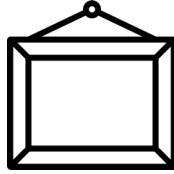


2



The first witness in Leila Abbott's trial was the police officer who arrested her, Detective John Smalley. Campbell frowned when he was introduced. Murray had only a handful of detectives, and she knew two of them. She had also met the detective sergeant, but only at a press conference she'd attended at the police station. She'd never heard of Smalley.

Her unspoken questions were answered when the prosecutor explained to the jury that Smalley had moved in July to the Lexington Police Department but had returned to Murray for the trial.

"Our unit was called in by an antique dealer in town, Michael Harder," the detective said in answer to a question from Vaughn. "He said a young woman had brought in a painting, wanting to sell it. He examined it and realized it was genuine and old. After looking up prices on works by the artist, he offered her five thousand dollars for it."

Vaughn frowned and turned so both the jury and the

defendant could see his face. “And if he bought the painting, why did he call the police about it?”

“He didn’t buy it. She refused his offer and left with the picture.”

“I see. So after she turned down his offer, he called the police?”

“Not immediately,” Smalley said. “He said he thought it over for a while and realized later the painting must be stolen.”

The defense attorney called out, “Hearsay.”

“Sustained,” said the judge.

Vaughn was ready to move on. Campbell figured he’d call the dealer to the stand later to tell his own story.

“How much time went by before Mr. Harder called the police?” Vaughn asked.

“About three days,” Smalley said. “Apparently he was bothered by the customer’s demeanor and did some online research—”

“Hearsay!”

“Sustained.”

Vaughn quickly came out with a different question. “Detective, in the course of your investigation, were you able to determine that the painting was authentic?”

“Yes. Once we had possession of it, we took it to an expert in Louisville, and he confirmed it.”

Vaughn turned to the judge. “Your Honor, the expert’s letter of authentication is Commonwealth’s exhibit number three.”

The judge nodded.

“What else did you learn about the painting?” Vaughn asked the detective.

“That it was stolen about twenty years ago, from a resident of Calloway County.”

“And where did you find the painting?”

“In the defendant’s house, here in Murray.”

Campbell frowned. The defendant wasn’t old enough to have stolen the painting twenty years ago. But then, Leila Abbott wasn’t charged with stealing it, only possessing it and attempting to sell it. Why hadn’t she accepted the offer of five thousand dollars? She must have known somehow that the artwork was worth more than that. Very interesting.

Bill McBride dropped by the police station after lunch. He glanced through the log that was open to news reporters and other interested citizens like him. It never hurt to see what was recorded there, although Bill usually heard about any arrests or other important happenings through his friends on the force.

When he was satisfied that he hadn’t missed out on anything of note, he moseyed into the detectives’ office. Keith was at his desk, and he glanced up from his computer screen as Bill approached.

“Hi, how’s it going?”

“Not bad,” Bill said. “A little slow, but that’s okay. Campbell’s in court today, and Nick and I are tying up loose ends.”

“No big cases right now?”

“Nope. Just the usual.”

“Did you know there’s a new P.I. in town?”

Bill blinked. “No, I did not.” He sat down on the corner of Keith’s desk. “What’s the scoop on him?”

Keith smiled. “*She* is newly licensed and moved here from Elizabethtown. She’s setting up shop on Chestnut Street.”

“You got the jump on me with that one.”

“Well, you’re all required to let us know when you open for business in our jurisdiction.”

“That’s true. Does she have a name?”

“Chilton,” Keith said. “Marissa Chilton. Her firm is Chilton Investigations.”

Bill eyed him sharply. “She’s setting up solo, then?”

“That’s my understanding—much as you did six or seven years ago.”

“Where did she train?”

“She worked with a P.I. in E-town for several years.”

“But she wasn’t a police officer before that?”

“No, you have the advantage of her there.”

Bill scowled.

“What are you thinking?” Keith asked.

“That maybe this is why business is so slow lately.”

“Oh, I doubt it. She’s only just hung her shingle this week. I believe she opened for business yesterday.” Keith punched a few computer keys and stood. “Coffee?”

“You got the good stuff?”

“Always, in this room.” Keith led him to the detectives’ refreshment station and poured a mug for Bill then another for himself. “You know your regulars won’t jump ship on you.”

Bill shrugged. It was true the local attorneys and businessmen he worked with frequently seemed very pleased with the work True Blue Investigations did.

“I guess we’ll see if this town’s big enough for another agency.”

Keith nodded and sipped his coffee. “This case Campbell’s on—the trial—”

“I don’t know what it is,” Bill said. “She called me at noon, but only for a minute, to say she’d been picked. Didn’t tell me what it was about.”

“She called me too. Same status—but I think I know what case it is.”

Bill lifted an eyebrow. “There’s no law against the two of us discussing it.”

“No, there’s not. I took a look at today’s court calendar. They’ve blocked out the entire week for a case from last year.”

“Something that happened before Campbell came home?”

“Yes. A stolen painting.”

“I remember that. It had something to do with an old lady dying, and her kid—no, her granddaughter—tried to sell off her things, and some of them turned out to be stolen goods.”

“One thing,” Keith corrected him as they walked back to his desk. “At least, as far as I know, it was only one. A painting that the granddaughter claims was in with a bunch of junk in the attic. The defendant says she’d never seen it before. The grandmother was dead, so she couldn’t ask her about it. She was going to hold a garage sale to get rid of stuff, but she thought that one item might be worth more than she’d get at a yard sale.”

“Oh, yeah. It was interesting, but I didn’t have anything to do with it.” Bill pulled over an extra chair and settled into it, across the desk from Keith. “I haven’t heard any more about it for months. Forgot all about it.”

“Well, it’s still active, and the trial begins today.”

Bill chuckled. “Campbell should find it interesting. Nick was regaling her last night with a list of all the ho-hum cases she’d probably have to hear. Drugs, shoplifting, domestics.”

“You can’t talk to her about it.” Keith’s pointed gaze brought Bill out of his reverie.

“Right. Understood. But when it’s over, she can tell me all about it. Of course, there might be something in the newspaper while it’s under way.”

“Don’t let her read about it, if there is.”

“I won’t. Do you think the woman’s guilty?”

“I have no idea,” Keith said. “When it happened, I was in

the middle of a big drug case. I kept on with that, and I think Matt Jackson was working a fraud, or maybe an embezzlement. Anyway, John Smalley picked it up, but we all figured the painting thing wasn't going anywhere."

"But here we are. And Smalley left the Murray P.D. a while ago, didn't he?"

"Yeah, last summer, but since he was the arresting officer, they called him to come testify."

"I get you." Bill eyed him curiously. "So, if you're not in on that, what are you working on?"

"Oh, somebody stole a bunch of equipment from Murray State's theater department. Camera, microphones, that kind of stuff."

"Huh." It sounded boring. Bill stood. "I'd better get home and get to work, or that new P.I. will start poaching all my clients. What'd you say her name was? Hilton?"

"Chilton. My opinion? She won't last. Not unless she has someone working with her."

"Well, don't look at me. I don't have room for another employee right now."

Keith grinned. "If she asks me, I'll tell her you said that."

When Campbell left the judicial building at five o'clock, her head was full of details. The jurors were allowed to take notes, and she'd filled several pages in the small notebook she carried in her purse.

She found her sympathies lay mostly with the defendant. From what the jury had heard so far, it seemed Leila Abbott had never intended to commit a crime.

The young woman had been her grandmother's main

caretaker for the past couple of years, since she lived closer to her than any other family members. Her grandmother, Teresa Abbott, had lived alone in a small house she'd rented with her husband for decades. When he died, Teresa stayed in the same home, and the accumulation of her adult life filled the attic and closets.

Toward the end, Teresa had gone into a nursing home. Leila had hoped her grandmother would recover enough to return home, but that hadn't happened. On her death, the landlord had been civil, but he'd let Leila and her mom know that he'd like the rental cleaned out by the end of the last month Teresa had paid for. They had only about three weeks to remove all of Mrs. Abbott's belongings.

Campbell wished she could sit down with Leila and hear the story from her. Maybe she would take the stand after the other witnesses were done. That seemed like a good idea to Campbell. Let her explain how she found the painting and why she thought she had a right to sell it. She wanted to hear Leila swear she knew nothing about the painting or its origins before her grandmother's death.

Tomorrow. Surely tomorrow would tell the jury what they needed to know to make their decision.

"So, how's it going?" her father asked when she went to the door of his private office. "In general, of course."

"Not bad. But it's a little boring. We aren't getting—" Campbell broke off, unsure of how much she should reveal the day's happenings.

Bill grunted. "I hope tomorrow's better. Want to go out for supper?"

"Not really. Is there anything in the fridge?"

"Let's go see." Bill rose and accompanied her to the kitchen, where they found an assortment of leftovers and sandwich makings.

Over a plate of leftover lasagna, tossed salad, and a corn muffin, Campbell found other topics to discuss with her dad.

“Oh, and the latest from Vera Hill,” Bill said with a hefty ham sandwich suspended halfway to his mouth. “Her daughter has a new love interest.”

Campbell quickly swallowed. “What? Dorothy’s dating someone new?”

“That’s right. Apparently she’s getting over her unfortunate relationship from last fall.”

After a moment’s consideration, Campbell said, “I hope it goes well for her. But also that she doesn’t jump into anything too fast.”

“That’s what I said, or at least, what I felt. I didn’t exactly say it out loud.” Bill took a big bite and set down the sandwich.

Poor Dad. Campbell knew he’d had hopes for himself when an old friend of her mother’s moved into town. But the circumstances that brought Jackie Fleming to Calloway County were too messy. Bill liked things tied up neatly, as with all of his investigations. Jackie still attended their church, and the McBrides remained on friendly terms with her, but Bill hadn’t asked her out again since helping put her ex in jail.

“Have you heard any more about the people who bought the Tatton house?” she asked.

Bill shook his head as he reached for his glass of root beer. “I saw a car out front this morning, but I was on my way downtown. Nick may have seen something.”

“Where *is* Nick?” He wasn’t in evidence when she got back from court, but she hadn’t thought much about it.

“He’s out chasing an errant husband.”

Campbell made a face. “Ew. A divorce case?”

“Maybe. Right now, it’s a potential fraud case.”

“Not one of those.” Jackie’s tale of woe with her short-term husband was too fresh in all their minds.

“Well, we’ll see what happens. I agreed to do two days’ work on it. If we can’t turn up anything solid, that’s it.”

“And what are you working on?” Campbell asked.

“An insurance case. Oh, and get this. Keith told me today that a new P.I. has set up shop in Murray.”

“What?” She stared at him. “We have competition, eh?”

“So it seems. She’s from E-town. Trained with someone over there, but she’s going solo now.”

“Why did she pick our town?”

“Who knows.”

“Interesting. I suppose you’ve done a little background?”

“You know me too well.” Bill took another bite of his sandwich.

Campbell chuckled. “All right, Dad. Spill it.”

After he swallowed, he rocked his head back and forth. “She worked for two years with an investigator over there.”

“Elizabethtown.”

“Right.”

“Do you know him?”

“I’ve met him. Ran into him once at a conference and another time when I had to testify in Frankfort, in a case the state was prosecuting.”

“And?”

“His name’s Tucker, and he’s a straight-up guy.”

“Then why did his trainee leave him after she qualified?”

“I don’t have an answer to that.”

“Yet,” she said.

Her father cracked a smile. “I’d say you know me too well, but I just said it. I may give him a call if I think it will be helpful.”

She waited, her eyebrows arched.

“I just don’t see a need to know unless I cross paths with her.”

“Sure, Dad.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You always want to know everything, and I’ve never heard you apply the need-to-know rule to yourself.”

“There’s a first time for everything,” he said mildly.

“Huh. Well, let me know if you do run across her. I’ll be interested to hear more about her. Uh, what’s her name?”

Bill frowned as if trying to remember, but he didn’t fool Campbell for one second.

“Chilton, I think.”

“Oh, you think.”

“Marissa Chilton, that’s it.”

She made a mental note. Her dad wasn’t the only one who could unearth a person’s past.