

# A BAD BOUT OF THE YIPS by Ken Harris

## EXCERPT

### CHAPTER ONE

*You've reached Rockfish & McGee, Investigative Specialists. At the tone, leave your name and message. Someone will get back to you. [Beep]*

Jawnie stared down at her phone, annoyed. She hung up the call after the office's message ended and slid the phone into her messenger bag. *With a proper receptionist comes a proper voicemail message. It's about time. Where the heck is everyone? Rockfish could be out doing God knows what, but what about Lynn? Maybe she's in the can after an extra spicy lunch?* Jawnie laughed to herself. *There were a thousand and one reasons Lynn couldn't get to the phone. Don't go all Rockfish at once.*

The sun had slipped behind the clouds on a mid-Thursday afternoon when Jawnie walked down the endless row of marble steps in front of the Baltimore County Government building. She had submitted her final report regarding former county employee Harvey Henderson, who had been sitting at home on disability from a leg injury suffered while on the job. Henderson ran a bulldozer at the county landfill. That was until he fell off the equipment and reportedly injured his leg.

Jawnie loved this type of case. She conducted a couple of surveillances to find out Henderson's daily schedule and then one final, quick outing to snap a few pictures from a safe distance. Jawnie followed Harvey and his mistress down to the town of Laurel and out on the Rocky Gorge Reservoir, where the couple spent the day attempting to wake-board. The day served as a twofer and the future ex-Mrs. Henderson would gain the information needed to win her freedom without spending a dime.

At the bottom of the steps, she pulled her phone back out, and double checked the time. Five after two and still no notifications. Apparently, nothing of importance had transpired while she was in the meeting with the County Commissioners. Her car was across the street in the paid lot, and she glanced up from the screen. Jawnie felt flush and concern filled her brain. The green Kia Soul remained parked at the corner, blocking a hydrant. Her heart kicked it up a notch.

*The damn thing hadn't moved in the hour and a half while I was inside. Jesus Christ, I don't need this shit today. Or any day. F\*\*k.*

Three times today since leaving her condo, the Kia coincidentally found itself parked nearby, always within eyesight. The odd shaped vehicle and the color stood out. *Amateur hour or someone who clearly wants me to notice.* Jawnie gritted her teeth, glanced both ways, and then kept her head down as she jogged across the street. She walked through the small lot until she found her Subaru and slid behind the wheel. She pulled around to the exit gate and paid the attendant. A second later, the arm rose, but the car didn't move. Thoughts of the Kia had Jawnie lost deep in her mind.

*What Would Rockfish Do? Probably tell me to go on the offensive, concern be damned. Well, I'm definitely not going to pull sideways in front of this guy, jump out and confront him, that's for sure. People are crazy these days and with my luck I'd end up TikTok famous #KarensGoneWild. Okay, let's see if I'm imagining things. Maybe give him a little I see you action instead.*

Jawnie turned left onto Pennsylvania Ave and sped up. At the end of the block, when she was right alongside the Kia, she held her breath and cut the wheel. The Subaru hung a hard right onto Baltimore Ave and missed the Kia's left front fender by only a foot. Enough to make him take notice. She straightened the wheel and exhaled. Her eyes shot to the rearview mirror. The Kia followed suit but was losing ground as she pressed down on the accelerator. The car remained a block back when Jawnie turned right again. Her eyes flickered from the front windshield to the rearview, expecting to see the Kia at any second, but it never appeared. Or at least that she noticed. Her grip on the steering wheel grew tighter.

*Did I lose him? Was he some civilian who flew into road rage when I almost hit him and then gave up once his blood pressure came down? No. I definitely saw that car multiple times today.*

Half an hour later and back in Anne Arundel County, Jawnie received an answer to her question. She spotted the Kia two cars back at a traffic light. *Alright McGee, you aren't imagining things. Let's figure out who this driver is.*

"Hey Siri. New note."

"What do you want it to say?"

"Dark green Kia Soul Maryland Plate 555-RJ4K."

"Ok, I've created your note. It's called Dark green Kia Soul Maryland plate 555-RJ4K."

*I'll call Michelle at DMV to run it as soon as I get back to the office. The favor may cost me a drink or an actual date, but it will be worth it to know who he is. Hopefully, the name will ring a bell. The last thing I need is a fresh surprise.*

Jawnie was only a mile from the office but took the Kia on a short sight-seeing tour of Linthicum Heights. See exactly how dedicated the driver was to their mission. First stop was Fairway Car Wash. Jawnie got in line behind the others and when it was her turn, she lined up the front left tire to the guide and selected the Supreme.

A tapping on the driver's side glass caught her attention. "Hands off the wheel, ma'am."

Jawnie looked down. White knuckles. Her hands slid off the wheel and fell to her lap as the car jerked forward. She tried to relax and think calmly as the conveyor pulled her forward. Each stage coated the windshield with a different chemical and blocked the view. *Because you don't see him, it doesn't mean he's gone. Maybe he's hiding behind that iHop, but with a simple line of sight as you exit the car wash? What's next? Mario's?* She had dry cleaning that was overdue to be picked up. *Big ass empty lot there, nowhere to hide and nowhere to street park.* As she exited the car wash, the track gave way. Her hands returned to the wheel. Jawnie waved off the man, wanting to finish drying the Subaru with an armful of hand towels. *I'm good, no thank you,* she mouthed as she cracked the window and slid out a five-dollar bill.

Mario's was four lights further down the road and by the third red light, the Kia emerged from the background. Jawnie could feel the sweat building on her lower back. A single drop formed on the side of her face. She lifted her arm and wiped away the drop with her sleeve. Mario's came up on the left and Jawnie put on her blinker. *No need to attempt some big ruse at this point.*

Five minutes later, she exited Mario's with her dry cleaning hung over her left shoulder and iPhone held in her right, ready to capture the moment for posterity's sake. Jawnie took the picture before the guy could raise his newspaper in a piss poor effort to hide his identity. She unlocked the Subaru and hung her clothes on the back hook. She got in and slammed the door. A combination of the force and noise caused her to jump.

*Goddamnit! WWRD? I should have done something proactive after the meeting back at the county building. Jawnie reached into the center console. She chose her weapon of choice and speed walked to the Kia. Deep breath, deep breath. Look and act like you belong here.*

The man was blond, with very short hair. Maybe balding. She couldn't tell with the slight window tint. When he spotted her approaching, the newspaper went back up. Jawnie snapped another picture before sliding the phone into her back pocket. She tapped on the window. The early edition of the Baltimore Sun didn't move.

She rapped her knuckles a second time. Harder, louder. This time the paper came down and the man's eyebrows went up. He reached over and lowered the window, roughly two inches, before speaking.

“Can I help—”

The mace streamed through the opening as if she was an Olympic crack shot. The creeper didn't see it coming and Jawnie didn't stick around to see the after-effects. She could hear his screams, interlaced with every curse word in the book by the time she slid behind the wheel. Her death grip returned, and she rocketed out of Mario's parking lot without a clear destination in mind and a little less rubber on her tires.

The Subaru ended up in the parking lot of a Wawa, a good half mile down the road. Jawnie parked behind the convenience store. She pulled up the note she made earlier with the Kia's license plate and added the photos. At the bottom of the note, she dictated the man's description in two sentences and returned her phone to the cup holder.

Jawnie exhaled and didn't move. *How long had it been? Three months? Maybe a little longer. Well, kid, it was an enjoyable ride. I look forward to the next extended period of calm. Maybe today showed I'm not built for this line of work.* Her mind went back to the night on Rockfish's front lawn. Porbeagle's gun. The sound of the shot. The smell of burning cotton as the bullet passed through the material of her oversized sweatshirt. *Fixing middle school laptops out of my garage doesn't sound so bad now. Granted, no one's launching a streaming network based on that show, but then again, I don't have to look over my shoulder every time I leave the goddamn house.* Jawnie stopped rubbing her hands and dropped her head into them. The tears flowed freely.

She didn't remember how long she remained parked next to the dumpster, but when she felt she could make it back to the office without having a complete emotional meltdown, she shifted into drive.

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