

Chapter XVII

Grimaldi left the archives with more unanswered questions and a heaviness in the pit of his stomach.

Most of the afternoon had been spent there, beginning with the files of deceased priests. He sat in the corner set aside this time by the archivist's assistant, an impeccably dressed and groomed nun with a coiffure.

“We've been going through a transition and finally we've gotten to the point where there is some semblance of order. You don't know how much better I feel,” Sister Betty McMahon said when she greeted him.

Grimaldi asked about Brother Thomas and was told he wasn't feeling better. The stroke happened so suddenly. No one could have anticipated it.

Grimaldi understood. Sister Betty was digging in, making ready to take over for the feisty old man. The thought weighed on him.

Grimaldi said he'd like to see the deceased priest's files. After some hesitancy, Sister Betty began pulling them, one at a time.

“Most of the information in these is not really for public consumption,” she said. “But seeing that you are an employee of the chancery, I guess it's okay.”

He wondered how much longer he would be able to come around and simply ask for files. The old man might have made a fuss about things, but he never cut people off. He stood up for the right to be open to information. How much longer would that right be valued down here? he asked himself.

While he waited for the first file, Grimaldi thought about asking Sister Betty how it was that a nun could look so good. But he let it drop.

“You have this place pretty well organized,” he yelled to her from his perch.

“There's so much to keep track of,” she yelled back. “If it weren't organized and easy to get to, it wouldn't make much sense, would it.”

“I guess not,” he said and smiled.

It took her much longer to find the files than it did Brother Thomas.

She finally came around, several folders in hand, and said, “When can I expect you will be done?”

“When I'm done,” he answered. “I'll do my best.”

“If you need me, I will be in my office upstairs,” she said, smiling obliquely.

As soon as she disappeared from sight, he opened the first few folders. Each had a familiarity: the same forms, containing date of birth, parents names, academia stuff; black and white glossy prints, capturing the slicked back hair of the early school days, early seminary days and ordination; after that there were relatively few photos and even less information unless there had been an appointment and it was written up in the diocesan newspaper. Then the clipping was included in the file. Some files had newspaper clippings from other papers. One or two had notes from the bishop about special assignments.

Grimaldi wondered if information had been removed, before going back to the men in the folders. Many had studied in seminaries in Europe before World War II. Some were there during the war and a few years after that.

Grimaldi flipped through file after file, but he couldn't find Lemay.

He helped himself to more files, having located the cabinet where Sister Betty kept them.

No Lemay, but he did find out what kept her. As she pulled the files, she had removed information that she didn't want him to see – she had stacked them to one side so she could easily return them to the proper files.

There were a few letters of encouragement from the former bishop regarding rehabilitation programs, certificates, and psychological evaluations.

Grimaldi had just completed flipping through two drawers of files looking for Lemay when he noticed them. He had just started skimming the loose pages when he heard footsteps.

“I would appreciate your asking rather than simply helping yourself,” a voice said. He recognized Sister Betty.

He looked over his shoulder. There she was.

“I don't mind helping you out, but I do mind it when you go ahead and do something without asking.”

She saw that he had been looking through other files and had discovered the pile of papers from the original folders.

“I appreciate everything you've done for me here,” Grimaldi said, “but it's not like you've gone out of your way to be Ms. Friendly and Sister Overly Helpful. I need some information, and it doesn't appear to be here. The deceased priest I'm looking for isn't in your files.”

“Impossible,” she said. “The files are complete. If you can tell me who it is, maybe I can help.”

``The priest's name is Lemay."

Her face darkened.

``I can't help you."

``I'm curious," Grimaldi said. ``If a man left the priesthood, would his file have been included with these?"

``I don't think so," Sister Betty said. He could see that this piqued her interest, despite her fear.

``I don't think it's possible to get those files."

``But you said that the files were complete."

``They are the files of deceased priests, Mr. Grimaldi."

``Please, call me Jack."

``Jack, I don't think it's possible to see those particular files."

``Why not?"

``It's not possible. If I thought I could help you, I would."

``Not even if you could help solve a murder?"

She paused.

``Not even if I thought it could help a murder," she said.

``Good day, Mr. Jack Grimaldi," she said.

``Good day, Sister Betty McMahan."

Before he left, he couldn't resist.

``Sister," he said, ``I love your hair."