

Chapter XIV

Grimaldi was stymied. Where was the connection? What was the motive behind Chris Brown's death? He'd gotten hold of the medical report.

There were no drugs in the body, no trace of use in the blood stream or marks on his skin from past use. There was no money. The kid didn't have a dime on him. And everyone that knew the kid didn't believe he was involved with anything illegal.

There wasn't even a sign of a struggle of any kind.

Yet, what Grimaldi knew was that there was a reason for everything. Guided or misguided, actions have consequences. Chris Brown was there on that night for a reason.

A vacuum only existed in the laboratory or in deep space. Here, on the messy streets and the dull Earth, reason abounded, and what was more, that made the mystery surrounding the young boy's death more mysterious.

The more he knew about this kid, the better. Then, he would be able to see connections that would lead to his killer. The more he knew about his relationships and relations, the better. Then he would have a better chance to understand what happened.

That Chris could be killed didn't surprise him. Death happened every day. Kids starved to death in sub-Saharan Africa, the disappeared reappeared as corpses in El Salvador, and children are absconded and sold into prostitution in New York City.

And what about God? Where is God when all this is happening? He struggled with this for a long while, Grimaldi did. In his head he knew people had been redeemed. God's son had come into the world to experience life, to stand with us in our trials, suffer

for our sins, and bring redemption to humanity. We would never have to stand alone again.

This knowledge translated into something deeper in the heart: it meant love. Love changes everything.

So while Grimaldi could never understand Katie's death from breast cancer, he could accept that through her suffering there came a transformation, not only in her, but in him.

He would ask himself, how could a woman with such beautiful breasts and such a young spunky body, someone so whole and vital, simply be destroyed?

But she wasn't destroyed, and in a sense she became whole again in her illness. God's ways are not our ways, he would think. Then love would transcend time, time's boundaries would drop away, and they would be there, in each other's presence, as if seated in eternity, communicating fully and wholly with each other in a way they never had before.

The trouble was that Grimaldi didn't know Chris. So it wasn't that way with Chris. He was simply gone. How did anyone deal with that? What was his aunt, Agnes, what was his aunt Agnes going through? What were his mother and father going through?

In the end, if they could not understand what had happened, could they at least accept it?

Grimaldi turned from his post by the window.

The night was a black one. For most of it, sleep had evaded him. Wild thoughts pressed themselves upon him and his only defense was to concentrate on the moment. When he could, Grimaldi dozed.

This time, as he climbed into bed, his last thought was about the rectory.

Not a bad place, he thought. Not a bad place, unless you happened to be Chris Brown.

He woke again in what seemed only a few minutes. He checked his watch and its fluorescent green numerals and slender hands told him it was 3 a.m. He got up to go to the bathroom.

At home the dark had bothered him, especially after Katie died. But here in this ancient building he didn't have any problem getting up and fumbling for his robe.

Maybe it was his imagination. There were only a few things here that were his, so he could concentrate on them. There weren't so many of his own things that they could turn on him. What else was there had no associations; either with good or bad times, idle attachments, enough time even to accumulate in piles so that clumped together it looked like something other than what it was.

When he was a child, he used to stay at his great aunt's home. Grimaldi loved being there, but at night he would have to sleep in a refinished room in the basement. Directly in front of the big double bed was a window that opened up to the backyard, one of those horizontal basement windows that opened outward. He used to sit in bed and stare at it until he got so frightened that he covered his head with his blanket.

This darkness, he thought, was like being under that blanket. All his fears could be allayed under the blanket. Was he safe? If something evil decided to descend upon him when he was a little boy, he would have been a sitting duck. But he was happy.

The future was outside. For all he knew, when that blanket was over his head, a titanic battle raged, good and bad angels fought over him.

What he had brought with him, was really so little and so insignificant. At least there was nothing with him that made much of a difference.

For his grandmother, there were things that could make a difference, yellow roses, for example. Whenever she had to make a decision, Grandma O'Grady use to pray to the Blessed Virgin, and if her prayer were to be fulfilled, Grandma would see, at some time during the day, a yellow rose. It could be in a bush, floral arrangement, on a dish, in wallpaper, or on television. It didn't make a difference to her because her prayer had been answered. She had the answer.

That never made any sense to him.

What did make sense was life and death. Solving the murder of this young boy, was becoming more important, closer to him, challenging his sense of propriety and faith.

That made sense.

Making sure the United States didn't go to war in the Persian Gulf simply over oil made sense. Giving money to programs that would support young pregnant women so they wouldn't abort made sense.

On either one of those issues people would call him crazy.

But they were people issues. How you live and how you are treated; how you treat others, and how you die. Christ had a lot to say about that. Grimaldi wondered, in his short time working for the church whether the ones in charge had gotten the part about Christ straight.

He fumbled for his slippers and pulled on his robe. Opening the door, the first thing that struck him was the blinding light pouring in through the hall window. Going from the darkness to the light virtually overwhelmed him.

He let his eyes adjust. Still the brightness was strong, and he had to shade his eyes with his hand.

At the window he found what was causing the brightness. A security light was attached to the side of the building and illuminated the grounds where Chris was shot.

The light threw an iridescent white sheet over the area. It began just below the corner of the building and ended by the church.

The quiet and stillness attracted Grimaldi. No sound came from outside. Except for a few creaks and cracks in the old building, there was nothing.

Outside the window, the branches and some leaves danced a silent ballet. He could almost smell the breeze and hear their rustling. He followed the forms, shadows cast and gray limbs down the trunk to the base of the tree.

That's when it struck him.

There was a figure standing in the shadows.

Instinctively Grimaldi moved out of sight beyond the window. His temples started pounding and the adrenaline pumped in his veins.

Had he been spied?

He closed his eyes and felt the leering stare of some unseen thing.

After a short moment, he knew he had to take a second look.

He dropped to one knee and slipped behind the dusty drapes.

There it was, a figure, hooded, hands in pockets, a bundle of some sort tucked nonchalantly under one arm.

As if on schedule, the figure moved along the edge of the light, down the sidewalk, pass the point where Chris had died, and out of sight.

A moment later the figure reappeared and, walking quickly, passed through Grimaldi's line of sight into the darkness. The bundle was gone.

Grimaldi's mind reeled. The pastor was right when he said that there were some things around here he'd rather not know about.

By this time Grimaldi's bladder was pounding, too, and he had to empty it before he could do anything else.

He slipped into the bathroom and relieved himself. As he did, he heard the creak of a door somewhere in the building.

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