

## Chapter 8

The sound of the condo door creaking open then clicking closed awakened Emily from a fitful sleep. She got out of bed and walked into the living room to find the blanket she had given Jim neatly folded on the end of the couch. And on the coffee table was Rachel's phone sitting atop a handwritten note.

Emily,

Thank you for your hospitality and understanding. Despite the obvious disparities, Rachel was the love of my life, and her death might as well have been mine. Although I tried, I was never able to come to terms with a world that harbored such cruelty and injustice.

I hope we can talk again. That will be up to you.

Jim

Emily wasn't in a hurry to get to the shop so she went about her normal morning routine without rushing. Aaron would open; she could get there when she wanted. At the same time, there was no reason to stay home, now that Jim was gone, so she was headed out the door not much later than usual, but instead of walking to the cafe she walked to the park.

Sitting on the bench overlooking the Ohio River, deep in thought about what to do about the phone and Jim, Emily heard a familiar voice: "Hi Emily. I saw you on the camera... It's a nice morning so I thought I would come down and say hi before I started my shift."

Without turning around, Emily replied "Hey Kip. I'm glad you stopped by, there's something I wanted to talk to you about. Can you sit for a minute?"

"Sure, what's up?"

“So look, what I want to tell you has to be between you and me. I want to talk to you as a friend, not as the Chief of Police. Are you okay with that?”

“Of course I am, Emily. Surprised you would have to ask. Is it something serious? Are you okay?”

“Yes and no, Kip. But I really need you to assure me that this will stay between you and me, for now at least. Like when we were in high school and you used to talk to me about your boyfriend drama. I kept all that to myself, and I need you to do the same now.”

“Right,” Kip said. “Drama... funny way to put it... but sure, between you and me Emily. What’s up?”

“Yesterday a strange thing happened. A guy—an old man, who said his name was James Stilton—stopped by the cafe and was talking to me about Rachel. Does that name ring a bell?”

“Not that I can recall,” Kip said, adjusting the belt that held his holstered weapon and tugging his pant-legs up a bit so he could sit comfortably on the bench next to Emily.

“James Stilton was the guy who was the main suspect in Rachel’s murder investigation,” Emily said. She waited for Kip’s response.

“Holy crap... that’s right. Are you sure it was him? What did he want?”

“Yes, I’m sure it was him... but there’s more,” Emily said, taking the phone from her jacket pocket and handing it to Kip. “Tap the screen.”

Kip tapped the screen. He looked at the wallpaper image and then at Emily, and sat in silence apparently at a loss for words. Emily picked up the conversation again: “He brought this. It’s Rachel’s cell phone... last night we tried a couple times to guess the passcode, but it’s still locked.”

"Holy shit, Emily. Did he tell you where he got it?" Kip asked.

"Yes. I don't need to tell you the whole story. Not right now, anyway. But I believe he's telling the truth... and I'd really like to unlock the phone. Mostly, that's what I want to ask you about."

"Okay," Kip said hesitantly.

"Here's what I want to know. If I gave this to you right now, would the police lab have a way to get at the phone's contents?" Emily asked.

"I'm pretty sure they could. This is old tech. The guys in the lab could probably offload the phone's filesystem and decrypt it without too much trouble," Kip replied. After a short pause he added "But it would have to be official work. I couldn't get them to do it on the side. If you wanted to do that, you could probably take it to someone, but I wouldn't know where to send you, given the circumstances."

"Okay. How about this: If what the guy told me is correct, I can try one more passcode. But if it's not right, the phone will erase itself. If that happened, do you think they could still get at what's on the phone?"

Kip thought for a moment and then said "I don't know. Maybe? Like I said, it's old tech... and the guys in the lab are pretty good. But after the phone wipes itself... I honestly don't know."

"That's sort of what I expected. I know you probably want to know a whole lot more than I've told you, but this is all I want to share right now. And I want you to look me in the eye and assure me again that this stays between you and me," Emily asserted.

"Are you safe?" Kip asked.

"Yes. I don't think the guy wants to do anything except to learn what happened to Rachel. I don't even know if I'll see him again. He stayed on my couch last night but left before I woke up. He left the phone with me,

though, and said I could do what I wanted with it, either keep it or give it to you officially," Emily replied.

"Okay, then it's between you and me. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. I really don't know. But I want some time to think it over. I really appreciate you keeping this to yourself," Emily said, taking the phone from Kip's hand.

Kip stood up, adjusted his belt, and smoothed out the crease on his uniform slacks and said "You'll call me right away if anything changes, right?"

"Of course," Emily replied without conviction.

"Is there something else, Emily?" Kip asked.

"Maybe... back during the investigation, did it seem like the they did all they could to figure out what happened? I mean, they interviewed Mr. Stilton, and let him go because of the DNA, but then there was never anyone else, no other suspects. Did everything seem normal to you?"

"I was pretty green then," Kip replied. "It was only my second year on the force, and I didn't have the view of everything as I do now. But, I don't know, I do recall that at the time I was a little... disappointed... maybe that's the right word. Rachel's murder was such a catastrophe here in town, and I thought the detectives would pull out all the stops to get to the bottom of it. They sort of did, but, I don't know, maybe just because at the time I didn't know how police work actually went, it felt a little hollow. If something like that happened today, I am certain we'd figure it out. But now we have the National DNA registry and all the comdev data. Things were different back then."

"I guess... okay, thanks for talking with me. I'll check in with you when I know more. Don't worry, everything is fine," Emily said, wrapping up the conversation.

“See you later then. I’m on duty until four, afterwards I’ll be home. Michael has been asking me to invite you for dinner. Want to come tonight?”

“Not tonight. But tell Michael I said hi. Maybe next week sometime,” Emily replied, smiling pleasantly at Kip while he turned to walk away.

Emily remained on the bench, rolling the phone over and over in her hand. The night before, in limbo between sleep and wakefulness, a thought had come to her about the passcode, but she was unsure if she wanted to act on it. She stood up and put the phone in her jacket pocket, but almost immediately took it back out and impulsively tapped 62771226 on the phone’s keypad and the screen filled with app icons.

“Doghouse,” she said out loud. Then she put the phone back in her pocket and walked to the cafe.

Emily worked the rest of the morning, through the lunch rush, and into the afternoon trying not to think about the phone. By late afternoon the cafe had emptied out—it was evidently going to be a slow day—so she sent Aaron home and busied herself cleaning and restocking. She was wiping down the counter top when the door bell jingled. Looking up from her work she watched Jim take a step into the shop, look around, and then walk over and sit down at the booth in the shop’s front window. “Hey Emily,” she heard him say.

From behind the counter Emily grabbed a sheet of paper and a marker and made a makeshift sign that said ‘Sorry, had to close early today. Will be back tomorrow morning as usual.’ She turned the shop’s open sign to closed and locked the door, hung the handwritten note in the window, and slid into the booth across from Jim. Pulling the phone from her pocket she said “Here, I want to show you something.” She entered the passcode to unlock the phone and slid it across the table to show Jim.

“What was it?” Jim asked.

“Doghouse... Mars and our old house number.”

"I would never have gotten that," Jim said, tapping the phone's screen to keep it from locking again. "Did you look at anything?"

"Nope. I was sort of waiting to see if you would come by again. Also, I'm really not too sure I want to get into all of this."

"It'll be okay. Come over next to me so we can look at it together," Jim said, sliding himself a little closer to the window side of the booth.

"Where's the dog?" Emily asked while she moved to his side of the table.

"In the Jeep."

"What should we look at first?"

"I think we should read her messages," Jim replied. He tapped the messaging app icon. Two contacts—one identified only as L and the other as J—were the last to message Rachel. Thinking J probably was short for Jim, he tapped that message thread to see the last few messages he had sent her.

J: Rachel, I want to come see you. I know you said you didn't want me to come, but I think this is important, and I have time.

J: Answer your phone, please. I left you a message.

J: Rachel, please get back to me.

"Those are from me," Jim said. "I sent on my way down. She didn't reply; I never heard anything from her."

"Who's L?" Emily asked.

"I don't know," Jim said, closing the J thread of messages and opening the L thread. Jim scrolled through the last few messages while Emily looked on.

L: I want to be with you again tonight. I am so happy with you in my arms, your smooth skin against mine. I want to ravage you, to press our bodies together, to get lost in each other.

R: Me too... it's so good... But I can't tonight. We can find a time again soon.

L: But we planned for tonight? Why did you change your mind?

R: I just can't tonight. It doesn't matter why, I just can't. We will find a time again soon.

L: Why not? Just tell me. You have to have a reason, you can't just change your mind like that.

R: Look, it doesn't mean anything... but someone might be coming by tonight or early tomorrow morning. I can explain more later, but I can't see you tonight.

L: Who is it?

R: A friend, that's all. Don't start making things up in your mind again. I don't want to message like this. Why don't you call me?

L: I can't call right now, I'm not alone. I'm going to come over later.

R: No. I said not tonight. Please. Resepct me. I can tell you more later. Just not tonight.

Jim asked "Do you have any idea who L is?"

A little stunned, Emily replied "No... keep scrolling back."

Jim scrolled back through the message history. The messages that scrolled by were not revealing, until he came to one that included a picture. It took a few seconds for the phone to render the image... two people, a couple, holding hands walking down the old Main Street of Point Pleasant. Below it was a short message.

R: Looks like you and Roger are working things out...

There was no reply. Jim looked up at Emily and said "Who's that?"

Emily stared at the phone with a dumbfounded look on her face. Without looking up at Jim she stammered "Oh my God..."

Jim put the phone down and waited for Emily to say more. Eventually the screen dimmed and went black, and Jim asked again "Who are they?"

"Oh my God..." Emily said again, this time adding "That's Roger and Lisa Thompson."

"Who are they?" Jim prodded.

"Roger Thompson was the mayor; Lisa was his wife."

"Are they still alive?" Jim asked right away.

"She is. Roger died maybe ten years ago. Heart attack. Lisa still lives in their house, though, a big place out at the end of Shore Street, on the river. I just saw her yesterday; she walks her dog downtown early morning most days, and comes in the shop often. I can't fucking believe it."

Jim peppered Emily with questions hoping to keep her talking. "Did you know that Rachel and Lisa were... involved... back then? What's she like? Do you think she could have killed Rachel?"



“Hell no, I didn’t know they were together like that. I mean, Rachel and Lisa were friends... Rachel went to dinner at their house now and then. And she and Lisa walked together sometimes. I never thought anything like this, though. Did Rachel ever say anything to you about Lisa, or another woman?”

“Nothing at all,” Jim replied. It was hard to believe. And then he asked again “What’s Lisa like?”

“I mean the truth is, she’s not a very nice woman. At the time, it was common knowledge that her and Roger were not really very close, even though they were married. Most thought it was a marriage of convenience, of sorts: Roger needed Lisa to play the part of a politician’s wife. It was no secret that he had plans to run for State office, which for some reason he never did. And Lisa liked the big house and the freedom, I guess, to do what she wanted when Roger wasn’t around, which seemed to be more often than not. But an affair with Rachel? Holy shit.”

Jim and Emily sat in silence for a while, until Jim spoke up. “Well shit, do you know why they let me go? I mean, I was there in her apartment, the investigators knew that from our phones. The way I told it, I was the last person to see Rachel alive... except for whoever killed her. The person in the shower. But they let me go. Do you know why? Do you remember? From the report?” Not waiting for Emily to reply, Jim answered his own question. “Because of the DNA samples... they identified DNA from another person in the apartment. It wasn’t mine, and they couldn’t say who’s it was because it was before the Registry... but the other DNA... it was from a female. That’s why they let me go.”

“So Lisa killed her?” Emily’s eyes widened. “Is that possible? And maybe they did know who it was after all. The Mayor’s wife? So they covered it up?”

“It seems like it could be that way,” Jim said softly.

“Give me the phone back,” Emily said, surprising herself with the abrupt tone of her voice. “I don’t want to look at this anymore. I don’t want anyone to. All of this is private. It’s Rachel’s. She never intended anyone to read any of this. Not you, not me. No one. She is still entitled to her privacy, even though she’s not here anymore. And nothing in this damn phone will change anything that happened.”

Just as Jim was handing Emily the phone, both were startled by a rap on the window. Outside, Kip waved when he made eye contact with Emily and gestured for her to let him in. Jim sat bolt upright and looked intensely at Emily as she slid out of the booth. Seeing his apprehension Emily said “Don’t worry, Jim. He’s a friend of mine. A good friend. I talked to him earlier today, again, just as a friend. He’s not here for you. I’m sure he’s just checking on me because I closed the shop.”

“I don’t want to stay. I don’t want to talk to him, whoever he is. Just let me out. I want to leave. You can keep the phone, anything you want, just let me go,” Jim said.

Emily took a step toward the door but stopped and turned back to Jim. “Jim, it’s okay,” she said as reassuringly as possible. “If you want to leave, you can. Kip won’t stop you. It might be good if you stayed and talked with him.”

“No, let me out,” Jim said, sliding from the booth and following Emily to the door.

“Okay, okay...,” Emily said. She unlocked and opened the door. Jim immediately stepped from behind her to the door’s threshold. Kip took a step to prevent Jim from reaching the sidewalk, but Emily gestured for Kip to step aside. Kip did so and watched Jim walk by; Jim did not look up at Kip or back at Emily as he turned on the sidewalk and quickly walked away.

“Was that him?” Kip asked. “Should I call for backup and stop him?”

"Yes... I mean no. It's okay, just let him go. He panicked when he saw you. I wish you hadn't surprised us like that," Emily said, walking away from the doorway. Kip followed her into the shop and closed the door.

"Emily, I had no idea it was him. I just wanted to check in on you."

"I know. I know."

"What were you talking with him about?" Kip asked.

Emily didn't answer right away. She didn't know if she should say more right now, tell Kip what she and Jim had found on Rachel's phone. Or not say anything at all. A range of actions and possible outcomes raced through her mind. Maybe she needed a lawyer. Kip waited patiently for her to reply.

Eventually, Emily said "He was just saying goodbye, Kip."

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The next morning, on her way to the cafe, Emily stepped out onto Fifth street and looked up and down both sides of the road for Jim's Jeep. Not seeing it, she followed the sidewalk and turned the corner onto Main Street and saw that several storefronts ahead the sidewalk was cordoned off with yellow tape. Two young public safety officers were standing by the tape directing pedestrians to the other side of the street. Both officers were young and new to the force, their uniforms ill-fitting and still creased from being folded in boxes. But Emily knew the boys from around town. Walking up to the officers she asked "What's up Darren?"

"Hey Ms. Klein. You're going to have to go to the other side of the street," Darren said, pointing to the opposite sidewalk.

"What happened, what's going on?"

His partner took a step closer to Emily. "We probably shouldn't say too much, Ms. Klein, but its pretty fucked up... It's Mrs. Thompson and her dog."

Glancing up and down the street, confirming that no other officers or pedestrians were within earshot, Darren said softly "Back in the alley, along the path by the floodwall... looks like Mrs. Thompson's dog was attacked and electrocuted by one of those damn robot dogs. That thing is still there too, damaged, inop now... and Mrs. Thompson... fuck... she was shot with a gun... a bullet. I've never seen anything like it."

"Oh shit," Emily muttered, turning to walk across the street. Darren called out "Ms. Klein? Before you go, can I ask you... did you hear anything earlier this morning?"

"No Darren, I didn't," Emily said, continuing to walk across the street.

"Ms. Klein? Can you wait a moment?" Emily stopped in the middle of the street but did not turn around. "We talked to Aaron down at the shop. He said you were talking to someone there yesterday, an older man with a dog. Did you know him? Who was he?"

"He was just an old guy passing through town," Emily replied.

As she started walking again she heard Darren say "The Chief will probably want to talk to you."

Emily continued on to the shop. Standing at the entrance, she saw Aaron working a few of the usual customers, and decided impulsively that she couldn't go in. She continued on to Tu-Endie-Wei park, where, instead of making her way to the bench on the shore of the Ohio, she walked to the Kanawha River, to a spot she knew was out of the view of the park's security camera. Standing where the freshly cut lawn blended into the riprap at the water's edge, watching the ripples and swirls on the river's surface, she lifted the phone from her pocket and threw in the river.