

Seth

Wednesday. Late afternoon.

Sitting on the rooftop of Wallace Investigations in the shade of a canopy, Seth reflected on his afternoon. He'd seen everything the South Bend PD had on the Jameson case. It was both what he expected and disappointing. But, he realized, if there had been the proverbial smoking gun, he wouldn't be here now.

Or maybe that voicemail to Butch *was* the smoking gun. Without it, Declan Jameson's death would have been ruled accidental, and life would have moved on.

While Stanton had welcomed him on the team, Seth had to run his own investigation, separate and unofficial. Top of Seth's list were Jameson's children, Danielle and Sean. If he were lucky, Jameson talked to one of them about what he thought *stunk*.

He dialed the number for Danielle in the police report. After five rings, it rolled to voicemail. Not a surprise. In the day and age of spam calls, he was one of the many who only answered numbers he knew. Well, his phone knew. Seth long ago stopped knowing phone numbers beyond his and the one that rang in the house where his father still lived.

He left a message for Mrs. Tolbert and then dialed the woman who had reported Jameson missing.

She picked up on the second ring. "Hello?" The female voice was soft, almost melodic.

"Mrs. O'Connell? My name is Seth Rizk. I am conducting a secondary investigation into Declan Jameson's death. How are you today, ma'am?" He asked the question to give the woman time to digest the mouthful he'd just given her.

"I'm fine, thank you for asking."

“I would like to meet with you to talk about Captain Jameson.”

“Who is it?” a nosy voice asked grumpily in the background.

“My nephew,” Mrs. O’Connell said away from the phone, then came back to the speaker.

“I would love if you visited. It’s been so long since I’ve seen you.”

“Ma’am? Did you hear what I said?”

“Of course. Tomorrow afternoon? That would be fine. You’re welcome to join us for lunch, if you don’t mind eating with a crowd of sophisticated, older ladies.”

“I would love to join you for lunch. I’ll be there at noon, Mrs. O’Connell. Or should I call you Aunt Morrighan?”

“Yes, that would be best,” she said. “Oh, it’s been such a long time since I’ve had someone to, er, talk to. You know, family. Do you have any news?”

“About Captain Jameson’s death? More questions than answers, but there are a few things I can share.”

She laughed, the sound forced and brittle. “Oh, that brother of yours. He always was a troublemaker.”

No, Jakob was the good brother. Not that she knew.

“I really can’t wait to hear what kind of trouble you’ve been making,” she said, her voice cracking.

Seth heard the real stress behind the faked banter. “I can come now. I’m in the city and can be there in twenty minutes.”

“No, no. Things are the same around here. It will be nice to have a break in routine ...”

“Seth, Aunt Morrighan. I’ll see you at noon. You have my number—don’t be shy about using it.”

“Wonderful, see you tomorrow, Seth.” She ended the call.

“Color me intrigued,” Seth said to the pigeon walking around the roof. “The woman was intimidated by someone. Maybe the same someone who shot Jameson up with heart meds. This ought to be an interesting visit. Hold that thought,” he said as his screen showed the daughter’s name. “Seth Rizk.”

“Hello, this is Danielle Tolbert. I’m returning your call?” The question held more than a little distressed.

“Thank you for calling, Mrs. Tolbert. My condolences on your loss. I met your father a long time ago. I’m one of the many who respected him.”

Not Jakob. Whatever his problem was.

“Thank you.” Her voice broke.

“I want to speak with both you and your brother, tomorrow if possible.”

She sniffled. “Why do you want to talk to Sean? He lives in Nashville, Tennessee and just came back home when Dad went missing. He doesn’t know anything.”

“With investigations, you just never know when the smallest, off-hand comment holds the key to the entire puzzle. I know this is hard.”

“Why isn’t the South Bend PD handling my father’s case? He worked for them for more than thirty years. He trusted them and wouldn’t like it if they were pushed aside.” Even in her grief, Danielle wasn’t rolling over for him.

“No one has pushed anyone aside. I spent the morning with Detective Stanton. If you prefer, I can see if he’s available to join us.”

A pregnant pause followed.

“No. It’s all right.” She didn’t sound as if it was. “As long as he knows you’re meeting with us, it’s okay. Sean is staying with us. Could you come by the house in the morning? Maybe nine thirty?” When Seth agreed, she ended the call with little courtesy or fanfare.

Seth sat with his elbows on his knees. He would have his hands full tomorrow. He would have to be strategic interviewing the grieving family. In his experience, the doors of cooperation could slam shut quickly. For an instant, he contemplated tagging Stanton. She obviously trusted him. But Seth wanted to get his own impressions. Stanton would be his backup plan, in case he did end up shut out.

The trip to Seven Families, to see Morrighan O’Connell, had to be solo. Walking in with a known cop could shut mouths he needed open.

Briefing the detective after would be good enough for now.

“Well,” he said to the pigeon, “since I’m not going anywhere soon ...” He opened the cooler, pulled out a Bud, and leaned back in his chair.