

Michael Key was housed in a holding cell with a dozen other inmates. Bunks lined the walls, each consisting of a slab of concrete and paper thin mattress. Not long after his arrival, bag meals were delivered to the cell, containing a bologna sandwich and fruit cup. Michael forced down several bites before losing his appetite. Exhaustion hung on his body like a lead blanket but anxiety set his mind racing. He had so many unanswered questions about Robin and what she must have told the police. He knew he should try to sleep but with the always-on fluorescent lights and the commotion of inmates coming and going, he knew it wouldn't happen.

He had no watch or phone and there was no clock in sight, but Michael guessed it was around 8 am when the guard unlocked the cell door and called his name. He was led to a square windowless room with cinder block walls painted off white. It was no bigger than a broom closet, with just enough space for the two hard plastic chairs and small table. The only decoration to be seen was a tin ashtray.

He was soon joined by a plain clothes detective who set a file folder and a pack of Newports on the table and took the other seat.

"Mr. Key, my name is Detective Bader. I'm going to go over some questions with you now." He pointed at the cigarettes. "You want one?"

"Don't smoke anymore," answered Key.

"Ok." Bader drew a laminated card from the folder and read out the *Miranda Rights* quickly and without emotion, like they were disclaimer copy at the end of a commercial.

"Do you understand these rights as I read them?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Having been read these rights, do you wish to answer questions?"

"Sure, but can you tell me what's going on?"

"It's also my duty to inform you that the audio and video of this interview is being recorded as standard practice."

Key said nothing. His face showed a dawning sense of alarm.

"Mr. Key, do you know why you're here?"

"Must be because of what happened with Robin."

“That’s right.”

“I agreed to come down here, but now it feels like I can’t leave.”

“It’s good that you’re cooperating, Mr. Key. Can I call you Michael?”

Michael paused and reached for the Newports, “Sure. Got a light?”

Bader passed him a book of matches and continued, “Michael, we need you to fill in the details of the incident from last night, ok?”

“Yeah. Look, I want to know what Robin told you about what happened. Wait, last night? It was only like five o’clock.”

Bader pulled a sheet from the folder. “That was the, um, incident at the park, yes. But our conversation is more concerned with what happened after that.”

“What do you mean? The cops told me to go home after that, so I did. Like I told the other guys, I got a little drunk and tried contacting Robin a couple times on the phone, but that’s it.”

Bader leaned back and folded his arms. “Is that really all you want to say, Michael? Because we can do this the difficult way if you want but it’s not going to help you.”

“What are you talking about? Can I talk to Robin? Really, there’s been some kind of misunderstanding.”

“Michael, Michael, stop. We know everything. We know what happened and we know that it was you.” Bader took a small stack of photos from the folder and laid them out on the table. Each shot showed a different angle of the Key’s front porch. Michael stopped dead, transfixed by the images. Wide shots and closeups of Robin’s lifeless body in a pool of dark blood, garishly lit by the camera flash.

“What is this,” whispered Michael. “Robin, no. What’s going on?” He looked to Bader, uncomprehending, tears welling in his eyes.

“Michael. You need to talk to me about what you did to Robin.”

* * *

Mason showered quickly, scrubbing himself down under nearly scalding water. His close-cropped hair needed little attention but he cleared yesterday’s stubble with an electric shaver. He gave his teeth a vigorous brushing and gargled with minty mouthwash to complete the ablutions and erase the traces

of last night's bender. A dull but persistent complaint from the region of his liver was the only reminder.

He opened the custom built walk-in closet and turned on the wall-mounted TV. Local morning news hits played as Mason surveyed the well-organized collection of suits, shirts, ties, handkerchiefs, and shoes. He was well aware that his wardrobe caused snickers among some of his colleagues. To them, his French cuffs, suspenders, vibrant colors, and hand-tailored pieces were ostentatious, obnoxious even. To him, this wardrobe was a public-facing business tool that communicated confidence and authority. It was a show for clients and juries, and they took notice. It was as simple as 'he looks like a good lawyer, so he must be a good lawyer.'

"It's another sunny one today, with highs in the low 60s, and a low pressure system that should stick around through the week...."

Mason made mental notes for his upcoming case as he dressed. He started with a fresh shirt - always white, always crisp. This morning he selected a two-button, double-vented black pinstripe suit that was the most sober model in his closet. Crystal cufflinks, a hot pink tie, and a supple pair of black and white Allen Edmonds wingtips completed the look.

"...found dead in front of her home last night. It is the 112th murder in Milwaukee so far this year..."

Mason straightened his double Windsor knot and gave himself an approving once over in the full length mirror. "Time to stick it to the man, Mitchell."

He grabbed his keys and briefcase from the hall table, which sat askew with one end moved away from the wall. He pushed it back into place with his hip and stopped at the dog bed to give the now slumbering Clyde one last head scratch.

"You be good. No parties or girls while I'm gone." Clyde gave a sleepy snort of acknowledgement and tucked his head deeper into the folds of his blanket. Mason made a note that both dog and blanket were overdue for a wash.

At the elevator Mason ran into his next door neighbor, Donna Hampton.

"Morning, Mason. Going down?"

"You bet. All good, Donna?"

"So-so. Dead tired. Couldn't sleep last night. You?"

"Slept like a baby."

“Ok, good. I thought maybe I heard something bumping around in your place late last night.”

Mason couldn't recall arriving home in the wee hours but imagined he must've stumbled in and that would explain the displaced table; the one set against the wall he shared with Donna's unit.

“Oh yeah, sorry about that. Clyde got a little rambunctious. Unfortunately, I was at the office pretty late and I think he had some pent up energy. I've got to try and get him out for walks more often.”

Donna nodded, seemingly satisfied with this explanation. The elevator doors opened, and Mason held out his arm. “After you, neighbor.”

“You know, I'm around the house a lot during the day. Freelance life, you know?”

“Right,” said Mason. He had no clue what she did for a living.

Donna continued, “I wouldn't mind taking Clyde out every now and then if you need. Just saying.”

Mason inwardly recoiled at the offer. He did feel for Clyde sitting alone all day but did not relish the idea of Donna Hampton having access to his home. It wasn't that he didn't trust her, but in his estimation a little distance made for better neighbors.

“Thanks, Donna. That's nice of you to offer. I'll keep it in mind.”

After descending the final two floors in silence Donna exited into the lobby with a polite wave that Mason returned with an impeccably civil smile.

One level down, Mason left the elevator and walked to his gleaming Mercedes sedan parked in a corner spot of the underground garage. He leased it new last summer and would flip it for a newer, shinier model in another year. Fine German engineering with all the bells and whistles meant the payments were steep, but then nobody wants a lawyer who drives a Kia.