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Campbell hurried back up the sidewalk to the new house. Had she just wasted half an hour? She liked Mrs. Vane, and she couldn't just ignore people like her, who had a shaky support system at best. More than ever, she was glad she'd moved home. Her mother had been gone more than seven years, and she would hate to see her father grow old in loneliness.

Nick glanced up at her when she walked into the office.

"Dad's not back?" she asked.

"Nope."

Nick was usually more talkative, and she figured he was angry with her—shirking was probably his diagnosis. He would probably finish way ahead of her with his part of the background checks.

Murray State University had entrusted True Blue Investigations with the names of six people, three candidates for each of two job openings. She got right to work and had nearly finished her first one when her father came home.

“Hey,” Bill said as he strolled into the room. “Just what I like to see—my investigators hard at work.”

Campbell smiled up at him. “I’m almost ready to email you my first report so you can check it. Oh, and Mrs. Hill wants to talk to you. She’ll be back in a while.”

“What about?”

Nick looked up. “Some creep her daughter’s dating. He wants her and Frank to invest in some fund he’s pushing, and Mrs. H. isn’t so sure about it.”

“Okay, we can look into it.”

“Nick told her a hundred dollars,” Campbell said cautiously.

Nick scowled at her. “She’s a neighbor.”

“Well, she did help us a little on the Tatton case,” Bill said.

“And she brought you a casserole,” Nick said almost triumphantly.

Bill laughed. “I’ll talk to her.”

“We could probably do a light background on the guy,” Nick said. “If he’s a career criminal, it shouldn’t take us long to find out.”

Bill stood on the old oriental rug, one of the few pieces Campbell hadn’t rejected of all those that came with the house. His gaze swept back and forth between her desk and Nick’s. They had situated them at opposite ends of the large room. Each of them had plenty of space, and she was glad not to be elbow-to-elbow with Nick, the way they’d been in the old office. She and Nick didn’t always get along, and a little distance seemed like a good idea.

“Okay, so if you can finish the job you’re doing for Murray State by tomorrow’s close of business, that would be great. Opening day is only four weeks from now.”

“No problem,” Nick said.

“Guess it’s a rush job. They need to do their hiring fast.”

Campbell was used to the way colleges worked, and she figured the administrators wished they had more time to make staffing decisions.

“True,” Bill said. “How are you coming, Nick?”

“Oh, I’ll be done by noon.”

Campbell’s shoulders slumped. He was showing off. He’d worked with her father for about three years, while she’d only been on board for a few weeks. Nick knew all the websites to check and the nuances of the reports he was reading. She hated to admit it, even to herself, but she was jealous of his ability.

“What are you working on, Dad?” she asked.

“I’ve still got a few picky things to handle on our change of location.”

“Can I help you with that?”

“I don’t think so, but thanks. I’ve been to the post office and the bank, and I ordered new business cards and letterheads. Now I’ve got to contact all our regular clients, to make sure everyone knows we’ve moved to Willow Street.”

Campbell nodded. Her father would handle each client just right. It was better for him to touch base with them, rather than his daughter, who was new in town.

“What about all the old letterheads and business cards?”

“Scrap paper.” Her father went into the hall just as someone knocked on the front door.

Nick looked over at Campbell. “Mrs. Hill.”

“No doubt. She’s probably been watching for him to drive in.”

In the entry, Bill opened the door. Nick and Campbell listened closely.

“Well, hello, Mrs. Hill. What can I do for you?”

“It’s Vera. Campbell says you’re all settled in?”

“Yeah, I think so,” Bill said.

“Well, I saw the new sign go up yesterday. Very classy, I must say.”

Nick grinned at Campbell, and she returned his smile. Mrs. Hill had come over twice during the move to gush about how cleverly they’d figured out what happened to Katherine Tyler, who’d lived here and been her neighbor for many years.

“That’s very nice of you,” Bill said. “Come on in. You don’t have to knock during business hours.”

“Well, I wasn’t sure.”

“We’re going to get a doorbell, but this is a business now.” As Bill spoke, the two ambled into the living room-turned-office. Nick and Campbell stood.

“Hi, Mrs. Hill,” Campbell said.

“Hello again, dear.” She turned back to Bill and laid a hand on his wrist. “Now, Mr. McBride, as I was telling the kids earlier, we have a family matter we’re concerned about. if I could have a private word with you ...”

Bill’s eyebrows shot up. “Sure you can, but you know, if I’m going to call you Vera, you need to call me Bill.”

“All right, but this is business. At least I think it is.”

“In that case, step into my private office.”

Campbell smiled at the pride in her father’s tone. He was definitely glad to be out of the tiny, one-room storefront that had been his office for six years.

She looked over at Nick. “Are you really almost done with your assignment?”

“I can finish it in an hour.”

She hesitated then said, “Would you mind looking at my first one and telling me if I missed anything? I want to learn to do things right for Dad. And for the clients, of course.”

“Sure. Bill gave you a list of what we need to look for, right?”

“Yes, and I memorized it.”

“Whatever for?”

“I’ve got my private investigator’s exam coming up in mid-September.”

Nick laughed. “That’s like two months away. You’re studying already.”

“Of course. This is all new to me. I figured I’d better start now.”

Nick shook his head. “I’ll bet in school, when your teacher told you to write a term paper, you started on it the same day you got the assignment.”

“Well ...” That was exactly what Campbell had done, but she was certain Nick would rag her about it if she admitted to it. “Come on, let’s get at it.”

Nick scanned her file quickly. “Looks good, Professor.”

Campbell was determined not to scream at him for calling her that. She’d lost her job as an English professor when the small private college in Iowa downsized its faculty. But Nick could come up with lots of worse nicknames, she realized, so she thanked him and kept quiet.

All was peaceful for the next half hour as she tackled the next potential hiree. The murmur of voices drifted across the hallway, but when she heard her dad and Mrs. Hill coming out of his office, she was surprised how much time had passed. What could they possibly have been hashing over? Mrs. Hill was a talker, but her father was efficient and didn’t like to fritter away his working hours.

“Well, thank you so much,” Mrs. Hill said.

Campbell perked up her ears as her dad saw the new client out.

“You’re welcome,” he said heartily. “We’ll see what we can turn up, and we’ll report back to you on Thursday.”

Thursday ... only two days. So her father considered this a quick job, probably more of a favor for their neighbor.

“Okay, you two,” he said from the doorway. “I told Vera we’d put in a few hours on this. I’d really hate to see her and her husband get bilked.”

“You think it’s a scam?” Nick asked.

“I’m not sure yet. He didn’t give them anything on paper, but I did a quick check on the fund name she gave me, and I didn’t find anything about it. That doesn’t mean it isn’t real. Nick, if you’re about done, I’ll put you on checking the guy’s background.”

Nick nodded.

Turning to Campbell, Bill said, “After you finish your work for MSU, come into my office and we’ll do some serious digging on the financial end.”

“What about lunch?” Nick asked.

“Oh, right.” Bill pulled out his wallet. “How about some sandwiches from Subway, Campbell?”

She pushed back her chair. “Or Mrs. Hill brought cheesy grits and sausage.”

He winced slightly. “Let’s save that for tonight.”

“Actually, I’m going out with Keith tonight.” She was thankful she had a legitimate reason to skip the meal.

“Of course you are.” Her dad smiled indulgently. “Nick, you want anything?”

Campbell did the lunch run and brought back drinks and sandwiches. By afternoon’s end, she had finished her Murray State profiles, and Nick and Bill had done a fair amount of research on Mrs. Hill’s situation. They gathered around the desk in Bill’s office.

“I want to do some follow-up on this tomorrow,” he said. “I couldn’t find anything about this fund through any of several financial services I checked. On the other hand, the Better Business Bureau has never heard of them either, so no complaints have been filed on it.”

“Yet,” Campbell said.

Nick pulled a skeptical face. “Maybe it’s just something he made up out of thin air.”

“It’s possible,” Bill said. “You got anything, Nick?”

“Well, this guy Dorothy Chambers is seeing—”

“Samuel Truman,” Bill said.

“Right. His full name is Eliot Samuel Truman, and he’s originally from Missouri. But he’s going by his middle name, and he has a Missouri driver’s license that lists him as Samuel, not Eliot, or E. Samuel, or E.S., or anything else.”

Bill grunted. “Where does he live now?”

“Benton.”

“Just up the road.”

“Yeah. I checked the address. It’s about eighteen miles from here. He’s been there a couple of months.”

“And yet, he still has a Missouri driver’s license. And you’re sure he’s the same guy?”

“Same birth date, and I couldn’t find a legal name change. However, I did find a conviction in Missouri on a misdemeanor. Petty theft.”

“How long ago?” Bill asked.

“The arrest was almost ten years ago.”

“Well, that shouldn’t count now, should it?” Campbell asked.

Her father shrugged. “It says something about his character ten years ago.”

She couldn’t argue with that. “Do we know how Dorothy met him?”

“Vera says through her work,” her father replied. “Dorothy is a clerk at the newspaper office.”

“Has he placed any ads in the paper?” Campbell asked.

“Not that I’ve been able to find out. But he has subscribed to both the Murray and Paducah newspapers.”

“Okay, so now what?” Nick asked.

“Find out everything you can about what he’s doing here in Kentucky. He must be approaching other people about this investment too. But is that his only way of making a living? Maybe it’s a sideline, and he has another job. Do it tomorrow, though. It’s quitting time.”

Campbell jumped up and hastily arranged her papers and shut her laptop.

“Big date tonight?” Nick asked.

She frowned but didn’t answer.

“Say hi to Keith for me,” he called as she left the room and headed for the stairs.



“This place is gorgeous.” Campbell laid down her menu and looked around the inside of the log-framed restaurant. One whole wall was made of windows that overlooked Kentucky Lake.

“Yeah. A friend told me about it.” Keith Fuller, her favorite police detective, smiled at her across the table. “So, how was your day?”

“Fine. First full day in the new office space. I think it’s going to work well. Come by and see us.”

“I will. I’ve got to be in court tomorrow, but maybe after that’s over.”

Campbell nodded. She was getting used to seeing her father and Keith head off to the courthouse to testify. She hadn’t been called in yet herself, but it wouldn’t be long before she had to give evidence in a case she’d bumbled into her first week in Murray.

“I had an interesting conversation with a neighbor today.”

She chuckled. “Probably spent too much time at her house sipping tea.”

“Oh? It’s good to bond with the neighbors.”

“I know, but I felt like she was looking for approval. Maybe because I’m an investigator.”

“In what way?”

“She’s been seeing a psychic. Miss Tryphenia.”

“Over on Second Street, right?”

“Yes. Has she been there a while?”

“Years. I think she’s harmless. At least, I haven’t heard of any complaints against her.”

“Good. It seems Mrs. Vane goes to her every couple of weeks for a reading.”

“Reading of what?”

“I’m not sure exactly. I think Miss Tryphenia encourages her and pretty much tells her everything’s okay. Sort of an emotional massage—a feel-good session.”

“Huh.”

“Mrs. Vane is widowed, and her kids all live out of state. I asked her if this woman is a friend, but she said it’s all business. And she pays her plenty.” Campbell frowned. “You know, Vera Hill made a remark about some friends and psychics to Nick and me earlier. I think maybe she was talking about Mrs. Vane.”

“Vera Hill—she’s the one across the street?”

“Right across from the Tatton house. Which, by the way, may be for sale soon. Dad said Tatton’s sister was over there with a real estate agent a couple of days ago. No sign out front yet, though.”

“I won’t be surprised if they want to sell it quickly.” Keith’s brown eyes lifted as the waitress came to the table. They gave their orders, and when she’d left them, Keith reverted to the

former topic. “You don’t think there’s anything fraudulent going on with this psychic business, do you?”

“I’m not sure. Miss Tryphenia did raise her price after the first couple sessions, and Mrs. Vane said her daughter doesn’t approve of her going there.”

“Well, if it’s her own money she’s spending, I guess she has the right to spend it where she wants.”

“Why would someone like Mrs. Vane do that? Do you think it’s because she’s lonely?”

“That could be a big part of it. Psychics—and con artists in general—prey on people who are vulnerable. In this case, she’s lost her husband, and her kids are far away. Maybe the readings make her feel less alone and more connected.”

“But I know she has friends.”

“They don’t give her the same thing this woman gives her.”

Campbell frowned. “I just don’t get it. What does Miss Tryphenia give her?”

Keith reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Hope.”



When she returned home, Campbell heard voices upstairs and hurried up to the private sitting room they’d made from one of the extra bedrooms. Her father was sitting in front of the TV, watching his favorite police drama. He pushed pause as she walked in.

“Hi. How was your evening?” he asked.

“Great. How about you? How were the grits?”

He hesitated, not meeting her gaze. “Actually, I—uh—I ordered a pizza.”

“Oh.” That surprised her. He was usually very tactful. “What do we tell Mrs. Hill when she asks us how we liked it?” Because she would, Campbell was certain.

Her dad didn't seem to have an answer.

"Do you think we should at least taste it?" she asked.

He sighed and lumbered up out of his armchair. "Okay, one little taste, and then we hit the ice cream."

In the kitchen, she opened several cupboards before finding where they'd stashed the custard cups. Scooping small portions of the casserole into two of them, she said sternly, "I'm going to heat this a little in the microwave, Dad, and you give it a fair chance."

"Okay." He looked like an unhappy little kid.

She managed not to laugh. A minute later, they poised with their spoons over their dishes. Her dad said, "One, two, three," and they each took a bite.

"Oh. Hot." She sucked air in and out quickly to cool the food in her mouth.

Her father chewed and swallowed. His eyebrows shot up. "You know, that's not bad."

She took a drink of cold water and blew on a second bite from her dish, avoiding taking a big piece of sausage the way she had the first time. She ignored the small burn and considered the flavor. "Yeah, I've had worse. Do you want me to throw it out or not?"

"Keep it. I'll eat some for lunch tomorrow."

She nodded and put their dishes in the dishwasher while he covered the casserole and returned it to the fridge.

"Hey, you delivered that letter down the street, right?" he asked.

"Yes, I did." She related her conversation with Mrs. Vane and added, "I told Keith, and he says this psychic's been in business a long time, and they haven't had any complaints filed against her."

"It's an odd name." Her dad filled a coffee mug. "Want some?"

“No, thanks. I want to sleep tonight. I’ll take some ice cream, though.” While she dished it out, she said, “I did a quick search on *Tryphenia* this afternoon. It is an uncommon name. It’s Greek. I think it may have been more popular in Colonial Days—not sure.”

“Well, they did use a lot of weird names then.”

Campbell laughed and followed him up the stairs to their private sitting room. “Tell me about it. Cotton Mather, Oceanus Hopkins.”

“Yeah, I remember your mother doing a lot of genealogy research and coming up with tons of crazy names. Love Brewster was a boy, if I remember right. I think my favorite was Submit Howe.” He wiggled his eyebrows. “Be thankful you weren’t named Hephzibah.”

“Oh, like Campbell’s one of the ten most popular names. I like it, though.” She curled up on the sofa with her legs under her. “Hey, I bet *Tryphenia* isn’t her real name.”

“Probably not.” Bill slid into his recliner and sipped his brew. “Tomorrow let’s dig deeper into Vera’s situation, and when we report back to her on Thursday, maybe I’ll mention Miss *Tryphenia* and see what she says.”

“You don’t want to upset her, Dad. She’s got troubles enough with her daughter.”

“Yeah, Dorothy’s the one I’m worried about right now—or actually, her boyfriend. He’s not exactly squeaky clean.”

“You think he’s a con artist?”

“Too soon to tell.”

She took a bite of her peppermint ice cream, thinking over the evening. “Keith pretty much said psychics are con artists.”

“Aren’t they?”

“I don’t know.”

“Surely you don’t believe some of them really have supernatural powers?”

“Well, no, I guess I don’t. But he said they prey on vulnerable people and sell them hope.”

“Keith’s right. Whatever a person needs, a psychic will focus on that and promise to provide it. They bring hope that life will get better and whatever bad feelings surround the customer will go away. I saw some of that when I was on the force in Bowling Green. We tried to prosecute one guy who was conning people, and the defense was that the victim gave him all her money of her own free will, so it wasn’t a crime.”

“Which is basically what Keith said. But if a con artist of any stripe stole thousands of dollars from a person, couldn’t you make a case that he’d deceived them?”

“It’s tough, but maybe. With a good lawyer. If the customer could prove he’d promised something in return, yes. But they’re crafty. They don’t usually do that. There was this one guy who had a little store, and he’d sell good luck charms and worry stones. He’d tell people if something bad was in their life—negative energy or whatever—this would help get rid of it.”

“What happened when it didn’t work?”

“Sometimes it seemed like it did. Sometimes the situation worked itself out.”

“Right.” Campbell’s voice was heavy with sarcasm.

Her dad set down his mug and leaned forward. “Okay, let’s say a woman’s upset because her son is marrying a young woman she can’t stand. The con artist sells her a charm for a hundred bucks. A couple weeks later, the son and his fiancée break up.”

“That’s not very common.”

“Maybe. But what if Mom spends more time with the girl and decides she’s not so bad after all? Isn’t that getting rid of the negative energy?”

“I guess.”

“And, hey, it was only a hundred bucks. It was worth a shot, right?” He picked up his mug and took a deep swallow.

“What if things get worse?”

“Then the con tells Mom it’s a difficult case and she needs a stronger charm. For more money.”

Campbell spooned a big bite of ice cream. “It’s sad that anyone would fall for that, but some folks have been known to lose their life savings to these people.”

“That usually happens over a long period of time. It’s the same principle, though. The con just takes longer getting to know them and gaining their trust. After a while, things feel better for the victim just because this person listens to them and takes their concerns seriously. But you’re right. Usually after a while, they raise the stakes.” Bill pulled his bowl closer.

“How can they do that, over and over?” Campbell asked.

“If they con the poor dupe out of a huge amount of money, they’ll disappear and open a new business in another area. But this one, Miss Tryphenia, I’d say has never taken it to that level.”

“Because she’s been here so long?”

“Yeah. If anyone lost an enormous amount to her, she’d have to move on.”

“Or be arrested?”

He shrugged. “The police would be aware of her, at the least.”

“Keith said she’s harmless.”

“I guess time will tell.”

They sat in silence for a long moment.

“Hey, Dad?”

“Yeah?”

“You mentioned Mom’s genealogy research.”

He nodded.

“What ever happened to all of it? She had all those big

three-ring binders full of family group sheets, and file folders of letters and records she'd copied."

"I still have it."

Campbell blinked. "Where? I didn't see it when we moved."

Her father let out a big sigh. "When I moved over here from Bowling Green, I didn't have room for all her stuff. That house was so small, and ... well, it was hard having it there to look at all the time. Not just her family tree stuff. Anyway, I got a storage unit and stashed it."

"In Bowling Green?" Campbell tried not to let her surprise show on her face.

"No, here. In case I wanted to get some things out." He looked tired.

A wave of pain washed over Campbell. She'd been in college when her mother died, and she'd come home for a week, for the service and to be with her dad for a few days. They'd sorted her mom's clothing, and she assumed he'd donated it somewhere after she went back to school. Then he'd moved to Murray.

She'd wondered on her sporadic visits where a few particular items had gone, but she didn't want to ask. If it had been too painful for her father and he'd given away or sold the Boston rocker that had once been her grandmother's, or the books her mom had loved, she supposed she could understand it. But she had felt a little hurt that he hadn't asked if she wanted any of her mother's things.

He drained his coffee mug. "I guess there's room here, if you want to have that stuff out again."

A lump formed in Campbell's throat. "Only if you want to, Dad."

He nodded, and his eyes glistened. "Yeah, let's do that sometime."

“Have you got her books?”

“Yeah. And the old dishes.”

“Grandma’s rocking chair?”

“That too. And Emily’s old desk.”

Campbell sniffed. “Thanks, Dad. I’m glad you kept Mom’s stuff.” She stood and rounded the table to give him a hug.