

ERRATA

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CHAPTER ONE

The call came at 6:40, and that was late enough to find me already awake. In homicide, you learn to count that as luck.

I'd been at the piano for close to an hour by then, working through Satie's Gnossienne repeating phrases until they felt more like breath. The ritual is three months old and already I can't imagine mornings without it.

The phone was on the kitchen counter. I heard it from the front room, stopped mid-phrase, and the house absorbed the silence the way it does in the hour before full dark becomes full light — completely, instantly, as if the music had never happened.

Dispatch. A female body in a drainage culvert along the Second Creek Greenway, near the UT campus corridor. Graduate student, his dog, 6:15.

I said: "On my way."

I didn't think anything yet. I thought: another one. There is always another one. I have been thinking another one for twelve years, and the thought has never once been wrong, and probably that should unsettle me more than it does, but this is what twelve years in homicide gives you — the knowledge that the thought is accurate, and the equipment to keep moving anyway. I got dressed in the dark.

The drive from Luttrell Street to the Second Creek Greenway takes eleven minutes at that hour, through the part of Knoxville that belongs to itself before the city wakes up and claims it back. North Fourth Avenue still dark, the Victorian porches holding their shadows, then down toward the interstate corridor and across, the skyline low against the hills the way Appalachian skylines always are — not reaching, just

present, the mountains behind everything a reminder that the city exists on someone else's terms. In late April the dogwoods are finishing and the redbuds are gone and the green coming up behind them has that intensity, that almost violent aliveness that East Tennessee produces for about three weeks every spring before the humidity settles in and softens everything into summer.

I parked behind the first cruiser and got out into air that smelled like creek water and honeysuckle and underneath both of them the other thing, the thing that does not leave crime scenes regardless of how good the morning smells. A presence I stopped trying to name about eight years in and have simply learned to register.

The tape was already up. A uniform lifted it without conversation. I didn't move fast. Moving fast at a scene serves no one except the person who needs to feel they're doing something.

The pedestrian bridge cast a shadow across the culvert opening. She was in the shadow.

I stopped at what I judged to be eight feet and looked.

The first thing you do at a scene is look. Not touch, not theorize, not begin the interior monologue about what this means and how it connects to what you already know. You look. You give the scene thirty seconds of genuine attention before you start dismantling it with your understanding. I learned this from a detective named Raymond Walker, who is retired now and playing golf in Maryville and has earned every stroke of it. He told me once that a scene is a sentence and you have to read it before you can argue about its meaning. I disagreed with Walker about a fair number of things. That wasn't one of them.

She was young — twenty, twenty-two, the age of someone who was, some months ago, a high school senior deciding about her future. And she had been placed, not fallen. The distinction is rarely ambiguous if you know what to look for. Her hands were folded across her chest with the deliberateness of someone arranging flowers — not the rough positioning of panic, not the accident of a body that simply stopped, but something considered, something that had taken time. Her running

shoes had been removed and set to the side. Not thrown, not dropped. Positioned, at a distance from the body that struck me immediately as chosen. Near the shoes, her personal items: keys on a carabiner clip, a small orange Moleskine notebook, cover face-up. Her hair — red, a deep copper-red that held its color even in the culvert's shadow — had been brushed and spread against the concrete with care.

And there it was.

The arrangement. The culvert. The removed shoes and the composed personal items and the wet drainage environment that would make forensic recovery a kind of misery. All of it together, the whole vocabulary of it landing at once the way a chord lands when you haven't heard it in years but haven't forgotten it either.

Gemmel.

Earl Gemmel had killed seven women over twelve years, and his scenes looked like this — culverts, ritual arrangement, items placed with intention around the body. His cases were documented, studied, written about extensively enough that the signature was available to anyone willing to go looking for it. He was in custody now, arrested eighteen months ago after the DNA genealogy work caught up with him — a former Knoxville law enforcement officer who had been retired and living quietly among us for years while the cases stayed cold, while the department he'd served processed the shame of that. The arrest had shaken something loose in the city that hadn't fully settled back yet. But he was in custody, which meant the man himself wasn't a possibility, which meant what I was looking at was someone who had studied his method and decided to use it.

A copycat. That's a specific kind of problem with a very unique shape, and I started moving through that shape in my mind — who studies Gemmel, why, what the choice of victim and location tells you about—

And then I looked at the hair.

It had been brushed. Spread. And parted — deliberately, precisely, on the left side of her head, the hair falling away in the direction it had

been trained to fall. From eight feet I could see that whoever had done this knew which direction that was.

Not a Gemmel thing. Gemmel never touched hair. His scenes were arranged but impersonal, a signature rather than a tenderness. The brushed and parted hair was never part of what he did. Not once across seven victims.

So not a Gemmel copy. Or not only that.

I stood very still. The creek moved behind me. Somewhere up the embankment a bird was doing what birds do in April, which is to say everything and nothing, just sound filling the space where thought should be.

I have been carrying a murder for twenty-six years. I know what the wrong side looks like.

The thought arrived not as an idea but as something physical, a change in pressure moving through the room of my chest all at once, impossible to locate, impossible to step away from. I kept my eyes on the hair. I kept breathing. The uniform behind me shuffled his feet and I was grateful for the sound, grateful for the proof that the world was still operating on ordinary terms, because mine had just shifted.

Sherman Kessler had brushed Katie's hair. He had done it with something that in a different universe might have been called tenderness — he had loved her, in the broken and catastrophic way he understood love, and the staging was the afterthought, the practical problem he had solved around that gesture. The hair was never about Gemmel. The hair was personal. And he had gotten the part wrong, because you can study someone for years from behind the distance of a professional role and still not know which way their hair falls when they are simply living, simply running, simply being a person that no one is watching.

The part in front of me was correct.

Whoever had stood over this girl in the dark and brushed her hair and spread it against the concrete had known which side. Had studied the original closely enough to find the error. Had understood not just that the error was there but what it meant — that the hair wasn't Gemmel's

touch at all, that it belonged to a different case entirely, a case that almost nobody alive had ever read closely enough to know.

Or.

The other possibility, which I owed it to myself and to this young woman and to years of hard-won professional judgment to hold alongside the first: I was wrong. The part was coincidence. The arrangement was a Gemmel study and nothing more, and I was doing the thing I have always been most at risk of doing — finding Katie Clover in every case that arrives with enough similarity to pull at the wound. The hair could just be hair. The correct side could be luck, or research, or the killer's own instinct about how a woman's hair should fall.

I have walked that road before. I know where it leads. I know the cost of it.

The difference was that this time I couldn't talk myself out of it. Every other time the feeling had been something I could set down if I worked at it hard enough, something I could separate from the evidence and examine from a professional distance. This wasn't moving. The recognition sat in my chest with the gravity of something true, and the fact that I couldn't be certain of it — couldn't be certain of anything standing in a culvert at seven in the morning with a girl I hadn't met yesterday and a wound I'd been carrying since I was eighteen — was exactly what made it so hard to breathe.

My vision narrowed. Not dramatically — I didn't reach for anything, didn't give the uniform behind me a single thing to observe or report. But the creek noise dropped away and the honeysuckle dropped away and what was left was the hair and the part and the weight of a morning that had become something I didn't have language for yet.

I breathed. I looked. I kept working.

Campus Police Detective Allison Spangler arrived twelve minutes after I did, which told me she'd been notified at roughly the same time, lived farther away, and didn't drive like me. She had two uniformed campus officers with her and the manner of someone who has worked the UT campus long enough to be genuinely unsurpriseable — a quality

that takes at least a decade to earn and is worth considerably more than most people give it credit for.

Mid-forties. Dark hair going silver at the temples in a way she hadn't corrected. She moved through the perimeter with the economy of a person who does not perform her own competence. I watched her read the scene the same way I had — without touching anything, without saying anything, giving it the full attention it required before she opened her mouth.

“KPD.” Not a question.

“Hawkes.” I showed her my badge.

“Spangler, UT Campus PD.” She looked at the body, then back at me. “Culvert’s off-campus. You got here first?”

“Just barely.”

She nodded once. The jurisdictional math was clear to both of us without discussion: the culvert sat technically outside the campus perimeter, which made it mine, but the pedestrian bridge above it was university property, and the victim — by the lanyard visible near her keys — was almost certainly a student. We would work it jointly. Neither of us said so because neither of us needed to. We were both old enough to understand that the case mattered more than the flag planted on it.

She looked at the hair. She looked at the shoes. She looked at the arranged items near the shoes and spent a moment with each element long enough to confirm she understood what she was seeing. Said nothing about any of it. That was the right instinct — the silence of someone who recognized that what she was looking at required careful language rather than immediate language. Not a universal quality.

“Who found her?”

I gave her what dispatch had given me. The graduate student was still on the embankment talking to a uniform, his dog on a tight leash — the dog looking considerably more distressed than the owner, which is sometimes how it goes with the kind of person who processes shock by going very still and answering questions in complete sentences.

“I’ll take the dog-walker,” Spangler said.

“He’s yours.”

She moved up the embankment. I went back to the scene.

The forensic team arrived and I stepped back and let them begin the work of reducing everything to evidence bags and measurements — converting a scene into a file, a person into a case number, a composed arrangement back into its component objects. I photographed everything before they got there. The hair, the shoes, the Moleskine, the distance and angle of each element to the others. Then I photographed my photographs, which is a habit Walker would have called redundant and which I call insurance. Official evidence photographs develop gaps over the years, in the way that institutional coincidences develop gaps, for reasons that are never quite explained.

The forensic pathologist gave me a window of eleven to two for time of death. Manual strangulation, preliminary. Then she looked up from where she was crouched and said: “Evidence of sexual contact. Perimortem.” She delivered it the way careful people say preliminary things — giving the finding exactly the weight it required and not a word more — and I nodded, and she went back to her work.

I stood with that for a moment. Gemmel’s victims had been violated. His scenes had looked like this — the culvert, the shoes, the arranged items, the wet drainage environment. If you were building a Gemmel, sexual violence was part of what you built. That was the obvious read, and it was not wrong, and I held it the way you hold the obvious read: seriously, provisionally, with one hand.

The other hand was holding something I couldn’t place yet. The staging in front of me had a quality — composed, deliberate, patient, the work of someone who had thought about each element and confirmed it before moving to the next. It had the register of an argument being made. The finding the pathologist had just given me had a different register. Not composed. Not patient. Not the vocabulary of someone constructing a demonstration. Something older than that. Something that did not come from the same place as the brushed hair and the arranged shoes and the precisely calibrated distance of each element from the body.

Two registers. Both present. Sitting alongside each other in a way that I could note and could not yet explain and was not going to pretend I could.

I filed it. I kept looking.

Luc arrived at seven-ten. I knew it was him before I saw him — four years of partnership teaches you a person's footsteps on varied terrain the way music teaches you intervals, not as a skill you decide to acquire but as something that accumulates in you until one day it's simply there. He came down the embankment the way he comes into any scene: not rushing, not performing, just arriving, with the deliberateness of a man who decided long ago he wasn't in the business of wasting motion.

He looked at the body. He looked at me looking at the body. He said nothing about either view.

He worked the scene from the opposite side — starting at the bridge and moving down — so that we formed two separate records rather than a single record built on each other's influence. This is the arrangement we have. It didn't require discussion when we started working together and doesn't require it now. He leads on paper. He handles the room when the room needs handling. In return I drive the investigation's actual momentum, which we both understand and neither of us announces, because announcing it would be like announcing the weather.

After ten minutes he came and stood beside me. We looked at the composition near the shoes.

"The hair part," I said.

He looked at it. He looked at me. "Yeah."

That was the whole conversation. Sometimes two words are exactly the right two words and a third would only diminish them.

The student ID was on the lanyard. A uniform retrieved it through the forensic team, read the name, handed it to Luc. We had a face that matched the girl in the culvert and something to call her. Green eyes in the photograph. A good face. Luc showed the card to Spangler, who had come back down from the embankment with the dog-walker squared away. She looked at the name, looked at the photo, and stepped away to call university administration — the kind of call that gets answered at

any hour when a campus police detective is on the other end, because universities don't sleep as cleanly as they pretend to.

She came back in under four minutes.

“Angie Simmons. Twenty-two. Senior.” She checked her phone. “French major. From Memphis.”

French major.

I didn't react. I've been developing that restraint for twelve years and have gotten reasonably competent at it, at least from the outside. But the words settled in alongside everything else — the hair and the shoes and the correct part and the orange notebook face-up in the wet concrete — and the accumulation of it was becoming something I was going to have to sit with before I could begin to understand its structure.

Luc said: “I'll handle the press.”

He went. I could hear him at the perimeter tape a minute later, the same three sentences in the same measured cadence: body of an unidentified female adult, investigation ongoing, no further comment. He says difficult things with a precision that forecloses follow-up without technically closing the door. It is a skill I have studied and cannot replicate. I tend to just close the door.

I stayed until the scene was fully processed — longer than I needed to and exactly as long as I intended.

Before the forensic team moved the body I photographed the hair one more time. I wanted the image in my camera and in my memory simultaneously, the way important things sometimes need to be held in two places at once. The part was clean. Decisive. The work of someone who had stood here in the dark and thought about which side it should fall on and confirmed it and been satisfied before leaving.

Knowledge. Earned by studying the original closely enough to find what was wrong with it.

Or luck. Or coincidence. Or my own wound looking for a mirror in the dark.

I stood at the culvert a moment after they carried her up the embankment. The honeysuckle smell reasserted itself, the way the ordi-

nary world reclaims spaces the instant the extraordinary loosens its grip. The creek moved. The light had changed — fully morning now, the Tennessee sky that pale blue it puts on for the few weeks before the humidity arrives, and to the southeast the Smokies just visible, blue-gray and patient the way they always are, the way they were before this city existed and will be long after, entirely indifferent to what happens in the valleys below them, which is either comforting or terrible depending on the morning.

This was not a comforting morning.

Spangler came and stood beside me on the bridge. We both looked down at where the body had been.

“You know something,” she said.

“I know a lot of things. Right now most of them are questions.”

She looked at me sideways, with the expression of someone deciding to let a statement be what it is rather than what it implies. I suspected that expression had served her well for fifteen years on a university campus, where most statements imply considerably more than they contain.

“I’ll be in touch,” I said.

“I’ll be here,” she said — meaning the campus, the institution, the whole complicated machinery of a university that doesn’t stop moving because one of its students has been found in a culvert. She would be there when the next thing happened, and the thing after that. I recognized the durability in it. I didn’t say so.

I drove back to Luttrell Street through morning traffic that hadn’t yet become what morning traffic becomes by eight. Through the UT corridor first, past the fraternity houses going pale in the early light, past the old church on Cumberland that has been a church since before anyone currently alive can remember, then up through the city proper, the downtown buildings modest against the hills the way Knoxville buildings tend to be modest — not competing with the topography, just occupying it, working with what the land gave them. North on the familiar streets into Fourth and Gill, where the Victorians line up behind their porches in the morning light and the dogwood in Mrs.

Patterson's yard is finally done and the yard beyond it is coming up in that deep green. Everything looked exactly as it always looks, which is to say ordinary, which is to say nothing like what I had just come from, which is exactly the thing about this city that I have always needed — the capacity of this place to simply continue, to be itself regardless of what is happening in a culvert three miles south.

I thought about Angie Simmons, twenty-two, French major, from Memphis, arranged in a drainage culvert with her hair parted on the correct side by someone who knew what the correct side was and why it mattered.

And I thought about the thing I had been not-thinking since the moment I saw the part: that Sherman Kessler had brushed Katie's hair because he had loved her, in the way he understood love, and he had gotten the part wrong because getting it right would have required a different kind of knowing — the kind that comes from simply watching someone live, from running beside them in the early morning light, from knowing which way their hair falls when they're just a person and nobody is watching. He had never been allowed to know her that way. His best was wrong.

And someone had found that. Had gone looking for it. Had understood not just that the error existed but what it cost and what correcting it required, had stood over a girl in the dark with a brush and the knowledge of an original scene that almost nobody alive had ever read, and had gotten it right.

I went home. Drank the coffee I'd made before dispatch called, cold now and fine. Sat at the kitchen table. Opened my notebook.

I wrote: Hair — correct side. Who knows which side was wrong?

Stared at it for a while.

Then I wrote one more word below that line, and sat with it before I closed the notebook, put on my jacket, and drove to KPD.

The word was Katie.

CHAPTER TWO

My desk at KPD is a thing I have made peace with over twelve years in the way you make peace with any piece of furniture that has witnessed too much of your life — not fond of it exactly, but adapted to it, the way your body adapts to a mattress or chair until the object and the posture become one continuous fact. It is in a corner of the bullpen with my back to the wall, which is where I always put my desk and which Luc has pointed out says something about me that I do not need him to interpret. I know what it says: I like walls behind me.

I sat down and took out my notebook and my phone and the granola bar I'd grabbed from my kitchen counter on the way out, and I laid all three of them on the desk in a row, and I looked at them, and then I put the granola bar in the drawer for later and opened the notebook to the page that had two lines on it.

Hair — correct side. Who knows which side was wrong?

Katie.

I stared at those two lines for a moment. Then I turned to a fresh page and began.

The way I work a scene — not the official way, the actual way — is that I build two records simultaneously. The official record is what goes into the case file: the scene photographs, the forensic pathologist's preliminary report, the chain-of-custody log for every item bagged and tagged and removed from the culvert by people wearing gloves. That record is accurate. It is also incomplete — official records describe what was found and do not argue about what it means.

My record is the argument.

I plugged my phone into my laptop and pulled up the photographs I'd taken at the scene — sixty-three of them, which I know is more than most detectives take and fewer than I wanted. I opened the ones I cared about: the hair, the shoes, the Moleskine and its surrounding composition, three angles of the overall arrangement. I put them in a folder and labeled it with the date and the case number and one word that doesn't belong in any official folder label but that I put there anyway: corrections.

Then I drew three columns on the fresh page of my notebook and labeled them.

The first column: Gemmel.

Earl Gemmel killed seven women between 1998 and 2010 across four counties in East Tennessee. His scenes were deliberate and ritualistic — culverts chosen with care, shoes removed and placed, personal items arranged near the body with the consistency of someone who had developed a method and adhered to it. The staging was a signature in the way that a pressed thumb is a signature — identifiable, repeated, intentional. What Gemmel did not do was attend to the victims themselves. Hair left as it fell. No grooming, no adjustment to appearance, no gesture toward the person beneath the arrangement. His staging was about the composition, not the individual.

The second column: Sherman.

Sherman Kessler killed Katie Clover on the evening of June 10, 2000. He studied Gemmel's cases — through press coverage, through whatever documentation he could access — and he replicated the method accurately enough: culvert, shoes removed, personal items placed near the body. He understood what Gemmel had been doing and he reproduced it with reasonable fidelity, given his sources.

He got three things wrong.

He brushed and parted her hair. This was not something he took from Gemmel — Gemmel never touched hair, never attended to how a victim looked, only to how the scene looked. The hair was Sherman's own addition, his own gesture toward the girl he had been fixating on since she was too young for it and had waited for with the patience of

someone who had confused obsession with devotion. He had combed her hair after she was dead because he cared about her, in the way that people like Sherman care about people — completely, incorrectly, and without the self-awareness to understand the difference. All these years later, and the hair is still the detail that undoes me. He thought he knew her. He didn't know her hair.

He placed her shoes at six feet. Gemmel's actual average, across documented cases, was five feet. Sherman took the number from press coverage that was, itself, imprecise — it reported "several feet" in most instances, and Sherman rounded up.

He placed her keys and compass necklace near the shoes in what the original scene photographs show as an arrangement that was approximate rather than considered — a general cluster rather than a composed grouping, the difference between putting things in the same area and putting them in relationship to each other.

These are the errors that appear in the case file. In Sherman's confession. In the autopsy report, partially, in redacted form. And in one other place — which I will come back to, because I always come back to it, because it is the detail that has been sitting in the back of my mind since I stood at the culvert this morning and registered the hair and didn't let myself complete the thought.

The third column: this morning.

Hair: brushed, spread, parted. Whether the part is correct — consistent with how she actually wore it — I don't yet know. Someone made a choice about it. Whether that choice reflects knowledge of the Clover case or just the way Angie Simmons's hair falls is a question I cannot yet answer and am not ready to stop asking.

Shoes: four and a half feet. Not six. Not five. Splitting the difference between Sherman's error and Gemmel's actual practice, as if someone had found the error, found the actual number, and then chose not to overcorrect.

Personal items: the Moleskine and the keys on a carabiner, placed with the deliberateness of someone composing a still life. Not in a cluster. In a relationship — the notebook face-up, the keys at a definitive angle,

the distance between them as considered as the distance between them and the body. Someone had put these objects down and then looked at them and then adjusted them. I had seen the evidence of that adjustment in the photograph — the slight arc in the concrete dust where something had been moved an inch or two before the final position was accepted.

I sat back and read the three columns.

Whoever did this has identified each of Sherman's errors and corrected them. They are not imitating Gemmel. They are not imitating Sherman. They are taking the original staging apart, finding what was wrong with it, and fixing it.

Or they are imitating Gemmel with enough care that the shoe distance is coincidence and the hair is just hair. I wrote that down too, below the first thought, because the margin list demands honesty even when honesty is inconvenient.

I wrote the question that followed from this as plainly as I could:

Who has the access to know the errors in Sherman's staging?

The answer list was not long. I wrote it in a column down the left margin of the page, the way I write things I don't want to have to look at all at once but cannot avoid looking at.

Myself.

Luc.

Sadie Price — who worked the cold case break with us and has since transferred to Chattanooga.

Martha Clover — who received the full case file after Sherman was identified, at her request. He never stood trial. He was dead before the DNA connected him to Katie, dead by his own hand, which meant there was no conviction, no sentencing, no courtroom moment where Martha could sit in the front row and watch someone answer for what he did. There was only the file. She asked for it anyway. I know she has read every word of it because she told me so, on the phone, about three weeks after we sent it. She said: now I know everything and none of it helps. I didn't have an answer for that. I still don't.

Clyde Stannis — retired to Sevierville, where he grows tomatoes and fishes Douglas Lake for crappie and bass and has, to my knowledge, not

thought about the Clover case since the day he handed the file to me and said he was glad it was closed and meant it. He knows every error in Sherman's staging because I walked him through each one when the DNA came back, in a conference room at KPD with Luc and Bill Abernathy present, and watched him go very quiet, just someone receiving information that reorganizes a quarter century of professional memory. He has the file. Whether he has looked at it since is a question I have not asked him.

Abernathy — retired to Cocoa Beach. He was Chief when the case broke. He knows.

And then the entry that is not a person.

Grant Kessler. And what Grant wrote.

Grant published his paper in the *Journal of Cold Case Methodology* fourteen months ago. I read it the week it appeared online and again when the print issue arrived; the copy has been in my bedside drawer since, under my phone charger and a paperback I haven't finished. The paper is titled "Corrective Evidence and Staging Analysis: A Framework for Identifying Secondary Homicide Reconstruction in Cold Cases." Twenty-two pages. Four case studies, all anonymized. The third case study — eleven pages, the longest — describes a homicide in an unnamed East Tennessee jurisdiction in which a killer constructed a false staging based on the documented patterns of a regional serial offender, introduced three significant errors into that staging through the limits of his available source material, and was ultimately identified through a genealogical DNA analysis that had no relationship to the staging at all.

Grant did not use Katie's name. He did not use Sherman's. He did not name the jurisdiction, the year, the serial offender, the victim. He anonymized every proper noun and most of the geography and all of the dates.

He also described, in clinical and complete detail, each of the three staging errors and what they revealed about the limits of the secondary killer's source material.

I have opinions about the fact that he thanked his department chair and his research assistant and did not mention his brother, who is dead

— by his own hand, identified as Katie’s killer only after the DNA closed the case, never charged, never tried, never named in a courtroom for what he did. Grant spent thirteen months concealing what Sherman had done, and Sherman died before any of it came to light, which means Grant’s penance has no object. There is no one to be punished. There is only the paper, and the careful anonymization, and the department chair who got thanked for his support of the research. I understand that. The anonymization holds — mostly — until you already know the case. Then the seams are visible.

I added one more line to the margin list, below Grant’s entry.

Whoever read Grant’s paper carefully enough to find the seam.

Luc appeared at my desk at eleven-forty with two coffees from K Brew — the good kind, not the bullpen machine, which produces something hot and brown that is technically coffee in the way that a parking garage is technically architecture. He set one in front of me without comment and then stood behind my left shoulder and read my three-column comparison for approximately ninety seconds without saying anything. This is what I have learned to value about Luc Phan in six years of partnership — he reads before he speaks, and when he does speak it is because he has something to add rather than something to respond to.

“The shoe distance,” Luc said.

“Yeah.”

“That’s not in any press coverage I’ve found.”

“No. It isn’t.”

He picked up his coffee. He looked at my margin list — the names, and the last entry. He read the last entry twice, which I know because I was watching.

“Grant’s paper.”

“Grant’s paper,” I said, eyes fixed on his.

“You think someone found the seam.”

“I think someone was looking for the seam.”

He nodded once. He did not ask me how I wanted to handle it yet, because we were both still in the part of the morning where the shapes

were becoming visible and naming them prematurely does not make them clearer. He knows this about the way I work. I know this about the way he waits.

He slid open my desk drawer and put the granola bar on top of my notebook without acknowledging that I'd put it there specifically to avoid eating it, and went back to his desk.

I ate the granola bar. It was the kind with chocolate chips that is trying to be a cookie and failing gracefully, which is a reasonable ambition. I drank the coffee, which was considerably better — K Brew does something with their espresso that the bullpen machine has never attempted and probably couldn't achieve without significant emotional support.

I wrote three words at the bottom of the margin list — get phone records — and closed the notebook. The last entry was still there, the one below Grant's name. A reader I couldn't yet name, somewhere in the overlap between careful scholarship and a culvert on the Second Creek Greenway.

Waiting to become a person.