



Campbell went out to get lunch and spent fifteen minutes sitting in the restaurant's parking lot, on her cell phone with Mart Brady while waiting for the takeout order. Mart was dismayed at the news of Bill's disappearance, but he couldn't offer her anything but sympathy.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "Call me if he doesn't turn up. Maybe I could come over for a day or two and help you."

"Thanks," Campbell told him. "The police are on it, and Nick and I are doing our best, but we just don't know where to look."

"Just follow up on every little crumb you get."

"I will. Thanks for being there, Uncle Mart." She went back to the office with Chinese in white take-out boxes.

She and Nick sat on either side of his desk to eat, making small talk and not mentioning her father. When she was done, Campbell cleared away the trash and wheeled her chair back to her dad's desk.

"Give me something to do. I've gone through Dad's address file and called everyone I remotely thought might have heard from him."

She hated feeling helpless—anything she could do now would feel like progress.

“Maybe you should take a look at Kentucky’s requirements for private investigators,” Nick said.

“Why?”

“Why not?”

Campbell leaned back in the chair, locking down on that thought. If her father didn’t turn up right away, she’d certainly want to keep looking for him. If she had a PI’s license, she could work alongside Nick. But that would probably take a lot of training. Former law enforcement officers could get a license easily, she was sure, but English professors?

She didn’t have time to think about it right now. She needed to find her dad and apply for a few more teaching jobs. Surely someone needed an English professor. She pursed her lips, regretting her major, even though she’d loved it. If she had a math or science degree, she could have a job within hours.

Halfheartedly, she searched for and opened the website for Western Kentucky University, in her hometown of Bowling Green. She really had no desire to go back there, did she? It felt like a regression. Still, she opened the tab on jobs available. Nothing in her field. She didn’t want to start applying for secretarial jobs. Not yet. And she didn’t want to move that far away until she knew her father was all right.

Nick had plunged into his workload once more, and she envied him. At least he had some clear direction on what to do next.

Maybe she should actually consider what he’d said. If Bill didn’t turn up soon, she might need to stay here longer than the few weeks she’d planned on.

A search on the computer came up with the Commonwealth’s statute. In seconds, she was looking at a file titled ‘Become a Private Detective through Training and

Certification in Kentucky.’ She scrolled to the section on minimum requirements.

- Must be at least 21 years old. *Check.*
- Be of good moral character. *Check.*
- Be a U.S. citizen or lawful resident alien. *Check.*
- If you have any felony convictions, 10 years must have passed since the completion of your sentence. *Not applicable.*
- No convictions for crimes involving dishonesty or moral turpitude within the past five years. *Check.*
- If you are a military veteran, you must not have been dishonorably discharged. *No problem there.*
- Be of sound mental capacity. *Check—despite what Nick might say.*
- No misdemeanor or higher convictions within the past three years for crimes involving controlled substances. *Check.*
- May not have been enrolled in a facility or program for substance abuse in the past three years. *Check.*
- May not chronically or habitually use alcohol or drugs. *Check.*

“Okay, so I researched the law for private investigators in Kentucky.” She looked up. “I meet the minimum requirements.”

“Great.” Nick stared at his screen.

She read on and found she easily met the education requirement. “So, for a few hundred bucks I can apply for a license.” Something farther down caught her eye. “Oh, wait. Do I need the liability insurance?”

“The agency covers that if you’re working for True Blue.”

She nodded and read on. A few minutes later, she sat back. “Sounds like I could put in the application right away and send

permission for them to see my medical records. Who does the background check and fingerprinting?"

"They do. And then you take the test."

Still not certain this was the way to go, she nodded. "I do expect to find another teaching job."

"Then you don't need to worry about the PI's test."

Campbell sighed. Joining her father's business had not been on her list of possibilities when she drove away from Feldman. Right now, she wasn't sure what she wanted to do, except find her father. Was she seriously considering this? Maybe it would be wise to apply, just in case she found herself the owner of the agency. A wave of nausea hit her. Why was she even thinking that? She clicked firmly to close the website.

Time to think about something else. Something constructive. She opened her purse and rummaged for the notebook where she'd jotted down information they'd gleaned when they interviewed diner patrons.

"I think I'll try to contact some more of the people who were at the diner last night," she said.

"Who's left?"

Campbell frowned over her notes. "Several unnamed college students, a Dr. Exter, a Brock Wilson..." Since she had both a first and last name there, she decided to start with Wilson.

To her surprise, he wasn't hard to find online. He worked at an auto parts store on Twelfth Street, a main thoroughfare running past the university's stadium and southward toward the Tennessee border. Several shopping centers clustered along it. She debated calling Wilson's store but decided to drive over there.

"I'll see if I can get five minutes with this guy, Wilson," she told Nick. "Call me if anything important comes up."

Nick said nothing, so she shoved the notebook in her purse and went out to her car.

She didn't want to disrupt Wilson's workday, but it turned

out he was the store manager. A clerk called him to the counter. He looked about forty, dark haired, had crows' feet at the corners of his eyes, and carried a few extra pounds on his tall frame.

"Sure, I remember Darrin being at the diner Monday night," he said. It seemed everyone in town—at least, everyone who frequented the Barn Owl—did indeed know Darrin Beresford.

"Did you speak to him?" Campbell asked.

"No."

"Did you see Bill McBride?"

"Who?"

Campbell grimaced. "Bill McBride. He owns True Blue Investigations."

"Don't know him," Wilson said.

"Okay. Well, did you notice anything unusual about Darrin Beresford while he was there or when he left?"

Wilson frowned. "I read in the paper that he's dead."

Of course, it had hit the *Ledger & Times* this morning. "That's right," Campbell said.

"Are you a cop?" Wilson asked.

"No, I'm Bill McBride's daughter. My dad hasn't come home since that night, and I think Darrin phoned him from the diner."

"I did see Darrin talking on his cell, but I don't know anything about the other guy. Your dad. I'm sorry about that."

"Thanks. I don't suppose you heard any of Darrin's phone conversation?"

Wilson squeezed his lips together and squinted. "I don't think so. Maybe ... hmm, at one point I did hear him say, 'I'm sure it's him. I don't care how long it's been.' Or something like that." He shrugged. "I have no idea who he was talking about."

"I'm sure it's him," Campbell repeated slowly. She jotted the words in her notebook. She was certain Darrin had something to do with her father's disappearance. When Brock Wilson

overhead him, was he telling her father he'd seen someone of interest?

That statement sounded like something he would tell an investigator. Darrin was known for calling the newspaper and the police with tips he thought were important. But how could she find out what—and who—he was talking about?

“Do you remember who else was there?” she asked.

“Well, I was there with Paul Exter.”

Campbell looked down at her notes. “*Doctor Exter?*”

“Yes. He’s a dentist.”

“Good to know.” She scribbled “Paul” beside the “Dr. Exter” she’d written while interviewing the diner’s owner.

Wilson glanced toward the door as a customer entered, but the clerk hurried forward to help the man. The manager leaned over the counter toward Campbell.

“Now that you mention it, there *was* something funny. Paul and I had been talking about playing golf together, and all of a sudden, he seemed distracted. I turned around to see what he was looking at. Darrin was yakking on his phone and I didn’t see anything weird. But then Darrin got up to leave, and that’s when Paul said he had to go.”

“Right after Darrin left?”

“Yeah.”

“Would you say he followed Darrin out?”

“Uh, I don’t know. He threw two twenties on the table and said, ‘Tonight’s on me. I’ll call you.’ And then he left. Very sudden.”

“Did he call you?” she asked.

“Yeah, the next day. We set up a golf date.”

“Did he tell you why he left the diner in such a hurry?”

“No, I don’t think it came up again. We’re playing golf on Saturday. I can ask him.”

“Do you guys eat at the Barn Owl often?”

“Who, me and Paul?”

She nodded.

"I do once in a while, maybe a couple times a month. I don't think Paul goes there much. Look, I've got to get back to work."

"Here's one of my father's business cards." She turned it over and wrote quickly on the back. "That's my cell phone number. Please call me if you think of anything else. And thanks for your time, Mr. Wilson."

"No probs."

Campbell drove back toward the office thinking over what he'd told her. Maybe she could talk to Dr. Exter, but he probably wouldn't like to be interrupted while he was working on patients. She decided to give his office a call later and try to set up something. On a whim, she turned toward the police station. When she stepped inside, Ferris was at the front desk.

"Ms. McBride," he said with a polite smile as she stepped up to the glass barrier.

"Hi. I was wondering if I could look at the police log."

"Sure. Come around through that door. He pointed to the side opposite where she'd gone with Fuller that morning. Ferris opened the door for her and led her to a small desk with a ledger lying open on its surface.

"This is where our dispatchers log calls. Later they're put in our computer log with more detail if it's appropriate."

Campbell was surprised to see the handwritten notations.

"If you have any questions, I'll be right over there." Ferris pointed to his usual station.

"Thanks." Campbell sat down and eyed the open book. The left-hand page was only about half full of calls that had come in over the past few hours. A barking dog, a stolen purse, a collision with a deer on Route 94. So, this was how the reporters got their tips on local law enforcement. And how her dad did it when he came in to see what was going on that might be of interest to him.

She flipped back a page. One day's entries ran right into the

next, and she was able to back up until Monday evening. She puzzled over the page for several minutes then stood and walked over to Officer Ferris. At the moment he wasn't talking to anyone, and he turned toward her.

"May I help you?"

"Yes," Campbell said. "I was looking at Monday night's log. I expected to see a call from Darrin Beresford, but I couldn't find it."

"Darrin?" Ferris's face went blank.

"Yes. I understand he called the police before he called my father. It was a 'recent call' on his cell phone. But there's no record of a call from him that evening or all day, in fact. I even checked back as far as Sunday morning."

"Okay, let me check who was on duty that night." Ferris clicked a few strokes on his keyboard and consulted the computer screen. He punched in a phone extension. A couple of minutes later, another officer came into the room.

"This is Patrol Sergeant Andrews," Ferris said and turned away to speak to a woman who had come to his window.

"May I help you?" Andrews asked.

"I hope so." Campbell introduced herself and explained she knew Darrin had called the police station's non-emergency number Monday night between 5 and 5:30 p.m. "I couldn't find a record of the call in the police log. Officer Ferris said you were on duty then."

Andrews hesitated. "Yes, I was the one who took Mr. Beresford's call."

"But it's not in the log." Campbell waited for him to respond.

The sergeant let out a quiet sigh. "It was a nothing call. Darrin claimed he'd seen someone who used to live in town a long time ago."

"Why would he think that was worth a call to the police?" Campbell asked.

Andrews said carefully, "The person Darrin claimed he saw



was a suspect in a crime several years ago, and the case is still open.”

“So, why isn’t that in the police log?”

Andrews’s face reddened. “Did you know Darrin?”

“Not personally, but I’ve heard things.”

He nodded. “That guy called here all the time. He was a bit of a crackpot, but don’t quote me on that. We didn’t really take Darrin seriously. If we did, we’d be out on wild goose chases all the time. One day it’s a cat up a tree, the next day he’s seen a mafia boss in town. Next time, it will be a UFO.”

“Okay.” Campbell wasn’t sure whether to push harder or not. She didn’t want to antagonize the police, but she wouldn’t learn any more if she didn’t.

“My father is missing,” she said. “Darrin made the call to you, and right after he hung up, he called my father. I’m guessing that was because he didn’t get any satisfaction from the police department.”

“It’s possible, but—”

“Don’t you have to take *every* call seriously?” Campbell asked.

Andrews dropped his voice. “Generally, that’s true. But due to experience, we had to ask Darrin to stop calling.”

That tallied with what Nick had told her. “So if you told him not to call, but he did anyway, wouldn’t you think maybe it was really something this time?”

Sgt. Andrews didn’t seem to have an answer to that. Campbell didn’t know the man, but his cheeks looked a little flushed, and she could swear he was holding back whatever he wanted to say.

“Detective Fuller is investigating Mr. Beresford’s death,” she said. “We think it’s connected to his contact with my father.”

“I’ll touch base with Detective Fuller.” Andrews seemed almost relieved that she’d taken the conversation in a different direction.

“Thank you.” It was all she could hope for, she supposed. She nodded and strode out to her car. Better check in with Nick. She headed for the office.

“You got something?” he asked as Campbell breezed in. He was clicking languidly at his keyboard and sipping coffee.

“Maybe. Remember how Ray, at the diner, said a Dr. Exter was in there Monday night?”

“Yeah, vaguely.”

She plopped her purse on her father’s desk. “Well, Brock Wilson was eating supper with him. Paul Exter, D.M.D. And it seems he got up and left in a rush right after Darrin Beresford left.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, really. So, I was thinking—”

Both desk phones rang. She glanced at Nick and picked up the one on her father’s desk.

“True Blue, Campbell McBride speaking.”

“Ms. McBride, it’s Detective Fuller. We’ve found your father’s car.”