



Greer studied the remains buried in the red clay dirt. “I can’t imagine these remains belong to the first victim, seeing how she seems to be complete and the angle would be wrong.”

“If it’s mine, there will be three more besides her.”

Agent Sullivan stood on the ridge above.

“Okay. Serial killer?”

That was usually FBI jurisdiction.

He shook his head, then squatted and held his hand down.

“Come on. Get out of there, and I’ll run it by both of you.”

“You just said we wouldn’t be read in.”

He shook his head and motioned with his hand.

Ignoring her first instinct to blow the man off, his actions were far too curious. Maybe she had misjudged him.

She stood and held up her hand, then hung on tight, using her feet to guide herself upward as he pulled. His arm wrapped around her waist to lead her from the hole, and she quickly stepped away, trying to ignore the cologne that immediately filled her senses. She had to admit, the guy smelled good.

“Come on. We can’t do much until the anthropologist gets

back, but I can give you basics.” He nodded toward his car, and she pulled off the gloves, turning to Rick.

“What changed?” she whispered as Rick came up beside her.

“I have no idea. Although, I’m certain it’s not your pleasant demeanor,” he mumbled as he stepped ahead.

Yes, everything she said had come out harsh. But her experiences with federal agencies never ended well. Bigger agencies assumed locals couldn’t do their jobs, so they moved in and took over. And the last time that happened, people died.

Swallowing the memories, she followed the men to an SUV.

Sullivan opened the door and tossed his sunglasses on the seat. Turning, he appeared with a file folder and handed it to Rick.

“Before moving to Homeland, I worked in the FBI on a cartel task force. There’s one case I never solved. When I moved to Homeland, I told them this case would bring me out, and they reluctantly agreed, probably because it was a long shot it would ever be discovered.”

She stood next to Rick and peered over his arm.

The file contained information on the Bolstero Cartel, a stiff-arm crew from the last decade that had moved in and out of the headlines. The case was dated seven years ago.

“I guess I don’t get it, Agent Sullivan. Why would you want to go back to the FBI just to work this kind of case?” Rick relented the file as she pulled it in close and read through the names.

“Rachel Sullivan.”

Sullivan’s jaw clenched.

“Relative?”

He nodded. “She was caught in the middle, the DEA tried to use her as a mole, and that’s what got her killed.”

“And you know that because?”

“Because she’s in that hole,” he growled.

Greer nodded and returned to the file. "Says here without a body, there was never a trial."

Anger burned on his reddening face.

"Hermann Bolstero was the leader and under investigation. She went in as a mole and began passing off information, but it was never enough. When she disappeared, I did some digging. Bolstero ran a trucking company, allowing him and his money to appear legit. The day she disappeared, along with a few other people connected to Bolstero, a truck supposedly broke down in this area.

"He had trackers on all his trucks. The notes I found said a truck broke down here, but the tracker went offline for three hours. When it came on, it was at a gas station a few blocks away. It left only a few hours later. Why would the tracker break down suddenly? And what caused the truck to leave after only a few hours if there was a breakdown?"

She closed the folder and crossed her arms. "That's not in here. How did you get that information?"

He shrugged. "I told you. I dug around."

"Man, that's awful. But if you're not FBI anymore, how is Homeland going to take this case? It's not their thing."

Sullivan narrowed his eyes at her before turning to Rick. "I have a provisional license with the FBI to continue working should this case come to court. I know the players, the background, everything about this case."

"But with that, I'm sure you would have to not only prove the identities, but also prove Bolstero's involvement. This was years ago."

"That's why I would like to be kept in the loop. I have more than enough information on Bolstero to make him pay for what happened."

"Why didn't the FBI peg him another way? I don't recall Bolstero ever being convicted of any crime. With the DEA involved, I'm guessing it was drugs. You're telling me that in all

the years he's been in business, he's never been convicted of anything? Even with a mole present?"

Sullivan blew out a breath and straightened from the SUV.

"They tried to make things stick, but he had a slick lawyer, and there were always technicalities. Instead of prosecuting Bolstero, the lawyer did his best to determine who the mole was. She said she was being careful, but she never should've been in that situation."

"Never should've been in that situation? You mean she didn't work for the DEA?"

"No. She was never an agent. She was coerced to work for them, and that position cost her her life."

A van pulled into the lot, idling close to the hole. A woman in a white plastic suit slid from the seat with a phone to her ear.

"I got it, thanks." The newcomer shoved the phone into her pocket, then turned to them. "Okay, you two guys, come unload everything. No sense a woman doing so much when you two can handle it."

"I'm Detective Bennett." Greer stuck out her hand and the woman took it.

"Dr. Shaver. I was here earlier. Seems like an interesting find. You have an idea who it might be?" Dr. Shaver nodded to the folder in Greer's hands.

"Possibly. I took a dive in there a minute ago, found more than one set of remains."

The woman frowned for a moment, then her eyes lit as she grinned. "Wouldn't happen to be Greer Bennett, would it?"

Greer smiled and nodded.

"Well, good grief. Why am I here?"

She chuckled. "Because you're the expert, not me. I've been out for a while."

Shaver nodded. "What did you assume?"

"Female, under the age of thirty. Mid-to-late twenties?"

"I agree. Where was the other set?"

Remains

Greer followed Dr. Shaver to the scene as the men finished unloading the digging equipment.

“See that rock? I moved it over and found the indentation of bone underneath. It fits our case file, but I want to see what you have to say. Your unbridled opinion.” She winked at the woman who nodded emphatically.

“Make the case fit the evidence, you’re right. Let me get to work.”

“Here’s my card, call or text me. I’d like to be kept updated as much as possible.”

Dr. Shaver took the card and dug out one of her own. “Here’s my email. I don’t keep my cell phone on me when I work, but it’s there too. Let me know if you need anything. I’ll be sure and give you updates. Nice to meet you Dr., I mean *Detective Bennett*.”

Dr. Shaver worked a small rung ladder into the ground and then placed it gently over the side, carefully climbing down to the remains.

The men walked up beside Greer as Dr. Shaver got to work.

“It’ll take her the rest of the day to remove the body. I wouldn’t plan on an ID until tomorrow at the earliest.”

“That long?” Sullivan’s green eyes narrowed, frustration etched on his features as he stared into the trench.

“I’m sorry, but with the decay and the possibility of trace evidence, all that dirt will have to be sifted through a layer at a time. If you can get the dental records of your potential victims to Dr. Shaver, I’m sure that will speed things up.”

He nodded, his gaze focused on the hole and the remains barely sticking up from the earth. To lose someone he loved and never know for sure what happened was a hard thing to carry around for all these years. And now, to have the answer so close ...

Greer bit the inside of her lip, shoving down her own feelings.

Not now, God, I can't deal with that now.

"Patrick, looks like you'll have a boring day." Rick's voice made her turn.

Patrick chuckled. "It's fine by me. I can handle sitting here in the cool breeze. I have some lures that need to be fine-tuned, anyway."

"You're going to mess with lures?" Agent Sullivan's heated voice cut through.

"So far, no one knows about this place or what's been discovered. Patrick's force is small. If this gets to the media, we might have to do some more drastic protocols to keep the evidence safe. But right now, I think we'll be fine." Rick's easy tone didn't seem to help the situation as the agent huffed and marched to his car.

"I don't think he likes me much." Patrick chuckled.

"He's got a personal interest." She crossed her arms, shivering.

Patrick and Rick continued their conversation about fishing and lures as her mind drifted. Agent Sullivan paced next to his SUV with a phone to his ear, rubbing the back of his neck.

Memories fell heavy on her chest, and she took a deep breath. It wasn't the same, not really. Her father had disappeared when she was six. But her mother had always said he'd run away with someone else, someone he loved more than them.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, images of the gravesite she helped to excavate five years ago flashed in her mind. Finding her father's body in a grave outside Nashville had effectively put an end to her forensic career. She transitioned into the Police Academy. If only she had found out why he had to die.

"Greer, ready?" Rick's voice pulled her to the present.

She nodded. "Let me get this back to the agent."

Crossing the field, she held out the file. "Here's your file back. Give me your number, and I'll keep you apprised."

He shook his head. "Keep it. I'll send you my number."

"You have my number?"

He nodded, looking over her shoulder. "Yours and your partner's. How well do you know this doctor?"

She shrugged. "I don't. But I'm sure she'll do a great job. There's not too many of them around, you know. It takes a lot of passion and expertise to get to that level of forensics."

He leaned back against his SUV.

"You staying here?"

He nodded, his gaze flicking to hers for a second.

"Okay. Hope you have good cell service." She made her way to the car, sliding in the seat behind the wheel.

"You good?" Rick asked.

She nodded, then started the car and put on her seatbelt, tossing the file to him. "Dr. Shaver will keep us updated. Can't do much until we get an ID."

Driving back in silence, Rick's prying eyes pricked her skin. "What is it now?"

"What's got you so quiet?"

"I'm not quiet. Just thinking."

"About?"

She groaned at the tone of his playful voice. "What do you think?"

"Agent Sullivan or Thomas. It's hard to tell."

"Neither."

He chuckled. "Well, the way you were looking at the agent earlier, I just wondered."

Her head snapped around to see his grin. "What? What're you talking about?"

"I asked you if you were ready like three times. You never answered. You just stared at Sullivan."

"I wasn't staring. I was thinking, and he was in my way."

Rick sat there grinning.

“Don’t go there. The case—it hits home a little, and I feel bad for him. What he’s going through.”

“Sorry, didn’t think about it that way. Have you been making any progress?”

“No. It’s a dead-end case, and I’ve been too busy,” she said.

His hand gripped her wrist. “Let me know if you ever want any help.”

“Thanks,” she whispered, working to focus on the road ahead.

“But you know, the guy didn’t have a wedding ring on.”

“Rick, seriously?”

His laughter filled the car as she drove back to the office.