

Provenance

XII

I lost track of time and felt a little startled when the back roads and side roads suddenly became familiar. For the first time in a long time, I knew where I was. I was definitely going to get my car back from the shop. Within minutes of realizing where I was, Thom was pulling up to the curb outside my apartment. I didn't see anyone lurking in the shadows, but Thom made me stay in the car until he had had a good look around. Have you ever realized that you feel better when you're in your own territory? I certainly felt steadier and more like my old self when I turned my key in the lock. Well, comparatively.

Everything was just as I had left it, and I felt a little resentment towards Thom. Why couldn't I have stayed here? If I had...I stopped myself. There was no point in thinking about how things could have gone differently. No point at all. I walked through to the bedroom and started scrambling through the closet for another backpack or something. As far as I knew, my old was sitting with the other unclaimed property back at the motel in Arlington. At least I still had my wallet and my cellphone tucked into my jeans' pockets. I packed again, stuffing clothes into an OCLC bag I had picked up at a conference years ago. I heard Thom's footsteps coming down the hall.

"I have your mail." Thom held out the envelopes and fliers out as though they were an olive branch.

"Thank you."

I found a spare pair of gloves and flipped through the lot pretty quickly. Bills. No letters. Big bundle of grocery store specials and coupons. I tossed the handful of newsprint and glossies into the trash.

"Just let me check my voice mail. Then you can tell me what the plan is."

My cell was out of power and I had to go hunting for the charger. When everything was plugged in, I saw that I had gotten a message. I *booped* my way through the menu and stuck the phone to my ear.

"Ada, hi!" It was Glenn. "Sue decided that the library is going to stay closed until Monday. It's going to take that long until they get the mess downstairs cleaned up."

Next message. "Ms. Wright. This is Sergeant Cooper with the Augusta Police Department. We recovered a small book in Dr. Jasper's possession that had your name on it. Please come to the station

to pick it up at your earliest convenience. We'd like to ask you a few questions when you come in.” He gave his number and hung up. My heart had started pounding again at the sound of the deep male authoritative voice. A panicky little voice in my head urgently reminding me about the man I had accidentally killed. It was just a matter of time before the police found out and hauled me in.

There were no more messages after that. Just as well, I'm not sure my adrenal glands could keep up with the demand.

I sucked in a calming breath and looked at Thom. “Change of plans. I have to go to the police station and get something that Dr. Jasper left for me. If you don't want to drive me, I'll walk.”

“You're not walking anywhere. I'll take you. Are you ready?”

I nodded and we headed back out. The station wasn't too far away, just a few blocks south of the university on Main Street. No matter what Thom said about Jack not going to the police, if I slipped and gave away what I had done—it was all over. I scrubbed my sweaty palms on my jeans. Get a grip, Ada.

Thom pulled into the parking lot of the two story brick city building. I made him stay put and walked into the station alone. After asking the duty officer where I could find Cooper, I made my way through the distinctly un-busy station. When I got to the detectives department, it was another story. The men and women stood around in small groups, talking very seriously to each other. Younger officers were running around delivering reports and fetching steaming mugs of institutional coffee. One such officer looked like he was manning the tip line, dutifully logging the calls from cranks and suspicious old ladies. I could see him visibly losing his faith in humanity as he sat at his gray metal desk.

I found Sergeant Cooper's office and pulled my gloves back on before I knocked tentatively at the door. I heard a gruff “Come in!” and pushed my way through the door. Sergeant Cooper was a middle aged man with graying black hair and a salt-and-pepper mustache. He had a small gut pushing on the buttons of his light blue shirt, but he still looked like he could kick teenaged ass. His inbox was full of manila folders and reports. I knew Augusta was a pretty low-crime town, so I guessed that most of this was about Dr. Jasper and Ed and Kyle. Three murders in one day. This was really going to play hell with our crime statistics.

Cooper pointed to a dull orange vinyl chair and I sat, making a loud, embarrassing puff of air explode out of the cushion. Cooper spun around in his chair and pulled something small out of a cardboard banker's box behind the desk. I craned my neck to get a peek at the object. It was a small book with a note stuck to it was a tan rubber band.

“We found this in Dr. Jasper's coat pocket. The note has your name on it, so I guess he wanted you to have it.”

Cooper laid the book down in the middle of his desk and looked at me. I resisted the urge to squirm under his gaze. I hadn't had anything to do with the murders (well, not those murders anyway), but I still felt like I had done something wrong. Okay, I had done something wrong. I had lied for Thom when the police had talked to us outside the library. But that wasn't that bad, was it? Don't answer that. Have you ever walked into a bank and noticed the cameras, and then suddenly didn't know what to do with your hands? I felt like that, but ten times worse.

I reached for the book and took it. I could feel Cooper staring at my gloved hands, aching to ask the question. The book was very small, just seven folded signatures of paper stapled together with big, clunky bits of metal. I pulled off the rubber band and set the note aside for a moment. There were a few bits of faded typed writing on the cover. *Fighting the Supernatural*, by Arthur Neeson. No publisher. Not surprising, since this looked like it had been typed on a typewriter and assembled by hand. A quick flip through the pages made me suspect that the author had spent a lot of time alone in a cabin in the woods with a tinfoil hat. Probably played a lot of Dungeons and Dragons when he was young, too. Didn't date a whole lot.

I looked at the note. “Ada. Did a little research after you left Friday night. Found this. There's good information in here. Will help you. Look at chapter five! Bruce.”

“Why did Dr. Jasper want you to have this?” Cooper asked.

My mind went blank for a minute as I scrambled for something to say. “He was helping me with some research. I'm writing a novel. About werewolves.” There was another thing for the list: learn how to lie under pressure. I could feel sweat starting to form at my hairline. It was a struggle to resist the urge to wipe my forehead.

“Werewolves?” Cooper said, raising his gray eyebrows at me.

“Yeah, it's a bit silly. But Dr. Jasper was helping me anyway.” I glanced down at the book. “It was really sweet of him.”

“I see. So that's it? Just a bit of help for a colleague?”

“Yes. Thank you for calling me. I would have been here sooner, but the battery in my phone went dead.” I heard myself babbling, but I couldn't stop myself. Shut up, Ada! Shut up! You're going to say something stupid. I tried to get a grip on myself.

“We didn't get a chance to talk to you on Monday. Did you come into work?”

“My boss sent me home.”

“Why?”

Crap. Just tell the truth, Ada. “I didn't feel well. The shock and everything. Glenn said that I could go home, since I hadn't seen anything useful.”

Cooper shook his head sadly. “You know, that's really for us to decide. Did you see anything? Hear anything? Anything you might know would really help us out.”

“No. I only got to the library after the police and the EMTs showed up.”

“All right, let's try a different tack. Did you know Dr. Jasper well?”

“Not really. We worked together. I delivered books to his department every now and then. And he helped me with my research.”

“Why did you go to him?” Cooper asked. He had pulled out a small notebook and was taking notes slowly with a Bic. “Why not another librarian?”

“I don't know. We just got to talking one day and I mentioned that I was writing a novel...” What was I doing? Too late to take it back now.

Cooper scribbled something down. “Did he ever mention that anyone might try to hurt him?”

“No.”

“And he wasn't in the habit of carrying valuables around?”

“I don't know. I don't think so.”

Cooper flipped the page of his notebook over. “Now, about the two men found in the bushes behind the library. Did you know them?”

“No, sir.”

“No ideas about why they were there?”

I shook my head. “No. As far as I know, no one goes there except to smoke.”

“These two weren't smokers and they weren't students. What about the friends you were with? Did they know the victims?”

“I don't think so. I mean, they were only there because I asked them to come, after I found out about what happened to Dr. Jasper. I remember telling this to the police at the time.”

“Of course. I was just hoping that you'd've remembered something since then.”

My ass, I thought. “Do you have any ideas about who did this?”

Cooper looked up at me and tossed his pen down on the desk. “We're following up on some leads.”

I knew from watching CSI every now and then that this meant they didn't have anything.

“What about Dr. Jasper?”

“Again, nothing definite. But we're following some leads. Thank you for your time, Ms. Wright.” Cooper handed me a card with his name and numbers on it. “If you think of anything, call me. Any information you can give us would be a big help.”

“So we're done?”

“One last question, Ms. Wright. Why are you wearing gloves?”

Ah, at last a question I had a *good* lie for. “I have Reynaud's syndrome, officer.” God bless whoever that mystery writer had been, who had written about this medical oddity in novel I could no longer recall. “It's like a severe case of poor circulation,” I explained.

Cooper noted it down on his notepad and circled the words. I knew that he was going to check up on it. Too late, Sergeant Cooper, I thought. It's a real condition and I'm not making it up. Ha!

“Is that all, Sergeant?” I asked in my most innocent sounding voice.

Cooper nodded. “Yes. Thank you for stopping by.”

I ducked out of the office as quickly as I could, Jasper's book tucked under my arm like a football. In record time, I was out of the station and looking around for Thom's black sedan. My hands and the back of my neck were sweaty, and my heart felt like it was going to pound its way out of my chest at any moment. I spotted Thom's car and hurried towards it with my head down and my legs scissoring along as fast as they could manage without actually jogging. The edgy bastard had parked on the far side of the lot, near the egress points.

When I opened the passenger side door, Thom greeted me with a tense, “What took so long?”

I slipped into my seat, shoving my OCLC bag out of the way. “They wanted me to answer a few questions.”

“Do they know anything?”

“They probably know lots of things. But they don't know what really happened to your guys or to Bruce,” I said. “And they don't know what happened at the bar. They don't know about me.”

Thom breathed out a sigh of relief and turned the key in the ignition. As he pulled out on to Main, I opened Jasper's book, skimming the pages.

“What is that?” Thom asked.

“It's what Dr. Jasper left for me.”

“What's it about?”

I ignored him and flipped through the pages to chapter five, just as Jasper's note had told me. The title marched proudly across the top of the page in slightly uneven type. “Fighting Werewolves.” I snorted. No matter how reasonable this book might sound, I didn't know if I could trust it. What did the

little nut job Neeson know about werewolves anyway? I hadn't known they existed until my life had taken a left turn last week. Focus, Ada. A few paragraphs in, I spotted a heading: How to kill werewolves.

“Contrary to popular belief, werewolves cannot be killed by ordinary silver objects,” it began. I sat up a little straighter. This explained why my necklace hadn't done anything more than distract the Tackler. Apparently, you had to use something that was completely silver *and* hit the wolf somewhere fatal. Head or heart. Plus, you had to wait around until their hearts stopped beating to make sure they were really dead. Strong werewolves sometimes managed to heal wounds that would have killed a human instantly. The Tackler apparently wasn't strong enough to heal himself before he suffocated. Jesus. I felt hot and sick with guilt again.

As I read on, Neeson carefully and painstakingly debunked myth after myth about werewolves. The man was clearly a nerd, but it looked like he really did know what he was talking about. I sent a silent thank you to Dr. Jasper and his weird book collecting habits. He must have found the book in his collection at home and stuffed it into a pocket or something to show me when I turned up at work on Monday. If only we had tried harder to watch over him, I thought.

I turned back to Neeson and learned that werewolves could also be poisoned by wolfsbane if you got them to ingest enough of it. Neeson suggested a lethal dose so high that I wondered how you could sneak enough of it into their food or drink to knock them out without the werewolf noticing. The only sure way to kill a werewolf, Neeson wrote, was to cut its head off. Great. Apparently, I need to start carrying a chainsaw around. A silver chainsaw. Could you get those at Home Depot?