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**CAROLYN ARNOLD**

**ELEVEN**

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Nothing in the twenty weeks at Quantico had prepared me for this.

A crime scene investigator, who had identified himself as Earl Royster when we'd first arrived, addressed my boss, FBI Supervisory Special Agent Jack Harper, "All of the victims were buried—" He held up a finger, his eyes squeezed shut, and he sneezed. "Sorry 'bout that. My allergies don't like it down here. They were all buried the same way."

This was my first case with the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit, and it had brought me and the three other members of my team to Salt Lick, Kentucky. The discovery was made this morning, and we were briefed and flown in from Quantico to the Louisville field office where we picked up a couple of SUVs. We drove from there and arrived in Salt Lick at about four in the afternoon.

We were in an underground bunker illuminated by portable lights brought in by the local investigative team. The space was eleven feet beneath the cellar of a house that was the size of a mobile trailer. We stood in a central hub from which four tunnels spread out like a root system. The space was fifteen feet by seven and a half feet and six and a half feet tall.

The walls were packed dirt, and an electrical cord ran along the ceiling and down the tunnels with pigtail light fixtures dangling every few feet. The bulbs cut into the height of the tunnels by eight inches.

I pulled on my shirt collar wishing for a smaller frame than my six foot two inches. As it was, the three of us could have reached

out and touched each other if we were so inclined. The tunnels were even narrower at three feet wide.

“It’s believed each victim had the same cuts inflicted,” Royster began, “although most of the remains are skeletal, so it’s not as easy to know for sure, but based on burial method alone, this guy obviously adhered to some sort of ritual. The most recent victim is only a few years old and was preserved by the soil. The oldest remains are estimated to date back twenty-five to thirty years. Bingham moved in twenty-six years ago.”

Lance Bingham was the property owner, age sixty-two, and was currently serving three to five years in a correctional facility for killing two cows and assaulting a neighbor. If he had moved in twenty-six years ago, that would put Bingham at thirty-six years old at the time. The statistical age for a serial killer to start out is early to mid-thirties.

The CSI continued to relay more information about how the tunnels branched out in various directions, likely extending beneath a neighboring cornfield, and the ends came to bulbous tips, like subterranean cul-de-sacs.

“There are eleven rooms and only ten bodies,” Jack summarized with impatience and pulled a cigarette out of a shirt pocket. He didn’t light up, but his mouth was clamped down on it as if it were a lifeline.

Royster’s gaze went from the cigarette to Jack’s eyes. “Yes. There’s one tunnel that leads to a dead end, and there’s one empty grave.”

Jack turned to me. “What do you make of it?” he asked, the cigarette bobbing on his lips as he spoke.

Everyone looked at me expectantly. “Of the empty grave?” I squeaked out.

Jack squinted and removed the cigarette from his mouth. “That and the latest victim.”

“Well...” My collar felt tighter, and I cleared my throat, then continued. “Bingham had been in prison for the last three years. The elaborate tunnel system he had going would have taken years to plan and dig, and it would have taken a lot of strength. My guess would be that Bingham wasn’t working alone. He had help and,

after he went to prison, someone followed in his footsteps.”

Jack perched the unlit smoke back between his lips. “Hmm.”

I wasn’t sure how to read *Hmm*, but the way his gaze scrutinized me, I was thinking he wasn’t necessarily impressed.

“Anyway, you’ll want to see it for yourself.” Royster gestured down one of the tunnels and took a step toward it. “I know I haven’t seen anything like—” Royster didn’t catch his sneeze in time, and snot sprayed through the air.

*Ick.* I stepped back.

More snuffles. “Again, sorry ’bout that. Anyway, this way.”

Jack motioned for me to follow behind Royster, ahead of him.

I took a deep breath, anticipating the tight quarters of the tunnel.

Sweat dripped down my back, and I pulled on my collar again.

“Go ahead, Kid,” Jack directed.

He’d adopted the pet name for me from the moment we’d met, and I wished he’d just call me by my name.

Both Jack and the CSI were watching me.

The CSI said, “We’ll look at the most recent victim first. Now, as you know, the victims alternated male and female. The tenth victim was female so we believe the next is going to be—”

“Let me guess, male,” Jack interrupted him.

“Yeah.” Royster took off down the third tunnel that fed off from the bottom right of the hub.

I followed behind him, tracing the walls with my hands. My heart palpitated. I ducked to miss the bulbs just as I knew I’d have to and worked at focusing on the positive. Above ground, the humidity sucked air from the lungs; in the tunnels, the air was cool but still suffocating.

I counted my paces—five, six. The further we went, the heavier my chest became, making the next breath less taken for granted.

Despite my extreme discomfort, this was my first case, and I had to be strong. The rumor was you either survived Jack and the two years of probationary service and became a certified special agent or your next job would be security detail at a mall.

Five more paces and we entered an offshoot from the main tunnel. According to Royster, three burial chambers were in this

tunnel. He described these as branches on a tree. Each branch came off the main trunk for the length of about ten feet and ended in a circular space of about eleven feet in diameter. The idea of more space seemed welcoming until we reached it.

A circular grave took up most of the space and was a couple of feet deep. Chicken wire rimmed the grave to help it retain its shape. With her wrists and ankles tied to metal stakes, her arms and legs formed the human equivalent of a star. As her body had dried from decomposition, the constraints had kept her positioned in the manner the killer had intended.

“And what made them dig?” Jack asked the CSI.

Jack was searching for specifics. We knew Bingham had entrusted his financials to his sister, but when she passed away a year ago, the back taxes had built up, and the county had come to reclaim the property.

Royster answered, “X marked the spot.” Neither Jack nor I displayed any amusement. The CSI continued. “He etched into the dirt, probably with a stick.”

“Why assume a stick?” Jack asked the question, and it resulted in an awkward silence.

My eyes settled on the body of the female who was estimated to be in her early twenties. It’s not that I had an aversion to a dead body, but looking at her made my stomach toss. She still had flesh on her bones. As the CSI had said, *Preserved by the soil*.

Her torso had eleven incisions. They were marked in the linear way to keep count. Two sets of four vertical cuts with one diagonal slash through each of them. The eleventh cut was the largest and was above the belly button.

“You realize the number eleven is believed to be a sign of purity?” Zach’s voice seemed to strike me from thin air, and my chest compressed further, knowing another person was going to share the limited space.

Zachery Miles was a member of our team, but unlike Jack’s reputation, Zach’s hadn’t preceded him. Any information I had, I’d gathered from his file that showed a flawless service record and the IQ of a genius. It also disclosed that he was thirty-seven, eight

years older than I was.

Jack stuck the cigarette he had been sucking on back into his shirt pocket. “Purity, huh?”

I looked down at the body of the woman in the shallow grave beside me. Nothing seemed too pure about any of this.

“I’m going to go,” Royster excused himself.

“That’s if you really dig into the numerology and spiritualistic meaning of the number,” Zachery said, disregarding the CSI entirely.

Jack stretched his neck side to side and looked at me. “I hate it when he gets into that shit.” He pointed a bony index finger at me. “Don’t let me catch you talking about it either.”

I just nodded. I felt I had just been admonished as if I were his child—not that he needed to zero in on me like that. Sure, I believed in the existence of God and angels, despite the evil in the world, but I didn’t have any avid interest in the unseen.

Zachery continued, “The primary understanding is the number one is that of new beginnings and purity. This is emphasized with the existence of two ones.”

My eyes scanned Zachery’s face. While his intelligence scoring revealed a genius, physically, he was of average looks. If anything, he was slightly taller than Jack and I, probably coming in at about six foot four. His hair was dark and trimmed short. He had a high brow line and brown eyes.

“Zachery here reads something once—” Jack tapped his head “—it’s there.”

JACK AND I SPENT THE next few hours making our way to every room where Jack insisted on standing beside all the bodies. He studied each of them carefully, even if only part of their remains had been uncovered. I’d pass him glances, but he seemed oblivious to my presence. We ended up back beside the most recent victim where we stayed for twenty minutes, not moving, not talking, just standing.

I understood what he saw. There was a different feel to this room, nothing quantifiable, but it was discernible. The killer had



a lot to say. He was organized and immaculate. He was precise and disciplined. He acted with a purpose, and, like most killers, he had a message to relay. We were looking for a controlled, highly intelligent unsub.

The intestines had been removed from nine of the victims, but Harold Jones, the coroner—who also came backed with a doctorate unlike most of his profession—wouldn't conclude it as the cause of death before conducting more tests. The last victim's intestines were intact, and, even though the cause of death needed confirmation, the talk that permeated the corridors of the bunker was that the men who did this were scary sons of bitches.

Zachery entered the room. "I find it fascinating he would bury his victims in circular graves."

*Fascinating?*

I looked up at Jack, and he flicked his lighter.

He held out his hands as if to say he wouldn't light up inside the burial chamber. His craving was getting desperate, though, which meant he'd be getting cranky. He said, "Continue, Zachery, by all means. The kid wants to hear."

"By combining both the number eleven and the circle, it makes me think of the coinherence symbol. Even the way the victims are laid out."

"Elaborate," Jack directed.

"It's a circle which combines a total of eleven inner points to complete it. As eleven means purity, so the coinherence symbol is related to religious traditions—at minimum thirteen, but some people can discern more, and each symbol is understood in different ways. The circle itself stands for completion and can symbolize eternity."

I cocked my head to the side. Zachery noticed.

"We have a skeptic here, Jack."

Jack faced me and spoke with the unlit cigarette having resumed its perch between his lips. "What do you make of it?"

*Is this a trap?* "You want to know what I think?"

"By all means, Slingshot."

There it was, the other dreaded nickname, no doubt his way

of reminding me that I didn't score perfectly on handguns at the academy. "Makes me think of the medical symbol. Maybe our guy has a background in medicine. It could explain the incisions being deep enough to inflict pain but not deep enough to cause them to bleed out. It would explain how he managed to take out their intestines."

*Was this what I signed up for?*

"Hmm," Jack mumbled. Zachery remained silent. Seconds later, Jack said, "You're assuming they didn't bleed out. Continue."

"The murders happened over a period of time. This one—" I gestured to the woman, and for a moment, realized how this job transformed the life of a person into an object "—she's recent. Bingham's been in prison for about three years now."

Jack flicked the lighter again. "So you're saying he had an apprentice?"

Zachery's lips lifted upward, and his eyes read, *Like Star Wars.*

I got it. I was the youngest on the team, twenty-nine this August, next month, and I was the new guy, but I didn't make it through four years of university studying mechanics and endure twenty weeks of the academy, coming out at the top of the class, to be treated like a child. "Not like an apprentice."

"Like what then—"

"Jack, the sheriff wants to speak with you." Paige Dawson, another member of our team, came into the burial chamber. She had come to Quantico from the New York field office claiming she wanted out of the big city. I met her when she was an instructor at the FBI Academy.

I pulled on my collar. Four of us were in here now. Dust caused me to cough and warranted a judgmental glare from Jack.

"How did you make out with the guy who discovered everything?"

"He's clean. I mean we had his background already, and he lives up to it. I really don't think he's involved at all."

Jack nodded and left the room.

I turned to Zachery. "I think he hates me."

"If he hated you, you'd know it." Zachery followed behind Jack.

## TWO

Salt Lick, Kentucky was right in the middle of nowhere and had a population shy of three hundred and fifty. Just as the town's name implied, underground mineral deposits were the craving of livestock, and due to this, it had originally attracted farmers to the area. I was surprised the village was large enough to boast a Journey's End Lodge and a Frosty Freeze.

I stepped into the main hub to see Jack in a heated conversation with Sheriff Harris. From an earlier meeting with him, I knew he covered all of Bath County which included three municipalities and a combined population of about twelve thousand.

"Ah, I'm doing the best I can, Agent, but, um, we've never seen the likes of this before." A born and raised Kentucky man, the sheriff was in his mid-fifties, had a bald head and carried about an extra sixty pounds that came to rest on his front. Both of his hands were braced on his hips, a stance of confidence, but the flicking up and down of his right index finger gave his insecurities away.

"It has nothing to do with what you've seen before, Sheriff. What matters is catching the unsub."

"Well, the property owner is in p-pri-prison," the Kentucky accent broke through.

"The bodies date back two to three decades with the newest one being within the last few years."

Harris's face brightened a reddish hue as he took a deep breath and exhaled loud enough to be heard.

Jack had the ability to make a lot of people nervous. His dark hair, which was dusted with silver at the sideburns, gave him a look of

distinction, but deeply-etched creases in his face exposed his trying past.

Harris shook his head. "So much violence, and it's tourist season 'round here." Harris paused. His eyes said, *You city folks wouldn't understand.* "Cave Run Lake is manmade but set in the middle of nature. People love coming here to get away. Word gets out about this, there go the tourists."

"Ten people have been murdered, and you're worried about tourists?"

"Course not, but—"

"It sounds like you were."

"Then you misunderstood, Agent. Besides, the counties around here are peaceful, law-abidin' citizens."

"Churchgoers?" Zachery came up from a tunnel.

"Well, ah, I wouldn't necessarily say that. There are probably about thirty churches or so throughout the county, and right here in Salt Lick there are three."

"That's quite a few considering the population here."

"S'pose so."

"Sheriff." A deputy came up to the group of them and pulled up his pants.

"Yes, White."

The deputy's face was the shade of his name. "The in-investigators found somethin' you should see." He passed glances among all of us.

Jack held out a hand as if to say, *By all means.*

We followed the deputy up the ramp that led to the cellar. With each step taking me closer to the surface, my chest allowed for more satisfying breaths. Jack glanced over at me. I guessed he was wondering if I was going to make it.

"This way, sir."

The deputy spoke from the front of the line, as he kept moving. His boots hit the wooden stairs that joined the cellar to the first floor.

I inhaled deeply as I came through the opening into the confined space Bingham had at one time called home. Sunlight made its way through tattered sheets that served as curtains, even though the time of day was now seven, and the sun would be sinking in the sky.

The deputy led us to Bingham's bedroom where there were two CSIs. I heard footsteps behind me: Paige. She smiled at me, but it quickly faded.

"They found it in the closet," the deputy said, pointing our focus in its direction.

The investigators moved aside, exposing an empty space. A shelf that ran the width of the closet sat perched at a forty-five-degree angle. The inside had been painted white at one time but now resembled an antiqued paint pattern the modern age went for. It was what I saw when my eyes followed the walls to the floor that held more interest.

Jack stepped in front of me; Zachery came up behind him and gave me a look that said, *Pull up the rear, Pending*. Pending being the nickname Zach had saddled me with to remind me of my twenty-four-month probationary period—as if I'd forget.

"We found it when we noticed the loose floorboard," one of the CSIs said. He held a clipboard wedged between an arm and his chest. The other hand held a pen which he clicked repeatedly. Jack looked at it, and the man stopped. The CSI went on. "Really, it's what's inside that's, well, what nightmares are made of."

I didn't know the man. In fact, I had never seen him before, but the reflection in his eyes told me he had witnessed something that even paled the gruesome find in the bunkers.

"You first, Kid." Jack stepped back.

Floorboards were hinged back and exposed a hole about two and a half feet square. My stomach tossed thinking of the CSI's words, *what nightmares are made of*.

"Come on, Brandon. I'll follow behind you." Paige's soft voice of encouragement was accompanied by a strategically placed hand on my right shoulder.

I glanced at her. I could do this. *God, I hated small spaces*. But I had wanted to be an FBI special agent and, well, that wish had been granted. Maybe the saying, *Be careful what you wish for, it might come true*, held merit.

I hunched over and looked into the hole. A wooden ladder went down at least twenty feet. The space below was lit.

Maybe if I just took it one step at a time.

“What are you waiting for, Pending?” Zachery taunted me. I didn’t look at him but picked up on the amusement in his voice.

I took a deep breath and lowered myself down.

Jack never said a word, but I could feel his energy. He didn’t think I was ready for this, but I would prove him wrong—somehow. The claustrophobia I had experienced in the underground passageways was nothing compared to the anxiety squeezing my chest now. At least the tunnels were the width of three feet. Here, four sides of packed earth hugged me, as if a substantial inhale would expand me to the confines of the space.

“I’m coming.” Again, Paige’s soft voice had a way of soothing me despite the tight quarters threatening to take my last breath and smother me alive.

I looked up. Paige’s face filled the opening, and her red wavy hair framed her face. The vision was replaced by the bottom of her shoes.

I continued my descent, one rung at a time, slowly, methodically. I tried to place myself somewhere else, but no images came despite my best efforts to conjure them—and what did I have waiting for me at the bottom? *What nightmares are made of.*

Minutes passed before my shoes reached the soil. I took a deep breath when I realized the height down here was about seven feet and looked around. The room was about five by five, and there was a doorway at the backside.

One pigtail fixture with a light bulb dangled from an electrical wire. It must have fed to the same circuit as the underground passageways and been connected to the power generator as it cast dim light, creating darkened shadows in the corners.

I looked up the ladder. Paige was about halfway down. There was movement behind her, and it was likely Jack and Zachery following behind her.

“You’re almost there,” I coached them.

By the time the rest of the team made it to the bottom, along with the deputy and a CSI, I had my breathing and my nerves under control.

Paige was the first to head around the bend in the wall.

“The sheriff is going to stay up there an’ take care of things.” The deputy pointed in the direction Paige went. “What they found is in here.”

Jack and Zachery had already headed around the bend. I followed.

Inside the room, Paige raised her hand to cover her mouth. It dropped when she noticed us.

A stainless steel table measuring ten feet by three feet was placed against the back wall. A commercial meat grinder sat on the table. Everything was pristine, and light from a bulb reflected off the surfaces.

To the left of the table was a chest freezer, plain white, one owned by the average consumer. I had one similar, but it was the smaller version because it was only Deb and me.

My stomach tossed thinking about the contents of this one. Paige’s feet were planted to where she had first entered the room. Zachery’s eyes fixed on Jack, who moved toward the freezer and, with a gloved hand, opened the lid.

Paige gasped, and Jack turned to face her. Disappointment was manifested in the way his eyes narrowed. “It’s empty.” Jack patted his shirt pocket again.

“If you’re thinking we found people’s remains in there, we haven’t,” the CSI said, “but tests have shown positive for human blood.”

“So he chopped up his victim’s intestines? Put them in the freezer? But where are they?” Paige wrapped her arms around her torso and bent over to look into the opening of the grinder.

“There are many cultures, the Korowai tribe of Papua New Guinea, for example, who have been reported to practice cannibalism even in this modern day,” Zachery said. “It can also be involved in religious rituals.”

Maybe my eyes should have been fixed on the freezer, on the horror that transpired underground in Salt Lick of Bath County, Kentucky. Instead, I found my training allowing me to focus, analyze, and be objective. In order to benefit the investigation, it would demand these three things, and I wouldn’t disappoint. My attention was on the size of the table, the size of the meat grinder, and the size of the freezer. “Anyone think to ask how this all got down here in the first

place?”

All five of them faced me.

“The opening down here is only, what, two feet square at the most? Now maybe the meat grinder would fit down, hoisted on a rope, but the table and the freezer? No way.”

“What are you saying, Slingshot?”

My eyes darted to Jack's. “I'm saying there has to be another way in.” I addressed the CSI, “Did you look for any other hidden passageways? I mean the guy obviously had a thing for them.”

“We didn't find anything.”

“Well, that doesn't make sense. Where are the burial sites in relation to here?”

“It would be that way.” Zachery pointed at the freezer.

We connected eyes, and both of us moved toward it. It slid easily. As we shoved it to the side, it revealed an opening behind it. I looked down into it. Another light bulb spawned eerie shadows. I rose to full height. This find should at least garner some praise from Jack Harper.

“Nothing like Hogan's Alley is it, Kid?”



## THREE

**H**ogan's Alley, originally named after a comic strip from the late 1800s, is a mock town used by the FBI in Quantico, Virginia as a training ground for future special agents. Placed on ten plus acres, the government built it with the aid of Hollywood set designers. The fact that Jack mentioned it by comparison silenced me.

I locked eyes with him before studying the size of the hole. It was just large enough for the freezer to fit through if turned.

"This guy did a lot of planning," Paige said. She moved closer to the tunnel entrance. "He definitely didn't want to get caught and probably never thought he would. That could be the elevated thinking of a narcissist."

Jack watched her speak, and something about the way his eyes fell, tracking to her lips, made me wonder about the nature of their relationship.

"Well, I'd definitely peg him as a psychotic, too. Narcissists usually only kill if it's the result of a personal affront, but this man gutted his victims and ground their intestines. Who knows if he ate them!" A visible shiver ran through Paige, and for some reason gauging her reaction intensified the severity of the situation.

Up until now, the training had taken over. I had cataloged the victims as fictional, not once living and breathing individuals. With the snap back to reality, I became aware of the presence of death and the way it hung in the air like a suffocating blanket. My stomach tightened, and I felt sick.

"Question is," Zachery began, "did these people threaten him

in some way? Were they random, or were these planned kills? The patience he seemed to execute with the cutting and burial indicates he was very organized. I'd almost lean to believe that they were planned, not random."

"It could be that they reminded him of one person who wronged him. That's not uncommon," Paige offered.

I was frozen in place, unable to move and incapable of thinking clearly.

The CSI hunched over and shone a flashlight into the opening. "It spreads out after a few feet. It almost looks as high as it does in here."

"I want to know what happened to the intestines," Jack stated matter-of-factly. "Slingshot, any ideas?"

"The guy knew he was going to prison and had them cleaned up?"

"But why?"

I wanted to say, *What do you mean, why?* I thought the answer was obvious, the question rhetorical, but I focused on Jack's two words. There was little risk that this room would be discovered even if the bodies were, and if the bodies were, what was a little ground-up human intestine? Another toss of my stomach brought bile into the back of my throat. "I'm not sure."

An ominous silence enveloped the room as if we were all absorbed in contemplating our mortality. The human reaction to death and uncertainty, of wanting to know but not wanting the answers, of sympathy for those lost yet relief that it wasn't us.

The CSI made his way through the opening. His flashlight cast more light in the dimly lit space. I followed and heard the rest of the team shuffle in behind me.

After a few feet, I could stand to full height.

The CSI looked up at the lit bulb. "The guy thought of everything."

The electricity that had been run down here was basic and minimal. A band of wire ran from the *meat room* to here, but it wasn't so much the wiring that garnered my attention.

To the side of the room, there was a stretcher with metal straps and stirrups. Beside it was a stainless steel tray with a single knife

lying on it. Just as with the table and meat grinder, light reflected off it. A roll of plastic sheeting stood vertically beside the bed.

“This just keeps getting creepier.” Paige took up position beside me.

“Say that again,” Deputy White said. “Scuse me.” His face paled and he slapped a hand over his mouth.

Jack was the last to come through the tunnel. Even he paused when his eyes settled on the items in the room. “What do you make of it, Kid?”

*Why am I the only one who needs to provide answers?*

“He killed them here.” I pointed back to where we came from. “Ground up their intestines in there.” I felt sick.

“Whoa, nicely put, Pending,” Zachery said.

“And how did he get them down here?”

“Well, there’s got to be another way in. The freezer alone discloses that, and I mean obviously, he wouldn’t be able to make the victims go down the ladder, past the meat grinder.” I took a deep breath, hoping this was the worst case I’d ever have to deal with. “There has to be another way in here, a passageway that connects to the burial sites.”

Paige said, “Bingham—”

“You assume,” Jack corrected her. “Maybe he worked with someone from the start. They picked the victims and brought them here.”

She disregarded him. “Bingham brought them down through the passageway that comes off the cellar. Maybe he drugged them or held them at gunpoint—”

“Or knife point.”

Paige rolled her eyes.

I looked forward to the day I could express myself in that manner to the supervisory special agent.

“Whatever. The point is he had a system worked out. Bring them down, bring them in here, cut them, kill them, gut them—”

“You’re assuming he didn’t gut them while alive.”

The deputy tightened the placement of his hand over his mouth and swiveled his hips to the right.

“You said kill them, and then gut them?” Jack asked.

“Either way.” A large exhale moved her hair briefly upward. “Gut them to kill them. There, you happy? He’s one sick son of a bitch either way.”

“And he just went away on a fluke charge, killing cows and assaulting a neighbor.” I knew once the words came out I should have thought them through. Deputy White looked capable of hauling me to the field and flogging me.

“Cattle are a v-very important investment ’round here. Farmin’ is what we people do. It’s to be respected an’ so is the livestock.”

The hint of a smirk dusted Jack’s lips. My discomfort brought him happiness. I felt my earlobes heat with anger.

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Then what did you mean?” Both the Kentucky-bred deputy and the local CSI kept their eyes on me.

“He has ten bodies buried underneath his property. Ten *human* bodies. There’s a freezer which seems to have been used to hold the unspeakable.” My arms pointed in both directions. “Numerous passageways, all the secrecy. Who was this guy really? And don’t say a killer because I think he was more than that.”

“What are you saying, Slingshot?”

“He didn’t kill them like this for no reason.” I gestured toward Zachery. “Maybe it’s something to do with that coinherence symbol of his, or maybe it has something to do with the health profession, but whatever it is, it was for a reason. This guy had something to say.”

Zachery stepped toward me. I moved back. He said, “The killers always have something to say.”

“Well, I believe this one has more to say than most.” All of them watched me as if I were about to shed light on the case. I wish I were.

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