

Twenty-two

Once Adam changed out of his muddy, charred clothes, the new day's pace went from merely chaotic to ludicrous speed.

Preparing to take down a murderer with no GBI backup was an unwise idea. But Adam had little choice. He couldn't involve other officers who wouldn't understand the subtleties of soul-possession.

Because no matter how careful he tried to be, that always seemed to become a factor in the end.

Plus, no cop worthy of the badge would want a part of this case. Given the lack of corroborating testimony and physical evidence, Adam was operating on very little hard data.

All he had was the new GPS tracking data on Maddix and Guthrie's car.

Sal's email was waiting for him when he finally got a moment to check his tablet. Not only had she sent a the tracking data, but she also provided Adam a copy of the digital recording from Maddix and Guthrie's dashboard cam, which was turned on at precisely 3:30 AM, the exact arrival time recorded in their report.

That's thirteen minutes after the actual arrival time recorded by their car's GPS.

Adam watched the video out of curiosity. It showed was two professional officers handling a call according to standard operating procedure.

At least it proved they knew proper procedure.

But again, it gave Adam no actionable evidence.

However, Guthrie and Maddix needed to account for their missing time. Their GPS put them at Palmetto Grove within seven minutes of Baranova's 911 call. What were they doing for the thirteen minutes between their actual arrival and the time they turned on their dashboard

cam?

Murdering Waylon Ellis and staging it to appear to be a suicide?

If so, then nothing short of a confession would convict them.

Or eyewitness testimony.

Which was why he was staging this pretext with Matt Corbin.

If Maddix and Guthrie were involved in Ellis's murder or its cover up, they would fear an "eyewitness." They already believed Matt Corbin had been obsessed with Rena and Ellis, so it was a small leap to believing he might have witnessed Ellis's last moments.

And if they were guilty of some infraction, they'd show up to find out what he knew.

Maybe silence him.

But instead of finding Matt Corbin, they'd deal with Adam.

And he intended to get a full confession.

Probably from that Guthrie kid. He looked like a young, idealistic lad. The guilt had to be eating him up inside.

That's why Adam had spoken to Guthrie specifically when he'd called BIPD to bait the trap. He wanted the kid off balance from the get-go.

The phone call sounded very official. He'd used his official title and pulled rank on the poor kid. Sometimes these jurisdictional pissing matches came in handy.

Adam engaged in some BS chitchat at the beginning, paid some lip service paid to professional courtesy. Yada.

But it came down to this.

"Corbin's agreed to come in and talk to us about Ellis's murder," Adam told Guthrie.

"I'm giving BIPD the courtesy of calling you ahead of time."

“Murder?” Guthrie repeated, sounding skeptical. “That what the shrink thinks?”

The way he said “the shrink” made his feelings about Calla pretty clear.

“It’s not just her opinion,” Adam said. “Turns out Ms. Bethel’s alleged stalker actually witnessed Ellis’s murder. He’s willing to come forward. We’ll make an arrest by midnight. Mark my words.”

“Corbin is your witness?” Guthrie clarified.

The kid was quick.

“We’ve arranged to pick up him tonight at his place. Eight PM. You’re gonna need to cancel the BOLO. We don’t need any uniformed cops spooking him away.”

Guthrie cleared his throat. “I’ll talk to Maddix.”

And that was that.

Guthrie was, like a guided missile now, going to go straight to the prime suspect to bait the trap.

Next, Adam needed to get Corbin safely out of the picture. Not only was he a loose cannon, but now he was a potential target. If anyone took out Corbin, it needed to be someone who understood the full implication of that action.

That task fell only to Adam.

Adam drove a GBI-issue sedan, complete with prisoner containment unit, across the island to Pursiful’s house. Calla sat in the passenger seat, and Ellis, whose hands remained bound behind him, was contained in the back seat.

They pulled into a small brick ranch style house that looked utterly out of place on Bell Island amid all the brightly colored vacation style homes. Pursiful’s yard was gated too, a short

wrought iron affair whose gate could be closed to seal off the driveway. It opened automatically for them, and Adam pulled the car inside. The gate swung shut behind them.

Calla glanced over her shoulder at it. “What is it with you guys and gates?”

Adam gave her a deadpan look and then went about the task of getting Ellis inside.

Pursiful awaited them at the door, Bask at his side.

“Untie our guest and take him to the kitchen, if you please, Mr. Shepherd. See that he has some water.” Then, he looked over the sweat-stained, sooty clothing and streaks of dirt on Ellis’s face. “A shower and a change of clothes too, if you please, Mr. Shepherd.”

“I ain’t showering a grown-ass man,” Adam growled as he shoved Ellis toward the kitchen.

Bask followed them, snarling at their heels.

Calla watched the exchange, wondering at Pursiful’s seemingly over-the-top politeness and hospitality to a man who was essentially his prisoner.

Adam removed the Ellis’s bindings and watered him. Then, he shoved him toward the rear of the house, presumably toward a change of clothes.

Once things were moving according to his directions, Pursiful settled himself in a wing-backed chair to wait.

“I would, of course, undertake the care of our guest,” Pursiful said, nodding to where Adam and Ellis had disappeared. “But as you are aware, I’m not the physical specimen that our Adam is.”

Ignoring the reference to him as “our Adam,” Calla gave him a questioning look. She had been wondering how a middle-aged man with epilepsy would restrain a young man in his prime if he decided to make trouble.

“Come,” Pursiful said to Calla, gesturing at the suede sofa beside his chair. “Sit with me. Adam will be out shortly.”

“But...what about Ellis?” Calla asked as she perched on the cushion, her attention drawn to the sounds coming from the back of the house where Adam was apparently wrestling with the man who just tried to kill them. “Shouldn’t someone help Adam?”

“Bask will watch Ellis,” Pursiful said. “One false step, and Bask will handle it.”

The sounds of a scuffle erupted. Then, a girlish scream.

“Call off your dog!” Ellis squealed, clearly in pain.

“Like I got any control of him,” Adam drawled back. “Step back into the bathroom, and he might let go of your....”

One more squeal ended the encounter.

Bask could obviously handle it.

Calla sat back on the sofa cushions.

“I’m glad we have a moment to talk,” Pursiful said, his tone conversational. “I image you have a few questions for me. Now that you are aware of the extent of all this.”

Calla focused on Pursiful. She did have questions. Lots of them.

“You said believed that I had the particular skill you required.” Calla leaned toward him. “Why? What could have possibly led you to believe that I would be a...soul-seer?”

“Soul-seers, it seems, are born of death and trauma,” Pursiful said, his expression turning serious. “A certain amount of emotional, shall we say, ‘instability’ seems to be a prerequisite for the formation of your gift.”

“You’re referring to the unusual circumstances of my birth.”

He nodded in agreement.

Calla couldn't decide whether to be offended or horrified that Pursiful had looked that deeply into her past.

Wondering how he had gotten that information in the first place, Calla leaned back in her seat, studying him. "You read my medical records?"

"That's right." Pursiful admitted while watching her out of dark brown eyes.

Uncomfortable with the level of personal knowledge he had on her, Calla shifted under his gaze.

"Your mother was clinically dead when you were brought into this world," he said. "You were literally born of death. My theory is that this experience gave your soul a glimpse into the spiritual world, and when you were brought into the fullness of life, you retained that memory subconsciously."

Calla chewed her lip. It sounded utterly ridiculous, but then so had everything else she had experienced the past few days.

"But I haven't always been a soul-seer," she pointed out.

"Your ability may have developed over time." He shrugged. "Or perhaps you were just unaware of it until now."

That was possible. If Adam hadn't come to her office, she probably never would have known.

"And Adam? Does he have some sort of gift too?"

"Adam plays a very particular role in our endeavor," Pursiful began, but then he stopped and shook his head. "That is his story to share, not mine."

This elitist attitude had frustrated Calla from the beginning. She understood why Adam hadn't tried to explain soul possession from the beginning. But now that she was on the inside,

she should be privy to all the information available.

“So you expect me to throw in with your duo and not be privy to the same information you have? That hardly seems fair.”

“I didn’t say you *couldn’t* know,” Pursiful corrected. “I merely said that you should ask him, not me. He will tell you his story. And you should tell him your story.”

Calla blinked at him. She’d assumed Adam would know everything Pursiful did.

“No,” Pursiful said. “I didn’t tell him your secrets.”

“Then, what do you bring to the table? What’s your super power?”

He chuckled and shrugged. “I’m afraid I bring only scientific curiosity.

“I find it difficult to believe that a scientist would be so open to the supernatural.”

“In all honesty, I wasn’t. Not at first. But many well-respected scientists have shown curiosity about what happened to the human consciousness after death. Einstein, for example. There is an entire branch of quantum physics that focuses on human consciousness. Not many scientists consider it to be a valid avenue of inquiry, I admit. But that is where I have found the most useful insights into the phenomena that I sometimes encounter in the lab. If I notice some anomalies, I send the case on to Shepherd at the GBI. He does his best to investigate, but the location of the invasive soul is not always so obvious.”

That’s why they needed her.

Calla pressed her fingers to her temples. “You know enough of my history, it seems, to be aware that I am not terribly reliable under pressure.”

Pursiful studied her. “According to Shepherd, you are more than capable of defending yourself.”

She thought back to the incident at Matt Corbin’s door, the attack in the parking lot, her

encounter with the firebomber.

She had fought back. Those times.

She'd been under pressure, but even the knife attack hadn't triggered flashbacks to her trauma memories.

As such, she'd been able to react out of instinct to protect herself.

But what would happen if her PTSD were triggered fully?