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*Dark Memories*

By

RoseAnn Foster

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford

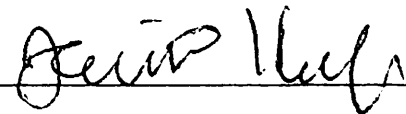
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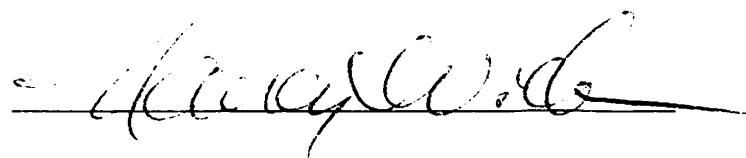
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Advisor: Professor Tom Franklin



Reader: Professor Jaime Harker



Reader: Professor Nancy Wicker

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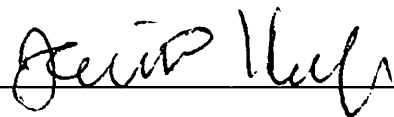
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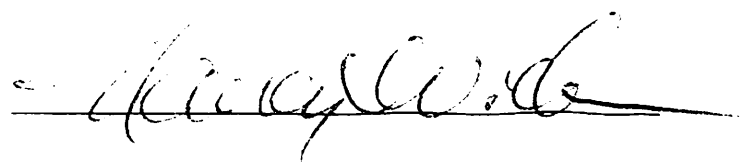
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RoseAnn Foster

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Dedicated to my family

Thanks for always being there

## Acknowledgements

A work such as this is not possible without help. I would first like to thank my family for their support and willingness to listen to endless brainstorming, read countless drafts, and be completely honest with me. I would like to especially thank my older brother, JD Foster, for his help in brainstorming. He is continually willing to listen and let me bounce ideas off him. Thanks for being the best devil's advocate.

I also owe a big thanks to the ladies of the University of Mississippi Archives at JD Williams Library. Though I know it is part of their job, their willingness to make suggestions for reading material and help navigating the archives was a huge help in this endeavor. I also appreciated their willingness to put up with me being the only person in their reading room with numerous boxes in front of me.

Without consultation with Professor Carl Jensen and graduate student, Connor Hagan, the depiction of law enforcement and its rules and regulations would have been much less accurate. I hope both of them can forgive the fiction and recognize my adherence to accuracy to the best of my ability within the limits of my genre and my story line. Both of them were absolutely amazing. I would like to add that Connor's willingness to take phone calls, emails, and text messages and quick reply were especially appreciated.

I'd also like to thank John Young, my abnormal psychology professor. Without his instruction and consultation, the representations of Alzheimer's and Dale's undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome would be much less realistic.

I owe a big shout out here to Christian Henson. As a reporter herself, Christian's knowledge of broadcast journalism and her willingness to share it was absolutely invaluable to the details in this piece.

I would also like to thank Lindsey Wallace and JJ Townsend. Lindsey's knowledge of football cheers and traditions was incredibly helpful. As a former Ole Miss Ambassador, JJ Townsend was absolutely crucial to the success of this novel. He gave me his Ambassador manual which gave me insight into the history of buildings and myths of the University.

Nels Strickland in University Housing was also a major help in the completion of this work. Without his help, I would have been unable to provide histories of the dorm buildings.

I would also like to thank John Samonds, Associate Dean of the Honors College. I have appreciated his willingness to listen and offer advice throughout this process.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Tom Franklin, my thesis advisor for his patience and understanding as I wrote my tale. I appreciate his suggestions and advice. I also cannot forget Greg Iles, who generously agreed to talk with me about writing mysteries, commercial success, and publishing.

## ABSTRACT

### *Dark Memories*

(Under the direction of Tom Franklin)

*Dark Memories* is the first in a series of mystery novels. It takes place at Ole Miss and I researched the history of the University and its traditions. This included a variety of interviews as well as reading many books. The story examines the problem of race relations and perception. The novel contains two parallel stories: the tale of three fraternity boys during the 1962 Integration and the contemporary homicide story.

When Jordan Teague finds the body of an Ole Miss co-ed, her friend and reporter, Meg Anderson begins working with Detective Davis Heard to find the truth. As they begin questioning students and faculty, Meg's friend from her undergraduate days and FBI Crime Analyst, Tyler White arrives with information linking the victim to a crime in the past.



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## Author's Note

### An Introduction to *Dark Memories*

I have always been drawn to the written word. I am not sure when it started. As a child, I reached out for the board books I am sure my parents read for me, and perhaps my desire to learn the written word was interpreted as infantile fidgeting. I generally pinpoint the beginning of my love affair with books and writing to the age of three. No paper or pen in our house was safe. I hoarded them; our church bulletins boasted the scribbled scrawl of my first stories. Any canvas was fair game.

My desire to write is undeniably intertwined with my love of reading, however, which came first is more of a chicken and egg dilemma. I do not remember a time in my life when my parents were not reading to me or I was reading myself. My parents can probably still recite *Go Dog Go* by Dr. Seuss and my dad can still, and often does at request, use the voices he created to characterize Hank, Drover, Wallace, and Junior, the cast of the *Hank the Cowdog* series. Arguably, both were early inspirations to my desire to write. The world of Dr. Seuss was fascinating. The mysteries and antics of *Hank the Cowdog* made me giggle and because my dad insisted on inserting my name into the story, an act which infuriated me because I was certain my name was not written, inspiration to learn to read all by myself.

By the time first grade rolled around, I had already filled diaries with scribbles, flipped through books on my bookshelf, and was familiar with the stories they told because of my parents' willingness to set aside their own books for mine each night. I was ready to read and write. Although the first few weeks were challenging, I quickly advanced my reading level to well beyond my grade. As I excelled in reading, so too did I excel in writing. My entries to my journal and my first grade essays got longer. I found myself writing at home. After reading a short non-fiction essay about Jane Goodall, I wrote my first research paper about elephants using the Animal Encyclopedia and Children's National Geographic as my sources. My fascination with the written word grew as I realized it opened the door to knowing anything I cared to research. The love affair with words had blossomed into a comfortable, loving and reciprocal relationship.

I have never lost my desire to write, instead it has only continued to grow. In Junior High, I decided to write my first novel. I knew I want to be published, and I had an idea. One hundred pages later, I had my first manuscript in hand. Looking back, I am glad every publisher and agent I sent a letter to rejected me. It was my first attempt at a novel, and admittedly, the teen romance written in diary format is not something I particularly want my name on now. However, it was an important milestone for me. Despite the rejection, I knew that sitting at a computer, and typing out a story was not only something I dreamed about, but something I enjoyed and could do.

In high school, I continued to pursue writing. With age, however comes the realization that someday, there has to be a job that pays the bills because electricity, water, phone lines, and trash men do not work for free. I had no desire to be a starving artist, and I am a practical woman. I had worked on the School District Broadcast News

program, *Hawk Eye News*, written articles for the local paper, and in high school, I enrolled in our High School Newspaper class. Though during my single semester on the paper (*The Aviary*) I wrote exclusively cover stories, I quickly realized this was not how I wanted to spend my entire life. I enjoyed finding my own stories and angles for them, a luxury I received at *Hawk Eye News* but not where column inches were a critical part of daily functioning. Nevertheless, I realized the value of versatility. I do not regret for a second that I spent time working freelance for our local paper, *The Red Oak Record*, working as Copy-Editor and Crime Anchor for *Hawk Eye News*, or even my time writing for *The Aviary*. Indeed, my time working for these organizations is part of why Megan Anderson in *Dark Memories* is a reporter and not a cop.

My senior year I embarked on another written adventure. For my Gifted and Talented Independent Study Project, I chose to write another novel. This time I wanted to write a mystery. The program put me in touch with Michelle Stimpson, a local Christian author in our area. She informed me that publishers want authors to understand marketing and participate in discussions with their following through social media. As I digested this information, I hit a dead end in my novel. I had written sixty pages only to realize that my familiarity with law enforcement was limited to CSI shows and other mystery novels. I had no idea how the investigation should continue. I had started a blog when Michelle informed me that this was something publishers looked for, and this became the central point of my senior project. I became the Texas Girl in Cowboy Boots, the title of the blog that discussed a little of everything from my impending graduation to the pride of buying custom boots with money I had earned tutoring.

By the time I graduated high school, I knew a few things for certain. My love of the written word had been instilled young, and I want to pursue it over the course of my life. I wanted and still want to see my name in print. I am capable of writing well written pieces for a variety of mediums, but my favorite and my preference is still the story—the novel.

These desires led me to the University of Mississippi, a school known for its rich literary heritage. From William Faulkner to Greg Iles and John Grisham, it was home to many great writers. I toured for the first time my sophomore year of High School, and I immediately fell in love with the beauty of the campus, its avid football fan base, and its rich heritage of tradition. It was the literary counterpart to the college I'd grown up with, my father's alma mater, Texas A&M University. Though A&M would have accepted me, and I knew I would have the storied traditions surrounding football to which I'd grown to associate with collegiate life, I knew that the Aggie English department had little to offer me. In the end, I did not even apply.

As I left Texas to pursue my Ole Miss English degree, I knew I had made the right choice. I chose to pursue a minor in Business Administration, hoping a marketing job could be my day job as I wrote. I could have pursued journalism. I had written for three newspapers and worked for many years as a reporter, Anchor, and Copy Editor of the District Broadcast program. I had enjoyed my time in each position with each organization, but I had found that I got tired of the way journalism operated. In print, I had to work with InDesign to create layouts. It was tedious work, and something I was completely uninterested in. Why did the layout matter if the story was good? I understood the aesthetics but I hated it. In both print and broadcast, I had found that periodically

stories were assigned. All stories were expected to maintain a certain point of view. While it was rare that I wanted to step outside these boundaries, I knew that should I attempt to, I would be censored. At one point, a few lines of my story, despite being accurate and researched, were cut for the sake of image. It did not change the story's message, but I knew then that journalism was not my future. I did not want to constantly bow to someone else's priorities of which stories should be covered, what angles were acceptable, and what truth to include. That is not and has never been my style. I knew journalism as a career would not offer me the freedom to write what I wanted. I looked forward to my time at the University, a place I felt certain academic freedom would be valued and censorship would not be a concern. For my future after graduation, I knew Marketing, Public Relations, or Communications was a much better fit.

### **Influences**

When I was younger, I asked every professional writer I met what their advice was for aspiring authors. I googled the question if I could not meet the author I respected. Even today, I pose this question to writers speaking at Square Books and University events. Almost all of them include two things in their response: read everything you can and write every day. I have taken this to heart.

Though I grew up having books such as *Go Dog Go*, *Hank the Cowdog*, and *Maggie and Devildust* read to me, I did and do pursue reading on my own. My initial interest in mystery novels can be traced to a visit to Flagstaff, Arizona, to my grandmother. While I worked as the caboosie to her docent tours of Riordan Mansion, I visited with a park ranger, Kathy, who suggested I read Nancy Drew. Upon my return to

Red Oak, my mother gave me her copy of *Nancy Drew The Secret of the Old Clock*. I devoured it. Then I sought more. My favorite is *Nancy Drew The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, which still has a home on my bookshelf. This was my introduction to mystery. I never looked back.

In my early teens, I read romance and mystery almost exclusively. However, as an avid reader, I quickly ran into a problem. While my parents wanted to encourage my reading and a broadening of my vocabulary and literary skill, I needed and wanted to read adult novels at an age when allowing me to choose anything I wanted from an adult fiction shelf was simply inappropriate. My mother chose to read books before me. As a result, I was soon introduced to J.D Robb books. The *In Death* series, though not particularly literary, is a fun and a fast read. It follows Lieutenant Eve Dallas, a New York homicide cop several years in the future. I still read every new book in the series. Though the mysteries are often almost formulaic in nature, I have found the J.D Robb's character development is what keeps me reading. Eve and her cohorts are so well developed that my mother and I sometimes find ourselves talking about them as if they are real people. I hope to develop my own characters this fully.

Eventually though, I would find authors my parents did not read with me. I do not remember when I stumbled across my first Greg Iles book: it was sometime in High School. I started with a Penn Cage novel. I loved it. It was exciting to realize that I had absolutely no idea who had committed the crime, an integral piece of the novel that was frequently falling into place too soon for me as I read books by J.D Robb even if they were entertaining. I quickly searched out every title I could find by him. I read them all: some of them in under 24 hours. It did not take me long to realize that Iles was an author



I wanted to emulate. I wanted my readers to question who had committed the crime until it all came together. I wanted my readers to stay up late with their lamps by their beds turned on, flipping page after page unable to find a place in which they were comfortable stopping.

Mysteries were not the only books I read though. True to the advice given by professional writers, I read a little of everything. This included Ayn Rand. I chose *The Fountainhead* as the topic for my junior year research paper. Not only was it an intriguing novel, but it communicated a philosophy I found fascinating as well. After my paper, I read other novels and essays by Rand. This culminated in my reading of *Atlas Shrugged* this past summer. Rand also has a talent for integrating a story so well that every detail matters. This is something I admire about her writing. She also has a tendency to include speeches by her heroes to explain their thoughts and actions, often to communicate important aspects of her philosophy. I chose to borrow this technique in my own novel. Detective Davis Heard has a two-page speech outlining his opinions on reverse racism, prejudice, and affirmative action. Though I would not venture to truly compare his speech, which he communicates with his head hung, to that of Rand's proud characters, I will admit that it is from her novels that I learned of this device.

I have read more than these authors. I have shelves of books that I cannot get rid of because I simply love them. My parents were generous as I grew up. They were always willing to buy me a paperback, drive me to a bookstore, or split the cost of a hardback. When people ask who my favorite author is, my answer will depend solely on what day it is. Monday may be Greg Iles, while Wednesday may be Ayn Rand. My

reading has certainly influenced my writing. It has shaped my idea of a good book and what I want to write.

### **This Novel: The Origin of *Dark Memories***

My father graduated from Texas A&M University in 1974. Growing up, I constantly heard his “Aggie stories.” We met his friends at Lot 74 outside Reed Area to tailgate before the game—before going to the Quad to watch Step Off on Hullabaloo, the March In, and most importantly, the football game in Kyle Field. I could sing the War Hymn in its entirety by the time I was five. After all, my dad sang this and Jodis from the Corp and the army to me as a baby as lullabies.

It was no surprise then to realize in High School that I could never attend a University that I could not be equally as dedicated to. I had grown up believing college was a time to study, sure, but that the college experience and the friendships that were made there were built around the traditions of the University. When my college search began, I asked every ambassador about the truly important things: tickets to the football game, traditions unique to the University, and what organizations were on campus. My high school calculus teacher used to joke that although I was not planning to attend the cult in College Station that bled maroon, I was simply searching for a different cult to join. There is, admittedly, some accuracy to that statement.

My background and my token questions I asked at every college tour resulted in a fascination with University tradition. College is a great time in a person’s life regardless of where he or she attends school, but tradition is what inspires alumni to return to campus, donate money, and cheer for a team. One night at our favorite Mexican food

restaurant, while discussing the college decision before me, I mentioned to my brother and my mother my fascination with these ideas. Where had Boomer Sooner come from at OU? Why did Ole Miss chant Hotty Toddy? The discussion was pure inspiration. By the time I returned from dinner, I knew I wanted to write a mystery series. Each book would take place at a different University and would showcase their tradition as my characters sought the criminal. Such a series would allow me to find the answers to my questions and maybe watch a little college football while I was at it. I wanted to write it, and *Dark Memories* is the first of the series.

Though I had a general idea of what I wanted to show in my novel, I did not have the actual plot line until last year. When the Student Senate threatened to ban the playing of Dixie at football games, I realized two things. The first was that while each university has its own unique traditions, each also has its own problems and controversies and these too are part of the make-up of the institution. The second was that Ole Miss constantly struggles with the public image of our tradition, rarely understands the origin of tradition, and this combination has resulted in what I believe to be a self-destructive identity crisis. After following the controversy in the *Daily Mississippian* for a few days, I found my story. Within the novel taking place at Ole Miss, there had to be a discussion about what constitutes racism, where traditions came from, and the ensuing battle regarding what our identity and tradition *should* be. Ole Miss struggles with the accusation of racism and often over corrects as a result. I chose to represent that struggle as the core of my novel. As a result, the issue of race is at the core of my novel.

In Aggieland, traditions and their origin are part of the vocabulary and part of “street education” and education within the Corp of Cadets from the time a freshman

arrives on campus. This is not the case at Ole Miss. I did not even know the name “University Grays” until April my freshmen year when they were mentioned as a by-product of a Civil War discussion in a history class I was enrolled in. No one elaborated on them beyond their presence at the Battle of Gettysburg. I would not hear of them again until I began researching the origins of the University traditions. Ole Miss does not discuss why we dress up in the Grove, where the Walk of Champions originated, or any basis for any tradition at all. I knew that to write this novel and show the controversies on campus with the tradition they are about, I needed to know as much as I could about where our traditions came from.

I also recognized I needed to know as much as possible about the 1962 Race Riots. After all, that incident is cited every time Ole Miss is on the news for anything. It is often mentioned in debates regarding tradition as one more reason we must change them. It was simply logical to include it in my story. Initially, I was not sure how, but I quickly settled on a parallel story when I thought about how the 1962 time period remains such a part of our controversy. It is an important part of the questions regarding identity and racism at Ole Miss.

During the course of my research, I read numerous books and spent many hours in the University Archives. Though I had an idea of what I wanted to include in my novel, I did not develop the plot until after my research.

During my time in the University Archives, I read looked through yearbooks from 1960 to 1964. This became my basis for many descriptions of clothing and some of the traditions that are either no longer here or the time at which they occur has changed. I

learned through the yearbooks that Rush was held prior to the school year starting during that time frame. I learned how students typically dressed by looking through the photos. I examined the spread that covered Dixie Week.

In addition to going through the yearbooks, I looked at newspaper and magazine articles preserved from the time frame. I started with the Clark Hairston Taylor collection, and quickly continued to the Henry T. Gallagher Collection. I proceeded to the Lewis Collection. The speech JD Williams gave on October 31, 1962, "Another Mississippi Story," is preserved in this collection. It is from this speech that I took the quotation used in my epigraph at the beginning of my novel. It also contained a variety of news articles from TIME, Newsweek, and LOOK magazine.

I also perused the Citizens Council Collection from this time frame. I read and looked at a variety of pamphlets used for their propaganda. This collection was particularly difficult to look through as it does contain some very offensive material. However, it helped me grasp the issues that surrounded integration. There was more than simply racism; there was also an issue regarding states' rights. It is from these pamphlets that Dale's insistence that Mississippi is sovereign, which he repeats to Charlie and Robert numerous times in the 1962 portion of the story, was born.

I also conducted research outside of the University Archives. I read a variety of books about Ole Miss, the 1962 Integration, the history of the University, and even spoke with students whose families have been associated with the University for many years. A friend who was formerly an Ole Miss ambassador gave me his copy of the Ambassador

handbook, which included information about when various buildings were built and their history.

While finding information on the history of the University was relatively easy, finding information regarding the origins of tradition was a little trickier. Luckily, many of the books about integration had background information outlining some traditions. Others I looked up online or simply asked about. Many traditions here are shrouded in myth, as perhaps tradition typically is, but some were fairly consistent. The origin of Colonel Reb, for instance, is fairly consistently traced back to Blind Jim Ivy, a black man who sold peanuts on campus and was loved by the students. Blind Jim came to campus in 1896 and became an integral part of Ole Miss for the next sixty years. He is rarely discussed now, but he was referred to as the Dean of Freshmen, taken to away football games at the expense of the students, and in his later years, cared for by the students who took up collections for his medical and eventually burial expenses (Eagles 43-46). The origin of the Walk of Champions in the 1980s as part of Billy Bower's walk of the football team from the Athletic Dorms to the stadium was also extremely consistent. However, the origin of the Hotty Toddy is less so. There were numerous stories regarding its beginning, all which refer to drinking but that is the only consistency. I ended up avoiding the issue all together by simply not including its origin.

Though some of the research was challenging and all of it was time consuming, I wanted my novel to be as accurate as I could make it. In addition to wanting to show the University and its history accurately, I also wanted to ensure the accuracy of my law enforcement officers. I worked with Professor Carl Jensen, a former FBI agent and a graduate student seeking employment with the FBI, Connor Hagan to represent this

portion of the story with as much accuracy as possible. Both gave generously of their time and I ask them to forgive the areas I fictionalized for the sake of the story. I asked them everything from how a crime scene was set up to what and how soon information would be released to the press, to how to include an FBI character into the story for the sake of continuity with my series. I knew I wanted someone with federal jurisdiction, but I was not certain how to go about including this. Professor Jensen is the reason Tyler White is an FBI Crime Analyst.

I also interviewed Christian Hensen, a current broadcast news reporter in Lubbock, Texas. She worked with me at Hawk Eye News (the school District Broadcast News program) and remains a friend of my older brother. I spoke with her over the phone to understand the details of the profession. She was also available by Facebook message, and generously helped me define Meg's role in the investigation and her priorities at her job. It is because of this conversation for instance, that Meg is very concerned with getting live shots. This is an important part of investigative journalism. It is also why there is a reference to the police scanner on Meg's desk at work and the importance of fact checking. Without Christian Hensen, many of these details would not have been included.

In total, I spent more than fifty hours conducting research for my novel. The details and information I gathered has lent credibility and realism to a novel that could have easily lacked believability.

### ***Writing Dark Memories***

I feel I have been very fortunate in that I attend a University with an Honors College that not only allows, but encourages my writing a mystery novel for my thesis. Over the course of my undergraduate career, I have had the good fortune of having a variety of excellent professors who have truly helped me become a better thinker and a better writer. My Honors 101 and 102 professor, Dr. Neil Manson, is an exceptional professor who despite not actively aiding in the creation of this work was nevertheless crucial to its completion. Professor Manson was one of the first teachers I ever had that returned a paper to me covered in red ink. Though admittedly, I had turned it in early for his review and after revisions, I made an A on the assignment. I still learned some important lessons from that experience. It was the first time anyone had challenged me in my writing, and it was humbling. I had gone through high school being told how wonderful my writing was, and my ink-stained draft was a lesson that there is always room for improvement. Manson's criticism is always constructive, and I always learn something new. Even now, I periodically correspond with him for help with articles for my internship with Phi Beta Kappa, and true to form he always finds plenty of room for improvement. Additionally, Professor Manson encourages my dream to write, but he also has encouraged me to think outside the box for fiction. Though I still chose to focus on a homicide with this mystery, Dr. Manson also opened the door to my consideration for other options for my future works. There are numerous crimes and the world of criminal fiction has room for more than murder.

I can cite a variety of professors throughout my time at Ole Miss and within the Honors College who have bettered me as a person, a student, a thinker, and a writer. This is what makes my University great: the encouragement of students' dreams and the



dedication of professors who want to help. Even during my final semester, I have three professors who are quickly becoming not only people I respect for their knowledge of their subject area, but also their willingness to help me pursue my passions and dreams even when it is not totally related to their subject.

In addition to excellent professors encouraging my writing, this novel is also shaped by a group of students. Part of the research credit for the creative thesis was taking English 424 Fiction Writing with my Thesis Advisor, Tom Franklin. I began writing *Dark Memories* during class and the students in it critiqued the first several pages. This was a particularly important experience for the scene when Meg meets Leah and looks through Brianna's dorm room. Initially the scene was completely inaccurate and unrealistic. The suggestions of the class to avoid having Meg tell Leah too much about what was going on and to make Leah more anxious about her roommate were important to my revision process. The workshop process helped me get started and forced me to consider even further my characters' backgrounds and motivations. My time in the class gave me some insight into the literary industry.

Of course, the advice was not limited to the class. Tom's input on this novel has also been important. Initially the readers did not meet Dale Norwood, the professor in contemporary Oxford, until the very end. Tom helped me understand that this is not a particularly wise decision for a mystery novel. The readers would feel tricked. I made the revisions. Admittedly, we did not agree on every revision. Tom has mentioned a variety of times that he feels the prologue in Jordan's perspective is jarring for readers and is technically unnecessary for the story. I respectfully disagree and have chosen to include it because of others I have asked to read it and my own experience. Murder mysteries need

a scene in which the body is found, and I cannot have Meg find the body initially because that would change her relationship with the investigation and its law enforcement officers. My research would not allow me to do or support that. However, an opening with Meg receiving a phone call is simply not enough of a hook. A variety of mysteries by Dan Brown include prologues or openings from a perspective the reader never hears from again, every CSI TV show is written in this format, and after having others read both openings, I chose to keep Jordan's prologue for its commercial value. It is the hook that every mystery reader expects, even if it breaks a rule.

I want this novel to be commercial. I want it to sell, and I believe it can. In addition to an audience of mystery readers, I think there are two niche markets inherently present for this book. The first is obvious: Ole Miss alumni and fans will be interested in a commercial story that takes place on campus. The second is high school teenagers making a college decision. Furthermore, once more books are written, I believe the market will increase. Obviously if an LSU alumnus reads the LSU University book and likes the character, he or she may very well follow Meg Anderson across the SEC. This is my goal. I understand that this novel may not be award winning caliber, and I understand that the series itself may not be the type of books that win awards. If my books sell and entertain a large number of readers, I will consider it a success. If I ever make the top of the New York Times Bestseller list, I will know I have arrived.

### ***Dark Memories and the Controversial Issue of Race***

The racial issues and point of view represented in *Dark Memories* are products of personal experiences and conversations. I have experienced both efforts to silence

historical accuracies and been the victim of reverse racism. I have watched society censor conversation in the name of political correctness and frankly, I see a society so intent on censoring words, history, and certain types of discussion that it could easily be compared to the society of *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. I did not set out to write a controversial novel. I simply sought to include my experiences and the issues I see still creating controversy on campus, though the events they stem from are years past. I wanted to include an issue that haunts the campus and is at the center of every debate and discussion we have about tradition, identity, and our heritage.

In high school, my English teacher who taught *Huck Finn* by Mark Twain told us that it was once listed as a banned book because it included the word “nigger.” She said when reading aloud, quoting from the book in papers or discussion, we would not include it. Though a few of my friends and I voiced our concern that it was a part of the book and a historically accurate term for the time it was written, we were told that to say or write it in any capacity—even in quotation for a paper—was racist. My friends and I were called racist for our desire to read the book as it had been written. As I did when I worked in journalism, I felt that censorship was unwarranted and frankly ridiculous. Why were we censoring a classic? Why were we limiting our discussion? It did not take me long to realize we were doing so out of fear. Fear of the accusation of racism. It is a powerful accusation in today’s society, even when it is completely unwarranted. This experience is the basis for Kimberly and Brianna’s initial confrontation.

When Obama was elected in 2008, I was in high school. At the time I was taking gym, my final P.E credit. The class was a diverse group of students; there were a variety of African American, Hispanic, as well as white girls. The day after Obama’s win, the

African American girls shoved me into my gym locker and spit on me. The girl in the center pointed at my face and yelled, "We in charge now, bitch." The other white girls quickly left the locker room. The teacher did nothing, though she walked out of her office while I was still surrounded, still in the middle of changing, by six if not more black girls. When I arrived at lunch that day, I would learn from a few friends that I was not alone in having such an experience. Indeed, a young African American male jumped on a table near me as my friends and I were discussing it and ran towards the stage at the front of the cafeteria, yelling, "Black Power! Black Power!" with his arm raised in a fist before running from the lunchroom. Once again, no one said or did anything, though the boy had literally stepped on some lunches of white students when he'd jumped on the table. Reverse racism is real. It is not a popular topic, and I have found it is often discounted. I have shared these experiences and been told that it was not racist and that it is acceptable behavior because I am not black and they are.

When I arrived at the University of Mississippi, I knew relatively little about it. I knew the students dressed up for football games. I knew we chanted the Hotty Toddy. I knew we had recently gotten rid of Colonel Reb, an act that was still controversial. At first, I did not examine it too closely. I thought of Colonel Reb as an interesting relic of the past, the Ole Miss equivalent of the Aggie phrase "Old Army," denoting something that was cool but is not necessarily honored or carried out anymore. However, that changed when I began learning of why we had rid ourselves of him. When I came to school here, I was told the students requested the change. Later, I was told the faculty Senate basically insisted the students choose a new mascot. At the end of the Fall Semester of my freshman year, an organization I was a part of brought in a guest speaker

who talked about all the racist traditions, how important it was to rid the University of them, and discussed racism on campus. It was implied that all whites were racist. I listened. But I couldn't quite understand. I asked when the traditions had started and where they had come from. Did they truly have racist origins? No one could tell me. Though it was not directly stated at that meeting, it was implied that all white people on the University of Mississippi campus were racist. Sadly, it set the tone and the precedent for a variety of conversations and discussions I would have throughout the remainder of my time here.

Last year, Obama was re-elected and the University freshmen burned a sign, yelled back and forth at one another, and stood around outside their dorms after a fire alarm was pulled (this is the story I was given from a friend who witnessed the proceedings). I had two professors who stopped class the next day to discuss what had happened. Though one professor admittedly was using it as a teaching moment and did not completely throw the lesson plan out the window, the other sought to foster a discussion about race on campus. Once again, it was implied, and this time, basically stated that the white students at the University of Mississippi are racist. All of them. Horrified and offended, I listened as all whites were lumped together into a mass of racist villains, and blanket generalizations about the race were espoused and taught in a University classroom. I was afraid to speak up and respond that these statements themselves were racist and unfair for fear of being accused of racism myself, an accusation I knew would be volatile, dangerous, and given the nature of society and the views espoused in the classroom and previous University meetings, likely irreversible. So I remained silent in a setting where open and free discussion should have prevailed.

The same year I had a friend confide to me that his sociology professor had stood in front of the class and stated, "All white people are racist." He elaborated to say that racism was discrimination against black people, and that is the only definition of racism and the only kind of discrimination that is racist. This was also stated in a University of Mississippi classroom.

In almost every English class I have taken, I have read at least one, if not more, contemporary novels or poetry about race. In each instance, the professors have introduced the novel by saying that it is important given that we are at the University of Mississippi to read such books. During my time on the Common Reading Experience Committee here, we have considered a book, sometimes several, about racism every year. Each year there are committee members who stress how important it is to introduce such a book to the freshmen because of where we are.

My University has a lot to be proud of. The University of Mississippi was one of the first southern universities to admit women and the first southern university to hire a female faculty member. *It was also the first southern university to integrate.* As a freshman, no one told me these facts. In fact, I was not made aware of any of them until I conducted my research for my novel. Instead of being proud of the progress we led (even when that progress was a struggle), we apologize for it. We teach our students to apologize for it.

I am not ashamed of my time at the University of Mississippi, and I am not ashamed of all that my University has accomplished. In May, I will walk across the Grove stage and receive my diploma. I will wear my University of Mississippi class ring.

and I will proudly say that I am an Ole Miss Rebel. I went to the University of Mississippi, the first Southern University to integrate, hire a female faculty member, and among the first to admit women. I went to the University of Mississippi, home to one of the best Honors Colleges in the nation, the alma mater of 25 Rhodes Scholars, and owner of more than 40 invention patents.

I did not set out to write a controversial novel, but my time at the University of Mississippi has made it abundantly clear that reverse racism, the concern about what constitutes racism, and how racism was present in the past here is at the heart of the University's issues regarding tradition and identity: the very topics I sought to discuss when I first thought of the University series idea. I sought to acknowledge the problems and the controversy on campus. These problems are part of the fabric of the University, and I would be remiss to exclude them. The novel becomes far less without these discussions. I acknowledge the University's past racism and I attempt to show the flip side, reverse racism and the desire of society to mandate equality—so much so that we have created inequalities and questions of merit. This is exactly what Detective Davis Heard discusses in his speech.

I recognize that prejudice exists. In fact, I recognize that it exists everywhere. There will always be those who discriminate based on race. Today, these kinds of people are a minority themselves, but they exist in the South, in the North, East, West. Heard recognizes that and says this in his speech.

My purpose is not to embarrass my University, but rather to recognize that it is not 1962 anymore. All the white people at the University of Mississippi are not racist.

Prejudice exists, but it exists everywhere against multiple races. Black against white discrimination is just as real and just as deplorable as white against black discrimination. At the heart of this novel, I am saying that prejudice in any form is wrong.



*“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”*

*-Martin Luther King*

*“A deeper question presses upon us: Shall we continue to have a real university, or only the outward husk and mere appearance of a university?”*

*- JD Williams*

*University of Mississippi Chancellor 1946-1968*

## Prologue

Jordan Teague would be turning twenty one in just under twenty four hours. Her friend, and recent—if two years previously still counted as recent—Ole Miss graduate, Meg Anderson had come back to Oxford for it. The separation had ended with her visit, and they planned to celebrate Jordan's newfound status. Her lips perked up at the edges as she thought about it. The important collegiate birthday was still in the future and Jordan focused on the uneven ground in front of her. She hadn't been to the tunnels since Meg had taken her there freshman year, and she'd forgotten the deep slope of the hill through the tree line, the fallen limbs that obstructed the sandy pathway, and the various spider webbed booby traps that required her to duck as she walked. Her intricate little dance to arrive at the entrance of the Oxford tunnels would have been better suited at a gymnastics competition, Jordan reflected.

The concrete paneling loomed before her, and she pulled the spray paint from her pocket and turned to her companions.

“Alright Ava, let's show Grant how it's done.”

Grant Elkins was a freshman Jordan had adopted as a friend and favored recipient of all Rebel traditions. Tonight was his first introduction to the Oxford tunnels. Just as Meg had taken her, Jordan was passing on the tradition.

“They aren't nearly as creepy as you made them sound.” he said to her.

Jordan rolled her eyes. "Well, no, I suppose not. Although there are rumors that Oxford's homeless come out here sometimes. And druggies."

"Riiight" he responded with an exaggerated eye roll. "Of course. Because there are so many druggies in Oxford."

Jordan flipped the flashlight beam back and forth between walls as she crouched and entered the concrete shaft that eventually opened into an Oxford Residential area. Jordan had never been down that far, but Meg had answered her question about the tunnel's end without hesitation. The erratic beam of the light, flashing over a Rebel version of a Jackson Pollack painting: the splattering of initials, names, and class years started to hurt her eyes.

"Tag whatever, wherever you want Grant. As you can see, everyone else has." Ava stated throwing her brown hair back behind her shoulder as she too pulled out a spray can and began to shake.

Jordan continued walking. She knew exactly where she wanted to write "21," but she didn't remember how far into the tunnels it was. As a freshman she'd seen a hollowed out indentation, large enough for her to almost fit inside but small enough that the wall was virtually a blank canvas. It was a location waiting for a statement, she thought.

Her confident stride echoed as she ran the flashlight impatiently up and down the walls, straining her eyes in the distance.

Behind her she heard Ava's whizzing clacks that accompany the shake of spray paint.

"Damn thing just doesn't want to spray," Ava complained distantly behind her.

"Where you going Jordan?" Grant called out to her back.

Jordan kept walking, sure she was close. She slowed the flick of her wrist, and saw, at the edge of the flashlight beam, a break in the rigid lines of the concrete. "There," she thought and briefly noticed the echo of her own footsteps as she rushed towards it.

It took a moment to register: the irregular lines and colors bleeding into the dust-colored walls. Jordan shined the light inside the hollowed out area she'd imagined as an empty canvas, and momentarily froze as she looked upon a girl, likely no bigger than herself, in a contorted position a gymnast would applaud. The girl's legs were bent up and with one knee broken pushed sideways over the other; one arm was behind her back while the other reached over her shoulder as if she had an itch between shoulder blades. Her face pressed into her legs. The girl did not move. She did not groan. She did nothing— not even breathe.

Jordan stared transfixed until she heard herself scream. The metallic clang of her heavy-duty flashlight hitting the floor only vaguely registered in her head as she turned and began to sprint from the tunnel.

Two flashlight beams flashed in her eyes, and she felt her stomach reject dinner as the familiar smell of her BLT sandwich began its fluid ascent up her throat. Jordan felt

herself blush as she vomited at the entrance of the tunnels. Embarrassment wasn't warranted, and she knew it. But she couldn't focus on anything but what'd she'd seen.

Between heavy puffs of breath, she stated to Grant and Ava, "Let's. Get. Out. Of. Here."

Without waiting for a response, she took off running through the ditch. As if she were running hurdles, she jumped and dodged every fallen tree branch, brushed away spider-webs, and watched and prayed for the sandy trail up the hill into the tree line.

Bounding up the path through broken brambles and interconnected kudzu, Jordan only paused when she arrived back at the cemetery. Still huffing and puffing, her mind raced faster than her legs had. What the hell was she supposed to do?

As a matter of habit, she reached for her phone. Help. She had to call someone. When she unlocked the screen, Meg's text message from earlier that night telling Jordan of her arrival pulled up. Jordan, allowing the tears to flow freely, pressed call without thought. She had to tell someone. She needed to call for help.

## Chapter 1

Meg Anderson stared at her laptop screen and tried to focus. The information on her various tabs was beginning to run together. Her notes, scribbled with enthusiasm over the past few hours, were starting to look like the indecipherable scrawl of a kindergartener.

She was supposed to be on vacation, the first since she'd graduated from Ole Miss two years previously. She had driven to Oxford to visit her friend, Jordan Teague for her twenty first birthday. And yet, she was doing research and skipping out on Jordan's adventure night to work. She shook her head. It wasn't even her story—she was doing research for her co-worker. Sometimes journalism was more than a career choice. Sometimes it was a lifestyle.

A headache began to pound beneath her temples, but she ignored it and scanned her notes. Jordan's desk chair moved beneath her as she jolted to the generic dubstep ringtone of her phone. Without so much as glancing at the caller ID, she grabbed the phone and answered. "Meg Anderson."

"MEG! HELP! SHE NEEDS HELP! MEG!" a voice Meg instantly recognized as Jordan Teague's screamed through the phone.

"Whoa, calm down, Jordan" Meg pressed save without thinking and spun away from the computer. "Who needs help? Tell me what happened."

Gasps of air huffed in and out of her ear. "The tunnels. A girl. I think she's...Meg, she's not moving. I was taking Grant to the tunnels and...MEG! I don't know what to do!" The unmistakable hiccupping sob followed the hysterical explanation.

"Jordan. Jordan. I need you to listen to me. Are you listening?"

A hiccup was her response.

"I need you to stay where you are. I'm going to call the police. I'll be right there. We're going to deal with this, but you have to stay there. I'm coming. Do you understand?" Meg asked.

Jordan whimpered.

"Jordan, do you understand?"

"Y-y-yees, Meg, Hurry!"

Meg grabbed her wallet and bounded out the door. Her truck rumbled to life as she turned the key and quickly jammed the shift into drive. She wasn't sure what awaited her at St. Peter's Cemetery, the entrance to the Oxford tunnels, but she had a gun in her truck and ran a six minute mile so she tried not to worry. As she accelerated out of the apartment complex parking lot, she dialed 9-1-1 and reported her friend's hysterical phone call.

She arrived at the cemetery before the police, and though she was careful not to inadvertently leave tire tread in someone's grave, she drove quickly to the Tree of

Knowledge in St. Peter's Cemetery – the tree that marked the location of the hidden path in the tree line at the cemetery's edge. As her headlights reflected on Jordan's red car, she searched for Jordan and Grant, the freshman Jordan had adopted and chosen to take to the tunnels. The intertwining iron piping form of a cross that stood to the left of the tree was hidden behind the car and Meg steered around the other side of it to park. Just as she passed Jordan's car, she saw her friend in her vehicle. Jordan's blonde hair could be seen through the window as she leaned against it. Jordan seemed to be looking at the iron cross in the darkness. It was almost a shadow in the night, the rusted iron somehow both brighter and darker than the night bearing down upon it. Meg threw the gearshift up to park, yanked the door handle, and banged on Jordan's car door.

The blonde jumped up, nearly hitting her head on the roof. Meg exhaled, realizing for the first time she'd been afraid her friend was hurt or worse. Grant shifted forward, and got out of the car. "She won't stop shaking. I don't know what she saw. She took me down the trail and I stopped at the entrance to write my initials on the wall," he told her.

Meg nodded as she watched Jordan slowly look in all the mirrors before getting out of the car. Meg focused on Jordan's hazy baby blues, and tuned out Grant's tale. She could see Jordan's hands shaking and her fidgeting to grab her own hands, like she wanted them to keep still. Meg reached for her and took her hand. It was as if Jordan had barely made it out of a walk in a freezer instead of returning from a trip to the tunnels in a warm autumn night.



She turned back to Jordan, unconcerned with the two others. “Jordan, tell me what happened. I can help her. Who is she?” Meg asked. Jordan slowly nodded with a loud shaky exhale.

“What happened?” Meg said again. “I can help.”

Jordan shook her head, and shifting her weight from each foot, whispered, “No. You can’t help.”

“What?” Meg asked, having barely heard Jordan’s whisper.

The hyperventilation broke into the familiar sound of wet, crying whines. “She’s dead, Meg. The girl in the tunnels. She wasn’t moving. She just all stuffed up in the hole— no sound, no nothing. She’s gotta be dead.”

Jordan slumped into Meg’s shoulder, defeated, and crying.

Meg saw the lights in the corner of her eyes. White headlights illuminating a row of headstones at a time, widening their glow as the car approached.

She tried to see through the tinted windows. The darkness seeped around the stopped police car, stretching out its oppressive night fog to embrace the car. The cruiser’s door opened slowly, like a moth flapping its wings as it readied itself for flight.

Meg felt her eyes squint as she strained against the darkness. The gleaming badge with polish smudges still rubbed into its golden shine cut through the darkness even as Meg searched for a nametag. The man walked toward her as she studied his gleaming credentials. He too was dark. An image of confidence, he walked with a purpose, each

booted step sure and echoing, even against the soft grass waiting to be removed for wooden boxes.

He extended his hand. "Ma'am, I'm Detective Davis Heard with Oxford Police Department. We received a 9-1-1 call regarding a body at this location. Are you Jordan Teague?"

Meg felt callouses on the palm of his hand as she returned his firm grip. "No sir, I'm Meg Anderson. I made the call. My friend Jordan called me, and I drove here as quickly as I could."

"Anderson? Meg. You're that reporter out of Memphis," he said with surprise.

"I am," Meg responded.

Davis nodded, seemingly without emotion. "Is this Miss Teague then?"

Meg shifted, forcing Jordan to turn.

Detective Heard glanced at her, and flipped open a pocket notebook. "So Ms. Teague, where exactly is this body?"

Jordan exhaled a shaky breath, and through hiccupping sobs responded, "I...that cut out, Meg. I was going to write 21 in that cubby hole. And she was there stuffed into the tunnel hole like a discarded lunchbox in a kindergarten cubby hole."

Her speech came out in rushes and broken sobs between every few words. Detective Heard nodded, making eye contact with her as she spoke. Meg couldn't help but admire his calm demeanor that conveyed complete willingness to listen.

“Okay. Can you show me where this hole is?”

Jordan seemed to freeze. Meg could feel the intake of breath and see her ball her fists. “It...it’s in the tunnels over there.” she said pointing to the trees. “Please...pl. please don’t make me go back.”

The detective looked at her then looked at Meg.

“I know where she’s talking about. The location. I know I can’t step into the crime scene. I know that would be an issue, but I know where it is. I can stop before I tread too closely to where the body is. We don’t need to put Jordan through seeing it all a second time.” Meg said.

Detective Heard hesitated. “I can’t have this on tomorrow’s news Ms. Anderson. I have a job to do.”

“I know that sir. And I don’t want to interfere. Whatever happened here needs to be solved. I want the truth to be found. Just like you.”

He paused and nodded.

Meg knew her way to the tunnels, and she walked the edge of the tree line, kudzu and greenery snaking up and onto the sandy hill, reaching out toward the headstones from a grave of its own. Meg looked for the indentations in the greenery for the sandy pathway, and just as the beam flashed against yet another vine of green the contrast of the beaten path, sand and mud tramped down slightly revealed itself in the shadows of the overlapping trees that keep its secret.

Meg nodded over her shoulder at Detective Heard and began her descent. She'd forgotten the deep slope of the hill through the tree line, the fallen limbs, and how prolific spiders were in building their webs.

As soon as they entered the concrete shaft, their boots echoed off the concrete floors of the tunnels. The erratic beam of the light flashed over the splattered initials, names, and class years. It was a bit of an undergraduate Rebel tradition, the tagging of the tunnels. It was on the "Freshman List," and an upperclassman introduced it to some freshman, who as an upperclassman imparted it to another. Meg had been Jordan's, and Jordan was Grant's. She wondered if the tradition would continue once the rumors of a body made their way through campus.

"We're close," Meg noted to her companion. She took a few steps further and stopped. It had taken a moment to register: the irregular lines of the indentation. "There," Meg pointed the flashlight beam and illuminated a girl, likely no bigger than herself, contorted into a human ball. Though she was several steps removed from it, she could make out the girl's outline clearly. The girl's brown hair knotted around her face. The pale whiteness of her face beneath it barely peeked out from beneath the strands.

Detective Heard nodded and motioned her back further. He walked up to the cubby hole and turned. "I'll need to contain this area." Without taking his eyes from hers, he reached for his phone and called in directions. "Confirmed body...coroner...sweepers..." Meg didn't focus on his call, instead noticing for the first time the pin he wore above his name tag. She recognized it. Detective Heard had attended the FBI's Training Academy for Detectives in Quantico.

Meg and Jordan wanted to stay at the Cemetery until the body was removed from the hollow grave she'd been stuffed into. Meg sat on the tailgate of her pick up, still holding Jordan's hand, and watched the flurry of activity. The black uniforms looked like ants, each with a job, crawling all over the cemetery and entering the tunnels. It was as if the location of the body was the location of their Queen, the center of their universe and the only thing they could focus on.

The squeak of wheels interrupted Meg's reverie. Listening closely, she could just barely make out the sound of Detective Heard's deep voice. "...It's going to take several of us to get her up this hill...You got that side?"

Meg watched as the ants broke through the trees. Six of them, three on each side, carrying the black bag on a stretcher, walked through the cemetery as if they were nothing more than pallbearers.

The doors of the body truck shut with finality, and Meg caught herself wiping a tear. The girl had seemed young, even from her vantage point. Eighteen maybe twenty years of life snuffed out and discarded.

Detective Heard wiped the sweat from his dark brow. He began walking towards them as he put his notebook in his pocket. "Ladies, this is all you can do tonight. We'll need formal statements, but for the moment, you should go home. I've got her, and I promise I will take care of her. Do you want an escort home?"

Meg looked over at Jordan, who still stared at the body truck. The brake lights lit up blood red, their glow shining on the nearest gravestones. "No, I think we'll make it."

Meg was still awake when the sun began to peek over the neighbor's house. When they had arrived back at Jordan's little house from the cemetery, Jordan had simply taken a shower and gone to bed. She'd told Meg she didn't want to talk. Meg couldn't blame her.

"I understand. Come get me if you need me. Oh, and Jordan? Happy birthday." Meg had told her.

Jordan was still in bed when Meg had given in to her wakefulness. Pulling the bottle of champagne she'd brought as a gift from her Vera Bradley bag, she'd raided Jordan's fridge for orange juice and made off with both to the front porch with a wine glass borrowed from the cabinet.

She traced the outline of the wine glass's rim as the sun's first rays broke through the darkness.

Meg thought about the various stories she'd written and presented over the past two years. Drive by shootings with victims face down on the concrete like a drunk drowning in their own vomit. Crooks embezzling, cheating, Ponzi-scheming their way to riches leaving poverty in their wake. Victims. Those who'd lost their life because of someone else's greed, lust, and anger. Victims.

Every story she wrote was researched from every angle. She didn't want to be one of those media hounds sensationalizing the guilty—or the innocent. So she tried to tell the story as it was as best she could put it together.

She had seen crime photos. She'd listened to cops talk of the dead numerous times. She tried to tell herself that seeing the brunette bent and broken was just seeing a crime scene photo before the picture was snapped. With a sigh, Meg knew that no matter how many times she allowed her brain to think it; it would never be true. She had seen a dead body before. And afterward, she had read every snippet about the case until the leads led nowhere, and the body was buried just as its file was buried beneath other manila coffins. She had sworn then that she would tell the stories of those who couldn't speak or didn't speak. The brunette stuffed in the tunnels couldn't speak. And her case might be just as much of a dead end.

Meg finished the glass as she realized that sometime today a couple would be receiving a phone call telling them their child was dead.

She heard the door open behind her as she looked at the empty glass.

“Morning,” she said without turning around.

“Morning,” Jordan paused and continued, “I'm not going to class today.”

Meg nodded and reached down for more orange juice and champagne, pouring each in her glass during the silence.

“Are you drinking?” Jordan asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am,” Meg replied unapologetically.

Without a word, Jordan got up and went back into the house. Meg took another drink, and just as she considered going back into the house and putting the drinks away, Jordan opened the door and pushed a glass in front of her.

“I could use a drink myself.”

Meg poured her a mimosa, and the two sat on the porch together drinking away the thoughts of the night before.

“I think I recognize her,” Jordan slurred at nearly eleven. “All night I kept seeing her. Over and over. It was like the shifting images of the looking glass toy I had as a child except instead of a new image with every click, it was the same lifeless brunette stuffed into a nonexistent grave minutes from the cemetery.”

Meg hadn't registered the irony of the location—a few minutes walk from the cemetery, a body had been stuffed into a concrete grave. Meg took a drink from her glass.

“I think it's Brianna. We were gonna give her a snap bid. The whole sorority really liked her...” Jordan trailed off.

“I'm sorry. Are you sure? If you are, you need to call Detective Heard. He'll need to know.”

“No. No. I'm not sure. I just. It looked like her hair. But maybe...it was dark. No. no. Couldn't be her. You know, it's weird. Today is my twenty first: I was so excited. And now...hard to celebrate my birth when I just saw someone dead,” Jordan said, turning the glass around in her hands.



Meg could think of nothing to say. Her brain felt light, and the fuzzy light-headedness that accompanies a good drunk had cast itself over her faculties like the Mississippi fog creeping in the morning. She took another drink, unsure which would come first: their choosing to stop or their killing the bottle. Dead Soldier.

## Chapter 2

September 1962

Charlie Mayes wondered if it was possible to drive with only a few fingers. He felt like he was gripping the red coils of a stove burner as he determinedly kept his hands at 10 and 2 on the steering wheel. He listened to Dale Norwood's tapping against the door of his car while Patsy Cline sang on the radio. Charlie glanced at his rearview mirror, and shook his head at Robert Bolden's anxious shifting in the seat and his crossed arms. He was just upset that he didn't call shotgun. Charlie thought as he noted the long line of cars behind him.

The trees were still green in the September sun as they reached out towards each other and framed 51 South. Ole Miss was playing Kentucky at Memorial Stadium and they were not going to miss it. They hadn't known each other long, but Charlie felt close to his new pledge brothers.

A car merged into their lane in front of them, and across the bumper black block letters read, "Keep Mississippi Sovereign." As Patsy lamented that she was walkin' after midnight, Dale reached across the gear shift and turned the volume down.

"You think they'll actually let this damn colored "Meredith" enroll at Ole Miss?" he asked. "I mean, the courts said they'd have to, but Mississippi is still her own state, right? Good ole Governor Barnett won't let it happen. Ya think?"

Charlie glanced in the rearview mirror again, unsure what he thought about the matter. Robert Bolden looked out the backseat window with a frown as he tried to stretch out his legs and smooth the wrinkles from his khaki pants.

“I mean, I think that Mississippi is her own state. Education is a state thing. And I for darn sure don’t want to integrate. That’s not how we do things here. I mean, I love our nigras here but they have their place. But I’m not sure it’ll stay that way. Not like the feds haven’t gone to war before.” Rob responded, the last sentence almost a whisper.

The silence in the car was oppressive as the boys all glanced at their dress shoes, each with a noticeable shine in the afternoon sun streaming through the side windows.

Charlie motioned at Dale for the Coke he was holding, leaned back, and took a swig from the lukewarm glass bottle.

“Good ole Ross won’t let it happen boys. He’s said so over and over. Those commie Kennedys haven’t got a say. This here is Mississippi. That’s why Ross was on campus at registration. Our state legislature passed the Interposition bill. Governor Barnett now says who gets in and who doesn’t. And that nigger doesn’t. Nah. We won’t have to integrate.”

In the corner of his vision, Charlie watched Dale smile and pull a black fine toothed comb from his pocket and comb his hair away from his eyes. They were going to a football game, and Ole Miss tradition called for all to be well dressed. Charlie felt the corners of his own lips pull at the edges, feeling the matter was in good hands, and there were better things to think of. Like the game. The Rebs were good this year; Johnny Vaught just might lead them to a championship.

“What’s the Meredith negro want to go to school at Ole Miss for anyhow?  
Doesn’t he know there are nigras schools?” Rob wondered aloud. “I don’t think we’ll  
integrate but it sure is stirring up a fuss.

### Chapter 3

Meg glanced at her watch: it was still early in the afternoon. Jordan was sprawled out on the couch beside her, restlessly sleeping off the hangover. Though Meg's head felt a little heavier than usual, she still could not sleep.

Working instinctively, Meg grabbed her phone and the card Detective Heard had given Jordan the night before.

"Detective Davis Heard," he answered after two rings.

"Hi. This is Meg. Meg Anderson, Jordan's friend that she called last night about the body in the tunnels?"

"I remember you, Ms. Anderson. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I just wanted to know. Jordan said she thought maybe she knew the girl today. Said her hair looked kinda like a girl name Brianna's. I just wanted to let you know, in case it might help. I'm sure you guys are already looking through information on missing students from the University and through the University ID database, but I thought it might help." Meg said.

Meg could hear steady breathing, but Detective Heard made no response.

"Detective?" she asked.

“Yes, Ms. Anderson. I appreciate your call. We are looking into all of those avenues. I cannot confirm or deny that Brianna Mayes came up in the course of it. I can’t have details of this story released to the media and mess up my investigation,” he told her.

“I understand. I have a friend at the FBI—a crime analyst— Tyler White. I have no intention of getting in the way. I just want to find the truth,” she told him.

Detective Heard remained silent for a moment before saying, “I understand Ms. Anderson. Thank you for calling me. I’ll be following up with you and Jordan soon. Thank you.”

The phone clicked in her ear. Meg took the phone from her ear as it registered that Jordan had never given her a last name. She’d said Brianna. Detective Heard had said Brianna Mayes. Meg kicked a pebble and ran her hand through her hair. She was certain there was only one reason he’s already have a full name.

Walking back into the house, Meg wondered how she would tell Jordan that she had not been mistaken.

Meg was attempting to tell herself that the slip of Brianna’s full name didn’t mean anything. She scrolled through the online sale pages at Dillard’s and told herself to resist the urge to Facebook Brianna Mayes when Jordan woke with a groan to the sound of the knock at the door.

“I’ll get it,” Meg said to her friend.

Detective Heard stood before her. “Afternoon Ms. Anderson.”

“You can call me Meg, Detective,” she said.

“Alright, can I come in? I’m here to speak with Ms. Teague,” Heard responded.

Meg stepped aside and opened the door to him.

Jordan slowly sat up, yellow hair fanning out like the crown of the statue of liberty. She dropped her head in her hands as she realized who it was. “What do you want?” she asked.

“Ms. Teague, we’ve identified the body. I need to ask you a few questions,” Detective Heard said gently, as if he was talking to a child. “Did you know Brianna Mayes?”

Jordan nodded hesitantly.

“What can you tell me about her?”

“Well, she is friends—roomies actually-- with Leah, one of my sorority sisters. Leah used to bring her by the house sometimes for lunch. Brianna was really focused on school. She was in the Honors College. Wanted to try out for student ambassadors. I think maybe she wanted to do Newswatch too. The campus news program?”

Detective Heard nodded. “Any reason anyone would want to hurt her?”

Jordan gasped. “It’s her. It was her. Meg,” she cried, reaching an arm over the couch. “Meg, it was Brianna. Oh my God.”

Meg quickly came around the couch and put her arm around Jordan.

“Jordan, honey, I need you to focus. I know it’s hard, but you’ll be helping the Detective find what happened to Brianna if you tell him everything you know. Any reason Brianna might have been in danger. Anything someone was holding a grudge against her for. Drugs. Money. Anything, small or big. You gotta tell him. Okay?” Meg said.

Jordan gripped Meg’s hand, nodding. “I think she said some of the fraternity guys were mad at her. I don’t know why though. She didn’t say. And Brianna didn’t do drugs. Not even addy.” Jordan told them.

Detective Heard’s pen scratched the paper as her wrote in his notepad. “These boys have names? You know what fraternity they’re in?”

Jordan shook her head as a tear slid down her face. “She was my friend. I really wanted her to join. I liked her.”

Detective Heard nodded. “I promise we are going to do everything in our power to make sure that we find who did this to your friend. But I have to ask, did you personally have anything against Brianna?”

“No! Absolutely not. I liked her. We were friends.”

Detective Heard nodded. “Thank you Ms. Teague. I’ll let you know if we have any more questions.”

He got up to leave. Meg squeezed Jordan’s hand and accompanied him out the door.



“Detective, I know you received training at the FBI Detective’s Academy and I’m sure you don’t need any help with your job. But Jordan is my friend and this will haunt her. I’m here through Sunday. Please let me know if there’s anything I can do to help.” Meg said.

Detective Heard nodded. “Ms. Anderson, this isn’t something that needs to be splashed all over the news. I need to carry out this investigation without the news creating bias or interfering. There have been enough cases like that in the media.”

Meg took a deep breath. “This isn’t about a story. This is about a girl who was stuffed in the Oxford tunnels. Will I want to tell her story? Yes. Someone has to. She deserves someone to stand for her. To remember her. But I don’t want to tell her story in such a way that it puts justice at risk. She deserves justice and I’ll be damned if I’m the reason she can’t get it. We don’t have to be enemies. We want the same thing.”

Detective Heard nodded again. “I’ll think about it. In the meantime, Ms. Anderson, this is my investigation. Don’t interfere.”

Meg cocked her head. “Right.”

When she returned indoors, Jordan was once again sprawled out on the couch, face in a pillow. She moved at the sound of Meg’s closing the door, the hyperventilation of a held in sob clear both in sound and the vibration of her torso.

“Meg,” Jordan reached out to her. “Brianna was my friend.”

Meg nodded. "I know Jordan. I know." She wasn't sure what to do to comfort her friend. Jordan's blue eyes were like ice crystals made all the more sparkling by the droplets of water pooling at their base.

Jordan grabbed Meg's hand. "Meg. I want you to find whoever did this. Don't let Brianna just be another case number. Unsolved. Solved. Whatever. You told me about how that happened to you in high school. That guy you found and they never found who killed him. Brianna was a person, my friend. I don't want that to happen to her." Her voice had become hardened and her tone dropping from its shrill hysterical, grief rang out the words with harsh severity.

"Of course, Jordan. I'll look into it. But I'm not a cop. I can't guarantee justice. That's the courts. And the law. I'm not the law. Just a reporter." Even as Meg said it, she knew it wouldn't make Jordan feel better. She had found a body before, and she understood the desire to see the case closed and justice prevail.

"A good reporter. Find who hurt Brianna, Meg. Please. You told me once that after forty eight hours the likelihood of finding the person who did it goes down. Two days. And Lord knows, the cops here are probably more concerned with policing the bars than dealing with bodies." Jordan said, the strong demanding tone wilting back into a whimper.

"Yea, I'll do it Jordan. But I'll need your help. I need to know about these frat guys. And if you can get me some time to chat with Leah that'd be great."

Jordan opened her mouth, tears finally falling from the endless well in her eyes. "Why Leah? She lived with Bri. She wouldn't hurt her."

“Jordan, who knows more about the comings and goings of a college student than their roommate? She’ll probably have some information. And maybe she’ll let me look at Brianna’s stuff. Think Brianna kept a journal?” Meg asked.

Jordan nodded at her, pulling her pink sweatpant covered legs into her chest. Meg watched as her friend seemed to crawl back inside her head like a rabbit retreating from the unpleasant glare of headlights.

Meg nodded at the desk worker in the Residential College as she walked in the door. She’d walked from the Square to avoid trying to get a visitor’s pass and find a parking space. It wasn’t worth it. Even when she’d been in school as a student, parking had been a colossal mess. Jordan had texted Leah and asked if she’d speak with Meg, and she was supposed to be returning from class any minute. Leah had seemed a little confused if the single question mark she’d sent via text was any indication, but she’d agreed.

The desk worker, a young gentleman with a book on his lap seemed to follow Meg with his eyes as she paced. It was Friday afternoon, and with a weekend- a football weekend- on the horizon, no doubt Meg was among a small minority impatient and anxious. She checked her watch. Surely, Leah would be coming through the door any minute.

Cheeks still red from the cool autumn weather, Leah walked through the doors and despite never having met Meg, walked straight to her.

“You must be Meg-Jordan said you’d probably look intense. My room is this way,” she said motioning toward the back hall. “So is this about Brianna? I haven’t seen her in a few days. Jordan said this was an emergency though so I am guessing Brianna won’t be mad.”

Meg nodded, unsure whether it was her place to share the news of the tragedy with Brianna’s roommate. Didn’t she know? Or would it be something as simple and callous as Brianna’s parents removing all her things that revealed it? Surely a dean or a residential advisor would notify her.

Leah’s red hair swung back and forth like a metronome as she walked ahead of Meg. Her gait in perfect beat. Left, right, left. Meg, intent on what she may find and nervous about how much to reveal, tuned out Leah’s mindless chatter. “Well this is it.” barely registered with Meg as Leah stopped and held up her Vera Bradley wallet, student ID showing in the plastic covering. With the beep of the door lock and a green light, Leah opened the door to an oasis of blue. One side navy, the other turquoise. Coffee mugs littered the desk on the right side; two of which held pens and highlighters and acted as bookends for spirals, folders, and paperwork.

Leah motioned to the right, “That’s her side. So what’s so urgent that you need to look for something before she’s even around? I tried calling her but she didn’t pick up. She hasn’t returned my call from yesterday, either. It’s weird. ”

Meg exhaled and watched as the red head slung her backpack to the floor beside her black rolling chair, procedure as usual. Then Leah turned and stared at her. Leah’s lips shrunk slowly, the edges of her smile contracting into a straight pink line.

“Something happened to her. I was out late on Thursday and when I got back I just assumed she was here. Didn’t want to turn on lights and wake her up. But she wasn’t here this morning and usually, she is. I thought maybe she’d just gone home with a boy or something. But no texts or anything. Didn’t come by the sorority for lunch. It wasn’t normal.”

Meg froze for a moment before answering. “I shouldn’t be here. Yes, something happened. I really can’t say anymore. I’m sure the Dean or your RA will address it with you.”

Leah, her face turning the pink color of the lip she was biting, nodded. “You can’t tell me anything?” Leah asked.

Meg sat beside Leah on the bed and stated simply, “No.”

Leah nodded again. “You’re acting like she’s dead or something.” Leah stuttered.

Meg didn’t know how to respond so she remained silent as tears began streaming down Leah’s face.

Still avoiding a response, Meg let her cry and brought tissues from Brianna’s desk.

As Leah blew her nose and wiped tears from her cheeks, Meg asked, “Need anything else?”

Leah shook her head and said, “Answers.”

“Me too.” Meg, whispered turning away from her.

Meg got up and began shuffling a few papers on the desk. From the number of stapled stacks with A's written across the top, it was obvious Brianna was studious. Meg was more interested in the planner, however. She glanced over the week. Brianna had a paper due in Art History the previous Wednesday, a meeting with her advisor on Monday, and "D.N at 4:15" on Thursday afternoon. Meg couldn't help but wonder if she'd been alive to keep that appointment: Heard hadn't said the time of death.

She glanced back through the past several weeks. Deadlines for organization applications, lunch appointments, test days, and homework assignments were all noted down in various shades of ink and lead. Meg couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at the meticulous planning. It was impressive how organized Brianna had been especially for a freshman.

Meg glanced back at Leah, who had yet to move from the bed. She rolled in front of her and asked if Brianna had mentioned any grudges or fights Brianna had had recently.

Leah nodded. "It wasn't a fight really. She told a guy to go to hell when he told her to, um, do him after only knowing her two days. She said after that he completely ignored her. Maybe he was mad, I guess. But maybe it was just weird. Then there was that girl that cussed Brianna out earlier this month after one of her honors classes. She told Brianna she was a racist and to go buy some bed sheets. Brianna was pretty annoyed. They were discussing a book and there was a racist theme or something. Guess Brianna said something this girl didn't like. Anyway, I don't think they have gotten along since. Obviously."

Noting the monotone, Meg turned and examined Leah more closely. The redhead's green eyes seemed to be staring through Brianna's wall. The poster of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* the only scenery. "Are you sure you're alright?" Meg asked, feeling the guilt of her breach of trust beginning to crash down on her.

Leah nodded, and her ponytail barely moved.

Meg sighed. "Leah, I know this is hard. I'm here for you, okay? When I leave, I'll leave you my number and you can call me. Anytime. When you're ready. At the moment though, I need names and contact information if you have it for the girl and the guy."

Without making eye contact, Leah nodded again and slowly slumped off the bed, walked to her desk and began writing on a post it, consulting her phone momentarily. "I don't have the guy's number. But honestly, I heard he's um, enjoying someone else's company. A more willing someone, no doubt," she said.

Meg thanked her and turned to glance over Brianna's desk again, sure she was missing something. She'd kept a journal in college and she'd been hoping Brianna had too. But if she had, Brianna hadn't kept hers in any place obvious. It wasn't on the desk. Most of the drawers contained clothes, school supplies, and some snack food. She opened a drawer again. A blue Delta Rho Bid Day shirt was neatly folded on top.

Leah handed Meg the post-it and turned back towards her own bed. "Meg, I think I want some time by myself. You almost done?"

“U’m yea Leah, I understand. One more thing, Jordan mentioned that some fraternity guys were really upset with Brianna. She didn’t know why though. Brianna mention anything to you about it?”

Leah turned. “A couple of our friends from Delta Rho suddenly didn’t want her hanging around as much. She didn’t talk about it too much to me. I just figured they were mad she went to another fraternity’s party a couple weekends back.” she shrugged.

With a nod, Meg thanked Leah and got up to leave.

Fraternity Row was a ten, maybe fifteen minute walk across campus, and it was a walk Meg remembered well. One of her good friends had been a Lambda Psi while she’d been in school, and she’d walked to the fraternity house numerous times to say hello to Tyler White. He’d been older than her, but they’d stayed in touch. Tyler had gone on to get his master’s and recently landed a job as a crime analyst at the FBI.

Recognizing she could use his expertise, Meg pulled out her phone, and dialed Tyler White. Three rings dialed in her ear before his voice came on. “Hello, you’ve reached Tyler White. Sorry I can’t get to the phone, but leave me a message with your name and number and I’ll return your call as soon as I can.”

“Hey Tyler. It’s Meg. I’m at Ole Miss for the weekend for Jordan Teague’s 21<sup>st</sup>. We ran into a little situation and I could maybe use some advice. Gimme a call, thanks.”

She hit the end button a little harder than necessary and her thumb print was clearly emblazoned on the bottom right of her smart phone screen. Meg took another



deep breath and glanced at the information Leah had written down. How in the world was she going to manage to talk to all these people before Sunday evening, when she had to return to Memphis?

Her brief phone call had only lasted the short walk from the RC South to the Union and the Grove. She stopped and looked at the ten acre plot of magnolias and oaks. The grass was still green, except for the red and blue lines spray painted across the acreage marking walk ways for tailgaters. Her lips perked at the edges as she considered that in a matter of hours, at nine, people would be sprinting across campus, tents on their shoulders, hoping to get prime tailgate real estate on the Walk of Champions. People were already lounging around in the grove trying to save a space. It never ceased to amaze Meg how a tradition, started in the 1980s, of the football team walking through the Grove on game day could incite such territorialism for tailgating, or such dedication on game days. Little kids climbed on parents' shoulders, held signs, and in their high pitched voices, screamed the Hotty Toddy chant. She sometimes wondered if Coach Billy Brewer knew his walk from the athletic dorms to the stadium would become such an integral part of game day that an arch would be erected in in the late nineties to cement and honor the tradition. A gift from a national championship team- the team that had won in spite of all the trials on campus in 1962.

Thoughts still on the lasting traditions and some that had been eradicated, Meg walked past Martindale and Bondurant and onto Fraternity Row. She hadn't spent much time at Delta Rho while in school so she wandered around looking for their letters. Upon stumbling across the white two story Delta Rho house on the back of Fraternity Row beside Sigma Chi, she knocked on the door.

## Chapter 4

September 1962

Charlie knew he was setting the pace for his companions, walking a little ahead of them. Memorial Stadium broke up the horizon, bleachers rising into the sky casting shadows across the throngs of fans clad in red and blue shuffling towards the gates ahead. Charlie glanced at his ticket again, allowing himself to feel the excitement.

Johnny Vaught was going to lead the Rebels to a Victory tonight. He could just feel it.

“Hey ya’ll, what do ya think the score will be? How much will we beat`em by?”

Dale and Robert starting talking together as they closed the small gap Charlie had created in his efforts to speed into the stadium.

“Well, we`re gonna have them by several touchdowns.”

“Over 20. We`ll win by more than twenty,” Robert said with a grin.

The crowd began to slow as the group funneled into a line. Charlie noted that the boys, still very aware of their newfound bond brotherhood, remained standing side by side. He felt his lips pull back at the edges, as he stuffed a hand in his pocket and began to scan the crowd for other members of the fraternity or maybe a pretty little Chi O to come sit with them. Wouldn` t that impress the actives?

As Charlie tuned out the chatter of his brothers' comments on the crowd, a woman walked down the line. Her black hair was pulled back into a bouncing pony tail. She wore red, like so many others, but on her blouse she wore a pin that said, "NEVER." With a lipsticked smile, she handed Charlie a flyer and reached across him to give one to Robert and Dale.

"Have fun at the game boys. Hotty Toddy!" she told them, clutching her stack of pamphlets.

Charlie watched her continue down the line for a minute before Dale elbowed him. "Hey man, you got a little drool there."

Charlie felt the blood rush to face as he tried to think of a comeback. Robert and Dale chuckled as he looked at the flyer, consciously ignoring them.

A monkey dressed as Colonel Reb with a bow tie and a cane pointed out at him. "Go Rebels, and that's a Court Order."

Charlie frowned. Why'd this have to be brought to the football game? Mississippi and her governor would ensure that Meredith wouldn't enter Ole Miss. All that mattered tonight was beating Kentucky. Governor Barnett had said it wouldn't happen. Mississippi was sovereign.

"Charlie," Robert said waving a hand in front of his face. "Charlie, man, get out your ticket. We're almost to the front."

“Yea man, don’t look so down. It’s funny.” Dale motioned to the flyer. “That monkey ain’t ever gettin’ in. Come on, let’s start the Hotty Toddy.” He counted out to three a finger at a time.

“ARE YOU READY?” the boys yelled the opening lines of the cheer to the crowd together, reveling in the rebel football atmosphere.

## Chapter 5

It took four sets of knocks before anyone came to the door. A boy with sandy hair clutched a solo cup with one hand and the door handle in the other. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"Yea. I'm Meg Anderson. I need to talk to some of your pledges, I think. Can I come in?"

The boy's eyes ran over her body. He shrugged, took a sip from his solo cup, and opened the door wide. Meg stepped inside. The foyer was a wide hallway that opened into a spacious living room. A few fraternity boys lounged on puffy brown leather couches. Meg couldn't help but wonder how many drunks had slept on them. She shook her head, opting to mentally avoid that thought. Behind the couch, Meg noted a composite from a decade earlier and began scanning the walls for more. It always amazed Meg, even in her undergraduate years, how long the Greek organizations had been part of the fabric of the University, the immense value placed on those who had come before within the chapter and the Greek dedication to upholding the University tradition.

Her greeter sat on the couch. "Uh, this is Meg Anderson guys," he said, gesturing in her direction.

The other two frat boys smiled and nodded. "Hey," they each said.

Meg stuffed her hands in her pocket. It felt like eons had passed since she'd been a girl at a frat house on a Friday afternoon. There'd been no banner stretching across the porch announcing a band so she assumed there wasn't a party scheduled for the evening. They were just relaxing on a Friday.

"Who's ya'lls president? Is he here?" she asked.

The boy with sandy brown hair pointed to the stairs. "Room 3."

Meg nodded and, boots echoing with every step, jogged up the stairs. She clicked down the hallway, head turning left and right until she saw an iron three on a door. Knocking on the door, she thought about what she was going to say to Delta Rho's president. She hadn't asked Leah the names of the boys who'd started to ostracize Brianna. Without a clue how she'd broach the subject, she forced herself to smile when the handle turned and the door opened. Beside it stood a boy with a conservative haircut, the brown hair combed to the side from his brown eyes, which rested on Meg. He smiled. "Hey. Uh, need something?"

Meg nodded. "You're the president here, right? I talked to a guy downstairs about maybe talking to the pledges. Or some of them. He told me to talk to you."

The boy opened the door a little wider. "I'm Ben Elderidge," he said, extending a hand. "And you are?"

"Meg Anderson."

Ben nodded. "You're an alum then. Aren't you on the news?"

She nodded. "Visiting a friend. Which kinda brings me to my next point. Did you know Brianna Mayes by any chance?"

Ben crossed his arms over his chest as he leaned back against the wooden built in shelf serving as a desk. "Sure. She came around every now and again. Haven't seen her in a while though. What's that got to do with you coming to talk to me?" He paused. "She's a freshman."

Meg nodded. "I've heard that some of your pledges discouraged her from returning to Delta Rho. That they were in some kind of fight or something. You know anything about it?"

Ben eyes narrowed into slits, but he stayed still, leaning casually against the desk. "The pledges haven't mentioned anything to me about it. Nor have any of my pledge trainers. But I doubt that rumor is true. I don't think any of my men would be discouraging a good lookin' girl like Brianna from spending time here. Who told you that anyway?"

Meg sat down on the futon across from the desk. "Why don't we leave it at a little bird told me? Did anyone else in the fraternity have issues with her? Maybe multiple brothers were interested and she chose both? Or neither?"

Ben unfolded his arms and sat in his rolling chair. "Why does this matter? Why make a special trip here to talk to me about some freaking gossip? This is the Ole Miss Greek system. One of the best in the country, and there's a lot of gossip. The Greek rumor mill works fast. If you're going to talk to me about every tid-bit, well, quite frankly, I don't have time."

“I’m not here to gossip. I’m here on some important business. Let’s just say Brianna is in trouble, and I’m looking into the matter. I just thought maybe you could offer some insight.”

Ben nodded and audibly, exhaled. “If she’s in trouble, why didn’t you say so? I’m sure any of my guys would be happy to help her out. Myself included. What can I do?”

Meg smiled. “Start by telling me anything you know or have heard on the Greek Rumor Mill. Anything about Brianna Mayes.”

Rolling his eyes, Ben spun around and sat in the chair by his desk. “Look, this is ridiculous. Guys talk. Girls talk. People talk. Whatever. Will this actually help?”

Meg shrugged. “That depends on how much is true. It’s not about what people say, Ben. It’s about what they get angry about, what they feel. And could those feelings lead to trouble? So, you said you wanted to help. So help.”

She’d hoped he wouldn’t skip a beat, that he’d tell her all about his pledges and whatever argument they were having with Brianna. She’d hoped that he’d talk about whatever fraternity drama Brianna was embroiled in.

But he didn’t. He didn’t tell her much she didn’t already know.

“Well, I mean, some of the pledges are a bit upset with her. One of them said she’d been around early enough to see some ritual stuff on Big Little Night, but I mean, no one else saw her and I doubt that’d be a reason for an argument. Some of guys kinda had a thing for her—I mean she was cute. But other than that, can’t help you.” he said.



She tried not to get irritated. She thought back to her own experiences with fraternities. Her friends had never imparted the secrets of their rituals to her, though they'd jokingly called her their bro. Big-Little Night was when the upper classmen revealed to the pledges which among them they would mentor throughout the year. There was a bond that went with it. Fraternity family trees were created and recorded from the ritual: men tracing their friendship and mentorship back through the decades. Even as an outsider, she'd understood it to be sacred. Even so, Meg wanted more information. "That's it?" she asked.

"That's it." He turned from her.

"Why do I feel like there is more to this that you aren't telling me?"

"Look, I'll look into it. But I can assure you, none of my guys would hurt Brianna. She wasn't around much lately, but no one told her she wasn't welcome here. Are you done?"

Meg nodded and stood to leave, noting for the first time the painted Delta Rho crest hanging on his wall. Each item within it had been a symbol and served a purpose—though she had no idea what it was. But her time with the Lambda Psi during her undergrad years had taught her a thing or two about fraternity tradition and secrecy. There'd been more than one time she'd joked that she wasn't allowed in the clubhouse because of some ritual function or other. The memory forced her to pause, even as she heard Ben shut his door behind her. How far would a fraternity go to protect its secrets?

Meg left Delta Rho wondering if she'd actually accomplished anything. She hadn't discovered which pledges had accused Brianna of witnessing a fraternity ritual. She hadn't convinced Ben to reveal if there were any major grudges. She hadn't learned anything particularly new.

Pulling the post it from her pocket, she looked at the information Leah had scrawled across it for her and sighed. Suddenly, the weight of unraveling the story of Brianna Mayes felt a bit heavier than she'd anticipated. Brianna deserved better. Meg didn't want her to become a police file waiting in a stack for further attention.

"But I'm not a freakin' cop." Meg muttered to herself as she kicked a pebble down the front steps of Delta Rho. Her phone hadn't vibrated during her meeting with Ben so Tyler had not yet called her back. The only other cop she felt certain would work the case didn't seem too keen on her curiosity or her participation at all for that matter.

Usually reporting entailed a little more tracking down facts already found by law enforcement, convincing them to talk, and shooting compelling and interesting live reports than actually determining what might qualify as motive and what wouldn't. She felt herself smile. Convincing law enforcement to talk.

Maybe Detective Heard didn't want her curiosity or her participation, but maybe she could convince him to talk.

The Oxford Police Department had been located on Molly Barr Road when she'd been in school. She hoped the growing town and student population hadn't warranted a

move. If it had, she had no idea where to go. Not that a move would stop her from locating it, but it would be easier if she didn't have to google or make phone calls while she drove.

As she drove around the Square, she quickly called Jordan. "Hey, how are you holdin' up?" she asked.

"The day still sucks. But it is my birthday. I think maybe, maybe I'll go by the house. See if anyone is hanging out. Maybe some of my sisters can cheer me up. Does that make me a bad person? I mean, Brianna is dead, and I want to be happy on my birthday. Just not."

"I don't think that's bad at all. I think it's a good idea. Grab a shower and go visit your sisters. You're 21, and yea, you're grieving. But no reason you should shut yourself in your house forever." Meg said.

"Yea. I think, I think I'll do that then."

"But hey, Jordan? Remember not to talk about what happened. No names or anything. It's okay to say last night was hard, but I'd wait on the rest of it. Okay?"

"Got it. I'll talk to you later. And Meg? Thanks." Jordan responded.

"Of course."

The line clicked off as Meg arrived at the stoplight. Her radio sang out Jason Aldean's "She's Country," and she tapped her fingers on the steering wheel to the beat. The light changed green as Meg sang out, "...in her cowboy boots with her down home roots- she's country." She glanced at what had been her home freshman year—the

Luckyday side of the Residential College—as she took a right onto Molly Bar and sang along with Jason until she turned into the police station.

Her car idled after she pulled into a visitor space. It felt strange to be coming to a police station without more information already in hand. Or having heard about the incident on her police scanner on her desk. She moved her rearview mirror over and checked herself, ensuring that she looked presentable. On the Friday before the LSU game, Oxford police department had a lot to do for parking and the city, and she wasn't going to get past the front door if she looked like a random college kid hoping to argue about a parking ticket.

There were few officers at their desks. Meg was easily able spot Heard sitting back at a table, scowling at a file folder. Meg watched as he picked up a pen, took a sip of coffee and glanced back at the folder with a glare.

“If I didn't know any better, Detective I'd think that folder was going to jump up and eat you.”

His eyebrows sank deeper into his eyes as a wrinkle formed over the bridge of his nose. “It's all this damn paperwork. Paperwork to deal with homicide. Paperwork for interagency cooperation. Paperwork for autopsies. Paperwork for damn near everything. Fucking, wasting my time.”

He looked up as Meg sat on the side of the desk. “Paperwork is always a bitch.” she stated.

Nodding, he said, "Yea. Yea it is. So uh, I'm sorry." He rubbed his hands over his face. "What can I do for you Ms. Anderson?"

"It's Meg." She allowed the silence to hang in the air for a moment like dust dancing in the light coming in the window. "So, Jordan is still pretty upset. I thought I'd come and check on the progress of the investigation. Offer to help out."

"You're a reporter, Ms. Anderson."

"I am. But I'm here to help a friend. The story is important. But currently, there is a girl dead. And one of my good friends mourning her death. I can find out information either way. But I'm here to help. I already talked to a few people on campus, got some information." Meg told him.

Detective Heard jumped out of his seat. "What? You did what?"

"Calm down. I didn't say anything specific to anyone I spoke to. I'm assuming you have notified the University that one of their students is dead so it isn't like I gave out information they wouldn't have gotten within a matter of hours. Like I said, I'm just here to help a friend. I am absolutely not here to be a nuisance."

Heard sighed and sat down. "Meg, I just want justice. And I'm afraid you will get in the way of the investigation and frankly, fuck it up. The district attorney can't prosecute with a civilian contaminating all the evidence."

"I am here until Sunday. And I'm not collecting evidence, that's not my job. I just follow where the leads take me." She smiled. "You mentioned paperwork for autopsies?"

Heard sighed. "Let's have you fill out some ride along paperwork. Keep everything official...Fucking paperwork," he muttered.

"Great. Where do I sign Detective?" Meg asked.

"Davis. Call me Davis."

"Okay. Davis. Where do I sign?"

He pointed to a black line at the bottom of a page with small print. Meg glanced through it. According to her contract, she was not supposed to get out of the car, had to obey orders from the officer she was accompanying, and her ride along could be suspended by the officer at any time. She allowed herself to smile. Given she was fairly certain Heard was only including her to keep an eye on her activities, she felt fairly confident she could fudge a little. Just a little, but enough to find the truth.

After she'd finished filling out paperwork and punctuating it with a few expletives of her own, she turned back to Davis, who was busily writing on a dry erase board. Brianna's smiling face was in the center, and the names of roommates and acquaintances littering the board. Meg felt there was a pattern to Davis's compartments of names and information, but it wasn't immediately apparent to her eyes.

She stood from the desk and walked over to stand behind him. Folding her arms across her chest, she studied the board. There were names she recognized. Leah was listed as the roommate. A few names she vaguely recognized as ones she'd heard while walking around the Delta Rho house were also listed.

“So, you gonna tell me about what all this is? Or?” she waited, letting the unfinished question hang between them.

“I have a system. I talked to her parents. They gave me some names. Friends she talked about. Professors. People who would have known what she was doing. They gave me her class schedule, and because of the University’s ID scanners for attendance in a couple freshman courses, I know that at the very least she scanned in for her Thursday one o’clock geology course.” Heard told her.

Meg nodded. “I’ve talked to Leah. And I talked to Delta Rho’s president, Ben Eldridge. These names,” she pointed to the three names she was sure she’d heard at Delta Rho. “I think they are Delta Rho boys. Maybe they are the pledges Leah said were acting weird to Brianna the past couple weeks.”

“Her parents mentioned that some of her friends were upset with her. Apparently Brianna walked in on some frat party or something. Showed up to the party a bit too early it seems.”

“Yea, but I mean, you really think they would hurt her? I mean, do you even have a cause of death yet?” Meg asked.

Davis turned and answered, “I guess you couldn’t see it from where you stood. And you weren’t there when we pulled her out. She was stabbed. More than once actually, but we there are stab wounds in her chest.”

With that, he added another photo to the board. Brianna crumpled and folded into her cubby hole in the tunnels. It focused on Brianna and was zoomed in closer than Meg

had been able to see the night before. She could make out the reddish brown stains in the plaid fabric of Brianna's shirt. As Meg noted Davis adding another photo, she shifted her attention to it and instantly leaned against the desk. It showed Brianna uncrumpled, the folds still visible like when someone unfolds tin foil. Rigor and breaks in her bones caused her body to lie at unnatural angles, and the gashes in her torso were clearly visible. The short but deep cuts each glaring out from the photograph from inside their puddles of blood, dried and dark. Her skin, obviously pale when alive, was drained of all color—the blood that should have colored her cheeks instead peppered her blouse.

Meg swallowed, and forced herself to look. She had seen crime photos before, walking into police stations for interviews and convincing officers to unofficially share case files with her. Somehow this was much more personal.

She jumped when her phone rang; the dubstep ringtone startling her from her thoughts. "Meg Anderson," she answered with as much professionalism as she could muster.

"Hey Meg. It's Tyler. Just returning your call from earlier. Shouldn't you be saving a spot in the Grove or shopping on the square or something? What's up?"

Meg glanced at Detective Heard. He was still reading notes in his notepad and adding questions in dry erase marker to the board. She quietly walked from the room.

"Tyler, Jordan found a body last night," Meg told her friend.

She heard a whistle through the phone. "Hell of a way to ring in a twenty-first birthday. Is she okay?"



Meg paused. "She's coping. Tyler, she knew the girl."

"Meg, I know what you're thinking. The cops are the investigators here. Not you. You know that. This isn't my jurisdiction. I can't really help you. Besides, isn't this supposed to be your vacation?" he asked.

"Well, uh, it was. But I can't just ignore this. The girl was stabbed, Tyler. You're in the FBI. Can't you rush Jackson on an autopsy? Do some research? Something?" Meg asked.

He sighed. She could practically picture him picking up a pencil on his desk, thinking. "There's no way I'll convince you to drop this is there?"

Meg shook her head as she stated matter of factly, "Absolutely not."

"I'll make some calls. See what I can do. Who's primary on the case?"

"Detective Davis Heard. He has a Bureau Detective Training pin. Any chance you know him?"

"Heard. Heard," Tyler muttered into the phone. "Maybe I've heard that name around before. I'm not sure I've met him personally, but if he has a pin, he's good."

"I hope so," Meg responded.

They continued to visit a little longer to talk about the Rebels' football hopes this season. "Of course we'll win the Egg Bowl. Fail State!" They both laughed at Meg's use of the popular jibe at Mississippi State's motto, "hail state."

After their conclusion that the Rebels would win the game against State and discussion of the upcoming LSU game that weekend, they said goodbye.

Meg walked back into Davis's desk area and sat down, looking up at the board as he finished adding another name. She took a breath and looked at the board again, all the crime photos with the blood and destruction, the names of those who last spoke with Brianna, and the names of those who may have been the one who stabbed her.

Looking at the photographs, Meg couldn't help but be disgusted. Brianna's birthday was listed on the board, December 12. She was eighteen years old. The pure waste of it, the loss of a person angered Meg. Someone needed to go to trial and be judged for the death of Brianna Mayes.

Davis Heard sat down beside her. "Pisses you off doesn't it?"

"Yea. It does. It's such a waste," Meg agreed. She turned, looked back at him, and immediately understood as she watched him study the photos beside her that Heard wasn't the type to give up. He wouldn't forget Brianna's case regardless of how long it took to close it. Even so, she knew she wanted to help close it.

As if understanding her thoughts, Heard nodded and took a drink of his coffee.

"So where do we go from here?" Meg asked.

## Chapter 6

September 1962

The gentle autumn breeze could be felt through the stadium. The stars and bars, large and small, waved throughout the stands. Charlie looked over at Dale and Robert. His brothers were waving their flags, handed out in the student section as they filed into the stadium. He smiled. They were there to cheer on the Rebels, a team with national championship potential. Excitement, like blood, coursed through the stadium. “Hotty Toddy, Gosh Almighty...” rang out around them. Charlie raised his flag. “Come On Rebs! Hotty Toddy!” he shouted.

It felt good. His parents had attended Ole Miss. He’d been cheering on his parents’ alma mater since before he could walk. He’d been the baby in the Grove sporting Rebel gear, the boy wearing blue and red to toss around a football in the yard. It was finally really his—not just his parents’. Glancing at his brothers, he knew they too were experiencing the awe and wonder at the revelry of their school. Robert and Dale, each clutching a soda from concessions, were also shouting their support and waving their flags. Go Rebs!

Robert jumped onto the bleachers when the football team ran onto the field. “Go Rebels!” he shouted, grinning.

The game was electric. Shouting fans and rebel flags crowded the stadium. Charlie took a sip from a coke and cheered the Hotty Toddy with Robert and Dale.

“Hell Yes. Damn Right! Hotty Toddy. Gosh Almighty. Who the Hell are we? Flim Flam. Bim Bam. Ole Miss by Damn!”

He couldn't remember where the tradition had started. Or why. But he loved it.

“Charlie! I heard a rumor Ross Barnett's here! They're dedicating the new state song tonight and he's giving a speech or something.” Dale said, wrapping an arm over Charlie's shoulder and shaking him.

“He's here?” Robert asked. “He gonna talk about that nigras? Integration's been the subject of nearly all his speeches lately. I don't wanna integrate neither, but I heard a rumor over by concessions that they're threatenin' that if Barnett intervenes too much, they'll shut down the school.”

“They won't. They can't. School is the state's rights. We're a state school. Mississippi's sovereign, remember boys?” Dale interjected.

Charlie took another sip of Coke. “We talked enough about this in the car. Let's just beat Kentucky and worry about integration later. You see Buck Randell tonight? He's playing well,” he said.

Charlie's companions nodded and turned to face the field as a roar erupted from the crowd. A gigantic Confederate flag was being unraveled across the field.

“We want Ross! We want Ross!” the crowd chanted.

Governor Ross Barnett stepped out onto the grass.

## Chapter 7

As Meg and Davis walked to the police cruiser, they passed the only TV in the office, a small cube with a digital converter hooked up in the break room. A reporter from the local news stated, with a breaking news banner across the bottom, "...Ole Miss co-ed found dead. Oxford Police has stated that the investigation is ongoing and declined to comment further. We will keep you updated as the story develops."

Meg felt herself frown, even as she tried not to. She truly did want to find the truth for the sake of Brianna, Jordan, and justice, but she was still a reporter. She exhaled. The full story. She would get the full story. She kept walking.

Outside the station, Davis leaned against his cruiser. "Remember the contract you signed, Ms. Anderson. I'm the primary on this investigation—this isn't your news story."

Meg nodded and opened the passenger door of the car.

They drove onto campus. The security guards, already stationed at campus entrances to ensure tailgating equipment did not arrive on campus until the Running of the Tents, waved them through the checkpoints.

They parked on the Circle in front of Carrier Hall. Meg couldn't help but grin momentarily. While she had parked blocks away from campus earlier in the day, Davis simply parked right in front of their destination.

They had looked up the office of Grace Livingston, Brianna's geology professor.

"We are going to get a little more information about Brianna's final hours. If we can reconstruct her meetings and whereabouts, we can find out her final location," Davis had said at the station.

Davis knocked on the door of Office 103, a brown door with comic strips and posters for trips and events around campus. A geology trip to the Grand Canyon over Intersession was advertised, but Meg didn't have time to read the other comics as almost immediately following Davis's knock a voice said, "It's open." from the inside.

They opened the door and introduced themselves to a slim brunette who introduced herself as Grace Livingston. "What can I do for you?" she asked, her smile falling from her face as she looked up and saw Davis's badge.

"Well, Ms. Livingston, I have already contacted the University regarding the death of one of the students here. When I talked to the Dean of Students this morning, they informed me Brianna Mayes checked into your one o'clock class yesterday. I am aware that it is a large class, but if you recognize this girl," he slid a photo across the desk, "and can think of anything that seemed off about her in class yesterday, it would be helpful."

Meg noted that Grace did not even glance at the photo. It was clear she didn't need to. At the mention of Brianna's name, she had frozen.

“I was wondering when I’d be seeing you. The Dean sent me an email about it earlier today. I’ve been trying to carry on as best I can. Brianna came to office hours and sat in the front. I know who she is...was.”

Davis nodded and waited. Meg followed his lead and remained quiet.

Grace Livingston took a deep breath, closing her eyes for a moment. “Brianna was a very bright young lady. I couldn’t convince her to major in geology though. Her only fault it seemed like.” She paused again, once again shutting her eyes.

Meg resisted interjecting into the silence with questions. Sometimes the quiet brought the most important facts to light, but it was the most difficult technique for Meg to use even as a reporter. She glanced at Davis, who looked completely relaxed and at ease.

Grace looked at Meg and back at Davis. “I’m sorry. I’ve never had a student who was in my class die before. I wasn’t prepared for that kind of news today. I guess no one is...” she exhaled again. “What do you need again?”

“Was there anything that seemed unusual on Thursday when she came to class? Did you hear her talk about her plans for later in the day?” Davis asked.

With a sigh, Grace nodded. “I see. Let me think.” She closed her eyes again and exhaled again. When she opened them she said, “You know, now that I think about it, she wasn’t paying as close attention as usual. Ordinarily, she asks questions and takes plenty of notes. You can tell by the way she looks at the slides and writes. There’s a rhythm most students develop. But yesterday, she was just writing and doodling. The notebook



was different too. She uses a blue one usually but yesterday, it was a composition notebook. A black one. Does that help?"

Davis looked over the notes he'd taken while she talked and nodded.

"Yes ma'am. Anything else you remember? Do you know anything about what was distracting her?" Heard pressed.

Grace shook her head. "I know she had a meeting later in the day. I heard her mention it on a phone call she made right after class. It sounded like she was talking to her mom maybe. Or dad. It seemed pretty clear to me that it was family. She said something being almost done but for a meeting. She didn't mention who or what organization it was with though."

Meg blurted out, "Did she talk to a friend in class? Someone she might have told her plans for the weekend?"

Grace shook her head. "She really just came in and took notes. Sometimes she asked me questions about an assignment or labs. But I never saw her come in or leave with anyone. Just she talked on the phone when she came and went. She was glued to her phone. She texted in class sometimes too, not very often. But periodically."

Davis nodded again, but Meg barely noticed. She was thinking back to her own undergraduate days only a few years before. She too had been glued to her phone. In fact, she kept more information in her phone calendar than in her planner. Her planner was primarily for homework and project assignments, but her phone held details: names, times, emails. She thought back to the crime scene photos. Had Brianna had her phone?

She couldn't remember seeing one, nor did she remember seeing the familiar rectangular bulge in Brianna's pockets.

Meg's thoughts were interrupted by Davis asking Grace if she had any more information that might be helpful.

"Well, Brianna seemed stressed. The first test she had one of the highest grades in the class. The last quiz we had she barely passed. I know she knew the material, like I said, she comes to my office hours. I've talked with her about it. She just didn't do well, which was pretty unlike her," Grace said.

Meg watched as Davis wrote another couple scribbles in his notebook.

"Thank you ma'am. If you think of anything else, please give me a call." He slid a business card across the desk.

Davis turned to walk out, and as Meg turned to follow, she watched Grace Livingston put her head in her hands and let out a breath. She briefly wondered if as all that chestnut hair fell into her face, Grace was yet again closing her eyes. She couldn't help but feel sorry for her, and wonder what kind of remarkable being Brianna must have been to inspire such grief in a professor that knew her only in the context of office hours and an hour and fifteen minutes each Tuesday and Thursday. With a look over her shoulder, Meg asked quietly, "Are you going to be okay Ms. Livingston?"

The hair hanging swished in a nodding motion.

"Okay." Meg whispered, wishing for some action she could fulfill to help something she could do to ease the pain.

Davis did not turn back to her as his boots echoed off the tile floors of Carrier. Meg had to elongate her own strides in order to catch up.

“So?” she asked. “What are your thoughts?”

“I think you need to remember that I ask the questions. first of all. Second, I want to know who Brianna was meeting. She didn’t seem to talk about it in detail with anyone. What was she so preoccupied with?” he asked.

“D.N. at 4:30.”

“What? What are you talking about?” He turned around.

“Her planner. She had a meeting at 4:30 with D.N on Thursday. But I have no idea what or who D.N is. I found her planner when I talked to Leah. She’s who told me about the girl who yelled at Brianna and the Delta Rho boys. But I had a thought in there. Do ya’ll have her phone?” Meg asked.

Davis stopped. “Her phone?”

She nodded and tried to resist her feeling of excitement. Maybe she was onto something! “Yea, her phone. Like in evidence?”

He flipped through his handheld notebook. Glancing at pages with his brow furrowed, black eyes focused completely on the lined pages in front of him. “I don’t. I don’t believe so.” he answered.

“How many college students do you know who go somewhere without their phone? When I went to school here, you could always count on me having three things: my ID, my chapstick, and my phone. Where is hers?”

“Maybe she left it in her room? Her purse?”

Meg shook her head, frustrated. “She went to a meeting at 4:30. So far that’s the last thing we know she did. Even if we assume that she hadn’t adopted the Ole Miss way of life where a purse becomes a single wristlet and all else is kept in the pockets, she would’ve had her purse or whatever with her. No woman anywhere goes out without whatever she views as her necessities.”

He shrugged, eyes still squinting at her with obvious skepticism. “Where are yours?”

Meg flipped her dark hair. “For a detective you are unobservant.” From her pocket, she pulled a cherry chapstick, and from the pocket of her jacket she revealed a small wallet that contained her phone at the back in a clear sleeve. “No woman goes anywhere without her stuff.”

Davis flipped through his notebook again. “I don’t have anything like that listed as being found on or near the body. I keep notes like this for my own personal use, but I don’t recall it being logged in any official report either. I have no idea. You think that she left it somewhere or do you think whoever put her in the tunnels kept her phone?”

Meg batted her lashes and grinned. “Why Detective, are you actually asking my opinion?”

She watched his face go from friendly to frowning and cleared her throat. "I think it's something worth looking into is all. Whether she had information on it or it got left somewhere or someone kept it, any information about it could help us trace her steps and figure this out."

Heard flipped through some pages in his notebook, nodded, and turned from her. Meg followed him as he walked out. She knew he wanted to visit another professor. He quickly made his way to Bishop, home of the history department and a few misplaced Southern Studies professors.

He didn't wait for her to keep up, and he didn't stop until he stood outside the door of an office. As Meg fell in line behind him, a man opened the door, revealing shelves of books on the wall behind it. His hair was clearly graying from its original color, and Meg was certain he would eventually boast a distinguished head of silver.

"Can I help you," he asked, briefcase in front of him.

Heard flashed his badge. "Yes, Professor Norwood. I'm here about Brianna Mayes. I wanted to know if she was acting strangely in your class Thursday morning or if she had mentioned any plans she had later in the day."

"Ah, yes, of course you're here about Brianna. I'm afraid I can't be of much help, though I certainly wish I could. I don't take attendance and it is a large lecture class. Brianna came and spoke to me about her first test score, otherwise I probably wouldn't even know her name," the man said, checking his watch. "I'm afraid I have got to run. I have a very sick mother, and I need to go home."

“Well, if you think of anything, Professor Norwood, please let me know.” Heard said, handing him a card.

“Yes, of course, I will,” the professor responded, walking past Meg with a nod.

They left Bishop Hall with the intention of returning to Delta Rho, but Meg insisted they stop by the library on the way.

“It’s a long shot, but maybe she went there to study or check a book out after her meeting. Or before. That would be on record,” she said as she opened the door. She glanced around at the recently added Starbucks and the printer’s marks stained on the windows above her. The marks represented famous printer’s marks, designs included in books so the reader could identify the printer with the quality of the job, throughout history. The building was named for Chancellor JD Williams, who was the residing Chancellor during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

Meg heard Davis following her rather than actually saw, and she kept walking. She pranced down the stairs and immediately turned to the West desk on her right, where lost and found items at the Library were generally kept.

A young man sat at the desk. He shifted in his seat and turned his head quickly to get his black bangs out of his eyes. His hair wasn’t long, but it was overdue for a trim. Meg couldn’t help but smile at the movement. For whatever reason it was a common gesture among frat stars at Ole Miss. The “Bama Bangs” head shake—the male counterpart to the female’s hair flip.

“Excuse me.” Meg smiled. “I need to know if any cell phones were turned in here recently.”

The boy nodded. “What does it look like?”

Meg felt her smile fall. She hadn’t thought this all the way through. “Well, I am looking for it if it was left by another co-ed named...”

Davis stepped in and slid Brianna’s picture beside Meg’s elbow. “Do you see this girl in here? Has she checked out some books or movies recently?”

The dark haired boy stared at the photo for a moment, squinting. “Yea. She comes in. I’ve never checked anything out to her, but I’ve seen her walk up the stairs both at this desk and the East desk.”

Meg interjected herself again. “So she goes to the third floor?”

The boy nodded.

Davis flipped to a blank page of his notebook. “What’s on the third floor?”

The boy sighed. “The third floor has the Administrative Suite, the Writing Center, books with call numbers A through H, and the Archives.”

Meg frowned. If Brianna was in the library often enough for a desk worker to recognize her walking by she was spending considerable time there. What would she be using so often on the third floor?

Glancing up, she could tell Davis was pondering the same question. His dark eyes had become narrow slits, buried beneath furrowed brow, intently studying his handheld

notebook. Quickly turning back to the boy, she found herself blurting out, "Do you have any idea what she did up there? Where she went? Overhear her say something to someone? Was she with anyone?"

The worker looked at her with wide eyes as he took a deep breath, patience obviously waning. "The third floor is a quiet floor. A lot of people study up there. I never saw her with anyone, but since she was going upstairs where silence is the point...well, it just isn't all that surprising. The Administrative Office and Archives close at five. And they are separate departments. Given that it's Friday, they probably left a little early, but if you ran up there right now, you might make it. But," he pointed to his computer. "It IS almost five. And the entire library closes at six on Friday. So..."

The silence hung in the air for a minute. Meg thought back to her college years. She hadn't limited herself to only studying in one location, and she felt sure that Brianna would also feel the constraints if she attempted to enforce that on herself. The library stayed open late, but not that late. Studying was one thing that, at least if one majored in anything remotely serious, needed to occur often. With extracurricular activities, some studying would have to occur outside the library. Of course, maybe that'd just been her.

She turned to her companion and shrugged. "You want to try going up there to see? I just don't know how we'll know it's hers unless she's one of those with a monogrammed case. I guess I didn't think this through." Meg felt herself reach up to run her hands through her hair, and consciously, put her hand down again. It was a habit she was trying to break, though she wasn't having much luck.



Davis shrugged. "We're here. And we'll walk back down and out these doors to go to Fraternity Row. Maybe there's some kind of identifying case or picture on her phone."

Meg nodded, and turned towards the elevator.

The third floor administration suite looked much like any other office with cubicle walls and desks with a few fake floral arrangements added for brightness. There was a single person in the entire space; she was looking at her watch. Meg immediately sympathized. They were about to make her long day longer.

"Ma'am? Could we look at the lost and found?"

The blonde looked behind Meg towards Davis then back at Meg. "What did ya'll lose?" she asked with an accompanying drawn out sigh.

"We're looking for a phone. A girl's phone. Do you have anything with a BM on it? Or maybe the name Brianna?"

The blonde stared at her, eyes wide and seemingly vacant. "I don't believe so." She looked in a lock box, then consulted a list, and shook her head. "Can you be more specific? Type of phone, color, model?"

It was Meg's turn to sigh. "Are any of them on? Maybe there's a photo?"

The blonde shook her head again. "Most of these have a dead battery."

“Thank you.”

As they were leaving the office, Meg turned to Davis. “Maybe you could ask her parents what model of phone she had? Then we could see if she left it here?”

“Meg, I think this is turning into a wild goose chase. I agree we need to find her phone, but I think maybe we should see about GPS. Talk to the phone company.”

“Which will take time. And doesn't it require a warrant?”

“Well, that depends on the cell company she used. Obviously, this is a homicide victim so we have probable cause. Some companies will happily divulge information as requested because of that. That being said, if the battery is out, they won't be able to locate it for us anyway. In the meantime, we will work on getting a list of recent calls. That should at least give us something. Who she was talking to and when can be useful information. Now, come on, I'm done wasting time on this. Let's go talk to the boys of Delta Rho.”

## Chapter 8

September 1962

Charlie felt like Ross Barnett was worlds away when he first walked onto the field. He could barely make out the familiar black glasses frames he'd seen in so many pictures. But the minute Ol' Ross began to speak, Charlie recognized him. It was the voice he'd heard on radio broadcasts, a voice he'd paired with a distinguished picture of the governor they'd had in high school. A black and white photo featuring Ross with his black suit jacket, and dark tie pinned against his white shirt. The man who championed the separation of the races and the preservation of their way of life. While Ross was governor, no negro would go to school at the University of Mississippi, of that Charlie was certain.

"Ladies and Gentlemen and my fellow Mississippians," the governor began, his voice booming over the loudspeaker.

The crowd let out a deafening roar. Every single one of the 41,000 members of the audience was on their feet, struggling to see the man fighting for the rights of the state—fighting to uphold the way of life they'd grown accustomed to. The way it had always been.

"I love Mississippi."

The crowd cheered again. The red and blue of the stars and bars waved from every section Charlie could see. Dale waved his proudly, shouting with the crowd. "YEEEEAAA." Robert let out a whistle, as Charlie held up his own flag to mimic Ross's arm pumping movements, emphasizing his points.

"I love her people!"

Once again, the crowd, already on their feet and shouting, let out a roar of agreement.

"Our customs. I love and respect our heritage!"

The crowd's screams echoed in the stadium, as if sound waves were bouncing off each other above the field. With the vibrations of cheers echoing through the stadium, Ross began to leave the gridiron. As Charlie watched him leave, he noticed Robert was saying something to him, but he couldn't hear what it was.

He didn't bother to ask what Robert had said, and instead watched Barnett walk off the field. He held his head high and waved to his constituents. Barnett reveled in the attention and admiration, basking in the glory of his determination.

## Chapter 9

In only a matter of minutes, they were back at Delta Rho. Meg smiled, realizing that with Heard's badge, maybe they would get a little bit more up front answers.

Knocking once again, the same boy opened the door again. And once again they were directed to the room of the Ben Elderidge, Delta Rho President.

Ben opened the door and rolled his eyes upon seeing Meg's face. "Woman, it is Friday night!" He glanced behind her at Davis, and motioned them in with a sigh. "I told you what I know before. What now?"

Davis stepped in front of her, pointing at his badge as an introduction. "Which pledges had issues with Brianna? You're the president of this fraternity. You know."

Ben leaned against his desk again, just as he had earlier that day. He rubbed the back of his neck and crossed his arms. As Meg watched him, she sat down on his futon once again.

"Ben, you know what's going on. Tell us," Meg said.

He sighed, rubbed his hands over his face, and sat on his desk looking back and forth between them.

"Nolan and Cole were pretty upset and concerned. She may have witnessed some of the ritual stuff for Big Brother night. It's ritual stuff about bonding, mentorship.

brotherhood.” he shrugged. “Obviously, the rituals are secret and they were just concerned. They were mad at her. And they suggested we get her to swear to secrecy. A bunch of the older guys told them it wasn’t that big of a deal. We explained to her that she couldn’t tell anyone and that it was significant to the fraternity. She understood. Brianna understood the importance of tradition. I was present for that conversation. Wasn’t at all concerned she’d tell anyone. So I think we all let it go.”

He paused and added, “The older guys did at least. Cole and Nolan, two of our pledges, were still pretty worked up about the whole thing. They knew her okay. When she stopped coming around, I mentioned it to one of the other guys, Nick who is my age. Anyway, he said he thinks they talked to her. I haven’t totally figured out what was said yet.”

“But after the conversation, Brianna no longer came over at all?” Heard asked.

Ben nodded as Meg frowned. Something happened then. Something made Brianna uncomfortable. No girl goes that hot and cold for absolutely no reason. Unless they were completely and totally crazy. Which was not the vibe Meg was getting from everything she was learning about Brianna.

“Where can we find Nolan and Cole? I’d like to chat with them,” Heard said.

“They live in Stockard. In the penthouse. But I’m not totally sure they are sticking around this weekend. I may be getting them confused with another pledge but I think they were considering going home.” He shrugged. “But if they’re here, they’ll be at Stockard. At least if they’re in their rooms.”

Stockard was one of the major freshman boy dorms, one of the two towers- the opposite of the girls' tower, Martin. The penthouse referred to the top floor, periodically used as the honors floor though from what Meg had heard, the Honors College floors were now beginning to transfer to the newer, nicer dorms, the Ridges.

Davis nodded and thanked him. Meg reached out and shook his hand. "You know Ben, you could've told me all this earlier today. Just saying." She smiled at him, hoping to maybe win some trust and loyalty in case she needed to come back yet again. It didn't sound to her like they were really done talking with the boys of Delta Rho.

The door of Delta Rho shut behind them with a resounding click. Meg closed her eyes and mentally reminded herself that had she been a college student on the other side of the conversation she would have been just as resistant to it. Cops were there for protection and investigations and all, but as a college student, it's hard to see past the party raids and those pesky possibilities of MIPs or DUIs or Drunk in Publics. It was hard to trust the people who so often seemed to persecute friends. With an exhale, she turned to Davis.

"What now?" Meg asked.

Davis checked his watch. "Wanna grab some dinner? Talk about the case and maybe continue in the early evening."

Meg hesitated. "I mean it's Friday. Should we really take the time?"

For the first time, Meg saw him smile. "Everybody's gotta eat. Food is fuel. Brain food. Come on, let's go grab some Ajax," he said.

Ajax, a Southern diner located on the Oxford Square, was easily one of the best places to eat in town. One of its best dishes, the "Big Easy," was rumored to have been created for Eli Manning. It was a strange combination of chicken fried steak, butter beans, and mashed potatoes on a hamburger bun that was absolutely delicious. Of course, the catfish and po-boys were nothing to sneeze at either. Recognized by a variety of foodie magazines and cooking channels, Ajax was also one of the most popular haunts every football weekend. Every hotel greeter and local would no doubt direct any visitor, whether from the opposing team or simply prospective student, to Ajax.

"You want to go to the Square? On a Football weekend? Are you insane?" Meg asked.

"Oh right. Damn. I'd love to have some of that catfish. Okay, how bout Handy Andy's?" Heard suggested.

Handy Andy's on the other hand was a Barbeque joint just off the square. The fact that it was a little bit off the beaten path made it slightly less busy, and it tended to cater to the more local crowd with a handful of students thrown in. Though its booths and chairs were rudimentary, its regular barbeque sandwich was hard to beat. Even Meg, a girl from Texas, could admit that Handy Andy's had excellent barbeque. And excellent tater tots.

Plus, it would be faster. "Okay. Yea, sure," she agreed.



Even though Handy Andy's catered to the locals, it was still busy. The only reason Meg and Davis lucked into a parking space was someone decided to leave at the exact right moment.

"Jesus loves us," Meg stated, thinking of her friend Piper who often used the phrase when they managed to find decent parking on the square. Sometimes miracles and parking are kinda the same thing. Especially in Oxford, Mississippi.

They got out of the car and into the line to order. Meg scanned the choices from a menu hanging above the counter where a boy with a cap was taking orders on a notepad, handing customers their order numbers, and taking payment. The choices hadn't changed much. Tater tots or French fries, corn dogs, banana pudding (she'd tried it her freshman year and noted it as among the best she'd had— though her figure probably couldn't afford it now that she was on-air talent), and of course, barbeque sandwiches.

"I think I'm getting the corn dog and maybe some tater tots," Heard told her.

She felt herself cock an eyebrow. "You aren't an LSU fan right? I can't be caught eatin' with the enemy you know. It'd be bad for my rep."

There had long been a joke about Ole Miss's out of state rivals that when they came to town, Oxford stank of corn dogs, which of course, seemed to be every LSU fan's food of choice. Due to this, Meg had insisted throughout her collegiate days that she

would not, could not eat a corn dog because Geaux to Hell LSU! Of course, the truth was she didn't particularly like corn dogs in the first place. But that was a lot less fun to say.

Heard laughed. "I went to school here. Wouldn't be caught dead in yallah britches. But their food of choice does have its merits. Occasionally. What are you getting?"

Meg allowed herself to smile back. "The classic. Regular Barbeque Sandwich, mild sauce. I might get some tater tots so I can have a couple. And sweet tea because Mississippi has the absolute best sweet tea."

Heard nodded. "Good choice."

The silence hung between them for a while. Meg chose to watch the people around her. There were some old men at a table, sipping on their cokes or teas, chatting about Oxford life. Two families, one of which seemed to be waiting on take out. Probably for the best as the toddling blonde boy pulled on his mom's shirt and began to pout. Meg sensed a tantrum on the horizon and thanked her lucky stars when the order came to the counter at that moment. The mom picked up the boy, nearly in tears, and the food and made a quick exit. Meg couldn't blame her. It's hard to be the mom with the crying baby in any restaurant, no matter how informal it may be.

As the woman made her escape, Meg came up to the front of the line, and she quickly placed her order. Heard did the same behind her, and they quickly made their way to a booth in the corner.

"So, where do we go from here?" Meg asked again.

Heard shrugged. "We keep asking questions. That's a lot of what police work is. Ask questions. And more questions. Find the truth."

"Right. Sooo, who do we talk to next?"

"Well, first I want to consider what we know right now. And remind you, once again, Ms. Anderson, that as interesting as your insights have been so far, this is not for your use in a news story. Right now, the media knows that a girl has been murdered. They don't have a photo. They don't have details. It's a criminal investigation. My criminal investigation. It's not a spectacle," he said.

Meg felt her eyes roll even as she tried to take the reminder completely seriously. "I am here to help. I'm a reporter, sure. But right now, I want to find out who did this. The rest can wait. We want the same things, Davis. We just go about them professionally differently. Okay?"

He frowned at her a little, but nodded. Meg wondered if that meant the answer she'd given was less than satisfactory. She had little time to reflect on it, however, because Heard continued on.

"I think Ben Elderidge has been working to figure out exactly what was said to Brianna too, albeit for different reasons. I don't think he's concerned that Nolan and Cole did anything violent but maybe is concerned about his fraternity image and the confidentiality of their ritual."

"Which with Brianna dead is now completely assured," Meg added.

Their order numbers were yelled out into the restaurant, and Heard got up to retrieve their food.

He laid her sandwich and tater tots before her with Mild Barbeque sauce and spread out his own meal in front of him. Before taking a bite of his corn dog, he said, "I agree that confidentiality is assured now, just not sure if I think that would drive someone to stab a girl so many times."

Meg squirted some sauce on her sandwich. "I think it may depend on the pledges. Think about group dynamics. New members of a fraternity, which is a huge deal at Ole Miss. We have one of the top Greek programs in the country; us and Bama switch back in forth for the top spot. They are all excited about the concepts of Brotherhood, but also about booze and parties and girls. Because they are freshmen and that's part of the initial attraction before the gentlemen part comes along. Which in some cases takes a while. Separate issue. But regardless, they feel like they are pledging something for life. When I hung with the Lamda Psi guys, the new pledges were always really intense about it. Lamda Psi 'til I die and all that. They hang with their new pledge bros like they are some kind of organism that can't survive apart for a while. So could I buy that they would hugely resent someone for interrupting and kinda stealing some of the secret knowledge that makes up that bond?" She took a bite. "Maybe. I could buy it in the right circumstances. On the other hand, fraternities place a lot of value on the knowledge of the older guys too. So hard to say. Depends on how angry they are about the interruption of their ritual thing."

Davis nodded. "Interesting thought there. I dunno. I just wonder about the multiple stab wounds. Feels like a crime of passion to me."

Meg swallowed her food. "I can see that. If it was the frat boys, I'd wonder if perhaps a group went and each stabbed her. It would seem to fit with the group dynamics part of that. But..." She took a bite of a tater tot.

Davis looked up at her. "But what?" he asked.

Meg sighed. "Well, when I talked to Leah, she mentioned something else. I didn't know how to bring it up before because I didn't want to offend you. But Leah mentioned that in one of Brianna's classes they were studying a book with a racism theme. Apparently, something Brianna said in class really upset one of the other girls in the class. Afterward, the girl confronted Brianna, called her racist, and apparently really chewed her out. Leah said that Brianna hadn't been hugely bothered by it, but she was freaked out enough by the girl's actions to talk to Leah about it. And anyway, Leah gave me the girl's name as someone who might want to harm Brianna. It's not exactly crime of passion, but it would be someone who was pretty angry."

Davis put down his corndog, the darkness of his hands contrasting sharply with the cream colored stick.

"Do you know anything else about the exchange?" he asked calmly.

Meg shook her head and took a big bite of her sandwich. She didn't want to be having this conversation. But she also couldn't bring herself to compromise the investigation by withholding the information.

“Meg, look, I’m not gonna freak out here. Okay? If it’s an avenue that needs to be pursued, it needs to be pursued. Murder is murder, regardless of reason. Or race,” Heard told her.

After swallowing, Meg exhaled and felt immediately relieved.

“I agree Davis. I was a little nervous about it. From what Leah said, Brianna was just pointing out when the book was written really. I think she said they were talking about Huck Finn.”

“And this girl freaked out about that?” Davis shook his head. “You know, I recognize that racism exists. It exists everywhere. North. South. East. West—whatever. South gets a bad rep. It’s not the 1960s anymore. It’s not the 1850s anymore. Mostly racism exists only in the backwoods hicks who still think the KKK should be a thing. Pretty much everyone else has moved on. And the people who get all pissed off and yell racist over things that aren’t...just make me angry. When I first made detective, I used to wonder if I got the promotion because I am qualified and am good at what I do, or if it was about affirmative action numbers. Yelling racism over stuff that is just plain disrespectful to everything that those who came before us worked for. I work hard every day. I do my job. And bein’ black has nothin’ to do with it. But the fact that sometimes I wonder if I got here for my own merit, by my own work, or the color of my skin because society has gotten so afraid of African Americans yelling racist and calling people crackers over something small...” he sighed. “Nevermind. This isn’t about the case. I don’t even know why I just told you all of that.”

Meg nodded. "You're getting comfortable with me. I have that effect on people."  
She smiled. "Forget it. So you want to see about talking to this girl? Leah gave me her name. We could look her up in the online directory and see if we can figure out which dorm she lives in. See if she's home on this Friday night?"

Davis nodded. "Doesn't sound like a bad idea."

## Chapter 10

September 1962

After the game, Charlie wasn't sure what to say. Dale and Robert, however, had plenty to say.

"See man? I told you. Ol' Ross. Man, he's not going to let us integrate. He's going to protect our way of life. Nothing to worry about man." Dale said, slapping the backs of Charlie and Robert with his Confederate flag still in hand.

"I was never worried that we'd integrate. I'm a hell of a lot more concerned about the school being shut down. Barnett said he'd sooner shut it down than see us lose segregation, ya know? And there's a rumor that we could lose accreditation," Robert responded. "But I gotta say, Ross sure gave one hell of a speech. I'm behind him but man; this is gonna be one hell of a fight."

"Then we'll fight it! Mississippi's sovereign, man. Our state. Our education. Our customs. Our heritage. All of it," Dale nodded, almost yelling.

Charlie watched them both and, shoved his hands in his pockets. Dale pulled Charlie closer beside him as they walked from the stadium. Charlie looked to his left where Dale's stars and bars waved in his face. "Why are you so quiet? Don't you feel better knowing that nigger isn't getting anywhere near Ole Miss?" Dale asked him.



Charlie shrugged. "I'm just happy we won the game. I told ya'll in the car on the way here. Ross isn't gonna let us integrate. I wasn't ever worried. I just wanna watch the rebels play football. Cause we sure played tonight. Johnny Vaught is one hell of a coach."

Dale smiled. "You're right man! Hotty Toddy! We just got a Rebels Victory!" He waved his Confederate flag above him.

Rebel fans dispersed across the parking lot of Victory stadium, a sea of red and blue retreating into cars and trucks to caravan back to Oxford, Mississippi. Confederate flags waved in victory. Charlie smiled at a small child, one hand holding a flag, the other the hand of his dad.

Charlie stopped for a moment to watch his friends walking in front of him. His love for his university pounding in his chest, and he smiled as he watched the huge crowd of people who shared his love for his institution, the institution of his father, and the heritage and customs it adhered to. It was Dixie Week. It was Colonel Reb. The Hotty Toddy. The Lyceum, the oldest building on campus. Rush Week.

"Hey guys, wait up!" Charlie jogged to catch up with his friends, holding tightly to his flag.

## Chapter 11

After leaving Handy Andy's, Meg and Davis opted to stop by the Police Station to find out where Kimberly Simpson lived. They needed a computer and the internet. Meg walked back to the desk she'd seen Davis working at when she'd arrived hours before and sat down in his leather chair. Pulling up the internet, she immediately went to the myOleMiss webpage. She tried to sign in with her old web ID, the online ID and password given to students to access the directory, school scheduling information, bursar and other accounts, but as an alumnus she couldn't log on.

She sighed and sat back.

"What?" Heard asked from behind her. "She not live on campus like we thought?"

"She's a freshman. Of course she lives on campus. Freshmen are still required to live on campus."

"What dorm then?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can't get into the directory."

Meg could almost feel Davis's scowl from behind her, the frustration in each exhale. But then again, perhaps she was projecting.

"I have an idea," she said and jumped back up to the keyboard. "Don't look."

And with that warning, she typed jateag1 into the web ID blank and held her breath that Jordan was using the same password as for school as Facebook.

She smiled and the computer switched to a webpage with multiple options saying, "Welcome Jordan Teague!"

"I'm in," Meg said, quickly clicking to the Directory and typing in Kimberly's name. With a quick search under Jordan's online Directory, Meg discovered the Kimberly Simpson lived in Martin.

Meg logged off and spun her chair around to look at Davis. "Ready to go? We can check to see if the Delta Rho pledges are at home in Stockard while we're there too. Though if we get there too late, they may be working with the other pledges to set up the fraternity tent if they're in town. Thinking about it, we shoulda had Ben give us the schedule for their Grove set up."

Davis ran his hands over his face. "I forgot. I need to be there at Running of the Tents. You'd think UPD could handle it...damn."

"Okay, you can head over there at like eight thirty. We still have a few hours. The Grove is on campus my friend. Let's move," she told him.

Just as she pushed up from her chair, her phone rang. "Meg Anderson," she answered, holding up her index finger.

"Hey Meg. Tyler. So I don't have a ton of time. I'm fixin' to catch a plane. But I wanted to let you know, I made some calls like you asked. Jackson will be looking into Brianna's case ASAP. Autopsies take a while but I asked them to bump Brianna's up on

the priority list. You have to remember though Meg, some of these tests take time to perform. The lab is looking into it though. I can tell you something though. Brianna was stabbed multiple times. Which I'm sure you've already figured out because that's how you work."

"Uh-huh. Yes. Anything interesting? As in new?" Meg asked him.

He chuckled in her ear. "I was getting to that. She wasn't stabbed with any kind of standard knife. The moldings don't seem to match any kind of standard knife type."

"What? What are you saying?" Meg asked.

"She was stabbed with a sharp object, approximately three and a half inches in length. It could be a knife, but it doesn't necessarily have to be. The impression seems to indicate a different type of curve. Could be a knife, could be something else," Tyler told her.

"What do you think she was stabbed with then? If it isn't necessarily a knife?" Meg asked.

"Working on that. Like I said, takes time. But hey, Meg. Gotta go. Plane to catch. But quick question, you said you're staying at Jordan's right?" he asked.

"Yea, why?"

"Oh, just asking. How's she doing?"

“Ummm...I’ve been working on trying to piece together what Brianna did in the last 24 to 48 hours. I actually haven’t seen her since this morning. Last time we spoke, she was going to the sorority house.” Meg said.

“Oh. Well, that’s probably good. They’ll probably try to help her have a better 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Listen, gotta go. Plane’s here. Talk to ya later.”

“Yea. Yea. Thanks Tyler. Safe flight.” she said.

She hit the end call button and momentarily felt guilty for abandoning her friend on her birthday. Jordan was grieving, and she clearly wanted justice for Brianna. Meg hoped Jordan understood she was only trying to help. She still felt a little guilty though. She’d only come to Oxford to see Jordan and celebrate her friend’s newfound legality. What kind of friend was she?

Meg sighed.

“Who was that?” Heard asked, breaking her train of thought.

“Oh um. My friend with the FBI. He called Jackson for me. Brianna wasn’t stabbed with any kind of standard knife. The molding is wrong. I guess maybe that means that if we can find the blade they can match it though.” Meg said.

Davis nodded even as his brows knit together in a frown. “You called the FBI?”

Meg shrugged. “Just a friend. He’s a crime analyst. Not an agent.”

“Meg, it’s my case. How many times do I have to say it before that sinks in? Mine. Okay? Please don’t create a jurisdiction nightmare.” Heard said, balling his fists.

Meg watched as his anger reddened his knuckles while he worked to maintain the appearance of a calm veneer.

“Look, we are all looking for the same thing. Tyler was just helping me out. And helping you out. The sooner Jackson can run the tox screens and do the autopsy and all that, the more we know. The more we know, the closer we are to discovering what happened. It was one phone call. He’s not working your case. Just making a few phone calls on your behalf. And mine. Are you ready to go? We’re on a time crunch, remember?” she asked.

Without unraveling his knotted eyebrows, Davis nodded.

They arrived at the towers and debated how to speak with Kimberly and the Delta Rho pledges. All University dorms required visitors to check in by providing an ID before going upstairs to speak with students. It was for safety of course, but it was also kind of annoying. Meg remembered back to her undergraduate days and the numerous times she ignored those particular rules.

Stockard and Martin were connected by the popular C-Store, a convenience location famous for its pizza sticks and availability of Ramen. Freshmen and upperclassmen alike utilized the store for late night snacks. The two dorms together, with eleven floors each, could accommodate a little over 1000 students, all of whom enjoyed the benefits of a convenience store nearby and a walk up a hill each day to class to walk off their late night binges.

They entered the lobby and walked towards the desk. Without so much as an introduction, Davis flashed his badge. "We're here to see Kimberly Simpson. Should be room 405. Fourth floor."

The desk worker glanced at the badge and then down at the desk. "I take it she isn't expecting you?"

Davis thought for a moment. "No. I need to speak with her regarding an ongoing police investigation though."

The blonde girl looked up at him. "Uh, just a sec." She picked up the phone and pressed in a few numbers. "Um, hey. There's an officer here that needs to speak to one our residents. Do I just send him up?"

She twisted the cord around her fingers. "Uh-huh. Alright thanks." She put the phone down. "Hall director gave the go ahead. Elevator is right there." She pointed across the desk.

Meg nodded. "Thank you ma'am," Heard said.

They walked over to the elevator and pressed button four. "You ready to talk to her?" Meg asked, still a little nervous about how the conversation would go. Though Civil Rights was nearly half a century past, and slavery ended more than a century ago, race had a way of still being not only a touchy subject, but politically and emotionally charged. Regardless of what side of the conversation one sat on. Meg thought back to a day she was hanging out with one of her guy friends, a young man who had been passed

over for a scholarship he'd qualified for and hadn't received because of the color of his skin. He was white.

The elevator dinged and Meg and Davis exited to the floor. It was fairly quiet. Friday night before a game was a time to be out to dinner, drinking with friends, or primping for a night on the Square or a Fraternity party. The only sounds, predictably, seemed to be coming from the bathroom. Regardless, Meg thought they should start by knocking on Kimberly's door. After all, it was where the girl lived.

The door to room 405 was open. A young black girl sat in front of a mirror applying make-up.

Meg knocked on the door. "Excuse me. Are you Kimberly Simpson?"

The girl turned and her eyes narrowed. "Who are you? And how'd you get up here?"

Meg looked to Heard and entered the room. "Meg Anderson. And this is Detective Davis Heard. We have a couple questions for you, Kimberly."

"About what?" she asked, still holding a tube of lipstick.

Davis interceded. "About Briana Mayes. We understand that you two had an argument recently."

Kimberly's bottom lip pushed out into an angry pout as her eyes turned to slits. "Wasn't no argument. Brianna is a redneck racist bitch. And I told her so."



Meg sat down in Kimberly's roommate's desk chair. "Why don't you tell us what happened?"

"We read *Huck Finn* for class. We were talkin' bout how it's listed as a controversial read because it uses the N-word. And Jim is a runaway slave and all that. And Huck thinks about how Jim is black. Well, Brianna says that of course the N-word was used. That was the time frame in which the book was written. And says that Huck and Jim are friends. She says it's a classic and the controversy is just because people are so afraid to just accept those facts because society has turned into a bastion of political correctness where people refuse to accept truths in context and overreact over small things. Said that Paula Deen was a victim of it! She said the network dropped her because of people's fear of appearing politically incorrect. Said the woman is an older lady who lived in the South during the course of the '50s and '60s. That she woulda been lying if she'd said she hadn't used the term in that deposition. But Brianna said she doubted Paula ever used it maliciously. Which is just stupid because it's derogatory. And it's racist. Ain't no way to use that term or teach it without bein' racist. Brianna was a cracker!"

Meg felt herself lean back away from Kimberly as her voice rose.

"Brianna was a cracker racist bitch. I was so angry in class. I told the class how hard it is to be black. Especially in the South. You know," she pointed at Heard, whose face contorted into a scowl before he was able to stop it.

"Brianna rolled her eyes. Like she knows something about bein' black. It was about then class was over. When we got out in the hall. I told her what I thought. Told that bitch that she was racist. Told her that she was the reason the South was so backward

and this school is still dealing with racism. Told her that she needed to get the fuck over herself 'cause we got a President. Yea, I told her." Kimberly said, finally applying a layer of lipstick to her top and bottom lips.

Kimberly nodded to herself, and looked over at Davis. Meg wondered if she would throw up her fist and say "Black Power" next. Kimberly reminded her a lot of some people she'd once known who'd claimed that they couldn't go to college 'cause of racism. It had nothing to do with their failing grades according to them.

Meg forced herself to focus on the girl in front of her. Remembering the excuses of people she'd known in high school would not help Brianna.

"And what did Brianna do then?" Meg asked, glancing at Heard.

Kimberly scowled. "She said, 'I'm sorry you feel that way.' And walked off. Can you believe that? Wouldn't even learn anything. Bitch."

Davis interjected, "And when was the last time you saw her?"

Kimberly shrugged. "Class I guess. She wasn't there today though. So I guess Wednesday afternoon. Why does all this matter anyway?"

"Part of a police investigation," Heard said.

"Oh. That bitch finally get into some trouble? Got what was coming to her. Bitch can go die in a hole for all I care." Kimberly picked up an eye shadow brush as Meg and Davis exchanged glances.

“You guys done? I’m kinda getting ready to go out tonight.” she said, motioning to the door.

Meg looked at Davis, who hesitated. Then he said, “If you think of anything else Ms. Simpson, please give me a call.” He handed her his card and turned to leave.

Meg and Davis did not speak as they rode the elevator down to the first floor. Meg wasn’t sure if this was for lack of something to say or neither of them wanted to dwell on what they had heard. Meg felt like she should feel that Brianna had done something wrong: she had clearly offended Kimberly with her comments, but at the same time, she agreed with what Brianna had said. Was that racist?

She glanced over at Heard. He had closed his eyes. His dark skin was slack. He was calm. Meg found herself admiring his ability to remain so. From what she’d heard at dinner, she was fairly certain that listening to Kimberly would have inspired annoyance. At the very least. And yet, he said nothing. The elevator doors opened, and at the ding, Davis opened his eyes. Still saying nothing they exited.

Meg shuffled a little as they walked into the lobby, the skidding of her shoes created a soft sliding friction noise on the carpet. “So, uh, are we gonna go talk to the boys who live in Stockard? The Delta Rho pledges?”

Davis checked his watch and shook his head. “Look Meg, I gotta go. I need to be at the Grove for the Running of the Tents. It’s nearly eight, and the Running of the Tents

is at nine. LSU Game. People will be anxious and try to start early. Big weekend, ya know?"

Meg felt her lips pull at the edges. "Isn't every weekend here a big weekend?"

Davis didn't return her grin, just nodded. "I'll meet up with you tomorrow morning. I have to work the game, but I'll be looking at the case as soon as I get to the station." He turned and walked away, rubbing his hand over his face as he did so.

As he pushed open the door, Meg wondered what she should do. She looked around the lobby. There were a couple students lounging on couches and chairs, chatting about the game and deciding where they wanted to go on the square or if they'd rather go to a fraternity party. Meg turned away from them.

She sighed. She wanted to keep working. She wanted to talk to the pledges of Delta Rho. Without further thought, she began walking down the hall that connected the Martin lobby to its twin tower, Stockard.

Much like the lobby of Martin, the Stockard lobby had a couple students hanging out and chatting. Glancing at the desk worker, Meg realized she didn't have a good way to get upstairs. She wasn't a guy so she couldn't pass as a student who lived there. And she didn't know a freshman she could text to let her in. She looked around the lobby again. A boy with dishwater blonde hair sat with one of his friends. The boy flitted his eyes over her as she looked at the students leisurely discussing their social lives. She smiled at him, and sauntered over to him.

"Hey, you live here?" she asked.

He nodded.

“Can I ask a favor?”

“What?” he asked, glancing at his friend.

“Well, I lost my keys yesterday. I was here hanging with some friends and I think I maybe left them in their room. I guess they aren’t getting good reception because they aren’t responding to my texts. Can you take me upstairs, check me in and whatever so I can see if I left them here?”

The boy nodded. “Yea, sure. I’m Jackson.” He reached out his hand as he stood up. Meg smiled as she shook it. “Meg.”

Jackson walked her over to the desk, where he told the desk worker he was checking her in. She smiled.

“ID?”

Meg quickly handed him her driver’s license. The desk worker glanced up at her. “You don’t have your student ID?”

Meg tried to look embarrassed and shrugged. “I lost it.”

With a shake of the head, the desk worker accepted her license and checked her into the system. She smiled, “Thanks.”

Jackson walked with her into the elevator. “You sure do seem to lose a lot of stuff.”

Meg shrugged again. "Guess I'm a little disorganized. Listen, thanks for helpin' me out. You can go back down to your friend whenever I get off the elevator."

She pressed the number eleven for the penthouse.

Jackson nodded. "Any chance I know your friends? I live on the ninth floor. Not so far apart."

"Um, Nolan and Cole? They're both Delta Rho pledges."

Jackson thought for a second. "I know some Delta Rhos, but not them. Surprised they live in the penthouse. Mostly it's Delta Psi guys up there. It's the honors floor."

Meg nodded.

"Me? I'm a KA," he told her.

"Cool," the door opened. "Well, thanks for the help Jackson. Nice meeting you." She ducked out of the elevator quickly and began walking away. She heard the elevator begin to move behind her and glanced back before she could help herself. Jackson wasn't in the hallway. She sighed in relief, glad he hadn't tried to continue the conversation. She wasn't sure how she would explain not only that she actually had her keys, but that she had never met Nolan and Cole. Didn't even know what they looked like.

She started looking at the room numbers. Nolan and Cole were roommates in room 1120. The hall was a square. She made the round, and found the room. The door was closed. For a moment, she just stared at it. She wasn't sure what she was expecting. Perhaps an open door like they had found at Kimberly's.

She knocked on the door. No answer.

She knocked again. Still no answer. Another young man walked down the hall in a blue towel and flip flops with a shower caddy in hand. "They already left."

Meg turned. "What?"

He pushed the shower caddy forward as a point. "Cole and Nolan. They already left. Said they were going to dinner. Or maybe they are reserving a spot for Delta Rho in the Grove. Something. They left."

"Oh," she frowned at the door. "Yea, thanks," she said to the recently showered boy already closing a door a few feet down the hallway.

She looked around. No one else was in sight. Unsure what she was looking for, she tried the knob. Unlocked.

She walked in and closed the door. Khakis, boxers, and polos littered the floor. A couple athletic shorts peeked from underneath the shirts. The sink was littered with toothpaste, shaved hairs, and an empty bottle of Wild Turkey.

She tiptoed through the maze of dirty clothes. She looked at their desks. School books, laptops, pens, a printer. Nothing special. She wasn't sure what she was looking for. Somewhere in her head, she heard Davis arguing she was going to contaminate evidence earlier in the day. She shook her head, and mentally vowed not to touch anything.

She walked further into the room. Other than finding open spaces to step on the floor, the galley style set up the boys used made glancing at their belongings easy. Look

left, look right. Proceed. Both their beds were unmade; the navy comforters looked almost knotted. Why did men seem to feel okay about leaving the bed unmade all the time? Their flat sheets weren't even visible. "Wonder what their mothers would think," Meg muttered to herself.

She glanced at their nightstands. Both boys had pocket knives. And both knives clearly had multiple blades and tools. It looked about three and a half inches. Both of them. She tried to see if she could see a curve in any of the folded over blades or tools by bending down and looking at them straight on. It didn't help. She had no idea what she was looking for, and even though her hands shook and she wanted to pick them up and look at the blades, she didn't.

She turned around, and with one last glance over the room, concluded it was time to leave.

The walk back to her car took her past the Grove. As she walked by the Walk of Champions, she saw Davis standing near the brick arch.

"Hey," she said to him. "I really think we need to find Nolan and Cole tomorrow. They own pocket knives. With multiple blades and tools. Could be one of them have an odd curve."

Davis's eyebrows shot up into his forehead. "And how do you know that?"

Meg waved her hand. "I was in Stockard. Did a little investigative work. It's what I do remember? Good night Davis. I'll see you tomorrow."



She could tell he wanted to yell at her, but before he could respond, she walked away. Behind her, she heard the bull horn. It was nine o'clock. She didn't have to turn around to know that the masses were now coming from every nook and cranny off-campus and hiding spaces on-campus, sprinting with tents, chairs, and tables. Some in wagons. Some on shoulders. From all directions, tail-gaters appeared and sprinted toward their real estate in Grove. Many had people sitting and standing, reserving spaces. Others would just do their best to get a decent space. The goal was in the front on the Walk, and if not that, then in the front on the Blue or Red Lanes.

Meg smiled as people rushed to the ten acre Grove behind her. Some things never changed. SEC football would always have rabid fans willing to sprint to their tail-gating location with a tent on their shoulder.

After she was past the Residential Colleges, Meg pulled out her phone. "I'm headed back now. Hope you've had a good birthday with your sorority sisters!" she texted Jordan.

## Chapter 12

September 1962

Charlie stretched before putting his duffel bag in his trunk beside Dale's and Robert's. He smiled. A rebel victory with his mother's breakfast was a good way to spend the weekend. Who could turn down biscuits, grits, and bacon? No one.

He packed his duffel in the car, feeling his heart sink a little as he realized he wouldn't be home again until Thanksgiving. He felt himself frown. Maybe he could come home before. Home cooking was so much better than anything served in the commons. And the Commons could not make grits right. Something about the consistency was just...not right. Not like his mother's.

Robert had eaten two helpings and Charlie had the distinct impression that if he hadn't gotten his own second helping first, Robert might have eaten three. The concession for Dale was the he'd gotten the extra biscuits.

Charlie looked at the bags in the trunk. On the other hand, home was not also home to two Miss Americas and the rest of the hottest co-eds in South.

Maybe it was time to get back on the road.

"Robert! Dale! Ready to go?"

His two fraternity brothers ambled outside, trailed by Charlie's mother.

Wiping her hands on her apron, she asked, "You sure you boys can't stay an extra hour or two? I've really enjoyed havin' ya here."

Charlie's dad ambled outside, overhearing his wife, touched her shoulder, "Now, Alma. Let the boys get back down to Oxford."

Dale and Robert smiled. "Well, thank you very much for breakfast ma'am. Sir." Dale turned to shake Charlie's father's hand.

The unspoken nod of respect between men occurred between each and Dale and Robert climbed into the car. This time Robert managed to commandeer the passenger seat, and Charlie felt fairly certain that this trip he would shift in his seat a little less.

He hugged his mother. "Thanks for all the food and stuff Mom. Dad," he mirrored his friend's earlier movements.

"Son," his dad gripped his hand.

With a nod, Charlie got into his car and turned the key. His parents waved as he shifted into gear and backed out of the driveway. Before he pulled onto the road, he and Robert waved back.

Charlie tapped his finger on the top of the steering wheel as he glared at the cars in front of him. There were so many of them. He thought back to the drive to Jackson Friday night. Had there been this many cars or did it just seem like less because his friends had been awake and chatting instead of quiet and sleeping?

He couldn't remember seeing so many cars on 51. They were practically bumper to bumper. He wanted a Coke, but with a quick glance in the mirror, he knew that was unlikely to happen. Dale, who was in charge of drink distribution from the small lunchbox cooler wedged behind the driver seat, was sleeping, mouth open and breathing onto the back passenger side window. The little condensation cloud revealed each inhale and exhale, and Charlie found himself wondering exactly how Dale's drool would land in his car, if indeed, Dale began drooling.

Robert too was asleep, but his sleep seemed a little more restless. Charlie was confident he'd wake eventually to keep him company on the drive.

With no one else in the car awake, Charlie found himself studying the cars ahead of him. The one immediately in front was from Louisiana. The car in front of the Cajun was also from another state. Or at the very least, it was a Mississippi plate from somewhere other than Hinds county. It certainly didn't look like his.

"Where the hell are they going?" he wondered.

The exit to Batesville, the gateway to Oxford, was bottlenecked. The highway became a funnel, funneling every car to that very exit.

"What are all these people doing over here? They can't all be headin back to Oxford," Robert said.

Charlie shook his head. "I dunno man. I've seen license plates from more states than I can remember ever seein' on 51 before. There something' goin' on next week in Oxford that I don't know about?"

Robert shook his head. "I haven't heard anything."

Charlie glanced in his mirror. Dale was still asleep. He debated waking him to see if he knew anything.

Robert, as if reading his mind, said "I doubt he's heard anything that we haven't."

Charlie sighed. "Where are they all coming from? I didn't think there were this many out of staters at the game yesterday. Hell, I didn't even think there were this many out of staters in Jackson this weekend. But I've seen Louisiana, Texas, Bama, all kinds of plates on the road. Just weird."

Robert nodded as he kept his eyes on the road ahead of them. With so many cars exiting, it felt like they were crawling.

What the hell was going on?

## Chapter 13

Meg pulled into the drive of Jordan's home, and her headlights illuminated a black SUV pulled off to the side of the drive. She squinted at the porch, and squealed when she saw a man sitting there, waiting.

His black bangs were brushed across his forehead. His lean form lounged easily in the chair. When she got out of the car, his blue eyes lit up.

"Tyler! What are you doing here?" she laughed, momentarily forgetting all that had happened in the previous thirty six hours.

"I found some information I thought you might be interested in. I told you I was getting on a plane! It's the weekend, Meg. And it's football. And well, I couldn't let you work this case all weekend. I know you; it's all you'd do."

Meg jumped into him and wrapped him in a hug. "Thank you. Thanks Tyler. So good to see you!"

Even in his embrace, she could tell he was smiling. "Good to see you too, Meg. It's been too long."

"It has," she agreed as she let him go and turned to unlock the door. He was older and had graduated before her. They'd remained in touch throughout their separation though. Their friendship, though long distance, had been maintained.

He picked up his duffel bag from beside the plastic chair he'd been sitting in and followed her inside. "Where is Jordan?" he asked.

Meg felt herself frown. "She went to the sorority house this afternoon. Try to hang with someone who might cheer her up a little. I talked to her on the phone earlier today. Texted her I was coming home, but she hasn't texted back."

Meg shrugged and added. "I'm sure she's fine. Probably just planning to go do something with her sorority sisters. It is her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. And after yesterday, she may just want to go get drunk."

Tyler nodded.

"So how have you been?" Meg asked.

He shrugged. "Can't complain. Finally done with all the schooling and working in the job I wanted. What about you?" He'd gotten his masters specifically to work at the FBI. Though he wasn't a field agent, he was a crime analyst and that was a start.

She smiled and shrugged back at him. "Can't complain. Working at a job I love. Getting some live shots."

They looked at each other, comfortable in the silence between them. They had been good friends in college. Meg had accompanied Tyler to a variety of parties, football games, and formals. He had listened to her talk about her past, heard her ramble on about telling the story of those who could not speak for themselves. He had nodded and listened when she had told him she had seen a dead body, talked to the police. And how scared it had made her. He was one of her best friends.

“So no offense Tyler, but what are you doing here? Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad you are. But, well, I’m curious. What’s the information?” Meg asked.

Tyler nodded and his eyes lit up as his lips pulled into a smile. He understood her curiosity.

“Before we start on that, you got anything to eat?”

Meg grimaced. “No idea,” but she found herself glancing around the kitchen. “I’ll see what we have on hand,” she added, thinking back to their college days. She’d cooked for him several times, late night study snacks, dinner, and the occasional lunch.

She found some frozen chicken and began assembling chicken sandwiches. As she gathered spices and chopped tomatoes and vegetables, she reiterated her question. “So are you going to tell me about this information?”

Tyler sighed. “How much research have you done on your victim?”

Meg put the chicken in a skillet, the sizzle resounded in the kitchen as she put it in. She sprinkled pepper onto it, and turned to meet his blue eyes. “I’ve looked briefly at her Facebook page, talked to her roommate and Jordan about her. She wanted to go into reporting. She was in the Honors College. Good in school. Well liked.”

Tyler nodded. “Sure, but what do you know about her family history? Anything?”

Meg shook her head. “What does it have to do with finding out what happened to her? I don’t understand.”



Tyler nodded again. "The FBI collects in-depth data on the victims of our investigations. Even though it isn't my case, I figured I'd do some quick research, since you had given me her name. When I started digging, well, I found some interesting facts. Brianna's dad, Charles was the roommate of one Robert Bolden. He was found dead in 1962. It's believed he died during the Race Riots. Charles is believed to have been there."

Meg turned the chicken over. "I still don't see what that has to do with Brianna's death. There were a lot of people at those riots, and besides, they happened like fifty years ago."

"You're right. But that's not all. I told you Robert Bolden had died in the riots. Do you know her mother's maiden name?"

Meg shook her head.

"Bolden. Elaine Bolden. She was three years younger than Robert. Must have met Charles when he was a senior and she was a freshman," he told her.

Putting the chicken on toast with a piece of Monterrey Jack, she answered, "I still don't understand why that is relevant."

"Have you not noticed that those riots still inspire anger? What if someone killed her, not because of her or her actions, but because of her parents and their actions?"

She set a plate with a chicken sandwich layered with tomato, lettuce, and cheese on the counter before him.

“But Tyler, have you pulled the crime scene photos? She was stabbed. Multiple times. It would have taken a lot of anger to do that. You think that kind of anger could be inspired because of revenge?”

He took a bite of his sandwich. “I think it’s an avenue worth exploring.”

Meg sighed. “We have a lot of those.”

She paused and checked her watch. Pulling out her phone, she texted Jordan again. “Hey, where are you? It’s getting late. Are you okay?” She looked at Tyler and sighed. “Sorry, I’m getting worried about her.”

Tyler glanced at his own watch. “Not so late by the standards of a college student. Especially one turning 21.”

Meg pursed her lips. “I guess. When did I become like a mom?”

Tyler laughed. “You’re just worried about your friend. It’s nice.”

Meg slumped onto the bar stool with a thud. “Right,” she put her head in her hands.

Even in her hair tent zipped closed with her hands, she could hear him get up from his bar stool. He rubbed his hands over her back. “You okay?”

Meg nodded through her hands.

“No. You’re not,” he said.

Meg sighed and dropped her hands to her lap. "I have to get back on Sunday Tyler. Tomorrow is game day. Sunday is well, Sunday. Jordan is worried. You know? Her friend was killed. And she's scared. She just wants whoever did it to be brought to justice. I don't blame her. And Jordan is...she wants me to make sure that the case is closed. Forty eight hour rule you know? What if I can't do it? What if I let her down?"

Tyler rubbed her back. "You won't. You won't. Because you're sitting here worrying about it. You won't. Because you care."

Meg sighed. "Thanks."

Tyler sat on the chair next to her.

Then the door opened and Jordan nearly fell through it with another blonde girl on her side.

The blonde laughed. "We insisted on taking her out for a little fun. Bought her some drinks for her 21<sup>st</sup>. She said yesterday was a rough day, so we bought her well, a lot."

Meg just nodded.

"TYLER!" Jordan squealed even as she wobbled. Meg was surprised Jordan remembered him from his one visit when Meg had been a senior.

The blonde grabbed her closer. "I'll just put her to bed."

Meg nodded. "Do you need help?"

The blonde shook her head. "I've done this a time or two."

Tyler shrugged. Meg just watched as the two shuffled into Jordan's room. The blonde shut the door behind them.

It was Saturday, barely. Meg checked her watch and wondered why she was still awake.

"Tyler?" she whispered to the couch beside her futon bed. "You awake?"

There was no answer. Meg sighed, knowing that the lack of answer was indeed her response. He was asleep.

She sat up, grabbed a legal pad and a pen, and for the second night in a row, opened the door and sat down in the plastic chair on the porch. There was too much on her mind. She was leaving on Sunday. She had to. She had to work. New employees didn't exactly have a ton of vacation time. But she didn't want to leave without knowing what had happened to Brianna.

She had seen a dead body before. She had been the one screaming, the one who had found it. During her senior year of high school, she had been running on what could loosely be termed a nature trail, though she'd often said it had more nature than trail. She'd found a young man shot in the chest. Multiple times. The cops had never found what had happened to him. It had inspired her to become a reporter. She had wondered what his story was, what his life might have been. And who and what had ended it. The case was still unsolved.

She closed her eyes for a moment and willed away the memory. This wasn't about the man who'd died years ago in Texas. It was about remembering Brianna and keeping her from becoming an unsolved case. It had been a little more than twenty four hours since the body had been found, and Meg wondered how much time they had before the trails went cold. She wanted to help Jordan cope by understanding what had happened.

Meg began writing. When she worked a story, she made lists of facts and important information. Usually it became a jumbled mess of arrows, scribbles, and lines. Sometimes she even employed the use of highlighters to classify the information. It was how she put together the puzzle and understood the motives and the hows.

She started with location. From the crime scene photos and her speculation with Heard, she knew it was unlikely that Brianna had actually been murdered in the tunnels. Brianna had been stabbed multiple times but there was no blood splattered on the walls or in the hole Brianna had been stuffed into. There was no indication of a struggle. Brianna's phone hadn't been found there.

Wounds and Weapon. A blade of some variety. Small but effective. And yet, Tyler had pointed out that given the molding and shape of the wounds, the blade wasn't necessarily a knife blade. Meg paused and gave that some thought. This was not a planned crime. How could it be? If someone had planned it, wouldn't it be a more likely scenario that the person would have used a gun or a bigger knife? A kitchen blade. A bullet. Meg scrawled her questions on her notepad. Wouldn't that be more effective?

She looked up for a moment, still thinking. A moth flew towards the porch light. It circled the light bulb again and again. What if it hadn't been planned, but instead had been the result of built up anger? Something that stews and frustrates a person. Maybe a confrontation was planned, but the death wasn't.

Meg watched the moth. And pondered confrontation. She wrote down Kimberly Simpson's name. Kimberly had been angry enough in class to yell at Brianna afterward. Leah indicated that Brianna said it was something like a tantrum. Meg tried to piece together what she'd heard. She could visualize Kimberly, finger pointed in Brianna's face, eyebrows pressed deep into a V as she spit out insult after insult.

And all Brianna had said is, "Sorry you feel that way." Even as Kimberly had talked about it, she had been animated. It wasn't simply an anecdote of the past, but a grudge of the present. Meg thought about it. Would Kimberly stew over something like that? Would she want to teach Brianna a lesson? Meg could visualize it. Perhaps Kimberly pacing her room, angry that Brianna didn't seem to respond to her. Angry the professor hadn't supported her more. Angry the other students hadn't supported her more. Kimberly would feel they were all being racist. All because of Brianna.

The moth circled the light again. And Meg turned her thoughts to the pledges of Delta Rho. They were freshmen, new to the organization. They were the boys buying every single t-shirt that came up for sale simple because it had letters on it. They were the boys who referred to the other members as brothers and made sure to include their fraternity allegiance in their introductions. They were the boys who marveled at the bonds of brotherhood and felt strongly about the rituals, the meetings, and the members.

They had yet to reach the apathy that comes with multiple years of long chapter meetings, and perhaps had yet to realize that the bonds of brotherhood were born from shared memories and time together rather than just the rituals.

And they felt their secrecy and their ritual had been intruded upon. That Brianna had seen something sacred and secret. Something she shouldn't have. Perhaps they felt the need to confront her about it. How could she? How would she prove that she would preserve their rituals?

Maybe she didn't give them the answers they wanted. Maybe there was not truly an answer they would be satisfied with. And they grabbed their pocket knives and stabbed her. She wouldn't be expecting it. And with more than one of them, she wouldn't get away.

Meg regretted not looking closer at the clothes on the floor. Blood would have splattered. Whoever hurt Brianna would have blood on their clothes. She tried to think back to the wreckage of a room that the pledges resided in. Athletic shorts, Khakis, polos. She'd glanced closely enough to know the contents of the floor, but she couldn't remember seeing anything with stains.

She put her pen down and rubbed her temples. She exhaled. Frustrated, she realized that though she could visualize the scenarios and even think about how the act had occurred, she still had no idea what had transpired. Brianna had gone to her classes Thursday. She had seemed a little distracted, but she had been there. Meg thought back to Brianna's planner. She had a meeting scheduled for later in the day. Heard hadn't mentioned it, and she only had a time and initials.

Sighing again, she scribbled, “Brianna’s meeting?” onto her notepad at the top and circled it. It was an hour unaccounted for. Did she make it to that meeting?

Meg thought about Tyler’s theory as she circled her note again. Brianna’s uncle had died in 1962. He was believed to have been at the riots back then. Meg sat up.

Did Kimberly Simpson know about this? Could she have believed the Brianna was taught racism growing up? Could she have killed Brianna because she was the white niece of a man killed years before? Would knowing such information simply fuel her anger?

Meg jumped up and rushed inside to wake up Tyler. They had to talk about this. She opened the door and the darkness surrounded her. Looking over at Tyler, feet hanging off the love seat, she realized how early it was. And how long tomorrow would be. She sighed and flipped her notepad over on the counter.

Her theory wasn’t going anywhere.

Despite the late night, Meg woke early on Saturday. She was up before Tyler or Jordan, and found herself wondering if she should wake them at all. Considering how Jordan had come in, Meg was betting she would be hung-over. If Tyler was awake, she’d try to place bets on whether or not Jordan would make it to the game at all. But Tyler wasn’t awake.

She glanced around the room. Her duffel bag was sagging with the weight of clothes and electronics that sat on top of it. The futon had multiple blankets, wrapped



around her legs with two pillows forming an L-shape where she'd cuddled with one. Tyler slept, stretched out across the loveseat, feet dangling from beneath his blanket. White socks peeking out beneath the blue blanket. An early morning light hinted at its presence from behind the blinds, each slit revealing a horizontal flare of sun.

Deciding that going back to sleep wasn't much of an option, Meg threw off her blankets and tiptoed in socked feet to the kitchen. If daylight wasn't going to wake up her companions, perhaps bacon, eggs, and coffee would. Meg smiled at the coffee pot, her favorite appliance in the kitchen.

She opened the fridge and pulled out her ingredients. As she put them on the counter, she saw a package of bagels. As she set down the package of bacon, she grabbed the bagels and set them next to her breakfast collection. She opened a few cabinets and found Jordan's skillets. She set three on the stove. She was going to create breakfast sandwiches, one of Tyler's favorites she remembered from their undergraduate breakfast for dinner nights.

As she sprayed nonstick spray on the pans, she found herself sniffing the air. The coffee was made. She rummaged through a few more cabinets in search of coffee mugs. "Ah-ha," she whispered to herself as soon as she found some. She poured a cup, added some sugar and took a sip. As she set it down on the counter, she noticed Thursday's *Daily Mississippian*, the school newspaper opened to the Opinion/Editorial section. She gave it a cursory glance, but when she looked at it, Brianna's name caught her eye beneath a headline that read, *Who the Hell Are We?*

She took a sip of coffee, and began to read. "In the opening lines of the Hotty Toddy, Rebels everywhere shout 'Who the Hell Are We?' Given the recent controversy in the Student Senate about a name change of our mascot from the 'Rebels,' I am forced to wonder if we know.

Lao Tse once said, 'Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habit. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.' No one can deny the wisdom of these words for a single individual. But what of an institution or a university?

To me, the answer is immediate and clear. The habits of an organization are the traditions and the rituals. Just a few years after the University opened an entire class of students, enlisted to fight in the Civil War. They made it to the High Water Mark in Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, and every last one of them died. We remember them in our traditions. The University Grays were often noted to be the best dressed in the Confederate Army, and this is why we dress for Game days and in the Grove. It isn't just an excuse to wear a bow tie or put on some lipstick. It isn't about being the hottest co-eds in the South. It is a habit with meaning, a tradition. At the University of Mississippi, we have a variety of traditions that remember our fallen dead.

Some criticize this. Why should we honor men who fought for the South, the losing side? I acknowledge that this controversy is sometimes a difficult one to fully grasp. Some argue that we are promoting racism and the antebellum hierarchy by commemorating them. But I disagree. Why did those men go to war? In the end, those men were fighting for their homeland. They were fighting for their sweethearts and the

children they might have. They were fighting for the piece of land that had been theirs for generations. Their country called and they answered; no different than those Vietnam veterans that were spit on for years.

Now, instead of recognizing their sacrifice, we minimize it by failing to teach our students about them. We fight to rid ourselves of every small reminder. We are the Rebels, but instead of communicating that we are 'Ole Miss, by damn' as the Hotty Toddy cheer goes, our student senate seeks to rid us of our words, our actions, our habits and our character.

I ask you, students of the University of Mississippi, Who the Hell Are We? Are we going to allow ourselves to be stripped of our identity? What will that leave us with? It will be a shell. We will have classrooms, a library, and a football team. But we will not be the Rebels. We will not be Ole Miss."

"Still love your coffee I see," Tyler said from the couch as she read the final line. "You going to pour me a cup?"

"I suppose, but only if you're on your best behavior," Meg teased in reply as she reached into the cabinet with the mugs.

"I'm always on my best behavior," Tyler replied, getting up and reaching for the mug of black coffee Meg held out to him.

"Right. So I was going to make some breakfast," Meg said.

"Don't let me stop you."

Meg nodded and turned back to the stove. She began breaking eggs, and letting them sizzle in their sunny side up glory. She threw the bacon in the other pan, and began melting butter so she could toast the bagels. As she prepared breakfast, she thought about Brianna's piece.

"Smells good," Tyler commented. "If Jordan doesn't get up, I call dibs. And I also have dibs if she is too hung-over to want food."

Meg snorted as she tried to suppress a laugh. "Fine," she paused. "Tyler, I have something I want to run by you. I thought of it last night."

"Shoot," he said, leaning forward on the counter from his barstool.

"I thought about what you said and what Davis and I have found. There's a girl that confronted Brianna in a pretty public way. Based on what I've heard I visualize it as a shouting, finger pointing type of affair. Anyway, she decided that Brianna was racist because of some comments Brianna made about the controversy of *Huck Finn*. And felt that the class and the professor did not handle the comments appropriately. This girl, Kimberly, is black and was pretty angry about the whole thing. Got a little upset just relaying her side of the story back to us. What if she found out that Brianna's dad was believed to have been at the Race Riots? And there's more. I just saw this," she nodded towards the newspaper. "Look at the article it's open to and who wrote it. It would have upset Kimberly just as much as the rest I think."

Tyler picked up the paper while Meg flipped a piece of bacon and checked on her egg. The butter sizzled and she put a bagel slice down in the pan.

“Possible. Definitely worth looking into. It would be like shaking a coke up. Enough of that and there will be pressure.” he agreed, setting the paper down.

Meg nodded and began assembling a breakfast sandwich.

“I have another thought too. In my file, one of Charlie and Robert’s friends is listed as well. Again, believed to have been present at the riot. Questioned regarding Robert’s death because he was a friend. They had gone to the game together the day before. He’s here now, teaching and working with the William Winter Institute. He hasn’t lived here in years, but his mother lives here and she’s ill. Might be worth talking to him too.”

“Okay, what’s his name?”

“Dale Norwood.”

Meg froze. “As in initials D.N? As in the same Norwood that is Professor Norwood in the Southern Studies department?” she asked.

Tyler nodded as his eyebrows arched up, questioning.

“Brianna had an appointment at 4:30 with D.N. Maybe Dale Norwood is that appointment. If it is, we can figure out if she went to it and what it was about. So far, Davis and I have drawn a blank. We went to his office, caught him on his way home. He didn’t seem to know her very well. Didn’t mention an appointment either, but that has to be it! Can’t believe we missed that connection!” she said.

Meg set the plate in front of Tyler and began assembling her own food.

“Interesting.” Tyler commented, taking a bite of his breakfast sandwich. “So what’s the plan for the day then?”

Meg stopped piling bacon onto her bagel. “It’s game day sweetheart. I think the only place we’ll be able to find anyone is in the Grove.”

The Grove was often cited as not only the best tailgating site in the SEC, but indeed the best tailgating location, period. Before every game, students, alumni, fans, and visitors gathered together underneath row after row of tents for the world’s largest outdoor cocktail party. Some tents boasted chandeliers; others boasted catered spreads complete with tablecloths and heating trays. Some even had TVs hooked up to generators so as to ensure not a game would be missed. But all of them shared a common theme: Southern hospitality.

Meg smiled as she thought about it. She’d missed it.

Meg assembled another breakfast sandwich, and looked towards Jordan’s door. She wasn’t sure if she should wake her or not, but she was fairly certain that Jordan would not want to miss game day. She walked around the counter and gently knocked on the door.

“Jordan?” she asked.

There was no answer.

“Jordan?” Meg walked in and sat on the bed beside the human lump that was her friend. Meg shook it a little, and the lump groaned.

“Jordan? You going Groving?” she asked, using the term for tailgating unique to Ole Miss and its tradition.

A groan escaped from under the covers again. “Coffee? Is there coffee?” Jordan asked.

“Yes, coffee and breakfast are in the kitchen.” Meg responded.

The lump slowly rolled over and sat up with yet another groan. “Okay, go Rebs. Ughh.” Jordan said, throwing back the covers.

As she walked out of her room to the kitchen, Jordan turned back to Meg. “Have you found out what happened yet?”

Meg sighed and shook her head. “No honey. I’m working on it. Tyler even came to help.”

Jordan just nodded and said. “Don’t let her become just a case file, Meg.”

“I won’t, Jordan.” Meg assured her.

## Chapter 14

September 1962

Charlie exhaled when he pulled into a parking space. A headache was forming at the base of his skull. The traffic hadn't let up. All the way down Highway 6, cars had been bumper to bumper. Though they had been moving faster than a crawl, it certainly hadn't felt that way. Texans, Cajuns, the entire South seemed to be converging toward Oxford, Mississippi.

Dale had woken up about halfway down Highway 6 and had immediately begun speculating.

"It's the commies. We're gathering together to defeat the commies." Followed by, "Maybe it's that Meredith nigger. Maybe the South is celebrating the continuance of segregation! Yea, maybe Ole Miss is hosting a party."

Robert, however, had been silent since the turn off. Which was nearly as disconcerting as Dale's never ending speculation about what was going on.

Charlie leaned his head back a bit, silently thanking God that the car ride was over. They were home in Oxford. There were co-eds to court and fraternity duties to attend to. And homework. That too. But perhaps first, he'd take a nap.



“Uh, Charlie, we getting’ out of the car?” Robert asked. It was the first sentence he’d uttered since Batesville.

“Yea man. Just felt like a hell of long trip.” Charlie opened his door and pulled his seat forward so Dale could exit. “Damn, it feels good to stand up.”

“Yea man! Don’t it? So, you wanna go see what seems to be goin’ on?” Dale asked.

Robert shook his head saying, “I’m tired Dale. If Charlie wants to go, he can go for it. But I think I’m gonna go see about doin’ some homework. You know where I’m at if it’s anything big.”

Charlie nodded saying, “Yea, Dale. I’m headin’ back to the room with Robert. If it’s anything major, come let us know, okay?”

Dale shrugged. “Suit yourself,” he turned and began walking towards the Circle in the heart of campus.

Charlie shook his head. “You know man, sometimes I worry about him.”

Robert smiled a tight lipped grin. “You and me both, brother.”

Charlie unlocked the trunk and grabbed each of their bags, leaving Dale’s in the trunk for whenever he chose to retrieve it. After he closed the trunk again, they turned to walk towards their dorm.

Charlie and Robert were roommates in Baxter Hall, and they fell in step beside each other. They said nothing, each in thought.

Charlie hadn't wanted to go with Dale. He wasn't totally sure he wanted to know what the reason was for so many coming to Oxford. Their football team was a favorite for the title, but Sunday at the very beginning of football season was a bit early to begin staking out a spot in the Grove.

He thought back to Ross Barnett's speech the night before. "Our customs...heritage..." He hoped no one was organizing anything stupid. The school had to stay open. Barnett had threatened to shut it down before it was ever integrated. If it remained open and failed to integrate, there were rumors that it would be discredited, rendering the degree worthless. Or so he'd heard. And either option was bad. Charlie didn't want to integrate, but he also didn't want to lose his school, his football team, or the traditions he'd been a part of his whole life. He'd grown up singing From Dixie with Love, and he wanted his children, if he ever had any, to do the same.

It was a mess. He didn't have the solution. He doubted anyone did. He was nervous. Whatever so many cars from all across the South were doing coming to Oxford, it couldn't be good.

Charlie felt his knuckles turning white on his suitcase handle. He took a deep breath. Maybe it was nothing. He was just over reacting. He glanced at Robert, whose face was twisted into a frown of concentration.

"Hey man, think you'll wanna throw the football around a little later? We can do some homework, maybe take a nap and then toss around the ole pigskin a little before supper."

Robert nodded. "Yea man. Yea, maybe."

Charlie had barely laid on his bed five minutes before there was a loud knocking at his dorm room door. He turned to Robert. Without speaking, they knew it was Dale.

“Open up man! You’re not gonna believe this!” Dale yelled at them from the hallway.

Charlie sighed in unison with his roommate. “It’s open.” he called out.

With that, Dale rushed in, throwing the door open, letting it hit the wall behind it. “We’ve been invaded!” Dale yelled.

Charlie resisted the urge to laugh. “Yea, by half the damn South. We noticed,” he said.

Dale turned and yelled, “No man! The Marshalls—the US Marshalls have surrounded the Lyceum! Those commie Kennedys have invaded Mississippi for that nighrah! We have been invaded!”

Robert walked towards Dale. “You’re kidding. This is a joke.”

Dale shook his head. “No. Not a joke. I wish it was. I really wish it was.”

Charlie found himself putting on his loafers. Robert turned from Dale and asked, “What are you doing?”

Charlie shrugged. “I’m just curious, man. Wanna go check it out. Don’t you?”

Robert shook his head. "They're gonna do what they're gonna do. I've said it before. I don't wanna integrate. But I don't wanna re-fight the Civil War either."

Dale interjected. "Mississippi is sovereign man! Don't you wanna protect our rights? Education is a state thing. Barnett declared interposition! They aren't following the Constitution!"

Charlie ignored him. "Look Rob. I just wanna check it out. It's not like I'm taking my gun with me. Aren't you a little bit curious?"

Robert sighed. "I'll put my shoes on."

The boys walked together from Baxter Hall. Dale continued to voice his annoyance at their invasion and the infringement upon their rights.

"I shouldn't be forced to go to school with some nighrah. I don't even get why he wants to go here anyhow. You know, they got smaller brains than us. Read it in a pamphlet. Why doesn't he just go to one of their schools? Ya know? Then these commie Kennedys would just leave us alone," Dale said.

Charlie tried to tune him out. He agreed with him generally. He didn't want to integrate. He didn't want to go to school with a nighrah. But he did not want to lose his school either. He wasn't sure what they should do. He just wanted to be an Ole Miss Rebel, just as his father had been.

The three arrived in the Circle and found they were not the only students who had come to witness the spectacle. Ole Miss men and women alike lounged across the Lyceum lawn, leering at the United States Marshalls.

The Marshalls stood legs apart, helmets strapped on tightly, looking straight across the Circle. Their stance put them opposite the students. The Marshalls had their guns slung over their shoulders and tear gas canisters on their belts.

Charlie looked at them, wondering how the President could send men to use force in the South. He thought back to what his grandfather had said at one point about the Civil War. "Lincoln called troops against his own people. Against his own nation." At the time, Charlie hadn't been able to understand. Wasn't the whole point that the Confederate States were a new nation? But as he looked at the US Marshalls surrounding the building that was the original home of his school, he understood. The white columns contrasting against the red brick were iconic to him. And they were surrounded.

A group of students to his right began chanting the Hotty Toddy. Charlie smiled. His school. His traditions. His home.

It irritated Charlie to see men surrounding the Lyceum-his school. Where he registered. Where he went to class. Surrounding the Lyceum for a nigras. He sighed and forced himself to look at them. The traitors.

From somewhere in the crowd behind him, he heard a student yell, "Nigger lovers!"

Another student yelled from elsewhere. "Commies! Commies! Dirty commies!"

Charlie looked around the crowd. He didn't know who'd yelled either of them, but he found himself nodding in agreement. They were there because of the Kennedys. The dirty commie Kennedys. There were Marshalls surrounding his school, threatening its future. Threatening his future.

Charlie felt his fists tighten at his sides. Everything he'd known as he was growing up. The social balance he'd grown up with. His region. His school. Threatened.

Charlie heard someone yell, in his own voice. "Nigger lovers." He looked around. Was that him? It was. He had yelled that time.

Shouts echoed around him. The Marshalls were supporting the commies, helping the niggers—they were invading. Threatening the way of life in the South.

Charlie turned to Dale and Robert. He'd heard Dale yell. If Robert had yelled, he hadn't noticed. Perhaps it was drowned out in the other shouting. Perhaps Robert was remaining silent. But Charlie could tell by the wrinkle in his forehead, that Robert, too, was angry. Charlie turned away.

It had been one hundred years since the South had been invaded by men in blue. One hundred years since General Grant had ridden his horse through the Lyceum doors and wounded men in both blue and gray alike had cried out from the floor. The wounded from Shiloh. Charlie glared at the U.S Marshalls, the American flag emblazoned on their uniform. The acid in his stomach seemed to gurgle as his insides flipped. "Was this history repeating itself?" he wondered.

## Chapter 15

It was nearly afternoon when they arrived at the Grove. Jordan, still clutching a coffee travel mug, said, "I'm going to go check on our tent," and wandered towards the row of Sorority tents.

Meg and Tyler had dressed up in their Grove attire— Tyler wore khakis and a button down with a bow tie, and Meg wore a backless sundress with heels. They waved to Jordan and stood at the head of the Walk of Champions. "Where to?" Tyler asked.

"Do you want to drop by the Lambda Psi tent?" Meg asked, referring to Tyler's fraternity.

Tyler shrugged. "We can. It'd be nice to see some of the guys again."

They started down the walk towards the blue spray painted trail titled the Blue Lane. Lambda Psi always put their tent up there.

Before they arrived, Meg noticed a large tent with a number of older gentlemen in coats with a variety of young men and women. The Banner read that it was the tent of the Associated Student Body.

Meg grabbed Tyler's sleeve. "Let's drop by this tent real quick. See if we can learn anything about what happened to Brianna, or what they think. They've seen the

article no doubt. It's a view that I doubt is popular with this crowd though. It'd be good to see what they think." she told him.

Tyler chuckled. "You never really stop working do you?"

"It's just for a minute Tyler. Just to see." she insisted.

"Okay," he said and followed her into the tent.

A few of the students stood clustered in a group with one of the gray haired men. Meg walked towards them.

"I'm not sure we will get it passed. Did you see the editorial in the *Daily Mississippian*? It's brought up a lot of controversy within the student body," one of the students said.

"What has?" Meg interjected.

Another student turned and said, "One of the senators has proposed a bill to suggest to faculty that we change our name because it's too much like the Confederate rebels. But several students have written into the *Daily Mississippian* in opposition to the idea, and we are anticipating that a large number of Greeks and alumni will oppose it."

Meg nodded, familiar with such controversy. While she was in school, the Senate had tried to ban the playing of "Dixie" at football games. Many students had opposed that bill as well.

The student continued, "The most recent editorial was really long. By a freshman no less. Brianna something or other. Talked all about the importance of tradition as part



of our identity. She made a case that it's an important part of what they University is and without it, we don't really have an identity."

Meg nodded again saying, "Interesting. And I'm sure that has faculty and students alike in an uproar. Is there anyone in particular who is upset? Who worked on the bill anyway?"

The student shrugged. "There were three students working on it including a freshman. I think Kimberly something and then a sophomore and a junior whose names I can't remember." He turned back to the group. "When are you guys going to go by your other tents? I think we should make sure to be here in shifts."

Meg took her cue to leave and walked over to Tyler, who was speaking with an older gentleman. "I think we're having a decent season. We'll make a decent bowl game," Tyler was saying. "Oh, this is my friend, Meg," he said, introducing her.

"Nice to meet you sir. Do you mind if I borrow Tyler for a moment?" Meg asked.

The gentleman shook his head, and Meg guided Tyler from the tent so she could relay what she had learned. "She would certainly have made some enemies by writing an article with such views. What do you think Kimberly would have thought of it? Especially since it was directly in opposition to a bill she was working on?" Meg asked.

Tyler shrugged. "Hard to say. Obviously she would have disagreed with it so I'm guessing Brianna wasn't her favorite person in the world to say the least," he responded.

"Exactly," Meg said in response.

“You know, Meg. I still think we should talk to Dale Norwood. Maybe he can shed some light on the whole situation. Who knows? Maybe we can figure out a little about what happened to Robert while we’re at it.”

Meg sighed. “I know. You plan on going to his house?”

Tyler nodded, but added with a grin. “Right now though. I think we should go to the Lambda Psi tent. They are bound to have some food, and honestly, I’m hungry.”

The two walked through the Grove, and admired the men dressed in slacks, button downs, and bow ties. The girls were dressed in red or blue dresses, heels, and had both hair and make-up done. Meg smiled and was delighted that some things never changed. On game day, there would always be a sea of red and blue in the grove. Whether it was a suit or a dress.

They turned right onto the Blue Lane, and found the Lambda Psi tent. The smell of barbeque, catered from the Ribcage on the Square, wafted into the air. Meg felt her stomach rumble, and blushed as she heard it growl.

“See? Told you this was a good idea,” Tyler said and walked in. It took only a moment before the boys Meg remembered as pledges from her senior year appeared to shake Tyler’s hand. “Good to see you sir!” one of them said. “And Meg! Great to have ya’ll back.” Jacob Johnson wrapped her in a hug.

“Yea, good to see you too, Jake,” Meg said with a laugh. “Got any food for me?”

“You bet.” and with that Jake led her to the table covered in a red table cloth and heaping with Barbeque, chips, dip, and a variety of foods. “Plates and cups are at the end.”

Meg smiled and said thank you.

Meg stood back from the group as she ate her food. Though mingling was something she did well, she was thinking about what she had heard. Davis hadn't mentioned Brianna writing an editorial. Neither had Leah or the Delta Rho boys. Or Kimberly Simpson. She couldn't help but wonder if it was just one more thing that could have pushed Kimberly over the edge. It had been published the day Brianna had died.

Meg threw away her now clean plate, and turned towards Tyler. She never ceased to be amazed by the camaraderie the fraternity fostered. They didn't all like each other. She had been privy to enough of their squabbles about the Executive Council and sweetheart elections to know that they didn't always agree on the direction the fraternity should go in, who should represent it, or even, who to rush. But if one of them was in trouble, all of them were. They would be there for each other to Hell and back. And the group shared enough tradition and memories to have obvious bonds. She smiled as she watched Tyler laugh at one of his younger fraternity brother's jokes.

Jake threw his arm around her again, and she jumped in surprise. “When are you going to leave that poor slob and come to me?” he joked, laughing.

She rolled her eyes and ducked from beneath his arm. “You know very well that I’m not with him, and even so you don’t have a shot.”

Jake feigned an arrow to the chest. “So cruel. I may die of heartbreak,” he leaned closer. “Would you cover it for the nightly news?”

Meg laughed. “Sure I would, Jake. Why the hell not?”

“You bothering her, Jake?” Tyler asked.

Meg shook her head. “Just the same old drunk Jake, Tyler.”

Jake smiled and swayed over to another group of girls.

“Tyler, think you want to go see Norwood now? Or do you think it would be better to drop by the Delta Rho tent?”

Tyler frowned in what Meg knew was a battle between continuing his mini vacation on Memory Lane and working the case she couldn’t tear herself away from. She could hear the seconds tick off the clock in her ears; she had to leave Sunday.

Even above the noise in the Grove, Meg could hear Tyler sigh. “It’ll be pretty easy to drop by the Delta Rho tent on our way from the Grove. But Meg, don’t you want to go to the game? You did buy a ticket, and it is one of the biggest games we play. It’s the LSU game.”

Meg shrugged. “I love cheering for the Rebels. And I want to yell, ‘Geaux to Hell LSU.’ But this...a girl is dead. Jordan’s friend is dead.”

Tyler sighed, “Okay. Come on, I think Delta Rho is just off the Red Lane.”

The Delta Rho tent was overflowing. Fraternity guys spilled out onto the Red Lane's walkway in a big cluster of animated discussion. Like the boys at Lambda Psi, they too were clearly a band of brothers. They laughed as they talked and teased each other mercilessly. Ben Elderidge let out a booming laugh as one of his fraternity brother's slapped his back: his drink sloshed over the edge of his red solo cup. Even as he shook the liquid from his hands, he smiled.

"I see you also decided to visit the Delta Rho fraternity tent, Ms. Anderson," a voice Meg recognized as Heard's said behind her.

She noticed Ben Elderidge take notice of them as she turned around. "Yes sir. And I have someone I'd like you to meet. This is Tyler White, crime analyst at the FBI. He's the one I spoke to on the phone the other day."

Tyler extended his hand. Meg noticed Davis straighten his creasing brows as he took Tyler's hand into his own dark palm. "I don't believe this is an FBI matter," he said.

Tyler nodded. "Just visiting my alma mater and helping out a friend. I did a little digging after Meg called, and yea, I'm interested. But it's your case."

"Yes, it is," Heard said.

Meg looked back and forth between the men. They stared at each other, each appearing at ease even as tension gathered like dust in the window light between them.

"Look, as I said, it's your case. I wanted to offer my help, but you're primary. I suggested to Meg that ya'll speak to Norwood again—Brianna's father had some history

that ties in with him. I would like to offer to help. If we split up, we'll get more done. I would be willing to go talk to Norwood. It's your case. Your call," Tyler said.

For a moment, there was silence. Meg found herself glancing back and forth again before Heard nodded. "Okay. But I'm primary. I will want a report," Heard said.

"Okay boys, now that we have that established. Let's get back to business, shall we?" Meg asked.

Heard responded quietly. "Yes, of course."

They approached Ben Elderidge, who had been watching the exchange while still conversing with the group of men surrounding him.

"Hello again," Meg said to Ben. "Aren't you going to offer me some food and a drink?" She smiled. Ben was not who she truly wanted to talk to.

He nodded. "What can I get for you Meg?"

"I'll have a coke," she said. Ben motioned her towards the tent, where he stopped and knelt down at a cooler painted with a beach front sunset on one side, and his name and a bow tie on the top. It was a Greek tradition for girls to paint their formal date's coolers, especially if the formal was a weekend trip. Meg had always avoided the practice, though she periodically felt guilty about it. She'd watched girls work for weeks to sand the color off the cooler so the paint would adhere correctly, wait for the various coats of paint to dry, and then cover it with Modge Podge. No one wanted their cooler to peel.

She smiled at Ben as she added, "And I'd like to know which one of these fine gentlemen are the famous pledges, Nolan and Cole."

Ben frowned at his cooler contents, Jack, red solo cups, and a liter of Coke, "You really came to the Grove to talk to mildly intoxicated pledges about Brianna?"

Meg shrugged. "Well, not exclusively. I want LSU to geaux to Hell just as much as anyone else here. I just want whoever hurt Brianna to go to jail first. Don't you think that would make the game more enjoyable?"

She heard Tyler laugh behind her.

"Whatever. Look, Nolan and Cole are over there." Ben pointed to two boys loading their paper plates with chips and dip. "Don't make a scene. They didn't do anything." He shook his head. "I can't believe you're doing this in the Grove."

Heard stepped between Ben and Meg. "Ben, we just need to talk to them. Okay?" Ben nodded, sighing.

Before Davis was finished with his sentence, Meg had begun to ease her way backwards into the tent. Tyler fell into step beside her, and just as she reached the two boys, Davis strode over.

"Hi. You guys must be Nolan and Cole?" Meg asked the two boys.

They nodded as they chewed.

"I'm Detective Davis Heard," Heard told them as he stepped in front of Meg.

One of the boys swallowed and extended his hand, "Nolan Bradshaw. This is Cole Graham."

"Nice to meet ya'll. This is Tyler White and Meg Anderson," Heard said.

Both boys set their cups on the table behind them and began inching away from them. Meg worked to stifle a laugh. If the Oxford Police Department arrested every freshman with a solo cup containing some mixed drink, a good portion of the student section would be absent every game. She glanced at Davis. Then again, maybe they had gotten a little stricter since her time in school.

Heard continued, "Look, we understand you boys had a dispute with Brianna Mayes. We just wanted to know what it was about and when you last saw her."

Even through their sunglasses, secured to their person with a fraternity croakie, Meg could tell they were staring, unblinking. The wide eyed expression of shock.

Nolan spoke first. "We heard that Brianna was the girl who died."

"I can't and won't confirm that. We're just trying to work out where she was and when," Heard said.

"We haven't seen her for a couple weeks," Cole interjected. "Not since we talked to her about umm...the incident."

Tyler, forever a fan of honesty, asked, "What incident?"

Cole quickly explained that Brianna had seen a secret ritual of the fraternity and that they had been upset that she had arrived at the house early. There was always a



celebration after such events; people drank at the house or caravanned to the bars on the Square. However, she arrived early enough to see more than she was supposed to.

“Right, and I bet that made you upset.” Meg interjected.

Nolan nodded. “But we didn’t do anything. We just went to talk to her. Met up at a table in the Grove maybe a week or maybe a little more than a week ago. She promised she wouldn’t say anything. I think she could tell we were pretty annoyed with her, because she said she wouldn’t come by until things had cooled off a little. Said she had a project of her own she wanted to focus on anyway and to let her know when we were okay with her coming back. At the time, we thought it was a decent deal. Neither of us wanted to be reminded that someone outside the fraternity had seen our ritual.”

“What project?” Tyler asked quickly, cutting Meg and Heard off before either could ask another question. Meg frowned. What did Brianna’s project have to do with anything?

They both shrugged. “She just said she wanted to do a little research on her own mini history project. She didn’t elaborate much. Almost like it was personal or something. She was being pretty secretive about it,” Nolan answered.

“Right. Do you boys have pocket knives?” Heard asked, glaring at Tyler.

They nodded; Cole began to reach into his pocket.

“I don’t need to see it. I just want to know, do you always carry them with you?”

Heard asked.

Nolan shrugged. “Mostly, yea. What’s this got to do with Brianna?” His mouth formed an “O” as he realized what such a line of questioning was implying.

“Look, we didn’t hurt her. Despite everything, we did like her. And a lot of our fraternity brothers did too. Some of the older guys were even upset that we’d talked to her at all and weren’t too thrilled that she had stopped coming around. The pledge activities to make up for that one were pretty brutal.” he said.

“Pledge activities?” Heard asked.

Cole pushed Nolan with his elbow. “Oh, you know, character building exercises. Build character. From boys to men. You know?”

Meg nodded, following Davis and Tyler’s lead. She felt fairly certain they were talking about push-ups and crunches but she wasn’t sure. However, her companions certainly seemed to understand, and she didn’t feel she should bother asking for further detail. It didn’t seem overly important anyway.

Heard smiled. “Ah. So can you guys tell me where you were on Thursday night? It’s a standard question.”

“We were at the house from dinner until about eight. Then we went back to the dorms, spent about 45 minutes hanging out and getting ready, and then we went back to the house. I was Sober Pledge so I was designated driver for several actives and Nolan here went out to the bars with a couple of the guys,” Cole said.

Heard pulled out his notebook. “I’m going to need their names, please.”

Nolan quickly gave them, while pointing to various guys standing in and around the tent.

As Meg, Davis, and Tyler turned to leave, Cole spoke up once more. “You know, she was going to talk to someone on staff I think. About her project. To be honest, I wondered if she was trying to start her thesis early. She was an Honors student you know?”

Tyler nodded. “Yeah, thanks.”

Meg felt herself raise an eyebrow. Tyler had a thought, and it irritated her that she wasn't connecting the dots. They'd always been pretty in tune in college.

In the distance, the band began playing. Though she couldn't see it, Meg could picture it. They would be standing near the Grove Stage off the Blue Lane. They would play the fight song and Dixie. Students, alums, casual fans, and even the LSU fans would surround the edges of the band members. It was tradition. Soon the football team would walk through the Grove on the Walk of Champions, high fiving all who crowded beside the brick lane to see them. The Hotty Toddy would be chanted.

Such were happy memories of her college days, but at that moment, hearing the band play was like ticking seconds on a bomb. She was supposed to go back to Memphis on Sunday— the next day. She was running out of time.

Meg, Tyler, and Davis gathered at the edge of the Red Lane behind a cluster of fans edging their way toward the Walk of Champions. The Hotty Toddy chant was being

yelled in round, with multiple groups at different paces and in different places. Typical Ole Miss game day in the Grove. Meg clutched her shoulders, aware for the first time of the breeze sweeping through the oak trees. She had never handled cold well. She had never handled anything below warm very well.

“I think we can cross the Delta Rho boys off our list,” Heard said.

Meg nodded. “I suppose. I really thought, based on what I’d heard, that they were much angrier about the whole ritual interruption thing. Where does leave us?” she asked her law enforcement comrades.

“With Kimberly Simpson,” Heard said.

Meg nodded, though she noticed as she did that Tyler had leaned back and frowned at Heard’s assessment. “Brianna wrote an article in the DM too. About the importance of tradition and her concern that the school was effectively killing its own identity. It was published on Thursday,” Meg said.

“I’ll look into it,” Heard assured her. “That certainly would have pissed Kimberly off.”

“There’s another avenue here that you guys are either blind to or simply ignoring,” Tyler interjected.

Meg felt herself frown and watched as Davis mirrored her facial expression.

“Her project, Meg. We need to talk to Dale Norwood. How do you feel about missing the game?” Tyler asked.

Meg sighed. In the distance a group of students yelled, “Purple shirts, yellow britches. go to Hell you sons of bitches!” She hadn’t been to a Rebel football game in years. Sometimes she didn’t even get to watch them on TV. But the clock was still ticking. “Yea. fine.”

Davis held up his hand. “For someone who isn’t taking over my investigation, you’re doing a mighty good job of doing exactly that. What are you talking about?” he asked.

Tyler quickly filled him in on what he had found about Brianna’s family history. “So I think she may have been looking into what happened that night,” he told them.

Heard nodded. “I talked to her family. They didn’t mention that Robert had died. Didn’t refer to him at all actually. And we talked about why Brianna came here, their attachment to the school. We had to. They were telling all they knew about what she’d been doing. Though, they didn’t mention her pursuing a personal project either.”

He took off his hat and scratched his head. “Go. I can’t though. I need to be on duty here during the game. We’re short staffed; it’s a huge weekend. I’ll meet up with you this afternoon. You have my number, Meg. Call me if you need me,” he said.

Tyler and Meg weaved through the crowd, turning sideways and holding hands so as not be separated. The team was getting off the buses at the head of the Walk. The crowd was screaming out names of players. Meg edged through between two large men pushing forward with children on their shoulders and grabbed Tyler’s hand again. Meg

had no idea where they were going, but clearly Tyler did. He'd always had a good memory. It was practically photographic, or maybe it was and he'd simply never admitted it to Meg. When they had been in school, he had been able to learn all of the names of Lambda Psi's pledge classes within a matter of days. It had always impressed her. And she'd always been a little jealous. For class she took copious notes and still had to reference them occasionally when writing a paper or completing an assignment. He had taken notes, but she had never seen him refer to them.

"Do you have any idea where we're going?" Meg asked him as she closed the gap between them, cutting between two women complimenting each other's fashion choices.

"Yep. Memorized the Norwood home address from the file. Officially it's the home of Mrs. Norwood, Dale's mother. But it's also listed as his address. They live a little ways off the Square." Tyler told her.

The Square referred to the town Square, named for its focal point, Courthouse Square. The Historic Courthouse stood in the center of the Square and has since 1872 when it was rebuilt after being burned down in 1864. The Square, the heart of the Oxford town, was home to a variety of shops, restaurants, and bars and was indeed, the popular location for townies and undergrads alike to congregate, shop, and eat. Home to some of the nation's best Southern dining, date night on the Square, at least in Meg's undergrad experience, is best held early in the evening or during the week.

Meg was surprised that the Norwoods would have a home so near the Square. Real estate prices there were outrageous, even for small apartments. She'd looked into it

once as an undergrad and concluded quickly that commuter life was for her, or at least her pocket book, after all.

The crowd was more spread out at the edge of the Grove. They had walked nearly its entire ten acres, and Tyler, despite the traffic blocks, checked both ways before crossing the street and continued to lead their journey. Though the crowd was primarily behind them walking to the stadium or watching the Walk of Champions, Meg was still dodging the occasional person and stepping double time to keep up with Tyler.

They crossed the bridge over the road, passed the Ford Center for the Performing Arts, and marched passed the band hall and the University Museum. Meg vowed that such a walk counted as exercise for the day; it felt like a long way to go in heels.

Tyler cut down a side street before arriving at the Square with a quick glance back at Meg to ensure she was keeping up. “Boys have no sensitivity to the nature of walking in high heels,” she thought. Many of her friends from Mississippi would likely have simply taken them off, but she had always had an insane, perhaps misplaced sense of pride in her ability to walk off the pain.

She kept a close eye on Tyler, knowing that without him she was going to be lost. He had a great sense of direction, and Meg simply did not. Luckily, as she turned the corner, she saw Tyler had stopped and was waiting in front of a small white house. Potted plants and flowers lined the front of the porch which was home to two white wicker chairs and their blue cushions.

Tyler gestured to the house, “Welcome to the home of the Norwoods.”

Tyler walked up the brick walkway cutting through the manicured lawn to the porch and turned. “You coming?”

Meg nodded and followed behind him. She had no idea what they were going to ask Dale Norwood. She didn’t know anything about the secret project Brianna was working on, and she wasn’t even certain that Dale Norwood was the appointment Brianna had noted in her planner with initials. When she’d been an undergrad she’d written appointments with professors as a time with the title of Professor. Meg glanced at Tyler.

“Were they here about Brianna or about Robert?” she wondered. She knew the FBI sometimes looked at Cold Cases, and she wondered if part of why Tyler was here was because of such an assignment. She shook her head. He would have told her.

Tyler hit the doorbell and chimes resounded through the house. “Let’s just see who’s home,” he told her.

For a moment, there was no answer. The silence of the seconds stretched into minutes, and Meg began to shift her feet.

“I don’t think...” she paused. A curtain beside the door pulled back an inch and a white face, sunken with lines and skin clinging, albeit, sagging, to its owner. From the porch, Meg could hear the sound of the deadbolt being pulled back into its socket as the door was unlocked.

“Charlie, come in. Come in,” the old woman said, waving her hands. “I haven’t seen you since Dale decided to transfer after that horrid night. Who’s this pretty lady?”



Tyler followed the woman in slowly, dumbfounded into speechlessness. Attempting to fill the silence, Meg introduced herself, “I’m Megan Anderson, ma’am. This is...”

Tyler, after a quick glance around the room, put his hand on Meg’s arm, causing her to pause.

“It’s good to see you Mrs. Norwood. I’m sorry I haven’t been around much. I thought maybe Dale would be here visiting for Fall break.” he said.

“Well, he’s back in town. But of course, with such a good football team he went to see the game. Even though he transferred, he still loves his Rebs. I’m sorry, Charlie, I’m being so rude. Can I make you and your lady, I’m sorry I already forgot your name...” Mrs. Norwood said.

Meg, still looking at Tyler in surprise, barely managed to respond. “Megan.”

“Right. Megan. I won’t forget this time. Dale is always telling me I’m forgetting, but I just keep telling him I’m a busy woman. Just preoccupied. Can I make you some tea?” she asked them.

Without waiting for a response, the woman shuffled behind a wall.

Meg whispered to Tyler, “What are you doing?”

“I’m talking to her. Isn’t it obvious? She has Alzheimer’s or at least something like it. She sees me as a slightly older Charlie than the last time she saw Brianna’s dad. I’m not going to make her uncomfortable by pointing out that I’m not who she thinks and she’s missing fifty some odd years of her life,” Tyler hissed back.

Meg was silenced.

“I won’t be a minute.” the woman croaked out from behind the wall.

Meg remembered Tyler had some kind of relation that had died of Alzheimer’s. Maybe an aunt? A grandmother? Close friend of the family? No wonder he had recognized what was happening instantly. She simply looked at him, realizing that he was still waiting for a response. Without knowing what else to say, she just nodded.

Mrs. Norwood had not returned from the kitchen so Meg took the opportunity to look around the room. She hadn’t paid much attention in their short entrance as she’d been distracted by Tyler’s willingness to play a part that was not his in a play that was not theirs.

They were in a living room. Pictures lined the wooden mantelpiece above a small fireplace. Meg looked more closely at them. There was a woman with sandy brown hair sitting in front of a gentleman who clutched her shoulder. They were smiling. Something about the way the hair was done, or perhaps the high structure of the cheekbone gave away that this was a much younger Mrs. Norwood. Though her cheeks merely hung on her face like clothes hung out to dry, the old woman’s bones set a high placed clothesline.

Next to the picture of the Norwoods was a black and white picture of three boys in freshmen beanies, the kind Meg had only seen in movies. They were all dressed similarly, in slacks and polos. They smiled as they stood next to each other in what Meg assumed was a backyard with a picnic table replete with food being kept warm by the sun. She leaned in as she realized that the boy on the right had dark black hair, just like Tyler. She nodded to the picture, wondering which was Dale. Behind her, a clinking of

cups could be heard, and she quickly turned as Ms. Norwood carried in a tray of tea and finger food.

“Please sit down. Any friend of Charlie’s is a friend of mine,” the woman said with a smile.

Tyler hadn’t sat yet either, but Meg walked next to him. They both sat on the couch opposite Mrs. Norwood.

As the old woman poured the tea, she asked Tyler. “So Charlie what brings you here? Is everything going well with your classes?”

“Yes ma’am, I’m enjoying school. I just wanted to come by and visit. Like I said, see if I could catch Dale on his Fall Break. Do you know when he’ll be back from the game?” Tyler asked.

Mrs. Norwood handed Meg a cup of tea. “Oh, you never know with him. Sometimes he’s back in the afternoons, sometimes it’s later. You know how he is. Honestly though, he hasn’t been the same since Robert died. Terrible what happened. We don’t talk about it though. Dale isn’t ready.”

“Of course, of course. I won’t bring it up with him ma’am. Is that really why he transferred? Robert?”

“That isn’t what he said of course. He told us and you too, I’m sure, that he would be happier elsewhere. I doubt it. He’s always loved Ole Miss. But with that negro getting admitted and the unrest of that night...and Robert, I think it was just a lot all at once. He

needed some distance. But we don't talk about it. He isn't ready. Do you understand me Charles Mayes?" Mrs. Norwood asked.

"Yes ma'am. I won't bring it up. I honestly just wanted to visit. See how he was," Tyler responded.

Mrs. Norwood smiled a dentured smile. "You always were such a good friend. You boys got so close after rush. I think Dale's father was disappointed when he left Ole Miss partially because he wouldn't have those fraternity ties anymore."

Tyler nodded. "Yes ma'am. We miss him."

Mrs. Norwood smiled. "Nice of you to say so. But I'm sure you have others you miss too. It seemed like so many students transferred after that negro came."

"Sure, some did," Tyler commented.

"Well after all the..." she pursed her lips, and Meg glanced down into her tea. She hadn't taken a sip but was simply holding the china cup. Perhaps for the first time in her life, she had no idea how to communicate within the conversation. "Unrest. Yes, after all the unrest, let's call it, you can hardly blame them. You know, Dale came and slept here for a few days after it all happened. It was the first time he'd come home all Fall. He'd call out in his sleep. Especially to Robert," Mrs. Norwood said.

"Did you ever ask him why?" Meg asked quietly, finding a voice.

Mrs. Norwood shook her head, "We don't talk about it. Dale isn't ready. He just needs time and distance is all. I just couldn't believe that you boys had to see some of it when you got back from the game. It's too bad you boys didn't come home earlier. Then

you never would have been out in it at all. Trying to find a parking space. Hmmf. And Robert never would have decided to get out and walk to the dorms. He'd probably be sitting here having tea with us and a pretty lady of his own."

Tyler nodded. "Yes ma'am. We should've come back sooner."

"You could've had dinner with us here," she told them.

"Yes ma'am. Well, it's been nice visiting with you Mrs. Norwood, but I best be getting back. Fraternity chores and homework awaits," Tyler said putting down the cup he'd never taken a sip from. Without further direction, Meg did the same.

"Of course. Of course. It was good to see you, Charlie. I'll tell Dale you came by."

Tyler shook his head. "Oh no, that's okay ma'am. I'll stop by some other time to catch him. Let it be a bit of a surprise."

Mrs. Norwood smiled and ushered them out, shuffling slowly ahead of them down the walkway. She opened the door and held it for them. "Okay Charlie. Whatever you say. But, Charlie, you remember what I said. No talking to Dale about what happened. Or about Robert. He's not ready. You understand me?"

"Yes ma'am," Tyler said again. "Good seeing you Mrs. Norwood."

She waved and shut the door behind them.

## Chapter 16

September 1962

The afternoon faded into the darkness. The crowd shrunk and grew. Students left for dinner and homework, dates and the library. But not Charlie, nor Dale and Robert. They stayed.

Charlie looked around him, still angry, but unable to turn away. The Marshalls stood, surrounding the Lyceum. They called on a bull horn for the crowd to disperse. Said they were there at the order of the government.

Charlie shook his head. From the corner of his eyes, he could see others doing the same.

“Nigger lovers!”

“Commies!”

The shouts echoed across the circle as the crowd nodded in agreement.

Robert cleared his throat, “Charlie. Dale. Look, over there.” He motioned to his right, where several men in white shirts with rolled up sleeves stood and added to the shouting.

“They aren’t from here. Do you recognize them?” Charlie asked.

Dale and Robert both shook their heads. "They must not be students," Dale said.

Charlie and Robert both nodded.

Charlie frowned as shouts echoed around him. He looked around again. There were less faces he recognized. The faces looked older; they had more facial hair—complete five o'clock shadows. Not patches in need of shaving. The shouting got louder.

"Mississippi is sovereign!"

"Go home nigger lovers!"

"Commies! Go Home!"

Charlie looked around again and rubbed his arms. He wasn't sure how he felt about all the unfamiliar faces. The Marshalls were one force, but this variety of outsiders, even if they agreed with him, were still outsiders. Perhaps they would get the Marshalls to leave. He felt himself shrug.

As his shoulder fell, he saw a brick flying in the air above the crowd. Towards the United States Marshalls. Charlie felt his eyes widen. Someone must have gotten a brick from the construction site nearby.

"What the hell was that?" Robert asked, his voice rising even as the shouting around them increased.

"It's starting," Dale responded. "We're going to make a stand."

Charlie found himself frowning. "I don't really think violence is the solution here, Dale. You seem pretty excited about this."

Robert interjected, "I think we need to get out of here. Beyond the brick throwing, it's probably not good for the fraternity for us to be here. Let's go."

"No! Absolutely not. This is to keep Mississippi sovereign! And to preserve our way of life! And our heritage. We have to stay," Dale said.

Charlie looked from one friend to the other and sighed. "Robert, we don't have to participate but I want to see what happens. Don't you? I mean, we have our way of life, our rights, our school. And it's threatened. Can't you see it?" he gestured towards the Marshalls.

Robert nodded. "But all those people, they aren't from here. What are they doing?"

"Supporting us," Dale replied. "Come on!" He picked up a rock and threw it towards the Lyceum. "GO HOME!" he yelled to the Marshalls.

Charlie couldn't believe that Dale had thrown something at Federal officers. He looked around and realized that Dale was not the only one. Men in dirty jeans and white t-shirts were throwing rocks, sticks, bricks, and anything else they could find. Projectiles, of any variety, were a weapon of the crowd. The shouting, once intermittent, had become constant.

Charlie turned to Robert, "Dale's right, man. We can't leave. If it gets worse, we will. But maybe the Marshalls will leave. Maybe they'll leave us alone."



Robert crossed his arms.

Dale grabbed their shoulders. "Come on!" he yelled.

And just as he turned, a projectile came flying from the Lyceum. As it hurled through the air, there was a trail of yellow smoke like a firework puffing away, unable to fully ignite.

Charlie clamped his hands over his face. His eyes burned. And his lungs were on fire. Coughing, he turned and began to run. He hoped Robert and Dale were behind him. He ran across the grass until the vapors seemed to dissipate a little. Charlie leaned against the statue of a Confederate soldier at the front of the Circle and tried to breathe in fresh air. "What the hell?" he asked between gasps.

"They'll pay for that!" Dale yelled, then gasped again.

Others gathered around the statue with them. All of them huffing and puffing. Some held handkerchiefs over their faces; others coughed into their hands.

A member of the crowd yelled to regroup. "We're going back! We're taking a stand!"

All around Charlie, members of the crowd cheered and agreed.

Charlie found himself nodding with the crowd even as he mentally acknowledged the danger. Across the grass, he could see the Marshalls. Still standing in front of his school. He felt his fists clench at his sides.

“Dale, Charlie. We should go. This is only going to escalate. I don’t want to go to school with a nigras either, but I ain’t goin to jail over it. Or worse,” Robert commented, looking back and forth from Charlie to Dale.

Charlie watched as a car entered the Circle. Someone said they were journalists. Members of the crowd ran towards it, hurling projectiles and screaming profanities. “Go home nigger lovers, you mother fuckers!” He shook his head; Robert was right. What was he doing here?

“What man, you won’t stand up for your school, your state? Your heritage? You a commie like them? I thought you were better than that! We have to make a stand Robert!” Dale said in reply.

Despite the wreckage he had just witnessed, Charlie found himself nodding again. The crowd yelled. Charlie saw a man begin running toward the construction sites. Getting more bricks without a doubt.

“We’re going back! Come on men!” echoed through the crowd.

The group surged forward. Charlie found himself running with them; Dale was ahead of him, arms and voice raised with the crowd. As they neared the Marshalls, they unloaded rocks, bricks, and empty tear gas canisters back at the uniformed invaders.

Charlie felt his arm lift and throw a rock in their direction. What was he doing?

“Mississippi is sovereign,” he heard himself yell.

Out of the cover of trees, he saw a bulldozer driving in the circle. A man in a white t-shirt steered it straight towards the Lyceum and the line of Marshalls around it. The Marshalls unleashed another load of tear gas. Charlie, coughing once again, ran.

As he ran, he heard the shouts within the crowd. "Reporter!"

"Get him!" the crowd yelled.

Charlie's lungs still burned, and it wasn't from physical exertion. He kept running.

A rifle sounded in the distance.

What was he doing here?

The shot echoed, and gunfire became a constant echo in the cacophony. Charlie stopped and looked around once more. "What am I doing here," he asked himself again. He could barely make out Dale and Robert amid the rising fumes, creeping like fog over the Circle. There were so many faces and so few of them were recognizable.

Ole Miss had just over 4000 students. He didn't know all of them, of course not. But he'd seen them at games, in the dining hall, at fraternity parties, and walking around campus. The group, originally a few hundred students in the afternoon, had grown. There had to be nearly two thousand people gathered. And most were not students.

Charlie shook his head as he listened to guns going off, orders for the Marshalls to fire more tear gas, and the shouts "Nigger Lover" and "Communists."

Dale walked up and slapped him on the back, “They’ll have to retreat. We’ll whip those dirty commies and send that nigras packing! Yes, sir!”

Robert stood and walked up and stood beside them. “Can we leave yet?”

Charlie paused.

“Of course not! We’ve got ‘em right where we want ‘em boys!” Dale yelled, and Charlie sighed.

“I guess Dale,” he said, looking at the Lyceum.

The vapors rose above it like the smoke rose over Atlanta nearly a century before. Charlie found himself wondering how the Southerners had felt to watch their homes, their way of life, and their livelihood get torched, the smoking embers the only reminder of everything that was gone with the wind. He felt he could relate. Men were shooting at the Marshalls, but the Marshalls stood in front of the columns of his school, the building at its center, its core.

He sighed again, and Robert asked again to leave.

Charlie shook his head, and looked up as the crowd yelled that General Edwin Walker was here to lead them to the steps of the Lyceum. “Maybe we have a chance at this thing,” Charlie told his friends. Without waiting for a response, he walked towards the statue, where General Walker, in his cowboy hat, was addressing the crowd.

“...and in Arkansas, I was on the wrong side. Not tonight men. Don’t let your honorable governor down! Stay with Ross Barnett! We’re ready! We will have reinforcements, men! They are coming from all over the nation to support our cause! The

government has started this, bloodshed is on their hands. We will finish it, men! We must charge.” Walker shouted.

The crowd cheered and began to turn towards the steps of the Lyceum. Shots fired, and tear gas canisters hurled through the air.

As Charlie ran with the group, he saw a boy he recognized. His large limbering frame ran through the crowd. After a second, he recognized him as Buck Randell, one of their best football players. What was he doing here?

“Turn back. People are hurt. I’ve seen it inside the doors! Stop! They’re so many injured!” Randell yelled.

Still watching Buck run through the crowd, arms waving, Charlie felt his gait slow. He watched Buck continue to run, just as he did on the grid iron, but this time it was a run for peace. Charlie looked around again. What was he doing here?

He stopped and shook his head. Robert had been right. This had escalated, and from what he could see, would continue to escalate. How many times would they run to the Marshalls throwing whatever weapon they could gather? How many times would the tear gas fill their lungs?

He searched the crowd. “Robert! Dale!” he called out to his friends.

The only answer was jeers, the never ending banter of the crowd.

He called out again, “Robert! Dale”

Turning around, he searched the faces of those running behind him. There was not a single face he recognized. Men were pouring from a gas can into bottles and ripping strips of their shirts off. Molotov cocktails. He heard another gunshot. "What am I doing here?" he asked himself again.

Without waiting any longer, he turned and ran from the Circle. From the Riot.

## Chapter 17

Meg and Tyler walked back to the road in silence. Meg was thinking about the picture of the three boys she had seen. They had seemed so happy, and in a matter of weeks, the unrest over integration would result in their separation. She had done the math. They would have been freshmen at the time. How long could they have known each other? And yet, glancing at Tyler, she thought of the bonds in fraternities. Maybe pledge classes got closer faster in those days. After barely a month of knowing each other, most of the classes she'd witnessed were still learning each other's names. Then again, if she remembered correctly, rush happened the week before school started in the '60s. The group could have met before ever officially becoming brothers. They could have been each other's first acquaintances during Rush.

"What do you think?" Tyler asked, glancing back at the house once again.

"I don't understand why Dale transferred. Or why she was so adamant that no one speak to him about what happened. And honestly, I feel like we just wasted some serious time. I don't see how any of that connects back to Brianna," Meg answered with a sigh. She glanced up at the sky and noted the sun had already begun its descent. She clutched her arms again, knowing the walk back to campus would be much cooler than the one they'd made to the Norwood residence.

Tyler nodded. “Look, if Brianna was looking into what happened to her uncle back then, she may very well have found Dale Norwood to talk to him. Don’t you think it’s odd that his mother, even with Alzheimer’s, insists they don’t talk about it?” he asked.

“I don’t think it was a very pretty sight back then. I can understand not wanting to talk about it.” Meg answered. “But I will admit, I did think it was strange that Dale seemed to have told his mother that they had stumbled upon the riot. From what I understand, the students that were present for it were there from fairly early on. And numbers wise, there were significantly more people there who weren’t students.”

“Right. But some were there. But I don’t buy Dale’s story about how they got there. I think Dale Norwood knows more than he said in the reports,” Tyler said.

Meg threw up her hands. “Tyler, focus! I understand that Dale Norwood might be hiding something. But if he is it’s about what happened in the sixties. Brianna Mayes died on Thursday. We’re trying to find out what happened to her, remember?”

Tyler nodded and touched her shoulder, “I just think it’s an avenue worth pursuing. We’ll talk to Davis about it, okay? But I think we need to consider this. Brianna may have met with Dale Norwood before she died. If so, it might be important that he is or at the very least, was hiding something.”

Meg ran her hands through her hair then back down over her face. “You’re right. I’m sorry. I just...I’m supposed to leave tomorrow.”

“Then we better make every second count,” Tyler.



Just as Tyler turned from her to lead her back to campus, Dale Norwood turned onto the street. Meg nodded his direction as soon as she saw him, “Tyler, that’s him.”

As they approached each other, Meg could tell Norwood recognized her. He’d seen them standing in front of his home, and she wasn’t sure how to address it. “What are you doing here?” he asked, gesturing to his porch.

“Mr. Norwood, I’m Tyler White. I believe you’ve met Meg Anderson. I had a few questions regarding Brianna Mayes and Robert Bolden. If we could come in and speak to you.” Tyler said coolly.

Meg watched as Norwood’s face turned red. “It looks like you’ve already been in. Did you talk to my mother? She’s very sick! I don’t need some strangers confusing her!”

“We didn’t confuse her, Mr. Norwood. We just let her talk to us. We wanted to speak with you.” Meg said.

“I have an office! You could have visited me there! Or called. You could have called. You certainly did not need to disturb my mother! You think I want to take the time to talk to you when my mother is inside?” he asked, face turning another shade of red. “If you have business with me! You talk to me! Period! Excuse me!” he shoved through them and as he turned into his drive, the slam of the small gate echoed across the sidewalk.

Meg allowed the silence to hang in the air for a moment. She wasn’t sure what to say even if she wanted to speak. Tyler frowned at the house, but said nothing. He simply

turned away from it and began walking. Meg began to follow and her phone rang. The dub step melody caused her to flinch. She had forgotten she even had her phone with her.

“Meg Anderson,” she answered as she continued walking.

“Hey Meg. It’s Scott McCord.”

Meg felt her eyes widen. Scott McCord was her news director. It was his job to assign stories or approve a reporter’s pitch. He determined the lineup for the newscast.

“Yes. Scott? What can I do for you?” she asked.

“I just wanted to check on you. You heard anything about this co-ed while you’ve been in Oxford? We have extra time slots tomorrow so I thought we’d put you on it. You’ll get a live shot if you can get it written and fact checked on time. You might want to come back a little early to get an editing bay. Can you do that?” he asked.

Meg squeezed her eyes shut. “I’m aware of it, but the investigators haven’t concluded their investigation yet. They’re pursuing all leads ya-de-dah. You know,” she said.

“But it was ruled homicide?” he asked.

“Yes, but it’s still unsolved. Listen, I don’t think...”

“Really? Well, keep me posted on that. It isn’t technically our area but a death on a football weekend might have an interesting angle. Football is national interest,” he said.

“Yes, I’ve considered that already. Listen, I don’t think I’ll be able to...”

“You’re a good reporter, Meg. See you tomorrow,” Scott said and hung up.

Meg looked down at her phone. She usually really liked Scott. Generally, he listened to her ideas and allowed her to pursue the leads she wanted. He assigned stories, sure. That was part of his job. But he gave her the live shots when she felt she'd earned them and was willing to work with her to help her improve. That was the first time he had interrupted and ignored what she was trying to say so completely. Whatever the reason, Scott wanted her on this story. She sighed. She was officially scheduled to be back in the studio within twenty four hours.

“Who was that? Davis?” Tyler asked.

Meg shook her head. “My news director. He wants me in studio to report on this. Tomorrow.”

“Oh.” Tyler said. Before he could elaborate further, Meg’s phone rang once again.

This time she checked the caller ID before answering. It was Heard.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hey. It’s Davis. I just took a break and went back to the station. I have the information on Brianna’s phone. The GPS is dead, but I have information on phone calls made and received. When are you guys getting back from the Norwoods? I thought we could get some food and discuss this.”

“We’re walking back now,” she told him.

“And did you find anything out?”

“Dale wasn’t there. We talked to his elderly mother. Which made him pretty angry when we ran into him as we were leaving. I’ll fill you in when we get back,” she said.

They said their goodbyes and hung up.

“Davis has information about who Brianna’s been calling and who has been calling her I guess. Wants us to meet up and get dinner to talk about it,” Meg told Tyler.

“Alright. Come on.” Tyler said.

## Chapter 18

September 1962

The click of the door behind him ushered in the first feeling of relief Charlie experienced since he'd started running. He felt like a coward. He'd left his friends behind. He reached for the door knob again and then watched his hand fall away. He turned and leaned against the wood. He couldn't go back. He didn't belong there. Not with all those guys yelling and screaming, shooting and throwing bricks. No, he didn't belong there. What had he been thinking?

He reached for the doorknob again, and once again watched his hand fall. Robert and Dale didn't belong there either. Surely, Robert would leave soon. Surely, he would convince Dale to come along.

Ross Barnett wouldn't let a nigras go to school at the University of Mississippi. Surely this battle would show the federal government that it was best not to force integration on them. They had an education to pursue.

Charlie walked from the door and stared at his room. With a sigh, he realized that tonight would decide whether the Negro Meredith graduated from the University of Mississippi or not. Whether Barnett closed the school, the feds forced Meredith in and kept it open or their segregated system was upheld would be decided. The silence in the

room was deafening. Charlie sighed again, partially for the noise and partially because though he didn't want to admit it to himself, he was scared.

What was going to happen?

The Lyceum, the school had already survived so much conflict. Oxford, the town, had been burned during the Civil War. Not Ole Miss, though. The school had been invaded, but it had stood. It just changed hands. The Lyceum had served as a hospital during the Battle of Shiloh. Charlie thought of Buck Randell running through the crowd. History was repeating itself; Buck had been running from the Lyceum saying that people were hurt in there.

General Grant himself had ridden through the doors of the Lyceum, in one end and out the other. But the school had stood.

Its students hadn't been so lucky. An entire class of Ole Miss students had died at the high water mark at Gettysburg in Picket's Charge. They were noted to have been the best dressed unit in the Confederate Army, a tradition carried on in the Grove every game day with fans dressing in their best to support the football team. The band played From Dixie with Love and the school honored its fallen dead. Those who fought bravely and died for their home.

Charlie walked to the little square window in his room. He looked out towards the Circle and wondered how many students were still out there, fighting with the men from all over the nation. Was history indeed repeating itself? Was that what was happening?

Charlie shook his head. It wasn't the same, exactly. The University Grays had died in a war for their country. They had died in service. In the military. What was happening outside was not an organized effort against an enemy. It was violence against a court order, a fight against change, a change he did not welcome either. But it was not a war effort, it was, he admitted, something different.

Unable to look out anymore, Charlie closed the blinds and turned away from the window. He sat on the bed and watched the door. Any minute now, Robert would walk in and they would say they'd seen it. They would talk about what the paper would say in the morning and guess whether or not Ole Miss would accept its first Negro student.

Charlie, still staring at the door, shook his head again. A nigras at Ole Miss. What did it mean? Would Ole Miss stay open? How much would change?

He forced himself not to think about it and checked his watch instead. It was late. The door was still closed.

Like a pebble rolling down a hill and unleashing an avalanche, Charlie felt the first pangs of guilt seep into his consciousness. He had left them.

Glancing at the clock, he realized it was late, or rather early in the morning. With a sigh, he decided he would busy himself by getting ready for bed. That would pass some time and perhaps, after he showered and readied himself for the day, Robert would be back. Maybe Dale would even be with him.

Charlie gathered a towel, his shower caddy, and shower shoes and went to shower.

He didn't spend long in the shower. He let the soap suds wash away the lingering stench of tear gas, smoke, and dirt. But after soaping and shampooing, he was finished. Though he was trying to kill time, he wasn't in the mood to linger. Not with his school in such a precarious position. Not with his friends out amid a group of men shooting and terrorizing. Not with a nighrah trying to upset everything. "Damn nighrah doesn't belong here anyway," he muttered to himself as he walked down the hall from the shower, shower caddy swinging at his side.

He took a breath outside his door. Surely Robert would be there. He would be. He wanted to leave earlier in the night. No way would he have stayed, not when they started throwing Molotov cocktails. Not with so much gunfire. Not with so much tear gas.

Charlie opened the door, reassuring himself that Robert would be lounging in his bed and Dale would be seated in a desk chair. They would be there.

But the hinge squeaked back and revealed an empty room. The creases and jumbling of covers on his bed, created by his sitting on it less than an hour before, was untouched. Robert's bedding was still straight; the pillows were still fluffed and leaning against the wall. The desk chairs were tucked beneath the flat wooden surface, unmoved. Charlie entered the room and accepted his solitude.

They would be back soon.

He got into bed. He was tired, but instead of closing his eyes, he stared at the white ceiling. There was not a single speck on it. The immaculate surface stretched out



above him. He stared at it and waited for the sound of someone clutching and turning the doorknob.

The light filtered in through the window, streaming across his bed and waking Charlie up. He must have dozed off sometime early in the morning while waiting for Robert's return. He quickly glanced over at Robert's side of the room.

The bed was still made; there was not even a crease in the sheets. The desk chair was still tucked neatly underneath its desk. All of Robert's things were in all the same places. He had not returned.

Charlie pulled his covers back and got out of bed to look out the window. Where were they? What had happened to his friends, his brothers?

The same feeling of guilt that had wrenched his stomach and tore at his heart the night before returned. He had left them. And they had not returned.

Charlie had to get ready for class. He couldn't sit in his dorm all day waiting for Robert to return no matter how concerned he was.

Maybe Robert had gone back to Dale's room and slept on the floor. It wouldn't be the first time something like that had happened. Or maybe they had both gone to the fraternity house and slept in the Chapter Room. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened either.

Still pondering all the places his friends could have gone and trying to ignore the thought of jail, he began getting ready for school. He grabbed a pair of khakis, loafers,

and a polo and began to dress. He stacked the books and notebooks necessary for his classes on his desk. and checked his watch.

He needed to leave if he was going to get breakfast.

Charlie glanced around the room again, letting his eyes settle on Robert's side. He wanted to believe that Robert had come in the night, slept, and had simply woken up early that morning. He wanted to believe that Robert and Dale would greet him at the dining hall and give him a hard time about sleeping through so much excitement. He wanted to believe nothing had changed. But looking at Robert's side of the room where everything was so perfectly in place and yet, by that very fact, out of place, he knew he couldn't fool himself. He wanted to believe nothing had changed. But everything had changed.

## Chapter 19

The hike back to campus did not seem nearly as long as the walk from it. Meg wondered if that was because her feet had simply gone numb or if it was because she had accepted fully that she was going to miss the game. Off in the distance, cannon fired. Ole Miss score. She sighed. It was the right decision of course, especially since Scott had requested that she cover the story the same night she was scheduled to return. She had an obligation to fulfill to Jordan and, admittedly Brianna, who had become a friend she'd never known. It seemed the more she learned of the girl the more interesting she became. If she'd have known her while she'd been alive, Meg was sure they would have been friends.

When they arrived back at the Grove, it was essentially vacant. Though there were always those who chose to stay and tailgate and watch the game on generator powered televisions, the majority of the crowd had followed the team hours before to Lock the Vaught, arm and arm, swaying side to side, as the team raced in and scream the Hotty Toddy until the rebels reached victory. Or defeat.

Meg and Tyler marched straight through the Grove, unimpeded by vast groups of people as they had been when they left. Their car was parked off campus. The University was always a parking nightmare on game days. There simply were not enough spaces, so Tyler and Meg, as fairly recent and savvy alums had opted to park in the lot across from the University entrance to Fraternity Row.

Upon their arrival at the car, Meg quickly texted Davis and they determined they would meet at his home for dinner. He was officially off the clock. He'd worked all day, but he'd managed to escape post-game traffic duty. Tyler started the engine as soon as Davis texted the directions to his home, and they quickly made their way down the through the streets of Oxford. As they circled through the Square, Meg looked out the window. A black man sat on the steps of the courthouse circle near a Confederate statue. He held up a sign that said "Anti-racism is racism." Another sign leaned against his side. "Affirmative Action is Racist." The man met Meg's eyes through the window. She could barely make out the lines in his face, but somehow she sensed he'd worked for everything he'd received in life. She looked away from him, and they continued driving off the square and onto some back streets of Oxford.

They pulled into the driveway of Davis's small dwelling as the sun dipped below the horizon, casting shadows across the Mississippi landscape. They stared at the house before them. Meg hadn't been sure what to expect, but a manicured lawn and a porch with wooden furniture was not it. There were no flowers, no welcome mat, and no door deck. There was however a grill on a patio beside the home. She supposed that was the way of bachelorhood. It was a small house, built for one.

Before they even got out of the car, Heard opened the door and leaned against the wooden railing, a chocolate lab grinning beside him. He reached down and scratched behind his ears.

"Hey, you didn't tell me you had a dog," Meg said as she closed the car door behind her. In the corner of her eye, she could see Tyler smile. He had always loved

dogs, and they had always displayed their own partiality towards him. It had frustrated Meg when they had volunteered at the Oxford Lafayette Humane Society together during their undergraduate days. It was like being the responsible aunt to a small child whose other relative always bought sweets, ice cream, and cake. She eventually accepted that she would always be second rate to dogs when Tyler was present. Her suspicions were once again confirmed when Davis's lab loped over to Tyler and quickly licked his hand when Tyler stretched it out before his nose.

"His name is Dex. He's a terrible guard dog. Likes everyone, and he's pretty good company. Potatoes and burgers sound okay for dinner? I'm afraid I'm not the best cook in the world." Heard said.

Tyler and Meg both nodded and followed him back into the house. Dex, opting to cheat on his owner, chose to walk in beside Tyler.

"So what'd you find out?" Heard asked, opening the fridge and grabbing a beer. As if he mentally heard his mother remind him that he was the host, he quickly added, "You guys want anything? Beer? Wine? Coke?"

Meg took a bottle of Coke and Tyler popped the top on a beer. They quickly filled Heard in on the day's events at Mrs. Norwood's home.

He nodded as they told him of her reminders not to talk to Dale about what had happened and her references to Tyler as Charlie. By the time they'd finished, Davis was pulling ranch fries out of the oven and melting cheese over burgers.

“What about you, man? What was on the phone records?” Tyler asked, finishing the detailing of his and Meg’s work for the day.

“Well, obviously there were repeating numbers. Brianna was probably one of the few college students who called her parents nearly every day,” Heard told them.

Meg felt the blood rush to her face. She had called her mother once a day, and sometimes twice a day. And she had called her brother once or twice a week. Her dad had received calls from her once a week or so, depending on how busy he was. Still did. Brianna hadn’t been the only one with such a close relationship to her family.

Heard put a plate in front of her and gestured to ketchup and mustard bottles he’d already set on the counter as he continued talking. “But there were a few other recurring numbers. It seems Kimberly Simpson had placed nearly a dozen phone calls to Brianna over the past week. Few of which lasted more than thirty seconds,” he said.

Meg watched as Tyler frowned despite Davis setting a plate of food in front of him. “So what? Kimberly was prank calling Brianna? Thirty seconds is hardly enough time to say anything,” Tyler mentioned.

Heard nodded, “I don’t know what if anything was said. But Kimberly didn’t mention calling Brianna. And from the looks of it, Kimberly didn’t start making these calls until recently. Based on our timeline, I don’t think it started until after their confrontation.”

Heard frowned and shook his head, and Meg spoke up, “So what’s Kimberly hiding then? There’s got to be more to this. Maybe she saw the editorial Brianna wrote and that fueled her anger?”

Tyler and Heard both shrugged.

“I don’t know, Davis. I’m not totally sure I buy this as a motive for murder. I get that Kimberly is upset, and probably is still angry. But I don’t know, it strikes me as a bit juvenile. And like a girl who is using the race card to create hate,” Tyler said. He dropped his French fry and looked up, clearing his throat. “No offense. I didn’t mean...” he let his sentence trail off.

Heard threw aside the dish towel he’d been using to hold the cookie sheet as he helped himself to a second helping of fries down and sighed. “I’m not offended. I’m offended by what she’s doing. Giving the entire race a bad name by hating and crying racism over something that isn’t,” he shook his head. “It’s not important...”

Meg didn’t hear the rest of his sentence. The journalist in her was intrigued. What could he mean? Her fingers tingled. Even so, she was certain she could never write a story about it. Some people may be interested, but some might find it offensive. She felt herself inwardly sigh. Scott would never approve it even if she could get Heard to discuss the topic in more detail.

“Did you hear anything I just said?” Heard asked, waving a hand in front of her face.

Meg swallowed her bite of burger, savoring the juicy beef and cheese combo, and shook her head. “Sorry, good burger. What were you saying?” she asked.

Both the boys shook their heads. “What?” Meg asked again.

“It’s the calls Brianna herself made in the past two weeks. She called the University Archives at the JD once, the Mississippi Cold Case Unit, and even more interesting, the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. And, the office number of the Southern Studies department. Which leads me to the next interesting recurring phone number, the office phone of Professor Dale Norwood,” Heard said.

Meg dropped her food. “No way!”

Davis nodded, “Yes way.”

Tyler clapped his hands together, “I had a gut feeling this was related somehow. We need to talk about it with Dale Norwood himself. Find out why he’s never mentioned this.”

Heard nodded, “At the moment however, all we know is that he was there in the 1960s when Robert Bolden was killed and that Brianna was trying to get in touch with him. These other numbers may not be related. Or they might be. We have to remember that this doesn’t really do anything besides give us more questions. Honestly, I think this may be the best lead we have on why Kimberly was so angry. Maybe the Huck Finn confrontation was just the beginning of it all.”

Meg felt herself nodding, “I agree. This could be the piece we’ve been missing.”



After dinner, the three adjourned to Davis's front porch. Though the sounds of the stadium could not quite be heard from such a distance, Meg could tell by the way they all glanced towards the Vaught that all of them wondered the outcome of the rivalry game. Did the corndogs win or did the Rebels triumph? Was there a victory party at the Grove, pouring into the bars at the Square or were Rebel fans drinking away their sorrows?

Meg resisted the urge to check the score on her phone. Somehow pulling up her score center application didn't feel right.

She glanced up at Davis, who was commenting on the approaching cold weather. Though they were spending time together, they had avoided the topic of Brianna, what she'd been doing before her demise, and any theories they might have about the matter after the dishes had been carefully rinsed and placed in the dishwasher. Instead they had talked a little about themselves, their favorite professional sports teams, and their childhoods.

Meg glanced up at Davis again. She was still curious about what he'd said at dinner. About Kimberly giving an entire race a bad name. She thought back to their discussion over burgers at Handy Andy's. He'd mentioned similar sentiments then too.

"Hey, Davis, can I ask you a question?" Meg asked, unable to resist any longer. Respecting the social boundary of the taboo and political correctness had never been her strong point. She was blunt and honest. And more curious than Pandora herself.

Heard took a sip of his beer. "Shoot."

Before she responded, Meg realized that if he was offended by her question he could block her from continuing with the investigation. Finding out what happened to Brianna was more important to her, so she backpedaled. “Well, I don’t know. You know, never mind.” Meg said. “I’m not sure I should ask.”

“What do you mean you aren’t sure you should ask?” Heard responded.

“I just...I don’t want to offend you. Or say the wrong thing. I just... It’s not important. Not important to the investigation or anything. I was just curious. It’s not important.” Meg said.

“Speak your mind, Ms. Anderson. Why are you afraid to?” he asked.

“I just was thinking about this old man Tyler and I saw on the Square. He had signs that said that Affirmative Action is racist and Anti-Racism is racism. And then I was thinking about what you said earlier. Like I said it’s not important. I was just...I don’t know. Is that over a line? I don’t know. Never mind,” she said, running a hand through her hair. Tyler took a sip of his beer. She knew he wasn’t going to say anything about it. Heard turned away from her and looked into the night.

“Ms. Anderson, why are you nervous to ask? Because I’m black?” Heard asked.

“I just don’t want to appear to be something I’m not,” she said.

“I’m not Kimberly, Ms. Anderson,” Heard said without turning back to her.

Meg didn’t respond at first. The silence hung between them. She still wanted to know. “What did you mean by all that at dinner? About Kimberly giving an entire race a bad name? You mentioned some similar feelings at Handy Andy’s the other night too. I

know, I probably shouldn't be asking. I wasn't going to. But then you just weren't saying anything. I just...it's interesting. I'm curious. If it's too out of line, just ignore it. Pretend I never asked," she said, putting down her drink. She ran a hand through her hair once more, and hoped she hadn't said something wrong.

She could feel Tyler staring at her. Unable to meet his eyes, she knew he disapproved. He was better at diplomacy. While she tended to run headfirst into the questions or the problem, Tyler would think and calmly set a course for calmer waters. She didn't usually mind rapids as long as she got where she wanted to go.

Heard set his beer down on his railing and sighed without turning back towards her. "Well, Meg. I don't know. It's a little hard to explain and not necessarily the most popular opinion. If you or Tyler said it out loud and in public, people, black and white, would call you a racist. Maybe, maybe it's me that's out of sorts. But I don't think so. I...some things have just gotten out of hand is all."

He paused. For a moment, Meg wasn't sure he was going to continue, but as she began to open her mouth to ask him to go on, he hung his head and continued.

"I know a lot of black people who say that the whites are keeping us down. That those dirty crackers been keeping us down since the days of slavery. It irritates me. Every time. Without fail. Every time. If I ever have children, I'd probably whip their ass or I dunno, ground them. Something. I'd punish them for that kind of talk. African Americans haven't been slaves for nearly two centuries now. And we've had equal opportunity for at least what? Half a century or more. And yet, still I hear people saying they can't make something of themselves because of the crackers. They talk with the same vehement

hatred that men in hoods might use. But they don't wear hoods. They don't wear anything. They have no mantra beyond their pathetic excuses for all their insurmountable odds. And so, because they are making excuses and blaming others, they hate the whites. They say cracker with the same disdain that people once said nigger. And what? It's okay because they're black? No. It's not.

We all say we've come so far, made so many strides. But the truth is there will always be prejudice. Are there still white people out there who are racist redneck hicks? You betcha. But they aren't all Southerners. Or all Mississippians. Or all the Ole Miss students. Or whatever. There will always be prejudice. There will always be some people out there with hate in their hearts. And they will occupy space and suck up air in whatever region on whatever ground in whatever country their hating hearts desire. Isn't what Hitler did to the Jews enough to prove that? Or farther back, the Reconquista? There will always be people who discriminate. Have prejudice. It saddens me to see people of my own race, now emancipated and with so many opportunities available, wasting time and effort hating others for the past. It's the past. Instead, I've seen some spit in the face of whites. Some say racism is only white against black. I don't buy it. I've seen otherwise.”

He took a sip of beer. Meg thought he was finished and was trying to digest all he'd said when he continued.

“And you know, it's not just watching the reverse racism. Watching the hate that was once shown to my race years and years ago. To my granddaddy. Returned to those who originally gave it. No, there's more to it than that.

All this affirmative action. All these help the minority scholarships and laws. You know, I can't help but wonder, Are those racist? I mean, so many of the minority scholarships for schools require a lesser grade point average or ACT score than for a regular scholarship. And because the laws mandate equal numbers of diversity in the workforce, minority workers can sometimes end up in jobs they don't deserve. Now yes, in the work place, qualifications provide the initial measuring stick. But, if two qualified candidates apply and the workplace doesn't have enough African Americans or Hispanics or whatever in their numbers, the white person isn't going to get that job. What are we teaching everyone? Because of race, it's okay to be less? Why is it that because of race or ethnicity merit doesn't matter as much? Because we want equality? Accepting a lower standard because of race or ethnicity isn't equality. That is discrimination. It's saying that we as a society expect less from those racially or ethnically different.

You know, I wonder sometimes, if I'm good enough to be a detective because of that. I wonder if I'm a black detective in Mississippi so that the numbers run right. So Mississippi can say we have a diverse group of law enforcement officers. Did I make it because I earned it? I worked to earn it. I wanted to earn it. But every day I go out there, I have to prove to myself that I'm good enough. That I'm a detective because I'm the man for the job and not because I'm black. I have not worked a single case that I haven't taken home. I have not worked a single case that I've forgotten. My cold cases will always be my cases. I will always review them and search for the answers. And still, I wonder, did I earn my rank? Have I earned my rank?"

Davis, still looking at the porch railing, shook his head.

“That’s my answer, Meg,” he said, turning back to face her. “It isn’t popular. And maybe it isn’t right. But it’s one thing that makes this case more difficult. I’ve seen death before. It’s never easy. I’ve seen the kind of disdain that Kimberly seemed to have for Brianna before. It’s never easy. Seeing them together...it’s not easy.”

Heard shook his head again. In the porch light, Meg could see his eyes shining with moisture. She looked away, but from the corner of her eye she saw him take another long swig of his beer. Meg wasn’t sure what to say. It was rare for her to be speechless. Even in uncomfortable silences, she could and often did find something to babble about. But this was different.

“It’s never easy,” echoed again in her head. She couldn’t agree more.

For a while, none of them said anything. Tyler didn’t speak. Davis didn’t speak. Meg didn’t speak. Cicadas were the only beings talking, and their chatter saturated the air around them. Such sounds were some of Meg’s favorites. When she’d been an undergrad, she’d thought about recording them. To her, the cicada chatter was like Mississippi music; it was hearing kudzu growing and the magnolias blooming. The last fading sounds of a Southern summer, falling away like leaves into the Fall.

She took a sip of her tea, and finally broke the silence. “You know Davis, I’m supposed to go back to Memphis tomorrow. I’m not technically supposed to be in the studio until mid-afternoon, but my news director thinks I should come in early. But I can’t leave like this. Just leaving everything hanging like this. Can we get together early tomorrow morning?”

Davis cocked his head to the side. “I suppose we can,” he leaned back. “I’m surprised you want to leave at all though. You’ve been on this like a hunting dog on the trail of somethin’ since the beginning. I couldn’t understand it at first. Thought it was just about the story. But it wasn’t was it?”

Meg felt the blood rush to her cheeks and mentally cursed her pale complexion. “I promised Jordan I’d do whatever had to be done to make sure that Brianna didn’t become a cold case, a file lost in a filing cabinet...”

There was a momentary pause. “Oh my God. Tyler! We left Jordan! She rode with us! I am officially the worst friend ever!” Meg exclaimed.

Meg reached into her pocket and pulled out her cell phone. She punched the touchscreen frantically, concerned she’d left her friend stranded on campus. The phone rang three times.

“Hi, you’ve reached Jordan Teague. Leave me a message and I’ll get back to you when I can.”

Meg stared at her phone. “Don’t you think the bad cell service in the Grove or the stadium would be better by now? The crowd cannot be anywhere near as huge as it was,” she said. She glanced back and forth from Tyler, who was frowning, and Davis. They both nodded, but said nothing.

Meg hit redial. Still Jordan didn’t pick up.

“Hi, you’ve reached Jordan Teague. Leave me a message and I’ll get back to you when I can.”

Meg left a quick message asking Jordan to call her as soon as she received the voicemail. She sighed as she hung up the phone, and turned to Tyler.

“I think we need to leave,” she said.

“Yea, guess it’s that time,” Tyler agreed. He reached out across the porch and shook Heard’s hand. The tension about jurisdiction was gone. Meg couldn’t help but notice the meeting of contrast, white and black fingers meeting in friendship and agreement.

“Thanks for having us man,” Tyler said and Meg nodded behind him.

“You make one hell of a burger, Davis,” she said with a smile.

She could feel his eyes on them as they set down their glasses and turned away towards the drive.



## Chapter 20

1962

Charlie walked down the sidewalk, constantly searching for a glimpse of Dale or Robert. Students walked in pairs and the occasional threesome. He tried to ignore the weight of his feet as he walked, the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He had left them. And now, he couldn't even find them.

Charlie stopped when he neared the Circle. He hadn't meant to walk this far. While he'd been focused on searching for his friends, he'd past the student union. In the breeze, he could smell faint wisps of tear gas, slowly dissipating from the night before. A car was still smoking in the Circle, blackened and covered in soot. Silver canisters, dented and broken, littered the ground. The bulldozer one man had driven towards the Marshalls was stopped outside the Lyceum. The hoses from a fire truck, dented and battered, were thrown across the ground, stretching out like an anaconda across the Circle, ready to squeeze out all life. Charlie couldn't help but stare. His school, a place of peace and beauty, had been attacked and the pains of the skirmish were abundantly clear. Suddenly Charlie understood how the Southerners must have felt, returning from various battlefields to homes, once idyllic places of beauty and calm, turned to ash and rubble. Would it ever be the same?

He turned away. As he walked back towards a breakfast he didn't want, he saw a dark figure in the distance. Students snickered and parted to avoid him. Charlie squinted. He couldn't quite make out what the commotion was.

Walking a little faster, he got closer and realized what was happening. James Meredith had enrolled. A nigras was enrolled in school at Ole Miss.

Students near him jeered. "Go home nigger."

Surrounding the dark figure was a group of white men. Meredith was being escorted from the Lyceum. If they were not in Oxford and the issue of integration so near the forefront of the nation's thoughts, Charlie would have guessed that Meredith was a criminal in custody being escorted to jail or perhaps, the courthouse. But Meredith was not a criminal. He was not being escorted to jail. The nigras Meredith was being escorted to class.

Charlie shook his head in disgust. What was happening to his school?

Charlie did not pay attention in his classes. He did not eat lunch. He spent his lunch hour looking around the dining hall. Searching. Dale and Robert were not there. He moved the salad around on his plate like a small child inspecting the greens with skepticism. Accepting that he was finished with classes for the day and lunch was not going to reveal his friends, Charlie got up and threw away his uneaten food.

After leaving the dining hall, he determined he would knock on Dale's dorm room door before returning to his own room.

He sulked back up the hill to his dorm room, hoping Robert and Dale would be there but understanding the unlikelihood. Several students passed him and glanced back after they'd walked by. He could feel their eyes. Could they see it? Did guilt cast a black shadow on its owner, revealing to the world his crimes?

He had left them.

When he got back to Baxter Hall, he went to Dale's room first. Dale lived on a different floor than he and Robert. Charlie knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, and a guy walked by and shook his head. "Jackson left this morning. He withdrew when he found out they let the nigras enroll. Haven't seen Dale since before the game," he said as he walked towards the bathroom.

Charlie nodded to the boy, disappearing down the hall. Dale wasn't there.

Charlie walked to his own room. He unlocked his door and quickly glanced around the room in hope. He was still optimistic.

Robert's brown suitcase was still packed and upright at the foot of his bed where he'd left it the night before. His bed still held the pristine creases of a tightly pulled and folded blanket. Robert had not returned while he had been in class. He had not returned at all.

Charlie put his books down on his own desk with a resounding thud. Dale probably had stayed at the riot all night given the way he had been carrying on. But Robert? No, Robert had wanted to leave. He wanted to leave after the shouting started.

Confrontation and conflict were not something Robert enjoyed. He had always chosen very carefully which battles, which arguments, to take on.

Charlie, still standing beside his desk, wondered what to do with himself. Where could they have gone? As he pondered what could have happened to his friends after he had returned to the dorm, he gasped. There was another place to look.

Charlie grabbed his car keys.

Charlie got into his car and stared at his steering wheel. He'd realized as he'd unlocked the driver's side that Dale's suitcase was still in the trunk. He'd never come back for it.

He'd never come back.

Charlie sighed and put the keys in the ignition. He pulled up the parking brake, pushed in the clutch and turned the key. Though he'd only been friends with Dale for about a month, if that long, he'd been to Dale's home on multiple Sundays. Mr. and Mrs. Norwood both enjoyed having the boys over to chew the fat, in some cases both literally and figuratively. Charlie thought back to two weeks before. They had eaten brisket, fruit salad, baked potatoes, and pecan pie outside at the picnic tables. He had driven Dale and Robert to Dale's home after Sunday cleaning at the fraternity house. They had forgotten they were still wearing their freshmen beanies when they'd arrived to the feast Mrs. Norwood had set in the backyard. She had smiled and run back into the house when

they'd stepped out of the back screen door. "Stay right there," she'd told them with a smile.

Mr. Norwood had lit a cigarette in her absence and had inhaled the first whiff of tobacco when she returned with the family 35 millimeter camera in hand. "Well, don't just stand there. Act like you like each other and smile," she'd said smiling back at them.

The boys had looked at her then back at each other. Dale had shrugged and said, "Better do it. She won't let us eat until we take the picture."

They had dutifully fallen in line, and Mrs. Norwood had adjusted the focus on the camera as she looked down into the lens. "Smile," she said and took the photo. "Now, let's eat," she said as she turned back to the house to put away her camera. Charlie hadn't needed to be told twice. He and his friends had quickly gone to the table and sat down. There was nothing like a home cooked meal.

Charlie sighed at the memory as he turned onto the Norwood's street. The picnic had only happened a few weeks ago and yet, it felt like a distant, happy memory. The kind of memory that one holds tightly and looks back on with a smile and nostalgia.

He pulled into the familiar drive. The flowers lining the walk in front of the porch were still blooming. The fall flowers were still open, though some of their orange and yellow petals were beginning to hang and sag like aging skin. Soon they would fall away. Charlie knew Mrs. Norwood would cull the front garden before the petals littered the soil though. She was an avid gardener.

Walking up the front porch steps, Charlie realized he wasn't sure what to say or how to explain to Mrs. Norwood why he had come. How do you tell a woman that her son seems to be missing? He'd heard the rumors around campus. Students whispered that some people had gone to jail. And some people had died. Plenty of people had been injured. Buck Randell had not lied in his run through the crowd. Should he tell Mrs. Norwood that her son could be in jail? Could be injured? Or dead?

He knocked on the door. Maybe she wouldn't be home. He glanced around the porch at the recently painted white railings and felt his head jerk up at the sound of the door opening.

"Charlie?" Mrs. Norwood asked, motioning him inside as he nodded. "Well, not that I'm not glad you're here, but don't you have class today?"

"I already went to my classes today, ma'am. I was looking for Dale. I haven't seen him since...since last night when we got back," he answered as he followed her down the hall.

Mrs. Norwood sat down in her chair and motioned for Charlie to sit on the couch near her. "Yes, at all that..." she cleared her throat. "Unrest."

Charlie nodded again and felt as if a crushing weight had fallen on top of him. He had to tell her. He looked up again, but she was reaching toward him.

"Dale is here. He came here late last night. He said you boys had gotten back and the highway patrol had blocked off the roads to campus. He told me about how it took

time to get onto campus to park and how you boys ended up mixed up in that mess walking back to your dorms.”

Charlie exhaled, feeling the weight lift from his shoulders. “He’s here? What about Robert? Was Robert with him?”

Mrs. Norwood’s brows knit together above her mascaraed eyelashes. “Dale said Robert had stayed to watch what happened. That Robert had been trying to find a place to watch from a safe distance. I would assume he’s in class, Charlie. Or maybe he withdrew. Dale told me he is thinking about withdrawing and transferring schools. I think what he saw was a little much for him.”

Charlie felt his mouth go slack. The muscles in his jaw would not have allowed him to speak even if his brain could have formed the sentences. What was she talking about? What had Dale told her?

“You know, we saw the National Guard drive by early this morning. Must have been quite a riot, Dale’s clothes were filthy. And imagine him helping that gentleman who got hit in the head with a brick! Blood was all over his sleeves and shoulders.”

No words came to Charlie’s mind. He could still hear her babbling away, but none of it seemed to make any sense. Who had gotten hit in the head with a brick? What did she mean there was blood on Dale’s clothes?

“Mrs. Norwood, I’m sorry to interrupt. Can I speak to Dale?”

She sighed and shook her head. “He’s napping, Charlie. As I said, I’ve never seen him so terrified. I think he walked here. Or maybe ran. Why don’t we just let him rest?”

Charlie felt himself nod even as his brain screamed against his agreement. “Will you tell him I came by?”

Mrs. Norwood nodded, “Of course dear. Now tell me about your classes.”



## Chapter 21

Meg texted Jordan again as they drove from Heard's house.

Still no response. Meg sighed and turned to Tyler, "You think she's okay?"

He nodded. "Honestly Meg, how many times did you and I go hang out at the house after the game? Especially games as big as this one? Why don't we go by her sorority house before we go home? I'm sure she's just hanging with her sisters."

"Yea. okay."

Between the white columns of Jordan's sorority house, the inside lighting peeked out from behind the curtains. A few girls sat on the porch, rocking in their rocking chairs and lounging in low cut blouses and dresses. They were clearly going out to late night at the Square, a practice common among undergrads. Win or lose, the bars at the Square would have long lines; some would run out of wristbands. All would host the lovely women of Ole Miss, often cited as home to America's hottest co-eds.

Meg searched the faces of the girls in rocking chairs. Jordan wasn't among them. She clutched the door handle and pulled. Getting out of the car, she crossed the street and asked the girls if they'd seen Jordan.

All shook their head except one. A brunette. After a moment's hesitation she said, "I think I heard her and Leah say they were going to go visit the Cemetery. She's been pretty upset since Thursday. We tried to get her to come out or even just stay here." The girl shrugged, and Meg nodded as she said her thanks.

When she got back to the car, she told Tyler they needed to drive to the Cemetery. Meg shook her head. Tyler, understanding her gesture, "You couldn't have guessed she'd go back there Meg. If she chose to go back, that's probably good. She's coping. And she asked you to do exactly what you're doing."

Meg sighed, "I'm doing what I promised; I just feel like a shitty friend. I came here for her birthday, and I end up consulting in the murder investigation of one of her friends. It's just so unfair is all."

Tyler nodded, turning down the street of the Cemetery. They passed the site of Faulkner's grave and kept driving. The headlights illuminated the grass pushing out of the ground between headstones. The car approached the iron cross that marked a grave at the head of the Cemetery's circle, where the opening in the trees revealed the trail to the tunnels

In the center of the circle, two girls sat beneath the tree that was planted there. They both sat looking at the tree line, at the break in the branches. The head of the trail was guarded by two cops. As the headlights shined on the two girls, Tyler slowed and parked behind the Mini Cooper parked on the opposite side of the circle from them.

"You can stop worrying now," Tyler said.

Meg nodded. “About finding her, yea I guess.”

Without further comment, they exited the vehicle, walked to the girls, and sat beside them. Leah and Jordan barely moved. Meg glanced at Jordan. She was holding Leah’s hand. Tears rolled down both the girls’ faces, the silent pain revealed in slow moving moisture sliding down one’s cheek. Behind their backs, Meg and Tyler exchanged glances. Meg knew that Tyler, like her, itched to walk the tunnels again. To see if something was missed. But in his glance, Meg could see he knew, as she did, they needed to sit with the girls for a moment.

Surrounded by the concrete markers of the dead, the four sat beneath the center tree of St. Peter’s Cemetery and said nothing.

They sat there a little over half an hour before anyone spoke. Jordan had reached for Meg’s hand a few minutes after they’d arrived, but even as she held it in her own palm, she said nothing. Meg wasn’t a fan of silence. She was a reporter, a job that required the gift of gab and a legitimate enjoyment of conversation. Despite her discomfort, she sensed her friend needed the silence. So for nearly forty five minutes, she’d sat in silence.

Jordan sighed and dropped Meg’s hand to wipe away the remnants of the stream that had been flowing down her face. “Meg, I meant to text you. I just...didn’t. Leah is coming home with us. Her dorm room is...empty. Anyways, she’s going to sleep in my room. I think we’re going to head back. I’m gonna ride with her,” Jordan said.

“We’ll meet you back at the house,” Tyler said.

After Leah and Jordan got into Leah’s car and started the engine, Meg turned to Tyler. “I feel like a terrible friend.”

Tyler shook his head. “You aren’t. She’s coping in her way. She and Leah are probably reminiscing about all the good times with Brianna right now. You and I can’t give her that. But we can give her justice. We can make sure that Brianna rests in peace and that whoever did this to her can’t do it to anyone else.”

With a sigh, Meg nodded, knowing the words only marginally helped her feel better but they were at least true.

Without discussing it, they both got up and walked to the car. Tyler turned and looked back to the opening to the tunnels. Meg started to reach for the glove box, intending to grab the flashlight, but she looked down and realized she was still in heels, pearls, and her Grove dress. “I’m not going to be able to walk the tunnels tonight Tyler,” Meg said.

He sighed but nodded. “I know. We couldn’t get in without Davis anyway; we wouldn’t be authorized. What do you think about coming back in the morning?”

Meg checked her watch, “Morning is a matter of hours Tyler.”

Tyler shrugged. “We can walk the tunnels and take Davis for coffee at High Point.” Meg smiled. High Point Coffee, the local coffee shop, had a location off Jackson Avenue and on the Square. And both locations served excellent coffee and snacks. There

had been a time Meg had spent excessive sums of money there. Especially since the lines at the Starbucks locations on campus could be so long.

“Alright,” Meg said. “It’s a deal.”

Despite the marathon nights of little to no sleep, Meg woke first the next day. She’d set her alarm for their excursion for 5:30 in the morning, but she was awake by five. Lying in bed, she thought again of Brianna. The girl searching for answers about the past. Jordan had said she’d wanted to be a broadcast journalist. And that she’d been in the Honors College. Somehow, it was disconcerting. The more Meg learned of the girl the more of herself she saw in her. Meg sat up in bed, ran her hand through her mess of curls, and sighed. She had chosen to be a journalist in high school, when she’d looked upon death herself. Though she had been less hysterical, it had been just as jarring as it had been for Jordan. She’d called the cops. But instead of crying, she’d learned what she could about the victim and the case. She shook her head. The murder had never been solved, and she’d watched the stories in the paper and on the news get shorter and shorter. And then, they disappeared. And it seemed like it was only a matter of days before the town forgot. Meg shook her head and tried not to think of it.

She got up and made coffee. Even if they went to High Point, Meg wanted a cup before she went traipsing around in the woods to get to the tunnels. Coffee was her magic wake up juice. Setting the coffee maker to run, she grabbed the file folder Tyler had left there when he’d arrived and walked back to the couch that was serving as her bed. She opened her laptop and used the light to scan through the pages.

There wasn't much she didn't already know. The file was notebook pages of Tyler's notes. His small script was scrawled across the pages detailing the riot, and what Charlie and his friend, Dale had admitted to their roles in it. Each had admitted to their presence, though Dale had claimed that they hadn't stayed long. And Tyler had noted that in the interview, Dale had continually stated that he would prefer not to talk about it. He hadn't done anything.

Meg looked up. Why would someone stress that over and over in an interview meant to be informative? Meg glanced at the coffee pot and seeing it full, got up to pour a cup. She threw in a spoonful of sugar and stirred as she pondered.

Kimberly had insisted over and over that Brianna was a racist. She had omitted several interactions but instead, had immediately stressed her belief in Brianna's racism.

The repetition bothered Meg. In both instances. It was like they had an excuse ready to wave away all questions. She thought about the interviews she'd conducted over the past two years. It was clear to her that Dale and Kimberly were both just avoiding the real issues. What happened at the riot? What happened between Kimberly and Brianna?

She sat back down and glanced through Tyler's papers again. She was quickly realizing that she knew the information. The review was causing her to think though. It almost seemed like Brianna's death was somehow tied to the constant discussion of race. From integration in the 1960s to when Brianna had died, the discussion, despite such increases in equality and enlightenment, hadn't ended. It had evolved. Davis's thoughts on Kimberly's insistence that Brianna's discussion of *Huck Finn* and her article about the importance of continuing the traditions of the school echoed in her head. She sighed.

Davis was right. There would always be those with prejudices. There were less of them than in the sixties, but they still existed. But, Meg mused, they existed on both sides of the racial lines. Would Kimberly have killed because of hers?

A high pitched beeping—her alarm—rang out into the living room, interrupting Meg’s musings. She jumped and spilled coffee down the front of the t-shirt she’d worn to bed. “Shit, Ow.” Meg said, wiping the front of her shirt even as she still clutched her cup of coffee.

“Well, good morning to you too,” Tyler said, running his hands over his face and rolling over on the couch to watch Meg as she stumbled back to the kitchen. He laughed. “Maybe that’s karma for always waking the house up so early. You okay?”

Meg felt herself glare at him. “Yes, I’m fine. We both know there would have been a lot more expletives if I wasn’t.”

Tyler nodded and grinned. “So I see you made coffee,” he said, getting up to pour himself a cup. “How long have you been awake?”

“Not long,” she responded, still wiping the front of her shirt with a paper towel. “Just been thinking about Brianna and everything...”

Tyler took a sip of coffee and leaned against the counter. He was much better at the silent waiting game than she was. Meg glanced at him and thought for a moment that he must be excellent at the FBI. She wasn’t entirely sure if crime analysts got to do interrogations or interviews; he’d never told her. But looking at him comfortably leaning against the counter in his plaid pajama bottoms and a faded fraternity shirt with its front

pocket falling off. she knew he'd be good at it. She looked back down at her stained shirt, mentally prayed Jordan had some Shout somewhere, and began to fill him in on her thoughts.

As she chattered, searching for stain treatment and a way to modestly change without waking up Jordan and Leah, her phone rang. "Will you get that?" she called to Tyler, hoping it wasn't work reminding her to come in. She rigged the laundry doors to partially enclose her and pulled her shirt off and replaced it.

As she walked out from the partially closed laundry doors, Tyler hung up. "Davis has Kimberly at the station. He's having a chat with her this morning. We've been invited to observe. Our plans to get Davis to revisit the scene are just going to have to wait," he said.

After Meg had treated the stain on her shirt and she and Tyler had taken quick showers, they got in the car and drove to the Station. At six thirty in the morning it was still dark out, but Meg figured it would probably be light out by the time they returned.

Meg and Tyler walked into the police station to meet Heard. Many of the desks were empty. Stacks of paperwork were spread out across them, some of which spilled out of file folders. Some of it was just loose leaf. Meg wondered how long it took police to actually finish paperwork. No one liked paperwork. She made a mental note to buy doughnuts for the officers who had to do paperwork before she interviewed them. Doughnuts would put them in a better mood.



They found Heard tossing a tennis ball into the air, looking at the crime board.

“Hey Davis, where is Kimberly?” Meg asked.

“She’s waiting for us in the interrogation room we set up. It actually doubles as a holding cell for drunks half the time, but this morning, it’s an interrogation room,” he said. He got up and walked around the desk. “I have some questions for her, and I want them on the record. You are here to observe and observe only. Got it?” he asked.

Meg and Tyler nodded and with that, Heard led them back to Kimberly.

The three of them sat opposite her. She had folded her arms across her chest and pursed her lips. The narrowness of her eyes gave away her anger.

Heard switched on a recorder. “This is Detective Davis Heard in interview with Kimberly Simpson. Ms. Simpson, you don’t have to answer my questions. That is your right. Anything you say could be used against you in the court of law. You have the right to have an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand?” he said.

Kimberly nodded. “Yea, I understand. What I don’t understand is what I’m doing here! I already told you, I didn’t like Brianna but I didn’t do a damn thing to her. Am I under arrest?”

Davis leaned back from the table and formed a delta with his leg. “No, you aren’t under arrest at this time.”

“So I when can I go?”

Davis sighed. "You are not under arrest. You can leave at any time. I just have some questions I'd like to ask you for the record. And I'm going to need to ask them sometime." Heard told her.

"Fine. If it'll make you leave me alone, what the hell do you want to know now?" she asked.

"Why didn't you tell us about the number of calls you placed to Brianna? What did you need to speak to her about?" he asked.

Kimberly's eyes narrowed even more, turning into slits that barely qualified as lines. "I didn't."

"Ms. Simpson, according to the phone records of Brianna Mayes, your cell phone made several short calls to her." Heard said.

Kimberly nodded. "Prank calls. Maybe it's juvenile, but I was angry. I called and hung up. Maybe once I asked her if the bed sheets she slept on were the same as the ones she wore, but those calls meant nothing."

Davis nodded. "Did you read Brianna's editorial published this past Thursday?"

Kimberly closed her eyes and quietly counted to ten. "Yes. That bitch acting like she knows what it means to be black. She was encouraging traditions we've finally managed to let go! Hmmf. Racist bitch. She's a cracker," Kimberly said.

Kimberly shook her head. "Brianna could write. But I've been working on a reply. People read it. People talked about what she said. The importance of tradition. Hmmf."

“So that made you angry?” Heard asked.

Kimberly slapped the table, “Damn right it made me angry! If I had my way, this school would change. We wouldn’t play Dixie. We wouldn’t call ourselves the Rebels. Maybe we’d even move that Confederate Grave site over by the Tad Pad. Dump them somewhere else! Isn’t like they won the war! These white crackers. I get so tired of them acting like we’re all friends. They enslaved us. They abused us. They treated us like inferior beings. And what? They think some scholarships are enough to make up for it? One month a year to consider as Black History Month? Those crackers. I don’t know what it’d take to make everything equal. I for damn sure don’t appreciate that my school still holds onto these racist traditions. Brianna, she couldn’t admit that. She just kept saying that these traditions honored the fallen dead, men who answered a call to war by their country. An entire class of Ole Miss students died in Picket’s charge. And that’s why we play Dixie. To remember them and their death. What’s their death matter? They died for the losing side. I don’t care why they went to war. I don’t care that they all died. I don’t care. Playing Dixie. Calling ourselves the Rebels. Keeping the Confederate Cemetery on campus. She said tradition is part of what makes a university unique. I don’t care. It all sounds...It sounds,” she elongated the word, drawing it out loudly. “It sounds racist. Those men don’t deserve remembrance,” she said.

Kimberly shook her head and added, “She was a racist bitch.”

Davis nodded. “You seem to feel pretty angry about Brianna’s opinions on the school’s traditions. Resent her voicing them in a manner that encouraged others to feel the same.”

Kimberly shrugged. "Maybe. It's not illegal to resent someone and everything they stand for from their cracker skin to their racist ideas."

"No. It isn't. But it is illegal to allow that resentment to drive you to harm someone." Heard said.

Kimberly slapped the table again shouting, "I. Did. Not. Do. Anything."

"Where were you Thursday evening?" Heard asked.

Kimberly took a deep breath. "I was studying in my dorm room."

"Can anyone verify that?"

Kimberly shook her head, "No, my roommate spent the evening with her boyfriend off campus. Someone on my floor might've seen me go to the bathroom, but maybe not. It's not like we all take roll call in the bathroom."

"Are you aware that Brianna's uncle was killed in the race riots here in 1962?"

Kimberly sat up straighter in her chair. "No. I didn't know that. But makes sense. Raise'em racist. Keep it in the family. All that nature and nurture stuff. Either way, heredity or what she grew up with. Cracker household."

"Don't leave town, Ms. Simpson," Heard said. He reached across the table and switched off the recorder and exited the room.

Meg and Tyler followed. "What are you doing Davis? She has no alibi and a ton of anger. Go through her things. She could very well have done this. She has a temper. And a lot of hate," Meg stated.

Tyler put his hand on Meg's arm. "He'll need a warrant to search her things. And at the moment all he has is speculation. He can't hold her. And he can't arrest her. We need more evidence. We need something," Tyler told her.

Meg ran her hands through her hair, wiping them over her face. "Fine. Let's go looking for something. Can you get a warrant for her dorm room?"

Davis was silent, obviously debating how he would approach the judge. He nodded slowly. "We have what could be a motive, anger and hatred. Which would fit with the violence of the stabbing. And we know she had opportunity." He scratched his head. "It still feels very circumstantial. We've noted her down as a person of interest since the beginning. We've got enough in our case file for a warrant, I think."

He picked up his cell phone. "Your honor..." Meg tuned him out. She was thinking. On the one hand, such a prejudicial murder seemed crazy. Part of Meg believed Kimberly. She was adamant that though she viewed Brianna as a racist bitch and truly did not like her, Kimberly didn't kill her. Then again, slapping the table for emphasis didn't exactly scream peaceful to her. Meg glanced at the crime board.

Brianna was pictured from various angles, every angle Meg could think of. The wounds were photographed and measured. She tried to envision Kimberly stabbing Brianna, tried to visualize the scenario. Did Brianna confront Kimberly about the prank phone calls? Maybe try to clear the air, only to find Kimberly interpret her clarification wrong. Did Kimberly read Brianna's opinion article and ask to meet Brianna? Meg nodded. That she could visualize. An angry request for a meeting, a stipulation that it be

in a quiet location. Brianna agreeing, hoping to clarify her opinions. Hoping to clear the air.

Meg sighed, and Davis hung up his phone with a smile.

“We can go meet the judge,” he said.

Warrant in hand, they arrived on campus and parked in front of Martin. As he had in Stockard, Heard led the way, walking up to the desk in the lobby. He requested to talk to the housing assistant. The desk worker nodded.

Meg watched Heard discuss the planned search with the housing assistant. She checked her watch, impatient. She needed to get back to Memphis to prepare for her segment, but her promise to Jordan— and her curiosity— kept her there, tapping her foot, waiting for the go ahead.

Heard turned from the housing assistant and motioned forward with a flip of his forefinger. Meg and Tyler followed him to the elevator. Before knocking on the door, Heard put on a pair of rubber gloves and handed a pair to Tyler and Meg.

He knocked and Kimberly, recently back from her questioning at the station, opened the door. Her lip curled up at them as her eyes narrowed. “What do you want?”

Heard handed her the warrant. “Ms. Simpson, we are here to search the premises. The details of our search are outlined in the warrant.”

“But...But... You can’t do that,” Kimberly stuttered. It was the first time Meg had seen her look so surprised. Her face relaxed from its angry pinched snarl into the defeated face of a child with a pacifier stuffed in its mouth. Meg watched as Kimberly quickly skimmed through the warrant, looking at the paper then at them. Meg found herself feeling sorry for her. Obviously, she felt her privacy had been invaded. Kimberly sat down on her desk chair and folded her arms across her chest.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this to one of your own. You’re a traitor. And you ain’t gonna find shit. Cause I didn’t do it,” she said to Heard’s back.

As a civilian, Meg was not particularly familiar with the rhythm of a police search. She found herself getting in the way as Davis and Tyler went over the room, looking through drawers and cabinets. It didn’t take long to realize they had some unspoken system, and she was only in the way. It was clear to her that it was part of police and FBI training, a system developed over time, with practice, perhaps in the academy.

She stood off the side and watched them. They had, without speaking, divided the room into smaller squares. Each covered a portion of the grid. But despite their efficiency, within a few hours they found nothing in Kimberly’s room.

Heard sighed as he closed the final drawer.

“Told you so. You can go now,” Kimberly said, smiling.

Heard took one last glance around the room, and looked at Tyler, who shrugged. Meg assumed they were both silently communing in their surprise that their search, so thorough, had yielded nothing. Not even so much as a pocket knife.

They stood in the parking lot of Martin after the search. No one said anything.

Meg thought back to the crime board again. Part of her really believed the Kimberly could have killed Brianna— that it was some kind of reverse racism, some kind of black on white hate crime. But after searching Kimberly’s dorm, she wondered if they were any closer to the answer than they had been on Friday morning.

She sighed. Maybe she needed to just go back to Memphis. They weren’t getting anywhere.

“We could go back to the tunnels. Take a look at the crime scene. Maybe that’ll give us an idea of what we need to be thinking about. Looking for. Meg and I thought about it last night but you called about Kimberly before we could suggest it this morning,” Tyler said.

Meg felt herself nod. If nothing popped there, if she couldn’t think of a new avenue or place Kimberly could have stashed a weapon, she would go back to Memphis.

Heard pointed at him, “That is actually not a bad idea.”



## Chapter 22

1962

Charlie hadn't paid much attention to how many days had passed since he had visited Mrs. Norwood. He had stopped walking into every old haunt searching for the lost souls of his friends. He had not seen either of them since the riot. They weren't the only ones missing anymore.

He had watched others pack their belongings and leave for another school. They didn't want to go to school with a nigras. It probably wasn't really that many. But without his best friends by his side, every absence, every empty desk seemed a gaping hole that would never again be filled.

Charlie's days were like his footsteps. One after the other, a mechanical motion simply carried out rather than considered.

He looked around his room. Robert's belongings were still just as they had been on Sunday before Dale had urged them out of the room, to action. As Charlie stared at the suitcase, a dust gatherer, he couldn't help but smile as he mentally correlated Dale's urgings to a call to arms. Perhaps some would see it that way.

He hadn't changed the calendars in the room. Not the desk calendar or the one hanging on the wall. It still said September.

Sitting at his desk, unsure whether he should work on homework, go to sleep, or go by the fraternity house, Charlie heard a knock at the door. He jumped from his seat. It seemed like such a long time since he'd had any kind of visitor knock at his dorm room. His social life upon coming to school had been Dale and Robert immediately during Rush, and after they received bids to the same fraternity, the pattern had been cemented.

Charlie answered the door. Dale stood in front of him. He wore a white t-shirt and jeans, his hair was a bit shaggy at the edges, and though it was still relatively early in the afternoon, he had a five o'clock shadow. Despite his disheveled appearance, Charlie felt himself smile for real for the first time since Meredith had been admitted. He could feel his eyes light up and his lips pull back towards his ears.

"Dale! Man, you're back! Come on in. It's so good to see you! Where have you been? What's happened to Robert? Come on, what's going on?" Charlie asked.

Dale entered the room with nothing more than a nod of acknowledgement. Charlie felt his smile slip off his face like paste oozing through the hand that squeezes it.

"Dale?" he asked.

Dale sat down on Charlie's desk chair.

"I'm leaving Charlie. I...I thought you should know. I've been at home—my real home, not my dorm since the riots. I can't stay here. I'm leaving Oxford. I got a job on a construction crew in Tennessee for the remainder of the semester. I'm going to transfer schools for the Spring. Or maybe just wait to start again until next year," Dale told him.

Charlie leaned against the wall, and nodded. His resurrected friend had returned only to give him news of his departure. Charlie felt the numbness of the past weeks seeping back into his bones. One foot in front of the other. Just keeping moving. Lost in the business of preparing himself for solitude once again, Charlie didn't say anything.

Dale continued into the silence. "Charlie, Robert won't be coming back. I saw a brick hit his head at the riots. It hit him pretty hard. We were running to the Lyceum. We were gonna take it, Charlie. We coulda. There was tear gas, and people were shooting but we woulda won Charlie. But...we were running, ready to fight, and Robert; he was just ahead of me. I saw his knees buckle. At first I thought he tripped, but he fell face first. I didn't know bodies could crumple, but that's what it was like Charlie. He just crumpled to the ground."

Dale shook his head.

"He was bleeding. It was like the brick had cracked his skull or something. Spurting blood with a gurgling sound. Coming up like some kind of geyser," Dale elaborated.

Charlie watched as a tear rolled down Dale's cheek. "I called for medics. I called for help. No one stopped. People just kept running and shooting. And there was tear gas. And Robert gurgled. And then, he stopped."

Dale shook his head again. "I dragged him out of the way. When I could, I picked him up as best I could. I laid him down in the Confederate cemetery. I was going to get help, but...I heard something. Someone coming. And I just ran. I didn't know where to go. Next thing I knew I was at home," he said.

Charlie looked at the ceiling as he responded, “I haven’t heard anything. Anyone ever find him?”

Dale shrugged. “I think so. I...I haven’t told anyone else. I just...you had to know. But I don’t want to think of it anymore. I can’t think of it anymore. I hear that gurgle when I am drifting off to sleep. Some people count sheep, I count spurts of blood. I’m done. You know Charlie. I’m leaving. And I’m never coming back.”

“Wait, Dale.” Charlie forced himself to look at him.

“I’m done talking about it Charlie. I’m not answering questions. Good bye,” Dale got up, and in a walk that was nearly a run, Dale left. The door slammed shut with a force that echoed across the room with finality.

Charlie stood in his room. He was alone once again. He looked up at the ceiling. This felt more permanent.

He thought of Robert. Why hadn’t anyone said anything to him? Charlie tried to think back to the papers just after the riot. Ray Gunter and Paul Guihard had been the only casualties listed. They had both been shot. By whom remained unknown. It could’ve been a Marshal. It could have been a stranger from another state.

He stood alone in his room, unmoving.

It seemed like it had been years since the night of the riot, but only a few days had passed. It was strange for him to realize how close together events were—going to see

Mrs. Norwood, Dale's visit, the Riot. There were already newspaper and magazine articles about what had happened.

Charlie had spoken to the Boldens; Robert's parents intended to come to Oxford to collect his things. He'd been too nervous to ask about the funeral. Surely they would tell him when it was. He wasn't certain where Robert's body had been moved to or how long it would take until it was given to his family for burial.

Sitting at his desk, Charlie found himself staring at Robert's side of the room. The unpacked suitcase. The collection of papers, notes from classes. There was a folded piece of paper between Robert's pencil holder and his paper clip cup. Charlie knew it was the phone number for a girl. He wondered if Robert had ever called her. They had discussed football and integration, the fraternity and classes more than the successes and failures of their dating life. Of course, they'd discussed the beauty of the girls at Ole Miss and wondered how to talk to the famous Chi O's, the sorority that was home to two recent Miss Americas.

He'd felt close to Robert. In the short amount of time that he'd known him, they've lived together, rushed together, eaten together. They were brothers. They had proudly put on their freshmen beanies and gone to pledge meetings, excited to be a part of something larger than themselves. A family on the Ole Miss campus.

There was a knock at the door, and Charlie sighed. Since word had gotten out about Robert's death, a few boys had dropped by periodically to check in on him. The conversations never seemed to last very long. Though Charlie was acquainted with them,

they weren't Robert. They weren't Dale. He felt the emptiness in his life keenly, even as he walked to the door to open it.

His eyes widened as he realized that instead of the visiting well-wishers, two men in suits stood outside his door.

"Charles Mayes?" one of them asked.

Charlie nodded.

"May we come in?"

Charlie stepped back for their entrance.

"My name is Detective Harper. This is my partner Detective Reed. We just wanted to ask you a few questions about the riot on September 29<sup>th</sup>."

Charlie sighed and felt himself fall into his desk chair. "Okay," he said with a sigh.

"The body of your roommate, Robert Bolden was found the morning after the riot. We're simply trying to establish a timeline leading up to his death and establish how he came to be there."

Charlie nodded and shrugged. "There were a lot of students at the riots, sir. At least at first."

Both detectives nodded. "Including yourself?" Harper asked.

Charlie looked him in the eye, “For a bit. I didn’t stay. I lost both Robert and Dale in all the...” he paused. “Excitement.”

The detectives exchanged glances. “Dale who?” Detective Reed asked.

Charlie sighed. “Dale Norwood. He’s withdrawn from the University. He saw a little too much blood. Tried to get Robert out of the tear gas and the guns, but it was too late.”

Detective Harper raised an eyebrow, “But you weren’t there?”

Charlie shook his head. “Dale just thought I should know. He didn’t really want to talk about it. Asked me not to ever ask him anything about it again...”

The Detectives scribbled in hand held note pads and Charlie began to pick at a fly away thread in his pant seam. “Not that it matters anyhow,” he muttered.

“What was that son?”

Charlie shook his head. “Dale won’t take my calls or meet with me. He withdrew from the University, from the fraternity, and apparently, our friendship.”

The detectives nodded. “What can you tell us about that night? How long were you there?”

Charlie picked at the thread and avoided their eyes. “Long enough to watch tear gas get thrown, guns to be fired, and outsiders to come to Oxford. I watched the Marshals attack, and I saw General Walker order a charge from the monument at the head of the Circle. Long enough to witness the chaos sir.”

They scribbled some more.

“Are you familiar with the names of Ray Guihard and Paul Gunter?”

Charlie nodded. “The paper said they died too. But their bodies were closer to everything. But before their names were released? No. I hadn’t heard of them.”

More scribbling. The etching of the pen seemed to echo in the room.

“And what time did you come back here?” the detective asked.

Charlie frowned. “To be honest, I didn’t look at the clock when I came in. After dark.”

The detectives exchanged glances again.

Detective Reed looked over the room. “Are these Robert’s things?”

Charlie nodded, and Detective Reed walked to Robert’s desk and began rifling through the papers. He unfolded the paper with the girl’s phone number. More scribbling.

Detective Harper was staring at him, and Charlie shifted beneath the weight of his gaze.

“Anything else you can tell us about the riots? What started the violence?” Reed asked.

Charlie felt himself frown. “I don’t know. It just sorta evolved.” He scratched his head. “Not sure I could say exactly how it escalated from insults to guns; when it stopped being just students I guess. Those rednecks...they were coming for a battle.”



More scribbling. Charlie shrugged. “The Marshals were here, on our campus, enforcing rules we didn’t ask for. I don’t know anyone who wanted that nigras here. And now that he is, people either insult him or ignore him. Don’t see how that’s good for anyone.” Charlie scratched his head again, though it wasn’t itching.

The two detectives, still scrawling in their palm held notebooks, barely glanced at him.

Detective Harper was the first to look up. He flipped his notebook closed with a single swishing motion. Detective Reed did the same within a matter of seconds.

“Thank you son,” Detective Harper said as he put his notebook in his inside suit pocket. Detective Reed reached out and handed him a card.

“If you think of anything else pertinent, don’t hesitate to call,” Detective Reed said.

They turned to leave. Charlie didn’t bother to get up, though he could almost hear his mother chastise him for his lack of manners.

At the door, Detective Harper turned. “One more thing son, this Dale character? Did he have any reason to want to harm Mr. Bolden?”

Charlie resisted the urge to laugh, “No sir. We were friends. Robert didn’t want to go that night, and it was Dale’s idea to go. But well, we all went. We were all curious.”

The detectives both nodded again, and opened the door.

“Thanks again son. Don’t forget to call if you think of anything else,” Detective Reed reiterated through the open door.

Charlie nodded, and then listened to the door click shut behind them. He walked over to Robert’s side of the room. He missed him. The quiet was oppressive. Charlie looked again at Robert’s unpacked suitcase and sighed. He turned from Robert’s scattered belongings, and looked at his own side of the room. The calendar still said September. September 29<sup>th</sup> was frozen in his mind. Without really understanding where he wanted to go, Charlie followed the Detectives from his dorm room.

Dale had said that he’d left Robert in the Confederate Cemetery. Charlie assumed he’d cut back through an alley between buildings and headed towards the square cemetery lot framed by its brick fence. The cemetery itself was shaped like a grave, a marker stood in its center. It read, “Here rest more than seven hundred soldiers, who died on the campus of the University of Mississippi when the buildings were used as a war hospital, 1862-1865. Most of them Confederate wounded at Shiloh, a few Federals of Grant’s Army, a few Confederates of Forrest’s Cavalry, even their names, save these, known but to God.”

Charlie walked slowly up to the opening in the fence, staring at the marker. With a nod to the fallen, he glanced around. He didn’t know what he expected to see. Someone had seen the body. The authorities had already found it. He didn’t see anything. He glanced about the graveyard. Robert wasn’t there.

Charlie glanced about. A few yards away from him, he could see a discoloration in the grass. He walked over to it. Though it was already fall and some of the meadow was exhibiting the splotches of brown dead grass, this discoloration was different. It stood out from the rest of the field. It wasn't the light beige of a dead plant. It was a deep brown, almost violent in its difference.

He bent down. Beneath him, he could smell the odor. The salty smell of blood, the faint whiff of sweat. Charlie realized this was where Robert had been left. In the layer of blood, he saw a bright glinting—he rummaged through the grass. It was a small St. Christopher's medal. No chain. Robert had worn one beneath his shirt.

Charlie clutched the medal in his hand and felt the markings press into his palm. Looking back down, Charlie felt a tear roll down his cheek. He sat down in the grass. The dark stain in front of him, the light brown splotches in a patch of green beside him. He hung his head, and for the first time since the riot, allowed himself to cry for all that had been lost.

For the end. For the dead.

## Chapter 23

They were in separate cars so they agreed to meet at the Cemetery in the Circle. The crime scene wasn't cleared yet, and Meg knew they wouldn't have access to the scene without Heard.

The drive was short. Oxford wasn't the biggest town. Just as Meg and Tyler had the night before, they drove straight to the back of the Cemetery and parked the car near the tree in the center of the circle. They sat beneath the tree as they had the night before while they waited for Heard to arrive.

Heard rumbled down the narrow cemetery road in his black Ford F-150 and stopped behind Meg's car. He got out then turned around and grabbed a flashlight from his cab. "Ready?" he asked as he locked his vehicle.

Meg and Tyler both nodded.

"Let's go," Meg answered.

The three edged their way down the dirt trail, each of them pushing back branches and dodging kudu snares. The noise of their movement was the only sound. Not a cricket chirped. Not a cicada sang. There wasn't even the soft sound of a bird's wings.

Meg found herself debating if the silence was disconcerting or peaceful as she searched for safe places to set her feet down. The sandy pathway gave a little beneath her feet, and she found her emotions about the silence mattered less than her ability to make it to the clearing.

Tyler ducked under a branch in front of her, and Meg followed his lead. They came out from beneath it to a flat, concrete pathway. The first sign of the tunnels. Meg sighed. It seemed like so long ago that she'd picked up her phone to Jordan's hysterics on the other end. And yet, it had only been a matter of days. No one was in custody yet though. The thought depressed her. With each passing minute, the truth was getting farther and farther from reach. With each passing minute, the truth was being distorted by time.

She looked at the two men beside her. Neither of them had moved since they had arrived at the concrete pathway. Without waiting for a signal or a discussion, Meg started walking.

"You're burning daylight," she said without turning around.

"There is plenty of daylight left to burn," Tyler responded.

Meg felt her lips turn up in a smile. She hadn't really realized how much she'd missed having Tyler White and his smart ass comments in her life. Even at the moments she was sure she couldn't possibly smile, he had a comment to make her grin.

She heard steps behind her, echoing off the pavement. They were catching up with her. More importantly, they were no longer standing still.

Within minutes, they stood before the mouth of the tunnels, its concrete archway beckoning in the darkness blocked only by crime scene tape and a lone uniformed officer. The three paused and solemnly bowed their heads a moment, as if each of them understood that in that moment, they were walking to a gravesite. It was a brief moment, but a moment in which each of them silently paid their respects to the dead.

Then, as quickly as it had passed, they continued on after Heard allowed them access to the scene by checking in with the officer on duty. Meg was familiar with the routine: she had given her information to a variety of uniforms and CSI techs logging those who came near a crime scene. It was part of her job to investigate, and though she could never cross the tape, her proximity forced them to take down her name, information, and credentials.

After they each checked in, Meg shined her flashlight on the walls, illuminating familiar sayings and drawings. For a brief instant, she wondered if the initials and the accompanying star she had spray painted on the wall when she'd taken Jordan to the tunnels was still there or if it had been covered up by another college student hoping to leave their mark. She didn't bother searching for it. The memory of it was enough for her, and she had a much more pressing purpose at the tunnels than commemorative markings of her undergraduate days.

She kept walking, shining her light on the walls in search of the small cubby hole Brianna had been bent into. Meg had been to the tunnels a few times during her college career; she had brought a few younger friends and had, her freshman year, been brought. Those trips combined with the one seared into memory of Brianna meant that she walked

confidently even in the darkness. She knew where she was going, and it didn't take long to find it.

Meg stared into the empty square cut out. A thin coat of dust lined the bottom of it. She wondered if this was the dust so often seen in CSI shows. She had seen crime scene photographs, pieced together evidence, and formed the story. She had never been so close to a processed crime scene. Her live shots were usually outside the building the crime happened, or near yellow Crime Scene tape. Though she seldom reflected on this aspect of her profession, she admitted to herself the locations of her stories were generally more about how they looked and what they communicated as a background than how close she could get to the actual crime scene. She justified it by acknowledging that aesthetics was part of what garnered attention; it helped entice the audience to listen to the stories she reported. And the stories were what was important.

She leaned closer, trying to avoid touching anything. Holding up her flashlight to examine the hole further, she leaned as close as she could manage and looked around. There were obvious stains on the concrete; they would wash away with the next contact with water. Rust red droplets of blood marking where Brianna's blood had dripped. Meg shined her light towards the back, wondering if Brianna's cell phone had somehow fallen out. She squinted into the hole. It didn't appear so.

Turning on her heel, she realized Heard and Tyler were standing back, waiting to examine the scene themselves. Watching her.

She shrugged and moved aside. Davis walked up next, running his flashlight beam over the location slowly. Meg watched as he seemed to examine every inch of the concrete. He leaned into the opening, just as she had, and Meg heard herself gasp.

In order to truly get a decent look inside the open grave, Meg had lifted onto her toes, shifting her weight and craning her neck. She was small, even for a girl, but as Heard easily leaned in, barely forced to even shift weight from his heels, Meg realized, it would have taken someone at least his size to lift Brianna from the ground and into her shadowy grave.

Heard quickly turned at her intake of breath, and Tyler simply nodded at her as if noting his mental acknowledgement and agreement with her realization.

“How tall are you Davis? How tall is Kimberly?” Meg asked, jamming the questions together.

Davis looked back at the hole and took a step back. With a nod, he realized the origin of the questions. “I’m six foot one,” he acknowledged. He paused for a moment, “Kimberly is five foot five. How tall are you?”

“Five foot two. Brianna was my height,” she said, thinking back to the crime board at the station.

Tyler and Davis both nodded.

“There’s no way Kimberly could have lifted and forced that dead weight in there. I don’t think I would have been able to, certainly. Kimberly wouldn’t have needed to stand on her toes to look at it, but stuffing a body in there...I doubt it,” Meg said.



Tyler nodded, walking up to the square cut out and glancing over it. "I would venture to guess that some of those broken bones were broken posthumously. Am I right?"

He looked over to Davis, who nodded.

"Would it be a fair guess that they were a result of literally stuffing her body inside this hole? Bending back whatever limb was necessary to get it inside? I mean, this isn't a large space. Jordan is five foot one. Meg has an inch on her and is the same height as Brianna. I'm not sure any of them could fit inside here without some strange bending and some help. So someone tall. And strong. Strong enough to break bones when stuffing a body in here." Tyler said.

Davis nodded. "I think someone my height could do it. You must be what, five eleven? Six foot?"

Tyler nodded. "I maybe could. But I'd need a hell of a lot of adrenalin to help."

Meg frowned. "Somehow I think hiding a body would be stressful enough to release some adrenalin."

Tyler shrugged.

The three stood there for a moment, and Heard kicked the concrete. "I feel like we're back to square one."

Tyler shook his head. "Not quite man. Kimberly is pretty much eliminated, sure. But we haven't had a chance to chat with Dale Norwood yet. Maybe he'll know something."

Meg nodded and glanced down the length of the tunnels. She'd always heard that the tunnels ran behind Oxford's Residential areas. It's what she'd been told. It's what she'd told her friends she'd taken there. However, she had never gone down that far. She looked back the way they'd come. In the distance, she could barely see the opening. Looking back the other way, she realized she could see a change in lighting. The darkness of the tunnels gave way to shadows, and there had to be light to make shadows.

Meg turned away from Davis and Tyler and began walking the length of the tunnels. Was there another way in? How far had someone walked with Brianna dead in their arms?

"Where are you going?" Heard called out to her.

"I don't really know yet," she yelled back without so much as a glance behind her.

Meg walked and noted the lessening of spray paint art. It took only a few minutes to arrive at a break in the tunnels, the end of which was only concrete. No spray paint initials. No spray paint pictures. No spray painted numbers. There was no color, no reds, no blues, no golds, nothing. There was only the gray darkness of concrete sidings. Only the darkened walls decorated with shadows.

She walked out from beneath the concrete. Behind her, she could hear Tyler and Davis following her. Vines snaked over the mud and sand without disturbance. Meg kicked at the flora. Clearly, this end of the tunnels was less well travelled. She carefully picked her steps and continued walking, looking up at the sky. The sun was overhead, and the warmth was making its way down through the trees.

The ditch seemed less steep and as Meg inched her way through the webbing of kudzu and vines, she could hear cars starting above her. Someone was cutting grass in the distance; she could hear a lawn mower.

She stopped to look through the trees. Shoving a hand through her hair to push back the strands escaping her loose ponytail, she wondered where she was. Behind her, a twig broke. Turning, she saw Tyler and Heard approach her.

“You guys have any idea where we are?” she asked.

Heard looked at the trees, then back at the tunnels, “We’ve gotta be behind one of the Residential areas off the Square. Maybe a few blocks from the Square.”

Tyler glanced back at the tunnels behind them and nodded, “Only one way to find out.” He carefully picked his way over to the ascent and began placing one step after the other, testing the sturdiness of the sand and avoiding crisscrossed vines as he went.

Meg looked ahead of her and wondered where the next tunnel was. She shrugged. They had come from the only tunnel she was sure existed. Heard following Tyler, and realizing they were leaving her behind, Meg did the same.

Heard and Tyler reached the top and stood in the trees, hands outstretched to help her with her ascent as she climbed the siding. After they’d all arrived in the trees, they turned and surveyed their location.

They were behind another line or two of trees, but between them, Meg could see fences and swing sets. She began walking to the street. The tree line was directly behind

some back yards, but some had a little distance between them. Meg walked behind the fences until she found an alley between properties.

With Tyler and Heard behind her, she walked the grassy hall between brick houses. She stopped at the sidewalk and looked down the street. Directly ahead stood a white fence around a garden surrounding a large porch. Mrs. Norwood, in a large straw hat, was outside in the morning sun, cutting dead flowers from their stems and pulling weeds from the soil.

“Son of a bitch,” Meg muttered and nodded her head in the direction of the Norwood residence. Tyler’s intake of breath behind her was audible.

“I must be missing something,” Heard admitted quietly beside them, glancing around the neighborhood. Meg nearly laughed as she looked at him. He was shifting his weight in discomfort.

Tyler nodded towards Mrs. Norwood and the house behind her, “That, my friend, is the Norwood residence. Dale Norwood is living and taking care of his mother on the street that is closest to the tunnels.”

“And judging from the location of the house, it’s closer to the tunnel than where we came up,” Meg added glancing back.

Tyler began walking towards the house, and Meg and Heard quickly fell in step behind.

“What are you doing?” Meg hissed behind him.

“I think it’s time to talk to Dale Norwood. Don’t you?” Tyler said.

Davis cleared his throat. "Not that I don't agree, but isn't that my call?"

Tyler stopped. "Well? Don't you agree?"

Davis walked in front of him and purposefully led the group. He unlatched the gate at the Norwood residence and called out to the lady of the house, "Mrs. Norwood, I'm Detective Davis Heard." He showed his badge clipped to his belt. "I need to speak with your son, Dale. Is he home?"

The old woman slowly got to her feet, pushing her hands into the dirt as she wobbled upright. Pushing white wisps of hair away from her face, she squinted at him, "Since when has law enforcement here been taking negroes?" She waved her hands at him. "Besides, my Dale has already talked to the Detectives. Those men in suits came and talked to him about all that messy business already."

Davis took a deep breath, "Ma'am. I don't think that is appropriate. I am with the Police Department. I'm investigating a murder, and I need to speak with your son."

"It's the Marshals that hurt Robert. Not my boy! Your lot has already upset him," Mrs. Norwood said, raising her voice.

Davis glanced back at Tyler, who shrugged.

Mrs. Norwood began crying, "I just don't understand. What do you need with Dale?"

Meg sniffed, suddenly noticing the potent smell of urine in the air. "Mrs. Norwood, we only need to talk to him," she said in as calm and soothing a voice she could manage.

The screen door opened on the porch, and a Dale Norwood, tall with a bit of a belly protruding beneath his Ole Miss sweatshirt, stepped out. "Everything okay Mother?" he asked, stopping when he saw Meg, Davis, and Tyler.

"I don't know these people. I don't understand. Dale," she whimpered.

Without even acknowledging their presence, Dale stepped down the porch steps and quickly took her hand. "It's okay, mother. Why don't we make tea? Or coffee? Come inside."

He took her arm as she teetered up the steps, her wobbling and whimpering revealing her frailty. Looking back at them he mouthed, "I'll speak with you in a moment."

Meg ran her fingers through her hair again as they waited for Dale Norwood to come back outside the house. Shifting her weight, she tried not to focus on his height. She hadn't been thinking about his build the first times she'd met him. Dale Norwood was at least as tall as Davis, maybe a half an inch or so taller. Though he was developing a bit of a gut, he had broad shoulders and a large build that spoke of strength.

He could have stuffed Brianna Mayes into her concrete grave. He could have carried her down the slope to the tunnel. Even as dead weight, for a man of his size and build, Brianna Mayes would be easy to toss around.

Intensely aware of the sun high in the afternoon sky, Meg was impatient for his return. After all, she was slated to return to Memphis.

After what seemed like an eternity, Dale Norwood came back out on the porch. Without even coming down the steps, he scowled and asked, "What the hell do you want?"

"I'm Detective Davis Heard and these are my associates, Meg Anderson and Tyler White. We spoke outside your office Friday afternoon. I'm looking into the death of Brianna Mayes. and I need to ask you a few more questions," Heard said.

Without so much as a blink, Dale turned, "We'll talk in the back. I don't want to discuss this so near the neighbors." Looking back at them, he added, "And try not to upset Mother anymore. She's not having a very good day. I'm afraid her Alzheimer's is really getting pretty advanced."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Tyler said as they followed him quietly through the house.

From the back porch, Meg noted that there was a latched gate in the backyard fence. Behind it, trees could be seen. Meg could visualize the slope in the tree line just behind its door.

"What do you need to know?" Dale growled. "Why couldn't this wait until my office hours Monday?"

Davis proceeded calmly, "We believe you may be the last person to have seen Brianna alive. assuming you are the D.N notated in her planner as her meeting. You didn't mention it before. Was that a meeting with you?"

Dale folded his arms across his chest. "She scheduled a meeting with me. Unfortunately, I had to return home that day. Mother was not doing so well."

Davis nodded. "So you didn't meet with her then?"

Dale was silent for a moment. "She came here. Unannounced. I don't know how she even got my address. It was problematic, but I talked with her."

"What about?" Heard asked.

The side of Dale's mouth twitched. "She had a few questions regarding former acquaintances of mine. And past...activities," he told them.

Tyler interjected. "She was the daughter of Charles Mayes and Elaine Bolden, the niece of Robert Bolden. You are noted to have associated with both men."

Dale scowled, then immediately, forced his facial muscles to relax. In his eyes, there was still anger, but he calmly responded with a nod.

"Did she ask you about Robert's death in the riots, Mr. Norwood?" Meg asked.

Meg could see his knuckles turning white as he grabbed his arm, "Yes. But I don't like to talk about that night. I wasn't there for long, but it was terrible what happened."

"You weren't there for long Mr. Norwood?" Heard asked.

"No. I was not," Norwood insisted.



“I’ve read some of the reports from that night. Charlie Mayes seemed to indicate that you were there for much longer. Longer than he was,” Heard responded.

Dale’s knuckles were bleached skin amidst a sea of blue—the dark fabric of his navy blue sweatshirt.

“I think you should leave,” Dale said calmly.

“We aren’t finished, Mr. Norwood,” Davis said with authority. “If you would like us to leave, you may accompany us to the station.”

“I have a very sick mother. I try not to leave her for long without a nurse or a neighbor looking after her. Especially on days like today,” Dale said.

“The decision is yours Mr. Norwood. We can continue to speak here, or you can accompany us to the station,” Heard reiterated.

Dale’s lips twitched again, his nose scrunching above his lip in dissatisfaction. “Fine,” he said through gritted teeth.

“So what did Brianna want to know about Robert’s death? And what did you tell her?” Meg asked.

Dale started to shake and the veins in his forehead began to protrude. “She said she didn’t believe me. Said that Charlie had always said that it had been me that wanted to go to the riots. We just had to park far from the dorms. But he...he lied to her. And Robert died. He got hit in the head with a brick. Are we done?”

Davis shook his head. "Afraid not Mr. Norwood. What time did Brianna leave here?"

Dale shrugged, tapping his finger on his arm, "Sometime that evening I guess. I didn't exactly check my watch." He glanced at the door of the house behind them, and added, "If you'll excuse me I'd like to check on my mother."

Heard nodded, and Dale turned to walk inside.

"There is something seriously off about him," Meg whispered.

Tyler and Heard both nodded slowly and watched the house.

Dale came back out after a couple minutes. Arms still crossed, he looked at each of them, meeting their eyes. "Where were we?" he asked.

"You were about to tell us more about the death of Robert Bolden. And what Brianna was doing looking into it," Tyler said.

Dale raised his eyebrows. "Was I?"

They all nodded. Dale walked between them and turned as soon as the fence was behind him. He looked at them.

"Mr. Norwood, what happened to Brianna Mayes? What did you tell her about Robert Bolden?" Heard pressed.

Dale shook his head and ran towards the gate in the back fence, yelling behind him. "I didn't do anything. I wasn't there. I don't want to talk about this." He unlatched the back gate before Meg or any of them had even moved. Meg felt her eyebrows rise as

she watched Heard and Tyler chase after him. Feeling like a swimmer flinching on the starting block, delayed, she followed.

Crossing through the gate, a shot hit the fence post next to her and Meg ducked back into the yard. Across the gate's opening from her, Heard and Tyler had crouched behind the wooden paneling themselves. Peeking through the slats, Meg could see Dale's arm outstretched beside a tree, hand gun pointed at the gate.

"I didn't do anything. She just kept talking. The Marshals. The Nigger. Tear Gas. I left that night. I forgot that night. I'm a professor! I'm a member of the Racial Reconciliation program. I can't think about the bullets. I can't think about the brick! That night." Dale shrieked from behind the greenery.

Meg glanced at Tyler and mouthed, "Post traumatic stress?"

Tyler shrugged back at her and glanced through the slats. Meg realized as she crouched beside the gate, this was the man that had stabbed Brianna. In some fit of rage, Dale had stabbed her for making him remember his own buried memories.

"Dale?" she yelled.

"Don't come out! I'm not talking about it. I'm not talking about it! I won't!" Dale screeched.

"Okay, we won't talk about it Dale. Just don't think about it. Just tell us what happened to Brianna. Did you hurt her?"

Dale shrieked. The sound, similar to the hysterical cries of a toddler, echoed through the trees.

“Just tell me what happened. It’s okay,” Meg cooed, trying her best to be reassuring. She ignored the startled glances of Tyler and Davis, both of whom were mouthing words at her.

“I...I didn’t mean to. I just...I couldn’t think about it, and she just kept talking and talking. And talking. She wanted to research that night. She wanted to talk to the Mississippi Cold Case Unit about it. She wanted to get a law enforcement group to submit the case! They have a conviction rate nine times the national average! She...she went to the archives. On and on. Names and times, blood and tear gas. I told her to shut up! Just shut up! But she just kept talking,” he wailed.

“Okay. I know. I know. And we won’t talk about that night. Us,” Meg said, standing in the opening of the gate holding up her hands. “We’re just here about Brianna. That’s all.” She paused and watched the gun wobble.

“I’ll shoot!” he said, hand shaking.

“You don’t want to hurt me Dale. You’ve seen enough death. Let’s just focus on Brianna. Was she angry that you didn’t want to talk?” Meg asked.

Dale lowered the gun and wiped his arm across his face, beneath his nose. He nodded. “She said she was going to find out what happened. And my participation would be revealed whether I liked it or not. Insisted that it would be better from me to admit it. She kept talking, and I just wanted her to shut up. So...so, I made her,” he sobbed.

Meg stepped forward, and motioned to Davis and Tyler. As they stood and inched out of the gate. Dale brought the gun up. “Don’t!” he yelled, tears streaming down his

face. "I'll...I'll..." he whimpered. Slowly, he lowered the handgun. But as the three began to walk forward, he brought it up to his face and pointed it instead to his temple.

"I can't. I can't go to jail. Who will take care of Mother? Who? I...I can't..." he cried, his face red.

"Put the gun down Mr. Norwood. We can talk about this," Heard said.

Dale shook his head. "I've relived that night. I can't think of it in the day, but I wake up in the night. I dream of Robert, his blood squirting into my hands. The brick. I threw the brick. It was an accident. I didn't want it to hit him. I threw it towards the Marshals. It was an accident. Robert just kept bleeding."

For a moment, no one spoke.

"It's in my head. I can't. I can't keep on like this," Dale cried, still holding the gun to his temple.

"Mr. Norwood, your mother has so few memories left. But she talks of you. She worries about you. Don't do this to her. She wants to see you. No matter where you are. No matter what happens. She loves you. She needs you, Mr. Norwood. Don't become a lost, confusing memory." Meg said.

"She doesn't form new ones. She...she's dying," Dale cried.

"She would know you were gone. Parents shouldn't outlive their children. She would feel your absence. Even with Alzheimer's. A mother has a sixth sense about her children. It's in her heart, and that seems to be working fine. She would sense your absence." Meg said, taking a small step forward.

At his temple, the gun moved Dale's hair. His hand was shaking. Meg couldn't tell if it was because he was crying or because he was nervous.

"She needs you to be alive, Mr. Norwood. Don't do this. Put down the gun," Tyler said, stepping forward just as Meg had.

The gap between them was closing. If he pulled the trigger, Meg knew she would be close enough that her ears would ring from the noise of the gun. Her clothes would get stained with the splattering of blood and brain. And she would witness his death in dreams that would wake her in the night, screaming. She mentally said a quick prayer, "Please God: don't let him pull that trigger."

"Put down the gun, Mr. Norwood," she said again as Tyler took another step forward. He stood directly in front of Dale Norwood, his stride much longer than her own. He reached up slowly, took Dale Norwood's hand, and gently eased the gun from it. "Don't," Tyler said again to him as he took the gun.

Meg and Heard both sighed. Dale collapsed into the grass, tears still streaming down his face.

Heard walked forward and took Dale's arm, pulling him to his feet. "Mr. Norwood, you are under arrest for the murder of Brianna Mayes and Robert Bolden. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand?"

Dale nodded and walked beside Heard as they began walking towards the house.

Meg looked up at the sky an hour later as Dale was ushered into a police car. It was late afternoon. She hadn't packed her things yet to return home. She was going to be late to the studio. With a sigh, she looked back at the Norwood house.

They had asked a neighbor to keep an eye on Mrs. Norwood until arrangements could be made for a full time caregiver. The woman, still upset from her morning encounter with three strangers, had lain in bed while her son had held a gun to his head.

Meg shook her head and watched Davis gesture to some uniforms. They were combing over the house in search of the murder weapon. Meg had suggested they check the office or the study. It seemed a logical place to meet with a persistent student.

Tyler stood next to her and they watched the activity around them. They weren't collecting evidence. Their role was done, though they loitered anyway.

An officer came out of the house with a bagged letter opener. The wooden handle was attached to a three inch metal piece shaped to a point. She assumed that was it. The first item Dale could grab to stop Brianna from discussing the night he'd sought to avoid since it had happened. The officer held it up to show Heard, who nodded. As they spoke, the officer held up another bag for Heard's inspection. In the sunlight, Meg saw it contained a tarnished St. Christopher's medal. It looked old. She wondered where it had come from, and felt herself shrug. Obviously it was evidence. Without asking, she assumed it had belonged to Brianna; perhaps it had been a family heirloom.

Meg shook her head. A letter opener. Spur of the moment. Death as an answer to avoid thoughts of violence that occurred years before. How long had he avoided it? How long had those around him helped him avoid it? Meg put her hands in her pockets.

“Well, when are you jetting back to Quantico?” she asked Tyler as she watched another officer show Heard a bagged cell phone.

He checked his watch. “I have a flight to catch this evening. I’ll probably go grab some ribs at Rendezvous before I go to the airport though.” Rendezvous was a barbeque joint they’d eaten at before a formal in Memphis in their undergrad years. Though it was in a sketchy alley, it boasted some of the best ribs anywhere and had the awards to prove it. Meg smiled at the thought.

They’d had some good times together. “Rendezvous is always good,” she agreed, turning from him to find out how to return to her car.

She walked up to Davis and interrupted his discussion with uniformed officers. “Any chance I can get a lift to my car? I’m due back in Memphis like now.”

He nodded and motioned to the man in uniform to his right. “It’s been good working with you, Ms. Anderson. You’re a pain in the ass, but when it comes down to it, you’re not a bad partner.” he took her hand into his own dark palm for a shake.

“Likewise.” she said with a smile. She turned, motioned to Tyler that she’d secured a ride, and followed the man in uniform.



Meg and Tyler arrived back at Jordan's home to find Leah and Jordan eating chips and watching Netflix in their pajamas. Both of them had pulled their hair back into a messy bun and wore oversized t-shirts.

Meg sat down beside them. "Jordan, Leah. We got him. The man who killed Brianna is in custody. Davis and some officers are working to solidify the case. He'll go to trial though. Brianna isn't going to be a cold case," Meg told them.

For the first time since Thursday night, Meg saw Jordan's smile reach her eyes. "Well, that's something I guess. As cliché as it sounds, I feel like this means Brianna will be able to rest in peace," Jordan said.

Meg nodded.

Jordan reached out and took her hand. "I'm sorry we didn't spend more time together. I was really looking forward to you being here. I just..." Jordan shrugged. "I wanted to spend time with people who knew Brianna. I wanted to forget about what she looked like in the tunnels. And I wanted her to show up like she was. Thank you though for helping to figure it all out. You too Tyler," Jordan said.

Meg and Tyler both nodded.

"I've been feeling like a terrible friend this weekend. I wanted to fulfill my promise and spend time with you. There just weren't enough hours in the days. I'm glad you aren't upset," Meg said. "Next time I come back down, we'll go get an Ole Fashioned at the Burgundy Room or City Grocery. My treat. Deal?"

"Sounds good to me," Jordan said.

“I’ve got to get going. I’m sorry, I got called into studio. I’m already running a little late,” Meg said.

Jordan nodded again. “I understand.”

Meg smiled, and began to pack up.

Meg put her bag in her car and turned to Tyler. They had finished packing nearly simultaneously. Though they were driving to the same place, he would be jetting off in matter of hours. Walking around campus and talking about old haunts throughout the weekend had made her remember how much she enjoyed his company. It was the first time she’d seen him in person in two years. They exchanged emails and texts. The occasional phone call. Especially when she was working on a story that involved a case on the federal scope. But really, they rarely met up to just spend time together. Remember the good times and make some more.

Meg kicked at the concrete, and Tyler stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“Well, this is it, I guess,” he said.

“Yea, I guess so,” Meg kicked a pebble, and Tyler turned away from her.

“Hey Tyler, wait,” she said, running her hands through her hair. “Don’t be a stranger okay? It was really good to see you.”

“It was really good to see you too, Meg. I missed you.”

"I missed you too," she said quietly. Feeling awkward, she leaned in for a hug.

As they parted, Meg added, "Let's plan to get together in person sometime when we aren't trying to solve something."

Tyler nodded. "It's a deal."

And with that, Meg got in her car and turned the key. She had to make a beeline for Memphis, and she shoved it into drive and pulled out of Jordan's driveway. And out of Oxford.

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