



# Ghostly Death (Ghostly #7)

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**Category:** Suspense Thriller

**Description:** When teenagers start dying around town, its up to Detective Angus Young to figure out if the cases are connected and who would want them dead.

Lance is one of the citys medical examiners and has a talent he doesnt share with many people — he sees ghosts.

Helping his boyfriend figure out who wants these kids dead just became his number one job. He can see some of their ghosts, and one of them just might be the key to breaking this case wide open.

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## Page 1

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Lance stepped back from the autopsy table and nodded to Kyle who was assisting him. "You able to finish?"

"Yeah, I'll get him back in the drawer. What's next?" Kyle asked.

Lance rolled his shoulders. It was only around ten in the morning, but he already felt as if he'd put in a full day. "I'm supposed to sit in on interviews with Sam. Go ahead and have a long lunch. We'll be at least a couple of hours."

"Bet you'll be happy when we finally get someone to work the front desk and you can have Carrie back." Kyle focused on the body as he spoke.

"I don't mind working with you, but it will be nice to have Carrie assisting again instead of having to work the front desk. We shouldn't be using our intern as an assistant. Brayden's here to train as an examiner, not hand us tools and prep things. He's been great stepping in where needed, but he's not learning the way he needs to by assisting us." Lance watched as Kyle worked.

"Hopefully, we'll hire someone in the next day or two." Kyle held up crossed gloved fingers. "Someone who won't quit two weeks later."

Lance agreed. They'd hired a young woman several weeks ago to replace their old receptionist and she'd been amazing. Took to the job like she'd been doing it her whole life and handled the families of the deceased gently. Then after two weeks, she'd called in and quit without giving a reason or any notice. That put Carrie back to working at the front desk and had Sam and Lance starting the interview process again. Luckily, they had several applicants from the first round they could interview.

"Enjoy your lunch. We'll get to the next autopsy once I'm done with Sam."

"Actually, you won't be doing interviews," Carrie said from the doorway.

Lance jumped at the unexpected voice. He took a deep breath as he tried to relax. It had been almost two months since the morgue had been taken hostage, but he still struggled at times to feel safe at work. They had plans to make the building more secure, but funding was an issue. Sam was doing his best to get things underway, but he could only do so much on his own without the mayor and city council approving his plans. He turned to look at Carrie. "I won't?"

"Nope, we just got a call for a pick up. Since Sam has to be here for the interviews, you get to do the dirty work today." Carrie gave him a sympathetic look.

Lance sighed. He hated going out to pick up bodies. He didn't like having to deal with upset families or crowds gathered around watching from a distance. It was part of his job, and he did it when it was needed, but he usually let Sam go out when it was possible. He didn't have a choice in this, so he nodded. "Do we know anything?"

Carrie glanced down at the paper in her hand. "Address is in a residential neighborhood. That's about all I can tell you."

"Let me wash. Then I'll head out. You coming with, Kyle, or do I grab Brayden?"  
Lance glanced back at him.

"Take Brayden. He needs the training in body pick ups. I'll finish here and either take lunch or find something else to work on." Kyle smiled. "Have fun."

"Thanks." Lance's voice was full of sarcasm as he walked over and took the paper from Carrie. Nothing about picking up bodies was fun. Though, maybe with his ability to see ghosts, it might be different. It wasn't often he saw the ghosts of the

deceased when working, but it happened. Not that he'd be able to speak to the ghost or let on one was there. Very few people knew of his ability, and he planned on keeping it that way.

"I'll let Brayden know he's with you. He's been helping me out front." Carrie wandered off.

Lance set the paper down before moving to the sink. He quickly took off his surgical gown before washing his hands and arms. Hopefully this wouldn't take long. He'd been looking forward to sitting in on interviews. It was shocking to see what kind of people applied to be a receptionist for the Medical Examiner's Office. They'd hired several people, but for one reason or another, they just hadn't worked out.

Lance hurried to his office, grabbing his cell phone from the drawer, then headed back to the front office to get the keys to the van. He glanced at the clock that hung on the wall over the main desk and was thankful that it was early in the day, and he wouldn't have to deal with a ton of traffic.

"Want me to drive?" Brayden held up the van keys from where he leaned against a filing cabinet.

"Sure, if you want. I'm hoping it's a quick in and out and we won't be long. I'd like to make it back for some of the other interviews if I can." Lance glanced over at Carrie. "See if Sam wants Kyle to sit in so he doesn't have to go through them alone."

"Or he can watch the desk and I can sit in." Carrie grinned. "See you two in a bit." She waved as she headed back down the hall.

"Let's do this." Lance led the way down the hallway to the garage where they kept the vans. He settled into the passenger seat. "Looks like that nicer area of town just west of the golf course." He punched the address into the GPS as Brayden hit the button to

lift the large garage doors.

"Do you ever hear about how the person died before going?" Brayden asked.

"Sometimes, but I prefer not knowing. I can go in without any preconceived notions. There are times when the police will give us info, but mostly if we need to bring special equipment. After all, we're the ones who are supposed to give the cause of death, not the police. But they'll sometimes let us know if it's a shooting or if the body has been there for a while." Lance watched as they pulled onto the road. "I'm going to let you take lead on this and I'll assist. It's good training. I know you've gone out with Sam on calls. You let me know what you're comfortable with."

Brayden nodded. "I'm pretty comfortable with things now. The first few times I went out, I struggled. I felt like everyone was watching me, just waiting for me to mess up."

"I still feel that way half the time. That's why I don't go out on many of these. I hate watching the family cry or witnesses freaking out. I had one family member try to demand I give her answers on site. She didn't want me to take the body until I told her what caused the death. We had to have the police restrain her so we could get the body in the van and get out of there," Lance said.

"Well, if you guys do hire me once my internship is done, I'll go out on calls, so you don't have to. I don't mind them." Brayden turned off the main road.

"Deal." Lance stared out the windows, wondering about the market value of the homes in this area. They were much larger than his house. He couldn't imagine living somewhere like this. He barely used the room he had now. Maybe if he had a huge family, but he didn't. It was just Angus and him. Well, there were two ghosts and a dog, but they didn't take up much room.

Lance grinned, thinking about the ghosts he shared his home with. He'd met them over the last year, and they'd become like family to him. They spent most of their time in his backyard.

"What are you grinning about?" Brayden asked.

"What? Oh, nothing really. Was just thinking about how nice it is to be living with Angus finally."

"Has he found a renter for his home yet?"

Lance shook his head. "Not yet. He's had a few college kids interested, but he doesn't want it to end up being a party house. Angus said the boys were hungover when they came to look at the place and talked about how nice his yard would be for parties. Not the best conversation to have with your landlord standing right there."

Brayden laughed. "Right? Besides, college kids would be leaving in a few years. I'd think you'd want someone more long-term."

"He just wants someone that won't trash the place." Lance glanced at Brayden. "How are things going with Christine?"

"Great. We went down to Galveston after we got off work on Friday and spent the weekend there. We didn't get home until around nine last night."

"Sounds like things are going well for you and Christine." Lance was glad to hear that. Christine was a good friend and local pediatrician who, like him, could see ghosts and speak to the dead. Lance was pretty sure that Christine hadn't told Brayden about her ability yet, and that was okay. Lance hadn't told him either. It was something personal that wasn't easy to share with others. He understood Christine's fear of others knowing.

"She's amazing. We have a lot of fun together. I'm going to take her to meet my parents Saturday. It's my mom's birthday and we're having a small party and barbecue. I figure it's laid back enough that Christine won't feel too uncomfortable." Brayden slowed the van as they neared the address. "Mom's a little worried about me dating an older woman, but I've assured her it's not that big a deal."

"Christine is what, five years older?" Lance asked.

"Eight, but seriously, it doesn't seem like it. I like that she's got more experience than me, especially in the medical field. She's so smart. It's the first time I've dated someone that I don't have to change the terminology when I talk so she can understand what I'm saying. I was telling her about that case we had last week. The one where that guy died after poisoning himself accidentally, and she was fascinated by the case. Do you know how nice it is to be able to talk about medical things and bodies and not have her disgusted or confused when I use medical words?"

Lance laughed. "Yeah, I get that. Angus might not understand the terminology, but he doesn't mind the talk about the dead. I try not to get too detailed, but he's sat in on enough autopsies that he knows what I do."

"A few too many police cars for this to be a simple home death," Brayden commented as he parked down the street from the house they were being called to. At least five squad cars and several detective cars were parked along the area.

Lance reached for the bag he needed and nodded. "Angus is here. That means it's a possible homicide. That's his car across the street. I've got our stuff. Let's see what have."

They walked in silence to the front door, pausing to check in with the officer who was at the door, then again to put covers over their shoes. Once inside, Lance took in the scene. To the left was a living room where Detective Amy Burns and Detective

Angus Young sat with what appeared to be two very upset adults. One man and woman, probably husband and wife.

"This way." An officer Lance didn't know gestured for them to follow him.

Lance wished he'd had a minute to talk to Angus, but that could wait. Nothing he would tell him would change what Lance and Brayden had to do now. It was best to go in knowing nothing.

He followed the officer down a long hallway to a bedroom. The room was empty except for the body of a young woman lying on the floor with a belt around her neck. Lance quickly looked around, searching the room. The girl was on her back on the carpeted floor, near the closet. There were no chairs, stools, or other items around her, and no ropes or items from the ceiling to have hung from. Even from a few feet away, Lance could see the bruising on the girl's neck telling him she'd probably either strangled herself or someone had done it to her. He opened the bag he carried and pulled out a pair of gloves before handing Brayden the bag. "Go ahead and get started. I need to find out if someone has already taken photos of the scene."

"I'll do that." A young woman stood in the doorway with a camera in hand. "Sorry, I was hoping to get here before you."

Lance smiled at her. "It's okay. We can work around each other. "We'll let you get some of the body before we do anything." He stepped aside, allowing her into the room.

"So young. Can't be more than fifteen or sixteen," Brayden whispered.

Lance looked at the body of the girl. She was young. Maybe five-foot-four with shoulder length brown hair. He could tell by the coloring of her skin without even having to touch her that she'd been dead for several hours. She wore a pair of sleep



shorts and a peach tank top. Her feet were bare.

Extending his search beyond the body, he saw her bed was unmade, the lamp on the nightstand beside it on. The window to the room was closed, but the full-length curtains were open.

"She wouldn't be strong enough to strangle herself with the belt, would she?" Brayden asked.

"Maybe, but unlikely. The belt doesn't appear to be notched closed around her neck. It's loose. We'll know more when we examine her. At this point, anything is possible." Lance didn't like the feeling he got. It took a lot of anger to strangle another person to death. It wasn't an easy death.

"Go ahead. I'm just going to get some pictures around the room, but you can examine the body." The forensic photographer smiled at them.

"Thanks." Brayden moved in to kneel beside the body.

"Lance," Detective Young called from the doorway.

"Hey." Lance smiled as he saw Angus standing there. He wanted to greet him with a kiss but fought back the urge, needing to stay professional. "What do we know?"

"Not a lot. Elizabeth Bradley, age seventeen. Her parents thought she'd already left for work this morning. She works at a bakery down the street. She was scheduled to be there at six this morning. When she didn't show, the owner, who is friends with Mrs. Bradley called to check on her. Mrs. Bradley came to see if Liz had overslept and found her like this." Angus stared past Lance to where Brayden was examining the body. "Her mother thought she'd left and walked to work like she usually does. Father left for work around seven-thirty and rushed back home when his wife called him about

this. No one else lives in the house. There is a sister, but she's going to school in Houston."

Lance wanted to ask a ton of questions, but not one of them would help on his side of the investigation. His curiosity could wait until Angus got home tonight and they could talk openly without everyone around. "Too young."

Angus nodded and braced a hand on Lance's shoulder. "Do you think you'll get to her today?"

Lance thought about his schedule. "The best I can give you is a maybe. I'll do my best to get to her today, but for sure tomorrow." He could work late if he could get someone to stay and assist him, but even then, he couldn't promise he'd have time today.

"Thanks." Angus leaned in closer. "Any ghost?"

Lance shook his head. "Nothing, sorry." He'd also hoped the girl might have stuck around after death, but so far, he'd seen no sign that she had. "I'll let you know if I see anything, but it's not likely."

"Never is when we need it to be." Angus sighed. "I'll call you later. I'll probably be late getting home."

"Me too, if I can get someone to stay and assist me." Lance didn't stay late often, but there were times it couldn't be avoided. If Angus needed this autopsy done, he'd do what he could to make sure it happened today.

Brayden stood. "I estimate the time of death to be between one or two this morning."

"Last time the parents saw her was around eleven when they went to bed." Angus

leaned against the doorframe.

The woman with the camera looked over at them. "I have dirt on the floor beneath the window. Not a lot, but just wanted to make you aware of it." She'd already set a yellow number marker down in the area.

"Window is unlocked, so if someone came in, they could have come that way." Brayden shrugged.

"Let's get her back to the morgue. Hopefully, we can find more answers once we get a look at her neck." Lance turned to Angus and whispered, "I love you."

Angus smiled and seemed to relax at the words. "Love you too." He gave Lance's shoulder a squeeze, then turned and headed back down the hallway.

"I'll go get the cart. Angus will keep the family distracted while we get her out." Lance hurried back out to the van, grabbing the gurney and a new body bag. He was already dreading the autopsy. Asphyxiation cases were hard. There were layers of neck tissue to peel back and inspect. It would be a good learning case for Brayden.

Lance had learned a long time ago not to come to conclusions too early, but everything he'd seen so far and heard from Angus made him think this was a homicide. That left him wondering what a seventeen-year-old could do to make someone so angry? Was it her boyfriend? A family member? It had to be someone she knew. He'd seen no sign of sexual abuse, but again, he couldn't confirm that without examining the body.

As he wheeled the gurney into the bedroom to get the body, he wondered how Sam was doing with interviews back at the morgue. If they could just hire someone, he'd have his assistant back in a few days. Something in his gut told him he was in for a long week. It was only Monday morning, and he was already busy. It was probably

for the best. He knew Angus well enough to know if this was a murder, he'd put in extra hours as well. Sitting home alone wasn't fun. He might as well be at work too.

## Page 2

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Angus set the last glass in the dishwasher then shut it and dried his hands on a towel. "Now that we have that done, how about a movie?" He glanced behind him to where Lance was sitting at the kitchen table with their dog, Haunt, at his feet.

"Sounds good. I'm so full I'm not sure I could go any farther than the living room." Lance patted his stomach. "That was amazing."

"Thank my mom, not me. She's the one that brought the roast over this afternoon. She called to tell me she'd left it in the fridge, and I just needed to warm it up once we got home." Angus shrugged. "I keep telling her we can cook, but she's convinced we'll starve or live off fast food if she doesn't cook for us."

"I'm not complaining. I love her cooking. Besides, she's leaving town tomorrow. We won't get anything for at least a week. She'll see when she gets back that we're still alive and not starving without her here to feed us." Lance drank the last of his tea before standing and taking the glass to the sink. "I'd offer to make popcorn, but I'm too full to enjoy it right now."

"You and me both." Angus smiled. He loved living with Lance. The newness was slowly wearing off and they'd found a comfortable routine together. He'd never doubted for a minute they'd get along. "Ray and Bethany here?" Angus glanced through the window into the backyard. It wasn't like he could see the two if they were there. Unlike Lance and his mother, he didn't have the ability to see ghosts, and that's exactly what Ray and Bethany were. The ghostly couple lived with them, spending most of their time in the backyard, but would often come in to watch a movie or visit with Lance.

"No, they went out." Lance pulled two bottles of water from the fridge, then headed to the living room. "Some dance class they've been taking."

Angus followed Lance and sat down beside him on the couch. "Maybe we should try a class with them sometime?"

Lance laughed. "Dancing? I mean, I can fake it with the best of them, but I don't think I can do any serious dancing. I'd break your toes, if not your whole foot."

"You're not that bad. We danced on the cruise ship." Angus had loved going to the club on the ship late into the night and holding Lance close.

"Right, after we had too much to drink and I wasn't thinking straight. I can't get drunk before going to a dance class." Lance reached for the remote. "What do you want to watch?"

"See what's new. There has to be something we haven't seen yet." Angus slipped off his shoes and relaxed. It had been a long day, and he was glad to be home. He'd gone over to the morgue to watch the autopsy on the young girl. He hadn't been shocked when Lance told him it appeared to be a homicide. He'd known from the evidence around the bedroom. Someone had come through the girl's window and killed her sometime in the middle of the night. He just didn't know who or why.

"Stop thinking about the case." Lance set the remote down on the coffee table.

"Am I that obvious?" Angus asked.

Lance laughed. "Yeah, you are. I know you well enough to know the look you get when you're thinking about cases. Where was Franks today?"

"He was in court. Probably tomorrow as well. How did interviews go?"

Lance laughed softly. "They didn't. Sam had two no-shows and the other three we interviewed weren't what we were looking for. One guy straight up told Sam that if he wasn't working with the bodies, he didn't want the job. He thought we'd allow him back in autopsy. Then there was the one girl who just wants a job for a few months before she goes off to college, and the other woman who was six months pregnant and not sure she'd be going back to work after having the baby."

"So what are you guys going to do?" Angus asked.

"Sam set up a few more interviews tomorrow. We need to find someone. It's been two months. Carrie is going to kill us if we keep her on the front desk much longer." Lance sighed. "We still have ads out. Hopefully, someone good will apply."

Angus continued to run his fingers through Lance's hair as the movie started. His mind was only half on the movie, the other half was thinking about everything he should be doing. Since he moved in with Lance, he'd put his house up for rent. He still hadn't found anyone to move in. He'd had some local college kids ask about it, but he didn't need that headache. He didn't need the money, but he hated having it sit empty. It had only been up for rent for a few weeks, but he was starting to wonder if he should sell it instead.

The sound of his phone ringing had him tensing. He knew that ringtone. "It's work." He shifted slightly to reach for his phone from where it sat on the coffee table.

Lance sat up, giving him room. "No, not tonight."

Angus sighed as he glanced at Lance. "Sorry." He answered the phone. "Young."

"We've got another murder. Phil's on a case at the racetrack. I need you and Franks on this one," Captain Marshall told him, then went on to give him an address.

"Give me fifteen." He ended the call and set the phone down before standing. "Sorry, I've got to go. I shouldn't be too long. They're calling Franks in as well." He was glad his partner would be there with him. Things would go faster with the two of them working the case.

"I thought Phil worked nights." Lance clicked off the TV.

"He's already on a call out at the racetrack. I'll try to hurry." He leaned over and kissed Lance before heading down the hall to the bedroom. He quickly dressed and made sure he had his wallet, notebook, pen, and gun, then headed back out.

Lance was already curled up on the couch with a book he'd been reading. Haunt had already stolen Angus's place on the couch beside him. "I guess someone's happy I have to go out." Angus ran his hand over the dog's head.

"She's just keeping your spot warm while you're gone." Lance closed his book. "Be careful out there."

"Promise." Angus leaned down and gave him a quick kiss. "Don't wait up." He grabbed his car keys and headed out the door.

Once on the road, he wondered about the case he was headed to. All he knew was it was a drowning. Odd that they would call him out for that. Usually, drownings were accidental. He was curious what had them calling this one murder.

He pulled up in front of a large family home in one of the nicer areas of Fairway. He didn't get many calls out this way. He noticed the medical examiner's van parked across the street, and several Fairway police vehicles around, but he didn't see Franks' car yet. He debated on waiting a few so they could walk in together, but curiosity won out and he stepped out of the car.



It was still light out, the sun dipping into the west. He liked that the days were getting longer, but that also meant warmer. In Texas, that meant hot. He was dreading what the next couple of months would bring. It was just the first part of June, and he was already wishing he could wear shorts and a t-shirt to work.

As he made his way to the front door, he smiled at the officer standing there. "Evening."

"Detective." The man nodded and wrote down Angus's name on his notebook that kept track of anyone coming in or out of the crime scene. "Go straight through. They're in the backyard. Family is in the living room."

"Thanks." He stepped inside and paused to pull out his gloves and take a pair of shoe covers from the box on the table beside the door. From where he stood, he could see an open sliding glass door in the back of the house and hear muted conversations going on. He made his way toward them, glancing only for a second into the living room where a woman cried as she sat on the couch with a towel around her hair and a blanket around her shoulders, while a uniformed officer stood, looking uncomfortable.

"Angus, good to see you." Mack, the night shift medical examiner shook his hand.

"Mack. What we got?" Angus took in the scene. A girl lay on the bottom of the deep end of the pool. As Angus looked closer, he could see she was weighed down with some kind of large bucket that appeared to be attached to her wrist with a chain and handcuffs. "What the hell?" Angus glanced back at Mack.

"It's a bucket of cement. Probably weighs eighty pounds. Officer Tholson is inside changing into his swim trunks. Lucky, he had them in his gym bag in his car. He's going to dive down, cut the chain, and bring her up, then go back down for the bucket." Mack frowned. "Mother came home from work late and found her. The

father is on his way home now."

Angus cringed. "Was anyone else home?"

Mack shrugged. "Not that I've heard, but I just got here. The mother jumped in and tried to pull her out but couldn't manage the body and the bucket together. I'm sure the panic didn't help. She got out and called for help."

"Let me out there." A man's voice boomed from inside the house.

Angus turned and saw a man he'd met just a few months ago while working on another case. He quickly made his way inside. "Mr. Bloomquist." He glanced at the officer who was trying to talk to him, then at the woman who'd been crying as she rushed toward the man.

"Alan..." She threw herself into his arms.

"Patricia, what happened?" Mr. Bloomquist held the woman to him as she cried. "Why are you wet?"

"I tried to save her. I tried, but I couldn't lift everything." The woman sobbed uncontrollably.

"Where is Fiona?" Mr. Bloomquist stared at Angus. "Where's my daughter?"

"Let's go sit in the living room." Angus tried to turn them in that direction. "Please, your wife doesn't need to see out there."

Mr. Bloomquist stared out the door for a long moment, then nodded. "Come, Patricia." He turned her, keeping her tucked up against him as he led her into the living room. Once he had her seated, he looked up at Angus. "What happened? She

called me saying Fiona was dead."

"We aren't sure what happened yet, but yes, your wife found her in the bottom of the pool. Paramedics were unable to help her. I'm afraid she's passed away." Angus wished he knew more. He'd just gotten there. He didn't know what to tell the father other than the truth.

"She was murdered," Patricia cried against his shoulder.

Alan Bloomquist's gaze shot to Angus. "Murdered?"

"Possibly. We don't have a clear picture yet of what happened, but it appears that way." Angus sighed. It could be suicide, but he'd never known anyone to drown themselves this way. It wasn't impossible but wasn't likely. "We'll be able to tell more once the medical examiner is able to look at her."

"What happened?" Alan shook his head. "She didn't like to swim alone. She wouldn't have gone out to the pool without someone with her."

Patricia wiped her tears with a tissue. "She was dressed. Not in her suit. I think someone made her get in. They chained her to a heavy bucket and made her get in."

Again, Alan raised his gaze to Angus. "Is this true?"

"All we know now is that she was found clothed in the bottom of the pool, chained to a bucket that appears to have cement in it. They are working right now to collect all the evidence. The medical examiner will take her and hopefully figure out what happened."

"Cement? Where would that come from?" Alan shook his head.

"We aren't sure." Angus took a seat in a chair that faced Alan and Patricia, then pulled out his notebook. "When was the last time either of you spoke to your daughter?"

"She called me after she got home from dance class. She was upset about something and wanted to cook dinner with me tonight. That doesn't happen often at her age. She seldom makes time to spend with me. I hated telling her that I'd be late. She was going to make dinner and have it ready for us. Then we'd make cookies together for dessert." Patricia glanced at her husband. "I shouldn't have worked late tonight. I should have come home. Maybe if I had, this wouldn't have happened." She started crying harder.

Angus glanced at the uniformed officer standing beside them. "Will you check in the kitchen and see if dinner was made?"

The officer nodded and headed for the kitchen.

"What time did you talk to her?" Angus asked as he saw Franks walk into the room.

"It would have been around three. I can look. My phone would show the time." She searched for her phone, then sighed. "My purse is by the front door. I drop it there when I come in the house."

"It's okay. We'll check it in a few." Angus noticed Franks head toward the backyard. He refocused on the parents. "You said she was upset? Did she say what about?"

"I asked, but she just sighed and said it was just a bad day. I assumed it was something to do with a boy she liked, but I really don't know. I figured I'd talk to her more when I got home." Patricia buried her face against her husband's shoulder.

Angus would have to interview Fiona's friends. Hopefully one of them would know

why she was upset. Did her mood earlier in the day have anything to do with her murder? Did someone threaten her? "Was Fiona dating anyone?" Angus asked.

Alan Bloomquist shook his head. "No, she'd broken up with a guy a few months ago because he moved out of town, but I don't think she'd started seeing anyone else. At least she hadn't told me if she was."

Patrica nodded. "She hadn't mentioned anyone to me. I know the small group of friends she hangs with includes several boys, but I don't think she was interested in any of them."

"Before I leave, I'd like to get the names of the friends you know of hers." Angus figured if anyone knew what was going on in Fiona's life it would be her closest friends. "Did she have a best friend?"

"Becky Gladstone. She and Fiona have been thick as thieves since they were in elementary school." Patricia shook her head as she looked at her husband. "How do we tell her about this? God, how do we tell anyone?"

"I'm only worried about why this happened. I couldn't care less about the rest." Alan stared at Angus. "Someone killed my daughter. I want to know who and why."

"So do I, Sir. And we will do everything we can to find those answers for you," Angus promised. "She was your only child?" He hated asking questions while their daughter's body was still being retrieved, and usually would wait until things calmed down, but right now, he felt it was best to keep them busy and talking so they wouldn't focus on what was going on out back. No parent needed to see their child placed in a body bag and hear the horrible sound of the zipper closing.

"Yes, we were never lucky enough to have more." Alan hugged his wife. "She's all we had."

Patricia cried too hard to speak. Angus understood. He'd do an official interview in the coming days with her once she'd calmed down a bit.

"Detective, the stuff to make dinner is on the counter, but nothing was started," the officer he'd sent to the kitchen told him. "Looks like her purse, cell phone, and backpack are sitting on the table."

"Make sure we get pictures and bag those for forensics." Angus hoped her phone would hold some kind of evidence. He turned his attention to Alan again. "We're going to also need to see your daughter's bedroom and any computer or digital devices she might have used recently."

"She's got a laptop. It's either in her room or in her bag," Alan told him. "There's a family computer downstairs, but she hasn't been on that in a long time. Not since we got her one of her own. She also has one of those Kindle devices. I don't know how often she used it."

Angus made notes, not wanting to forget anything. "Did Fiona have a job or anything?"

Alan shook his head. "She was taking several dance classes over the summer. She's always liked dancing. We told her as long as she was getting good grades and was staying out of trouble, she didn't have to get a job unless she wanted one."

"Her grades were good?" Angus asked.

"Not as good as they used to be, but she passed all her classes last year. We pushed her a little to do better but weren't really concerned." Alan shrugged.

"How was your relationship with her?" Angus asked, trying hard to hear what was going on in the backyard, but not alert the parents so they'd want to go out there.

"I'd guess the same as any family with a teenager. We fight about things sometimes, see the world in different ways, but still managed to get along for the most part. It wasn't uncommon for Fiona to help her mother with things or for them to go shopping together. She wasn't like some kids who refuse to spend any time with their parents. I'm ashamed to admit Patricia was closer to her than I was. But that was because I usually work a lot." Alan kissed his wife's forehead as she still sobbed against his shoulder. "What happens now?"

Angus sighed. He always hated having to tell family members that the medical examiner would be doing an autopsy. No one wanted to think about their loved one being cut open that way. Yet, it was what was going to happen. He could only do his best to word it in a way that might make it easier to hear. "The medical examiner will try to find out exactly what happened to Fiona. We'll investigate the scene and interview her friends. You don't happen to have security cameras set up anywhere, do you?"

"We do. They cover the front porch and part of the driveway. We have a doorbell camera that shows us who is at the door when it rings." Alan glanced over at the hallway as more members of the crime scene unit walked in. "Can I go back there and see?"

"It's best if you don't," Angus warned.

"I need to see..." Alan stood. "I have to know." He quickly rushed from the room.

Angus let him go. Franks was back there and would handle Alan if he lost control or got in the way. He focused on Patricia, who held her head low, wiping tears with an overused tissue. He quickly reached for another from the box on the table and handed it to her. "Can I call someone to come be with you?"

She shook her head, then glanced up and took a deep breath. "I guess my sister. I can

call her. Can you get my purse for me?"

"Of course." He stood and went to the front door, finding it sitting on a small table. He grabbed it and took it back to her. "Before you call, can you give me the time of your last contact with Fiona?"

Her hands shook as she dug out her phone and hit several buttons. She read something and tears again started streaming from her eyes. In a shaky voice she said, "Fiona texted me at eight minutes after three. She'd probably just gotten home. Her dance class ended at two-thirty."

"She drives?" Angus inquired.

Patricia nodded. "The red Toyota out front is hers."

Angus made a note. "Go ahead and call your sister. I'll be right back." He stood, turning to the officer standing in the room. "Keep her in here. I won't be long."

The officer nodded. "No problem, Detective."

Walking out back, Angus made his way to Franks' side. "This is the second teen killed today. It's possible they knew each other."

Franks eyes widened. "The suicide case you mentioned when we talked on the phone?"

Angus nodded. "It wasn't suicide. Lance said the girl was strangled." He watched as Mack zipped the bag with the body inside. The large bucket of dried cement sat to the side. It would also be bagged and taken into evidence along with the chain they'd cut that had held the body and bucket together.



"You think they're connected?" Franks asked.

Angus shrugged. "Timing is interesting."

"And I thought I'd have a nice quiet night." Franks rolled his shoulders. "I'll get officers to talk to the neighbors. Maybe someone saw something."

Angus nodded to Alan Bloomquist, who stood alone, staring at the body bag that contained his daughter. "I've questioned the parents a bit, but we'll come back tomorrow for a formal interview. As of now, I know the house has cameras out front." He went on to tell Franks everything he'd learned while speaking to the parents. "Once we collect evidence, we'll call it a night and start in the morning." He pulled out his phone and sent a text to Lance, telling him that he'd be late and not to wait up.

"I've got court in the morning. You'll be on your own until I finish up there," Franks reminded him.

"Shoot, that's right. Well, I'll find out what I can. If these cases are connected, we need to figure out how and why. I can meet with the family alone if you're stuck at the courthouse all day." Angus smiled at the heart emoji that he got back from Lance.

"I'm hoping to be out of there by noon." Franks stepped back as Mack and one of the officers pushed the gurney carrying the body toward the gate that led into the backyard. The crime scene unit was still around, taking pictures and doing what they did best.

"You don't have to be here. I'm just going to collect the victim's electronics and see if we have anything on the cameras." Angus hoped he wouldn't be on scene too late.

"I'm good for a few. Let's go find her phone and see if she kept any kind of journal in

her room." Franks turned to go inside.

Angus followed, pausing at Alan Bloomquist's side. "Come on inside. Your wife will need you." He gently guided the man back into the house, hating that one of the last memories the man would have of his daughter was her being placed in a body bag.

It was going to be a long night, and with two murders to solve and Franks back in court tomorrow, he'd have his hands full. The fact the dead were kids made it even harder, and he was sure the news would find these cases interesting once word got out, which would just add more problems. The sooner he found the killers, the sooner his life would get back to normal.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Angus cursed whoever had left the coffee pot empty as he walked into the office. It was an unwritten rule that it never sat empty. Franks was in court, so that left Detective Burns or Detective Madison. Considering the half cup of coffee on Detective Burns desk, he figured it was her.

He quickly headed out into the hallway to fill the pot full of water, then back into to the office where he started a fresh pot. He glared at Amy's coffee cup again as he went to his desk to wait while it brewed.

He stared at his computer as he waited for it to load, thinking over what he had to work on today. Things had been quiet recently. Other than an unknown male shooting victim someone had found in a car near the racetrack, they hadn't had any murders. Signs on and around the body found near the track linked the victim to a local gang, but without a confirmed identity, things weren't going anywhere anytime soon.

"Morning." Detective Amy Burns walked into the office.

"You drank the last of the coffee." Angus didn't glance up at her.

"Shit, sorry. My brother-in-law dropped in and took the last of it. I meant to make more after he left, but I ended up walking him outside." Amy glanced at the pot. "I'll make the next pot you finish."

Angus shook his head. "Sorry for complaining. I'm just testy. It was a late night. How's Officer Burns doing?" He knew her brother was a street cop. Angus had worked with him on several occasions.

"We're trying to decide what to do for my mother-in-law's birthday. She'll be sixty." Amy picked up her coffee cup and stood, going over to fill it. She reached for Angus's mug and filled it for him.

"Thanks." Angus took the cup.

"I heard about a drowning last night. Was the body really held down with a bucket of cement?" She wrinkled her nose as she sat back down at her desk.

"Yeah. She's the daughter of Alan Bloomquist."

"The attorney?"

Angus nodded and went on to tell her about Fiona's mother coming home and finding her at the bottom of the pool. "Seventeen, just like the other girl earlier that morning."

"Connected?" Amy asked.

"I hope to find out today. They went to the same school, but that doesn't mean anything. I plan on talking to Liz's boyfriend at ten if you want to join me. I'll ask about her friends then. I figure her boyfriend will know more than anyone about what was going on in her life." Angus clicked to a file on his computer where he'd made notes yesterday. "You left before I did yesterday, and I was still there when Marcus Bradley called to inform Gavin what had happened. He spoke to his parents first so they could be there for him, then told Gavin what happened. Everyone was upset. It was horrible. I know Liz was dating Gavin. I'm told they'd been a couple since eighth grade. The parents said he was like a son to them. They figured the kids would get married once they graduated high school." Angus tapped his pen on the desk.

"Does Gavin have an alibi?" Amy asked.

"His parents said he'd been home all night, but we both know at his age, he could have easily snuck out and been back before the parents woke up. My gut says he's not who we're looking for, but I have no evidence to back that up. We need to go into this with an open mind. I'm very interested in finding out if these two victims knew each other." Angus dropped the pen and reached for his coffee. "This afternoon, I'm interviewing Fiona's parents. I'm not sure what to expect with her father being a big-league attorney, but hopefully, they will be open with us and not play the legal games with us."

"Where's Franks?" Amy asked.

"In court. His testimony got held over a day. He should be back in the office late today or tomorrow."

"Then I'll join you for those interviews if you don't mind the company," Amy offered.

"I welcome it." Amy was great with grieving families and would be a great asset with keeping them calm and comfortable. "I want to drop by the morgue and see if they've gotten to Fiona yet. I mentioned the case to Lance this morning and he promised to put a rush on it if he could."

"They find someone to replace Kathy yet?" Amy asked.

"Nope. Seems they're not having any luck. Lance mentioned they were going to interview more today."

"I'm going to give my sister a call and see if she's interested. She just got divorced and is moving out here in a week. She's been an executive secretary for years. Do you think they'd wait a week or so for her to get here if she's interested?"

"We can ask when we're there. She could interview through Zoom or something. I

know Lance is desperate to get Carrie back assisting him, but for a dependable person who doesn't have some death fetish, I'm sure they'd wait." Angus shrugged. "Can't hurt to ask."

"Death fetish?" Amy wrinkled her brow.

"Yeah, crazy, right?" Angus laughed. "I guess they keep having people interview who just want to deal with the bodies." He shook his head. "I didn't even know you had a sister. Where's she now?"

"Vail, Colorado. She married at seventeen and moved away. Her now ex-husband runs one of the ski resorts in the area. She worked for the same company. The divorce hasn't been pretty. I don't blame her for wanting to move and start over. I never did like her husband. He's one of those men who have to have the best of everything. Flaunt all his money. I don't remember the last time Gretta looked happy. I'm hoping coming here will help. She's going to stay with us for a few months while she looks for an apartment or condo here."

"I've got a house for rent." Angus grinned.

"Too much room for her. She wants to downsize and keep it simple. She doesn't want the upkeep and yard work." Amy stood. "I'm going to hit the bathroom, then we can head out. I'll meet you in the lobby."

Angus nodded, downed the rest of his coffee, then grabbed his things before heading to the lobby. He only had to wait a few minutes for Amy to meet him, then they headed out to the parking lot. "You okay if I drive?"

"By all means, please be my chauffeur today." She grinned. "Just promise me you've got air conditioning."

"If I didn't, you'd be driving us." Angus pulled out his keys and hit the button on the fob to unlock the doors. "You have warned your sister about our heat, right? It'll be a huge change from Vail."

"Oh, I've warned her. She's only been here once to visit and that was in November. She has no idea what she's in for with our summer temperatures." Amy got into the passenger seat.

Angus got in and started the car. "Where are you two from originally?"

"Ohio. My dad still lives there. I tried to get him to move here when Mom died, but he's got a lot of friends back home. He's happy there. I go see him a few times a year. He's coming here for Thanksgiving this year since Gretta will be here." Amy reached out and turned the air conditioner up a couple of notches. "You're lucky to have your parents close."

"I am. I can't imagine it any other way. I love that they're just a few minutes away when I want to visit. They're good about not interfering in my life too much. If they were a pain in the ass, I'd probably feel different about living close." Angus pulled onto the road. It was a short drive to the Medical Examiner's Office. Hardly enough time for the car to cool off.

"Are Lance's parents alive?" Amy asked.

"No, they died years ago. He's got a brother in the Navy but that's it. My mom's adopted him though. You'd think Lance was one of her own kids."

"That's good. It's important that your parents like who you date or marry. My parents hated Gretta's husband. That should have warned her off him, but unfortunately, she married him before introducing him to the family." Amy sighed. "I'm just glad she finally got smart and left him."

"Was he abusive?" Angus glanced over at Amy.

"Not physically that I know of, but mentally and verbally for sure. She was never good enough for him. He wanted that trophy wife he could show off. Gretta tried to be what he wanted, but that's not who she is. She's more comfortable in jeans and a t-shirt. He wanted sexy dresses and heels all the time. He'll find himself some young thing on the slopes to replace her, if he hasn't already. I'm hoping in time, she'll find someone who lets her be herself. Right now, she claims she'll never date again."

"We all go through that after a bad breakup. I imagine a divorce is even more traumatic." Angus pulled into the parking lot of the M.E.'s office and found the closest parking spot. "Ready to get to work?"

"You really think he's got the autopsy done already? It's just after nine." Amy got out of the car.

Angus met her and started inside. "Maybe not but it doesn't hurt to check." He held the door to the main office open for Amy to step inside then followed her.

"Morning." Carrie smiled up from her desk behind the counter.

"Morning." Amy smiled. "Strange seeing you out front."

Carrie sighed. "It's not where I want to be, that's for sure."

"Have you hired anyone yet?" Amy asked.

Carrie shook her head. "We're still interviewing. I think Sam has two more coming in today."

"My sister is going to be moving here in a week and will need a job. She's got office



experience. If she's interested, how do I have her apply?" Amy asked.

Carrie stood up and handed Amy a business card. "The job qualifications are on our website. The address is on that card. Have her look at it and if it's something she might like doing, have her call me directly. I'll set up an interview."

"Could she interview virtually? Like I said, she won't be here for a week." Amy slid the business card into her pocket.

"Sure. I'll even give Sam a heads up that she might apply so he doesn't hire someone in desperation. I can't wait to get back into autopsy, but I'll suffer working out here for another week if it means we get someone hired who will stick around." Amy stood and pushed the sign in log toward Angus. "I'm guessing you're here to see Lance?"

Angus nodded as he signed his and Amy's name on the log. "They haven't gotten through Fiona Bloomquist's autopsy yet, have they?"

"Sam and Kyle have her on the table now. Autopsy room one if you want to view. Brayden and Lance are working on the guy from the raceway in room two." Carrie hit the button that unlocked the half-door that would allow Amy and Angus back so they could get to the viewing rooms.

"Thanks." Angus started back.

"I'll call my sister as soon as we finish here," Amy told Carrie as she followed Angus.

"Perfect. If she's interested, we can set up an interview as soon as she's able," Carrie called to her.

"Think your sister will want the job?" Angus asked as they walked down the hallway.

"Finding a job was her biggest worry. I think she'll jump on it. I'm just not sure if she'll be comfortable working with the dead."

"She won't have to. Kathy, the lady she'd be replacing never went in the back to see the bodies. She stayed in the front office or breakroom. She would have to deal with grieving families, but if she's anything like you, she'd be great at that." Angus pushed a door open and started up the small stairway that led to the viewing rooms.

"Where to first?" Amy asked.

"Autopsy one. I'm hoping to find out if Fiona was dead before she was placed in the pool." Angus opened the door to the first viewing room. He slowly walked in, looking down at the room below him where Sam and Kyle were working.

"Morning, Detectives." Sam glanced up. "Just getting started here."

"Morning," both Amy and Angus said in unison.

"So, you don't know if she drowned yet?" Angus asked.

"Actually, I do. I've gotten far enough that I know she has water in her lungs. I can't give you anything final until I finish, but I feel safe saying this was a drowning. I can't verify as of yet if she was injured or conscious when going into the water. She does appear to have broken several fingernails, and we'll send samples to the lab to see what was under her nails, but by the scratches around her ankle where the chain was, I'm guessing it might be her own skin from where she fought to try and get the chain free." Sam shook his head. "Just when you think you've seen it all."

Angus nodded. "I had the same thought."

"It'll be another hour before I can give you much more." Sam went back to work.

"That's okay. I mostly wanted to know if she was alive when she went into the water. I'll get the final report from you later." Angus didn't need to watch more. He'd seen enough autopsies to not get queasy over them, but seeing a young girl cut open was pushing his limits. "Thanks, Sam."

"No problem. Sorry I don't have more for you." Sam didn't look up at them as he worked.

"I knew it was early." Angus waved him off before nodding to Amy that they should go.

They stayed quiet as they went from autopsy one to autopsy two.

"You're here early." Lance glanced up from where he stood over the body of a man.

"Was hoping for information before I meet with families." Angus took a step closer to the window and frowned. He knew the man on the table. "That's the shooting victim from by the racetrack Phil got called on?"

"Yeah, one shot to the back of the head, execution style." Lance didn't look up.

"Got an identity on him?"

"Nope. He had nothing on him when they found him." Brayden glanced up at them, then back at the chart. "Looks to be around forty."

"I know him." Angus sighed. "At least I think it's him. Jeffery Biggler. I arrested his brother Carl a few years back for murder. Jeffery was one of the suspects at the time. The brothers have ties to the cartel. If she's still around, his mother and sister live just outside of the city." He pulled out his phone and sent a message to Phil. "His prints should be on file to verify it's him."

"We'll follow up." Lance set the scalpel he held down before glancing up. "You get what you need on your case?"

"Enough for now. We're headed to talk to Liz's boyfriend first, then to speak to the Bloomquists. I'll be late again tonight," Angus told him.

"I'll see you when you get there." Lance smiled. "The sooner you solve these murders, the sooner we get our nights back."

"Won't be soon enough." Angus was nowhere close to figuring out who killed either of the girls. "Call if anything pops."

"I will. Stay safe." Lance glanced up and smiled.

"Always." Angus blew him a kiss then turned and followed Amy out of the viewing room, wishing the day was over.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Gavin Ingersoll looked much older than his seventeen years. He stood as Angus and Amy walked into the living room, escorted by Gavin's mother. The kid was tall, towering over Angus. If he passed Gavin on the streets, he would have put him well into his twenties.

"It's nice to meet you, Gavin." Amy shook his hand. "We're so sorry for your loss. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us."

"I'll do whatever I can to help," Gavin told them. His eyes were red as if he'd been crying and he looked exhausted.

"Can I get you anything to drink?" Gavin's mother asked.

"No, thank you," Angus said as Amy shook her head as well. "We just have a few questions for you. We won't take long."

Gavin sat down on the couch. "I wish I knew how to help you."

Amy sat down in a chair across from Gavin and Angus continued to stand since the only other seat was on the couch with Gavin, and he wanted to leave that for his mother.

"You can help by telling us about Liz. Help us understand who she was, tell us about her friends." Amy pulled out her notebook and pen. "You two were dating?"

"We've always been together. We met in seventh grade and started dating right after that." Gavin stared out the living room window. "I was going to propose to her after

we graduated."

"Do you know anyone who was angry with Liz or might have wanted to hurt her?" Angus asked.

Gavin shook his head. "Everyone liked her. She was nice to everyone. I don't have a clue who would want to hurt her."

"Was she fighting with her family or anyone that you knew of?" Amy asked.

"No. She got along with her parents for the most part. They'd argue over things like curfew but never anything major. We did everything together. If someone was angry with her, I'd know. The only time we weren't together was when we were at work." Gavin took a deep breath.

"When was the last time you spoke to her?" Angus asked.

Gavin looked up at him, his eyes glistening with tears. "She sent me a text around midnight, but if you mean talking, I called her around ten. We didn't talk about anything important. Just about how our day was."

"What was her text about later?" Amy asked.

"Just to let me know she was going to sleep. She always sent one right before she went to bed." Gavin's shoulders slumped. "I was already asleep, so I didn't respond."

"What about close friends? Who did the two of you hang out with?" Amy asked softly.

"There is a group of us that hang out a lot. Terrance Jefferies. He's my best friend. And Tom Eckhart. We are all on the basketball team together. Then Liz's best friend

is Gail Smith, but we also hang around with Fiona Bloomquist a lot. The girls are all on the dance team."

Angus exchanged a look with Amy at the mention of Fiona.

"So you all knew Fiona?" Amy asked.

"Yeah, sure. We've been friends with her since our freshman year. Liz knows her better than I do, but she hangs around with us all the time." Gavin looked confused.

"You don't think Fiona killed Liz, do you? She'd have no reason."

Amy shook her head. "No, we don't think that. I guess you've been grieving and haven't had the news on this morning." Amy glanced at Gavin's mother, then at Gavin. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but Fiona died last night."

"What? How?" Gavin's mother threw her hand over her mouth.

"It appears she was also murdered. We're waiting for the medical examiner to confirm everything." Angus watched Gavin closely, looking for any signs of guilt, but the poor kid looked crushed and genuinely upset at the news.

The unshed tears finally leaked from his eyes, and he quickly wiped them away.

"How?" Gavin asked. "Was she strangled too?"

"No, she was drowned," Amy said softly. "She was found in the family pool last night."

Gavin's eyes widened and he shook his head. "Do you know who did it?"

Amy shook her head. "Not yet."

"Do you think that Liz and Fiona's deaths are related?" Gavin's mother asked as she wiped tears from her eyes.

"We're not sure yet. It is interesting that they were friends. How close was Liz to Fiona?" Amy asked.

"Close. They talked almost every day and any time we went out as a group, Fiona was with us. She was dating a friend of mine until he moved away a few months ago. Liz was closer to Gail than Fiona, but they were still really good friends." Gavin looked over at Angus. "Does this mean Gail's in danger? Is someone going after the girls?"

"We don't know right now, but we'd like to speak to Gail if you know how to get hold of her," Angus said.

"Sure. She tried to call me this morning, but I wasn't up to talking so I didn't answer. I bet she was calling to tell me about Fiona." Gavin reached for his phone. He scrolled through some things, then looked back at Angus. "I have her number." He read it to Angus.

Angus quickly wrote it in his notebook. "You said her last name is Smith?"

"Yeah." Gavin set his phone down.

"Can you think of anyone who would have been upset with both girls?" Amy asked.

"No, seriously, everyone liked them. Fiona could be a bit snobbish at times, but not mean. And lately, we haven't been hanging around other people. We usually just head over to Terrance's house and kick back in his basement to watch movies or play video games." Gavin shook his head. "Someone has to let Gail know to be careful."



"We'll call her as soon as we finish here," Angus promised. They'd have to talk to the girl's parents first since she was underage. He didn't like that the two murdered girls were close friends. That meant the likelihood of their killer being the same person was high. What happened to make someone want them dead? Gavin was definitely strong enough to strangle someone and lift the bucket of cement, but Angus just didn't get that feeling from Gavin. His grief was real. Still, he couldn't check him off the suspect list yet. There were still too many unknowns.

"Help us get an idea of who Liz's life. What was her typical day?" Amy asked.

Gavin shrugged. "She'd work at the bakery until around one, then go home. Then she'd usually come over here after she'd changed. Sometimes I'd pick her up from work. We'd hang out here most of the time until everyone else got off work or done doing whatever they had to do, then head over to Terrance's house. He's got a really great set up in his basement. Kinda a theater setting. We could watch movies or game on the big screen. Other nights, we'd head over to the park and the girls would talk while Terrance, Tom, and I played basketball. It just depended on our mood." Gavin sighed. "I wish I could tell you something that would help, but seriously, we were kind of boring."

"Everything you tell us helps us get an idea of Liz's life," Angus assured him.

"And Fiona's," Amy added.

"Fiona didn't always come over to Terrance's. She had a lot going on. She's big into her dance stuff and would have practices or performances all the time." Gavin ran his fingers through his hair. "Gail could probably tell you more about her."

"So Fiona wasn't dating Terrance or Tom?" Angus asked.

"No, she hadn't seen anyone that I know of for a few months. Not since her old

boyfriend moved. I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but you're bound to find out anyway. It's just that Tom's parents don't know, but Tom and Terrance are kind of a thing. I don't think anyone outside of our small group really knows about it though. Terrance's family knows, but Tom's would freak out."

Gavin's mother gasped, then covered her mouth for a second. "Sorry. That was news to me. I had no idea, and I see those boys together all the time. They hide it well."

Gavin blushed. "They didn't want anyone to know. I told them you and dad wouldn't care, but Tom is so scared his parents will find out." He looked at Amy and Angus. "You won't tell them, will you?"

"We'll do our best to keep their secret, but if it's important to the case, it may come out." Amy smiled. "I promise to do our best not to bring it to anyone's attention."

"Thanks. They'll hate me for telling you." Gavin sighed.

"It's easier if we know everything." Angus was sure they'd be able to tell if the boys had tried to keep something from them. It would make them appear guilty if they were withholding something like that. It was better to know upfront. Angus would do everything he could to keep Tom's parents from finding out.

"Any other secrets we should know?" Amy asked.

Gavin shook his head. "No. We really just sit around and game most nights. Nothing exciting. We all got along. I seriously don't think any of us would kill someone. The biggest fight we get into is who gets the last slice of pizza."

"Where were you last evening? Did you leave the house at all yesterday?" Angus asked.

Gavin shook his head. "I was here all day with my parents. After I heard about Liz, I sort of lost it. Terrance and Tom came over around four and stayed with me until about eight or so. Gail called to check on me earlier in the day. She was really upset. She didn't find out until she got off work and got a message someone had left her."

Amy nodded. "Anything else you can think of that we should know?"

"Not that I can think of." Gavin glanced over at his mother.

"If we think of anything, we will call you," his mother promised.

"Then we'll let you go. We might contact you again if we have questions. And you can call us anytime." Angus handed Gavin his card. "We're so sorry for your loss."

"Thanks." Gavin took the card.

Gavin's mother stood. "You'll contact Gail, right? Should I call her mother and warn her?"

"No, let us do that. We'll call her as soon as we leave here," Amy promised.

They said their goodbyes and headed out to the car. Once back on the road, Angus glanced over at Amy. "Give Gail a call and see if we can meet with her."

Amy pulled out her phone and took Angus's notebook to get the number. "What does your gut tell you?"

"Nothing, and I hate that." Angus frowned. "I don't think Gavin is our suspect, though he's strong enough to have killed either girl. His grief is too raw. Besides, he was home with his parents, and I don't think they'd lie for him. He also gave the two other boys alibies if they were with him last night when Fiona was killed."

"She was last heard from around three in the afternoon, right?" Amy asked as she dialed. She held up a finger as she focused on the call.

"Gail, this is Detective Amy Burns. We were hoping to be able to sit down and talk to you about Elizabeth Bradly and Fiona Bloomquist. Could you give me a call back as soon as you get this?" Amy left her number, then ended the call. "Voicemail. We'll give her a bit to call us back, but if she doesn't, I think we should head over to her place and at least talk to her parents."

"Agreed. Let's grab something for lunch, then head back to the station. We'll have to get Gail's address. I'd also like to set up interviews with Terrance and Tom as soon as possible." Angus sighed. "We should have gotten their numbers from Gavin as well."

"We'll call him if we can't get them on our own." Amy set her phone in the middle console drink holder. "Hit that taco stand near the station. I'm burned out on burgers."

Angus did as he was told, wishing he could grab lunch with Lance. He hoped he was having a better day than he was. The day was barely half-over and he still had a ton to do.

## Page 5

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It was just after four as Lance finished his last autopsy for the day. He smiled at Jeremy, the ghost who haunted the Medical Examiner's Office. He'd died at the young age of twenty-four from a massive heart attack. Since then, he decided instead of moving into the light, he'd stick around and learn all about being a medical examiner. By watching over Lance's shoulder, he'd become quite good at diagnosing deaths. Sadly, Lance was the only one who could see or speak with him, and Jeremy couldn't do more than watch since he was a ghost.

"You have plans tonight?" Jeremy asked.

"No. Angus will probably work late. I'm just going to go home and do some laundry. Might mow the front yard if I find the motivation." Lance left the scrub room and headed to his office. Keeping his voice low so no one would think he was talking to himself, he asked, "You want to come over?"

"Not tonight. Going home for a bit." Jeremy walked through the wall of Lance's office.

Lance pushed his door open and joined him. "The offer stands. You know you can drop by anytime. Bethany and Ray are always happy for company."

"Yeah, I'll be there Friday. You said Cel is going to be there?" Jeremy appeared to lean against the wall.

"She's teaching me to make pepperoni pizza pasta. She says we eat too much pizza and need to find other ways to deal with our cravings." Lance grinned as he sat down. "It sounds interesting. So far, she hasn't had me make anything bad, so I have to trust

her."

"God, I wish I could eat." Jeremy appeared to pat his stomach.

A knock on his door had Lance sitting up straight. "Come in."

"Hey, Lance. I hate to do this to you, but Sam is already gone. We just got a call for a pick up. Kyle will go with you." Carrie gave him a sympathetic look. "It's under the Fairway Bridge."

Lance groaned. "A jumper?"

"Sounds like it. I didn't get much info. They said to take the utility road on the south end. It's narrow, but you can get the van through."

"Yeah, I've been there a few times. Sadly, it's a common area for pick ups." He'd handled more than his share of suicides from that bridge.

"I'd go with, but it's my mom's birthday party tonight. I want to be there," Jeremy stated.

Lance ignored him since Carrie couldn't see or hear him. "Where'd Sam go?"

"He had a dentist appointment. He thought making it later in the day would be safe. Figures the one time he leaves early, we get a call." Carrie handed him the information she'd written down. "Kyle's out front. Ready when you are."

Lance made sure he had his phone as he stood. "Sooner we go, the sooner I'm home." He nodded to Jeremy as he left the office. He wanted to say goodbye, but with Carrie right there, he couldn't. "You staying late?" he asked Carrie.

"Not unless you need me to do the intake. I'll go as soon as Mack gets here." She glanced over her shoulder at him.

"Nah, I can handle that. No point in you hanging around. I'll do the intake paperwork." Lance grabbed the van keys from Carrie's desk. "Ready?" he asked Kyle who was leaning against the front counter.

"Yep, want me to drive?" Kyle asked.

"You been beneath the bridge before?" Lance asked, knowing the road there was tricky going down from the bridge.

"A few times. I'm good." Kyle caught the keys as Lance tossed them.

"See you tomorrow." Lance nodded to Carrie before following Kyle out to the garage and into the van.

"Hope you didn't have plans tonight." Kyle started the van and hit the button to open the garage door.

"Nope, laundry can wait." Lance doublechecked they had everything they needed, then clicked his seatbelt into place. Once they were on their way, he sent a quick text to Angus to let him know he was working late. When he didn't get a text back right away, he figured Angus was working late as well. He'd expected that. With two murder cases in the last twenty-four hours, Angus would be deep into investigations.

"I don't even want to think about laundry. I'm flying out to Phoenix Friday night and laundry is just one of many things I need to do before I go." Kyle focused on traffic which was heavy due to everyone getting off work.

"Another art show?" Lance had yet to see any of Kyle's paintings, but they had to be

good considering the amount of time he spent at art shows.

"Yeah, this one is a pretty big deal too. It's invite only. I'll be back Sunday night late. I've already shipped the paintings there. I just have to approve their placement once I get there." Kyle sounded excited.

"We're going to lose you, aren't we? You'll go off and be some famous artist and leave the dead bodies behind," Lance teased.

"Not yet, but hopefully someday. Right now, I make enough painting to survive, but just barely. I need to keep my job at the morgue for now. I'm not saying I won't ever quit, but it won't be anytime soon." Kyle slowed for a red light. "This is two calls you've been out on in two days. That might be a record."

Lance laughed. "No, when Sam's on vacation I've been busier, but it is rare I'm out this much when he's around. I can't complain. He's good about taking all the calls so I don't have to. I don't mind picking up the slack when I need to. I'm not looking forward to this one though. Jumpers are never fun, but hopefully there won't be family around to have to deal with."

"I'm just hoping this one hasn't been there for days." Kyle grimaced.

"Yeah, me too." Lance didn't want to deal with a body that had been in the heat for days. His phone dinged and he smiled seeing it was Angus letting him know he'd be a few more hours as well. It would probably end up being one of those nights where they got home just in time to slide into bed and say goodnight to each other.

"Must be Angus. You always get that silly grin when he messages," Kyle teased.

"I hope the day never comes when I don't smile at his messages. I know we've been together about a year, but I still feel the same as when it was new." Lance was



happier than ever now that they were living together.

"That's the way it should be. Do you think you'll get married someday?"

"I'd like to, but we haven't really talked too much about it. I think he'd like to as well. I wouldn't mind adopting a kid or two down the road and doing the whole family thing." Lance liked the idea of having kids running around the house and yard.

"I can see that for you two. You'd make great dads, though with your careers, you'd both be over-protective."

"Probably. I know how easy it is to die doing stupid, simple things, and Angus knows how easy it is to go down the wrong path into a life of crime. We'd probably never let our kids leave the house." Lance laughed. "Maybe we should stick to having a dog instead."

"You only have the one dog, right?" Kyle turned off the main highway onto the small utility road that would take them to the area below the bridge.

"Yeah, she's enough for now. I hate that we aren't home more often to spend time with her." He wasn't about to tell Kyle about the ghosts who kept his dog, Haunt, company when he couldn't be there. Thankfully, animals could see and interact with ghosts. "Long way down." Lance arched his head to look out the window at the bridge.

"Yeah, I hate suicides, but jumpers are the worst. I wonder what they're thinking as they drop. I'm so scared of heights I wouldn't walk across that bridge, let alone jump from it," Kyle said.

"Yeah, same." Lance took in the bridge. It was an old railroad track that was no longer used. The train used to pick up and drop off at an old refinery that had been

abandoned when Lance had been a kid. He'd been to the bridge as a teenager, drinking a few beers with friends as they looked over the area. Beneath it was a narrow gorge, the riverbed dry. He'd only seen water in it a few times in his life when the area saw heavier rain than normal.

Kyle slowed the van, parking behind one of two police cars. "I'll grab the gear."

"Thanks." Lance climbed out of the van and headed toward where two officers stood talking to a man dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. A baseball cap hid half his face from view, but Lance was pretty sure he didn't know the man. A few feet from them, the body of the jumper lay crumpled and bloody on the hard dirt, blood soaking into the ground around a massive head wound. What he didn't expect was the ghost of a young girl pacing back and forth beside the body. He nodded to the men as he came to stand beside them. As badly as he wanted to talk to the ghost, he couldn't with others around.

"This is our M.E.," one officer said to the plain clothed man, then looking at Lance he continued. "This is Terry Williams. He saw the girl jump and called it in."

"I didn't jump! I was pushed," the ghost girl cried. "I didn't jump!"

Lance's eyes widened just a bit as he glanced her way, but he quickly looked back at Terry and offered his hand. "I'm sorry you had to see that."

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing." Terry shook his head. "I was just out for a walk and happened to look that way. I saw her falling. I hurried over here, praying she was okay, but..." he trailed off as he looked at the body.

Kyle walked up, bypassing them and going directly to the body. Lance watched as he parked the gurney and then set the bag down on the ground. Lance was sure Kyle could do everything himself if he was allowed to, but without a license, Kyle could

only assist.

"If you could see if she's got any I.D. on her, that would help." One of the officers turned to glance at the body.

"I'll see what I can find." Lance left the group and headed over to where Kyle was. He needed to speak to the ghost but couldn't until he was alone with her or was sure no one was watching them. Having heard her say she was pushed, he was going to look at this as a murder, not a suicide. Not that it would really change anything he had to do, but since there wasn't a crime scene team looking around, he would do what he could to look for any evidence.

"She looks young." Kyle stared at the woman's body. Her long brown hair was now coated with coagulating blood, and her legs were both broken with compound fractures. "Looks like she landed on her legs, then her head hit that rock." Kyle gestured to a bolder a few inches from the woman's head.

"I didn't feel the pain." The ghost of the girl stood behind Kyle.

Lance glanced up at her and gave a small smile.

Her eyes went wide. "You see me?"

He barely nodded.

"But the others don't, do they?" She walked closer to where Lance was pulling on his protective gear.

"No," he whispered.

"You have to tell them that I didn't jump. I didn't commit suicide." Her eyes glistened

as if filling with tears.

Lance had seen this before. There were no tears to fall, yet the ghost appeared to have tears in her eyes. It was the strangest thing. He glanced back at Kyle, making sure he wasn't paying attention to him. When he was sure he wouldn't be heard, he whispered to the ghost. "Stay with me. I can help, but not here." He pulled what he needed from the bag and went to the body. He looked at Kyle. "Glance around and make sure nothing flew off the body when she hit. Look for a purse or something. Maybe jewelry."

"On it." He stood and started wandering the area around the body.

"My wallet is in my backpack. I don't know where it ended up." The ghost's voice broke with emotion. "He hit me when I was getting into my car after work. I came to as he was dragging me onto the bridge."

Lance glanced up, surprised at what she was saying. It was the middle of the day. Who would be brave enough to kidnap someone from their work, then drag them unconscious to a public bridge? Sure, the area was quiet and didn't have a lot of people around, but still, it would have been risky. Someone could have seen them. Lance was sure there were cameras on the bridge. At least there had been a few years back when he'd dealt with another suicide case.

He finished the exam and then checked her pockets to see if he could find any I.D.. As the girl had told him, there was none. She had a small notepad in her pocket along with a pen that now leaked ink all over Lance's gloves. "I need an evidence bag."

One of the officers hurried over and held one open for him to drop the notebook in. Then opened another for the pen so it didn't leak ink onto the notepad. "That it?"

Lance nodded. "Didn't find any I.D. The notepad appears to have a bunch of numbers

written in it. I didn't see a name anywhere. Hopefully, her prints are in the system, but as young as she appears, it's doubtful."

"Should I go into that light?" the ghost asked.

"Not yet!" Lance said loudly, then cursed himself for speaking out loud.

"Not yet, what?" Kyle asked.

"Was just thinking out loud." Lance laughed at himself. "Sorry." He ducked his head as he prepared the body to be moved, only glancing up once Kyle had moved to pull the gurney closer. Lance met the ghost girl's stare. "No light. Not yet. I need to talk to you first." His voice was barely a whisper, but she nodded, letting him know she'd heard.

The light was something every ghost saw. Most walked into it directly after dying. He was told it was warm and welcoming and called to a ghost to enter it. He figured it was the portal to whatever came next. Not every ghost went into it. Like those who lived with him, they ignored it. The light never went away, but he heard it got easier to ignore it the longer you went without entering it. It was something he couldn't see.

Kyle helped him get the body into the bag, then onto the gurney. Lance took a moment to look around the area before saying his goodbyes and following Kyle back to the van, making sure the ghost was with them.

Once they had the body loaded, Kyle climbed back into the front seat. "I hate suicides, but when they're young like this one, it's even worse."

Lance nodded, though he was aware this was a murder, not a suicide. The issue would be how to prove that without any evidence. They couldn't use a ghost's testimony as official evidence. He was going to have to pray he could find the area

she'd been hit and knocked out during the autopsy and that it would show she was injured before falling from the bridge. The likelihood of that was going to be slim with the amount of head trauma there was.

Lance quickly pulled out his phone and sent a text to Angus.

Lance: I have a ghost who claims she was murdered. Appeared to be suicide. I'll be at the morgue another hour or so. If I don't see you there, I'll bring her home with me.

Angus: On my way to your office now .

Lance: Doors are locked. On my way there. Meet me by the back garage. About ten minutes away.

Angus: Thumbs up emoji.

Lance smiled and set his phone back into his pocket.

"Must have been Angus to get you to smile like that." Kyle grinned.

"It was. He's meeting us. Hopefully, once I get this intake done, he and I can grab dinner and head home. He's got two cases that have kept him busy. I'll take any time with him I can get." Lance hated that he was just about to add a third case to Angus's pile, but he couldn't ignore a ghost's claims. It was something they had to investigate.

He settled back, taking the time to relax, because something told him that the rest of the evening wasn't going to be as easy as dinner and kicking back at home.

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The last thing Angus had time for was a trip to the morgue, even if he wanted to see Lance and get at least a hug and kiss before he jumped back into case files. Still, if he had a ghost claiming they were murdered, he had to listen. He could have easily waited for Lance to bring the ghost home and talk with the ghost later, but he had no clue who this ghost was and if it was someone they'd want to know where they lived.

He pulled up by the back of the Medical Examiner's Office and parked, wishing there was shade. It was hot. Too hot. His dress shirt stuck to his body, and he needed a shower seriously bad. He still had stuff to do before he could go home. He'd been waiting for Gail Smith to get back to him, but when she hadn't, he'd arranged to meet with her family this evening. Being a minor, it was only right to let her parents in on what was going on and alert them that there could be a risk to their daughter since her two best friends had already been killed. He'd found out that Gail got off work at four. He arranged to be at her place by seven, hoping she'd have at least called him by then, but so far, he hadn't heard from her.

In the rearview mirror, he saw the Medical Examiner's van pulling up to the large garage door. He waited for it to open, then walked inside as it parked. A second later, Lance climbed out of the passenger seat, and Kyle from the driver's side. "You're working late?"

"Sam had a dentist appointment and this call came in right before I was going to call it a night." Lance leaned in and kissed Angus quickly. "Thanks for coming by. I just need to get this body in and we can talk."

"No problem. I have a meeting at seven, but I'm all yours until then." Angus stepped back as Kyle and Lance pulled the body from the back of the van. He kept his

distance as they rolled it into the morgue.

"Guess that means dinner is out." Lance glanced over his shoulder.

"Yeah, I can grab something on the way home if you want." Angus hadn't even had time to think about food, but he was hungry.

"I'll grab something from that Italian place and have it ready for you when you get there," Lance told him. "I'll be done long before you are."

"Thanks. I shouldn't be too late. I'll wait for you in your office for now. Take your time." He watched as Kyle and Lance pushed the body into the back where the bodies were held for autopsy. He had no idea what they had to do when a body came in. He figured there had to be a shitload of paperwork to do. He entered Lance's office and sat down, wondering what this ghost had to tell him. It wasn't often that Lance came across a ghost in the morgue who claimed to be murdered, but this was hardly the first time. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes, wishing he could take just a short nap, but there wasn't time. He had less than an hour to get to the Smith's home. He'd sent Amy home. He could handle a simple interview himself. Tomorrow, Franks would be back and things would get back to normal. Busy, but normal.

"You look exhausted." Lance moved into the office and shut the door.

"I am. It's been a long day." Angus sat up straighter.

"And here I am making it longer." Lance kissed him before moving to sit behind his desk. "I haven't had time to talk to the new ghost. We were called to pick up her body under the Fairway Bridge. We assumed she was a jumper, but she claims she was pushed." Lance glanced to the other side of the room where the ghost must have been standing.



Angus was used to being unable to see them since he'd grown up with his mother seeing ghosts, but he still wished he had the ability. It would make things so much easier if he could question the ghosts without a go-between. "Let's start with her name and age." Angus pulled out his notebook and pen.

"Just so you know, we weren't able to identify her on scene, so you can't let on you know her name until we find another way to identify her." Lance glanced to where the ghost was standing. "I'm Lance and this is my boyfriend, Detective Young. He can't see you but knows I can. We'll help you if we can. What's your name?"

Angus waited in silence while Lance listened and made his own notes on a pad on his desk.

"She says her name is Gail Smith and she's seventeen. She was—" Lance started.

"Wait." Angus held up a hand. "Gail Smith?"

"Yeah? You know her?" Lance asked.

"It's her family I'm scheduled to meet with tonight. I wanted to question Gail about her friends' murders and warn her to be careful." Angus ran his fingers over his short hair and sighed. "Well fuck. This changes everything."

"Are you talking about Fiona Bloomquist and Elizabeth Bradley?" Lance asked.

Angus nodded.

"She knows about both deaths. She found out on the news this morning while she was getting ready for work. She thought about calling in sick, but knew they were already short staffed, so she went in. She was planning on going over to talk to Gavin tonight once she got home and changed." Lance leaned back in his chair. "She didn't think

she was at risk."

Angus nodded as he tried to think how to handle this. He couldn't go see her parents and tell them she was dead. How would he ever explain that a ghost told him? If her body had no I.D. on it, he had no choice but to wait and let things play out as they normally would. The family would have to report her missing, then be notified that the medical examiner had a body matching her description. It was going to be a long, drawn-out mess. "She said she was murdered?"

"Yeah, we all thought she was a jumper. It's what most of us think when we get a call for a body under the bridge, but she was very vocal that she was pushed. She didn't jump." Lance seemed to be listening to Gail as she spoke to him.

"She left the nursing home she works at around four and was walking to her car when she was hit from behind. She remembers pain on the back of her head, then nothing until she came to as someone was dragging her to the bridge. He never spoke or said anything as he pushed her from the bridge. She tried to fight but was in too much pain and confused."

"Were you able to see the person?" Angus asked the ghost even though he couldn't see her.

Lance shook his head. "She said he was wearing a black ski mask. He had on gloves and a long-sleeved shirt. She gripped the arm of his shirt as she was pushed, trying to hold on, but it tore."

"Make a note of that. If she tore his shirt, she might have held the material in her hand until she hit the bottom." Angus made a note in his book. "Is she sure it was a man?" He was already pretty sure whoever was killing these girls was a man due to the strength needed to strangle someone and maneuver that large bucket of cement, but he couldn't be one-hundred-percent sure.

"No, but she thinks it was. He was bigger than her. Not much, but his arm felt stronger, and he moved her easier than she would think a woman could. He was dragging her, but she got the feeling he wasn't much taller than her," Lance told him. "Are there still cameras on the bridge?"

Angus shrugged. "Last I knew there was, but that's been ages ago. I'll find out. My problem now is that I know she's dead, but I can't let on it's her until she's identified through non-paranormal connections. I'm going to have to go meet with her family tonight. Question them about Fiona and Liz and warn them to tell Gail to be careful. They'll have to report her missing tomorrow and go through the proper channels." He sighed and looked over to where he thought Gail was standing. "I'm sorry I can't do more. I will investigate your murder off the books for now. That way we'll be ahead once we finally identify your body." He had no idea what he could really do until she was identified, but the fact she was dead told him they had a possible serial killer on their hands. He could call in the feds once he confirmed her death was murder. He glanced at Lance. "Will you be able to tell if she jumped or was pushed?"

Lance shook his head. "Doubtful. Her body was a mess. I'll try and look for trauma to her head that happened when she was hit from behind, but even that will be hard to find considering the damage from the fall. I'll do her autopsy first thing in the morning. Until then, I'd like to invite her home with us, if you're okay with that."

"Sure, I don't mind. I have more questions for her that I don't have time to ask right now. I need to go speak with her parents. That's not going to be fun since I have to keep quiet about her death for now. Introduce her to the others and have them help her adapt. I'm sure she has a million questions." Angus was glad that Ray and Bethany lived with them and were always willing to help a new ghost understand what it was like to be dead. He stood. "I'll be home as soon as I can. I'll try and figure out a way to start investigating things without drawing attention to myself." He leaned in and gave Lance a soft kiss, aware Gail's ghost was watching them. He pulled back and turned to where he figured she was. "I'll do my best to help you. I'm

guessing whoever killed you also killed Fiona and Liz. We just need to figure out who that person is. We'll talk more when I get home tonight. Thanks for sticking around to help."

"See you in a few hours. Go out the back door in the garage. I've got to find Mack and talk to him before I leave." Lance smiled.

Angus nodded and left the room, wondering how things always ended up so get so crazy. Having ghosts around did help in the long run, but it made things so hard at first because he couldn't use what they told him until they found a way to do it by the book. He made his way out of the building and to his car, cursing the evening heat that had it feeling like a sauna. He started the car, leaving the door open until the air conditioning pushed the hot air out. He had ten minutes to get across town to the Smith's house. Once there, he'd act as surprised as they were that Gail wasn't home yet. He'd tell them to search for her car at work and along the way she usually drove home. He hoped they'd find it in the parking lot of her work. Even more, he hoped there were cameras there showing her getting attacked. It was the break they needed. So far, they had no information about the killer other than the little Gail had just given him.

Traffic was heavy, but he still managed to make it across town in time to pull up in front of the Smith's home at seven. Like her other friends, the home was in the upper-class area of town where the richer families lived. He hadn't had time to find out what the Smiths did for a living, but he would in time. He sat for a moment, dreading what he was about to do. He hated himself for lying to a family when he knew their daughter was dead, but if he went in telling them he'd seen her ghost, they'd think he was crazy. He'd show up to work tomorrow with orders to go see the shrink. He didn't have a choice in this, no matter how crappy it was.

With a sigh, he forced himself to get out of the car and head up to the door. He rang the doorbell and waited only a few seconds before a man answered. He wore a very

expensive suit as he smiled and pushed the door wide. Angus smiled. "I'm Detective Young. I spoke with your wife earlier today."

"Yes, she told me you'd be dropping by. I'm sorry, but Gail isn't home yet. We've tried to call her, but if she's working, she doesn't always check her messages. She was supposed to be off at four, but it's not uncommon for her to work extra shifts if she's needed. I hope that won't be a problem. Please, come in." The man stepped back, allowing Angus inside.

"It's not a problem, but I will need to speak with her at some point." Angus smiled again as a woman stepped into the entry hall. She was short, probably no more than five feet tall and several inches of that was due to the hairstyle she had. She was also dressed nicely in a simple but beautiful summer dress.

"I'm Stephanie Smith, and you met my husband, Fred." She gestured to the living room. "We can speak in here. Can I get you anything to drink?"

"No, thank you." His gut was churning already because of the lies he was about to tell. Okay, so he wasn't going to really lie, just omit a few things, but it still left him sick to his stomach. This nice couple's world was about to spin out of control as soon as they found out about their daughter. He took a seat on the couch and pulled out his notebook. "I won't take much of your time. I'm just following up on a few things since Gail was good friends with Fiona and Elizabeth."

"We're heartbroken about their deaths. I can't imagine who would want to hurt them. Do you have any leads?" Stephanie asked as she sat down on the love seat with her husband beside her.

"We're working on that." Angus assured them. "You knew both girls?"

"Oh, sure. They've been coming around for years. Liz and Gail were best friends. I

didn't know Fiona as well, but she was always nice when she was here. The girls would usually spend most of their time in Gail's room, but they'd stay for dinner sometimes. I'm not sure what I can tell you that might help." Stephanie shrugged.

"That's really why I was hoping to talk to Gail. Had she mentioned any issues or problems she or the other girls had recently?" Angus asked. "Trouble with a boyfriend or someone one of them worked with?"

"No, not that I was aware of. Gail hasn't dated much. I thought she might be interested in that sweet boy, Terrance, but she swore they were just friends. Told me Terrance was interested in someone else. Gail is mostly focused on her job. She works at Fairview Care Center helping with some of the therapy and stuff they do there. She wants to be a physical therapist and thought this would give her a head start. Honestly, she works so much, her time with her friends has been half of what it used to be. And I know Fiona had dance classes that kept her busy. Liz and Gail always make time for each other, but you know how it is at their age. I never know what they're up to. I was so upset when I heard about Liz. I thought Gail would take a few days off work to grieve, but she refused. Said she was needed at work, and it would be easier if she was there instead of home crying all day." She put her hand to her mouth and shook her head. "Listen to me go on."

"It's okay. This is all stuff I need to know." Angus smiled at the woman's embarrassment, then hated himself because he shouldn't be smiling when this woman's daughter was dead, and he couldn't tell her. God, he really hated this. They should be mourning their daughter right now, not laughing about things. It was all he could do not to tell them the truth. "I'll speak with Gail later and find out more about her friendships." It wasn't a lie. He'd interview Gail as soon as he got home. It just wasn't in the way the parents expected. He couldn't stay any longer or he'd be at risk of telling them everything. He slowly stood and offered his hand to Fred. "Thank you for taking the time to speak with me."

"I'm sorry we aren't more help. I'm always at work, and well, you know how teenagers are. Between work and friends, we're the last to know anything." Fred slid his arm around his wife's waist. "Feel free to call us if you have any more questions, and we'll make sure Gail calls you as soon as she gets home. Well, probably tomorrow morning since it seems she's working late tonight."

"That will be fine. Just tell her to be careful. We don't know who is doing this or why. She needs to be alert at all times," Angus warned.

"Is our daughter in danger?" Fred asked, a look of concern finally showing.

"Yes, right now, everyone is in danger. There is a murderer out there and Gail and her friends seem to have caught his attention. Be alert." He swallowed hard, again wanting to tell them the truth. He turned for the door. "I'll see myself out." He wasn't usually so rushed when leaving an interview, but he needed to get out of the house now before he did something he couldn't take back. He quickly made his way to his car and locked himself inside. He started the car and pulled away, not even giving the home a final look. This went against everything he stood for as a cop, and as a man. What if it was his child? He slammed his fist on the steering wheel as he pulled out of the neighborhood. He'd made a lot of mistakes in his life and done a lot of stupid things, but never had anything made him feel as guilty as this did.

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Lance walked into the house and gave Gail a warm smile. "Welcome to my home. Please make yourself comfortable. The only room off limits is my bedroom." He laughed as Haunt ran up to greet them. "And this is Haunt. She thinks she owns the place."

"She's so cute." Gail bent down and pet the dog. "She can see me too?"

"And feel your touch," Bethany said from the living room. She walked closer. "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you."

Lance saw the hesitation in Gail as she stood and took a step back. "It's okay. This is Bethany. She's one of the ghosts I told you about who lives with me." He saw Ray step up beside Bethany. While Bethany looked like any woman you'd see around today, Ray was from a different era. Dying over a hundred years ago, he still chose to where his newsboy hat and knicker pants. "And this is Ray." He met Ray and Bethany's curious gazes. "This is Gail. She was pushed off a bridge today and didn't survive. Angus and I are trying to help her, but I thought you two might be able to help her with a few ghostly tips too."

"Oh, honey, you just died? I'm so sorry. You're probably still in shock." Bethany walked up to her and appeared to put her arm around Gail. "Come on in back and we'll talk. I'm glad Lance brought you home with him." She led Gail through the house and into the backyard. Haunt followed, leaving Ray and Lance watching them.

"She's had a rough few days. Her two best friends were murdered yesterday, and then today she was pushed off a bridge. It was labeled a suicide until Angus or I can prove she was pushed. As of right now, Angus and I are the only ones who know her



identity since she didn't have any on her when she died. Angus will want to talk to her when he gets home, but for now, maybe you two could help ease some of her fears?" Lance carried the takeout bags to the kitchen.

"Sure thing. Will she be staying the night?" Ray asked.

"That's up to her. I'll drive her to her house if she wants to be with her family once she speaks to Angus. Right now, she's just confused and upset. She asked me on the way home why her two friends weren't around if they'd just died. I tried to explain about the light, but I think you'll be able to help her understand better than I ever could." Lance watched Bethany and Gail appear to sit at the outdoor table. Haunt stayed right by Gail's side as if she somehow knew she needed her support.

"We'll help her adjust. It can be very confusing at first. How long had she been dead before you found her?" Ray asked.

"Maybe an hour or two. Someone saw her falling and called it in, so it wasn't long. Just the time for the police to get there and call us." Lance put the food in the fridge, unsure how long it would be before Angus would get home.

"Ooof, so very new. I'm glad you found her and brought her here." Ray shook his head. "Horrible when the young are dying long before their time. Has Angus got any new leads?"

"Not that I know of, but we didn't have a lot of time to talk. Gail was there and we were focused on her. I'll find out more tonight when he gets home. He wants to interview Gail tonight, but I think time with you and Bethany will help calm her. I wish the other girls had stuck around to be here with us. Maybe one of them saw their killer."

"I trust Angus to figure things out. Gail will be okay once she accepts that she's dead.

Once you interview her, she can decide to stick around or move on. Her friends will be in the light waiting for her." Ray smiled. "Go shower. I'll go see what the girls are talking about."

"Thanks, Ray. I don't say it enough, but I'm glad you're here." Lance wished he could hug Ray. "You're the best friend I never knew I needed."

Ray laughed. "I wandered for a hundred years, and it took meeting you to find my home. The feeling is mutual. Now go wash the death off so you can eat." Ray floated through the wall and into the backyard.

Lance headed down the hall to his room and stripped out of his clothes. A hot shower was always first on his agenda after getting home. He didn't get dirty at work really, but he always had the scent of death on him. At least he thought he did. Angus swore that wasn't true, but no matter what, Lance wanted his shower.

He relaxed in the water longer than he should have, leaning against the tile and letting the water run over him. It was going to be a long night. Probably a long week with three murder cases going on. Angus would put in long hours and get little sleep. Lance understood why, but he hated it when they didn't get time together at night. It was when he was able to recharge and just forget everything with Angus by his side.

Refusing to get caught up in negative emotions, Lance shut off the shower and stepped out, quickly drying himself off. He knew what he was getting into when he fell in love with Angus. He wouldn't want him any other way. He cared about his cases and finding the killers. It wouldn't be long before things were back to normal, and they'd be curled up on the couch together again.

Once dressed, he wandered out back and took a seat at the table with Bethany, Ray, and Gail. He was glad to see Gail looking a bit calmer than she had been. The nervous energy was gone as she asked Ray and Bethany more about a ghost's

abilities.

"How come you can see us, but others can't?" Gail asked him.

"I'm not sure. I had a bad car accident and soon after, I was able to see ghosts. There are a few of us who can see you. Angus's mother can, and I know a few others who can, but I don't think there are many like us around. I thought I was going crazy and seeing hallucinations at first. Angus's mother came over and talked me through it," Lance explained.

"Are there a lot of ghosts around?" Gail asked Bethany.

"More than you'd think. Did you meet Jeremy at the morgue?" Bethany asked.

"He wasn't there. He went home for the night to be with his family. He should be back tomorrow. Cel is coming over on Friday. She's a ghost who is teaching me to cook. And there are a few others around. Angus's mother has a ghost who lives with her named Betty. They're out of town right now, but if you stick around, you'll meet her."

"I'm not sure if I'm going to stay here. I like the way the light feels, and if Liz and Fiona are in the light, I want to be with them. I'll stay to find out who killed me, but after that, I think I'm going to go." Gail shrugged. "I think I'd get bored here alone."

"The choice is yours. You're welcome to stay here with us until you decide. If you want to go home to your house, I can drive you over later. Just know that you won't be in the way here if you want to hang out with Bethany and Ray." Lance never minded peaceful ghosts around. It was rare he found angry ghosts, but there had been a few he wouldn't invite to his home.

"Thanks. I'm not sure what to do. It's not as if my parents can see me. They won't

even know I'm there." She sighed. "They don't even know I'm dead yet."

"We'll try and get your body identified as quickly as we can," Lance promised. "It won't take long once they realize you're missing."

"They'll know something is wrong when I'm not home by ten tonight. I sometimes stay and help get dinner out, then if there's an evening activity, I'll stay for that. I just hope they don't think I killed myself because I was upset over Liz and Fiona dying. Someone has to tell them that I didn't jump." Gail stared at Lance. "You have to make sure they know."

"I think they'll be able to tell something isn't right. Let the police do their job. Angus will do everything he can to show you didn't go there on your own. I don't know where there were cameras, but if there are any, he will look through every single one for video of you." He wanted to assure her they'd prove she was murdered, but he couldn't.

"Thanks for being so nice about this," Gail said softly.

"Of course. You've been through so much the last couple of days with losing your friends, then being kidnapped and killed. I'm glad I could at least introduce you to Ray and Bethany to help you understand things."

"It helps knowing I'm not alone." She smiled at Ray.

"No matter what you decide, you won't be alone. You have us here, and if you go into the light, you'll have friends and family there help you," Ray told her.

They talked a while more, then Lance excused himself and went inside. As much as he wanted to wait for Angus to get home to eat, he was starving. He pulled his lasagna out of the fridge, slid it on a plate and put it in the microwave. While he

waited for it to warm, he poured himself a glass of lemonade. He drank half of it before the food was done warming. He refilled the glass and sat down to eat. It was funny how eating alone was now such a lonely thing. He'd gone years before meeting Angus where he'd come home to an empty house and spend every evening by himself. Now, he was so spoiled by having someone by his side, that the few nights they couldn't be together seemed to drag on forever.

He finished eating and grabbed the novel he was reading and curled up on the couch. Haunt hadn't left Gail's side, so for once he had the couch to himself and took advantage of it, lying back as he lost himself in the story so he would quit worrying about Angus.

It was almost an hour later when Lance heard Angus pull his car into the garage. He set his book down and stood, going to the door that connected the garage to the house to greet him. As the door opened and Angus walked in, Lance knew it had been a horrible day. He could see the lines around Angus's eyes deepen, the color of his skin a bit paler than usual, and the slump of his shoulders, bearing unseen weight from whatever information he'd been carrying all day.

"Hey." Angus gave him a small smile.

"Hey back." Lance frowned. "Bad day?"

"Possibly the worst of my life." Angus tossed his keys on the small table beside the door and stepped into Lance's arms.

Lance hugged him, feeling how drained Angus was. He wondered what had happened since he'd seen him just a few hours ago to cause him to be so stressed. "What can I do?" He brushed a kiss over Angus's neck.

"Nothing. No cure for this." Angus sighed as he pulled back. "It's an internal dilemma

I have to sort out."

"Let me get your dinner warming and we can talk." Lance started to turn away.

Angus gripped his arm. "No food. If I tried to eat, I might throw up. My stomach is twisted in knots right now. I need to sit for a bit before I even think about food." He made his way to the living room and sank down on the couch.

"What happened?" Lance sat down beside him.

"I can't do this. I just can't." Angus closed his eyes as he leaned his head back on the couch.

"What?" Lance rested a hand on Angus' thigh.

"What I did tonight. I went and spoke to Gail's parents, knowing she was dead, but acting like everything was just fine. They're going to spend the night wondering where their daughter is, if she's okay, and I could have just told them the truth, but because it would label you and me crazy, I couldn't say a word. I can't do that again. It's not right. Maybe I should have sent Mom over to talk to them, but I hate putting that on her."

"She left town this morning anyway, but I get what you're saying. My moral issues aren't as severe as yours. I'm just doing an autopsy on a Jane Doe that really isn't a Jane Doe. In the end, she'll end up in the right hands, but for you, it's different. I don't know how to solve the issue. Maybe I stop telling you when a ghost shows up. I'm not sure. I had no idea when Gail spoke to me today that she would end up being involved in the case you were actively working."

"You had no way of knowing. This isn't your fault. I want you to tell me when a ghost has information. More than once, it's helped me solve a case. This one

though..." Angus shook his head. "I've never had to outright lie to a child's parents. They're sitting there right now, still expecting their daughter to walk in the door, and I know she's not going to be doing that."

"You didn't have a choice. You couldn't tell them without making you look either guilty or crazy. Tomorrow, we'll figure out a way to identify her and right this wrong. I get how horrible it is and how wrong it feels, but you really didn't have any other options."

"It makes me want to quit my job," Angus admitted.

Lance didn't know what to say. How was he supposed to respond to that? "This is a rare case. It may never happen this way again. You had no way of knowing it would turn out this way when you set up that interview. Normally, if you knew a person was dead, you'd wait to talk to the family. You could have postponed the interview, but that would have seemed strange to do so late. By the time you wake up, they'll have reported her missing and I'll do her autopsy first thing. She's already on record with a preliminary description. Once she's listed as missing, it will be a matter of a few phone calls to confirm we have her."

"I know. I just felt like shit looking them in the eyes and knowing their daughter was dead. Now I'm going to have to sit down with them again for a much darker interview and watch them grieve." Angus sat up straighter. "I'll work through this. Right now, it just sucks I had to do that. Is Gail here?"

Lance nodded. "In back with Ray and Bethany."

"I need to talk to her. Whoever pushed her probably killed Fiona and Elizabeth too. I want to find out what she knows before she might go into the light, and I lose my chance."

"I'll grab her." Lance stood and went to the back door. He smiled seeing Gail on the ground, petting Haunt. "Hey, Angus is back. He'd like to ask you a few questions if you're up to it."

"Sure." Gail floated up to appear standing. Haunt stood, still staying right by her side. "Can she come in?"

"Of course. She's got full run of the house." Lance grinned at the dog who was supposed to be his, but clearly belonged to the ghosts. If they ever moved on, the damn dog would be heartbroken.

"Do you want us to come with you?" Ray asked Gail.

"Please." She nodded.

Lance turned and headed back inside. He found Angus still on the couch, but with his notebook out and ready to get to work.

"Hi again." Gail sank down on the floor beside the coffee table and Haunt settled beside her. "How were my parents?"

Lance quickly started repeating what Gail said so Angus could hear.

"Good, they think you stayed late to work. I'm so sorry I couldn't tell them the truth." Angus seemed to know where Gail was because of how Haunt was acting.

"No, that's okay. I don't want them to be sad. The longer they go without knowing, the better. I hate how upset they'll be when they find out. And if they believe I jumped, it will be even worse."

Lance repeated everything she said.



"We'll do all we can to prove you didn't commit suicide. I'll start looking for camera feeds as soon as I get into work tomorrow. Do you remember seeing anyone when you left work? As you walked out the door, was there anyone there or anything that seemed out of place?" Angus asked, getting right to the questions.

"Not that I remember. I went out the side door because that leads to the back parking lot where employees park. There was a silver car parked by the curb, but that wasn't strange. People always park there when they're picking up or dropping off employees. I didn't see anyone in or around the car though. I looked across the lot at my car, stepped off the sidewalk, and that's when something hit the back of my head. I think I cried out, but then I don't remember anything until I was being dragged to the bridge." Gail moved her hand along the back of her head, but her ghostly hand appeared to move through her head instead of rubbing it.

Lance again told Angus everything, pausing as Angus wrote things down.

"Tell me about that. What happened when you started to wake up?" Angus asked.

"The pain was so bad. I was being pulled by my hair. I fought to get away, grabbing at the person's arms. I think it was a guy. I clawed and tried to get my feet under me, but he was moving too fast. My vision was blurry. I'm not sure if it was because I was crying or bleeding. I think I was bleeding. I know I was crying. I knew I was outside, but I didn't know where I was until I saw the train tracks. Then I saw he was pulling me onto the bridge. I fought harder, but he lifted me like I weighed nothing. I knew I was going over the railing and tried to hold on to him. I remember his shirtsleeve tearing, then I was falling. I don't remember anything after that. It took me a few to realize I was standing outside of my body, staring at myself crumpled there. I was in shock and couldn't understand for a bit. It wasn't long before some guy ran up, freaking out as he called the police. I just stood there watching until Lance got there and could see me." Gail grinned at Lance. "I'm glad you came. I wouldn't have known what to do. I was scared to go into the light because I wanted to know who

killed me and wasn't sure I could find out if I went to it. I also hoped I could find Fiona and Liz, but I guess they didn't stick around."

Lance explained everything to Angus, then focused on Gail. "Tomorrow, I'm going to do your autopsy. Hopefully, we'll be able to let your parents know your body is at the morgue. You don't need to be there for any of that. You're free to stay here with Ray and Bethany or I can drive you to your parents and you can be there with them. It's up to you."

"Once we figure out where your car is, and see if there are cameras, I'll start investigating who grabbed you. Just the fact that you died a day after Fiona and Liz makes your death curious. We'd investigate it anyway just because of your link to the other girls," Angus told her.

"Is it true that Liz was strangled, and Fiona drowned?" Gail asked.

Lance repeated her question.

"Yes, that's all true," Angus confirmed.

"Did you talk to Gavin, Tom, and Terrance?" Gail asked.

Again, Lance told Angus what she asked.

"I did talk to Gavin, but he didn't seem to know anything. Why? Is there something I should know?" Angus asked.

"Well, it's just strange. A few weeks ago, we were all talking, and we had this conversation about what would be the worst way to die. I'm scared of heights, so I said falling. Liz said choking because you wouldn't be able to get air into your lungs and would know you were dying. And Fiona, she's scared of water. She will swim,

but only if someone is with her. She said drowning would be the worst for her."

Angus sat forward as Lance repeated everything. "Who was all there for that conversation?"

"Just the six of us," Gail told him. "But I don't think any one of the guys would do this to us. I mean, I trust all of them. I can't see why one of them would want to hurt us."

Lance repeated everything, stunned at the news. This had to have something to do with the case. He stared at Angus. "That can't be a coincidence, can it?"

Angus shook his head. "I wouldn't think so." Angus looked to where Gail was. "Tell me more. Did everyone comment about how they'd hate to die?"

"Yeah, let me think. Um, Terrance said he'd hate to be crushed. Like rocks falling on him or a building collapsing on top of him. Tom said he thought poison would be bad, especially if you could slowly feel it working. Gavin said starvation or lack of water. He went into this gruesome thing about the body starting to shut down and devour itself." She frowned. "This means the guys are at risk too, right?"

"I think it would mean exactly that," Lance said after telling Angus what Gail had said.

"I'm not going to ignore it. I'll talk to them in the morning and warn them to be careful. I wonder why Gavin didn't mention this to me when I interviewed him." Angus set his notebook down. "Was anyone else there at the time?"

"No, not with us. His parents weren't home. They were hardly ever home until late. Like nine or ten most nights. That's why we'd go over to Terrance's house. No one would bother us." She looked troubled. "You can't think one of the guys did this to

us."

Lance repeated everything, wishing he could comfort Gail. Bethany and Ray were standing behind her, but even they could only listen. There was nothing that was going to make this easier on Gail.

"I have to investigate all angles," Angus told her.

"Well, I know it wasn't Gavin or Terrance who had me. The guy wasn't tall enough. Even Tom is tall, but not as tall as the other two. I just don't think any of them would hurt us. We were close. And there is no way Gavin would hurt Liz. They were so in love." Gail appeared to bury her face against Haunt.

Lance had seen too many cases where a couple was supposedly too in love to harm one another but ended up doing so anyway. He was sure Angus would investigate each of the boys and look into each alibi. He figured it was no coincidence that they'd had the conversation about dying and then suddenly started dying exactly how they most feared. He finished telling Angus everything. He saw the added stress on Angus's face as he got more information. Knowing Angus as well as he did, he was sure he wanted to go back out and talk to the boys now, but it was nearing ten at night and everything would have to wait for tomorrow.

"Is there anything else you think I should know? Anyone who had a problem with you guys or threatened one of you?" Angus asked.

Gail shook her head. "No, things were good. I can't think of anything. We would have talked about it if something happened, or someone had a problem."

Lance shook his head at Angus. "She said there is nothing she can think of." He then turned his attention back to Gail. "Did you want to go home tonight or stay here?"

"It's okay if I stay here? I think I'd get lonely at my parents since they can't see me. I don't want to sit in the dark alone. I kind of want to go with you tomorrow for my autopsy, if that's okay." Gail shrugged. "I'm just curious."

Lance learned long ago that ghosts weren't as queasy about death and dead bodies as the living were. "I don't think you should sit through it all, but if you want to, you're more than welcome. I won't be able to talk to you much while I'm at work, but there is a ghost who stays at the morgue you can visit with if he's around."

"You'll like Jeremy. He's cool," Ray said. "But you're welcome to stay with us if you want."

"Thanks. I'll decide in the morning." Gail kept petting Haunt.

Lance gave Angus's thigh a pat. "You hungry yet?"

"No, but I need to eat. Let me go shower and I'll try." Angus stood.

Lance got up as well. "You go shower. I'll warm the food."

"You're good at taking care of me." Angus paused to kiss Lance softly. "Thank you."

"It goes both ways. You got me through that migraine last week. It's what couples do. Now go shower and change. You look exhausted." Lance wanted to go with him, wash him, dry him, clothe him, and just let Angus relax, but he was sure Angus would never let him go that far. "Once you eat, we'll head to bed."

"Sounds good." Angus headed down the hall.

"We'll leave you two alone." Bethany stood and called Haunt to her. "We'll see you in the morning."

"Night." Lance watched the ghosts and dog head into the backyard, leaving him to get Angus his food, then tuck him into bed where they both could forget murder for a few hours while they slept.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

"How do you get yourself into this shit?" Franks stared at Angus after he'd explained everything that had happened the day before.

Angus set his coffee cup down harder than he should have. "It's not like I asked for it to happen. I had no way of knowing the ghost that contacted Lance was the same girl I was supposed to interview just hours later." He was so grateful that Franks knew about Lance's ability to see ghosts and he could talk this through with him. They sat in their office at the station going over autopsy reports and pictures of each scene. With the office door closed, they could discuss ghosts without anyone hearing them.

"I leave you alone for one day..." Franks muttered.

"It was two days you were in court, not one. And it's not as if having you around would have changed any of this. Now I have to find a way to investigate Gail's death as a murder since I know it wasn't a suicide. Got any great ideas?" Angus asked.

"Just do it. If anyone asks, tell the captain the truth. You told him about ghosts after the hostage situation. Now's as good a time as any to see if he's seriously going to have your back when you have a ghostly informant." Franks took a long drink of his coffee, then continued. "It's not such a far stretch to investigate Gail's death since she is so closely tied to Fiona and Elizabeth. You'd be crazy not to look into it." Franks stood and walked across the room to refill his coffee. "I say we go out and take a look at the bridge area. See if we find drag marks, or maybe a piece of torn clothing. If we wait, we risk losing evidence. As soon as Gail is reported missing, we start pulling camera feeds of her work and the bridge area."

"I'm shocked they haven't called yet to let me know she's missing. You'd think with

her two best friends murdered that you'd be upset if your kid didn't come home." Angus held his cup out for Franks to fill his as well. "I thought for sure they'd call last night when she didn't get home. Now I don't know what to do."

"All you can do is wait." Franks handed the full cup back to Angus.

"And while I wait, the case grows colder." Angus took the cup. "Thanks."

"Nothing about this case is growing cold. We have Fiona and Elizabeth's cases to work on. I'm sure we're looking for the same killer for all three girls. I say we go and interview Terrance and Tom today. Our killer has to be someone who heard their conversation about ways to die. That gives us three suspects." Franks sat back at his desk. "You don't think it's Gavin?"

"No, my gut says he's telling the truth. I don't think he snuck out and killed Fiona. His parents said he was there with them, and I believe them. Besides, Gail said he's too tall. He's taller than I am. Gail swears it couldn't be any of the guys, but if not them, who? Did someone tell someone about their conversation?"

"Maybe. It's something we can ask about today. For now, call and set up interviews with Tom and Terrance this afternoon, then we'll head out to the bridge and look for evidence since we have a slight risk of rain this afternoon that could wash away any tracks. By the time we're done, hopefully Lance has Gail's autopsy done and her parents have reported her missing. Once they do that, you can let them know they have a body matching her description at the morgue. Then you'll be able to open a third murder case and add whatever we find today to the evidence."

"That doesn't look suspicious at all." Angus sighed.

"So what? You were following a hunch. Captain Marshall will back you, especially if you find anything. Drink up and let's go. We're burning daylight."



Angus rolled his eyes. "I can sure tell that you had two days out of the office."

"I had two days of sitting on my ass at the courthouse waiting to testify for less than an hour. I'm ready to get back to doing something." Franks stood. "Ready?"

With a sigh, Angus stood. He had no idea where Franks was finding the energy, but he'd feed off it. "Yeah, let's do this." He grabbed his stuff and shoved it in his pockets. "You're driving."

"Works for me." Franks walked out of the office.

Angus followed, hoping that they'd find something. He needed something to break. Just one clue to give him direction. He'd set up interviews with the boys as they drove. He wasn't sure if either Tom or Terrance had jobs, but he'd work around them. If things went right, he'd be dealing with Gail's family this afternoon because it wouldn't take long to confirm the body in the morgue was her once they reported her missing. He had no clue why they were waiting. They had to have noticed she didn't come home overnight. As they got in the car, he glanced at Franks. "Do you think I should call the Smiths and see if I can set up another time to interview Gail? They'd have to tell me she didn't come home, right? Then I could tell them I'd check the hospitals, which would include the morgue."

Franks shrugged. "Yeah, that would work."

Angus pulled out his phone and found the Smith's phone number. He hit call and waited several rings.

"Hello?"

"Hi, this is Detective Young. I was hoping to catch Gail. I've tried to call her phone and she isn't answering. I was hoping to set up a time to speak with her."

"Oh, Detective Young, I'm glad you called. Gail didn't come home after work last night. I'm not sure if she went to a friend's house overnight or what, but she isn't answering our calls either. I was just about to call her work to speak to her there. We went to bed early and when we got up, we realized she wasn't home. It's not like her to do that, especially when she has to know we'd worry with all these murders happening." Mrs. Smith sounded calm. "She should be at work now. She'll get off at four. I'll have her call you once I speak with her. I'm guessing her phone is dead."

Angus wanted to tell her it wasn't the phone that was dead, but that would be cruel. "That sounds good. I'll be waiting for her call." Angus thanked her before ending the call. He set his phone down. "Well, that didn't help. They think she was at a friend's place last night and is at work now. Her mother said she's calling her work to speak with her since Gail's phone appears to have a dead battery."

Franks sighed. "You'd think with her two friends murdered that the parents would be a little more concerned."

"I would be if it was my kid." Angus wouldn't have let his kid out if his group of friends were being murdered. He'd keep his child by his side until the threat had passed. He was sure he'd be the most overprotective parent there was. "All I can do now is wait. I tried to move things along, but if they aren't concerned, I can't start calling around to hospitals." He closed his eyes. "Facing those parents last night, knowing their child was already dead and not being able to tell them was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. I hated myself for keeping it from them. I still do. They should know."

"One of the tough parts about having paranormal contacts," Franks told him. "You know if you said something they'd think you were crazy or involved in the murders. There's no way to play this out without letting them piece it together naturally."

"Well, I wish they'd hurry up." Angus opened his eyes and looked over at Franks.

"I'm in the wrong job to be friends with people who see ghosts."

"You're in the perfect job for it. Sometimes you just have to maneuver around things differently. Look at all the good you've done because of it. This one case isn't your normal. It probably won't ever happen again. We'll get through today, then tomorrow you won't have to hold on to the secret anymore." Franks turned down the road that would take them to the bridge.

"That's what Lance said last night about today." Angus sighed. "I know you're right. I just hate it. Even now, we're out here searching for evidence. What if we find something? How do I explain us even being here?"

"We'll deal with that if we find anything." Franks parked the car on the side of the road. "Okay, if Gail was dragged to the bridge, this had to be where the person parked. There's nowhere else."

Angus got out of the car and looked around. It was a quiet road that sat between two yellowing fields of overgrown grass and weeds. The nearest home was nearly two blocks away. "No cameras in the area that I can see, but if I remember right, the city put a couple on the bridge after the kids started coming out here at night to drink."

"Has the gorge ever had water in it?" Franks asked.

"Not that I can remember. When I was in high school, the trains used to still run in this area, but when the refinery shut down, that stopped. It was a popular make-out spot for teens until the cameras went in. We still get some kids coming out here to drink, but they go below the bridge now, not on it. Mostly, it's people jogging the old trails or walking their dogs." He looked around. "If she was unconscious when he got her out of the car or truck, we should see somewhere he started to drag her once he got her out of the vehicle." He walked up and down the side of the road, looking at the long grass.

"Over here." Franks had gone the other direction. "The weeds are all pressed down. Get your phone out. We'll want pictures of this."

"Any shoe prints?" Angus asked as he walked over, switching his camera on.

"Not that I can see, but the weeds aren't as thick closer to the bridge. You said she fought him?"

Angus nodded. "Fought and tore his shirt. So if you see any black material, we'll bag it." They followed the trail of smashed weeds, careful to stay to the side of the path so they didn't disrupt any evidence. "Is that blood?" He paused, seeing something on the blades of long grass.

"Sure looks like it to me. I'll run back to the car and get a vial. We can collect a sample." Franks headed back to the car.

Angus wasn't sure what good it would do. They couldn't turn it in as evidence without there being a ton of questions. At least they'd have it safe to claim they found it later should Gail's parents ever report her missing. Even then, they'd have to prove she was murdered and not just someone upset about her friend's deaths who became suicidal. Why couldn't things be easy?

Franks kneeled, swabbing the blood off the grass and sticking it in the vial before capping it. Even with the blood dry, the swab was able to get a good sample. "I'm going to cut off some of these other areas with blood and bag them, just in case I didn't get enough on the swab." Franks cut the grass low and placed it in an evidence bag. "Would be a lot easier if we had a forensics unit out here with us."

"It looks like she might have started struggling there." Angus pointed to an area about five feet ahead of them where the grass and weeds weren't as evenly flattened. "So she fought for a good twenty feet before he got her on the bridge. Then struggled with

her to lift her up over that railing. That's a good three feet high. Not easy to get someone over if they're fighting you."

"Reaffirming your thinking that it has to be a man." Franks walked ahead.

"It has to be. Even Gail said it had to be a man she fought with. I guess it could be a very in shape woman. It had to be someone who heard their conversation on dying. That's not just coincidence. There are a million ways to kill someone, and yet, each of these girls died the way they feared the most." Angus stood and looked over the edge of the bridge. "That's a long drop onto hard, rocky dirt. We've seen a lot of suicides here and I don't recall ever hearing of a survivor."

"Yeah, me neither." Franks ran his fingers through his hair. "Honestly, unless you're going to jump from the top of one of the buildings, there isn't a better place to end things. What does this girl weigh?"

"I haven't seen her, but I'm guessing not more than one-ten, one-fifteen from the pictures I saw on her parents' wall. She was maybe five-foot-four. That's a lot to lift up and over, especially if they're struggling," Angus said.

"But she was bleeding and injured. A head injury would weaken a person. She wasn't at full strength. Still, I agree with your thinking that it was a male. Probably one of the three boys." Franks stepped back. "Let's go see if Lance has any information from her autopsy, then we'll meet with the other two boys. Maybe, by then, the parents will have called her in as missing and we can move forward. You want to drive down and look at the area where she landed?"

"No, I think Lance would have glanced around. We'll backtrack later if we need to. Let's go see what the autopsy had to show." Angus tucked his phone in his pocket and headed back to the car.

Once on the road, Angus sent a quick text to Lance to let him know they were headed his way. He wasn't sure he'd get it before they arrived, but at least he tried. Gail had gone into the morgue with Lance earlier, but he wasn't sure if she'd stuck around. Knowing Jeremy, the ghost who stayed at the morgue, he was dragging her around, showing her all his favorite places. It wouldn't matter if Gail was there. He couldn't talk to her anyway and didn't really have any other questions for her at this point.

All he could do now was wait. The one thing he wasn't good at doing, but until he could tie Gail's murder in with the others, it would have to wait. He would focus on Fiona and Elizabeth, and hopefully find a break there so he wouldn't have to worry about who killed Gail. That person would already be in jail.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance listened to Gail and Jeremy as they talked. Jeremy was explaining everything Lance was doing since Lance couldn't talk to the ghosts with Brayden assisting on the autopsy. He was surprised Gail stuck around for her own autopsy, but she seemed to be handling it well and asking a lot of questions.

"Are you sitting in on interviews later?" Brayden asked.

Lance refocused and glanced up at Brayden. "The only one I'm aware of is the Zoom meeting with Detective Burn's sister. I'll be there for that. She's supposed to call in around one."

"Have you met her before?" Brayden asked.

"No, but if she's anything like her sister, she'll be great. Better than that one yesterday who wanted to know if she got the job if she could bring her friends on a tour of the morgue." Lance shook his head. "I've met more strange people in the last few weeks interviewing that I ever cared to."

Brayden laughed. "Yeah, there are some odd people out there."

Lance focused on Gail's body. "See here? This is where her head hit the rock when she landed. It appears she hit feet first, then crumpled, then her head hit the rock. See the difference in the damage to this side of the skull compared to the other side? I'm guessing something or someone hit her on the other side before she hit the ground. Maybe she hit her head on the railing when she jumped, but that would be unlikely." Lance already knew she'd been hit on the head before being taken to the bridge, but he couldn't let on he had that knowledge. He had to play this out like every piece of

evidence he found on the body was new information.

"It didn't crack the skull." Brayden looked closer.

"No, but it was bleeding pretty badly. I need to look at the photos we took before we washed the body, but I seem to remember her clothes being covered in blood on this side, where on the other side, the side she hit when she fell, the blood was pooled beneath her head." He was keeping his terminology simple so Gail could understand what he was saying since he couldn't explain directly to her. He'd already warned her he would have to talk as if he assumed this was a suicide until he found evidence it wasn't.

Brayden made a note on the chart they were using to mark injuries. "So, you think she was bleeding before she jumped?"

"It's possible. That along with the broken fingernails and possible skin we collected under her nails makes me suspicious. There is also this bruising on her arms that looks an awful lot like someone grabbed her." He pointed to an area on her upper arm.

"Maybe someone tried to grab her when she jumped and couldn't hold on to her?" Brayden asked.

"Possible. That's pretty shitty of them if they watched her fall and didn't call for help after." Lance reached for the camera to take pictures of her skull. He was desperate to find something that proved she didn't jump.

"Hey, sorry to interrupt, but I thought we'd drop in and say hi." Angus's voice came through the speaker that connected the viewing room to the autopsy room.

Lance glanced up and smiled. "Nice surprise. Good to see you back, Franks."



"Thanks. Even an autopsy is better than sitting in the courthouse all day." Franks looked down. "What you working on?"

"Jane Doe. Found beneath the Fairway Bridge yesterday. A witness saw her falling from the bridge, but I'm not so sure she jumped." Lance was sure Angus had filled Franks in on the case, but he had to continue to play it off as if they didn't know anything since Brayden was there.

"What makes you say that?" Angus asked.

"Broken nails, what appears to have been skin under her nails, and a head injury that doesn't match up with the injuries sustained from the fall. I also noticed her shoes were filled with dirt and dust when we removed them. Not sure how to explain that, but it caught my attention." Lance was sure it was from her being dragged, but again, couldn't comment that.

"She looks young," Franks observed.

"My guess would be mid to late teens." Lance sighed. "Too young, that's for sure." He tried to think of anything else he needed Angus to know, but so far, there wasn't anything he could think of that might help his case.

"You probably already guessed, but I'll be late getting home tonight," Angus told him.

Lance smiled, but it was unseen under his mask. "I figured. Haunt and I will have dinner waiting for you."

"Sounds good. Give me a call later when you get a break. We've got work to do on the Bradly and Bloomquist cases." Angus waved.

Lance waved back. "See you tonight. Glad you're back, Franks. Keep him safe."

"Always." Franks laughed as they left the viewing room.

"Can I go with them?" Gail asked.

Lance couldn't answer but gave a slight nod.

"I'll go with you," Jeremy told her. "Hurry, they won't even know we're with them."

Lance watched the two ghosts float from the room. He took a deep breath and got back to work. He let Brayden do most of the work, learning how to identify common injuries from a long fall. Some causes of death were so common they saw them daily, but others didn't come in as often and were a great chance to teach. This was one of those cases. Brayden would be interning for quite a while, then hopefully, hired on as a new examiner if everything went as planned.

"Is it hard never knowing when Angus will be home or get called out on a case?" Brayden asked as they worked.

"It was at first, but I'm used to it. I get his job can be crazy. I think it helps that our jobs are so closely tied together. I understand what he's doing and often am involved in the same cases. He loves what he does and that's all that matters. It's not every night he gets home late. We go weeks with things being peaceful and calm, but then weeks like this happen. We make it work. Does Christine get called out often?"

"Not unless it's an emergency with one of her patients. From time to time the hospital will call to let her know her patient is there. She'll usually go in if it's an emergency, but most of the time it can wait until the next day. We haven't been together long enough for us to spend a lot of nights together. We talk throughout the week, maybe grab dinner, but it's the weekends when we spend nights together. I hope we get to

the point where we're more serious, but we're taking it slow. We're both work focused and that's okay." Brayden shrugged. "I'm in no hurry to get married. I've got work to focus on. Maybe once I have my M.E.'s license and know for sure where I'll be working, I can figure out my next steps."

"I'm hoping your future is here. We need you." Lance didn't want to think about keeping up the pace with only two daytime examiners. As the city grew, so did the death rate.

"Lance?" Carrie stood in the doorway.

"Yeah?" He glanced over at her.

"I have a family calling looking for their daughter who went missing last night. She matches the description of your Jane Doe. How long before you're done in here?"

"I'll be at least another hour, but we got some decent photos you can show them if they want to come in to verify it's her. See if Sam can meet with them or have them come in once we finish up and I can talk to them." He hated this part of the job, but the sooner they verified Gail's identity, the sooner Angus could investigate her death. "Warn them, they may want to have another friend or family member come in to verify. There is some facial trauma we can't hide."

"I'll let them know. Thanks. I'll come back and tell you what they decide." Carrie sighed. "I hate this part of my job."

"You and me both, but I'll be glad if we don't have to add another name to our Jane Doe list. Everyone deserves to be named and claimed." Lance wished Gail had stuck around. She would probably want to be with her parents for this, but Lance had no way of getting hold of Angus to tell him he had the ghosts with him and needed them back here. He couldn't cut out in the middle of an autopsy to make a phone call.

Hopefully, they'd be back before her family arrived.

"Almost makes me not want kids when I think of having to possibly someday bury one." Brayden inspected a large bruise on the body's hip.

"I know. I can't even imagine. I hate talking to any family member, but grieving parents are the worst. Thankfully, we don't have to do it often." Lance moved in a bit. "What are you looking at?"

"If she landed on her left side, why do we have this bruise on her right hip? It almost looks like a straight line, as if she got it from bumping into a bar of some kind." Brayden measured the bruise and made a note.

"I agree." Lance met Brayden's gaze. "The more we find, the less suicidal this looks. I have too many questions to write this off as suicide yet." Even if he hadn't already known Gail had been murdered, the appearance of her body would make him question things.

"So, what do we do now?" Brayden asked.

"We hold the body without giving a cause of death for now. Hopefully, once she is identified, we'll get more information that might help us figure out what happened to her. For now, cause of death is undetermined and suspicious unless we find something more as we work." It was the least he could do while Angus looked for stronger evidence.

It took a little over an hour to finish up, then Lance headed into his office. He'd been waiting to get five minutes alone to call Angus. He made sure his door was shut and pulled out his phone as he sank into his chair.

"Hey, what's up?" Angus answered after the first ring.

"Just finished Gail's autopsy. First, Gail and Jeremy should be with you. They left with you at least. Not sure if they've stuck with you. Gail's parents called here and talked to Carrie. Since Gail's description matched our Jane Doe, they are coming in so they can look at photos we have to confirm identity. I figured you'd need to know that," Lance told him.

"Yeah, I just hung up with them. They're nearly hysterical. I made sure they had people with them to drive them there. Mrs. Smith's brother is bringing Mr. Smith in to verify the identity. Once they do, Franks and I will be able to start digging a little deeper. What did the autopsy show?"

"I'm ruling it as undetermined and suspicious. There is head trauma that doesn't fit with suicide and some odd bruising I didn't like. We got what looked to me like skin under her nails, but the lab will have to verify that. But I think it's safe to say your killer may have scratches on him. The clothes are bagged and will go to the lab, but I did find a piece of black material, not very large, that was with the body, but doesn't appear to be part of anything Gail was wearing at the time. Could be the torn shirt she mentioned." Lance unscrewed the lid on his bottle of water. "Bruising on her arm matches with someone being grabbed, at least in my opinion."

"You've seen enough to know. I trust you. Her parents said Gail's work said her car is still in the parking lot and they hadn't seen her since four when she got off work yesterday. Franks and I will run over and see if they have cameras up outside once we get the identity verified."

"There was probably enough bleeding from the first hit on the head that knocked her out that there should be blood evidence in whatever vehicle was used to move her from work to the bridge," Lance informed him.

"Yeah, Franks and I went to the bridge this morning. We found evidence of something, or someone being dragged to the bridge and a few blood drops that we

collected for evidence. Once we can, we'll send a team out to get a better look. We're headed to talk to the other two boys now. I'm curious if either of them will bring up the conversation the group had about deaths. I'll give you a call when we get done and see how things are on your end," Angus said.

"Sounds good. Don't forget to eat sometime today too. You'll need the energy. I'll talk to you later. Love you."

"Love you too." Angus ended the call.

Lance sighed and leaned back in his chair, taking a long drink of water. He needed to go out front and find out who was meeting with Gail's family. He hoped it would be Sam, because he didn't want to have to fake not knowing anything about Gail. He was worried he'd something wrong or slip up just once and let on he knew more than he should. No matter who did it, it was going to be a long afternoon. He had a ton of paperwork to do, and now he had to let Carrie and Sam know that Gail's body shouldn't be released just yet. That wouldn't go over well with the family, but it was his medical opinion that something wasn't right. They'd have to deal with it.

He took a minute more to finish his water, then forced himself to get up. The sooner he went out front, the sooner he'd know what was going on. No matter how stressful his day was, he wouldn't have changed places with Angus. He was sure Angus would be drained by the time he got home. All he could do was be there for him. Together, they'd find answers, but like always, never fast enough.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Angus sat across from Terrance Jefferies. The young man was tense and a bit nervous, but no more than most people he interviewed were. He was polite and had said he'd do anything to help them find answers. Angus just hoped that was true.

Like Gavin, Terrance was tall. Not as tall as Gavin, but at least six feet, maybe an inch more. He understood why Gail was so sure whoever had her hadn't been Gavin or Terrance.

"I'm sorry about the death of your friends," Franks stated. "Do you know of anyone who would want to hurt them? Anyone they've had a fight with recently?"

Terrance ran his fingers through his dark hair. It hung a bit long, covering his eyes when he leaned forward. "No, but I didn't know the girls that well. I mean, we hung out, but we weren't best friends or anything. I knew Liz better than I know Fiona or Gail, but that's only because Gavin dated her so she was around me more."

"So you didn't get together all the time and hang out?" Angus asked.

"No, we did, but the girls would sit talking while we gamed. Sometimes the girls would play too, but it was like there was always two groups there. The girls would have one conversation going while we had our own. Sometimes we'd all talk, but that wasn't always the normal." Terrance wrung his hands together in his lap. "In fact, there was one conversation we all had together not too long ago. I thought of it last night when I was thinking about their deaths. It's kinda strange."

"Tell us about it." Franks had his notebook out.

"A while back, maybe a couple weeks ago, we were all here in the basement. We'd ordered pizza and someone had watched some documentary on dying. We got talking about the worst ways to die. We all mentioned how we'd hate to die. Well, Fiona said drowning, Liz said choking or being strangled. Pretty much not being able to get air. I said being crushed, like having a building fall down on top of you after an earthquake or something." Terrance sighed. "Anyway, you see how strange it is that the girls died just how they feared?"

"What did Gavin, Gail, and Tom say?" Angus asked, though he already knew.

"Um, Gav. said he'd hate to starve to death. Gail was really scared of heights, so hers was falling from a high place, and Tom said poisoning." Terrance shifted as if very uncomfortable. "At the time, it was just a conversation. I didn't think much of it, but now, I'm kinda freaked out."

Angus nodded. "It is a bit suspicious. Do you think someone in your group is responsible for the deaths?"

"No, not at all." Terrance sat up straighter and shook his head. "No one in our group would do anything like that. I mean, I trust them all. I can't see anyone hurting another. We were friends. Have been for years. We've got each other's backs. Ya' know what I mean? No, I don't think anyone could do this, but it's just odd. Maybe someone mentioned the conversation to someone outside our group? I don't know."

"Was anyone else there that day? Someone you usually don't hang with?" Franks asked.

"No, it was like always. My parents were working late so we came here." A blush tinted his cheeks. "We usually came here to be alone."

Angus wondered if that was because of Terrance's relationship with Tom. He



wouldn't ask about that yet. There was no reason to bring it up for now.

"Seriously, we didn't invite others over very often. My parents knew everyone who was there, and don't like it when I bring strangers over they haven't met yet." Terrance looked up as another teen walked into the room.

"What's going on, Ter?" the boy asked.

Angus looked the kid over. He didn't resemble Terrance at all. The kid was probably around twelve or thirteen. He was shorter, maybe five-five. He was also very thin and lanky. His hair was a mess as if he'd just climbed out of bed, and he was pale, as if he didn't get outside much.

"Nothing, Johnny. It's not your concern." Terrance waved the kid off.

"Whatever." Johnny rolled his eyes and turned into the kitchen.

"Who is that?" Franks asked.

"My stepbrother." Terrance shrugged as if the kid wasn't important.

"Is he usually here when your friends are over?" Angus asked.

"Yeah, but he like, never leaves his room. He's a nerd. Always on his computer. He only comes out of his room to eat or pee unless Mom and Dad make him come out." Terrance didn't seem interested in his stepbrother.

"How old is he?" Angus heard the fridge door close, then the water turn on in the kitchen.

"Fifteen," Terrance said.

Angus made a note.

"How would you say Gavin and Elizabeth's relationship was? Any problems there?" Franks asked.

"Not at all. Hell, those two were made for each other. The only thing stopping them from getting married now was their parents. They are like the perfect couple." Terrance grinned. "They've always been together."

"Are they the only ones that were dating out of your group?" Franks asked.

Angus sighed. So much for secrets. Maybe he should have told Franks about Tom and Terrance before they got here. He really didn't think it was going to come up in conversation. He watched Terrance to see his reaction to the question.

Terrance smiled and his cheeks pinkened a bit. "It's a secret because Tom's parents will kill him if they find out, but my parents know. All my friends know. Tom and I have been dating for a little over a year now. But we are really careful about who knows. Everyone at school and on the basketball team just thinks we're best friends." He looked worried for a minute. "You won't tell Tom's parents, will you? Seriously, they'll freak out."

Angus held up a hand. "We won't tell anyone unless it becomes important to the case. Right now, it's not. We don't want to out anyone." He wished he could guarantee the news wouldn't come out, but he couldn't do that.

"Detective Young is right. We don't need to get into any of that for now. The last thing we want is to cause Tom any problems. Things are good with you two? No issues?" Franks wrote something down.

"No, they're good. It's just hard not being able to go out and do things as a couple. As

soon as he graduates, he's moving out, then we'll be able to go public. It's just another year." Terrance shrugged. "We'll get an apartment together then. Gavin and Liz were going to get a place with us, but now, well, I don't know what Gavin will do. Losing Liz is destroying him."

They talked a bit more about the friends' relationships and how everyone got along. They spoke a bit about Terrance's alibi during Liz and Fiona's deaths, which Angus thought was solid. He'd looked into Tom and Terrance's alibis after he'd spoken to Gavin. The boys had been together during Fiona's murder, but they'd been in a very public park playing ball when Fiona died and had several friends to back up that they were there, along with cameras in the park that showed them playing basketball. Both boys had been home with family during Elizabeth's murder, and he had no reason to doubt that as of now.

"Can you think of anything else we should know?" Franks asked.

"Not at the moment. I'm seriously freaked out. I'm not sure if someone was just going after Liz and Fiona or if I should worry about them coming after the rest of us. I wasn't so worried until I remembered the conversation we had about dying. Now I'm worried someone will try and push a bunch of rocks on me. I'm staying home until you catch whoever did this."

"I wish I could ease your mind, but I can't. We have no idea who is doing this or why. It's probably best for you to stay in as much as you can until we find out." Franks stood and offered his card. "Call us if you think of anything or if something happens that we should be aware of."

"I will. Thank you." Terrance got up and saw them out.

Once in the car and on the road, Franks glanced over at Angus. "Thoughts?"

"He seems genuinely freaked out, and not the guilty freaked out we sometimes see. We'll see what Tom is like. I was surprised to find out about Johnny. I had no clue there was a stepbrother. We may need to speak to him at some point. He was in the house when that conversation took place, but I didn't get murder vibes off the kid." Angus looked at his notebook. "Still, I'm not getting those vibes off anyone in this case, but it has to be one of them, doesn't it?"

"Unless someone talked to someone about the conversation they all had or someone else was there. Have we verified where Terrance's parents were that afternoon or during any of the murders?" Franks stopped at a stop sign.

"No, but we will." Angus pointed. "Tom's house is there on the left." It was only a few blocks from Terrance's home. Like the others, the homes were more expensive with the yards professionally manicured. "I'm obviously in the wrong line of work. I couldn't afford a place like this no matter how I saved."

"You and me both. But would you really want something so big? I mean, what do you do with all the room? Even my little place is bigger than I need." Franks parked the car.

"Yeah, that's true. The bigger the house, the bigger the bills for everything, I guess. I bet their yard care bill is about the same as my mortgage was." Angus shoved his notebook in his pocket. "Let's do this."

They climbed out of the car into the hot air. Angus couldn't wait to get home, get a shower, and put on something lighter. He was so done with the heat and was counting the days until cooler weather moved in.

"I hear dogs," Franks said as he rang the doorbell.

"Great. Haunt hates it when I come home smelling of others. She makes me feel like

I'm cheating on her. I'll get the silent treatment for hours." Angus sighed.

Franks laughed, then sobered as the door opened.

"I'm guessing you're the detectives who called to speak to our son?" an older woman asked as she swung the door open. She appeared to be sixty or so, but that couldn't be right. He would have sworn he'd read the wife was in her late forties. She wore a tailored pantsuit and wore very little make-up. Her gray hair fell in perfect curls around her small face.

"Yes, I'm Detective Franks, and this is Detective Young." Franks offered his hand.

"Come in. We're ready for you." She stepped aside, ignoring Franks' hand.

Angus followed Franks into the entry way, then waited as the woman closed the door and led them to a large living room. He could see a dog gate in the distance with two small dogs watching them through it. "I'm Claire Eckhart. My husband Don can't be with us, but he's available by phone if you need to speak with him."

"That's fine. We're really just here to speak with Tom." Angus smiled at the teenager who was standing by a chair. He offered his hand to the boy. "I'm Detective Young. Thanks for meeting with us."

"I'm glad to help. I don't know how I can help, but I'll do whatever I can." He shook Angus's hand, then nodded. "Have a seat."

Angus and Franks sat side by side on the couch while Tom and his mother had chairs across from them. Tom looked more nervously at his mother than he did at either Franks or him. Angus got the feeling that Tom didn't communicate well with his parents, and that wasn't just because he was hiding the fact he was gay.

"We're sorry about the death of your two friends." Franks pulled out his notebook. "Can you think of anyone who would want to hurt them?"

Tom shook his head. "No one. Terrance and I were talking about it this morning, and we can't imagine who would do something like this. I mean, everyone loved Liz, and Fiona was popular too. They didn't have enemies. None of us did. We kept to ourselves. At least outside of the basketball team, but the girls didn't really get involved with basketball except to come to our games when they start up."

They ran through pretty much the same conversation they'd had with Terrance and Gavin, getting no new information. Either these boys were good at hiding secrets or they really didn't have a clue who killed the girls.

Tom glanced at his mother when there was a lull in the conversation, then back at Angus. "Did Terrance tell you about the talk we all had one night about dying?"

"He did." Franks nodded.

"What conversation?" Mrs. Eckhart asked.

Franks ignored the woman. "Do you remember anyone else in the house that night other than the six of you?"

"Um, I guess Terrance's brother was upstairs, but he never comes downstairs where we are. Heck, he doesn't even come out of his room. There was no one else there. Tom's parents don't get home until later."

"Did you or anyone you know of tell anyone about that conversation?" Angus asked.

"What conversation?" Mrs. Eckhart asked again.

"Your son can tell you once we leave if he wants to. Let us finish our questions so we don't keep you." Franks stared directly at the woman, all but telling her this wasn't about her.

Angus was glad. He already didn't like Tom's parents. If their son had to hide who he was dating, then Angus had little respect for them. Right or wrong, it was how he felt. He knew the fear of coming out to people, but luckily, he never had to worry about that fear with his parents.

Mrs. Eckhart frowned but kept quiet.

"I didn't talk to anyone about it. I'd forgotten about it until Terrance brought it up. It wasn't like it was an important thing. At least it wasn't until it started to come true." Tom sat forward. "Am I safe? Are Terrance, Gavin, Gail, and I going to be next?"

"I can't answer that. We are doing everything we can to figure out who killed Elizabeth and Fiona, but until we do, it's probably smart to be careful. Keep doors locked, make sure any security cameras are working. I wouldn't take any chances," Angus warned him.

"Don and I are leaving town tomorrow morning. We'll only be gone through Sunday. I'm letting Tom stay with Terrance. Do you think that's wise?" Mrs. Eckart asked.

"Yes. Much better than him being here alone. There is safety in numbers. We've given the same warning to Terrance about being careful," Franks told her.

"Good. I'm so worried. I can't believe this is happening." She rubbed her hands together. "What leads do you have?"

"We aren't able to talk about an active investigation." Angus closed his notebook, figuring it was better to end this before she started demanding answers that they

didn't have. "Thank you for talking with us." Angus handed Terrance one of his cards. "Call us if you think of anything, no matter how small it might be."

"Thanks." Tom took the card and stood.

Angus and Franks both stood. Angus shook the boy's hand. "We'll be in touch if we have more questions."

"Okay." Tom slid past his mother and walked them to the door. "I'll be at Terrance's starting tonight. You can get hold of me there."

"Sounds good. Have a good time and try not to worry too much. I know this is hard on all of you." Franks shook his hand, then they were out the door.

"What now?" Angus asked as they pulled away from the curb.

"Food." Franks smiled. "Then after we eat, we'll start looking into Gail's death. By the time we're back in the office, hopefully she's been identified. Either way, the family told us she was missing. We can at least see if her work has any cameras and start things moving."

"Sounds good to me. How about that chicken place across from the high school?" Angus had a craving for wings.

"Perfect." Franks nodded. "Maybe a double order since I doubt we'll be home for dinner tonight."

"Yeah." It wouldn't be the first time they'd eaten at their desks. "It's going to be a long one."

"We'll figure this out. Something's got to break."



"Let's just hope it's before someone else gets killed." Angus stared out the window, not wanting to think about which one of the teens might be next.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance stared at the letter in his hands in shock. He almost forgot to breathe, he was so surprised by the news. His brother was coming home. Not just coming home, but coming home to stay. Sure, it was still a year away, but it was something to look forward to. Lance had spent so much time over the years worrying about his brother that the thought of having him back, living in the same place, was almost impossible to imagine.

Jackson had been in the military so long that Lance almost forgot what it was like to have him around. The few times he'd visited had been few and far between, never long enough to fall into a pattern like they'd had when they were younger. Now, Jackson was coming home to stay, and Lance couldn't quit smiling.

"Did you win the lottery?" Bethany asked as she came in from the backyard.

"I feel like it. Jackson is coming home to stay. It won't be until next June, but it's something to look forward to." He held up the letter he'd been reading. "He says he's done and ready to find something new to do with his life."

"Oh, that's great news. I bet you're so relieved." Bethany appeared to sit in the chair beside him at the kitchen table. "He'll stay here, right?"

"I think at first, but he won't stay long. He'll want to get his own place. He's welcome here as long as he wants to stay. God, I just can't believe he's really doing this. I figured he'd stay in the Navy until he was either killed or told he was too old to keep going. I know he always said he was thinking about it, but I never really believed him." Lance set the letter down. "It can't come soon enough."

"What can't come soon enough?" Ray and Gail floated into the house.

"My brother is coming home in a year to stay. No more Navy."

"That's great news. I bet it has something to do with that girl he was seeing when he came to visit." Ray took a seat.

"Maybe. Those two have always had something. I'd love for them to get back together now that she's divorced." Lance smiled at Gail. "How are you holding up?"

She shrugged. "I feel lost. Like there is something I should be doing, but I don't know what it is. I'm glad my parents finally know I'm dead, but I can't go there and watch them cry over me."

He understood. Her uncle had come to verify her body and had been upset. He could only imagine how upset her family was. Gail had gone back to the house with her uncle when he'd left the morgue, but showed back up a few hours later. Death was so final for the living, and they took it a lot different than the dead did.

"Want me to put a movie on or something to help distract you?" Lance offered.

"Would you? That would help. I didn't even think about still watching TV. I guess I won't miss out on all the new movies if I stick around here, will I?" Gail laughed.

"Even better that you can go to the movies for free now. No one will even know you're there." Ray grinned. "Bethany and I do that sometimes. We'll go spend the day at the theater, jumping from one movie to another. Works for concerts and plays as well."

"I hadn't thought about that. I mean, you mentioned we could travel places, but I guess I didn't really think about all the other stuff." Gail got up. "What movie?"

"You decide. I'll scan through and you tell me when you see something you like."  
Lance got up and went into the living room. "What do you like?"

Gail glanced at Ray. "Will you hate me if I say chick-flicks?"

Ray laughed. "I can sit through anything. Curl up on the couch with Haunt and see what was just released. There's got to be something good."

Lance sat on the arm of the couch and started scanning new releases. It didn't take long before the ghosts agreed on one. Lance hit play before setting the remote down and heading back into the kitchen. It was after eight and he was still waiting for Angus to get home. He'd talked to him shortly after Gail had been identified, and Angus and Franks were headed over to Gail's house to talk to the parents.

The media was all over the case, and it was bound to get worse once they linked Gail's death to the others. Thankfully, it seemed the families were being helpful and not putting a ton more pressure on the police to give them answers. Still, with three teenagers dead, it would only be time before people demanded answers.

With nothing to do but wait for Angus to get home, Lance emptied the dishwasher, then sat down at the table and started a letter to his brother. They were exchanging letters more often since Jackson had visited during Christmas. It was a nice change since before that, he would be lucky to get a letter every few months. Like most of his brother's letters, they didn't tell Lance much about what Jackson was up to or even where he was, but it was nice to hear from him and know that he was safe.

Lance filled him in on what he'd been up to and told him about how different it was living with Angus compared to dating. He also updated him on things going on around town and how the area was growing. He wasn't sure if Jackson cared about all of it, but it was something to share to maybe help Jackson enjoy a bit of home. He told him about Haunt and even the ghosts, though he was careful to speak of them as

if they were living people just in case anyone read the letters.

Lance smiled, remembering how shocked and unbelieving his brother had been about his ability to see ghosts. Luckily, one of Jackson's friends had been with him — a friend who died a couple of years ago. That had made telling Jackson about ghosts a lot easier than it would have been if he hadn't had his friend here to help convince him. Now, he was able to talk about Ray and Bethany as if they were family friends. Jackson even asked about them in his letters.

The front door opened and Haunt barked once. Lance stood, going to the fridge and pulling out Angus's favorite TV dinner. It wasn't a huge meal, but the two of them seldom bothered cooking on nights they weren't home together. He shoved it in the microwave and turned it on just as Angus walked into the kitchen.

"What a long day." Angus tossed his stuff on the table before coming over and pulling Lance into a tight hug. "I missed you."

"Missed you too." Lance kissed him softly. "Seven minutes and dinner will be ready. What can I get you to drink?"

"Just water. I need to eat, shower, then sleep. I'm beat." Angus sat down. "Sorry I'm not better company."

"Beside me in bed is my favorite way to be with you." Lance grinned. "Don't feel bad. It's been a busy week for all of us. It's been one thing after another. How'd it go at the Smiths' home?"

"Like you'd expect for a couple that just found out their child was dead. They're having a rough go of it. They refuse to believe it was suicide, and I don't blame them. Not with two of her friends killed in the same week. Franks and I will pick up security footage from Gail's work in the morning and go from there. The cameras on

the bridge are down. The city hasn't approved funding to fix or replace them." Angus rolled his eyes.

"Is the city funding anything anymore?" Lance sighed.

"The mayor's pet projects are all funded, but nothing that matters." Angus took the water that Lance set in front of him. "Thanks."

Lance sat down. "Can I do anything to help you?"

"Not really. It's a matter of leg work. We'll get the video and see what it shows. I've set up an interview with the guy who saw Gail falling, but from the sounds of it, he only saw her falling, not up on the bridge." Angus took a drink.

"He said the same thing when we went to pick up the body. Hopefully, you can see what the person who took her was driving."

"Hopefully." Angus rolled his eyes. "Nothing is going our way on this case. We had her car towed today, but I don't expect we'll find anything in it. The only reason Franks and I are allowed to look into Gail's case is because of her ties to Fiona and Elizabeth. If it wasn't for that, they'd be happy to call it suicide. They said she was upset about her friends' deaths and wanted to join them."

"Even if I hadn't talked to Gail and known beforehand that she was pushed, I wouldn't have signed off on suicide with the evidence I found on the body. She was injured before falling." Lance was glad he was the last line in defense, because he was sure there were a lot of cases the police may gloss over. Even if he was questioned on his opinion, he was sure that Sam would redo the autopsy and come to the same conclusion he had. "How were the interviews with the boys?"

"We got nothing from them. They're both scared and worried that they're next. I didn't

sense guilt from either one of them. These kids were tight. I wish I'd had a group of friends like that in high school. Tom and Terrance are staying together the next few days, so hopefully, they'll be safe. It's Gavin I'm worried most about if someone is coming after the whole group. His home has great security though, so maybe he'll be safe. He said he wasn't planning on leaving the house." Angus got up as the microwave beeped and got his dinner before returning to the table. "How was your day?"

"Good. We hired Amy's sister, Gretta, today. She won't start for two weeks, but everyone liked her. She seems confident and mentally strong enough to deal with the families." Lance smiled. "She has a ton of office experience, which is great."

"If she's anything like Amy, she'll be great with the families. I'm glad you're giving her a chance, and I bet she's excited to get the job. It sounds like she's had a tough time through her divorce. This could be exactly what she needs." Angus cut into his food. "Carrie can't be happy having to work the front desk for another two weeks."

"She's not, but said she'd rather work it now and be done with it than keep going back and forth training people who don't work out. Heard from your parents?"

"Mom sent a photo of them on Fisherman's Wharf, but that's all I've heard. They must be having a good time. I think they're headed south tomorrow and plan to be near San Diego sometime next week. Mom and Betty are excited to hang around Hollywood and see what dead famous people they can find."

"I'd love to talk to someone dead that didn't connect to a murder." Lance sighed.

"Yeah, that would be a nice change." Angus ate in silence for a moment, then glanced at Lance. "I like the thought that someday we might be able to travel around the country like Mom and Dad do. Retirement feels like it's so far away, but it gives me something to look forward to."

"We don't have to wait to retire. We can still afford smaller trips. Maybe once a year. It's a start. It's something we should talk about more and plan for next spring or summer."

"We'll make a list of places we want to see and figure out what we can afford, but later. Right now, I just want to shower and sleep. I need to stop thinking over this case for a while and the only way I'm going to do that is sleep."

"The ghosts are all watching a movie. I'll make sure they're set for the night, then I'll join you. I could use an early night myself."

"You could join me in the shower. Help me relax a little so I'll sleep better." Angus nudged his leg against Lance's.

"I could do that. Give you a little hands-on relaxation." Lance waggled his eyebrows.

Angus laughed. "You know, suddenly I'm not as hungry as I thought I was."

"Nope, you need to eat. The offer to help you relax isn't going anywhere. You can take your time, enjoy your food, then we'll say our goodnights. We won't have to even worry about Haunt. She hasn't left Gail's side since they met."

"I'm glad Gail has her to help her accept everything that happened." Angus finished his water, then took the last bite of his meal. "Do you think she'll move on?"

"I think so. It helps that she knows Fiona and Liz have crossed over and will hopefully be there waiting for her." Lance shrugged. "At least I assume they crossed. I guess there's no way of really knowing."

"Enough about ghosts and cases. It's time to forget work and focus on more important things, like you." Angus stood and threw his trash away. "You see to the ghosts. I'll



go get the shower going and meet you there."

"Deal." Lance kissed him softly, then stepped back. Someday they wouldn't have to find time alone together. One day, they'd be retired and able to take advantage of the long days together without thinking about work or murders. That day might be a long way away, but he still looked forward to it.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance was glad it was Friday. He'd left work, stopped at the store to pick up a few things he needed for dinner, and was headed home to spend the night with friends. He wasn't sure who was coming. Franks had an open invitation, but with the case going on, Lance wasn't even sure Angus would make it.

Last he'd heard, there hadn't been any big breaks on the case, but they hadn't had a lot of time to talk about things. Lance had been in bed by the time Angus had gotten home the night before, and other than a few whispered words, they hadn't talked. This morning, Lance had been in a rush to get out the door for the morning staff meeting they had, and Angus had been on the phone with Franks, so there hadn't been time to talk then either. He was hoping for a quiet weekend where they could catch up and enjoy some time together.

The house was quiet as he walked in. Even Haunt didn't come to greet him, though that was normal since Gail had been there. It was going to break Haunt's heart if Gail crossed over. The dog had really taken to her.

Lance glanced out the kitchen window and saw the ghosts all sitting around the table. He didn't see Cel yet, so he took out the notes he'd taken when she'd showed up at his work yesterday and tried to figure out what he should do first. It was a simple recipe, but even so, he was always more comfortable with Cel there watching over him.

Figuring that boiling pasta couldn't be too hard, he started that, then went on to grating cheese and cutting up a few other things that went into the pepperoni pizza pasta that he was making.

"Stop eating the pepperoni or you won't be hungry for dinner." Cel's voice came from

behind him.

Lance jumped at the sound, then laughed. He swallowed the bite of pepperoni he'd just taken and grinned at her. She always looked happy. Her brown eyes twinkled with mischief as she moved farther into the kitchen. "Cel, it's good to see you."

"You as well. How have things been?" She walked over and looked into the pot of boiling pasta. "Stir this so it doesn't clump."

Lance did as told. "Things have been good. Busy. Angus is working on a murder case. Three teenagers have died." Lance pointed out the window. "That's Gail. She was the third to die. As far as we know, the only one to stick around. I'm not sure if her case has been classified as murder yet. She was pushed from the Fairway Bridge, and they were calling it suicide."

"Oh, the poor girl. So young. And what of the other two?" Cel asked.

"One strangled, one drowned. All three girls were friends." Lance went on to tell her about the murders and the teens as she directed him at what to do to get dinner finished.

"That's horrible. Will Angus be with us tonight?" Cel asked.

"He said he would be. He hasn't called to say he'll be late." Lance glanced at the clock on the stove. "He should be here any time. How are things with your grandchildren?"

"I miss them while they're in Arizona, but I've been down a few times to check on them. They seem happy. It's been an adjustment for them, but they're making new friends in the area. My son is dating again, which is good. I'm not too happy with the women he's been seeing, but so far it doesn't seem to be anything serious. It's not as if I can do anything about it anyway. It sucks to sit back and watch, and not be able to

give my input on things."

"True, but if you were alive, you wouldn't even know half of what you do now. You wouldn't have the insight you do being dead. You raised your son to be a good man. All you can do now is hope those lessons stuck and he finds someone good for him and the boys." Lance stole another slice of pepperoni.

"I'd smack your hand if I could." Cel admonished him with a grin.

"I know, but it's addictive, and I'm starving." Lance turned as he heard the front door open. "And that should be Angus."

"And Franks," Angus said as he walked into the kitchen. "Something smells good." Angus looked around. "Cel here?"

"She is leaning against the counter by the sink." Lance went over and kissed Angus, then smiled at Franks as he walked in. "Glad you could make it."

"Me too. I'm so hungry." Franks went to the table, then paused. "No one sitting here, is there?"

"No, everyone but Cel is outside still." Lance was glad that Franks was adapting to a life around ghosts. At first, Lance feared that he'd struggle with the knowledge that ghosts existed. He'd taken some convincing, but now he seemed to accept things and just go with it when Lance said ghosts were present.

"Hey, Cel. Thanks for doing this again. I love Friday night meals." Angus took a seat beside Franks.

"You're welcome. It gives me something to take my mind off family things, so I'm thankful for it as well," Cel told him.

Lance repeated everything as he drained the pasta. Once he'd set the pot down, he glanced back at the table. "Anything new on the case?"

"Not a ton. We've got video of Gail leaving work, but the camera angle is just off. We can see her get grabbed by someone, but we never see a face or what vehicle she's taken to. We do see a car leave the parking lot on another camera and are able to see it on a few traffic cameras, but not a single one gives us a view of the license plate. But at least we have the make and model," Angus informed him.

"And before you ask, no, the car isn't owned by any of the teens or their families. We have no idea who owns the car. We'll ask Gail about it tonight. Hopefully, she remembers someone with that car." Franks got up and pulled a bottle of water from the fridge, tossed it to Angus, then grabbed one for himself. "We found Gail's purse in the bushes near the area where she was taken. Everything is there. Nothing appears stolen. Again, we'll confirm with her once we talk to her."

"Due to the video and her purse being found, we've officially opened a homicide case on her, so there is that." Angus twisted the cap off the bottle. "Still nothing that gives us any leads on anything."

Lance started to add the ingredients to the pasta, his mouth watering as he did. "Well, dinner is about five minutes out. I'm just waiting on the garlic bread. So, wash up and be ready."

Angus stood. "I'll be right back." He headed down the hall.

Franks got up and went to the sink, washing his hands there. "Are you staying in town for a while, Cel?"

"I am. I should be here through the rest of the summer. My grandbabies are doing fine. I need to try and step back. I worry about them too much and there is nothing I

can do to protect them. I need to let them live a little." Cel took a deep breath. "It's hard to let go."

Lance repeated what she said.

"That's why I don't think I'd stick around. I'd want to add my two cents to everything and I'd get frustrated when I couldn't. Lance and Lizzy would probably hate me because I'd be nagging them to give everyone my opinion."

Cel laughed. "That's exactly how I feel. More than once I've thought about having Lance contact my son, but in the long run, it would only make things harder if my family knew I was still around."

Lance again repeated things, then nodded. "I wouldn't mind passing a message off for you, but I wouldn't give advice or get involved in their lives or choices. I doubt they'd believe anything I said anyway. We've learned how hard it can be to convince some people that ghosts exist."

Angus walked back in just as Lance was pulling the bread from the oven. "What can I help with?"

Lance shook his head as he set the bread on a cutting board. "I think I've got it done. Just grab the salad I made earlier out of the fridge. I've got the rest." He quickly moved the pasta to the table, then the bread. He grabbed a drink for himself, then sat down beside Angus.

"I'm going to let you eat and head outside with the others." Cel waved as she pushed through the wall.

"Cel went outside." Lance took some salad. "I'm so hungry."

"Me too, and this looks amazing. I never would have thought to make pizza out of pasta."

"Well, it's not really pizza. Just the stuff you put on a pizza over the noodles. I think we could do a variety of things with this recipe. Maybe try sausage next time."

Franks nodded. "This is almost simple enough I could do it."

"Do you cook much now that you have a bigger kitchen?" Lance asked.

"Not really. I'm too lazy. Sometimes I'll cook breakfast on the weekends, but it's just me. I don't see the point in dirtying a lot of dishes just for one person." Franks took a bite of the pasta and groaned. "This is good. Maybe even better than real pepperoni pizza."

Angus nodded. "This will be great as a leftover too."

"I made enough that we can send some home with Franks and have enough to get us through the weekend." Lance took a bite, savoring the flavors. It was delicious, but then again, everything Cel suggested always was.

They were digesting the meal and talking when Angus's phone rang. They all exchanged looks as he answered. It was obvious by the way Angus tensed that it was something important.

"What is it?" Franks asked when Angus ended the call.

"That was Detective Madison. He was letting me know that Tom Eckhart was just rushed to the hospital after having chest pains and seizures. Terrance and his parents are with him, but with everything going on, he thought we should be alerted."

"How'd Phil find out?" Lance asked. Detective Phil Madison worked the night shift in the homicide division. Medical calls usually wouldn't cross his desk.

"He was talking to his brother at the fire station when the call came in. He recognized the address as one we'd been investigating and went with the EMS unit to the call." Angus glanced at Franks. "We should probably head to the hospital. This can't be a coincidence."

"I hate my job." Franks grabbed another slice of garlic bread and stood.

"I'll call when I know how late I'll be." Angus leaned over and gave Lance a kiss. "Tell Cel thanks for dinner."

"I will." Lance stood to see them out, praying that this was not going to turn into another dead teenager. Chest pain and seizures could mean a number of things, but all Lance could do was think of the number of ways to murder someone that might have those side effects. With a heavy sigh, he cleaned up the kitchen, trying not to think the worst, but after the week they'd had, it wasn't easy.



*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Angus walked into the emergency room and saw Terrance Jefferies right away. He headed in his direction, seeing the worry on the teen's face. "Terrance?"

"Please, find out something. They haven't told us anything yet." Terrance gripped Angus's arm. "They'll talk to you."

Angus heard the grief in the young man's voice. He couldn't blame him for his worry. With all he'd dealt with over the last week, he had every reason to be upset. "Easy. They'll come out as soon as they have something to tell us. For now, why don't you tell me what happened?" He glanced past Terrance to the two adults who had stood when Terrance had grabbed Angus's arm. His brother, who hadn't even looked up from his phone, sat slumped in a chair. "You must be Terrance's parents. I'm Detective Young, and this is Detective Franks. We've spoken on the phone."

"Yes, Detective, thank you for coming." Mr. Jefferies gripped his son's shoulder. "Let's take a seat and try to stay calm."

Terrance looked ready to argue, but took a deep breath and sat down. "Sorry, I'm just so scared. He was turning blue. He said his chest hurt and it was hard to breathe, then he had a seizure. I freaked out."

"Does Tom have any medical conditions?" Franks asked as he sat down beside Angus.

"No, none. He's never had any problems." Terrance's eyes were filled with tears. "Do you think someone tried to kill him?"

Angus recalled that Tom's most feared way of dying was to be poisoned. That was exactly something that might cause these medical issues. "I don't know. Let me go see if I can talk to the doctor and get an update. I'll be right back. While I'm gone, tell Detective Franks what exactly happened." Angus stood, wanting to let the doctor know to check for poisoning. If this was related to the case, it should be the first thing they look for. He quickly made his way to the nurses' desk up front and showed his badge. "If I could speak to the doctor treating Tom Eckhart, I may have information he needs on his condition."

"Go on back." She glanced at her computer screen. "Room seven."

"Thanks." Angus made his way back. He weaved through people and gurneys that lined the area until he saw room seven. He watched several people in the room doing different tasks but didn't see the doctor. He took a step into the room. "Excuse me, I'm Detective Young. You're going to want to check him for poisons. This is related to a case I'm already working on."

He saw one of the nurses frown. "Do you know what kind of poison?"

"No, it could be anything, but I'm guessing he was exposed to something. Probably ingested it." Angus stared at Tom who was unconscious as he lay flat on the gurney. Angus could see his chest rising, showing that he was breathing, but knew from experience that the numbers on the machine by the bed weren't good. His blood pressure was low, as were his oxygen levels.

"Suicide?" the nurse asked.

Angus shook his head. "No."

She frowned deeper. "I'll let the doctor know." She swept by him and into the hallway.

Angus stood there a bit longer, watching as a woman drew blood, then labeled each vial. When she stepped out, Angus went farther into the room to stand beside Tom's bed. He placed his hand on the boy's arm, feeling how cool his body was. "Terrance is in the waiting room. He needs you. Stay strong and hold on for him," Angus said softly. He had to find out who was doing this to the kids. Right now, his attention was on everyone who lived at Terrance's home. He really doubted Terrance would hurt Tom, but he couldn't take his doubt as a sure thing. He'd been shocked in other cases. He didn't think it was the parents, and that left Terrance's brother, Johnny. But his size and age made Angus hesitate. It wasn't impossible that he could have lifted the girls, but did he even have a driver's license? Where would he get a car? And what reason would he have to kill off his brother's friends? It was all stuff he would need to look into.

Angus leaned close to Tom's ear again. "You're strong. You can pull through this. Keep holding on."

"Detective?" A man walked into the room.

Angus straightened. "Detective Young." He offered his hand.

"Dr. Monroe. You say you think this boy was poisoned?" The doctor raised a brow.

"Long story, but a case I'm working has several teenagers dying. All of them, including Tom." Angus nodded toward the bed. "Talked about how they would hate dying most. Every single one who has died has died in the way they feared. Tom's fear was being poisoned. I can't tell you with what or how, but it would be the first thing I looked at."

"His symptoms match several types of poisoning. I've got the lab rushing his blood work. Until we know what he ingested, I can't do much more than we're already doing. He's improving with what we're doing and hopefully will continue to do so as

we find out more." The doctor checked something on the computer, then turned back to Angus. "I'm about to go out and talk to his parents now."

Angus sighed. "His parents are out of town. He was staying with his best friend. They are as close as brothers. I know you are limited in what you can share with them, but I promise you that Tom will do better if you allow Terrance to be with him for a bit. I'm sure the parents are on their way home now, but until then..." Angus's voice trailed off.

"I will do what I can. Right now, my main concern is getting his blood pressure up and finding out if he has been poisoned. Will you be staying as well?" the doctor asked.

"No, but if anything should change or there are problems, you can call me anytime." He handed his card to the doctor. "If our investigation finds anything that might help you, I'll call you, but you're probably going to find answers before we do."

"Let's hope so. Horrible that someone is attacking our teens. I've seen the news. Is this part of that drowning and strangulation?"

Angus nodded. "But let's keep that quiet for now. The last thing you need is media attention while Tom's recovering." And Angus prayed that he would recover. Looking at how pale the kid was right now, he wasn't sure.

"Agreed." The doctor sighed. "I'll walk out and talk to the family, but as they are not Tom's family, I'm limited in what I can share. I'll do my best to keep them informed, but let the parents know they can call me if they're going to be a while getting here. I will allow Terrance to see Tom for a few minutes, but then he needs to go. Tomorrow, we'll have a better idea on Tom's condition and perhaps he can spend more time with him then."

"Thank you. That will mean a lot to the boys." Angus was glad Terrance would at least get to see Tom for a few minutes tonight. Angus and the doctor walked out to the waiting room.

The moment Terrance saw them, he ran toward them. "Is he okay?"

Angus gripped Terrance's shoulder as his family came to stand behind him. "I saw him. He's not out of danger yet, but he's better than when they brought him in. We need to give them time to work on him, then if he's stable, you can go see him."

The doctor nodded. "I'm Doctor Monroe. The detective is correct. Give us some time to make sure he's stable and I'll let you in to see him for a few minutes. Not long, mind you. We're still working out what is going on. Does he have any food allergies or medical issues that you know of?"

Terrance shook his head. "No, nothing. He's healthy. He plays basketball. He can eat anything. I'd know if he had any allergies. We've been friends for years. I know everything about him."

"What did he eat today?" the doctor asked.

"We had pancakes for breakfast, then made a frozen pizza for lunch, and Mom made meatloaf for dinner. It's all stuff we've had before." Terrance glanced at Angus. "I was with him all day. No one got near enough to poison him. Mom and Dad were at work. Tom and I just gamed all day. We didn't leave the house. Hell, other than the kitchen and bathroom, we didn't leave the basement. We heard about Gail and were upset and scared. We were extra careful."

"Johnny, were you there all day?" Angus asked.

The young boy's head snapped up from where he'd been paying attention to his

phone. "What?"

"Were you home all day too?" Angus repeated.

"Yeah, I was. I was in my room. I ate breakfast with them, but I skipped lunch. Mom made me come out for dinner, then again to come here." He shrugged.

Franks met Angus's gaze, and he knew that Franks was thinking the same thing he was. It had to be someone in the house that somehow gave Tom poison, if that was really what was wrong with him. Right now, they had no evidence. He couldn't arrest someone on a hunch. He needed to wait this out and see what the hospital tests found, then he'd start interviewing family members. He rolled his shoulders, trying to figure out how to play this. Making accusations he couldn't back up with evidence would just upset everyone.

"I'll be back out with another update soon and perhaps you can see him then. We are doing everything we can for him. Please, if his parents arrive, let the nurse at the desk know." Dr. Monroe gave the family a nod, then turned left.

"I can't believe this is happening." Terrance fought to hold back tears.

His mother pulled him to her, hugging him tightly. "We'll get through this. It's been a horrible week."

Terrance towered over his mother, but in that moment, he looked like a frail child as he clung to her, his head buried against her shoulder. "I love him, Mom."

"I know you do. We'll be here until we know for sure he's going to be okay. We won't leave him." She rubbed her hand over Terrance's back.

Angus swallowed hard, unable to avoid getting caught up in the emotion. A little over

a year ago, this would have hardly affected him, but now that he had Lance in his life, he understood all too well how agonizing it would be to see someone you love clinging to life. He prayed he would never be in Terrance's position. "We're going to go, but the hospital will call us once they can give an update. Tomorrow, we'd like to come over and speak to you some more." He said the words to Mr. Jefferies but meant them for everyone.

"Sure, I have to work, but Wanda will be home with the boys. I can get away to meet with you. Just give me a call." Mr. Jefferies handed Franks his card. "We'll do anything we can to help. If this is related to the other teens' deaths, we want to put a stop to it."

"Thanks. We'll call in the morning and schedule things. If anything changes overnight that we need to be aware of, please let us know. Terrance, stay alert," Franks warned.

Terrance nodded. "I'm not going near anything that can fall on top and crush me." He said it with a joking tone, but his eyes were serious and scared.

"Good." Angus hated leaving the boy. He wanted to put him in protective custody to protect him, but he didn't have the evidence he needed to do that yet. He had to find a break in this case. He couldn't go off hunches. He needed something solid. Everything in his gut said to take Terrance with him, but he had nothing to back up that hunch. He'd get outside, talk to Franks, and hope that his partner could either calm his nerves or give him something to work with that he hadn't seen. "We'll talk in the morning." He said his goodbyes and followed Franks out to the parking lot.

"I don't like this," Franks said once they were alone. "If poison was used, it came from inside that house."

"I was hoping you'd tell me I was crazy for feeling the same thing." Angus sighed.

"Sorry." Franks paused under one of the streetlights in the parking lot. "We need to interview Johnny." Franks ran his fingers through his hair. "Other than the parents, he's the only other link. I don't think Terrance is killing off his friends. Especially now that Tom's been attacked. That kid is head-over-heels for that boy. He wouldn't hurt him."

"I agree. And I don't think it's the parents. What do we know about the family?" Angus started walking toward his car again.

"The parents married three years ago. Terrance and his mother moved in with Johnny and his father. No problems reported. Sounds like the boys never bonded, but they both are so into their own worlds that it wasn't an issue. Both boys are good students, no issues at school for either one of them. Both parents are successful and work a lot. The principal at the high school says both parents attend Terrance's games on a regular basis. Johnny is active in several computer clubs at school, and again, both parents have shown him support." Franks slid into the car as soon as Angus unlocked the door.

"We've got to find a lead. My gut says we need to take a closer look at Johnny, but I have nothing to back that up other than he was in the house when the death conversation happened. He could have overheard it. What I don't get is how he got a car and took Gail? How did he carry that bucket of dried cement and manage Fiona as well? He could have easily snuck out to attack Elizabeth. And how would he poison Tom with everyone around? It sounds like Tom and Terrance ate the same things." Angus started the car.

"I'm with you on all of this. We'll see if the parents will allow us to interview Johnny tomorrow. It's the best we can do right now. We can't even add Tom to the victim list until we find out for sure it was poison that caused his problems. There are a number of things that could have caused him to have a seizure. We should probably sit down one on one with each of the parents as well. We'll need to check Gavin's alibi for



tonight, but I'm betting he hasn't left the house. Besides, Gavin's fear of death was starvation. That's not something easily accomplished. He'd have to be taken and held somewhere for days." Franks leaned his head against the window. "We can't do more until we hear from the hospital. We might as well get some sleep and start fresh in the morning."

Angus agreed. He drove them back to Lance's and Franks waved goodbye as he got into his car. Tomorrow would have to be soon enough. As Angus walked into the quiet house, he realized his weekend was shot and Lance would be on his own while once again he worked a case. It was becoming too common. Still, it was his job and Lance had signed on when they started dating, knowing what he was getting into. It just sucked that he was sacrificing time with Lance for the job yet again.

He quietly undressed and showered before sliding into bed beside Lance. When Lance wrapped him in his arms and kissed his neck softly, Angus finally relaxed. No matter how busy work was, he always had Lance to come home to, and that was everything to him.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance listened as Angus explained to Gail what had happened to Tom the night before. It wasn't exactly how he wanted to spend his Saturday morning, but he understood that this needed to be done. He admired Angus for being able to speak to what appeared to be thin air and still have as much compassion and empathy in his voice. He loved him so much for his acceptance and understanding when it came to ghosts.

"So is he okay now?" Gail asked.

Lance looked at Angus. "She's asking if he's okay now."

Angus nodded. "I just spoke to the hospital. He's going to be okay. His parents got back in town this morning and are with him. They're keeping him in the hospital for another day or two while they flush the poison from his system."

"Do they know what poisoned him?" Lance asked.

"Tetrahydrozoline, better known as an ingredient in eye drops. Taken as eye drops, it helps clear redness from the eyes, but taken orally, it can be deadly." Angus stared at where Gail was sitting. "The doctor isn't sure if it was a large one-time dose or something that was given to him in smaller doses over a few days, but it caused his chest pain and breathing issues, along with the seizure he had. Thankfully, Terrance acted quickly and got help. It could have been deadly."

Lance was glad Bethany and Ray sat with Gail to give her comfort. And, of course, Haunt was there by her side.

"Eye drops?" Gail looked shocked.

Lance nodded. "Eye drops are very dangerous if taken orally. I've seen several deaths come through the morgue due to them. What's good for one part of the body isn't always good for the other parts. Not all eye drops have it in them. I tend to avoid eye drops with it, just because I've seen what it can do and don't like having it around. But anyone can run out and buy a bottle. If someone wanted to poison Tom, it would be one of the easiest ways."

Angus looked at his phone. "Franks and I are headed over to Terrance's today to interview everyone in the house. What do you know about his family?"

Gail shrugged. "Not much. His parents work a ton, but when they are home, they're nice. I never hear them fighting or arguing. Terrance wasn't very close to his stepdad, but he said he liked having a dad again. Terrance's dad left right after he was born, and he never knew him." She paused to let Lance repeat what she'd said.

"What about Johnny? Did he get along with Terrance?" Angus asked.

"Not at all. No one liked Johnny. I mean, we didn't really know him, but he was never friendly. We'd only see him in passing really. He'd come out of his room to get food or sometimes be on his laptop in the upstairs living room when we'd come in. He would glare up at us and make us feel like he didn't want us there, but we'd just go downstairs and do our thing and ignore him. Terrance didn't talk much about him, but I know they weren't close. They didn't have anything in common. Terrance was all about playing basketball, and I doubt Johnny ever touched a ball unless he was forced to in gym class." Gail paused again.

Lance let Angus know what she'd said, his stomach rolling at the direction this questioning was going. Did Angus actually think a kid was doing all this killing? He wasn't in a place he dared ask questions — not with Gail sitting right there — but he

wanted to know what Angus was thinking.

"I want you to think back on your killer. Do you think it is possible that it was Johnny?" Angus asked.

Gail's eyes widened and she shook her head, but then she stilled. Lance watched as she really thought about the question. He saw the way her ghostly body seemed to tense as the idea that a fifteen-year-old brother of a friend might be her killer really settled with her. She shrugged. "My first thought was no way, but I guess it could have been. The height is right, but my killer seemed a lot stronger than I would have thought Johnny would be."

"But you were injured and had been unconscious right before you fought with him. Could that have made you weaker and him seem stronger?" Lance asked, then repeated what Gail had said to Angus.

"Maybe. It could have been him, but I couldn't be sure." Gail shrugged.

Lance looked at Angus. "She can't be sure, but it's possible." He reached for his coffee. "During her autopsy, we found what I think was skin under her nails. We haven't gotten the lab results back yet on that, but I'd say there is a good chance that whoever pushed Gail off that bridge has scratches somewhere on him."

"His arms. I scratched his arms." Gail nodded.

"She says she scratched his arms, so if you can get Johnny to show you his arms during an interview, maybe that will give you at least enough to hold him while you find more evidence to charge him?" Lance wished it wasn't the weekend and that he could go back to work and put a rush on the lab work.

"That's something we'll definitely look at. We're also going to run by the hospital and

talk to Tom now that he's awake and see if he remembers anything. It wouldn't have been hard to dump some eye drops into whatever Tom was drinking, but I need one of the boys to verify that Johnny was around them enough to do that." Angus wrote something in his notebook. "Did you ever hear Johnny and Terrance argue?"

"Not really arguing. Just make comments. You know how siblings insult each other. Terrance would call Johnny a nerd, and Johnny would call Terrance a stupid jock. Just stuff in passing. Seriously, Johnny barely came out of his room. We'd hardly ever see him. Terrance didn't hate him or anything. They just didn't have anything in common. I remember Fiona asking if Johnny had any friends and Terrance shrugged and said they were all online. He said no one ever came over to the house and Johnny didn't leave unless it was to school or some computer camp he went to for a few weeks last summer." Gail stopped so Lance could repeat everything. "Sorry, I forget he can't hear me, and you have to tell him what I say."

"It's okay. We're used to this." Lance smiled as he thought about how second-nature it had become to speak for the ghosts so Angus could hear them. He hardly thought about doing it now. It was just natural.

Angus glanced at his phone as it beeped. "That's Franks. He's on his way over to pick me up. We'll head over to check on Tom first, then go speak to Terrance and his family." He glanced at Lance. "I should be back by one or two. That gives us the afternoon together."

"It's okay. I know this is your job. I've got laundry to do and unfortunately, I can't bribe Ray or Bethany into mowing the back yard. I've got plenty to keep me occupied until you get home. What did you want to do for dinner?"

"How about I grill those steaks we bought? I think there is a can of baked beans we can open to have with it, and there's some salad left over from last night." Angus set his phone down.

"Sounds good." Lance always loved it when Angus grilled. "I'll get the steaks out and ready. I found a marinade that sounds good in one of those books of Cel's we bought."

"Looking forward to trying it." Angus stood. "I need to get ready. Is there anything else you can think of that I should know about Johnny or Terrance's family?" He looked where Gail was sitting.

"No, not that I can think of. I don't know why Johnny would do anything to all of us. We hardly knew him." Gail continued to run her ghostly fingers over Haunt's fur.

"I hope he didn't do this, but it's something I have to investigate. Thanks for your help." Angus looked at Lance. "Help me in the bedroom for a minute?"

Lance smiled. "Of course." He was used to Angus asking him that when he wanted to steal a few minutes alone without the ghosts watching them. He stood and followed Angus into the bedroom, not shocked at all when Angus closed the door and pulled Lance into his arms.

"I really hate it when I can't spend weekends together." Angus brushed his mouth over Lance's, holding him tightly against his body.

"It's not the whole weekend. It's a few hours. We'd both be lost in yard work if you were here anyway. Go see what you can learn. This case is important. I'd rather you catch this killer than hang around with me." Lance rocked his hips. "But tonight, when you get home, I plan on getting all your attention."

"I'll be yours all night. I promise." Angus rocked back against him.

Lance groaned then pulled away before things went too far and it would be impossible to stop. "Don't tempt me to keep you here when you have places to be."

"Franks would wait for me." Angus gave a sly grin.

"And the last thing I want is for Franks to know what we're doing in here. We have all night and all day tomorrow. As badly as I want you, we can wait. My desire for you isn't going to fade in a few hours. I always want you." Lance leaned in and gave him another kiss. "Now get ready. I'll go let Franks in if he shows up."

"I'll be right out." Angus turned for the bathroom.

Lance let him go and headed out to the living room. The ghosts had moved to the backyard, leaving him alone in the house. He cleaned up their morning dishes, sticking them in the dishwasher to deal with later, and started to plan his day.

He'd just made a grocery list when he heard Franks knock, then the door open.

"It's just me," Franks yelled.

"In the kitchen," Lance called back.

Franks walked in a second later and frowned. "Where's Haunt? She always greets me at the door."

"With our new ghost. She hasn't left Gail's side since they met. It's as if Haunt knows she needs the extra affection." Lance nodded to the coffee pot. "There's still coffee there if you want some."

"I'm good, but thanks." Franks took a seat. "I stopped and had breakfast at Benny's this morning before coming over here. It's becoming a Saturday habit."

Lance raised a brow. "Alone?"

"Yes, alone. Don't go getting that hopeful look in your eyes. I'm happy being single. Stop thinking that's going to change," Franks growled.

"I thought I was happy single until I met Angus." Lance grinned.

"Same. Meeting the right person changes everything." Angus walked into the kitchen, going to Lance and dropping a kiss on his lips before looking at Franks. "You ready?"

"If it means avoiding the dating conversation again, I'm more than ready. Hospital, then the Jefferies?"

"Yeah, I want to see if we can get more information on the poison used. I found very little online telling me how much a person has to receive to make them this sick." Angus patted his pockets, making sure he had everything, then turned back to Lance. "Shouldn't be more than a few hours."

"I'll be here. Take your time. I hope you find—" Lance stopped speaking as Angus's phone rang.

Angus answered and almost instantly his body tensed, and his expression grew serious. "How long ago?" He cast a look at Franks, then at Lance. "Okay, we're on our way." Angus ended the call and frowned. "That was Detective Burns. A call just went out for police and an ambulance for the Jefferies home. She was in the office working on something when she heard the call over the radio and remembered the address as one connected to our case." He ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head. "I'll be later than planned." Angus turned to leave, and Franks stood and followed.

"Be safe." Lance's gut tightened, praying it was something simple and not another murder. He headed into the backyard, debating whether to tell Gail, but in the end decided she had a right to know what was going on. He sat down at the table and told



her about the call.

Gail stood. "Can I go with them?" She started to move toward the house.

"They're already gone," Lance called to her.

She turned. "I can walk there, or grab a ride from someone going that way, right? You said I could jump into cars without people knowing?" She looked at Ray. "I need to be there. Maybe I can see something, learn something. I can go into the house and listen where you guys can't." She looked at Lance.

Lance sighed.

"She's right. We can go where Angus and Franks can't without a warrant. Maybe we'll learn something. It's worth a try." Bethany stood beside Gail. "Will you give us a ride?"

Lance didn't like this, but honestly, if he didn't give them a ride, they'd just go find one. He almost asked if she knew the address, then remembered the kids spent most of their free time at Terrance's home. "Let me grab my wallet and keys. Meet me in the garage."

Angus was not going to be happy about this, but Lance would simply drop the ghosts off down the street a bit, then head home. They could tag along with Angus when he was done if they needed a ride back to the house. All in all, having the ghosts spy wasn't a bad idea. It was something they should have thought of earlier. They'd never be seen, couldn't be injured, and were able to go places the police couldn't. The trouble came when the ghosts might actually find something out and then Angus couldn't use it as evidence, because, of course, who is going to believe that a ghost told him?

"Ready?" He got into the car, seeing Ray and Bethany in the back seat and Gail in the passenger seat. "Where am I going?"

"Do you know where Baxter Park is? Terrance lives just down the road from there," Gail told him.

"Sure. I used to play softball there when I was in a summer league a few years ago." Lance knew the area well. Then again, at one point or another, he'd been out to pick up bodies in most areas of Fairway.

"Once we're close I can direct you." Gail leaned toward Lance. "Do you know what the emergency was?"

"No, just that an ambulance was called. It could be nothing more than someone falling, or someone cutting their hand chopping vegetables." He hoped it was that simple, but the hush in the car told him that none of them believed that.

"Gail, maybe you should let me go in first." Ray met Lance's gaze in the rearview mirror. "Considering how Terrance was scared to die, it might not be pretty."

"Oh, God!" Gail's hand went to cover her mouth. "He was scared of being crushed." She sagged in her seat. "Please don't let him be hurt." She held her hands together as if praying, but glanced back at Ray. "I'll be okay. I watched Lance do my autopsy. I can handle it."

Lance wasn't sure, but he'd learned long ago not to argue with the ghosts about these things. To his surprise, the ghosts handled death and horrible death scenes way better than he imagined they would.

Silence filled the car as he drove, thankful that the weekend traffic wasn't heavy. It took only about ten minutes to cross town and drive into the neighborhood. Once they

got to the park, Gail told Lance where to turn. He saw the flashing lights first, then his stomach tightened as he saw the medical examiner's van parked on the curb. This wasn't going to be just a simple fall or someone needing stitches. Lance parked and he watched as Gail floated out of the car and rushed to the house with Bethany and Ray following. Lance sat for a moment debating on what to do, but finally decided to get out and walk over to the medical examiner's van. Either Sam or Mack would be there since they swapped calls over the weekend. He was here and he would see if he could help. If not, he'd quietly leave, knowing that Angus would have his hands full well into the night if another teen was dead.

Lance walked over to the medical examiner's van but didn't see anyone around it. It was unlocked, so he helped himself to what he would need and made his way toward the house. He knew before he got there that it was probably Terrance who had died. Standing in the driveway, Gail, Ray, and Bethany stood with a very tall young man. The guy had a confused look on his face as Gail spoke to him. Lance wanted to approach, but there were other first responders out front, and he couldn't risk drawing attention to himself by speaking with ghosts that no one else could see. He'd get his chance to speak with them later.

One of the two garage doors was open and crime scene tape was already in place, keeping people from entering the garage. He saw Mack standing inside the garage, speaking with one of the paramedics who had responded. He looked around but didn't see Angus or Franks anywhere. He nodded to one of the officers he knew, but stayed to the side, not wanting to interfere with everything going on. He couldn't see the body, but he guessed it was in the garage by the attention the area was getting.

"Lance?" Mack called as he looked out to the driveway from the garage. He moved closer. "You come with Angus?"

Not wanting to lie, Lance simply said, "You need help?"

"I won't turn it down. But it's a bad one." Mack glanced back over his shoulder.  
"Prepare yourself."

Lance's stomach tightened, but he'd expected it to be bad. After all, Terrance's fear had been being crushed. Lance didn't know yet how it had happened, but was ready for anything. Crossing under the crime scene tape, he paused to give his name and position to the officer securing the area, slid on a pair of booties over his shoes, then gloved up. He took a deep breath and prepared himself for the worst.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Angus stood in the doorway that led from the house to the garage and clenched his jaw as he looked at the body of Terrance Jefferies. Guilt flooded him because of this death. He'd known the risk and hadn't taken Terrance out of the house to protect him. It didn't matter that he hadn't had any evidence to do that. He could have prevented this and hadn't.

Terrance's body was upright, bowed over the top of the long chest freezer that stood against the back wall of the garage. The lid was open, and Terrance's head rested on one of the items inside the freezer. Blood trickled from the boy's mouth, but even more horrifying was seeing how the car had crushed Terrance's body between the grill of the car and the freezer. The car still sat in place, holding the body upright. Terrance's feet dangled just off the ground as if the car had forced him up just a few inches before crushing him to death. With Terrance's height, the car had hit his pelvic area, but that had been enough to kill him. Terrance had fallen forward, his head inside the open freezer. It was one of the most horrific things he'd seen, and he'd seen a lot.

Terrance's mother had come home to find him that way. Angus didn't want to think about the shock she'd had when she'd opened the garage door and pulled her car in beside the other car that had crushed her son.

She'd called for help right away, but Terrance was already gone. So was their suspect. Johnny Jefferies was nowhere to be found. Angus already had people searching for him in the area, but it was clear that the murder had happened earlier in the day. That gave Johnny time to run. The question was, where would or could a fifteen-year-old run to?

He could hear Mrs. Jefferies crying in the living room as she spoke to Franks. Angus was glad Franks was dealing with her, because every time Angus looked into her grieving eyes, another wave of guilt rushed through him. He'd thought he had time. Thought that Terrance would be safe with his parents around. He figured the parents would be home over the weekend. He had no idea Mr. Jefferies usually went into the office on Saturdays, and that was something he should have confirmed. Mrs. Jefferies had gone shopping. She was only gone for a few hours, but it had been enough.

Angus watched as Mack walked back toward the body. He'd already looked over the scene but hadn't started to deal with the body yet. There was so much more than just confirming the body was dead. Angus was shocked to see Lance walk in behind Mack. He narrowed his eyes, wondering what he was doing there. He slowly made his way around the back of the car to where Lance stood, looking at Terrance's body. "Hey?"

"Hey, sorry to intrude, but Gail insisted on coming. It was easier for me to drive her." Lance kept his voice low. "I assume the new ghost I see with Gail might be your victim."

Angus's eyes went wide. "Seriously? He's here?"

Lance nodded but didn't say more as Mack moved closer to them.

"His brother is missing. We're assuming he did this, which means he's somehow managed to kill all of them. I've got people searching, but he could be anywhere now. I've sent an officer to Gavin's home and to the hospital to keep an eye on them until we find Johnny." Angus looked at the body and shook his head. Now wasn't the time to cry on Lance's shoulder, but he really wished he could get a hug right now.

"Has forensics finished with the car? We need to move it back so we can retrieve the body." Mack asked.

Angus didn't want to be here for this, but it was his job. He went over and spoke the man who had been collecting evidence. The whole car would be taken to the lab, but someone would have to at least get into it and reverse it to release the body from where it was being held. After speaking to the man, Angus walked back to Lance and Mack. "Give him five minutes, then he'll back it up a bit. We're waiting on the flatbed wrecker to get here to haul it, but we need to remove the body before opening that second garage door."

"That's fine. We only need a little room to work." Mack sighed. "Horrible way to die."

Angus knew it had been Terrance's biggest fear. Again, he fought back a wave of guilt. He should have prevented this.

"You okay?" Lance looked concerned.

"Yeah, I will be." Angus wasn't up to talking about everything now. Tonight, with a cold beer, he'd talk to Lance about his feelings, but here at the scene wasn't the place. He gestured Lance to move away from Mack for a moment, then leaned in. "I need to speak to Terrance if he's still around."

"I know. Ray and Bethany won't let him go into the light without at least speaking to me first," Lance told him quietly. "He appears upset. They're outside in the driveway right now."

Angus nodded but didn't say more as Mack started to move toward the body.

"We'll talk once this is done." Lance nodded to the body. "Go do your job, and I'll do mine."

Angus groaned. If he'd been doing his job correctly, maybe Terrance would still be

alive. He gave Lance a nod, then turned to start back into the house when he heard screaming from out front. Turning back, he quickly made his way to the front of the house to find an officer holding Mr. Jefferies back from crossing the crime scene tape. Angus hurried over. "Mr. Jefferies, your wife is inside. Let's go through the front door and talk to her there."

"I need to see. Is it true? Is Terrance really dead?" Mr. Jefferies tried to move past the tape again.

Angus gripped his arm. "It is, but we're collecting evidence right now and can't have you there. Your wife needs you. Let's focus on her and let them finish up here." He kept a tight grip on Mr. Jefferies' arm as he led him up the front steps and into the house.

Franks glanced up as Mrs. Jefferies ran to her husband. She cried hard against his chest as he held her to him. Angus moved into the living room and leaned in. "Lance is out helping Mack. We need to interview the others after."

Franks brows went up. "Others?"

Angus nodded, hoping Franks would catch on that Terrance's ghost had remained. "Lance will help us on that once we finish up here." He watched as the Jefferies took a seat on the couch, both of them crying.

"They think Johnny did this," Mrs. Jefferies cried. "They think he's responsible for all this."

Mr. Jefferies looked up. "Is this true? Where is Johnny?"

"We don't know. He wasn't home when I got here." Mrs. Jefferies wiped at her tears with a tissue. "I called for help and rushed into the house to make sure Johnny was



safe, but he was gone. I don't know where."

"Do you mind if I have a quick look around Johnny's room?" Angus asked. He could wait for a warrant, but if the family would give permission, it would help hurry things along.

"You think my son did this?" Mr. Jefferies shook his head. "Impossible. Johnny isn't capable of killing someone. He's not an angry kid."

"Then where is he?" Mrs. Jefferies turned on her husband. "Where is your son? He never leaves the house, yet he's gone now? My son is dead, and yours is missing."

Mr. Jefferies stood up. "Johnny would never do something like this. Maybe the killer took him." He stared at Angus and Franks. "That's possible. Maybe my son is in danger while you sit here calling him the killer."

Angus understood the need for a father to defend his son. And the father was right, it was possible, but not probable. With the information they had, Angus was sure the kid was a killer. The problem was, all he had was information and not evidence to back up his thinking. "We are looking at every possibility. I have people out there now, searching to find your son. We want to make sure he's safe, but we also have questions we need to ask him."

"No way. Johnny couldn't do something like this." Mr. Jefferies shook his head as he stared at his wife. "You can't think he could."

"Then where is he?" she yelled at him.

Angus exchanged a look with Franks. This was not what he needed right now. "Let's stay calm. We can't solve anything if you're fighting."

Franks nodded. "Is there somewhere your son would go? A friend's house or another family member's? Maybe he saw what happened and got scared."

Angus didn't believe it for a moment, but Franks' questions seemed to calm everyone down.

"No, all his friends were online. I don't know of anyone local that he hung out with. He might go to my mother's house, but even that is doubtful." Mr. Jefferies sighed.

"Can you call her and see if he's there?" Angus asked.

Mr. Jefferies huffed out a long breath but pulled out his phone. "I'm not telling her about Terrance now. I need to do that in person." He quickly hit a button on his phone. "Hey, Mom, how are you?" Mr. Jefferies' tone had gone soft and gentle. He seemed to listen for a minute, then nodded. "Hey, I'm looking for Johnny. Did he happen to come over there today?" Mr. Jefferies' eyes widened, and he cast a look at his wife. "What time?"

"He's there?" Mrs. Jefferies gripped her husband's arm.

Mr. Jefferies shook his head, still focused on the call. "Okay, Mom. If you see him, please call me." He ended the call and looked over at Franks and Angus. "He came by to get her car a little over an hour ago."

"He doesn't have a license." Mrs. Jefferies frowned.

"His learner's permit, but Mom wouldn't know the difference." Mr. Jefferies sighed. "What does this mean?"

"Did he say why he needed her car?"

"He wanted to run to the mall to get a new set of headphones." Mr. Jefferies shook his head. "Johnny hated the mall. He ordered everything online. He never goes shopping. Mom said he promised to be back in a few hours."

"We need your mother's name and any information about her vehicle that you know." Franks had his notepad out.

"I can't believe this is happening." Mr. Jefferies looked at his wife. "Call Edward. If Johnny is a suspect, he's going to need a lawyer."

Angus groaned inwardly. A lawyer would only delay them getting information they needed.

"Detectives, I want to know if my son is safe, so I'll give you the information you want about my mother, but that's all I'll give you for now. Any search of his room or further information that may hurt my son will have to wait until you get a warrant, or my attorney is here."

"Understood." Franks took the information on Mr. Jefferies' mother, getting her name, address, and the make and model of her car. As soon as they called it in, they'd have the license plate number and be able to start searching for the car.

Angus went to the door and called to one of the uniformed officers. "Could you stay with the Jefferies while we make some calls?"

"Yes, Sir." The officer walked into the house and stood by the door to the living room.

"We'll go call this in and get people looking," Franks told the Jefferies as he stood. "Please stay with the officer while we finish up in the garage."

Mr. Jefferies nodded. "Please find him."

"We're doing all we can," Angus assured him as he walked out of the house.

Once they were away from the parents, Franks stopped and pulled out his phone. "Like you, I think Johnny did this, but as of right now, we have nothing tying him to the murders other than he's gone missing, and that doesn't prove guilt. We need to find something solid."

Angus rolled his shoulders. "The make and model of the grandmother's car matches the one we saw leaving Gail's work. It's a start. I was hoping to get into his bedroom. Maybe find a bottle of eye drops. He's a minor, which is going to make this extra hard. With the parents already lawyered up, it's going to be slow getting any information."

"I hate to do it, but we need to play the parents against each other. Remember, they're remarried. Mrs. Jefferies just lost her only son. She's going to be more willing to help than Mr. Jefferies who is going to try and protect his son." Franks nodded to where Mack and Lance were rolling the body to the van. "You said Terrance stuck around?"

Angus nodded. "That's what Lance said. I'm still not completely sure why he's here. He said Gail wanted to come, but if we can interview Terrance, maybe he saw something that will help."

"Sure, help us know what happened, but still not give us usable evidence to back it up." Franks sighed. "Let's go talk to your man and see what he knows."

Angus followed Franks to the medical examiner's van. He waited while they loaded the body into the back, then for Lance to finish up. They watched as Mack drove off, then looked at one another. "Is now a good time to talk to Terrance?"

Lance glanced over at the driveway and nodded. "I'll grab him. Meet us at your car." Lance pulled out his phone and acted as if he was listening to someone talk.

Angus was used to this. He followed Franks over to where they'd parked. He unlocked the door and they both got into the front seat. "This is not how I planned to spend my weekend."

Franks laughed. "You know better than to make plans. If you really want a carefree weekend, you need to leave your phone behind and get out of town."

"If only." Angus rested his head back against the seat and smiled as Franks turned on the air conditioning. He had to find something to link Johnny to these murders or he was in for a very long week. He hoped that Terrance had seen something, but as he watched Lance walk to the car, he was reminded how seldom luck was on his side.

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Lance opened the back door of the car and slid in. Once he shut the door, he sighed. "Next time, remind me to stay home."

"I thought you were staying home." Angus glared at him.

"Sorry, it was my fault. I wanted to be here," Gail said. "And it was a good thing I did since Terrance was here."

Lance repeated what she said for Franks and Angus. "But I didn't have to stay. I could have just dropped them off. I'm glad I could help Mack, but that was a tough one." He waved a hand to the empty space of the back seat. "Both Gail and Terrance are here with me. Terrance, you know the detectives already, but what you don't know is they both know I can see ghosts. While they can't see or hear you, they will have me talk for you. Is that okay?"

Terrance nodded. "Yeah, sure. I'm still not sure how this happened."

"Did you see who did it?" Lance asked.

"No. I went out to the garage to get a frozen pizza. The garage was dark. I turned on the light, went to the freezer, opened it, and that's when I felt something hit me. I tried to turn to look back, but the pain was so bad. I either passed out or died then because the next thing I knew I was standing to the side of the freezer, looking at myself. The car was crushing me against the freezer, but the car was empty. I didn't see anyone. Then I noticed the bright light. I almost went to it, but I was too freaked out looking at my body. I wanted to know how it happened. Who did it to me."

Lance repeated everything for Angus and Franks, trying hard not to think in medical terms as he thought about what would happen to a person as they were crushed the way Terrance had been.

"Had you talked to Johnny at all before it happened?" Franks asked.

"No. I got up around eight and he was still in his room. I talked to Mom for a bit while I ate breakfast, then I went to my room. Mom stuck her head in around ten to tell me she was running to the store and would be back in a few hours, then we'd go see Tom. Around eleven, I was hungry again, so I went out to get a pizza. After I died, I just stood there until Mom came home. She freaked and I couldn't do anything to calm her down. I tried everything, but she couldn't see me. She just stared at my body. I thought she was going to move the car, but then she didn't. She later told one of the cops she worried she'd do more damage if she moved it. She was hoping I wasn't dead, even though she couldn't find a pulse." Terrance's eyes shimmered as if he was holding back tears.

"Had you been alive, she could have done more damage moving the car," Lance told him after repeating everything.

"Has Johnny acted oddly lately?" Angus asked.

"No more than usual. He keeps to himself. Hides in his room. He was pissed off he had to hang out at the hospital the other day when we took Tom in, but he didn't say anything to Mom or Dad. He just told me that he was tired of always having everything be about me and my friends." Terrance looked at Gail. "Do you think he's the one who killed you?"

Gail nodded. "It makes sense. He was there to overhear our conversation about dying. Maybe he was in the stairwell or something, listening in on us. He was about the right size for the guy who pushed me from the bridge. I can't be sure, but who else would

know everything we said to do this? Gavin hasn't left his house since Fiona's death, and Tom's in the hospital, so that means it wasn't one of us."

"Would you two mind doing us a favor? I know you can't touch anything or pick things up, but would you mind going into Johnny's room and looking around? I'm looking for anything that might relate to the deaths. I'm also curious if he took his laptop with him when he left today. We know he's borrowed your grandmother's car in the last few hours, but we have no idea where he might have been. We're working to get warrants, but that will take some time. We don't have a lot of evidence to give a judge to back our theory." Franks spoke to the area where the ghosts were even though he couldn't see them.

Lance smiled. Franks had come a long way since finding out about ghosts. Here he was just accepting that they were really there even though he had no solid proof. It couldn't be easy. Lance wasn't sure he would have ever believed it if he hadn't been able to see the truth with his own eyes. Hell, even after seeing the truth, he doubted it. He'd thought he was going insane after meeting his first ghost.

"Sure, we can look." Terrance shrugged, then looked at Gail. "Is that okay? Are there rules we have to follow?"

She laughed. "No, we can help them. Tonight, we'll sit down and talk about being a ghost. Ray's been dead for a long time. He knows everything."

"I don't know. I think I should go be with Tom." Terrance's shoulders slumped. "He's going to be so upset when he finds out I'm dead."

"We'll make sure he's got people with him. You can go to him tonight if you want, but he won't know you're there." Lance felt sorry for the young couple who were now torn apart by death.



"You can tell him I'm there." Terrance looked hopeful.

"And you think he'll believe me? Or that it will even help him? It will probably just make it worse wondering where you are or trying to talk to you, but you can't talk back to him. I can't be there all night to communicate for you. I'm not even sure I'm willing to let him know you're a ghost. It's a touchy situation." Lance really didn't want to get into the issue that might come up from telling someone he could see ghosts. Only those he trusted most knew.

"Um, remember, we can only hear one side of this conversation," Angus said from the front seat.

"Sorry." Lance laughed. "Wasn't important right now. What is, is finding out where Johnny is and proving that he was the one committing these murders."

"We'll go in and look now," Gail told him.

"You okay if they go in now, or do you have more questions?" Lance asked.

"They can go now. We've got to get back to work, but have them tell you, then you can let us know if they find anything. I'd like to try and make sure the Jefferies don't go into Johnny's room until we can get a warrant to get in there ourselves." Angus opened the car door. "Thanks for helping us."

"Of course. I want to know who killed me," Terrance said as he and Gail floated out of the car. "I'll do whatever I can to help." The two ghosts floated across the lawn and into the house.

Lance got out of the car and stood beside Angus. "They're inside now. Terrance said he'd do whatever he could to help. I'm going to try and get him to stay at our place tonight, but he really wants to be with Tom. Speaking of which, can we make sure

Tom has someone there to help him through this? His parents don't know how close he and Terrance were. I worry he's going to need someone he can trust to lean on."

"I'll call and make sure the hospital has someone there for him." Franks pulled out his phone.

Angus turned to Lance. "I'm not happy you're here and had to see this scene, but I'm glad you're here for me. I feel like I've fucked this case all up."

"How? You've done everything you could with the information you have." Lance rested his hand on Angus's arm.

"I should have kept Terrance away from Johnny. We all figured Johnny was the killer. I knew there was a risk. I just thought I had time. I thought his parents would stay home. I should have protected him." Angus's eyes were full of grief and torment.

"You had no way of knowing. Again, you did all you could with what you knew. Don't carry this on your shoulders." Even as he said the words, Lance was sure they were pointless. Angus would blame himself and nothing Lance said would stop it. All he could do was be there to listen as Angus worked through this on his own. "I love you. I know you have done everything you can to keep people safe. Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, it's not enough. We just have to move on. We can't question the what ifs. You've done all you could up to now."

"I still don't have a bit of proof Johnny is the killer, even though in my gut I know he is." Angus stared up at the sky for a long moment, then sighed. "I've got to work. Call me or grab me if they find anything in Johnny's room."

Lance watched him walk off, wishing there was something more he could do for him. He'd seen him this way before and knew that in time, they'd talk more about it, but until the case was solved, Angus wouldn't focus on himself, no matter how much

inner turmoil there was. Lance sighed and headed back to the driveway where Ray and Bethany were standing. He pulled his phone back out and went to stand beside them. "Angus sent the other two into the house to look at things."

"Anything we can do to help?" Bethany asked.

Lance shrugged. "Not unless you know where Terrance's stepbrother took off to or can find evidence that he's behind all these murders."

"Any idea where he'd go?" Ray asked.

"No, he took his grandmother's car and now no one knows where he is. My guess is he's trying to leave town, but how far can a fifteen-year-old get? Police are watching for the car. He'll have to dump it and find another way after a while. He has to know he can't come back home. The fact he left home at all tells me he has to be the murderer." Lance wished they had more to work with.

"We'll go in with Gail and Terrance. Maybe fresh eyes will help. Terrance is still struggling to accept everything that's happened. I'm glad we found him, so he doesn't have to wander around alone." Ray seemed to take Bethany's hand, but it was really just a connection of their energy mingling. "You okay out here?"

"Yeah. Let me know if you find anything so I can let Angus know. Thanks, you two." Lance smiled as he pulled the phone from his ear.

"Anytime." Ray winked, then the two were floating through the wall and into the house.

Lance sighed as he looked around, taking in the area. Curious neighbors watched from their front porches, and numerous police wandered the area as paramedics cleaned up and got ready to leave. Thankfully, he didn't see any media vans, but it

wouldn't be long before this case was connected to the others. Angus had said the only reason they hadn't called in the feds so far was because it wasn't confirmed Gail's death was murder yet, but now, there was no telling if the feds would take over the case. Lance was torn. While it would be nice to let Angus and Franks take a step back, they deserved to keep working on a case they'd become so invested in.

As he waited, he thought about the murders. No matter how he tried, he couldn't imagine a reason why a fifteen-year-old would have enough hate to kill so many people. What had happened to make him do something like this? These types of killings were personal. He would have watched the life fade out of Elizabeth and Fiona. He would have watched Terrance's body crushed between the freezer and car, knowing exactly what he was doing. Lance had seen a lot of death in his life, but he seldom understood the reasoning behind most murders. He couldn't imagine having something in his mind snap that would make him commit a murder. Self-defense he understood, hell, he even understood the case he'd worked where a man had killed his daughter's rapist. That made sense to him, but this, he just couldn't see how it could ever make sense.

He straightened as he saw the ghosts float out of the garage. They stayed close together as they came to stand beside him. Lance pulled out his phone and put it to his ear. "How'd things go?"

"There's an empty box in his garbage for eye drops, and there is a receipt just under his bed that's from the hardware store down the road." Gail spoke quickly in her excitement.

"And his laptop is gone, so he probably took it with him. His handheld gaming system is gone too," Terrance told Lance. "I bet if he gets on to play any of his usual games, he'll use his regular player's name. Can you track him using that?"

Lance had no idea, but hopefully, Angus would know. "Let me send a quick message

to Angus. Give me a second." He pulled his phone from his ear, quickly letting Angus know what the ghosts had found. He left the message simple, saying there was more when Angus could get a moment to talk. He put the phone back to his ear. "We'll see what he says."

"He's interviewing my parents again." Terrance glanced back at the house. "My mom is really upset. My stepdad is trying to stop them from searching the house. Mom wants to let them do whatever they need to. I get it, Johnny's his son, but anyone can see Johnny is guilty. Why else would he have taken off? I wish I could let Mom know I'm okay, but she would freak out if anyone mentioned I was a ghost. She hates things like ghosts or talk of any life after death stuff. She won't even watch a movie with stuff like that in it. She has nightmares."

Lance wished he could hug the boy. "It's going to be hard for a while. I'm sure they're both struggling. One son is dead, probably killed by the other. It's going to take them both some time to work through their emotions. My advice, and it's simply advice, you don't have to take it, but I think it would be easier for you to come stay at my place for a few days and let your parents work through their grief and anger. You can't do anything to help them so it will only hurt you to watch them go through it all."

"I'd like to see Tom." Terrance glanced at Gail. "Will you go with me?"

"How about we all go?" Ray moved forward. "Bethany and I have friends there we can visit while you go up and see Tom."

Lance smiled, remembering the hospital ghosts who had helped them in a case a while back. "I can drop you guys off there once I talk to Angus. There's no point in me hanging around here if you guys aren't here. Angus will be busy. I have plenty to do at home."

"Thanks." Terrance blew out a breath. "Out of everyone, he's the one who I'm most worried about."

"Gavin's still alive. He'll help him," Gail said. "They can grieve together."

Lance sighed. So much pain, but at least whether alive or a ghost, they had someone to help them. Hopefully, Elizabeth and Fiona had gone into the light and found each other there.

"Lance?" Angus called as he walked across the lawn toward him.

"Hey." He smiled. "You didn't have to come right out."

"I needed to get out of there for a bit. Franks can handle it. I'm leaving an officer to guard Johnny's bedroom until I can get a warrant to get in there. You said they found eye drops and a receipt?" Angus pulled out his notepad. "Anything else?"

"They found the box the eye drops came in, not the actual drops." Lance glanced at Ray for confirmation. At his nod, Lance continued, "Gail said there was also a receipt under the bed for a hardware store."

"Did you see what he bought?" Angus asked.

Gail shook her head. "It was too dark to make out the light print. I just noticed the bolder print of the hardware store's name."

Lance told Angus what she said. "Terrance says he took his laptop and his gaming device. As addicted as Johnny is at gaming, can you track him with those? Maybe through his gaming I.D. info or something?"

Angus shrugged. "Probably. I'll have to leave that up to our computer guys, but I'd

think it would be possible. Do you know his gaming name?"

Terrance shook his head.

"Nope, sorry," Lance told him.

"That's okay. We'll find it. Did he use any other computers or systems in the house?"

"He'd use the Xbox in the basement sometimes, but I never saw him on the family computer, just his laptop. He probably has his phone on him too. My stepdad should have info on that, I don't even know his number. I had it in my phone, but I never called him." Terrance shook his head. "I don't even know where my phone is now."

"Get used to not having it," Bethany teased. "We can't hold them."

Lance laughed as he told Angus about everything they'd said.

"I'll get a warrant for the Xbox then, and we'll see if we can track his phone. You were all on the same plan?"

Terrance nodded. "Yeah, my stepdad put us on his after they got married."

Lance relayed the information.

"Thanks, this will help. I'm trying to push those warrants through, but I don't know how long that will take." Angus looked at Lance. "I'll be late."

"I figured. Go do your job. I'm dropping them off at the hospital before I head home. I'll see you when you get there." He brushed a quick kiss over Angus's mouth, aware of where they were and that Angus was working. "Good luck."

"Thanks." Angus headed back into the house.

Lance nodded and started for the car, not wanting to draw attention to him appearing to talk to himself. He could have pulled his phone out again, but why bother when they could talk openly once in the car?

The heat in the car took Lance's breath away and he cranked up the A.C., leaving the car door open until the rush of air cooled the car. As he finally shut the door and secured his seat belt, he glanced over at Gail in the passenger seat. "I'm a bit jealous right now. Not only does the heat not bother you guys anymore, but you can't get sunburns either."

"I hadn't even thought about that," Terrance said from the back seat.

"You have a lot to learn. We'll go through it all later tonight when we get back home. You lose a lot of abilities, but there are some you gain as well," Ray informed Terrance.

"I can't believe I'm dead. I thought I was safe at home." Terrance sighed. "I can't understand why Johnny would do all this?"

"Did you two have a huge fight at some point?" Lance asked.

"No, nothing. We didn't hide the fact we didn't really like each other, but we just kept our distance for the most part. Honestly, I didn't think it was that bad. We were just different. He didn't understand me, and I didn't understand him. We had different interests. I tried to game with him and stuff when our parents were dating. Tried to be his friend. He just wouldn't talk. We'd game and the whole time I got the feeling he was being forced to play with me. Like his dad was making him do it. The first chance Johnny would get, he'd take off to his room again. Finally, I just gave up asking if he wanted to do things."



"He never talked to any of us but Fiona. Sometimes he'd talk to her when she'd be in the kitchen. He even asked her out once, but she turned him down," Gail said.

"I didn't know about that." Terrance looked shocked.

"Yeah, he invited her to the Halloween dance. She was nice about it and told him no thanks. She told me and Liz about it the next day. She was kind of amused by it. I think she kept from telling you because she was afraid that you'd tell Johnny to back off. She didn't want to embarrass him." Gail smiled. "We thought it was cute, him wanting to date an older girl."

Lance smiled at the thought that a two-year difference in age was a big deal, but then when he'd been that age, he'd probably thought so too. Now, he knew adults in relationships with nearly twenty years separating them.

"Could he have been so upset with her saying no that he killed her?" Terrance asked.

"Her, maybe, but the rest of you? That doesn't make sense," Bethany commented.

"Sadly, like many other cases, we may never know the reason behind Johnny's actions." Lance slowed as traffic got heavier.

"I hate that. I want to know what I did to deserve this." Gail frowned. "Do you think we know if we go into the light?"

"No one knows what happens in the light," Ray told her. "We can only assume from the feeling it gives off that it's not a bad place. We've seen where evil souls go, and it's not peaceful like the light."

Lance listened as Bethany and Ray explained to Gail and Terrance about the black mist they'd seen surrounding evil ghosts. Lance still got the chills each time he heard

them talk about it. He really didn't want to know where they went.

When he pulled up in front of the hospital, Lance was glad to see the ghosts off. He hated to think about how hard this would be for Terrance, but even more so for Tom who would have to go on without Terrance by his side. Lance couldn't think about it for long or he'd start worrying about Angus and fearing he'd end up in that same position someday.

He said his goodbyes and headed home, determined not to think about the case or the danger that Angus faced every day. Life was to be lived, not stressed over, worrying about when death might come.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Angus glanced at Franks across the table of the small diner they'd decided to grab dinner at. They were still waiting for the warrants to come in for the Jefferies' house and expected them any moment. They'd decided to grab food while they could and take a few minutes to breathe and regroup.

"We've got everyone watching for the car, and if he does fire up his gaming system or laptop, we'll know." Franks dipped a fry into his ketchup. "He's fifteen. How far can he get?"

"If he left town before we put the call out, he could be halfway through Texas by now." Angus sighed. "We should have put Terrance in protective custody last night."

"This is not your fault. We had nothing to back up our reasoning. We can't upend someone's life over a gut feeling." Franks leaned back. "I get how you feel. I feel the same way, but we've done everything we can with what we had to work with. This kid's been lucky not to leave evidence behind. No one wants to consider a fifteen-year-old is a mass murderer. If he hadn't gone after Terrance and Tom in the house, we'd still have no idea he was our suspect."

"They're so young." Angus stared at his half-eaten burger.

"I agree, but we have a job to do, and we do it to the best of our abilities. We work with what evidence we have. We can't doubt the job we've done. What we have to do now is catch this kid and see if we can find out why he did this. For the life of me, I can't think of anything that could be so bad in a fifteen-year-old's life that would make him go on a killing spree." Franks shrugged. "Then again, we see it in school shootings all the time."

"Thank God we haven't had one of those here." Angus forced himself to take another bite. He needed the energy the food would offer, but his stomach was in knots. He couldn't stop thinking about Tom and how devastated he had to be once he heard Terrance was dead. It made him imagine himself in the same position, losing Lance. It would kill him. Even knowing about the afterlife, he didn't want to think about a life where he couldn't hold Lance in his arms.

Franks looked down at his phone as it beeped. "We've got the warrants to search the Jefferies' home."

Angus took one more bite of his food, then pushed it back. He pulled out his wallet, found the bills he needed, then tossed them on the table. "Let's go. I want solid evidence on hand when we bring Johnny in. I don't want any lawyer finding a way to let him walk out of our custody." He stood.

Franks nodded, took the last gulp of his coffee, and followed. "Slow down. Officers are on scene. We're not going to lose evidence."

Angus glanced at his partner. "You don't think Johnny will go after Gavin now, do you?" He'd been worried about the kid since he was the only one not attacked so far.

"We've got an officer outside his home, and he's got great security. We've warned him to be careful. Both his parents are with him. There's not much more we can do." Franks gripped Angus's elbow. "You've got to take a breath. I haven't seen you this worked up over a case in a long time."

Angus couldn't explain it to Franks. He was still upset about having lied to Gail's parents after her death, and now, the guilt he was feeling over Terrance was eating him up. He wasn't sure why this case was getting to him, but it was. He nodded. "I know. I'll be okay. I just want him caught."

Franks unlocked the car, and they got inside. They sat silently for a while as they headed back to the Jefferies' home. Angus sat with his head back, eyes closed, mentally listing everything they needed to do. With the eyedrop box and receipt from the hardware store, he'd have enough to get a warrant to arrest Johnny. Right now, he was only a person of interest they wanted for questioning. Holding him wouldn't be a problem since he was driving illegally with a learner's permit. He couldn't count on the family being helpful, though he was sure Mrs. Jefferies would do all she could to bring her son's killer to justice. This was going to destroy their marriage. Angus couldn't imagine recovering from something like this to make it work, especially if Mr. Jefferies was defending his son. It was a mess.

"So I hear Amy's sister is going to be working at the morgue." Franks glanced at Angus.

"Trying to distract me from the case?" Angus laughed.

"Is it working?"

"Yeah, Gretta will start there in a week or so. Hopefully, she'll be a good fit. Lance said everyone liked her when she interviewed. Sounds like she's had a tough marriage. I think coming here will be good for her." Angus tried to recall all he'd been told.

"Is this a younger or older sister?" Franks asked.

"Not sure. My impression is younger, but I really don't know. Amy worried over her like a big sister, but I guess a little sister would worry the same way. I'm just glad they found someone to help in the morgue. I know they've gotten so busy the last year or so and they're all tired. The morgue was ignored when the city decided on their budget this year. Sam's pushing hard to make something happen next year before they all burn out."

"It's the mayor. She's got the city council under her thumb. All her pet projects are being handled while the rest of the city is functioning on a budget from twenty years ago. The chief asked for an updated computer system. It was refused. New squad cars, refused. It's that way all over the city. Everyone I talk to who works for the city is hurting." Franks pulled up in front of the Jefferies' home. "You ready to do this?"

"No, but I want it over." Angus climbed from the car. It was nearing seven in the evening but was still hot. Typical Texas summer. A single police car sat by the curb, and a nice BMW sat behind it. "Probably their lawyer." He eyed the car as they walked past it.

"We've got our warrant. There's nothing he can do now. We don't need to interview anyone yet. We got all we could from the parents earlier. I believe if Mrs. Jefferies knew where Johnny might be, she'd tell us." Franks rang the doorbell.

"So do I." Angus took a deep breath and put on his game face.

Mr. Jefferies answered the door, frowning when he saw them. "Detectives."

"Sorry to bother you again, but we've got a warrant to search your son's room and take the Xbox from the basement," Franks told him.

"Care to email me a copy of the warrant?" An older gray-haired gentleman walked up behind Mr. Jefferies and offered his hand. "I'm Ben Tinto, the Jefferies' attorney."

"Nice to meet you." Angus shook his hand. "If you'll give me your email address, I'll send it to you." He was glad they no longer had to wait for paper copies like they had years ago. The digital world was an amazing place.

They stood in the entry hall for several minutes while emails were exchanged. Once everyone had a copy of the warrant, the attorney stepped back. "Get what you need."

"Thank you." Angus didn't have to ask which room was Johnny's. He could tell the moment he went upstairs and saw the uniformed officer standing outside the door.

"Detectives." The officer nodded toward them.

"Thanks for keeping guard, Officer Reese. You can go now. We've got our warrant." Franks shook the young cop's hand. "Anyone give you any problems?"

"The father tried, but I shut him down quick. Once the lawyer showed up, everyone stayed downstairs. I heard quite a bit of fighting, but no information that might help you guys." The officer stepped away from the door.

"Thanks. Hopefully, we find something." Angus pushed the door open, pausing to put on a pair of gloves. The room was small with only a bed and small dresser. A TV screen hung from one wall, and posters of cartoon characters Angus didn't recognize hung around the room. He directed his focus to the trash can and smiled, seeing the eye drop box right on top. He quickly took several photos of it, then picked it up, held it for Franks to see, then put it inside an evidence bag. "Now to find that receipt." He bent down, pulling the comforter up so it wasn't hanging over the edge. The receipt was near the edge of the bed and Angus used his flashlight to illuminate it while he took several photos before reaching for it. He read the purchases and grinned. "Bingo. A bag of easy mix cement, a five-gallon bucket, two locks, and a length of chain."

"That, along with the grandmother's car leaving the scene of Gail's kidnapping should seal the deal." Franks grinned as he searched through dresser drawers.

"Now we just have to locate him." Angus continued to search under the bed, then under the mattress, but found nothing else that seemed important. He'd send a forensics unit in to collect his shoes and look at other items for trace evidence. There was always a chance the shirt Gail had torn was around with her blood on it.

"He won't get far. The car only had half a tank of gas and as far as we know, he only has maybe fifty dollars on him at most." Franks held up a female's earring. "This look familiar?"

"No, but I can't say I remember what the girls were wearing at the time of their deaths. Bag it. It might be something. Maybe he took a souvenir from each murder." Angus pushed up, feeling his knees pop as he stood. He was tired and his body was reminding him how little rest he'd had this week. Less than a week and he'd faced four murders, one attempted murder, and a ton of questions he couldn't answer until now.

"We've done all we can for tonight. I say we head home, get some sleep, and hope there's some sign of him overnight. Everyone in the area has an eye out for the car and our computer gurus are watching his accounts. If there is any activity, they'll call." Franks slapped a hand on Angus's shoulder. "It's been a long day."

It had, but Angus didn't want to end it until he had Johnny in custody. Then again, being a minor, there were going to be a dozen hoops to jump through. "I hope they charge him as an adult." Angus stepped from the room once they were done searching.

"So do I, but you know how the courts are. He could go into juvenile custody until he's eighteen and get out. There's no good ending to this either way. We've got four dead teenagers, and two others devastated by the deaths of those they love. No matter what happens, it's not going to take away the pain Johnny's caused." Franks sighed. "Let's go make sure someone is watching the parents, so they don't help him somehow, then head home. We both need a few hours away from this."

Angus nodded without argument. Franks was right. It was late and they couldn't do anything now. They'd turn in what evidence they found, let the forensics unit come in and look over things, and pray something turned up. Other than drive around looking



for Johnny's car, they couldn't do much more.

They said their goodbyes to the Jefferies, then headed out just as forensics was walking in. A part of Angus wanted to stay and see what they might find, but he'd get a text if they did come across anything of interest. As he climbed into Franks' car, he thought about the pain he'd seen in both parents' eyes. One grieving for the loss of her son's life, the other grieving for the loss of his son's freedom, or at least that was what was hopefully going to happen. He had sympathy for both parents. Their pain was just starting, and it would be months before they could find any peace if this all went to court. And for what? Angus still couldn't find any reason anyone had to die. "What makes a fifteen-year-old so angry he does this?"

"I couldn't tell you. I don't many sane people could." Franks pulled away from the curb. "We may never find out."

"True." It wouldn't be the first case they'd work where they never found out why it happened, but with this one, he wanted the closure knowing would bring. He wanted that for himself, but more so for the families and friends of those killed.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance heard the buzzing of Angus's phone and for a second, he was tempted to silence it and let him sleep. The thought fled as he thought about who was probably calling and how important a call at five in the morning could be. "Babe, wake up. Your phone." Lance ran his hand over Angus's arm, hating to wake him.

"Hmm?" Angus stirred.

"Your phone is ringing. It's probably work." Lance reached over Angus and picked up the phone. Seeing Franks' name on the screen, Lance answered. "Hey, Franks. Give Angus a minute."

"Sure thing." Franks sounded just as groggy and uncaffeinated as Lance felt.

"Angus, Franks is on the phone." Lance nudged Angus a bit harder.

"What time is it?" Angus opened his eyes.

"Just after five." Lance held the phone toward Angus.

Angus took the phone. "What's going on?" He cleared his throat as he sat up.

"I'll go start the coffee." Lance slid out of bed, sure that like most calls in the middle of the night, this would mean Angus was needed for something. As he slipped on his robe, he noticed Haunt sleeping at the foot of the bed and smiled as she got up to follow him out. Once in the kitchen, he flipped on the lights and went to pull out the coffee filter and grounds. They'd tried the pods for a week, but found they went through too much coffee to make them cost effective. They were better off using the

twelve-cup pot and brewing it.

As he woke up a bit more, Lance realized that the house was quiet, and the backyard appeared empty. When he'd gone to bed, Bethany, Ray, Gail, and Terrance were there, talking as they played with Haunt. The visit to Tom had been upsetting for Terrance and the ghosts had grouped around him, trying to help him get through facing the fact he was dead, and Tom would go on living without him.

"Sorry." Angus walked out, running his fingers through his hair. He wore a pair of shorts and nothing else. "Franks is on his way over. The car was found abandoned in front of Gavin's home. We've got officers inside with Gavin and his family right now. No signs of Johnny anywhere. More officers are asking neighbors who have surveillance cameras, but being it's so early in the morning, they are only waking those closest to where the car is parked. They'll wait until later to contact others. They have eyes on the car, but are not approaching yet, hoping Johnny will come back to it."

"So what are you and Franks going to do so early?" Lance asked as the coffee started to drip.

Angus shrugged. "We don't have to go in, but since we're up and things are breaking, we decided to go in. Maybe drive around the area, looking for Johnny. I told Franks to call me last night if he heard anything and I'd do the same, so he called. I'm just sorry it woke you up."

"I can go back to bed. It's Sunday. I don't have plans." Lance pulled three mugs out of the cupboard. "I'm a bit surprised all the ghosts are gone. They were all here when we went to bed."

"Would they have gone back to the hospital?" Franks asked as he took a seat at the table.

"Maybe, but I can't see why in the middle of the night. It's just odd. Maybe they're visiting other ghosts or helping Terrance learn how to jump into cars to get places." Lance tightened the tie on his robe.

"Well, they aren't kids we have to look after. They'll show up." Angus reached out and pulled Lance down on his lap. "Thank you for being so understanding. I know my hours are shit and I get too many calls at odd hours." He nuzzled his nose along Lance's neck. "I'll make it up to you."

"You have nothing to make up. It's what you do. We find time when we can. If you weren't out there saving lives, I might be a little more upset, but I see the good you do. I'd never stand in your way or complain." Lance rested his head on Angus's shoulder.

"It doesn't feel like I'm saving lives this week. I should have protected Terrance better," Angus nearly whispered the words.

"This wasn't your fault. You did everything you could within the law. Sure, we could have sent the ghosts over to watch over him, but even then, they wouldn't have been able to stop what happened. Sometime events are out of our control and that sucks, but we can't question every decision we make because things go wrong from time to time." Lance understood what Angus was feeling, but he wasn't sure how to help him. There was nothing he could say that Angus didn't already know. He just had to work through it slowly. Every case Angus worked took a toll, but some were worse than others. This one would stick with him for a while. "I'm sorry, it's so hard."

"Thanks. I just wish I'd done something different. Something more." He hugged Lance, then released him. "I'm seriously going to find a way for us to get some alone time soon."

"Maybe another weekend trip." Lance kissed him and stood to pour the coffee. "We'll

talk about it once this is over."

"Deal." Angus took the cup that Lance offered him.

Lance poured two more cups and brought them to the table. When Angus raised a brow, Lance laughed. "Franks is worse than either of us when he doesn't get his coffee, but he's too lazy to make his own this early. Coffee shops aren't open this early on Sunday, so I figured he's going to need it."

"Smart." Angus grinned. "Not only taking care of me, but my partner too."

"You're sort of a package deal. At least until Franks finds someone to spoil him." Lance blew over his coffee, then took a sip.

"That may be a while. He doesn't seem interested in settling down yet. He dates, but he never even brings them to his house." Angus shrugged. "The right one will come around one day." He took a sip of his coffee. "I'm so tired. I'm not sure even coffee can save me today."

"Want me to make a thermos so you can take some with you?" Lance hated seeing the lines of fatigue on Angus's face.

"Nah, we'll stop for some later." Angus took another drink.

"I'm going to go unlock the front door so Franks can come in when he gets here." Lance stood.

"Stay. I'll do it. I have to go change anyway." Angus took another gulp of coffee, then stood. He bent and kissed Lance before heading out of the kitchen.

While he waited, Lance looked through some of the ads that had come in the mail

yesterday. Cel had mentioned wanting to make steak salads this Friday, and he wondered what he would need. He assumed it would just be a salad with steak in it, but with Cel, anything was possible.

The front door opened and shut and a minute later Franks walked in. He looked as tired as Lance felt. "Morning." He sank down in the chair and sighed. "Sorry to wake you."

"It's okay. Coffee is for you." He pushed the third cup he'd poured toward Franks. "Any news?"

Franks shook his head. "Nothing since I called. I figure we'll drive around and see if we notice him anywhere. After-all, the others are all looking for the kid in his yearbook photo. Angus and I have seen him recently. There's a big difference. He had longer hair in his photo. I thought for sure he'd leave town. I have to admit I was a bit stunned to find that car here locally. I thought someone would pick him up crossing state lines."

"Maybe he thought he could kidnap Gavin and starve him to death since that's how Gavin feared dying, then found out Gavin was being guarded and had to figure out a new plan." Lance didn't have a clue what the fifteen-year-old was thinking. None of it made sense.

"Possibly, but at this point, he has to know we're on to him. I'd think he'd be running scared. He had to have a plan for after this was all done, wouldn't he?"

"One would think, but we don't think like a teen would. He very well could be doing it one thing at a time then coming up with another plan." Lance stared out the back window, again wondering where the ghosts were.

"Do I need to remind you that I'm not worth shit at five in the morning?" Angus

walked out, tucking his shirt into his pants.

"That's the great thing about working together. We get the best of each other, no matter the time of day." Franks lifted his coffee cup in salute.

"What's the plan?" Angus sat down and reached for his coffee.

"Don't really have one. Figured we'd drive around a bit and brainstorm. Try and get into Johnny's mind. Figure out his plan. Officers are talking to his parents again, trying to find out if he has any friends from school or online that he might go to for help. I personally think that's a dead end, but Captain Marshall figured it was worth pursuing. My guess is he was going to attempt to get into Gavin's house, then found the cops there and had to forget about Gavin. Not sure why he left his only means of transportation. Not a lot of places he can go at five in the morning, and on a Sunday, even the buses don't run as often. Getting out of the area won't be easy unless he's hitchhiking." Franks rolled his shoulders.

"Are we watching his grandmother's house?" Angus asked.

"We are, but she's actually at the Jefferies' home now. They took her there to be with the family." Franks got up to refill his coffee cup, then offered to fill theirs as well.

"Thanks." Lance took the full cup.

"Last one, then we go." Angus took his. "I think he's running scared. No place to go, no one to help him. He's got four murder charges and one attempted facing him. He's realizing his life is over if he doesn't leave town. But with limited money and limited options, where does he go?"

"Then why dump the car? It's his way out." Lance asked.

"Maybe he thought they saw him and was scared to go back to the car. It's just a few houses down from Gavin's," Franks said.

Lance was about to ask a question when Bethany floated into the room. "We found him." She looked excited. "He's at the Fairway Bridge where Gail died. He's just sitting there, staring across the valley."

Lance stood. "Bethany just came in. Johnny is at the Fairway Bridge. She said he's just sitting there staring into space."

Franks stood and Angus followed.

"I don't know how you guys found him but thank you," Angus smiled.

"I'm calling it in." Franks already had his phone to his ear.

"We were at Gavin's when he approached the house. He saw the police cars, turned around, and ran down the street. We followed. It was pure luck that Gail saw him out there. I'll tell you more later."

"Need me?" Lance asked.

"No, but call if you get any more information." Angus glanced over his shoulder.

"I'm going with them," Bethany told Lance.

"Bethany's riding with you," Lance called.

The sound of the door closing was the only answer Lance got. He sighed as he sat back down at the table and prayed that everything would go smoothly. He didn't like the fact that Johnny was at the bridge. Suicide had to be on his mind with him facing



a life in prison for the murders he committed.

Lance dropped a hand to Haunt's back, brushing his fingertips over her. As tired as he was, there would be no going back to bed. He needed to keep busy so he didn't worry about Angus. With a long sigh, he finished off his cup of coffee, then cleaned up the others and put them in the dishwasher. He'd start with laundry, then vacuum. He'd keep finding simple tasks to keep him busy until he got a call that everything was okay. With the way his luck ran, he'd have the whole house clean and yard manicured before Angus even got home.

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Angus glanced at Franks as the call came in that the suspect was in custody. He sighed in relief, glad he wasn't going to have to talk someone out of jumping. He'd find out the details later, but for now, he wanted to get to the station and interview Johnny. "You still with us, Bethany?"

A cool electrical feeling brushed his arm.

"Good. Hopefully, the others will join us at the station. I'm guessing Gail and Terrance will want to hear what Johnny has to say." Angus glanced into the back seat as he spoke.

"Still struggling to get used to that." Franks grinned. "Had she touched me, I might end up going off the road."

"I've had a lifetime to get used to things. Give yourself time. You've come a long way since finding out about the ghosts hanging around." Angus refocused. "We know he's already got a lawyer, at least I'm assuming he'll be using Ben Tito to represent him. I highly doubt Mr. Jefferies is going to let his son face this on his own."

"Do you think they'll try him as an adult?" Franks asked.

"Could go either way. I'd charge him as an adult, but I'm not the D.A.." Angus shrugged. "There's a lot of variables in play. I think a lot of it will come down to how cooperative Johnny is with us. These crimes were horrific. Everything he does and has done will be taken into consideration."

Franks nodded. "I can't imagine how hard this is for Mrs. Jefferies. Can a person

grieve for one son while defending another?"

"I'm not sure I could, especially if it was a stepson. I get you are supposed to love your step kids as much as your blood children, but in a case like this, I'd think there would have to be a line I couldn't cross." Angus took a deep breath as they neared the police station. "Looks like the news already got wind of things." Several media vans lined up along the curb in front of the station and as Franks pulled into the lot, cameras aimed at the car and reporters screamed questions. With the windows up, Angus couldn't hear them, but he was sure this was going to turn into a media nightmare. Fiona's father had made sure the media kept their focus on the case, giving several interviews through the week and updating the press as each new murder happened. Angus understood the need to keep the public's attention on this, but it sure made his job harder.

"Damn it. This is going to be a pain." Franks pulled the car into a parking lot.

"We knew it would happen. Mr. Bloomquist knows better than anyone how to play the media, so he gets exactly the attention he wants. I'd hate to be the D.A. on this case with him breathing down my neck." Angus got out of the car.

Franks fell into step beside him. "Johnny's a minor. Only so much info can go out from us."

"I have no doubt the families of the victims won't be worried about Johnny's age." Angus looked back at the mass of cameras still pointed in their direction. It wasn't even seven in the morning and there were at least ten of them. He was sure the number would triple throughout the day.

It was quiet as they walked into the station, too early for most of the support staff to be on site. Angus ignored the turn toward his office and instead headed to the area where the interview rooms were. He needed an update before he could prepare to sit

down for an interview. Franks was by his side as they weaved through the hallways to the back of the building where there were interview rooms and holding cells for people to wait in before being transported to the county jail.

"Detectives," Captain Marshall leaned against the hallway wall, speaking to one of the uniformed officers.

"Morning." Franks nodded.

"Captain." Angus paused to stand by them. "Where is he?"

"Interrogation one. We're waiting on his attorney," the officer said.

"You brought him in?" Franks asked.

"About twenty minutes ago," the officer acknowledged.

"What was he doing when you found him?" Angus asked.

"Sitting on the bridge crying. He wasn't near the edge like he was going to jump. Just sitting in the middle of the bridge, with his knees pulled up to his chest and head bowed. He didn't even look up as we approached. He ignored all our orders. Didn't move when we told him to show us his hands or get down on his stomach. We finally got him in custody. He didn't fight, didn't say a word, just continued to cry." The officer shrugged. "We just got word that his laptop and a few other items we couldn't identify right away were found broken under the bridge. Our guess is he tossed them off, then sat down and was either trying to work up the nerve to jump or was waiting for us to come get him."

"Do you think you can get a confession?" Captain Marshall asked.

"No." Angus was sure about that. "Not with his attorney there."

"Okay, so we know he's going to lawyer up and chances of getting anything out of him in questioning is not going to be easy. So, what do you think about allowing his parents in to see him? Do you think they might get him talking, even against the lawyer's advice?" Franks suggested.

"Possibly. It's worked on cases in the past. Especially if the parents are a trigger for something. We could try. The attorney will object, but he doesn't get the final say. The parents do. I'm betting the need to speak to their son is stronger than their need to obey the attorney." Captain Marshall rubbed his hand over his chin. "Maybe give it a go with the attorney first, then let the parents as a nicety before we send him to holding."

"I need more coffee before I do any of this." Franks turned and walked toward the small breakroom at the end of the hall.

Angus followed, needing a moment to collect his thoughts before things got going. He still needed to run to his office and gather some notes and a file filled with whatever. It didn't matter if most of the pages in the file were blank. Johnny wouldn't see them. Angus just needed Johnny to think they had a ton of evidence against him. He took the cup of coffee Franks offered him and took a seat at the table. He pulled out his notebook and started making notes. "We have the eye drop box and receipt. What other physical evidence do we have?"

"Not much. They are testing dirt found in the sole of Johnny's shoe to see if it matches the dirt found inside Elizabeth's window, but who knows when results will come in? Blood and a tear were found on one of Johnny's shirts, but from the placement of the blood, we have to assume that it was from the scratches Gail made on Johnny's arm. We can look at his arm to confirm there are scratches. The lab is working to confirm whose blood it is." Franks took a seat across from Angus. "I want

to bring up him asking Fiona out. He's going to wonder how we have that information, and it will unsettle him trying to figure it out."

Angus nodded as he made notes. "We can also stretch the truth and tell him we have video of him kidnapping Gail from work. He doesn't have to know we don't have his face on the video."

"Use the threat of being charged as an adult to get him talking. Tell him the more cooperative he is, the better his chances of facing juvenile court. He might be willing to admit to more if he isn't looking at fifty years in prison." Franks took a sip of coffee. "I'll walk down to our office and get a file for us in a minute."

"Thanks." Angus was glad to have a few extra minutes to caffeinate. He pulled out his phone and sent a quick text to Lance to update him. That way, Lance could let the ghosts know what was going on if they weren't already here watching. He figured the ghosts would have followed Johnny from the bridge to the station, and Bethany had been with them when they left home, so she would be updating the others on things.

It took an hour before Johnny's attorney showed. He walked in with a confident, smug look on his face and was escorted to the interrogation room quickly. It was another twenty minutes before he stepped out and alerted Franks and Angus that he was ready when they were.

Just to play with Johnny's mind, Angus and Franks waited another twenty minutes before going in. All the sitting handcuffed to a small table in a tiny room had to be getting to the kid. Not even his attorney had requested a drink for him. Angus was aware that Johnny's parents waited in another room but weren't being allowed back to the integration area.

"Ready to do this?" Franks handed Angus the file they'd made.

"May he confess quickly so I can get home early." Angus was tired and hungry. The last thing he wanted was to face off with this kid for hours on end. He reminded himself this was his job and interviewing a suspect was better than being out on the streets searching for that suspect.

They walked into the interrogation room a few minutes after the attorney had gone back in. The first thing Angus noticed were the red-rimmed, swollen eyes of the boy that sat in front of him. He thought back to the first time he'd seen Johnny and had thought he looked twelve. Today, he looked almost younger the way he sat with his shoulders hunched and a look of fear in his eyes. "Morning." Angus dropped the large file onto the table with a thud.

Johnny stared at the file, then over at his attorney. "Is that all on me?"

"Don't worry about the file," the attorney, Ben Tinto told him. "Good morning, Detectives."

"And to answer your question, Johnny, yes, this is all about you. You've had a very busy week. Four murders and one attempted murder in less than seven days. Should we talk about them in order, or just pick and choose?" Detective Franks smiled.

"My client has nothing to say." Ben Tinto glared at Franks.

"Are you sure?" Angus asked. "Because we have a lot to talk to him about. We found the box from the eye drops in his room, along with a receipt that has him buying a bucket and cement mix the day of Fiona Bloomquist's death. We have him on camera kidnapping Gail Smith from work. We have a witness that saw her thrown from the bridge." That was stretching the truth, but Johnny didn't need to know that. "And we have skin under Gail's fingernails that I'm guessing will match scratch marks on Johnny's arm. How about it, Johnny? Are you willing to let us have a look at that arm?"

Johnny wore a long-sleeved t-shirt, but his hand went to his arm and covered it, directly over the area where Gail had told them her claw marks would be.

Angus smiled. "Has to be hard wearing long-sleeves in the heat we've been having. It's okay if you don't want to show us now. We'll get them when we book you into jail."

"He's a minor. He won't be going to jail," Ben Tinto stated.

"That will be up to the D.A." Franks smiled at Johnny. "With these crimes, he could easily be facing being charged as an adult. But even in juvenile detention, he's going to have to strip. We'll see those scratches sooner or later. My guess is after four murders, Johnny will be facing time in prison, not juvenile detention."

"Is that true? Can they charge me as an adult?" Johnny's eyes were wide and tear-filled as he stared at his attorney.

"It's possible, but not probable." Ben patted Johnny's hand.

"So tell me, why did you do this?" Angus asked. "Was it because Fiona said no when you asked her out?"

Johnny sucked in a breath.

"Nah, he would have just killed her, not the others if that was the case. There's got to be more to this," Franks bantered back.

"Maybe he asked all of them and they all turned him down." Angus shrugged.

Johnny glared.



"Detectives." Ben glared at Angus. "My client has nothing to say. You're wasting your time and ours."

"Oh, I don't know. I think Johnny has plenty of time. Maybe looking at fifty years. What do you think, Franks?" Angus raised a brow at his partner.

"At least that, unless he starts cooperating with us." Franks looked at Johnny. "Your attorney might tell you not to talk to us, but he also knows that if you cooperate it might help the D.A. decide to not charge you as an adult. You could be out at eighteen or nineteen if you're lucky."

"Is this true?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, but that doesn't mean it's guaranteed. Before you say anything, I want the D.A. to confirm he's willing to work with us and charge you as a juvenile." Ben stared at Johnny. "Let me do my job."

"Go do it then. Find out what I'm being charged with," Johnny said.

"I can tell you that. As of now, and we may add more charges as we investigate, but you are facing four counts of murder, one attempted murder, two counts of trespassing, one of breaking and entering, one count of kidnapping, and at least two counts of driving without another licensed driver in the vehicle with you." Franks glanced at Angus. "Did I forget anything?"

"I think that about covers it." Angus leaned back in his chair, folding his arms over his chest.

"Can I talk to my dad?" Johnny asked Ben.

"I don't think—" Ben started.

Angus interrupted, "We'd be willing to let that happen."

"Please." Johnny nodded at Angus.

"Johnny, I don't think you should." Ben leaned toward the kid. "You'll have time to talk to him later."

"I'd really like to see him now." Johnny looked at Angus. "It's up to me, right? He can't make me not talk to him."

"It's your choice. Your attorney is here to advise you, but you can make up your own mind." Angus hoped this worked.

"Is he here?" Johnny asked.

"Just down the hall. Would you like me to get him?" Franks stood.

"Yeah." Johnny took a deep breath. "I need to talk to him."

"I'll be right back." Franks quickly left the room.

Angus stood as well. "We'll pick up where we left off after your visit."

"Johnny, listen to me. Anything you say to your father can be used against you. They'll be listening to everything," Ben warned him.

Angus stepped from the room, taking a deep breath as he leaned against the wall. They'd gotten nothing from Johnny, but he hadn't expected to. He studied his notes as he waited for Franks to return and was elated when he saw Mr. Jefferies being followed by Mrs. Jefferies. He'd hoped both would want to speak to their son, but when Johnny had only asked to see his father, Angus wasn't sure how it would work

out.

"Right in here." Franks opened the door and allowed Mr. and Mrs. Jefferies into the room.

The moment the door closed, Angus and Franks stepped into the next room to watch the conversation through the one-way window.

"Why'd you bring her? I don't want to talk to her." Johnny glared at his stepmother.

"She's your mother. Why wouldn't I bring her?" Mr. Jefferies asked.

"She's not my mother. My mother died. I didn't ask her to come live with us. You did." Johnny's anger came out of nowhere as he glared at his stepmother.

"Johnny, you can't talk to her that way." Mr. Jefferies stepped closer.

"Let's stay calm." Ben Tinto stood.

"All you care about is her and her son. You don't care about me." Johnny went on as if his father hadn't spoken. "You go to his basketball games, and brag about how great he is at sports. You welcome all his friends over and let them practically live with us. You even asked him where we should go on vacation, but you didn't ask me." Johnny tugged on his arm, causing the chain attached to the handcuffs to catch.

"Terrance and I did everything we could to include you. To love you," Mrs. Jefferies cried. "He did nothing to hurt you, and you killed him." Tears streamed down her face as she stared at Johnny. "I never tried to replace your mother, but I wanted to be there for you. You were the one who kept us closed out."

"Did you come to a single one of my school events?" Johnny argued.

"What events?" Mrs. Jefferies stared.

"Exactly. You didn't even take the time to know about them. Yet, you have every single basketball game Terrance played scheduled on the calendar." Johnny had tears streaming down his cheeks.

"You never told us." Mr. Jefferies paled.

"Did Terrance tell you about his games?" Johnny stared hard at them. "Or did you get the schedule and mark down all the games?" He pointed at Mrs. Jefferies. "I remember Terrance telling you that you didn't need to come to the games, and you both argued with him saying you'd be there for all home games."

"This is why you killed Terrance? Because I went to his games?" Mrs. Jefferies sank into a chair.

"Not because of the games. I killed him because he was more important to both of you than I was. I was nobody. You ignored me. He had all his friends over while I sat in my room. Not once did you ask me if I wanted to have people over."

"I didn't know you had friends," Mr. Jefferies yelled back, then shook his head. "Of course, you have friends, but I thought they were all online."

"That's just where we talk and hang out, but I would have liked to have them over to game sometime. But no, Terrance and his friends were always there."

"You could have joined them. I know Terrance offered to let you game with them." Mrs. Jefferies was crying hard.

"They laughed at me. Made fun of me." Johnny wiped at his eyes with the back of his wrist. "They deserved everything I did to them."

Angus glanced at Franks. "We'll, we got our confession."

"As heartbreaking as it was." Franks stepped back from the window.

Angus watched a minute longer as the attorney tried to get everyone to quiet but failed. Beside him, the captain, D.A., and a couple of other officers watched. Every word was being recorded, every confession solidifying the case against Johnny Jefferies. There wasn't much more for them to do.

"Buy you breakfast?" Franks asked.

With a full day of paperwork ahead, Angus figured they better eat while they could. He told the captain they'd be back and followed Franks out the door. Whatever battle was going on in that room wasn't his to worry about. They'd gotten the confession. Now the case was in the D.A.'s hands.

As they left the station, Angus thought about the case. This wasn't a win for anyone. Four teens were dead, one arrested, and everyone else would be picking up the pieces for years to come as they tried to forget this week and get their lives back in order. For him, he'd finish paperwork today, then go home with Lance and find peace in his arms before starting on another case in the morning. It was a vicious circle, but keeping killers off the streets had its rewards. One thing was for sure, after this week, he needed to plan some time away with Lance. As important as the job was, Lance was more important, and he refused to get so caught up in work that he'd ever forget that. As he got into the car, he pulled out his phone and sent a quick text, reminding Lance that he loved him.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance scooped a bit of ice cream from the bowl he held, watching as Haunt ran the yard, chasing Terrance around it. Beside him, Angus had his own bowl of ice cream, but he was focused on his phone. "Put it down. You're mine tonight, not work's."

Angus smiled and set his phone aside. "It was Captain Marshall. He was letting me know that it looks like Johnny is getting a plea deal. He'll admit to his crimes and be charged as a juvenile."

"How do you feel about that?" Lance asked.

"I'm torn. I hate to see his life over at fifteen because he gets sent to jail for life, but he did kill four people. He knew what he was doing. I'm not sure it's punishment enough for all the hurt he caused."

Gail looked over at them from where she sat across the table with Ray and Bethany. "I thought I'd be more upset, but I'm not. I'd rather still be alive, but the anger and hate I thought I'd have for Johnny isn't there. I feel sorry for him. I wish we'd done more to include him. I can't help but feel like maybe we caused some of this."

"You didn't make him choose murder," Angus stated after Lance told him what she'd said. "There were other ways he could have handled his anger."

Terrance walked over. "No, he was invited to join us. Every time we ordered pizza, we offered him some. We always asked if he wanted to join us, but he'd roll his eyes. It got to the point that yeah, we'd quit asking him, but that was his choice, not ours."

Lance told Angus what was said.

"One thing I've learned when it comes to murder is no one is to blame except the person who chose to do it. Most of us find ways to show when we're upset. We don't go killing people. Don't feel guilty." Angus scraped the last of his ice cream from the bowl. "Millions of kids face the problems Johnny did and don't kill people."

Lance agreed. He didn't feel a bit of sorrow for Johnny. He'd made his choices. The ones he felt sorry for were the victims, the families, and the friends who had lost so many. He couldn't stop thinking of Tom who couldn't mourn Terrance the way he should because he had to hide what they meant to each other from his family. It was something Lance didn't bring up because Terrance was having a hard enough time, but it really hit hard. Needing to change the subject, Lance set his bowl down. "Have you two decided if you're going to stick around awhile or head into the light?"

Gail and Terrance exchanged smiles.

"Thanks to Ray telling us about all the free travel we can do, we've decided to stay for a while and travel. We're not sure where we'll go or for how long we'll keep it up, but we both agreed there's too much out there to see for us to cross over now. We are going to leave in a few days and start our adventure in California. We'll travel the coast and work our way through each state, then maybe go overseas and see other places. I've always wanted to go to Egypt." Gail sighed. "I just wish Liz and Fiona were here to go with us."

"Who knows what's in the light? Maybe they are seeing even greater things," Bethany said. "I think it's great you guys are going to explore. The light will be there when you're ready."

Lance told Angus everything, then smiled at the ghosts. "I'm so jealous of you two. There's so much to see out there. No matter where you go, know that you two are welcome back here anytime. My home is always open to you two. I hope that at some point you two will come back and tell us all about the great things you've seen."

Angus nodded. "Exactly what he said. While I am so sorry you two died, I'm glad you're not letting it stop you from living."

Lance smiled at how perfectly Angus had said that. "I love you."

"Love you too." Angus kissed him softly.

"That's our cue to get out of here." Ray stood. "We'll leave you two alone for a few hours. We're going to head over and check on Tom and Gavin, then we're taking Terrance and Gail to meet some of our friends across town. We want them to know others when they decide to come back."

"That's great. Someday, I want to meet these people too," Lance told Ray before explaining to Angus that the ghosts were leaving for a while. "You guys have fun." He watched the ghosts rise and with a wave, they floated out of the backyard. "They're gone. Looks like it's just the three of us." Lance smiled as Haunt came back to his side after seeing the ghosts leave.

"It's okay, girl, they'll be back." Angus brushed his hand over the dog's back. "As for us, I'm not sure what to do with us having time alone. I'm tempted to hide my phone in the garage so no one can get hold of me."

Lance got up from his chair and settled onto Angus's lap. "After the week you've had, if anyone calls you tonight, they won't like the way I answer. Tonight, I want to forget work, forget ghosts, and forget that there is a world around us. Tonight, it's just you and me."

"I like the way you think. I'll make you a deal. You clean up out here, while I go in and get Haunt's dinner and make sure she has water. Then I'll lock up and meet you in the bedroom. Last one in the shower has to deal with the cold tile on their back."



"Promise to warm me up if I lose?" Lance nipped Angus's lip.

"I'll warm you up and keep you that way all night. That's one promise I know I can keep." Angus reached over and turned off his phone. "See, no one can call me in to work now. I'm all yours."

"I've known that since almost the day we met, and no matter how many times you're called away, I know you're mine and will always come home when you can." Lance stood. "Meet you in the shower."

"Unless I get there first." Angus stood and ran inside.

Lance laughed as he picked up their empty bowls. Life was an adventure with Angus by his side, but it was a life he wouldn't trade for anything. He was happy, and with Angus as his partner, that wasn't going to change.

*Source Creation Date: July 22, 2025, 1:46 am*

Lance looked out over the lake and pointed as a hawk flew down and caught a fish out of the water. "How is it he can catch a fish, and I can't?" He glared at the fishing pole he'd been holding for nearly an hour without even a bite.

"He does it all the time. You go out fishing how often?" Angus asked.

Lance blushed. "This may be the first time in about fifteen years."

"See, that's why that bird is better than you." Angus reeled his line in and set his pole down. They floated on a small boat in the middle of a quiet lake, the two of them the only people around. "I don't care if we catch a damn thing. I'm enjoying the two of us here alone too much to worry about dinner."

Lance reeled his line in and set his pole beside Angus's. "I was smart enough to make sure we had hot dogs to roast over the fire tonight just in case we didn't catch anything." He eased back and rested his back against Angus's chest. "This is perfect. I didn't realize how badly I needed to get away."

"After the last few weeks, I knew we had to get away or something was going to break. When Franks told me about this lake, I figured a few days alone in a tent without anyone else around would be perfect for us.

"Not a single person or ghost around." Lance closed his eyes. "I almost forgot what it was like not to have a ghost somewhere. This weekend has been so good." Their phones didn't get a signal, Haunt was with Franks for the weekend, and other than a few mosquitos, nothing had bothered the two of them since they'd gotten the tent up and fell into each other's arms.

"We should make this a yearly thing." Angus brushed his fingers through Lance's hair.

"I'd like that. This place is amazing." It had been a little over an hour drive on their bikes to get here, but the ride had been beautiful.

There was a splash and Lance opened his eyes. "What was that?"

"A fish jumping." Angus grinned.

"The fish are just mocking me now." Lance sat up and reached for his pole. "I'm determined."

Angus moved aside, giving Lance room to cast. "We can stay here as long as it takes." He opened a soda and watched as Lance's fishing line sailed through the air.

"If it means no one bothering us, I might take a while." Lance focused on his line, slowly reeling it in a little.

"You know, you don't need to fish to keep me here with you. I'm happy floating along under the stars if that's what you want." Angus wrapped an arm around Lance's waist.

"That's what I want." Lance leaned in for a kiss.

Angus returned the kiss, pulling Lance closer and pressing their bodies together. Just when things were getting interesting, Lance jerked back, surprising Angus. "What's wrong?"

"I think I caught one." Lance reeled his line in, fighting something small.

Angus sighed and let Lance do his thing, proud when he reeled in a small trout. "You got one."

"Still not the best catch of my life." Lance took the fish off the hook and tossed it back into the water.

"Oh really?" Angus raised a brow.

"The best catch ever was the day I caught you." Lance put his pole back down and turned to the man he loved. "I'm never throwing you back."

At those words, Angus kissed him again and pulled him onto his lap, careful not to shake the boat. "We either head back to shore or we find a way not to rock the boat."

Lance laughed. "To shore it is. We can come back out here once the moon is up." He kissed Angus back, more relaxed than he'd been in a long time and wishing that the weekend would never end.