



A WHITELEY PRESS, LLC, BOOK  
SnapStories Edition

Copyright © 2016 by J. W. Becton  
<http://www.jwbecton.com>

*Uncorrected advanced proof for online viewing only.  
Material and/or information herein is not in its final form and should not be further  
disseminated.  
The characters and events in this book are fictitious or used fictitiously. Any similarity to real  
people, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.  
**This book contains no sound theological doctrine. Do not start a cult based on this  
series.***

## Fifteen

Calla was nearly finished with her concluding statements on her psychological autopsy on Waylon Ellis when her cell phone chirped.

Lost in the intricacies of what might turn out to be a pointless exercise, Calla reached for the phone and answered without checking the caller ID.

“Hello, Escott here,” she said, using her work greeting.

“H-he broke into my condo,” a female voice said in a stage whisper.

“What?” Calla asked, snapping out of her work-induced haze. She looked away from her laptop and realized hours had passed since she’d arrived back at the clinic after her disastrous morning interview with Adam and Ellis. It was now well past five, and the January sun had already set.

“He broke into my house,” the quavering voice repeated.

“Who is this?” she asked, standing up and finding her legs wobbly from disuse.

“Rena Bethel.” Ellis’s girlfriend. “Matt Corbin broke in here while I was on my run.”

“Why do you think that?” Calla asked when she really wanted to ask why Rena had called her and not the police.

“Because he was sitting on my couch when I got back.”

“Is he still there?” Calla asked, immediately going on alert. She might be new to the world of soul attachments, but she knew that Ellis’s decision to enter Rena’s house couldn’t be good.

“No,” Rena warbled. “He was talking crazy again, and I asked him to leave.”

“And he did? He left?”

“Yeah, but Matt got really upset about leaving,” Rena said. “He wanted me to go with

him. He kept telling me to pack a bag and get in his car. That was the only way we'd be together. He even cried."

Wow. Ellis was losing his grasp on reality, and frankly, Calla couldn't blame him. She was just hanging on by a thread too.

"Did he say where he was going? Or why?"

"No, he just kept telling me we had to leave now. That's the only way I could ever be with Waylon again. Then, he started trying to...I don't know. Convince me that he could be like Waylon. He told me all this stalker stuff about us. How Waylon and I used to cuddle in bed and watch baseball in the summer. He even knew some of the other stuff we did in bed.... It was like he was trying to get me to think he could be a substitute for Waylon or something."

Dread dropped into the pit of Calla's stomach. She knew she couldn't distance herself from this any longer. There was no point in trying. She was in this. Deep.

The fear and paranoia in Rena's voice tugged at her. And she had a darn good reason to be afraid. She was in more danger than she even realized. What if Ellis didn't accept Rena's refusal? What if the next time he entered her condo he wasn't so polite?

Calla knew what it was like to feel like you have to watch your back all the time.

It was no life.

"Have you called the police?" Calla asked, lifting a hand to her brow as she did.

"Yes," Rena responded. "I called Brody, and he told me he was on the way, but they're not here yet."

"When Officer Maddix arrives, ask about filing for an order of protection against Matt Corbin."

Even as Calla suggested the restraining order, she wondered if the document would mean

anything in this situation. Restraining orders were marginally effective under normal circumstances. A piece of paper never stopped anyone who truly wanted to do harm.

But a restraining order against the consciousness of a dead guy?

Calla nearly laughed at the absurdity.

It was a joke. The intruder was the lovelorn spirit of sociopath Waylon Ellis, not “stalker” Matt Corbin.

Still creepy, but not quite the same situation Rena envisioned.

Calla considered the situation for a moment. She could well understand why Ellis might have felt compelled to enter Rena’s house and make another attempt at convincing her that he was Waylon Ellis. He obviously missed her and wanted her to see him.

Really see him.

He was desperate.

Calla stiffened at that thought.

There was a lot that could go wrong when desperation and death met.

Ellis had left her house, and the police were on the way. Rena was safe and about to be in good hands. Other than alerting Adam to Ellis’s escalating acts of desperate infatuation, Calla wanted to keep her distance.

“Is there something you need from me?” Calla asked, hoping she just wanted to hear a friendly voice while she waited for the police to arrive.

“No.... I don’t know, ” Rena equivocated. “I guess I called because you were the only person I told about Matt stalking me. Plus, you’re a shrink, right? So I figured you’d understand why I felt so...violated. And your card was right here on the kitchen island. So I just called.”

“I’m afraid there’s nothing I can do personally,” Calla said. “But I’ll call my contact at

the GBI. The one who asked me to look into Mr. Ellis's suicide. Special Agent Adam Shepherd will come over to ask you some questions, take a look around."

Rena fell silent for a moment. "Y-you think this has something to do with Waylon?"

"I didn't say that," Calla said, mentally chiding herself for letting her mouth run away with her brain. "But if Corbin has been watching you and Waylon, maybe it does. Special Agent Shepherd will know what to do."

"Okay," Rena whispered, her tone uncertain. "You'll be with him right?"

"No, Rena, that kind of investigation is really not my—"

"Please," Rena pleaded. "I—I don't know if I can do this by myself."

Calla stopped pacing. Rena sounded scared. Paranoid.

Calla knew those feelings.

"I'll be there."

Forgetting everything else—the time of day, the open autopsy file, everything—Calla rushed out of the office, dialing Adam as she went.

"Ellis broke into Rena's place," Calla said when he answered. She gave him all the details she knew. "I'm on my way there now."

"Right behind you," Adam said.

And he was. He arrived at Palmetto Grove minutes after Calla parked just out of the way of the police cruiser already in Rena's driveway.

To his credit, Adam didn't say a word about Calla's showing up after swearing off the case. He just gave her a brief nod and said, "I'll park around the corner and then check the exterior for signs of a break-in."

He pulled away, leaving Calla to take in Palmetto Grove at night.

Not that it was particularly dark.

Streetlights were positioned at regular intervals, sending halos of buzzing yellow light toward the ground. Plus, Rena must have turned on every exterior and interior light in her condo. The front yard looked radioactive. Blinking as she entered the wash of light, Calla went to the front door. After a few seconds, Rena appeared. Her her blond hair was held together in a loose ponytail, and loose strands quivered around her face. Signs of strain showed around her mouth and eyes.

“I’m so glad you’re here,” Rena said, using a shaky hand to push open the glass door. “Come in. Brody is here.”

Calla followed Rena inside to find Officer Brody Maddix and his partner—she thought his name was Guthrie—sitting at the kitchen island in front of a laptop.

Officer Maddix looked up as soon as Rena came into view. He gave her a heartening smile, and Rena seemed to pull herself together visibly.

She brushed a stray hair from her face and sat on the stool beside Maddix.

“They’re helping me get a protection order against Corbin,” she explained, her voice noticeably calmer. “They’ve got the forms right online.”

She pointed at the computer and then smiled up at the policeman, who returned it with more warmth than Calla expected from a patrol cop on a call. Of course, Officer Maddix and Rena had gone to high school together.

Maybe that explained it.

“You’ll have to go to the mainland,” Maddix explained, giving Calla a chance to meander around the kitchen and see the results of the break-in for herself. “To file the petition at the the

Jacks County Superior Court.”

Unsure of what she was looking for, Calla poked around Rena’s condo, but nothing looked out of place to her. She peeked into the adjoining rooms, again seeing no obvious signs that Ellis had been there.

She returned to the kitchen.

“Within thirty days,” Maddix was saying, “a judge will review the petition. In the meantime, he may grant an *ex parte*—a temporary order—and then there will be a hearing—”

“A hearing?” Rena repeated sounding worried. “I thought the form was all I had to do.”

“The judge has to hear both sides,” Maddix explained, stepping slightly closer. “It’ll be okay.”

“But the guy is stalking you,” Guthrie added, tapping away at the keyboard. “You need to have your locks changed. Do whatever it takes to protect yourself.”

“I just want this over,” Rena said, her voice heavy and tired.

Officer Maddix put an arm around her and gave her a quick sideways squeeze.

Calla watched all this from the periphery, wondering at the gesture. It seemed too friendly, even for high school pals.

For a woman who was supposed to be grieving the love of her life, Rena seemed to be awfully cozy with another man.

And Maddix was obviously fond of Rena. He’d responded to more than one disorderly conduct call involving her and Ellis. What if he’d finally had enough of seeing this woman—his friend—in violent situations? Especially when Rena refused to acknowledge Ellis’s abuse.

Calla cocked her head to the side and studied Maddix. He was a cop. Therefore, he likely had little aversion to violence and a low tolerance for lawbreakers.

That night, Officer Maddix would have known that Ellis was too inebriated to fight back. Plus, he would have noticed the shotgun over the TV.

Calla glanced at the Glock on his belt.

A police officer would know how to use a shotgun, not that it was terribly difficult to figure out. But he would also know how to stage a murder to appear to be a suicide.

And as the first responder on the scene, he could sway the perception and investigation toward suicide from the beginning.

The timing would be tight, but it seemed plausible that Maddix could have returned to Palmetto Grove and killed Waylon Ellis, thus freeing a woman he perceived to be an innocent victim from her abusive partner.

“You interviewed Matt Corbin, didn’t you?” Rena asked, interrupting Calla’s musings. “I saw you in his driveway after you left my condo.”

Calla nodded, stepping closer to the group gathered around the kitchen island.

“Did you ask him about me?” Rena asked. “About stalking me?”

Calla shook her head. How was she supposed to explain that she hadn’t needed to question Corbin about stalking her. Everything he knew about Rena, he knew because Ellis lived it.

“I was there to question Mr. Corbin about Mr. Ellis’s state of mind, not about his own actions.”

“Did he volunteer anything about me?” Rena asked.

Calla shook her head again.

“Did you notice anything that might indicate that Corbin has been stalking Rena?” Brody asked in a measured tone.

Guthrie's typing paused.

Were they expecting him to have a telescope and long range mic in the front room?

“As I said, I wasn't there to question Mr. Corbin about stalking,” Calla repeated, crossing her arms over her chest. “I didn't see anything to indicate that he was doing anything inappropriate.”

Neither police officer appeared pleased with that response. But that was all she would say.

It was all she could say.

The rest was too unbelievable.