my mind. There was joy and happiness attached to the name. I'm not sure if that makes sense."

"It absolutely does," Jude said. "Every time you hear Wolf's name, it makes you smile. Same with Lizbet."

"Right," Cope agreed. "That's almost exactly what I felt."

It wasn't much to go on. Neither was the glimpse of Frankie's murder.

I'm sorry I didn't tell you about that earlier, but sometimes I get more of a complete picture as time goes on.

"He could feel Fitz and Ronan's disappointment in him."

He felt like he was going to throw up like Kenny P.

and blast their friends with regurgitated mushroom pizza. Ten's hand on his arm, gave Cope pause.

"No one's disappointed or mad at you," Ten assured Cope. "They both get very intense when they're working on a case. You're doing great, right Ronan?"

Cope snorted. He knew Ronan would agree with anything Tennyson said when he used that voice. It was Ten's warning to Ronan that he'd be sleeping on the sofa if he didn't answer the question correctly.

“Cope is doing great. So much of what you’ve told us is very helpful.” Ronan paused, his eyes on Ten. “Just in the future, it would be even helpful-er if you told us what you were seeing sooner.”

“Use the code word scone if it happens again, okay?” Jude asked with a bright grin.

“Jude, how the hell am I going to work scone into a conversation with a possible murder suspect? Excuse me, Mr. Killer, might you have a scone I could nosh upon?” Cope lifted his drink to his lips with his pinkie finger extended.

Tennyson burst out laughing. “When I would work these cases with Ronan, my safe word was cactus. It wasn’t easy figuring out a way to say it that didn’t sound completely ridiculous. Why don’t you guys figure out a better word that won’t tie Cope in knots when he tries to use it?”

“How about cow?” Ronan suggested. “Or horse. Chicken. Goat. Pick one.”

“What if I just moo?” Cope asked. He did just that. The entire table cracked up laughing.

“We want you to attract our attention, not alert us that you’re in crisis.” Fitz said with a shake of his head.

“I am in crisis,” Cope said, feeling sad he had to bring the mood of the room down.

“A woman and her unborn child are dead. I’m only picking up tiny threads of the story.

It’s frustrating that I can’t be more help.

Right now, Ronan’s thinking about going out for some Funyuns because they always

put Ten in the mood.

Fitz is wondering if we've got any Pepcid because the sausage is spicy and Wolf thinks it would be fun if he were the next projectile vomiter in Miss Becca's classroom.

"He turned to Jude. "Promise you'll talk to Wonder Wolf about that. "

"You got it." Jude said.

"What I'm trying to say is that I can read so much about all of you right now. It wasn't this easy today at Oliver's house."

"We're all relaxing, having dinner," Ten said. "No one has their guard up. Although I do wish Ronan would make more of an effort to keep some things about our relationship under his damn hat." Ten rolled his eyes. "I can't believe you think Funyuns are an aphrodisiac."

"Hey, I call them like I see them, Hot Pants." Ronan waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"You sure do, Hunk of Burning Chub!" Ten flashed a so-there look.

Jude cackled. "Oh, my God!! Is that what you call him?"

"Don't you dare." Ronan cautioned, pointing a finger at his husband.

"God, no, it's what he calls himself." Ten rolled his eyes. "He puts on Everly's Wicked Witch cape and dances around the bedroom singing 'Burning Love' in the worst Elvis impersonation I've ever heard."

“Is that what happened to my cape?” Everly asked, sounding outraged. “You told me it got lost, Daddy!”

“It did get lost...in my closet.” Ronan smacked a loud kiss to Everly’s cheek.

“The King would roll over in his grave if he heard you ruining his songs like that.” Everly put her paper plate in the trash and walked back to the table. “Ollie is hiding something. I don’t know what, but he doesn’t want any of you to find out what it is.”

Jude held up a hand for a high five. “Can you tell if this thing is an object or if it’s a secret?”

Everly frowned and reached out for Ten’s hand. Cope knew she was sometimes able to get a clearer picture when her own gifts were amplified by Tennyson’s. “Both, actually. The thing has to do with the secret. I wish I could tell you more.”

“Thanks, little miss.” Ronan smacked a kiss to the side of her head. “You’re the bestest.”

“I know!” Everly ran back into the living room.

Cope was continually impressed by Everly’s gifts. He hadn’t been able to tell Oliver was hiding anything. He spent an hour with the man at West Side Magick earlier in the day and another half hour at his house that afternoon and Cope hadn’t gotten a whiff of what Everly was talking about.

“We’ll start tomorrow with Frankie’s parents,” Fitz said.

“Jude, do a deep dive on both of them. Check their financial situation. Did they come into any money? I want to be ready to take a run at them. It’s not likely they had anything to do with their daughter’s murder, but we all know it’s possible.

Find me something we don't already know.

Hunk of Burning Chub, go back through all of their interviews, see if there's a nugget of something no one picked up on.

"Fitz snickered and Jude started singing "Burning Love," with Ronan's lyric change.

Before long, the entire table was laughing their asses off.

With the exception of Cope. He was busy reaching out to his spirit guides to see if someone could give him any extra information about Sofia and Dante Conti.

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After the pizza party wrapped up the night before, Jude helped get the kids to bed and sat down with his laptop.

He went through the Conti's financial records with a fine toothed comb.

There were large deposits into their joint account once every month or so.

Jude also saw a lot of ATM activity at Foxwoods, a casino in nearby Connecticut.

Jude would ask the Conti's about those deposits, but he'd bet his own bottom dollar that the large deposits were gambling winnings.

He'd gotten Wolf onto the school bus with the other big kids and dropped Lizbet off with Nana Kaye and Ezra. The plan for the day was for the kids to play outside and then "help" Kaye bake cookies.

Jude was in the middle of his bowl of cereal when his phone chimed. It was a message from Ronan letting him know he and Fitz were ready to go. "Cope? Are you ready to leave the house?" Jude called up the stairs.

"Yeah, just a minute," Cope called back.

Jude finished the dregs of his cereal and was toeing into his shoes when Cope came downstairs. "You good?"

"Yeah, I was chatting with Bertha. She's been on the lookout for Frankie Adams and hasn't had any luck finding her."

“I had a feeling you were going to say that.” Jude handed Cope his jacket and ushered him out the door. Fitz was parked in front of the house, ready for action. They got into the backseat and clicked their seatbelts.

“Before we came out to the car,” Jude began, “Cope said he’d been talking with Bertha Craig who hadn’t been able to locate Frankie. I have a question about that, but wanted to ask it with everyone here.”

“Go for it.” Cope reached for Jude’s hand.

“How rare is it for a spirit to disappear like this? The majority of cases we’ve worked in the past had the murder victim showing up at some point. Should we be worried that Frankie hasn’t shown herself to you?”

“Spirits are just like people. Some are gregarious and outgoing, while others are mistrustful or shy. It could be that Frankie has crossed over and is happy on the other side or she could be in a specific place that we haven’t been to yet.”

“Are you saying she could be trapped somewhere?” Ronan asked.

“It’s a possibility, but remember when we were at the morgue the other day and I was telling you I encountered a bunch of spirits who didn’t know they were dead?

” Cope asked. “They were stuck in the morgue, because they didn’t know they could go somewhere else.

Frankie could be in that boat. She could also be stuck in the place her body was found. ”

Ronan sighed. “Shit, I was afraid you were going to say that.”

“If I don’t see her today at her parents’ house, we might want to go out to the Salem Towne Forest and visit the crime scene.” Cope sighed. “There’s one more thing.”

Jude was almost afraid to ask. “What’s that?”

“Frankie’s body isn’t whole. The ME showed us how many bones were missing. It’s also possible she’s with those remains, waiting for them to be discovered. Is there any plan to get scent dogs in the field to see if those bones can be located?”

“Cisco said he was going to get a K9 team out there to conduct a search, but I have to tell you that it might not be possible to find all the remains. Predators tend to grab what they can and run so that other animals don’t try to take what’s theirs,” Fitzgibbon said.

“I can’t imagine what this is like for Frankie’s parents,” Ronan continued. “Is there anything we can do to help the search team recover everything, Cope?”

“Possibly. Everything hinges on Frankie making contact. I’ve been reaching out to her with no luck. I’m really hoping I’ll encounter her today.”

Jude gave their joined hands a squeeze. He knew how hard these cases were on Cope.

Speaking with spirits who’d died violently at the hands of another drained Cope completely.

The only advantage he had in this case was already knowing Francesca Adams was murdered.

However, that advantage wouldn’t count for much if Cope couldn’t find her spirit.

“This is it up here on the right,” Ronan said. “Yellow house with white shutters.”

The house was a simple Cape Cod design. The most striking detail of the property was that the entire front yard was filled with tulips in a rainbow of colors. “Wow,” Jude said. “Talk about a labor of love.”

“Tulips are Frankie’s favorite flower,” Cope said. “She and her mother used to plant bulbs every fall together. When Frankie went missing, Sofia turned the yard into one giant tulip bed, for her daughter to see when she came home.” He blew out a shaky breath. “Sofia is in a bad way.”

“Any sign she was the one who killed Frankie?” Fitzgibbon asked.

“None,” Cope said, shaking his head. “The ramifications of Frankie’s death are hitting Sofia like a literal ton of bricks. I’ve never sensed this much guilt in all my years of having this gift.”

“We need to treat this as a fact-finding mission, unless or until either of the parents say something that points to their involvement in Frankie’s murder. Got it?” Fitzgibbon asked.

“Got it,” Jude and Ronan chorused back.

Jude’s mind spun as he and the other detectives approached the house.

His brain bounced back and forth between Cope and how he was going to handle the Contis’ grief.

Before he’d met Ten and Ronan, Jude wasn’t an emotional person.

He didn’t cry or get attached to anything or anyone.

Ronan changed that. Everly, even more so.

The thought of losing either of his kids turned Jude's knees to jelly.

He didn't know how Frankie's parents had kept going in light of her disappearance.

"Good morning, Mr. Conti," Fitzgibbon said, breaking Jude out of his train of thought. "I'm Captain Kevin Fitzgibbon and these are my detectives, and consultant. We're here to speak with you about your daughter."

"Call me, Dante. My wife and I have been expecting you. Seeing Cope Forbes with the best detectives Salem has to offer is the only thing that's gone right in the four years since Frankie disappeared." Dante opened the door and ushered Fitzgibbon and the others inside.

Jude knew Dante was in his mid-fifties, but the man looked as if he were over seventy.

He was thin as a toothpick, with his clothes hanging from his frame.

Dark eyes were ringed with even darker circles.

If Jude didn't know better, he would have thought the man had been on the losing end of a fight.

"This is my wife, Frankie's mother, Sofia," Dante said as he entered the living room.

Fitzgibbon introduced himself, Ronan, and Jude.

Before he could speak about Cope, Sofia got to her feet.

She crossed the room and took one of Cope's hands in both of her own.

“I’m so glad to see you, Cope. My friend, Tabitha, comes to see you once a month.

She’s been urging me to make an appointment, but to be honest, I didn’t want to know if Frankie was...

” Sofia’s dark eyes began to water. “Please, come in.” She led Cope to the sofa and sat beside him.

“Tabitha Stowe is one of my favorite customers,” Cope said with a smile. “Her love story with Grumpy George always leaves me believing in the power of true love. My husband can be a bit of a grouch too, at times.”

Sofia offered a sad smile. “Tabby used to complain about George’s demeanor all the time.

When he passed, I remember her feeling so much guilt for not appreciating those grumpy moods and now that we know Frankie is gone, I feel the same way.

I remember shouting at her when she was five and scribbled on the kitchen wall with crayons.

Other parents put frames around the scribbles and call it art.

I just shouted and sent her to timeout.” Sofia dabbed at her eyes.

Dante patted her back, in what looked to Jude like a practiced motion. He couldn’t imagine how many times Dante had tried to comfort his wife over the last four years.

“Is she here, Cope? Is my baby here with us now?” Sofia wore a hopeful look.

Cope took a deep breath. “She isn’t here at the moment, but let’s see what happens.”

Dante opened his mouth looking like he was coming for Cope with both barrels loaded, Cope continued, seemingly oblivious to Dante's mood.

"It took Tabby two appointments with me before George would speak. Some spirits are shy or mistrustful, especially when they've died violently.

Why don't we let Captain Fitzgibbon get on with his questions and we'll circle back later. "

Sofia nodded, turning her attention to Fitzgibbon. "What do you know about my daughter's death?"

"Right now, very little," Fitzgibbon said. "We know Frankie died from a single gunshot wound to the back of the head. We haven't found the projectile, so we don't know what kind of gun was used. The autopsy didn't show any other signs of violence."

"How could it when all that's left of our beautiful daughter is a bag of bones?" Dante said, bitterly.

"This is why we need to speak with you both," Ronan continued. "Was Oliver violent toward your daughter in any way at any time?"

"No. Never." Sofia didn't take her eyes off Ronan. "I know you're going to tell me that my daughter might not have told me things that happened behind closed doors with her husband, but I know for a fact that Oliver would never lay a hand on Frankie."

Jude wondered how the hell to ask how Sofia knew that? Did she have Frankie's house bugged with cameras? Had she lived with them for a period of time. "Please continue, you have our full attention."

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“Oliver’s father battered his mother throughout their forty year marriage.

Over the years, Oliver had begged and pleaded with her to leave him.

Maggie finally did, after she’d been diagnosed with a brain tumor.

Glioblastoma. The diagnosis is an instant death sentence and Walt beat her when she told him.

I guess cancer was Maggie’s final straw.

She lived with Ollie for the last year of her life, which was the year before he met Frankie.

There’s no way Oliver would have hurt my daughter the way his father hurt his mother. ”

“Was there anyone in Frankie’s life who wished her ill or was jealous of her? Someone at work or at the food pantry?” Jude asked. Violence came in all shapes and forms. In this day and age, everyone was capable of flying off the handle and committing a horrendous act.

“Everyone loved Frankie,” Dante said.

Obviously not every one, Jude thought to himself.

“Frankie was a bright light in this community. She volunteered so much of her free

time to people who were less fortunate than she was. Not only did she work at the food pantry, she also donated to it as well. She always mentioned a woman named Mia Evans. Mia ran Sea Witches and was responsible for sourcing donations and creating marketing materials that would encourage people to give. Frankie never had anything bad to say about this woman, but when my daughter disappeared, Mia didn't show up at any of the vigils and didn't help with the searches.

She'd always claimed her responsibility was to the people who depended on the pantry for their survival, but there were so many others who could have worked in Mia's stead for an hour or two here or there. "

Jude scribbled the name in his notebook.

He'd met Mia several times in the past. The Salem PD had sponsored a color run last year with all of the proceeds going to Sea Witches Food Pantry.

She'd run the course and when she finished, looked like she'd fallen into a rainbow.

Mia had crossed the finish line just ahead of Jude, so he'd been there to hear her heartfelt interviews with local reporters who were covering the event.

It had even been Mia's idea for the volunteers who threw the colored powder at the runners to solicit donations, just like the runners.

Jude couldn't imagine a woman, like Mia, whose entire life was wrapped up in her community could have committed this murder, but he'd been in the business long enough to know anyone was capable of murder.

"What about people in City Hall? Were there folks who disliked Frankie for her stance on issues or because she'd been elected when they hadn't?" Fitz asked.

Sofia and Dante nodded. “Ambrose Watson,” the couple said together.

If there was ever a villain hiding in plain sight, it was Watson.

The man was conservative with a capital C, which didn’t bother Jude.

Everyone was entitled to their own stance on issues that affected Salem, but the way he’d gone about trying to cancel pride celebrations and the parade was diabolical.

He’d used fearmongering, promoting the stereotype that the LGBTQIA+ population was out to indoctrinate the children of Salem, likening them to the witches who’d infected Salem back in the 1690’s.

Watson paid for billboards to be erected all over Salem, which caused a rise in hate crimes, and violence against openly gay couples.

“What was his relationship like with Frankie?” Jude asked.

“The two of them were like oil and water,” Sofia said. “Frankie wanted more money budgeted for food, fuel, and housing assistance. She was a huge proponent of universal daycare which would have been paid for by Salem taxpayers.”

“Frankie was the polar opposite to Watson,” Dante continued. “The only thing they had in common was the fact both breathed oxygen. At the time of Frankie’s disappearance, Watson was trying to push through a city ordinance that would add additional taxes for psychic practitioners.”

“I remember that!” Ronan said, sounding energized.

“Ten was off his gourd at the thought of raising prices for psychic readings. He thought West Side Magick would lose business, especially with the summer tourism

season around the corner. The proposed bill galvanized Tennyson. He attended protests, carried signs, got our neighbors to sign a petition against the bill. I remember the ordinance failing when it came before the city council for a vote, but I don't remember the particulars of how that happened. Do you, Jude?"

Jude nodded. "The motion was defeated six to four. There are eleven members of the council, so there was one member who didn't take part in the vote."

"The missing member was Frankie," Sofia said on a snuffle. "In her absence, Watson managed to persuade three other members of the council to vote for the bill to pass. All three of them had promised Frankie they would vote no. That promise went out the window when she wasn't there for the vote."

Jude gut feeling that Watson was somehow involved in Frankie's murder strengthened. He turned to Cope, wondering if his husband was picking up any information about Watson. "Cope, is your gift telling you anything about Watson?"

Cope's face paled. He looked like he was going to throw up.

Bolting from the table, Cope ran toward the bathroom.

Seconds later, Jude could hear his husband getting sick.

"I'm so sorry." Jude looked back and forth between Sofia and Dante.

"In all the years we've been together, this has never happened. "

"Do you think Cope saw something?" Sofia asked, sounding scared and hopeful in equal measure.

"I'm not sure. I'll go check on him." Jude was worried about Cope. Ten was famous

for tossing his cookies when he was in the presence of overwhelming pain and suffering. Jude had been telling the truth when he said nothing like this had ever happened to Cope before.

Unless Jude missed his guess, Cope had seen something.

Possibly more of the vision he'd had of Frankie and the gun coming up to aim at her head.

What if he'd seen the killer? Or Frankie's last moments?

Heading for the bathroom, he hoped Cope would be able to tell him what had just happened and together, they could figure out a way to tell the Conti's without adding further heartbreak.

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Cope knelt in front of the Conti's toilet, afraid he was going to get sick again.

He'd projectile vomited so hard that what was left of his scrambled eggs had crashed into the bowl and splattered up at him.

More than anything Cope wanted to wash the regurgitated egg off his skin, but was afraid to move from the floor.

The cold tiles felt heavenly against his hot face.

A soft knock solved Cope's most imminent worry, that he'd been forgotten and left on the floor to die alone. "Jude?"

"Yeah, it's me." Jude opened the door and shut himself inside the small room. He went to the sink and wet a washcloth, which he used to gently clean up Cope. "Are you okay to stand up?"

"I'm not sure. I think I'm safer here for the moment." What Cope wanted to do was run out of the house and not look back, but knew that was the last thing he could do.

"What the hell happened back there?" Jude asked, cupping Cope's face in his hands. "Did you have more of your vision?"

Cope shook his head. "No, it was worse."

"What could possibly be worse than seeing Frankie's last moments on Earth?"

“I saw her spirit, Jude.” Cope felt his stomach threaten to rebel again. He took several deep breaths through his mouth, hoping to calm the rising storm.

“You see ghosts all the time. What was different about seeing Frankie?”

“She was sitting like this in the chair across from her father.” Cope crossed his arms over his chest, like a corpse in a coffin.

“Frankie’s hands were bound at the wrists in a figure eight.

She was fighting against the duct tape with all the strength she had.

More tape was secured over her mouth. Jude, I could hear her muffled screams for help. ”

“Jesus.” Jude gulped for air. “I can understand why you bolted from the room. Was that all you saw?” Jude sounded as if he were afraid there was much more to come.

“Yeah. Frankie couldn’t speak to me. Spirits are no longer bound by what ailed them in life.

Blind spirits can see, the deaf can hear.

It shouldn’t have mattered that she couldn’t speak with her physical body, she should have been able to speak to me through telepathy.

” Tears streamed down Cope’s face. “Frankie was terrified, Jude. I’ve never seen fear like that in another person’s eyes before.

I don’t think I’ll ever forget the look on her face.

” Cope dashed his hands against his eyes.

He tried to stand and faltered. Jude grabbed his shoulders to help steady him.

“I’ve got you.” Jude wrapped his arms around Cope. “I hate to ask, but if we walk back into the living room, will she still be there?”

“I don’t know.” Cope shivered against Jude’s shoulder. “I’m almost afraid to find out. On the one hand, Frankie’s parents deserve to know what I saw. It’s going to break them all over again. On the other hand, it’s possible Frankie is gone or there’s more she has to show me.”

“Let’s find out, okay?” Jude held Cope tighter. “I promise we’ll get you out of here as soon as we can, but what do we do about Frankie? Is there any way we can get her to appear to you at the shop or at our house?”

“I can try.” Cope took a deep breath and steeled his spine.

He needed to be strong for Dante and Sofia.

God knew they’d been through enough. He pulled away from Jude and washed his face in the sink before cupping water in his hands to rinse out his mouth.

“Okay, I’m ready. I don’t know how steady on my feet I’m going to be. ”

“I’ve got you, babe. I promise.”

Nodding, Cope opened the bathroom door and walked back into the living room, which was dead silent. All eyes were on Cope as he resumed his seat.

“Are you okay?” Sofia asked. “Can I get you some tea or ginger ale?”

“Thank you, but I’m okay. I’m so sorry for what happened a few minutes ago.” Cope’s eyes moved between Frankie’s parents. He could feel their grief as if it were as tangible as the glossy magazines on the coffee table. What he was about to tell them was only going to intensify their pain.

“Did you see our daughter?” Dante asked. He was holding Sofia’s hand in what looked like a death grip.

“I did,” Cope confirmed. “She appeared in the chair across from you.” He pointed. “She isn’t there now.” It was a minor relief for Cope not to have to see Frankie restrained and terrified, but he knew that any information he could get from her could be the clue that would lead to her killer.

“Was she hurt?” Sofia asked. Tears cascaded down her face. The grief-stricken mother didn’t bother to wipe them away.

“Sort of. Frankie’s hands were bound in duct tape in front of her.” Cope held up arms to demonstrate, like he’d done for Jude earlier. “The tape was wound around her hands, so she wasn’t able to free herself. Her mouth was duct taped shut.”

Sofia gasped. She looked as if she was going to lose complete control of her emotions, but a steady look from Dante seemed to give her strength. “What else? I can see in your eyes there’s more.”

Cope felt his stomach twist. If there was anything left in it, he would have been sick again. “Frankie was terrified. I could see it in her eyes. I could hear her muffled screams but she couldn’t speak to me.”

“Why not?” Sofia’s devastated look turned to panic.

“I’m not sure. It could be that she was too scared to realize she wasn’t connected to

her physical body anymore.

” Cope took a breath. He’d give anything not to reveal the other reason Frankie might not have been able to communicate.

“It’s also possible that she’s stuck in that moment in her afterlife. ”

“Stuck?” Sofia asked, her eyes pleading with Cope for an explanation.

“Sort of like a record skipping over the same lyrics or like that movie Groundhog Day , where the main character relived the same day over and over again.”

“Oh, sweet, Jesus,” Sofia said, on a sob. “Is there any way you can communicate with her so that she stops living in that one horrible moment?”

“I hope so.” Cope rifled a hand through his hair. “Do you have anything that belonged to your daughter? Something special that she had a strong connection with?”

“I do.” Sofia left the room. Cope her climb the stairs.

“I can’t tell you boys how much I appreciate you being here today,” Dante said. “I was afraid the Salem Police wouldn’t pay a whole lot of attention to Frankie’s case since it was so old and there’s not a lot of evidence to go by.”

“I knew your daughter and son-in-law,” Jude began.

“One of our cats got very sick, on a Saturday, of course. We called Oliver’s vet clinic and were told to bring Sabrina right in.

It was Cope and I, along with our son, Wolf, who was two at the time.

He was so upset that the cat was sick. She slept on his bed and they were the best of friends.

” Jude grinned at Cope. “Frankie was with Oliver at the clinic that day and comforted our son. It turned out the cat needed some antibiotics, but I never forgot the care Oliver provided or the way Frankie helped our son.”

“That’s Frankie and Oliver in a nutshell.

” Dante offered a wistful smile. “When Frankie went missing, the cops assumed Oliver had done something to her. When we backed him up, they thought we couldn’t see the forest for the trees.

We knew Frankie wouldn’t have walked away from her life and we knew Oliver wouldn’t have done anything to harm her. ”

“Here we go.” Sofia walked into the room carrying a well-loved stuffed animal.

It was so worn down that Cope couldn’t tell what kind of an animal it had been when it was new.

The fur was yellow and matted and one eyeball was bigger than the other.

“This is Snowball, Frankie’s favorite stuffed cat.

She needed to have her tonsils out when she was four-years-old.

We knew how hard the surgery would be for her and we wanted to make it easier for her to handle.

Dante bought the toy and I left it on Frankie’s bed before we left for the hospital, so it

would be waiting for her when she got home.

From that day on, Snowball went everywhere with Frankie.

On vacations, sleepovers, follow- up visits to the doctor.

The only time she left it behind was when she married Oliver. She left him sitting on her bed.”

“Do you mind if I take Snowball with me?” Cope asked. “I promise I’ll get her back to you as soon as possible.”

“Sure,” Sofia agreed.

Cope looked around the room and saw how exhausted everyone looked. He was about to give Jude the code word to wrap up the interview, when Fitzgibbon started to speak.

“I’ve got one last question for you.” Fitz took a deep breath. “Did either of you know Frankie was pregnant when she disappeared?”

“What?” Sofia shrieked. “Pregnant?” She turned to Dante. “Did you know?”

Dante shook his head. “I knew she and Oliver were trying. I didn’t want to badger her about how things were going. Frankie would have told us, Sofia. She would have told Ollie and then us.”

“Do you know how far along?” Sofia asked.

“She was about eight weeks,” Cope said. “When we were at the morgue, I heard the name Amelia.”

“That’s my mother’s name,” Dante said, his eyes filling with unshed tears.

“Can we see her?” Sofia reached for Dante’s arm. “Amelia? Can we see our granddaughter?”

“I’ll call the medical examiner and set something up for the two of you.” Fitzgibbon’s eyes had gone glossy. He stood up and offered Dante his hand. “We’ll be in touch when we have further information to share about the case, or if Cope is able to connect with Frankie.”

“Do you think the pregnancy is what put Frankie in danger?” Dante swiped at the tears coursing down his face.

“It’s a possibility.” Fitz turned to Ronan and Jude, who both stood. Fitz handed Dante one of his business cards. “If there’s anything else you think we need to know, don’t hesitate to call, day or night.”

The couple nodded.

“There is one last thing,” Sofia said. “Vince Holbrook had a thriving vet practice in Salem. When Ollie opened his office, Vince’s clients started transferring their pets to Oliver.

Within six months of his clinic opening, Vince was out of business.

He came to the clinic one day and threatened to get Oliver where it would hurt the most. Dante and I told the police about Vince when Frankie went missing, but they dismissed us. ”

“I promise we’ll look into Vince.” Ronan held out his hand for Sofia, who stood and hugged him instead.

“Thank you for listening to us,” Dante said, leading Fitzgibbon to the door. “We’ve waited four years to find out what happened to our darling girl. I feel like you’ll be able to get justice for Frankie and her daughter.”

Looking too emotional to speak, Fitz nodded and headed out the door.

Cope cradled Snowball in his arms. “I’ll be in touch.”

“Make sure Frankie knows she can always come home, Cope.” Sofia hugged him, as well.

“I will,” Cope promised.

Over the course of the twenty plus years he’d been able to speak with the dead, Cope had only come across a few spirits who were stuck in a moment.

He wasn’t certain that was what Frankie was dealing with, but he would do whatever he could to speak with her.

Cope didn’t know a lot about murder, but if a stranger wanted to kill Frankie, they would have shot her in her home and been done with it.

A friend or a loved one would have been let into her home with no questions asked.

He was convinced the killer knew Frankie, which made the crime an even bigger betrayal.

The killer bound Frankie and took her out of the house for a reason.

It was up to Cope to figure out what that reason was.

Cope wouldn't stop until he figured out who did this to Frankie and her unborn daughter.

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Jude sat at the conference table waiting for Fitz to finish his call with Salem Police Chief, Cisco Jackson. He was updating their boss on the interviews they'd conducted with Oliver and Frankie's parents. Aside from a couple of new names to pursue, they had no evidence pointing them to the killer.

"Cisco wants us at Frankie's funeral," Fitz said, as he walked out of his office.

"When is it?" Jude asked.

Jude knew that killers sometimes attended their victims' funeral services as a way to further get off on their crime. Frankie had been dead for four years, it was possible her killer was long gone.

"Jude?" Fitz asked, sounding like he'd called Jude's name more than once.

"Sorry, Cap, I was thinking about the funeral and how Frankie's killer might not put in an appearance."

"Why do you think that?" Ronan asked.

"Frankie was murdered four years ago. Whoever killed her has been living on the edge ever since. If it were me, I would have gotten out of town as soon as the heat died down and it wouldn't have looked suspicious."

Fitz tapped his pen against the table. "You think her killer is a stranger." It wasn't a question.

Jude sighed. “It’s the only option that makes sense.”

“Frankie was taken from her house, was tied up and had tape over her mouth. She was moved to a second location where she was shot in the head and left in the woods. If the killer was a stranger, they would have done the deed and gotten out of the house before anyone noticed he’d been there.”

“I hear you, Cap.” Jude sighed. “We’ve all done this job long enough to know that nine out of ten times the killer is somehow known to the victim.

You always talk about how our victims are flawed.

People are imperfect, so it makes sense victims would be as well.

It’s just that I don’t see any flaws in Frankie.

Here’s a woman who dedicated her life to serving others.

She was a member of the Salem City Council, volunteered her time and money to local food banks.

She participated in color runs, turkey trots, and polar plunges to raise money for all kinds of charities.

” Jude paused, trying to collect his rising emotions.

“Frankie was beloved by her husband, her family, her friends, her community, which is why I think her killer had to be a stranger.”

Fitzgibbon nodded. “If that’s the case, if it was a stranger, why risk taking Frankie out of the house in broad daylight?”

“The only thing I can think is that the killer gave her a reason to walk out of the house under her own power. Maybe the killer had a partner who was going to kill Oliver or Frankie’s parents if she didn’t come along quietly.” Jude shook his head. He knew none of this made any sense. “Fuck.”

“Everyone makes enemies, Jude,” Ronan said quietly.

“Neighbors who hate barking dogs, late night parties, and trash bins left out after collection. Coworkers who are jealous of a promotion or the special treatment you get and they don’t.

Drivers who cut you off on the highway. People who bring a cart full of groceries into the twelve items or less lane.

In this day and age, we find ridiculous reasons to hate each other.

I agree that Frankie was a paragon in this community.

She was a loving daughter, wife, and friend, but someone killed her anyway. Someone she knew and possibly loved.”

“You’re right,” Jude agreed. It made no sense that anyone would want to harm Frankie, but someone had. Someone who needed to pay. “What’s our next step?”

“Step one, I want you, Cope, and Tennyson to try to reach out to Frankie. Bring Carson in if you think he can help. We need to get as much information from Frankie as we can. Ronan, get on Doctor Vincent Holbrook. Where is he? Does he have a criminal record? Reach out to friends, family, an ex-wife or husband. Get me everything you can find. We’re going to pay him a visit tomorrow morning.

I’m going to do the same thing with Ambrose Watson.

I want to see him tomorrow afternoon. Shock and awe, no advance notice to either man. ”

“Do you think seeing them tomorrow will keep them away from the funeral? You know, make them duck and cover?” Jude asked.

Fitzgibbon barked a quick laugh. “We’re gonna have a press conference later in the day saying we have no suspects and want the public’s help.

Cisco’s setting up a tip line. Our faces will be plastered all over the news, making our potential suspects think they’re in the clear.

I want you both in suits, not black though, save those for the funeral. ”

“You got it, Cap,” Ronan agreed.

“Shout if you need me.” Fitz headed back into his office and shut the door.

Jude got up from the table and grabbed bottles of water for himself and Ronan from the office fridge.

He’d been so proud of Cope when Fitzgibbon put him on this case, but Jude hadn’t anticipated it going as wrong as it did at the Conti’s house.

When they’d gotten back to West Side Magick, Jude had offered to drive Cope home so he could rest, but his husband insisted on going back to work.

“How’s Cope?” Ronan asked, seeming to read Jude’s mind.

“He’s shell-shocked.” Jude thought that was the best description of what his husband was going through. “You heard me offer to take him home, but he said no. He’s

standing his ground.”

“Tennyson is the same way when we work cases. The day I took him to the prison to meet with Tank Hutchins, his lawyer, and you, I had no idea that just being close to the prison would affect him the way it did. I had to pull off to the side of the highway so he could throw up. Not having these gifts ourselves makes it hard to anticipate how certain situations will affect Ten and Cope. Not to mention the fact that we’re conditioned to handle the kinds of violence these cases entail. ”

“You’re right, we are used to seeing humanity at its very worst,” Jude agreed.

“Fitz wants me to work with Cope on connecting with Frankie again. I know our case could very well depend on what her spirit is able to tell us, but Jesus, he saw Frankie bound and screaming for help. Help Cope couldn’t provide.

I want nothing more than to solve this murder.

I know Cope does too, but how do I protect him from what he sees? ”

“I don’t know.” Ronan sighed. “It’s possible that when Cope makes contact again, Frankie will appear to him like any other spirit, but I don’t think that’s likely.

When Ten and I worked that serial killer case, one of the murder victims could only speak to Ten through images.

It wasn’t until we caught the killer that Justin Wilson was able to speak with Ten like this.

” Ronan motioned between himself and Jude.

“At least that boy was able to find a way to communicate. What if all Frankie can do

is show Cope her last agonizing moments?” Jude remembered Frankie fondly from the time they’d met a few years back.

The idea of seeing her bound with duct tape broke him and all he could do was imagine what happened. Cope had seen it with his own eyes.

“All we can do is trust in Cope and Ten’s abilities.

Whatever information Frankie is trying to convey is critical to this investigation.

It’s possible that Tennyson might be able to speak with Frankie in a way Cope can’t.

Not to say your husband isn’t as skilled, but the one thing I’ve learned over the years working with Ten and Everly is that their gifts work differently.

We know there are things Everly can do that Ten can’t.

We also know their gifts are stronger together.

I’m sure the same will be true with the two of you. ”

Jude nodded. “The three of them working together on Cope’s spell is what led you and Fitz to find me when I was taken.

” He shivered in the warm room. Jude still struggled with being abducted and held in a cage.

Cope had put his cauldron away several years ago, but pulled it back out in order to find Jude.

His husband was more powerful than he realized.

What Jude needed to do was make Cope remember what a badass he was.

Yeah, it was horribly tragic that Frankie had been abducted and murdered, but it would be even more gutting if her killer was never captured.

“Frankie and I have so much in common, only I was found in time. She was not so lucky.”

“I was wondering when you’d mention that,” Ronan said on a sigh. “If you’re struggling with this case, it’s okay to tell me. What you went through a few months back was traumatic and terrifying. It makes sense you’d see similarities between yourself and Frankie.”

This was the exact reason Jude had kept his thoughts on this subject to himself.

The last few months had been trying in so many ways, not the least of which were well-meaning friends and family who offered unsolicited advice on how to get over what happened to him, or worse, handed him the number of their shrink.

“I’m okay. I can handle anything that comes my way, but Cope isn’t built that way.

I need to step up and do everything I can to help get him through this case.

He’s full of feelings and emotions that I tend to tamp down.

I’m not sure I’ve got the right skill set to help him. ”

“Bullshit!” Ronan rolled his eyes. “You’ve been exactly what Cope needs when things go sideways.”

“Maybe,” Jude muttered. Jude knew his strengths and his weaknesses. Dealing with

emotions was definitely not one of his strongest suits.

“Spoiler alert, asshole, you do have those same feelings and emotions! The only difference between you and Cope is that he lets them out so they don’t fester.

You shove them down deep until they have no choice but to erupt out of you.

Usually at the worst possible moment. There’s no one more capable of helping Cope through this case than you. ”

“Maybe you have a point.” Jude checked his watch and stood up from the table. Cope’s reading session was scheduled to end in a few minutes.

“There’s no maybe about it. If you want me in on this meeting, that’s no problem. I’ve got plenty of time to work on Dr. Holbrook so we’re prepared to meet him tomorrow.”

“You’ve worked so closely with Ten on these cases. I’d appreciate you being there.”

“You got it.” Ronan slapped a hand on Jude’s back. “We’re gonna find the fucker who did this to Frankie and when we do, he’ll wish he’d never been born. Right?”

“Right,” Jude agreed. He took a deep breath and steeled his spine. Being drugged, kidnapped, and held against his will had been the worst experience of Jude’s life, but if it gave him a leg up on helping to solve Frankie’s murder, then it was worth every second of the pain and trauma he’d survived.

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For the first time in his career, Cope was afraid to speak with the dead.

He'd pushed himself through his last appointment, Chad Hampton, a young man who'd lost his wife to cancer, and barely kept from crying alongside the widower.

In this client, he'd seen Oliver Adams. A man who had lived an ordinary life, until fate stepped in and shattered his future.

Thankfully, Cope had been able to reach out to Millie Hampton with ease. The woman appeared hale and healthy, just as she'd looked in life. He'd spoken to cancer-ravaged spirits in the past and these people, along with their devastated loved ones, broke his heart.

Seeing Francesca Adams bound and terrified was going to stick with Cope for the rest of his life.

Part of him wanted to go all out, no holds barred, to find the monster who killed the young, pregnant woman, the other part wanted to hide under the bed with a jar of peanut butter and a spoon.

The wildly vacillating points of view weren't like Cope at all.

He'd always been a middle of the road kind of guy, happy not to be too high or too low, but with this spirit, there was no middle ground.

A knock at Cope's door startled him. He knew Jude and Ten were coming in to try to channel Frankie, but he'd been so deep in his own thoughts that the meeting had

slipped his mind. “Come in.”

The door opened, and in walked Jude, Ten and Ronan, which didn’t surprise Cope one bit. “Hey, guys.”

“Hi, babe.” Jude pressed a kiss to Cope’s temple and set a cup of coffee in front of him.

Cope didn’t have to smell the brew to know it was his favorite mocha latte from Cassie’s bakery. “Thanks, I could really use this.” He took his first heavenly sip as the others settled around his reading table.

“I brought Ronan to this meeting because he’s had so much experience working with Tennyson on cases like this one.”

“I’m glad you’re here, Ronan. I’m going to need all the help I can get.

” That was the understatement of the century.

Cope knew he could have passed this case off to Tennyson, that way Frankie would get the best psychic for the job and he could go back to his easy life of reuniting lost loved ones.

In fact, on the ride back from Frankie’s parents’ house, that had been Cope’s plan.

He’d give Ten the case and let the expert handle it.

Halfway through lunch, Cope changed his mind. He was the one who’d seen Frankie bound and terrified. She was begging not just for help, but for his help. Cope would be damned if he didn’t see this case through to the end. “Ten, can you go get Snowball?”

“You got it.” Ten smiled and left the room.

“Get it? Where did you leave Frankie’s old stuffie? It’s not still in the SUV is it?” Jude asked, looking alarmed.

Cope found his first smile in what felt like forever.

“Carson has a lead-lined lock box behind the check-out counter. We usually use it for special order items with dark energy, so that energy doesn’t influence us.

What we all learned is that the lead works as a barrier to our gifts.

None of us can see or sense anything when it’s inside the box, just like Superman. ”

“I remember that creepy D-O-L-L someone asked us to hold for them.” Jude shivered. Ronan did too. “Does Frankie’s stuffed cat have that same kind of energy?” Jude asked.

“No,” Cope said, as Ten walked back into the room carrying the stuffed cat.

“I didn’t want to speak to Frankie until it was time.

” What Cope actually meant was that he didn’t want to see her, bound and terrified, until he was surrounded by his friends.

If anyone could help him get through this reading, it was Tennyson.

Setting the battered stuffed toy in the center of the table, Ten took the seat beside Cope and held out his hand.

Cope grabbed onto it like a lifeline. “Frankie, this is my friend Tennyson. I’m hoping

that with his help, we'll be able to better communicate with you.

What you showed me this morning terrified and overwhelmed me.

I'm hoping that together with my friends, we can turn down your pain and focus on what happened that awful day so we can catch the bastard who hurt you and baby Amelia. Are you here with us now?"

The room was silent. Cope was afraid that Frankie wouldn't appear.

"My daughter, Everly, has a stuffed unicorn that Jude gave her when she was a baby. It was white with a bright pink mane and tail. She carried that animal with her everywhere, usually around the neck like she was choking the poor thing. By the time she was three years old, it was so battered that I was afraid it would fall apart completely. Ronan and I bought every unicorn stuffie we could find in hopes that we could switch out Pinkie and get her to focus on another toy." Ten laughed.

"Seeing Snowball reminded me of how much love our daughter gave her unicorn. The same kind of love you gave to your cat. All of us gathered here today want to help you find peace. We want to reunite you with your family. Please let us help you."

Cope heard Frankie's terrified scream a second before she appeared, bound and begging for help. She sat in the empty chair beside Ten, across from Jude.

"Oh, my God," Jude whispered. "Frankie."

Cope knew his husband could see the frightened spirit and based on the look of shock on Ronan's face, he could see her too.

Her screams echoed in the small room, so loud and strong that the family picture on

his desk tipped forward and landed face down.

Much more of this and Frankie might shatter the glass.

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star,” Cope began to sing. “How I wonder what you are.”

The others joined in singing the lullaby.

Frankie’s screams began to quiet as Cope finished off the second chorus.

Instead of screaming, the spirit was rocking back and forth with her knees pulled up to her chest. “Frankie, I know you’re scared.

I can feel your fear in my bones. I know this might be the only way you think you can communicate with me, but you can move out of this memory.

Come back to us. We all want to help you.

” Cold sweat trickled down Cope’s spine.

All of the feelings blasting out of Frankie were buffeting against him, like rough waves pounding the shore.

“Let us help you break free,” Ten said gently, offering his hand to Frankie.

Cope found himself wishing Everly was in the room with them. Her soul would be able to speak to Frankie without words. It was a skill he hadn’t quite mastered himself. “Take yourself back to earlier that day. You can do it. I know you can.”

Slowly, as Cope watched, the pain and fear melted away from Frankie’s face, as did the duct tape over her mouth and wrists. Appearing behind her was Bertha Craig. “I

can only give you boys a few more minutes.” With those words, Bertha faded from view.

“I’m dead?” Frankie asked Cope, looking completely bewildered.

“I’m so sorry but you were-” Cope’s sentence was interrupted by Ronan holding up a hand to silence him.

“Can you tell us the last things you remember?” Ronan asked.

Cope knew what Ronan was doing, trying to get the information Frankie had before telling her what they knew.

Frankie’s dark eyes slid closed. “I was at home alone. Oliver and I were supposed to get take out that night. We’d been fighting since Italy. He was angry about the-” Frankie’s eyes widened. Her visage started to dim.

“Angry about what, Frankie?” Ronan asked.

“My baby.” Frankie’s hands flew to her midsection, wrapping around what should have been her growing bump. “Where’s my baby? Where’s Amelia? Did Oliver take her? Hurt her?” She stood up, looking frantically around the room.

Cope shook his head. “Amelia died with you.”

Frankie’s eyes filled with anguish. “My baby is dead?” Frankie sat down hard. “I’m dead. My baby is dead. Is Oliver dead too? Please tell me he’s burning in hell.”

“No, he’s alive and well. We met with him this morning,” Jude said. “He said he didn’t know you were pregnant.”

Frankie barked out a bitter laugh. “He gave me an ultimatum in front of the Trevi Fountain. Get an abortion or a divorce. The choice was mine.” Frankie frowned. “It wasn’t much of a choice, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t,” Ronan agreed. “Can you take us back through that day?”

“It was a normal day. I’d volunteered at the food pantry and had gone home.

I was going to spend the rest of the day figuring out how to tell Oliver I was done with the marriage.

I was supposed to give him my answer to his ultimatum.

Wait,” Frankie paused, her eyes widening, “I didn’t volunteer.

I was going to see an attorney. Marcia, Marcy, Merry? ”

“Melanie Baker?” Cope asked, seeing the sign over her office door in his mind’s eye. The sign indicated Melanie practiced family law.

“Yes, that’s her. Melanie handled Angela’s divorce with care and compassion, so I called her office and made an appointment from my hotel room in Rome. I met with her that day.”

“You were going to divorce Oliver and keep Amelia?” Cope asked.

“Yes. I was going to move back in with my parents until I got back on my feet.”

“Did they know you were expecting their first grandchild?” Ronan asked.

Frankie shook her head. “No, I wanted to file for divorce first. I didn’t want the news

of my daughter mangled by what an incredible asshole her father was.” As she spoke, Frankie began to fade from view.

“Did Oliver do this to you?” Jude asked, getting to his feet and reaching out for Frankie’s hand.

Frankie’s eyes widened, but she vanished before she could answer.

“Cope? Can you still hear her? Who killed Frankie?” Jude asked, slumping back into his seat.

“She’s gone, Jude. Frankie never answered your question.” Cope sank his head into his hands.

“Ten, what about you, can you reach Frankie?” Ronan asked. “Did Bertha run out of juice?”

“No, she’s gone, but Bertha’s here.” As Ten spoke, Bertha materialized in the seat that Frankie had vacated.

“Hi, boys,” Bertha said. “I didn’t run out of juice, like Handsome suggested. Frankie took off. If I had to describe it, I’d said it was like that cartoon mouse who zoomed around and left a cloud of dust behind him.”

“Speedy Gonzales,” Ronan said, with a grin.

“Carson and Cole loved those cartoons.” Bertha wore a wistful smile. “And before you ask, Frankie didn’t answer the question about who killed her. I couldn’t read it from her.”

“Neither could I,” Ten said.

“It was like her memory was coming back one piece at a time,” Cope said. “I had that happen last year with the daughter of a client.”

“Did the spirit get their memory back?” Jude asked.

“She did, but it took nearly six months. The daughter was drunk when she wrapped her car around a tree, so it took a while for her to overcome her passing and the fact that she had so much to live for that had all been lost over a poor decision.”

“Are you saying it could take Frankie months to remember who kidnapped and killed her?” Jude asked, sounding impatient.

“It’s possible,” Cope agreed.

“Is there anything we can do to speed up the process?” Ronan asked.

“Frankie has to recover her memories on her own.” It wasn’t the answer Cope wanted to give. He knew Ronan, Jude, and Fitz were anxious to solve this case. “All we can do right now is keep working to find the killer ourselves.”

“We need to add Melanie Baker to the list of people to interview. She might not agree to talk to us, but I’ll call tomorrow,” Jude said. He got out of his seat and headed for Bertha, who stood up and hugged him. “It’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you too, honey.” Bertha wrapped her arms around Jude, whose eyes were glittering with unshed tears. “I’m so sorry I couldn’t do more to find you.”

Jude mumbled something unintelligible and hugged Bertha harder.

Ronan motioned for Ten to leave the room with him. Cope followed behind.

What Jude needed right now was a mother's love to help get him through the trauma he faced when he'd been kidnapped and nearly murdered himself.

If he were a betting man, Cope would guess Frankie needed the same thing.

He hoped that once this case was over and the monster who killed Frankie was behind bars, he would be able to reunite mother and daughter in person.

Until then, Cope wasn't going to rest until the killer was caught.

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Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 3:50 am

Jude, Fitz, and Ronan sat in the SUV waiting for Cope to drop Lizbet off with Nana Kaye.

There had been a change of plans. According to his secretary, Ambrose Watson was out of town and would be returning the next day.

After dropping in to see Dr. Vince Holbrook, the team would pop in on Oliver later that afternoon to ask about the baby.

Fitzgibbon was pissed to find out that Frankie's husband had known she was pregnant and never said a word to any of the cops who'd interviewed him when his wife went missing.

When they'd asked about a possible child, his lawyer wouldn't let him answer the question.

Jude knew that was because Oliver's answer could later be used against him.

It spoke volumes to Jude that Oliver kept news of the baby a secret from everyone.

"Sorry that took so long," Cope said, getting into the car. "Lizzy B was a little clingy this morning. She was happy to see Kaye and Ezzie, but didn't want to let me go either."

"She's been like that a lot lately. Do you think it's a phase or should we be worried?" Jude asked, as Fitz pulled out of his parking space.

“I’m not sure,” Cope said. “With everything going on with her birthday party plans and now with this case, Lizbet’s behavior isn’t at the top of my worries for today.”

“Everly went through something similar when we’d leave for work. She was older than Lizbet though, by about six months. It was just a phase for Everly. We gave her a little extra love each night by adding the Goodnight song into our bedtime routine.”

“And that worked?” Cope asked.

“It distracted Everly long enough for her self-confidence to grow.”

“We’ll give it a shot. Thanks, Ronan.”

The car was silent for a few minutes. Jude was studying Cope. He’d been a little off his game for the last few days thanks to the Frankie Adams case. Unfortunately, the Goodnight song wasn’t going to help bring Cope back to his old, happy self. “Are you okay?” Jude asked, reaching for Cope’s hand.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Cope offered a smile. “I don’t know how you all do this every day, face the worst of humanity and still come out smiling.”

“It’s not as easy as I make it look.” Jude waggled his eyebrows at his husband.

“It’s just a matter of putting my head down and powering through.

I feel good when we get a killer off the street, but that feeling doesn’t last long because there’s always the next one and the one after that.

” It was exhausting to think about the Salem Cold Cases that were still in their boxes untouched.

“Have you heard or sensed anything else from Frankie?”

Cope shook his head. “No, it’s been quiet since she left my reading room yesterday.” He paused, giving their joined hands a squeeze. “Are you feeling better after talking to Bertha?”

Jude sighed. He knew Cope was going to ask him about his and Bertha’s epic hug-fest, it was just a matter of when.

“Bertha feels so guilty for not being able to help me more when I was taken.” Guilty was an understatement.

Bertha had been absolutely beside herself.

Unbeknownst to Ronan, Everly had been the one to gently walk her back from the edge of the cliff.

Neither she, nor Ten or Cope knew where Jude was.

It wasn’t until they all worked together that they’d been able to locate him.

“We’ve had a couple of chats about what happened and how to move forward,” Cope said. “I tried to explain that our gifts are not all-encompassing. It’s not like we’re Avengers riding in to save the day every time something goes wrong. We have extraordinary gifts, but we’re all still human.”

Jude knew Bertha hated those conversations, not because she’d told him, but because the two of them were built the same way. Never stop. Never surrender. “I hear that and speaking of, let’s talk about Dr. Holbrook.”

“Okay,” Fitz agreed. “What were you able to find out about him?”

“He was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1982. Got his undergrad at UMass Amherst in 2004 and went to Tufts for his DVM, graduating in 2008. He worked for a couple of vet clinics around Boston before opening his own practice in Salem in 2009. That clinic thrived until Oliver Adams came to town. His practice opened in 2016 and within six or seven months Holbrook’s business was on the verge of closing. ”

“Why?” Cope asked. “What the hell was Oliver doing that robbed Holbrook of his patients?”

“That’s a good question, but I’ve got a better one,” Ronan bounced his eyebrows at Jude, “what was Holbrook doing that made his patients flee his practice like rats off a sinking ship?”

“You’re right, that is a better question.” Jude agreed.

“Are you getting anything about him, Cope? Is he a cheat? A gambler? A drinker?”

“I’m not seeing anything at all.” Cope shook his head.

“Ronan wants to grill kabobs tonight and Fitz is wondering about buying a new SUV, so I know my gift is working. I’m guessing that Holbrook knows we’re coming.

Not because anyone told him, but because he was on the original list of people interviewed when Frankie vanished four years ago and figures the SPD will get to him at some point. ”

Jude hoped that was all it was. He needed Cope’s gift to be running on all cylinders today.

He’d spent the night before going back through the Yelp reviews for Holbrook’s clinic and eighty percent of them were positive.

Even the ones that were less than five star reviews didn't offer a reason why most of Holbrook's clients jumped ship to Oliver Adams.

"This is it, up here." Ronan pointed to a strip mall sign. "Doggie Divas."

"A licensed veterinarian is working as a pet groomer?" Jude asked, feeling as stunned as he sounded. "This makes no sense." Why the hell had this man fallen so far careerwise?

"Let's go make it make sense." Fitz parked the car and climbed out of the SUV.

Jude followed behind him. All they had so far in this investigation was questions. It was time to get some answers.

The bell on the door jingled when Fitzgibbon entered. Several dogs began barking. One perky dust mop charged toward Jude. He bent to scoop up the little dog, who instantly began to lick his face.

"Can I help you gentlemen?" A tall man wearing a damp Doggie Divas apron asked. He was in the process of soaping up a tiny dog. "The barbershop is three doors down." The man pointed to his left.

"We're not here to be groomed." Fitz offered a fleeting smile. "I'm Captain Kevin Fitzgibbon from the Salem Cold Case Unit and we're here to speak with Vince Holbrook."

"That's me," the tall man said. "Mandy, can you finish up with Killer for me?"

"Sure thing, Vinny." Mandy winked at him and approached the small dog, who began barking like a ferocious squeaky toy.

“Follow me,” Holbrook waved Fitzgibbon forward. He opened a door leading to a conference room. “Can I get you anything? Water? Soda? Coffee?”

Fitz shook his head and took a seat. “No, thank you, Dr. Holbrook. Like I said, we’re from the Salem Police. I’m Captain Fitzgibbon and this is Detective O’Mara and Detective Byrne. Cope Forbes is our consultant.”

“My mother is a huge fan of all the psychics at West Side Magick. I could have used your services several years ago, Cope. Maybe you could have clued me in that the business I worked so long and so hard to establish was about to collapse.” Holbrook sighed and took a seat across from the detectives.

He folded his hands in front of him, looking resigned to his fate.

“Even with my gift, I’m not able to see what went so wrong for your business. I can feel your resentment and frustration, but I’m not getting any clues as to what went so wrong. Can you tell us what happened?” Cope asked.

“Oliver Adams did this to me because he thought I was after his wife. He told everyone who’d listen that I was the scum of the earth because I was trying to break up their marriage.

” Holbrook shrugged. “I’d been so busy with school and getting my veterinarian practice off the ground that I hadn’t taken a lot of time to date.

About six months before Adams came to town, I’d figured it was time to get myself out there.

I got on a couple of the dating sites and met several women, but no one that I could see myself settling down with. ”

“Where do Oliver and Francesca come into the picture?” Ronan asked, looking as if he didn’t want to hear another word about Holbrook’s dating life.

“They came into my clinic to meet me. Oliver said he was looking to start a vet practice here in Salem, which I thought was a great idea. I had more patients than I could handle. He seemed like a great guy, at first, but as time went on I started to hear rumors about the way he treated his wife. People were saying he was controlling and jealous, among other things, which I took with a grain of salt. Gossip is almost never true, although most of my customers believed the worst in me.” Holbrook paused, before focusing his attention on Jude.

“It wasn’t until Frankie showed up on my doorstep that I realized all the rumors about her husband were true. ”

“Frankie came to your house?” Jude asked. He looked at Cope for confirmation that the former veterinarian was telling the truth. Cope nodded, confirming Holbrook’s claim.

“It was New Year’s Day and I was off, but Oliver was on call.

We’d agreed to be on call for alternating holidays, so that we could each enjoy some downtime.

Like kids, pets don’t know it’s a long weekend.

They get sick when they get sick. Anyway, according to Frankie, Oliver had been called in for an emergency with a Great Dane.

Bronx had been hit by a car and needed emergency surgery.

Being the wife of a vet, Frankie knew Oliver would be out of the house for hours.

I couldn't have been more surprised to see her standing on my front porch. ”

“Why did she come to see you?” Fitzgibbon asked.

Holbrook shook his head. “I’m not sure I should tell you. Frankie deserves her privacy.”

“Frankie’s dead, Holbrook,” Jude said with a sneer. “She doesn’t care about privacy. We care about catching her killer. Right now, we’re just having a little chat, but if you refuse to cooperate, we can continue this conversation downtown.”

Holbrook worried his bottom lip with his teeth. “Frankie was afraid Oliver was cheating on her.”

Jude frowned at the news. “Why would Frankie come to you with this accusation instead of chatting with her best friends or her mother?” Frankie and Holbrook barely knew each other. “It makes no sense that she’d confide in you, unless-”

“She wanted to sleep with me to get back at her husband,” Holbrook finished with a shrug. “Yeah, that was exactly why she’d showed up at my house.”

“Did you, uhh?” Ronan began, looking as though he wasn’t quite sure how to finish.

“Did I do it? No,” Holbrook said with a roll of his eyes.

“If you didn’t sleep with Frankie, why did Oliver come after your practice?” Ronan asked.

“Because he was tracking Frankie’s phone and knew she’d been at my house for several hours that day. We didn’t have sex, but we did talk and had lunch together as friends. Once Oliver found out where his wife had been, he started to come after me

and my business.”

“How did he do that?” Fitz asked. “We went through the reviews of your clinic and for the most part, they all raved about you and the services you provided.”

“That’s right, but Oliver had a lot of rich and powerful friends thanks to his time at Tufts. He told anyone who would listen that I was screwing his wife. The person who did the most damage was a member of the Salem City Council.”

Jude had a feeling he knew exactly who Holbrook was talking about. “Ambrose Watson?”

“Yeah, that dirty bastard. Not only did he do his best to bring me down, he did the same thing to Frankie, making it look like she’d been the one embezzling money from the city’s treasury.

I’d bet my last nickel that Watson was the one who stole the money and set it up to look like Frankie was the embezzler.

I probably shouldn’t say this to three detectives, but if I were out for revenge, I would have killed Oliver, not Frankie.

He ruined everything, while she was one in a million. ”

Jude didn’t need Cope’s gift to know Holbrook was telling the truth. “During your chat with Frankie, did she bring up anyone who had an axe to grind with her?”

“The only people she had issues with were her husband and Watson and my money is on the husband. If he’s capable of bankrupting my business, then he’s definitely capable of killing his wife.”

Fitzgibbon stood up with a nod. He grabbed a business card from his wallet and set it down in front of Holbrook. "Call me if you think of anyone else who would have wanted to hurt Frankie."

"You got it," Holbrook said, with a helpless look.

"There's nothing Americans love more than a comeback story," Jude said on his way out the door. "If I were you, I'd start the wheels in motion."

"Thanks." Holbrook shook Jude's hand and ushered him out of the conference room.

"Thank you for your help with the Francesca Adams case, Vince!" Jude said with a grin. He knew the other employees would talk about why Holbrook had been sequestered with members of the Salem Police Department. With one sentence, Jude made sure they all knew what happened in the back room.

With Holbrook crossed firmly off the suspect list, Jude turned his attention back to the two remaining suspects, Oliver Adams and Ambrose Watson.

He had a feeling Oliver would show his true colors at Frankie's funeral, which left Jude with Watson.

Holbrook mentioning his views that the city councilman had stolen the money was in line with Jude's thoughts as well.

The first thing he was going to do when they all got back to the office was to put in a request for the grand larceny case to be reopened. He had thirty-six hours to gather as much information on the councilman as possible.

Make no mistake, Jude was coming for Watson.

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Source Creation Date: July 31, 2025, 3:50 am

Our Lady of the Sea was full to bursting.

Cope and the others had gotten to the church early, knowing there would be a lot of people who'd want to be in attendance for Frankie's funeral, not all of them with the purest intentions.

There were people who wanted to see the drama of grief, others who hoped a fight would break out.

Cope also knew there was a very real possibility that Frankie's killer would be in the building.

Fitzgibbon had gathered the detectives, along with Cope and Tennyson the night before to put together a game plan. He'd asked the psychics to gather as much information as they could, while the detectives kept an eye on Oliver Adams, Frankie's parents, and the people who interacted with them.

Cope, for his part, wasn't a fan of using his gift in loud, crowded places.

Malls, airports, department stores, and churches were hell for him.

It felt like being in an appliance store with all the televisions and radios turned up to full blast. Sometimes it was hard to differentiate who was thinking what.

Thankfully, the good thing about the funeral, from a psychic standpoint, would be that once the service started, the noise would pipe down and he'd be better able to concentrate.

“God, I hate wearing this fucking tie!” Jude tugged at the knot and squirmed on the hard, wooden pew.

Cope pushed down from his husband, leaving several feet between them.

“What the hell are you doing?” Jude asked, sounding even more annoyed than he had seconds ago.

“I don’t want to get hit by second hand lightning.”

Jude raised an eyebrow. “Why do you think I’m going to get hit by lightning?”

“You took the name of the Lord in vain and you said ‘fuck’ in church.” Cope groaned when he realized he’d done the same thing.

“Um, isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?” Jude raised a questioning eyebrow.

Cope slid back down the pew. “Have you noticed anything out of the ordinary?” They were sitting in the fifth row to the left of the casket.

Oliver and Frankie’s family would be seated in front of them when the service got underway.

Ronan and Ten were further back on the right side and Cope hadn’t seen Fitz since they’d gotten out of the SUV.

“You mean aside from the fact that Frankie’s parents won’t even look at Oliver?”

“They think he killed their daughter. Thankfully, both of them are easy to read. Grief does that. All you can think about is your loss and with that, your guard goes down.”

“What about Oliver, is his guard down?” Jude looked as if he already knew the answer to that question.

Cope closed his eyes and attempted to zero in on Oliver.

Cope shivered. “He’s not grieving, Jude.

This is the last place he wants to be and he’s sick and tired of people offering condolences.

He just wants to go home, call out for pizza, and hang out with-” Cope gasped. What he was seeing was unexpected.

“Angie Melton, Frankie’s best friend.” Jude said.

Cope’s eyes popped open. “How did you know that?”

“They’re standing together beside the coffin.” Jude angled his chin toward Oliver. “She’s rubbing his back.”

“Why?” Cope asked, feeling as thunderstruck as he sounded.

“Oliver is the top suspect in her best friend’s murder.

Why would she be with him instead of Frankie’s parents?

” Thankfully, Cope hadn’t ever been in a situation like this, but he liked to think that if he was, he would be on the side of the parents, not the potential killer.

“I wouldn’t touch him if he were the last man on earth.

” Cope knew Oliver was innocent until proven guilty in the eyes of the law.

In his eyes, Oliver was guilty until proven innocent, and the way he was leaning close to Angie kept Cope’s needle firmly on guilty.

“Murder makes strange bedfellows,” Jude said. He looked as if he had something more to say, but paused when his phone buzzed. “It’s Ronan. ‘WTF is up with Oliver and Angie?’ I guess we’re not the only ones who noticed what’s going on.”

Cope sighed. This was going to be a long day and the funeral hadn’t even started yet. “I’m sure they’re just banding together for Frankie’s sake.”

“Seriously?” Jude asked, his thumbs flying over his phone’s keyboard. “They’re boning each other,” he said quietly, obviously not wanting anyone else to hear him. “Ten agrees.”

“Does he agree because he can see it or because them being together like this looks bad?” Cope thought it looked more than just bad. It was rude and inconsiderate.

“A little bit of both, according to Ronan. He also said he hasn’t seen anything else suspicious.” Jude wore a disappointed look.

“Where is Fitz?” Cope asked, turning to look behind him. According to his father, Buford, you weren’t supposed to turn around in church, but he supposed it didn’t matter much now that his father wasn’t there to box his ears.

“He’s outside with the mourners still filing into the church.

Service is supposed to start in five minutes.

Knowing Fitz, he’ll stay at the back of the church in case there’s trouble or someone

tries to make a break for it.

There are several undercover cops from the SPD in the crowd.

I've already seen three of them." Jude's attention was still firmly focused on Oliver. "Oh, shit, here we go!"

Cope looked up in time to see Oliver step up to the coffin and drape himself over it. Cope could hear wailing.

"What the hell are you doing?" An angry sounding Dante Conti shouted. He stalked toward Frankie's coffin, his hands fisted at his side. "It's your fault Frankie is lying in this box. Get away from her now."

Oliver continued to wail. Cope focused his attention on the man, needing to know if his wailing was authentic or an Oscar-worthy performance.

Shutting his eyes, Cope reached out to Oliver and was flooded with emotions.

"It's fake," he muttered. "Gonna look good on the news. Pointing cops away from him. He knows you're all here."

"What he saw next was most definitely going to get Oliver punched in the face."

In his mind's eye, he saw Angie riding Oliver, screaming through her climax.

He'd hate to be their neighbor in the summer with the windows open. The scene flashed again. More sex, this time in a car in the pouring rain, with a woman who wasn't Frankie or Angie.

Trying to delve deeper into Oliver's mind, Cope was interrupted by shouts and a

scream.

His eyes opened just in time to see Frankie's father take a swing at Oliver, whose face was already red, presumably from crying, but Cope knew better.

Oliver had done this to himself, most probably from holding his breath between wails.

The smack of Dante's fist into Oliver's face echoed throughout the church.

Oliver stumbled backward into Angie's arms. When he regained his footing, he looked like he was going to charge at Dante, but several uniformed members of the SPD swooped in to pull the two men apart.

"Sweet Jesus," Jude muttered. "There's something you don't see every day, people punching each other at a funeral."

"Oliver deserved it." Cope said quietly.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?" Jude asked.

Cope shook his head. "I don't know for certain if Oliver killed Frankie, but he was cheating on her left, right, and sideways. I just saw the highlight reel of his sex life." Cope shivered. "I need a hot shower with a bucket of soap."

"Looks like both men are being allowed to stay." Jude pointed toward the front of the church where the Conti's were being led back to their seats to the right of the casket, while Oliver was being ushered to the left side seats that were usually reserved for people who would be doing readings or giving the eulogy.

Jude's phone buzzed again. "Ronan is asking if Fitz wants to pick Oliver up after the

mass is over.”

“He doesn’t,” Cope said. Kevin Fitzgibbon was the easiest person Cope had ever read. He leaked information like a sieve. He wished Oliver Adams was as easy to delve into as the captain.

“You’re right,” Jude agreed, his eyes glued to his phone screen. “Fitz wants us to see Ambrose first. Then Angie. He likes the idea of Oliver having to sweat it out.”

Cope knew from experience that people were more likely to spill their guts when they were stressed and anxious.

Oliver was filled with both, alongside a healthy dose of fear.

“I’m looking forward to speaking with Angie.

I can’t get much of a read on her right now.

She’s pissed at Frankie’s parents and Oliver.

She keeps going back and forth between them. ”

“That makes no sense,” Jude said. “According to what Dante Conti told us, Frankie and Angela had been friends since middle school. You’d think she’d be on their side in this.”

“It feels more like she’s angry that Oliver made such a bold plea for pity and that Dante rose to the bait.

” Cope didn’t understand Angie’s place in this drama at all.

She'd had a long chat with the Conti's earlier in the morning that ended with hugs all around.

Now, she was trying to soothe and console Oliver.

Cope had been out of his mind with grief when his mother, Elizabeth, died, but he hadn't gone as far as to fling himself on her coffin.

People grieved differently and sometimes, not at all.

He supposed that after a time, Oliver had come to grips with the fact that Frankie was gone and wasn't coming back.

It must have been a huge shock to his system when her remains were discovered.

Whether from the shock of Frankie actually being dead or the fact that he'd been the one to kill her and leave her body in the forest, remained to be seen.

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Thankfully, there hadn't been any other violent incidents at Frankie's funeral. Jude, Cope, and the others had attended the private burial, which Oliver and Angie skipped. After everyone had thrown red roses into the grave, they'd gone to the Hawthorne Hotel for what Cope called the mercy meal.

It had been much more sedate than the funeral. Cope and Ten had done their best to literally read the room and hadn't been able to add anyone else to the suspect list. Grief was the strongest of all emotions, according to Ten. It was also the hardest one to read through, which frustrated Jude.

After the meal, Ten and Cope had gone home to be with the kids, while Jude, Ronan, and Fitz headed back to the office.

Ronan wanted to look into Angie's background, Fitz updated Cisco Jackson of the goings on at the funeral, and Jude had finally gotten the police file for the investigation into the stolen million dollars.

Jude felt like the key to the case was in this file.

If he could figure out what happened to the stolen money from start to finish, he was sure he'd find the embezzler and possibly Frankie's killer.

Setting himself up at the large table, Jude spread out the contents of the file.

Most of it was financial records, but Ambrose Watson's police file was inside, as was Frankie's.

Jude sighed. It was going to be a long afternoon.

“How’s it going?” Ronan asked, taking a seat at the table and opening his laptop.

“All these financials.” Jude shook his head. “I hate math, and accounting. How the hell do people do this for a living?”

“Beats the hell out of me, but here’s the thing.” Ronan grinned. “Frankie was murdered within a few hours of being kidnapped. She didn’t steal this money and she sure as hell didn’t move it offshore. I think we both know that.”

Jude nodded. He hadn’t thought she’d stolen the money in the first place. “I would assume that the real embezzler is shitting their pants right now, waiting for us to show up on their doorstep.”

“Ambrose Watson wasn’t at the funeral today. The undercovers at the service were specifically looking for him. What does that tell you?” Ronan asked.

“Well, first off that Watson’s a world-class prick. Secondly, it tells me that he’s trying to lay low, assuming we’ll forget about him if he flies under the radar. Not on my fucking watch!” Jude wagged his eyebrows.

“Agreed.” Ronan turned back to his computer. Jude could hear him typing.

Not wanting to dig into the file, Jude did it anyway. Someone else’s math phobia could very well be the reason Watson wasn’t caught originally. First off, he grabbed Frankie’s police report. Aside from a decades old speeding ticket, her record was clean. No big surprise there.

Next up was Watson’s rap sheet. It had more heft to it than Frankie’s.

Skimming through the pages, Jude saw that Watson had been arrested on a couple of misdemeanors and had several petty shoplifting charges fifteen years ago when he was in his early twenties, which somehow didn't bother his constituents enough to vote him out of office.

There had been no other arrests in the ten years that Watson had served, which didn't mean he hadn't been up to his old tricks, but that he had high-placed friends who could help him get out of trouble.

Which brought Jude to the missing money. He picked up the bank statement for the account the stolen money had been funneled into. It had been opened at the First Salem Bank and was under Frankie's name. "Talk to me about opening a bank account."

"What do you need to know?" Ronan asked.

"For starters, can I walk into a bank branch today and open an account under your name?" If it was possible, it would have been a snap for someone to open an account under Frankie's name. All that would be left to do after that was transfer the stolen money into it.

"Under certain circumstances, yes," Ronan agreed

"What kind of circumstances?"

"After Everly was born, Fitz and Jace gave her a large check to start her college fund. We had to get her a social security card and since Ten and I are her parents, we were able to open an account in her name. Ten is the trustee for the account, meaning that he can make deposits and withdrawals on the account. That ends on Everly's eighteenth birthday and she'll be in full control of the account. "

“Gotcha, but that isn’t exactly what I was hoping you’d say.” Jude needed to know if it was possible for one adult to do it for another.

“You can also open an account for someone else if you are their legal guardian, conservator, or if you have the person’s power of attorney,” Ronan said. “I also suppose it would work if you had a person who looked like Frankie and had her driver’s license and social security number.”

“Okay, that’s more in line with what I was thinking. Someone managed to get a hold of Frankie’s license and personal information. That has to be how this account was opened. Do we think there’s any way Frankie did this herself?”

“What, like she was part of the embezzlement?” Ronan asked, shaking his head. “If that was the case, wouldn’t she have used the money to get out of being kidnapped? One million dollars would be a powerful motivator to keep someone from killing you.”

“You’re right.” Jude grabbed his phone and called the branch location where the account had been set up. He put the call on speaker for Ronan to hear. As the call connected, Fitz walked out of his office to join them.

“First Salem Bank, Troy speaking.” Troy’s voice was high-pitched and lyrical. Jude didn’t need Cope’s gift to know the man was gay.

“Hi, Troy, my name is Jude Byrne, I’m a detective with the Salem Police Department. I need a little bit of information I’m hoping you can help me out with.” Jude flirted with Troy, hoping that would gain him a bit more cooperation.

“I might not be able to give you much without a warrant, but let’s hear what you’re looking for.”

Jude heard the interest in Troy's voice. "My team is looking into the murder of Frankie Adams."

"Oh, that poor little lamb," Troy said, his voice thick with emotion. "My sister and I knew her from the food bank. She never judged my mother for needing help feeding her family. When Frankie went missing, Suzi and I volunteered to help with the search. It's terrible that she was murdered."

"Indeed it is. Are you familiar with the million dollars that went missing from the Salem City Treasury?"

"I am. There's no way in hell Frankie stole that money, Detective Byrne." Troy practically purred Jude's name.

"I agree with you completely, Troy." Jude wagged his eyebrows at Ronan. "What I'm hoping you can help me out with is information about who opened that account in her name. Is there any way you have signed documents we could compare to Frankie's real signature?"

"I can do you one better. There's closed circuit film from that day. It's one more layer of security we use to protect ourselves from liability."

Jude couldn't believe his luck. "Can you send that to us or do we need to get a warrant?"

"Hold on." Elevator music filled the room.

Fitzgibbon took a seat at the table. "If he can't send this to us, I'll write the warrant myself. We can have it for Judge Patterson to sign in about an hour. Let's hope we don't need to take that step."

“Detective Byrne?” Troy asked, when he came back on the line.

“Yes, I’m here.” Jude’s heart pounded in his chest.

“You’re in luck. When the original search warrant was given to us four years ago, security video was included, but for some reason was never sent to the Salem Police. My branch manager said we can send it to you without a new warrant being issued. Where can I send it?”

Jude gave Fitzgibbon’s email address. “That address belongs to the Cold Case Captain.”

“Oh, Captain Fitzgibbon is-” Troy stopped.

“He’s what?” Jude asked, the smile in his voice apparent.

“Like a fine wine.” Troy sighed dreamily.

It took all of Jude’s self-control not to burst out laughing. “I agree, Troy, he’s definitely gotten better with age.”

Fitzgibbon flexed like he was competing for Mr. Universe.

“One last question. The money was transferred out of the account online the day Frankie went missing.”

“Yes, I see that here in the file. The million dollars went to an offshore account. I have no information about that account, not whose name it was under or what country it’s in.”

Jude knew Troy was going to say that. He’d read it in the file, but there might be

another way to get around that. “Any chance that transaction has an IP address associated with it?”

“Genius, Detective Byrne,” Troy said with a small squeal. He read off the numbers, which Jude wrote down. Hopefully this information would be able to tell them the location of the computer that transferred the money.

“Troy, this is Captain Fitzgibbon.”

Troy gasped. “Hello, captain, how long have you been on this call?” For the first time during the call, he sounded nervous.

“Long enough to know you’re excellent at your job.” Fitz winked at Jude.

“Thank you, sir. I hope the information I’m sending can help find the person who stole the money.”

“I’m sure it will. I have one last question before we let you go.”

“Sure.” Troy sounded positively giddy.

“Was the driver’s license used to open the account scanned into the file?”

“It sure is. The license is Frankie’s alright.”

“Perfect, can you include that scan in my email?”

“I sure can. If there’s anything else you need, anything at all, be sure to let me know.”

“I will, Troy, thank you.” Fitzgibbon tapped Jude’s phone to end the call. Fitz stood tall and made like he was straightening his tie. “I’ve still got it.”

Ronan rolled his eyes. “What you’ve got remains to be seen.”

“Prick,” Fitz muttered.

“If the ID on file belongs to Frankie, what good does it do us to have a copy of it?”
Jude asked.

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“Call the Registry of Motor Vehicles, Jude. Find out if Frankie had a duplicate license issued.” Fitz turned to Ronan.

“Trace the IP address of that money transfer and then call Oliver and ask him if he knows anything about Frankie’s license being stolen.

Make him think we’re looking at the embezzler as the killer so he drops his guard.

” His phone pinged as he spoke. “It’s Troy.

” Fitz tapped his screen, stared at it for a few seconds and laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Ronan asked.

“See for yourself.” Fitz turned the phone around so both Jude and Ronan could see it. “That’s the first of five pictures Troy sent from the day the account was opened in Frankie’s name.

“Oh, fuck!” Jude snorted. The images were of a man and a woman. The woman looked a lot like Frankie, but she was wearing a baseball cap, which obscured part of her face. Her features were similar to Frankie’s but that woman wasn’t her. The man was easily identifiable. “Ambrose Watson.”

“That son of a bitch,” Ronan said. He grabbed his phone. “I’m calling Oliver.” Seconds later, his voice filled the room.

“Detective O’Mara, this is a surprise. Are you calling to ask me to give a statement

on the way my former father-in-law attacked me at my wife's funeral?" Oliver sounded spiteful. Jude was surprised he hadn't already filed a report himself, he seemed the petty type.

"Unfortunately not, I'm cold case. You'd have to file a complaint at the police department."

Oliver sighed. "I figured as much. Why are you calling?"

"I have a question for you."

"I can't answer any questions without my attorney present." Oliver's smarmy smile was evident in his voice. The asshole was enjoying this, no doubt about it.

"Understood, you call him and I'll work other leads regarding Ambrose Watson," Ronan paused.

His eyes sparkled with glee. "Make your call fast because we had a tip earlier in the day letting us know that Watson looks like he's about to run.

He's got one million reasons to get out of town before it's too late. "

"Wait, you want to talk to me about Watson ?" Oliver sounded as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"I sure do. We just got off the phone with the First Salem Bank who sent us still photos from the day Frankie opened the alleged embezzlement account. The woman in the picture is not Frankie. We don't know who she is yet, but even more interestingly, the man with her in the photo isn't you."

"It's Watson?" Oliver asked, sounding shocked.

“I can’t talk about this with you since Pryce isn’t there, but call us back when he is. Have a great day, Oliver.”

“Wait!” Oliver shouted, as Ronan’s finger hovered over the end call button. “I waive my right to have my attorney present. Can you speak with me now?”

“I can,” Ronan said, grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

“Who was the man in the picture?” Oliver asked, breathlessly.

“It’s Ambrose Watson,” Ronan answered. “Since the account was opened in Frankie’s name, Watson must have had access to Frankie’s license and social security number. Do you have any idea how he could have gotten that information?”

Jude crossed his fingers and hoped Oliver would remember something that could help.

“Are you asking if I was the one who gave Watson my wife’s information?” Oliver snapped.

“No, not at all,” Ronan said, in what sounded like a soothing voice.

“Oh, wait!” Oliver said. “Frankie lost her driver’s license.”

“She did?” Ronan asked.

“Yeah, it was several months before she went missing. I had to take her to the registry to get a duplicate license issued. Do you think that’s how Watson was able to open an account in Frankie’s name?”

“I do,” Ronan agreed. “Is there any chance Frankie kept her Social Security Card in

her wallet?”

“No,” Oliver said. “We kept those in our safe with our passports. Why?”

“You need the number along with a photo ID to open an account. We need to figure out how Watson could have had access to that.”

“Employee records,” Oliver said easily. “All of that information would have been in the system. He would have needed someone with the proper HR clearance to get into the file, but I wouldn’t put it past him to have friends that could help him out.”

“I agree. Thanks for your help, Oliver.”

“Are you gonna be able to stop him from leaving town?” Oliver asked, sounding relieved.

“We’re gonna do our best. If he stole the money, it’s not a stretch to think Watson killed Frankie too, so that she wouldn’t be able to point the finger at him.” Ronan rolled his eyes. “We’ll be in touch.” He ended the call wearing a triumphant look.

“I’ve got a contact at the RMV.” Jude fired off a quick text. Seconds later a reply came back. “Son of a bitch.”

“What?” Ronan asked, sounding excited.

“Frankie applied for a duplicate license the day after the bank account was opened.” Jude tapped his phone and the printer whirled to life. “But, that’s not all.”

“Did you look up the IP Address?” Fitz asked, as he grabbed the printout.

“I sure did.” Jude snorted. You’ll never guess where it originated from.”

“City Hall?” Ronan asked.

“Nope, try again,” Jude was loving every moment of this. There was nothing better than stupid criminals.

“Watson’s house,” Fitzgibbon said, sounding incredulous.

“We’ve got a bingo!” Jude laughed.

“Let’s go get this fucker!” Ronan got to his feet.

“Everyone, hold on. I’ll apply for the warrant to search Watson’s home and work computers,” Fitz walked back into his office.

“I’ll text Cope and tell him we’ll pick him up in a bit.” Jude grinned as his thumbs flew over the keyboard.

Jude didn’t think Watson killed Frankie.

He’d set it up so that it looked like she stole the money.

There would have been no reason to kill her.

If someone noticed the money had been stolen, all Watson would have to do was pack a bag and get on a plane to a country with a non-extradition treaty.

They were going to solve the embezzlement case and were quickly closing in on Frankie’s killer.

It was only a matter of time.

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Two hours later, Cope sat in the backseat of Fitzgibbon's SUV as they headed toward Derby Street where Ambrose Watson lived, for the moment at least. If Fitz didn't slap the handcuffs on him today, it was likely the man would flee to parts unknown.

If it were Cope, he'd fly to the south of France, get a little plastic surgery done and live out his life quietly, with a boatload of cash in the bank.

With a million dollars and friends in high places, the sky was the limit for Watson.

"Slow down, it's the third house on the right." Ronan pointed. "With the U-Haul truck in the driveway, it wouldn't have been hard to pick out which house was Watson's."

Fitz parked the SUV several houses down and appeared to be studying the property. "Jude, do a search on the house. See if it's listed with a realtor or if it's been recently sold."

"It's not for sale and hasn't been sold," Cope said from the backseat. In this instance, they didn't need the internet. Cope could read the situation like a book.

"Well then who the hell is moving out?" Ronan asked, as two men closed the truck's cargo door and climbed into the cab.

"Count to ten." Cope snickered. "You're about to find out." He'd seen what was about to happen in stunning clarity. Under other circumstances it might be funny, but not with Frankie Adams dead and a million stolen dollars in the wind.

“Go fuck yourself, you cheating bastard!” A woman screamed as she burst through the front door.

“I hope that skinny, titless bitch was worth it.” The woman was gorgeous, even as angry as she was.

She was tall with long blonde hair that reached to her waist. It flew out behind her as she stormed toward her car.

Dressed in a crop top with her boobs threatening to spill out and yoga pants that left nothing to the imagination, Cope could see what attracted Watson to her.

“Parker, please!” Watson shouted at the woman. He ran out the front door and stumbled down the stairs. “Just listen to me. It’s not what you think. Briana means nothing to me. She’s just another whore on the grift.”

“Then the two of you are perfect for each other, aren’t you?” Parker floated down the driveway toward a newish looking Toyota sedan. She started the car and shifted it into gear.

“Parker, wait!” Watson sprinted in front of the revving vehicle. He stood his ground with his hands out in front of him. “Stop! Fucking stop!”

“Okay, let’s go!” Fitz shook his head. “Ronan, you and I will grab Romeo, Jude, you’ve got Juliet. She’s angry, make sure you use her anger against her to get whatever you can from her. Cope, stay with Jude. We’re gonna bring Watson back into the house and you can work your magic on him then.”

“Got it,” Cope said. He and Jude got out of the SUV and headed toward Parker, who was shouting for Watson to get out of her fucking way.

“Mr. Watson?” Fitzgibbon called out, flashing his badge. “I’m Captain Kevin Fitzgibbon from the Salem Police Cold Case Unit. My colleagues and I are here to talk to you about Francesca Adams’s murder.”

“Can’t you see I’m fucking busy!” Watson’s eyes never left Parker, who looked like she wanted to run him over.

“Come with us, Mr. Watson,” Ronan said, taking the man’s right elbow. Fitzgibbon grabbed the left.

“Wait! Stop! You can’t do this. I need to go after Parker. I love her!”

“He’s right,” Cope said with a grin. “Not to mention Heidi, Kellie, Brenda, and a stripper named Cinnamon.”

“Text Fitz with that info. I’ll go see if we can get Parker to talk to us.” Jude left Cope standing in the driveway in front of the silver Camry. He watched as Jude spoke to her in low tones. No doubt his husband was employing every ounce of charm he possessed to persuade Parker to speak with them.

A few seconds later, the engine shut off, and with Jude’s assistance, Parker got out of the car.

He ushered her toward Fitzgibbon’s SUV. Cope opened the passenger back door for her.

Jude climbed in behind her, leaving Cope to go around to the passenger side.

He got into the front seat, not wanting Parker to feel like she was boxed in or trapped.

“Parker, this is my husband, Cope.”

“Nice to meet you,” Parker said, her voice still full of frustration. “You promised to tell me what this was about. Now, talk.”

Jude offered a sheepish grin. He definitely had turned the charm up full blast. “We’re with the Salem Police’s Cold Case Division.”

“Jesus Christ on a trampoline! Do you think Watson killed someone? I wouldn’t put it past him, horny, selfish, piece of shit that he is!”

“Does the name Francesca Adams ring a bell?” Jude asked.

Parker nodded. “Yeah, that’s the woman whose body was found in the woods a few days ago. Ambrose worked with her. Was he fucking her too?”

“Not to the best of our knowledge.” Jude offered the distraught woman a smile.

“Has he ever mentioned Frankie to you?” Cope asked. His gift was turned up to full blast. All he was getting from her at the moment was anger and betrayal. If Jude could calm her down, it was possible Cope could get more information out of her.

“When her remains were discovered he changed,” Parker said.

“Changed how?” Jude asked, biting his lower lip.

“He was irritable and paranoid. The slightest thing would set him off and he was always looking over his shoulder as if he thought someone was out to get him. I assumed there was something going on at work. There always was.” Parker rolled her eyes.

“Christ, he was a lousy city councilman and I do mean lousy. His favorite way to earn votes was with his dick. All he wanted to do was cut taxes for the rich and make the

poor pay for the cuts.”

“Did he ever mention the stolen money?” Jude asked.

Parker’s eyes widened. “What, the money that Frankie stole from the bank before she disappeared?”

Jude nodded.

“Only to say that it had been the perfect crime. She’d managed to stash the money away without anyone noticing.” Parker sighed. “I guess she didn’t get very far with it.”

Cope could feel Parker’s empathy toward the murdered woman. “Were there ever times when Ambrose had more money than you thought he should have had? You know, did he give you expensive gifts or take you on luxury vacations?”

Parker nodded. “We went to Bora Bora last year and he gave me diamond earrings.” She pulled her hair back to expose square cut studs that Cope would guess were a carat each.

“Ambrose told me the money had come from a great aunt who’d recently passed and left him an inheritance.

I knew that story was bullshit, since he’d mentioned before that both of his parents were only children.

I just assumed the money came from one of the rich women he was fucking on the side.”

Cope shook his head. In Parker’s eyes, it didn’t seem to matter that Ambrose was

cheating if the infidelity came with perks like jewelry and trips to far-flung tropical beaches.

“Do you think he had anything to do with stealing the money or killing Frankie?” Jude asked.

“He’s too much of a coward to kill anyone. If I had to guess, I’d say he was very capable of stealing the money and making it look like Frankie did it. Ambrose has been very paranoid these last few days. He’s packed bug out bags and has them ready to go at the front door.”

Jude pulled out his phone and handed it to Parker. “Does this woman look familiar to you?”

From where he was sitting, Cope could see Jude had shown her the pictures from the bank security footage.

“Fuck me with a chainsaw. That’s Heidi Coombs. What the fuck is up with that ridiculous wig. Heidi’s a brunette like me. She’s been my bestie since elementary school. Heidi hates Ambrose. Why the hell is she at a bank with him?”

“This woman is dressed to look like Frankie Adams.” Jude showed Parker a picture of Frankie.

“Jesus, they could be twins.” Parker pulled her eyes from the screen and looked at Jude. “Are you telling me Ambrose used my best friend to open a bank account in the dead woman’s name?”

Cope nodded. “We think it’s possible. Although Frankie was still alive at the time.”

“That dirty bastard. I wouldn’t put any of this past him. Killing no, embezzling under

someone else's name, yes." Parker reached for the door handle. "I've got to get the hell out of here."

Jude handed her his phone. "Type in your number. We might have more questions for you at some point."

Parker looked less than enthused over giving a detective her phone number.

"Your evidence could be what puts Ambrose in prison." Jude wagged his eyebrows.

Parker managed a small laugh. She typed her number and gave the phone back to Jude before climbing out of the SUV.

"Call me when they convict the SOB. I want to be there when he's being hauled off to jail.

His big dick won't be able to save him then.

"Slamming the door shut, Parker hurried toward her car.

Jude snorted. "You get anything else from Parker?"

"She's a sweet girl who actually thought Watson was her one and only," Cope said. "She had a whole life planned out for them in her mind. I feel bad for her, because it's only going to get worse from here."

"Worse, how?" Jude asked,

"She's pregnant. Two weeks along. Parker doesn't know yet, but I can feel the baby and his sweet little soul.

” Cope smiled, there was no happier news than that a new baby was coming.

“Watson’s arrest is going to fire up a shit storm.

Not just for Watson and the Salem City Council, but for the First Salem Bank, not to mention when all the past lovers start creeping out of the woodwork with what they know about Watson and his big dick. ”

“Promise me that if we ever get divorced that you don’t throw my big dick around as a strike against me.” Jude grinned, waggling his eyebrows.

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Cope rolled his eyes. “Why the hell would I do that? If you pissed me off enough to divorce you, I’d tell the world you had a three-incher.

” Cope demonstrated with his thumb and first finger.

With a laugh, he got out of the SUV. As he walked toward Watson’s front door, he heard Jude’s outraged howl.

As Cope was approaching the front door, he heard shouting. It was Ambrose Watson and he was pissed off. He knocked on the door as Jude caught up with him.

Fitz opened the door. “Ronan’s nearly got him. I’m just standing by making sure Watson doesn’t try to charge at Ronan. Cope stayed with Fitz, while Jude walked into the living room to join Ronan.

“This is my partner, Jude Byrne,” Ronan said.

“Jesus, I know you!” Watson shouted. “You’re the asshole president of the Salem Elementary School’s PTA! The one who wants to indoctrinate our kids with Drag Queen Story Hour and wants to fly the pride flag on school grounds.”

“Councilman Watson,” Jude began sounding exhausted, “you have every right to disagree with my beliefs about LGBTQIA+ people, however, what you don’t have the right to do is steal a million dollars from the City of Salem and all of the taxpayers who live here.”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about,” Watson spat back.

“Miss Goodie Two Shoes Frankie Adams stole the money. There’s proof she stole it.

Just because your dumb asses couldn’t find it, doesn’t mean you can pass the blame onto someone else.

What’s next, you and the rest of the Keystone Cops accusing me of killing that bitch?
”

Jude’s hands curled into fists. Cope found himself torn between wanting to keep the peace and wanting to see Watson take a punch to the throat. “Keep talking asshole,” Jude urged.

Watson smirked. He looked like a deranged Disney villain. “I’ll tell you this, Oliver Adams was fucking half the women in this city. Ask me how I know?”

Ronan rolled his eyes. “How do you know that, Mr. Watson?”

“Because bitches talk. I can’t tell you how many women I’ve banged who tell me my dick is bigger than his and that Adams shoots his wad almost instantly. You want my two cents. Adams killed his wife so he could get her insurance money and bang all the stupid girls he could get his hands on.”

Jude pulled his phone out and started tapping it. “You want to talk about bitches? Tell me about this one.”

Cope knew Jude was showing the picture of Heidi Coombs with Watson at the bank.

“I have no idea who that woman is,” Watson said, as his hands started to shake.

“That’s interesting on two fronts,” Jude said with a self-satisfied grin. “One, you didn’t call her a bitch, and two, you’re standing beside her in the next picture.” Jude

swiped his finger across the screen.

Watson visibly paled when he was shown the picture. “I-I don’t...”

“Cut the bullshit, Watson,” Jude shouted.

“These are still images the First Salem Bank sent to us from their security footage of the day Frankie Adams,” Jude made air quotes over her name, “opened the bank account that the embezzled city money was funneled into. The bank also sent us the scan of Frankie’s license, which, oddly enough, had been stolen the day before.

We have evidence that Frankie was working at Sea Witches Food Pantry during the time of this bank transaction.

This isn’t Frankie Adams. It’s Heidi Coombs, your lover and Parker’s soon-to-be former best friend. ”

Cope loved seeing his husband like this, angry and pushing for the truth. He’d never seen this side of his husband before and it was fucking hot. Maybe he’d ask Ten if he could take Lizbet and Wolfie for the night so he and Jude could get down to pound town.

“Frankie didn’t open this account and she didn’t steal the money. You did!” Jude accused.

“I didn’t steal anything you son-of-a bitch!” Watson whined.

“Once we get you arraigned for embezzlement, wire fraud, tax fraud, and half a dozen other counts, then we’ll move on to the first degree murder charge, which I’m sure you know comes with an automatic life sentence with no parole.

Guess you're gonna have to kiss the bitches goodbye. " Jude crossed his arms over his chest.

Cope got a front row seat to every thought rolling through Watson's mind.

Not only did he steal the money from Salem's city treasury, he'd also done something similar while he worked at two other companies in New Jersey.

"Anyone happen to know the statute of limitations on wire fraud in the state of New Jersey?" His eyes never left Watson's.

"Five years!" Ronan called out. "Why?"

"You'll want to get in touch with Brewster Financial and Ocean City Investment Brokers, both of which Watson worked at and embezzled from.

" Cope grinned. "Oh, and Parker is pregnant with a baby boy, but before you start picking out names you need to know the baby's not yours, it's Nathan Stanford's.

I believe he's one of your colleagues on the city council? "

"Who the fuck are you?" Watson roared, bolting out of his seat toward Cope, who stood his ground. "Did that bitch Heidi rat me out?"

Ronan grabbed Watson's arm and yanked him away from Cope, while Jude grabbed his left and wrestled both wrists into the cuffs.

"Ambrose Watson, you're under arrest for embezzlement, wire fraud, and bank fraud.

You have the right to remain silent." Ronan marched the screaming man out of the house with Fitzgibbon on his heels.

Jude wore a shit-eating grin. “I’m impressed, Mr. Forbes. It’s not your usual style to come at people like you did with Watson.”

“I swear, as the father of a daughter and the uncle to several nieces, if he called women bitches one more time, I’d be getting arrested for assault right now.”

Jude snorted. “No you wouldn’t. Ronan, Fitz, and I wouldn’t have seen a thing. Hell, I’m sure we all would have gotten a shot in ourselves.” He sobered. “Watson didn’t kill Frankie.”

“No, he didn’t,” Cope agreed. “I got to see all the rotten stuff Watson has done throughout his life, but killing Frankie wasn’t one of them, and before you ask, he didn’t pay anyone to kill her either.

When she disappeared, Watson saw it as the perfect opportunity to move the money offshore and blame Frankie for the theft.

He’s been loving every moment of the world thinking Frankie stole the money and ran off with it. ”

“If it wasn’t for those boy scouts finding Frankie’s remains he would have kept on getting away with it.”

“Exactly.” Cope sighed. “Can we go home now? I want to order pizza and cuddle our kids while we watch Finding Nemo for the millionth time.”

Jude nodded. “I know how hard this case has been on you. If anyone deserves pizza and cuddles, it’s you.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not done yet. We still don’t know who killed Frankie. I want one more shot at Oliver Adams.”

“Hold on there, tiger,” Jude chuckled. “Let’s get a good night’s sleep and then we’ll figure out how to come at Oliver Adams.”

“He’s not going to know what hit him.” Cope was filled, not with revenge, but with hope that he and the detectives would find Frankie’s killer so she and everyone who loved her could find some peace.

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Cope had ordered enough pizza to last a month.

Mushroom and bacon was his husband's favorite.

There was also pepperoni, which he and the kids loved.

After dinner, the kids had their baths and were now sitting on the living room sectional waiting for Jude, who was cleaning up the kitchen and putting the leftover pizza in the fridge.

"Dada!" Lizbet called when Jude walked into the living room. She climbed out of Cope's lap and crawled into his when he sat down.

"Hi, little girl." Jude kissed his daughter's head. Lizbet wore a pair of bright pink footie pajamas. Her blonde hair had dried quickly and almost reached her shoulders. As much as he hated to admit it, his little girl was growing up. He wished he could stop time and just revel in this moment.

"Memo!" Lizbet sang out.

Cope started the movie. Wolf munched on his popcorn, while Jude snuggled his daughter. After what he'd witnessed during the last few days with the Frankie Adams case, he didn't want to let Lizzy B go. All Jude wanted to do was shove the case to the side and spend a night at home with his family.

"Uh, oh," Cope whispered, reaching for Jude's hand. He pointed toward the front door five seconds before the bell rang." "I'll get it." When he opened the door, Ronan

and Fitz were standing on their doorstep. “Come on in. I’ll start the coffee.” With a sigh, Cope headed for the kitchen.

Jude set his daughter next to Wolf on the sofa and hurried into the kitchen. “Is everything okay?”

Ronan and Fitzgibbon took seats at the table. “Did some research on Angie Melton.”

“You didn’t have enough of this case already?” Jude asked. He’d left it at the door when he’d gotten home. They would be back at it again in the morning, but Ronan was never one to let things go.

“Something was bothering me about Angie,” Ronan began.

“You mean how close she seemed to Oliver today?” Jude asked. He’d been bothered not only by the way she seemed to be comforting Oliver, but by the cold manner in which she treated Frankie’s parents.

“No. Yes.” Ronan shook his head, looking confused.

“Which one is it?” Jude asked.

“Yes, I was upset about what happened at the funeral today, but what was bothering me happened a few days ago. When we got to Oliver’s house to interview him with Reagan Pryce present, Angie was there, which I thought was odd.” He paused to take a cup of coffee from Cope.

Jude could see where Ronan was going with his train of thought. “Oliver was the obvious suspect when Frankie’s death was ruled a homicide. I don’t know about you, but as Frankie’s best friend, I sure as hell wouldn’t be at the house of the man who had the most to gain by killing her.”

“Where would you have gone?” Fitz asked.

“To Frankie’s parents’ house,” Ronan said.

“I would have gone there when the remains were discovered and then again when the news broke that she’d been murdered.

” Jude paused. “In addition to showing up to support Dante and Sofia, I would have also brought food. Casseroles, chicken pot pies, lasagna.”

“Tell him what you found out,” Fitzgibbon urged.

“I ran Angie’s criminal record which is spotless.

No great surprise there,” Ronan said. “The big surprise came from Facebook. You all know I hate the platform. I would never share pictures of my kids or posts about being on vacation, but from a law enforcement perspective, the website is gold.” Ronan tapped his screen and handed his phone to Jude.

Nearly every picture Angie had posted was of her and Oliver. “These go back years.”

“Did you tell them what I saw at the funeral?” Cope asked, taking the phone from Jude and scrolling through the pictures.

“You mean the mini porno?” Ronan asked.

“Yeah,” Cope agreed. “I saw him having sex with several women, none of whom were Frankie. Which might not mean anything. His wife has been gone for four years. Those liaisons could have taken place after Frankie disappeared. I might get a lot more information out of him now that you all told him you were looking at Watson for the embezzlement and the murder.”

“Who do we see first tomorrow, Oliver or Angie?” Ronan asked.

“I have a feeling that where we find one, we’ll find the other, especially if we show up around eight. Oliver’s vet clinic doesn’t open until nine,” Fitz added.

“What about Angie, does she work?” Jude asked.

“Yeah, she’s a medical transcriptionist for a practice of pediatric oncologists. Angie works in the office on Monday and from home Tuesday through Thursday. I say we start with her first thing tomorrow morning,” Ronan said.

“Agreed,” Fitz said. “What else have we got here?”

“Frankie’s parents didn’t do this,” Jude said. There was no way they’d kidnapped their daughter, bound her, walked her into the woods and shot her execution style. Lizbet’s laugh from the other room reached Jude. The thought of harming one hair on her head made him sick to his stomach.

“I don’t think Doctor Holbrook did it either,” Ronan said. “Although I do want to talk to Oliver about accusing Frankie of sleeping with him.”

“Not to mention the way he tracked her phone,” Jude added. He couldn’t imagine wanting to pin Cope down like that. His husband had a life he loved, friends he spent time with, and things he liked to do without Jude. Who the hell was Jude to follow his every movement?

“It’s also not Ambrose Watson,” Cope added. “I could read him clear as crystal. He’s an embezzler and a serial cheater, but he didn’t kill Frankie.”

“So,” Fitz said, blowing out a frustrated breath, “all we’re left with is Oliver.”

“Who doesn’t want to talk to us without his lawyer being present,” Jude grumped.

“Not true!” Ronan rubbed his hands together like a cartoon villain. “When we spoke to him earlier about Ambrose Watson, he was more than happy to talk to us. I bet you a dime to a donut that we’ll find him with Angie, so we knock on the door and say we’re there to speak to her.”

Jude could see where this was leading. “We go in guns blazing accusing Angie of being the killer. She was jealous of Frankie being Oliver’s wife. Jealous of the baby.”

“Maybe Oliver agreed to stay with his wife because of the baby. We make Angie feel alone and abandoned,” Fitz said. “All we have to do is hope Oliver takes the bait.”

Cope snickered. “Oh, I can guarantee he will.”

Jude eyed his husband, knowing that his gift may have offered them the opportunity to solve Frankie’s murder. “Tell us, Cope!”

“Angie’s pregnant.” Cope paused. “We’ll just point out that Oliver killed his pregnant wife. I’m sure it won’t be too hard to convince Angie she and her unborn child could be next.”

“All we’ll have to do is sit back and wait for the fireworks to start.” Ronan was all smiles.

“Sounds like a plan.” Fitz got up from his seat. “Get some sleep. I want to knock on their door around eight.”

“You got it.” Jude followed behind his partners as they left the house. He hurried back into the kitchen where Cope sat wearing a self-satisfied grin.

“Good work,” Jude said, pulling Cope into his arms. “How the hell did you know about the baby?”

“A little bird told me.” Cope waggled his eyebrows.

“Let me guess, Bertha?” Jude chuckled.

“Yup.” Cope chuckled. “Apparently she’s been stuck to Angie like glue from the moment she left Oliver’s house the day we interviewed him. She sings to the baby. Angie is obviously very attached. Promise you won’t go at her too hard. We don’t want to put the child in danger.”

“The only person who’s going to be in danger tomorrow is Oliver.” Not only had Oliver killed his wife, but their unborn daughter. Jude would do everything in his power to make sure that same fate wasn’t awaiting Angie and her baby.

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Sitting in the backseat of Fitzgibbon's SUV, Cope couldn't believe how calm he was. They were going to Oliver's house to confront the man about killing his wife. Cope figured he'd be a bundle of nerves, but, in fact, he'd never been more at peace.

After Ronan and Fitz left the night before, he and Jude sat at the kitchen table going over possible questions to ask Oliver, along with ways to get Angie to turn on her lover.

He didn't want to say or do anything that could hurt Angie's child, but at this point, the bigger danger came from Oliver.

If he could kill his pregnant wife, it wouldn't bother him to kill a pregnant girlfriend.

"Cope?" Fitz asked from the driver's seat. "You good to go?"

"Yeah, I'm good." Cope offered Fitz a tentative smile in the rearview mirror.

"The last time we did this together, we were on our way to rescue Jude." His mind flashed back to that awful day.

With Cope's emotions running high, his gift had been useless.

It had been Ronan and Fitz who'd found and saved Jude from his tormentor.

"My gift is working and I'm ready to catch a killer. "

"Angie's car is in the driveway," Ronan said as Fitz parked down the street from

Oliver's house.

"We knew she would be here." Jude hopped out of the SUV and walked to the other side to help Cope out.

"Thank goodness the media has died down." Where there had been media vans and glammed up reporters with microphones, now the street was quiet with neighbors going about their daily business which didn't include picketing Oliver's house.

Cope was glad too. He knew that sometimes the Salem Police Department got pushback from residents when Ten was involved in solving cold cases.

The notoriety usually gained West Side Magick more customers, which Cope loved.

Today, though, he wanted to fly under the radar.

Use the bit of knowledge his gift provided and bring Frankie's killer to justice.

"Do you ever feel like you get to know the victims?" Cope asked when he met the detectives at the head of Oliver's driveway.

Ronan nodded. "All the time. I use that as fuel when I feel like we've run out of evidence and suspects. From everything we've learned, Frankie was a giver. Now it's time we return the favor and give her some long overdue justice."

"Damn right." Jude bumped fists with Ronan. He started for Oliver's front door, shoulder to shoulder with his partners.

Cope found himself glad he was on their side. If these three detectives showed up on his doorstep while working an active murder case he would have shit a solid gold brick. Probably two.

Oliver opened the front door and wilted at the sight of the detectives. “My lawyer’s not here. I’m not speaking to you.” He moved to shut the door in Fitzgibbon’s face.

“We’re not here to speak with you.” Fitz pushed past Oliver and into the house.

Cope watched Oliver’s look of shock turn to fear. The last thing he wanted was for his girlfriend to speak to Salem Police detectives. With Oliver’s attention on Angie, that would give Cope the perfect opportunity to get inside Oliver’s head.

“Good morning, Angie,” Fitzgibbon greeted, walking into the kitchen.

Angie whirled around from the sink, where she’d been washing dishes. “What the hell are you all doing here? You know you can’t speak to Oliver without his lawyer.”

“Well then it’s a good thing we’re here to see you.” Fitz offered a bland smile.

“Me?” Angie sounded outraged. “Who the hell do you think you are bursting into Oliver’s house? I don’t have to say a word to you.” Grabbing a nearby dish towel, Angie dried her hands.

“You’ve got two choices,” Ronan began, “have a seat and answer a few quick questions about your best friend, Frankie, or we perp walk you out the door and take you downtown. I’m sure the video of you being shoved into a police cruiser will be all over Facebook before we even leave the neighborhood. ”

Rolling her eyes, Angie took a seat at the kitchen table. Oliver sat beside her. When the three detective’s sat opposite, Cope took the opportunity to sit at the head of the table closest to Angie.

“What do you want to know about Frankie?” Angie asked. “I would have thought by now that you’d have gotten all the information you needed.”

“We just want you to tell us about your friendship with Frankie.” Ronan sounded almost gentle.

“We met in middle school and had been best friends for life.” Angie shrugged. “We were the maids of honor in each other’s weddings, hung out every weekend, and Frankie was there for me when my husband left me for another woman.”

“Sounds like a great friendship,” Fitz said, offering a kind smile. “In the week leading up to Frankie’s disappearance, had you seen her at all?”

Angie nodded. She took a deep breath and appeared to be relaxing.

She obviously believed Fitz when he said he just wanted to talk about her friendship with Frankie.

“We had yoga on Monday at noon. We always went across the street and got milkshakes when class was over.” Angie barked a quick laugh, turning her attention to Oliver who was silent, but smiling.

“We had plans on Friday to have lunch, but she’d already been taken. ”

Fitz nodded, scribbling notes on his pad. “Did you talk on the phone or text between milkshakes on Monday and Frankie going missing on Thursday?”

“We texted each other every day, but we didn’t talk. Frankie was busy with her charities and an upcoming vote on some city council bill.”

“This is all very helpful, Angie.” Fitz tapped his pad with his pen. “When was it that you started sleeping with Oliver? Before or after her death?”

Cope’s full attention was on Oliver as Fitz asked his question. Fear rolled off him in

waves. Scared people made stupid decisions. Oliver's guard was dropping. Cope also sensed a feeling of relief that the detectives were going at Angie, not him.

"What the fuck business is that of yours?" Angie asked, red in the face.

"Oliver ruled over his wife with an iron fist. He monitored her phone, tracked her whereabouts. How the hell did he have time for you, when stalking his wife seemed to be his favorite hobby?" Jude asked, sounding benign.

Cope knew better. He was about to drop the hammer.

"When Oliver was with me, neither of us were thinking about Frankie," Angie said, her eyes tearing up.

"Yeah, he was my best friend's husband, but I was in love.

My marriage was a disaster. Dom didn't want to work, fucked around with other women and drank too much. Oliver was the exact opposite of him."

"Actually, he wasn't," Fitz said. "We have it on good authority that Oliver was seeing other women besides you, both before and after Frankie disappeared."

"What are you talking about?" Angie's bravado faltered. "Oliver has always been faithful to me."

"If he'll cheat with you, he'll cheat on you," Ronan said. "A smart woman like yourself should have known that."

Angie stammered. Cope watched as her entire world crumbled around her. Everything she thought she'd known about Oliver was a lie.

A lie Cope was going to use to his benefit. “Who is Jenn French? Misty Harrington? Deb Collins? Joy Prince?” Cope asked, slapping on a dazed look, as if his gift had just shocked him with what it had revealed.

Angie’s mouth dropped open. “I work with them? Why?”

“I think you know why,” Cope said. He could feel the anger building inside Angie. It wasn’t going to take much more for her to explode at Oliver. Then it would be game on.

“Oliver knows them too, but not in a professional manner like you do.” Jude paused, obviously giving Angie a few seconds to understand what he was saying.

“You used to think it was cute when Oliver would come see you at work. Bring you flowers. Take you to lunch.” Cope could see those afternoons in his mind’s eye.

“Only while you were finishing up your work or freshening your make up in the ladies room, he was charming all of your coworkers. He was a real fox in the henhouse.”

“That’s not true,” Angie said, looking back and forth between Oliver and Cope. When Oliver said nothing, she slammed her hand on the table. “Tell me this isn’t true,” she demanded.

“Angie, baby, I-” Oliver began.

“Don’t you baby me!” Angie shouted. “Tell me what the fuck is going on, Ollie. When Frankie disappeared you promised it was us against the world.”

“Is that what he told you, Angie? That when Frankie was out of the picture the two of you could be together forever?” Jude asked, his voice full of sympathy. “You poor

thing.”

“That’s enough!” Oliver thundered. “You said you were here to question Angie about her friendship with Frankie. This has gone way beyond what you promised.”

Ronan chuckled. “I’ve been friends with Jude for going on seven years. Not once in that time have I fucked his husband.”

“Good to know,” Jude deadpanned. “But you did just that, Angie. Is that why you killed Frankie? Because you knew Oliver would run to you for comfort?”

Angie looked like she’d been struck by lightning.

“Oliver promised he would be all mine if Frankie was out of the picture. I believed you. I loved you so much that I was willing to do anything to have you.” She looked as if she had more to say when Oliver interrupted.

“Angie, shut up!” Oliver commanded. “Shut the fuck up. You don’t have to say another word without your lawyer present.”

Oliver’s fear was palpable. The man was terrified that Angie would keep talking, but with as scared as he was, Cope couldn’t reach the truth Oliver was so desperate to protect.

“I don’t have a lawyer. You said I didn’t need one.” Angie looked askance. Her gaze landed on Cope. “He was cheating on me? For real?”

“For real. I’m sorry Angie, but the women I mentioned to you are just the tip of the iceberg.” Cope wasn’t the least bit sorry. All that mattered was finding Frankie’s killer.

“You son of a bitch!” Angie shouted.

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“Why did he want Frankie dead?” Ronan asked, sitting forward in his chair, as if to hear Angie better.

“He didn’t want to be a father!” Angie shouted.

“Then or now ?” Cope asked.

“What?” Angie and Oliver shouted together.

“You didn’t tell Oliver you have his bun in your oven?” Jude asked.

“You’re pregnant? You stupid bitch.” Oliver wore a disgusted look.

“With Oliver not wanting to be a father and you six weeks pregnant with his son, I’d say that puts you and your baby in grave danger.” Fitz sounded worried on Angie’s behalf.

Cope knew that was just what Angie needed to turn this fight nuclear.

“Is that true, Angie? Are you pregnant?” Oliver asked, his voice full of rage.

Angie wrapped her arms around her stomach and nodded. “You said things would be different. You said we’d get married and have a family. You promised you’d make all of my wildest dreams come true.” Tears streaked down her cheeks.

“Are you fucking stupid?” Oliver shouted. “I fed you that bullshit so you’d kill Frankie!”

Oliver's pronouncement hung in the air. Cope was stunned. He'd thought Oliver was hiding the fact that he'd killed his wife. It was a shock to hear Oliver had merely been the spark that lit the flame.

"I killed Frankie, my best friend in the world, for a cheating, lying asshole." Angie's mouth hung open in obvious shock. She sank her head into her hands.

Cope couldn't believe his ears. Angie had killed Frankie? He turned to Jude who looked just as surprised as Cope felt.

"Tell us what happened that day." Fitzgibbon's pen was at the ready.

Angie lifted her head. Her cheeks were streaked with tears.

"I called Frankie to ask if she wanted to go to lunch. Told her I wanted to hear about her trip to Italy." Angie's voice was almost robotic.

Gone was any trace of emotion. "She agreed. I picked her up. We had lunch at Lobster Charlie's.

Then I drove her out to the Salem Towne Forest. Gave her some bullshit line about a rare orchid blooming.

Frankie loved wild orchids. When we got out of the car, we walked for a mile or so.

I pistol whipped her, knocking Frankie to the ground.

While she was dazed I slapped tape over her mouth and wrapped her wrists in duct tape.

I marched her deeper into the forest, past the walking trails, so deep into the woods

that the sunlight barely made it through the trees.

I shouted at her the whole time. I was so angry.

So fucking angry that she had this wonderful life with Oliver and I was all alone.

Frankie was walking ahead of me and I shot her in the back of the head.

I left her where she fell and walked back to my car. ”

“Where’s the gun, Angie?” Ronan asked.

“I drove to Marblehead and threw it into the ocean.” Angie turned to Oliver. “I trusted you.”

“That was your first mistake,” Oliver said, an evil grin spread over his face.

“Angela Melton,” Fitzgibbon began. “You’re under arrest for the kidnapping and murder of Francesca Adams.” He pulled out his handcuffs and slapped them on Angie’s wrists. Fitz read Angie her rights as he marched her out the front door.

Oliver laughed as Angie was being led out of the house.

“What the hell could possibly be so funny?” Jude asked.

“Angie just confessed to murdering my wife. That frees up Frankie’s insurance money. I’ll finally be able to live the kind of life I want. Free and easy. With ten million dollars in my pocket.” Oliver laughed again.

“I know the perfect thing you can spend that money on.” Jude’s face was blank, but Cope knew it was just an act.

“Oh, yeah? What’s that? A new boat? A swinging bachelor pad in Florida?” Oliver smiled from ear to ear.

“Your lawyer.” Jude stood up and unclipped his handcuffs.

“Oliver Adams, you’re under arrest for conspiracy to commit murder, first degree murder, and for accessory after the fact in the murder of Francesca Adams.” He grinned as Ronan yanked Oliver out of his chair and held him while Jude cuffed him. “You have the right to remain silent...”

Cope stayed in his seat as a screaming Oliver was taken out of his house.

He didn’t need to see Angie and Oliver put into police cars, there was more important business to attend to.

While Angie and Oliver told their twisted stories, Frankie had watched it all from a spot near the stove. “Are you okay?”

“I am,” Frankie agreed. “What’s going to happen to them?”

Cope had seen it all, courtesy of his gift.

“Angie will plead guilty to your murder and testify against Oliver on the condition she remains free until her child is born. The baby, a daughter she’ll name Verity, will be raised by her sister in South Carolina.

Angie will serve a life sentence. Oliver will go through a splashy trial and will be found guilty on all three charges.

He’ll spend ten years in jail and will be murdered by his cellmate. A man named Gideon Wells.”

“Oh, Gideon,” Frankie whispered, sounding heartbroken. “He used to come into Sea Witches with his mother and would carry her shopping basket. I’d heard rumors that he sold drugs, but he was so kind to his mother.”

Cope nodded. “Gideon loved seeing you at the food pantry. You never once judged him or his mother. Killing Oliver is his way of avenging you.”

“I’m not sure how I feel about that.” Frankie paused. “No, that’s not true. I’m Italian, I want Oliver to rot in hell for hurting me and our daughter.” As Frankie spoke, the white light appeared.

Cope felt the warm glow on his face. A small girl stepped forward wearing a purple flowered dress. She wore her blonde hair in pigtails and was the spitting image of Frankie. “Come on, Mommy, heaven’s waiting for us.”

“Amelia?” Frankie’s smile lit up her entire face. She rushed toward her daughter and scooped her up. “My sweet girl.” Frankie set her daughter down and turned to Cope. “Promise me you’ll tell my parents we’re okay.”

Cope, too overcome with emotion to speak, placed his hand over his heart and nodded.

With a laugh, Frankie grabbed Amelia’s hand and ran into the light.

Cope felt tears dripping down his face. A hand on his shoulder startled him. He looked up to see Jude standing beside him. “How much of that did you see?” Cope reached for a clean napkin and dabbed at his teary eyes.

“I heard laughing and saw the light fade. Then there was this feeling of peace. I can still feel it.” Jude wore an awed look.

“That’s always my favorite part.” Cope stood from his seat and wrapped his arms around Jude. “Thank you for letting me work on this case.”

“I’m so proud of you.” Jude held his husband tight.

“Let’s go see Dante and Sofia Conti. Then we’re going home to our kids. I’m gonna hug the stuffing out of them!”

“Me too!” Jude agreed, leading Cope out of the house.

Walking outside, Cope saw two Salem Police cruisers pull away from the house. One carried Oliver Adams, the other Angie Melton. Other officers stood in the driveway with Fitz and Ronan. Several more police cars lined the street.

Oliver and Angie were going to spend the rest of their lives behind bars, while Frankie spent eternity with her daughter. Justice had finally been served.

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Several days later...

“Happy Birthday, dear Lizbet! Happy Birthday to you!” Everyone sang to the birthday girl, whose mouth was smeared in orange frosting.

Lizbet started to cry when Jude pulled the cake away from her.

“Welcome to the terrible twos,” Ronan said, grabbing cake plates, while Jude sliced up the Nemo cake. “Here you go, Lizzy B!” He set the first piece of cake in front of the birthday girl, who dug in with both hands. Soon all of the kids were served. Cope ran around the table scooping the ice cream.

Jude took a piece of cake and was taking a bite when Ronan burst out laughing. He hauled Fitzgibbon into his arms and started dancing him around the kitchen.

“Do I even want to know what this is about?” Jude asked, when Ronan let Fitz go.

“You definitely do!” Ronan said, slapping Fitz on the shoulder.

“Are you getting promoted? Don’t tell me Cisco’s stepping down and you’re taking his place with Ronan taking yours?” Jude knew Ronan would be a kiss ass captain.

“This is better than that!” Fitz laughed.

“Oh! Ronan’s leaving.” Jude swiped a hand over his brow. “Phew! Imagine how much more we’ll get done when we don’t have to listen to his whining.”

“I don’t whine.” Ronan rolled his eyes. “I’m just dramatic.”

Jude didn’t have the time or the energy to debate the point with Ronan at the moment, but he would definitely circle back later. “Okay, so what’s the news?”

“Jace and I are going to be fathers again.” Fitzgibbon grinned happily.

“What?” Jude laughed. He hugged Fitzgibbon the same way Ronan had. “I thought you were undecided about having another baby.”

“Jace is retiring from the Tremont Street Mission.” Fitz sounded as shocked as Jude felt.

“You’re kidding!” Jude couldn’t believe his ears. He figured the only way Jace would ever leave the shelter was in a body bag.

“It’s going to take a few months for him to get everything settled. He’ll still serve on the board , but that won’t take up the kind of time he was devoting to it before.” Fitz shook his head in obvious disbelief.

“Congrats, Fitzzy, that’s really great news.” Jude felt almost jealous. With Lizbet firmly in the toddler stage, he wouldn’t mind having another baby of his own to cuddle.

“What’s even better is that I can keep working. I’ll take time off when the baby comes, but we’ll still be the Three Musketeers.”

“Are you going to go the surrogate route or are you going to adopt?” Jude asked.

“We’re going to adopt. We’re working on our application now. We’ve kept up our foster parent certification, so that should make things a little easier, but we’ll see what happens.”

“That’s great news.” Jude couldn’t have been more thrilled for his friends.

“I want you both to promise me something.” Fitz looked back and forth between Ronan and Jude.

“Anything! Name it,” Ronan said. Jude nodded his agreement.

“If Cope or Ten get a vision about this, don’t tell us. We want all of this to happen organically by surprise.”

“You got it,” Jude agreed. He had no doubt that any information Cope did get would be shared with Ten, and vice versa. It was going to be hard with four people knowing the secret, but that was a worry for another day.

“If you need help with Aurora and sibling rivalry, I’ve got you. We went through it with Everly when Ezzie was born.”

“I started seeing a therapist a few weeks back to talk out my feelings on adopting another child,” Fitz paused, as if he were expecting Jude or Ronan to offer their two cents.

“We’re going to move on to telling Aurora and everything that comes along with that now that our decision has been made, but the two of you will be my first phone calls when jealousy rears its head. ”

“Prezzies, Dada!” Lizbet shouted from her throne.

“Yes, princess!” Jude bowed and headed for his daughter. The pile of presents in the living room was taller than Lizzy B herself. He wiped his daughter’s mouth before pulling her out of the high chair. The other kids ran ahead, while Jude snuggled his daughter. “I love you, little girl.”

“Ya ooo!” Lizbet said, and pressed a sloppy kiss to Jude’s cheek.

“Did you just say, ‘I love you?’” Jude couldn’t believe his ears.

“Ya ooo, Dada!” Lizbet set her hands on either side of Jude’s face. “Prezzies!”

“Let’s go open your presents!” Jude set Lizbet down and watched her run to the pile of gifts her friends and family brought. There were almost as many kids as presents and with one more on the way, their family was growing again.

After losing both of his parents when he was a child, Jude never imagined being part of a loud, raucous, amazing family like this one. As far as he was concerned, the more, the merrier.

THE END