

Chapter XII

It would be his last trip home for a while. Grimaldi packed enough clothes for two weeks. He called his next door neighbor to explain that he'd be away and would she watch the house while he was gone.

He'd had a break in, he told her, and so if anything looked suspicious she should call the police. There might even be someone investigating.

He left a new message on his answering machine.

Then he did something fairly impulsive, even for him.

He dialed the only listing for A. Watson in the Deer River phone book.

Agnes Watson's voice was restrained, formal. When he heard her say hello, Grimaldi saw her face, though, and this stopped him for a moment.

"Hello," she said again, and finally he told her who it was.

He explained that he was wondering how the family was doing.

"For some mysterious reason, I've become involved in this and that's that," he told her.

He'd hoped he wasn't too abrupt when he'd spoken with her the day before. He apologized. He admitted being curious about Nelson Johnson.

"Stop me if I become obnoxious," he said. "But what does Mr. Johnson have to do with all this?"

"Mr. Johnson has been a support for our family and Chris for a long, long time."

"What is it he does," Grimaldi asked.

“He's a social worker and a good Christian man, too good of a Christian. He works with kids in the project. He worked closely with Chris.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean he is the type of person who is totally caught up in his work.”

“The kind of guy who would burn the midnight oil.”

“Much more than that, but this is all another story. We're making final arrangements for the funeral,” she said. “Will you be there?”

He was taken back.

“Most likely,” he answered.

“I'm sorry if I've upset you,” he continued. “I just have so many questions and the strangest things have been happening. I'm trying to figure out why.”

“Aren't we all, Mr. Grimaldi? Aren't we all.”

There was a pause and his heart went out to this woman.

“Like, why was a young man who worked his way out of the inner city to a better life left for dead on a cold sidewalk? Why couldn't it have been his druggie cousin? Why did it have to be Chris? How's that for starters?” she asked.

He listened as her voice cracked, and she began to cry. It wasn't a weak voice, though.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “There are just some things that are beyond us all and if we start to question them then we really get in trouble.”

“No, Ms. Watson, I'm sorry,” Grimaldi said. “If you should see Mr. Johnson, please tell him I was asking for him. I hope to talk with him soon.”

He pulled into the parking lot next to the St. Bernadette rectory in time for dinner.

Welcome to your new home, he thought as he pulled his suitcase from the trunk of his Reliant.

Sullivan had arranged things for him, all right

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