

Chapter XXVI

Grimaldi woke several times in the night. He hadn't wanted to disturb Paradis. But anything was better than spending another night in the rectory. If Prygocki were in on something, and Grimaldi thought he was, Grimaldi didn't want to be in the middle of it.

Besides Paradis' connection to the whole thing was obscure enough that he wouldn't draw the same attention as Grimaldi.

The first time he woke it was unfamiliarity. The change in scenery had that effect on him. It gave him some time to think, though, for despite his tiredness, his mind was working.

Once, he saw that Prygocki was Chris's father, and Johnson coached a team at the school. Another minute, Lemay was alive and Johnson was dead. Another, Chris was alive and pointing an accusing finger at Prygocki. There was a macabre dance in the factory and everyone was there, dressed in Halloween costumes like witches, stirring a cauldron with baseball bats. Chris was tied up in a corner.

Finally, Chris someone raised a knife against Chris, and then let it drop. A voice said, "You really didn't have to."

The wielder of the knife asked, "Well then, what did you mean?"

After that Grimaldi slept soundly until about four. He had to get up to urinate. As he stood over the toilet, he thought, Prygocki is going to stage some kind of protest during the funeral. Either that or he's going to bump somebody else off. Whatever it is, he'd have his hands full.

Grimaldi'd left a message with Prygocki that the board had decided to take his recommendation and put off the closing of the school until after the actual reorganization and construction took place. It was a long range plan that the people could commit to. Any premature announcement would weaken the diocese's argument. So things would work out best for everybody this way.

Paradis prided himself on his cooking ability. By the time Grimaldi woke, about an hour later than usual, the apartment was filled with the smell of coffee and frying food.

“You're a bum,” Paradis said when Grimaldi walked into the kitchen. Karen, his girlfriend, was sitting at the table.

“You could have got me up earlier,” Grimaldi said.

“No, I couldn't so I stooped to the lowest possible bribe. I cooked you breakfast.”

Grimaldi ate and he ate. Pancakes, eggs, sausages. He relayed his dreams, but there was one thing he had forgotten. There had been something familiar about the man with the knife. He was sure the man had been faceless. He didn't make the connection until his second cup of coffee.

What it was that he remembered was the faceless creature saying that cult killings are never out in the open the way this one was. They were always kept secret.

Killings like this are always done to desecrate the sacred, but they are not done in public.

Grimaldi liked to think it was some form of communication with the dead homeless man, a spirit loose upon earth until his death had been avenged.

But as soon as he remembered the dream, he knew where the inspiration lay, with Prygocki. He'd heard the words the day after Chris's death, waiting outside the classroom.

Ritualistic worship like this is always tied to the darkness, the world of secrets far from the light, the truth. Much more than in a Stephen King novel, too. It happens and it happens again and again right in our midst. Just last year in an abandoned factory in South Riverton, police found satanic symbols in the subterranean vaults beneath the city. It was obvious to Grimaldi someone was playing games.

``I'll be damned," Grimaldi said.

``That," Paradis asked.

``That good," he answered. Then he explained in some detail his thoughts.

Paradis listened as he sipped his coffee.

``Look," he said, ``it would take a court order to exhume the body, that is if anybody knew where to find it. And the only way to get the order is with proof. You've got a cockamamie idea, that I'll tell you right out intrigues me, but the guy's credentials are impeccable. There is no way to pin this thing on Prygocki."

Grimaldi was on his feet.

``Thanks for breakfast."

He had a few details to work out at the office before the funeral. He was sure that's where it would happen. If Prygocki was a homicidal maniac, he'd want whatever he did out in the open. He'd come close to disclosure already. Now that Grimaldi looked back and listened to every thing that he read and heard, he saw that it was only a matter of time before the thing broke open.

As he was musing at his desk, there was a knock at the door. Sullivan entered.

“Congratulations, Grimaldi,” he said. “You pulled off a major coup yesterday. Getting the bishop to reverse himself was a masterful stroke. Personally, I think it's a bad move. All the cards have been stacked against another year at St. Boniface's. But that's how the bishop works. He doesn't consult and weigh recommendations. He makes up his mind and rams things through. That's why we have problems like this in the first place. That's why you're with us. He came down on your side this time. Next time who knows?”

“One thing puzzles me, though,” Sullivan said. “Why the trip to Majesty Gardens? And all this interest in the murdered boy?”

“I've got an inquisitive nature,” Grimaldi said.

“It's not interested in Ms. Watson, is it? She's a beautiful woman, but she's only trouble. Prygocki could tell you that. I think she broke up his marriage.”

“Maybe not that inquisitive,” Grimaldi said, but he was taken back.

“When we took you on,” Sullivan said, “we offered and you accepted that there'd be no more reporting, no more adventures. I put my neck on the line. Your job is communications. You help us with that and you're doing your job. If not, you're history and we don't get anybody to replace you. Sets the church back a decade or two, don't you think.”

Grimaldi smiled.

“Thanks, chief,” he said. “If I told you I'd been kidnapped, you wouldn't believe me.”

“Whatever it is that you are on to, just get on with it,” Sullivan said.

“Does that mean I have your blessing?” Grimaldi asked.

“Grimaldi, let me tell you one thing. The day is coming when we are going to have to trust each other. It's the nature of the church. It's not stupidity, or maudlin sentimentality. We need each other. So I'm going to start the ball rolling. The night before the killing, a document outlining the school proposal disappeared from the school office. Only three people knew about it. The bishop, the school superintendent, and me. At yesterday's meeting, one other person knew about the details, and the argument.”

“Sometimes, things like that happen.”

“Not like this.”

“Well, I've got a theory,” Grimaldi said.

He sat down with Sullivan and outlined his plan. When they parted, Grimaldi headed for the funeral. Sullivan headed for the bishop's office.

If he had things working correctly, he could get to the church where he could keep an eye on Prygocki. Chancellor had his instructions; Paradis was working his end.

The spooky thing about Prygocki was that he played both ends. He was a deacon in the church. That meant he could have access to the consecrated hosts. If anything, he played both ends to extremes. Perhaps there was a strange type of balance in his life that he exhibited that worked to his advantage so that Paradis, an able reporter, could call him exemplary, so that he could work in a system that abhorred ritualistic worship and, yet, he could prosper.

Unless it was a front for something else.

But there had to be more to it.

Unless it was a front.

If Prygocki was that upset about losing the school that he killed Lemay and was trying to frame Johnson for killing his own son, the man was unbalanced. He was fiftyish – losing everything he must have had frightened him.

But Grimaldi could see it now. During his research, Prygocki had come across the ritualistic killings down south. To set off his own murder, he tipped off the police that some cult had infiltrated the area. Three weeks later, a man is found murdered in an abandoned factory in Long River. So what if it is fabricated. It worked.

But how did Lemay die and why hadn't the diocese followed up on his disappearance?

It was criminal. Now Prygocki was out there thinking the school was going to close again. Who knew what would happen. Almost anything.

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