

3



The next morning, Campbell packed up her laptop and rode with her father to Benton while Nick stayed at the office to do more online research on Samuel Truman.

As he pulled out of their driveway, Bill turned past the vacant house next door.

“I wonder who we’ll get for new neighbors.” Ben Tatton’s old house was built of light-colored brick, as were many residences in Murray. She liked their white wood-frame better, but the other house would make a cozy place for someone—as long as they didn’t mind living in a house where a man had been murdered.

“Are we going to Truman’s apartment?” she asked a few minutes later, as they whizzed past cornfields and the South Marshall County Middle School.

“I don’t think so. I don’t want him to realize Vera’s got someone looking at him. Let’s nose around and see if we can catch any of his neighbors. He hasn’t lived there very long, but we might find someone who can give us some information.”

They soon learned that Truman lived in a house that had

been divided into four apartments. One of the first things Nick had ferreted out was the make and model of their target's car. They confirmed it wasn't parked at the house before they got out. A ten-year-old pickup and a Ford Fusion sat in the parking area.

"Truman's in apartment 2. Let's try number 1 first," Bill said.

Campbell walked with him to the door, taking in the neighborhood's ambiance. Older houses nearby were becoming rundown, and farther down the block sat a convenience store with gas pumps. She pulled in a deep, slow breath. Her nerves always kicked up a little when she made the first contact with a witness—or a source, as her father termed it.

The apartment door opened, and her dad smiled at a man of about thirty-five, wearing jeans, a black T-shirt, and work boots, with a couple days' worth of stubble on his face.

"Hey."

"Hi, my name's Bill McBride, and this is my daughter, Campbell. Can we ask you a couple of questions?"

"Are you selling something?"

"No, we're private investigators."

He blinked. "Fine, if you come inside. I'm packing my lunch. Gotta leave in ten minutes."

"Thanks. We won't take much of your time."

Campbell followed her father inside, amazed at the man's trust. They could be lying criminals, and he invited them in, just like that. Of course, they were neatly groomed, and her father was well-spoken. But then, so was Sam Truman, from what they'd learned.

"I'm Ted Holloway." He waved toward a couple of stools at the island in his kitchen, where he had bread, mustard, cold cuts, and cheese spread out.

Campbell sat down, and her father claimed the stool next to her.

“We’re curious about your neighbor, Sam Truman,” her dad said.

“Yeah? He’s all right.”

Bill smiled. “Could you be more specific?”

Ted shrugged and squeezed mustard onto a slice of bread. “He loaned me his car when my truck broke down.”

“Anything else?”

“Oh, sure. He’s brought over beer and pizza and hung out.”

“What does he do for a living?”

Ted paused in arranging the sliced ham on his bread. “I think he said he’s some kind of consultant.”

“In what field?”

“I dunno. But he’s smart.”

“How do you know that?”

Ted smiled and shook his head. “You can tell just by talking to him.”

Bill glanced at Campbell, and she took it as license to ask her own questions.

“Has he ever talked to you about money?” she said.

“Yeah, a little. I told him I’ve got a small stash, and I’m looking for an investment. I was thinking of buying shares of Caterpillar or Google, but Sam told me about this startup company he’s investing in. I’m looking at it.”

“Can you show us the material?” Bill asked.

Ted eyed him thoughtfully. “I don’t have anything on paper yet. Sam said he’d get me a prospectus.”

Campbell turned her attention to her father. Would he warn this poor, innocent guy?

Ted put the lid on his sandwich and reached for a plastic bag. “You said you’re investigators. Has Sam done something I should know about?”

“We’re not sure,” Bill said. “He may be squeaky clean, but you might want to hold off a bit before handing over your savings.”

“Really.”

Ted and Bill gazed at each other for a long moment.

Bill pulled out a business card. “This is my contact information. I’m not a police officer, but I spent a lot of years on the P.D. in Bowling Green. If you want to check up on me, ask for their detective sergeant, or call the Murray P.D. and ask for Detective Fuller. They can tell you about me.”

“So, is this a police case? I mean—is someone official looking into it?”

“Not yet. We’re just asking a few preliminary questions for a private client who’s also been befriended by Mr. Truman.”

“I see.”

“And we’d appreciate it if you didn’t tell him we were here.”

“Yeah, I can see why. Thanks.” He closed his lunch box and picked it up. “Now I’ve got to get to work.”

“Sure. Thanks for your time,” Bill said. Campbell followed him outside, where house numbers for units 3 and 4 flanked the main door. Inside the entry, stairs led them to the doors of the upper apartments. Bill pushed the bell for number 3. Campbell wasn’t surprised when a woman in her twenties opened the door and regarded them curiously.

“Can I help you?”

“Yes, we were wondering if you know Mr. Truman, in apartment 2,” Bill said.

Her features softened. “I’ve met him. Why do you ask?”

Bill handed her one of his business cards. “I’m Bill McBride, from True Blue Investigations in Murray. We’ve had an inquiry about Mr. Truman, and we’re trying to get a sense of his relationships with his neighbors, Ms., uh—?”

“Andrea Finley.” Her eyebrows drew together as she peered at the card. “He’s only lived in the building a couple of months, but he seems like a nice guy. Is he in some sort of trouble?”

“No, not at all.” Bill smiled. “So, there’s nothing about him that would make you uneasy?”

“No. My roommate and I like him a lot. He’s very polite, and he’ll run errands if anyone needs something.”

“Is your roommate home? Maybe we could talk to her too.”

Andrea shook her head. “She’s teaching summer school right now. To tell you the truth, I think she’s a bit smitten with Sam.”

Campbell leaned in a little. “Sounds like Sam Truman’s the ideal neighbor.”

“Yeah, kind of. But you’re making me a little nervous. Are you sure there’s nothing wrong?”

“There’s not,” Bill said. “We would appreciate it if you didn’t mention our visit to him, though. Our client is eager to know if other people are as impressed with Mr. Truman as she is.”

“Oh, a job thing?”

“Something like that. He hasn’t talked to you about finances, has he?”

Andrea eyed Bill blankly. “No. Why would he?”

“No reason.”

“I mean, he recommends restaurants and things, and when he first moved in, he did ask us what bank we used, so he could set up his account at a place he could trust.”

“I see.”

Her face clouded for a moment. “He did tell us about a clairvoyant in Murray.”

Campbell caught her breath.

Bill chuckled. “Now, that’s interesting. Have you ever had your fortune told?”

“No, but my roommate, Sarah, went to her once. She said it was a hoot. We were thinking of hiring the woman to do readings at a party.”

“Sounds like fun,” Campbell said. “But you’ve never met her personally?”

“Not yet. I may go see her with Sarah this weekend.”

Campbell glanced at her father, and he gave her an almost imperceptible nod to continue. “Do you know her name? It sounds like something I might enjoy.”

“It’s an odd name.” Andrea frowned. “Starts with a T, I think. Did I tell you she lives in Murray? I’m sure you could find her online.”

“Thanks. I’ll take a look.” Campbell smiled and stepped back.

“Thanks a lot for your time, Ms. Finley,” Bill said.

The door closed behind them as they walked away. At the top of the stairs, Bill put a hand on Campbell’s arm.

“Let’s check apartment 4.”

Campbell waited while he punched the doorbell on the other upstairs unit, but no one responded.

“Okay,” her dad said as he rejoined her. “I’m guessing that pickup in the yard belongs to Ted Holloway. The Fusion’s probably Andrea’s.”

As they went downstairs, Campbell glanced at him. “She seemed to think Sam Truman’s the salt of the earth.”

“Well, that’s how these people operate, you know. They’re very charming, and they make you feel as if you want them to be your best friend.”

“He hasn’t asked Andrea or her roommate to invest.”

“Probably he learned enough from them to see they don’t have much money for that kind of thing. And he probably wouldn’t hit up all his closest neighbors. That might look suspicious.”

“But he recommended Miss Tryphenia.”

“Yeah.” Bill shook his head as they stepped outside into the oppressive heat. The white pickup truck was gone. “I think we can assume that’s the clairvoyant she meant. I didn’t expect that.”

“Me either. I almost gave away that we knew about her.”

“You did fine.”

“Isn’t Sam Truman forty-five years old?” she asked.

“I think that’s correct, according to our research.”

“Well, I mean—Vera Hill’s daughter must be at least forty. Don’t you think Andrea Finley would be a little young for him?”

“We don’t know how old her roommate is.”

“True. She’s a teacher.” While her dad drove southward toward Murray, Campbell took a notebook from her purse and wrote down the names they’d learned and the details Ted and Andrea had given them.

“Preparing to write up your notes?”

“Yeah, my supervisor has me turn in a report every day.” She grinned at him.

“You’re easy to train, believe me.”

She guessed Nick hadn’t been so pliable. Writing reports was a breeze for her, and she loved keeping an organized file on each case, with details they could all check when needed. It made her feel like she was really helping the agency, even though she was still a newbie.

“I’m thinking it might be time for a visit to Miss Tryphenia,” her father said, jerking Campbell’s attention back to the case at hand.

“Really? Are you going to ask her about Sam Truman?”

“No, that’s not my plan, exactly. I was kind of thinking you could go. Pose as a customer.”

Campbell gulped. “Ask her to give me a reading?”

His eyebrows shot up.

“That’s what Mrs. Vane called it,” she said. “Not fortune telling. You get a reading.”

“Reading of what? Palms? Cards? Tea leaves?”

“I don’t know.”

“Hmm. Maybe we should do a little more digging first.” They reached Murray, and he turned off on Main Street.

“Well, Vera Hill said not to talk to her about psychics—she said she leaves that to her friends. Plural. I’m thinking maybe she knows someone else besides Mrs. Vane who goes to the psychic.”

“Good thinking,” Bill said. “Let’s ask her tomorrow. Meanwhile, I hope Nick’s got some more leads on Truman for us. So far, we haven’t found any evidence that this guy has an actual job.”

“Maybe he’s psychic, too, and he levitates.” At her dad’s blank look, she said, “You know, no visible means of support.”

He let out a belly laugh. “Your education was worth every penny.”

“Come on, Dad. It was a stupid pun.”

“I thought it was pretty good. Maybe you should consider standup comedy.”

“No, thanks. I get enough laughs working with you and Nick.”

They rolled past Eighth Street, their usual turn.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“I want a visual on the psychic parlor. Can you get your phone ready and snap a picture?”

He turned at Second Street, and Campbell’s pulse picked up.

“It’s down there, on your side.” Bill nodded ahead, and she soon located the sign. “Miss Tryphenia, Psychic Readings,” he read aloud as they approached.

Campbell whipped her phone up, zeroed in on the building, and tapped. Her father slowed down, and she had time for a closeup of the sign as well.

“Got it.”

“Nice work, kiddo.” He accelerated gently and turned at the next corner, heading back toward Eighth and Willow Street.

“Nope, I didn’t find anything. Not since he moved to Kentucky, anyway.” Nick’s dark eyebrows drew together as he scrolled through a computer file. “I checked all the accounting firms and investment brokers in the area, but I didn’t find him anywhere.”

“And no social media?” Bill had brought his plate of casserole and salad into the office, and he settled in one of the armchairs.

“Nope,” Nick said, “unless he’s got accounts under a different name.”

Campbell sat at her desk eating the sandwich she’d made herself for lunch, mulling over the enigma of Sam Truman. “We need to find out what the connection is between him and Miss Tryphenia.”

Her father looked over at her, and his gaze sharpened. “How much have you put online about yourself?”

“You mean Facebook and that sort of thing?”

“Yeah.”

“You asked me not to talk about the business on social media, and I haven’t.”

“Good. Of course, your picture is on our agency’s website, if anyone looks there.” He frowned for a moment. “You haven’t posted anything about working here?”

“No. I wanted to brag about it, but I haven’t.”

Nick smirked, and she hastily went on.

“When I first got here, I did post about coming to live with my father and looking for a job.”

“But you never said what job you took?” Bill asked.

Campbell shook her head. “It seems most of my friends in Iowa have forgotten about me. Nobody’s followed up and asked what I’m doing now.”

“Not even Steve?” Nick asked with a sneer.

“Not since his run-in with the police over that medal business. I think he’s been glad to stay clear of me for the past few weeks.”

There. She’d wiped the smile off Nick’s face. He shrugged and turned back to his screen.

“Why are you asking?” She gazed straight at her father.

“I’m thinking maybe you could sort of accidentally meet up with one of them and not tell them who you are. They might try to work their magic on you, and we’d learn something.”

“Do you really want me to set up an appointment for a reading? Or are you talking about bumping into Sam Truman? He does seem to like the ladies.”

“Not yet. Let’s find out a little more first.”

Nick looked up from his screen. “I just did a search for your name, Professor, and it found our agency website. It’s third on the list.”

Bill frowned. “Not good. That’s the trouble with advertising when you sometimes need anonymity.”

“What came up first?” Campbell asked.

“Feldman University,” Nick said. “Then your Facebook page.”

She groaned. So much for keeping a low profile.

“Don’t worry about it.” Her dad stood and went to the coffeemaker they kept on a side table. “Nick does a good job on our website. It does exactly what I wanted it to—gives the

public an overview of our services and draws in new clients.” He filled his mug and headed back to his seat. “Remember how Andrea said they might hire Miss Tryphenia to entertain at a party?”

“Yeah. What are you thinking?” Campbell asked.

“One of us—or somebody else we enlist—could inquire about her rates for parties and just get a general sense of her and the way she works.”

Campbell lifted her chin as an idea formulated in her mind. “Maybe Reagan Brady would come over this weekend. She might do it, and she doesn’t have any obvious local connections.”

Her dad pursed his lips for a moment. “She’s young, and she’s not trained. But maybe you two could go together. If she didn’t mind using her name, you could just tag along as an anonymous friend.”

“The woman would see me, so she’d recognize me if I ran into her later.”

“Let’s think it over.” Her father took his coffee mug and turned toward the door. “I’ll be in my office. Campbell, work up your notes and then report to me for another assignment.”

The background checks for the university had been delivered. Her father kept her busy that afternoon with updating reports and practicing skip tracing techniques while he and Nick tapped every resource they could think of for more information on Truman. Campbell spent the final hour of her workday studying for the upcoming exam.

Everyone’s spirits lifted when Keith walked in the front door shortly before five o’clock.

“Hey, come in. Sit down.” Bill led him to the seating area near the empty fireplace in the main office. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, thanks. I’m on my way to my folks’ house for supper.”

Keith sat and crossed his long legs as the others gathered and took comfortable seats. “So, how’s it going with the psychic thing?”

Campbell’s dad shot her a quick glance. “Well, we’re not actually investigating the psychic. Not officially, that is. That’s sort of a side thing that came up.”

Keith nodded. “Campbell mentioned to me that a neighbor had some involvement with a local medium.”

“There may be a connection between Miss Tryphenia and our official case.” Campbell looked at her father to see if he would object to discussing it with the police detective.

“She’s right, I’m afraid,” Bill said. “The fellow we’re looking into recommended this psychic to one of his neighbors. He hasn’t been in the area all that long, and we’re wondering what the link is between them.”

“Who’s the subject you’re looking at, if you don’t mind telling me,” Keith said.

“Samuel Truman, or Eliot Samuel Truman,” Bill said.

“Doesn’t ring a bell.”

Nick ran a hand through his hair. “We’re pretty sure he hasn’t had a run-in with the law since he moved here, but he’s got an old rap sheet in Missouri.”

Campbell couldn’t help smiling. In her study session she’d just learned that the letters in “rap” sheet stood for “record of arrests and prosecutions.”

“Why is that funny?” Nick frowned at her.

“Oh, it’s not. I was thinking of something else. I haven’t met this Truman character, but he sounds like a piece of work. His neighbors love him, but there’s just a slimy feel about him.”

“Why are you investigating him?” Keith looked to Bill for an answer.

“Because he’s cozying up to our client’s daughter, and she’s concerned. It doesn’t feel right to the client.”

“How old’s the daughter?”

“At least forty.” Bill sighed with a sidelong glance at Campbell. “We never stop worrying about our kids, right, Soup?”

“I have no expertise in this area,” she said, “but if you’re an example, Dad, then yes. I agree wholeheartedly.”

Keith smiled. “Your daughter’s got her head on straight. What’s this Truman doing that the mom doesn’t like?”

“He’s pushing some kind of investment scheme,” Bill said. “Have you ever heard of the Billings-Phifer Fund?”

“No, but I can put out some feelers.”

“I wish we could connect with him without letting on that we’re investigators, but we’re too easy to find online.” Bill sat back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling. “Are you on social media?”

“I’m not, but a lot of officers are.”

“Don’t they tell you not to?” Nick asked.

“They encourage us to keep a low profile. Officers who have accounts are supposed to remember that they’re representing the department and the community on there. Anyone who posts something questionable is disciplined.”

“That’s the way it is with Bill.” Nick didn’t seem happy about it.

“It’s common sense.” Bill didn’t seem offended. “I tell them, if someone looks us up to see if they want to hire us, and they see a picture of you doing something irresponsible, they’re not going to want to do business with us.”

“Yeah, being active on social media can make it hard to investigate discreetly.” Keith pushed to his feet. “Well, I’d better get going.”

“You haven’t even seen my private office yet.” Bill almost pouted.

Keith chuckled. “Don’t forget, I saw it when it was Katherine Tyler’s private office and someone had just ransacked it.”

“Oh, yeah. Well, it’s a lot nicer now.”

“Campbell told me you’ve fixed up your private quarters upstairs too. Tell you what, I’ll come by again soon for the grand tour.”

“Have supper with us tomorrow,” Campbell said quickly.

“All right, I’d like that.”

She walked with him into the entry. Keith turned to face her and reached out to brush back a strand of her hair, his hand grazing her cheek.

“I’m so glad you decided to stay in town.”

“Even under Dad’s eagle eye?”

“Especially. Bill’s a good friend, and I know he’s looking out for you. Just be careful, will you?”

“Of course.”

Keith nodded and left smiling.