

One

Detective Laura Kimber turned the corner in her unmarked cruiser, she reduced her speed, her hands slippery with sweat as they gripped the wheel. She looked toward an alley near Boston Avenue and she saw a homeless black guy looking through a woman's hand bag.

He saw Kimber's cruiser so he stood upright and steadied himself with his feet apart. His hands fumbled as he tried to hide the handbag behind his back. He then stood frozen, not in fear, but in disbelief as he watched the cruiser speed away.

"I must be getting soft," she whispered. "Crazy, but it'll be the last time I turn a blind eye. Besides, nobody reported a stolen hand bag yet."

It was a quiet August night and Kimber hoped it'll stay that way. Bridgeport, the largest city in the state always had surprises, and Kimber half expected one to rear its ugly head.

Even before she opened her eyes, Miriam Ortiz was aware of two things. The 90 degree serial killer, and the smell of blood. Horror and fear made her lie perfectly still, eyes closed and head pounding. She was on her stomach and probably on the basement floor. Her hands tied behind her back and her feet tied with a strong chain wrapped in plastic. She opened her eyes just a slit, just enough to see. Dirty old furniture, stained broken down boxes and scattered pieces of Christmas decorations. She didn't recognize the basement, but she knew it was close to her neighborhood. Then she looked to the left side of the dirty basement and she saw a man standing near the corner taking a piss. The urine slapped the wall as if it was trying to penetrate the crumbling concrete.

There was a clock on the wall that also displayed the temperature. There was a glowing 88 for the high and a 62 for the low.

***It never reached 90 degrees. It never reached 90 degrees.* That was the only thing she could whisper and her heart started racing even faster. Of course there was the smell of blood, but she knew it wasn't coming from her. She was not harmed.**

The man stopped and stared at the clock. He was whispering incoherently, but she knew he wouldn't kill her. He would only kill in 90 degree heat. That was his calling card. The news made it clear.

What was he going to do?

Miriam Ortiz concentrated on listening, she was feeling uneasy because of the ranting. She couldn't make anything out. She was wondering if he would change his own rules.

She then heard some normal words, but it was quickly masked by the high humming sound of the water heater. Fear concentrated right where she was tied. The smell of blood attacked her nostrils again, and then she saw the source. It was another woman who he had killed yesterday. She was tied the same way, and she had her throat slit with a crude dull knife.

Miriam knew it was a yesterday killing because the temperature had reached 92 for the high. She remembered seeing her there when she was dragged in. As far as Miriam could tell, there was no blood on the floor which meant all the blood around her had dried and became part of the dirty basement floor. Then everything went black when she was hit in the back of the head with a blunt object.

The serial killer moved slowly across the basement floor sniffing the air like a hound dog.

“88 degrees,” he allowed his voice just to rise a little. “88 degrees.”

With the rest of his body perfectly still, he slowly raised his right arm, keeping his hand limp, and his palm down with his index finger pointing to the clock. She jumped when she heard a cat screaming when it ran past the house.

He walked over to her and pulled a paper sack over her head. He held her face for a few moments in the palm of his hand, but then released it. She heard footsteps, and then the slamming of a door.

But nothing else. Try as she might, she couldn't hear anything else. She couldn't hear the water in the old plumbing nor the electricity humming in the lines not even the shifting and creaking of the old wood structure as fear pressed against the building.

Clip in, safety off, and a full round in the chamber. The action was quick and smooth after so many years of practice. Detective Laura Kimber walked into that basement and discovered two women tied on the floor. One dead and the other quivering in fear. She could see the dried blood on the floor as well as smell it.

Miriam Ortiz rolled and sat up all in a single motion her gaze darting around the basement warily. Something was recognized with a sense of familiarity, a person that was trained to protect her. She felt relief filling her senses, and dulling the throbbing pain in her head.

“Are you okay?” Kimber asked.

“It only reached 88 degrees,” she whispered.

“Everything's okay now,” Kimber said.

“How did you find me?”

“Someone called in a tip,” the detective replied. “Did you get a look at the guy?”

Miriam trembled when the detective asked her that question. He wasn't particularly a big man. He was in fact very lean and wiry. She noticed his hair was so blond and his eyes were a dead looking gray. His face was as cold as ice with no muscle movement.

“No,” she started. “I didn't get a very good look at him.”

Kimber grimaced.

“He didn't kill me because it didn't reach 90 degrees,” she said softly.

“Too bad this other girl wasn't as lucky,” Kimber said.

“She was killed yesterday.”

Kimber nodded.

Two

They had a suspect, but Detective Laura Kimber didn't feel right. She knew this man was not the serial killer. There was just something about him that wasn't right.

“Laura?” Chambers voice cut into her thoughts. Her mouth was open, but before she could reply a knock sounded at the interrogation room door.

O'Brien walked in with a cigar pinched between his thumb and forefinger. He was a big man with a barrel chest and shaved head. He towered over Nathan Chambers, but that didn't give him any kind of edge, it was pretty clear who was in charge.

“This the man?” he asked Chambers.

Just by looking at the suspect, no one could say for sure. His skin had been described as pale, the suspected sitting at the corner end of the table had olive skin. His fingers were chapped, and he limped. He looked very weak despite the fact that he stood six feet and four inches, with rounding shoulders.

O'Brien raised the cigar to his mouth and took a slow pull. The glowing tip illuminated his thin lips, veined nose, blue eyes that gleamed with curiosity.

"Laura brought in a potential victim slash witness, but she's not helping much." said Chambers.

"This is not our man," Laura said as she sat next to the suspect. "My gut is not wrong."

"You went into that basement without back-up," said Chambers. "Didn't you learn anything from the last time you did that?"

She looked down and thought about that very incident as she closed her eyes.

Brian Doyle, the man who the circuit courts named as the person who beat women to death, was tried twice. Despite a witness's testimony and other corroborating evidence, the first jury was hung, the second found Doyle innocent. Tried by his peers and that old reasonable doubt sent him on his way.

A 23 year old woman was beaten to death at Wentfield Park over by the railroad tracks, and Detective Laura Kimber found Doyle at the murder scene, licking his chops. She immediately called for back up and began chasing Doyle into a condemned building on Wordin Avenue. Kimber had reached the front door and entered without back up and her pistol drawn.

There was silence. Kimber drew a deep breath and held it. She heard, in front of her, a floor creak, she stopped. Listened hard, trying to calibrate the distance and direction of Brian Doyle.

The silence was loud, but only in Kimber's head as she paced slowly forward. She didn't know what to expect, and she knew she should have waited for back up.

Detective Laura Kimber heard the pop of automatic weapon fire, muffled by its passage through sheet-rock. Before she could generate another thought, there was a great concussive bang, and a terrible shriek that ended in a second bang, which was so much louder than the first. Bringing with it the movement of the floor like an earthquake, and the room she was standing in plunged into darkness. Kimber froze, the blackness was total, it was such an overwhelming absence of light. With her eyes opened or closed, it didn't matter. It was simply pitched black.

Kimber had this blind urge to run, seek light, and to just get the hell out of there, but she couldn't. The darkness felt like chains and it bounded her in place. The room around her seem to expand and close in on her all at the same time. That's when she first realized she was hit two times in the chest.

In her space in the dark she just stayed on the floor looking up at an odd light seeping through. That odd light was Brian Doyle who had put his gun away and removed a pair of brass knuckles out of his coat pocket. He slipped them on and smiled at the detective. He had missing front teeth and cracked yellow teeth that was barely holding on to the gums. Perhaps the bone loss came from beatings and not a severe case of gingivitis.

"Bullet proof vest stopped the bullets,"he smirked. "But I bet you that these brass knuckles could shatter every bone in your face. Perhaps cave in your skull too. I think I'm going to enjoy finding that out."

A voice in Kimber's head wanted the detective to scream. Let the anger fill her lungs before the beating started. The voice wanted her to fear no man, and to take the beating like a hero.

She slowly whispered, a hero to who?

She was a police detective, but that wouldn't stop Brian Doyle from carrying out his threats. He would crush her skull in. He would do it.

"When!" she screamed. The minutes passed, Kimber shifted restlessly on the floor.

Doyle allowed the fear of death to crawl inside the detective. He wanted her to anticipate death. He wanted her to see it coming before he delivers the first blow.

They were in a condemned building that has just crumbled around them. He knew they were going to be alone for a while because of the dead woman at the park. They were sealed in together like being trapped in her tomb. Doyle stood over Kimber like a solitary figure, and death draped in shadows behind him. He was the last man Kimber was going to see. Doyle was bald on top. but had long wild hair on the sides. unkempt and soiled with sweat. He had a coarse beard riddled with gray and carried upward toward his cheeks. It was the last image that burned in Laura Kimber's mind. It was an image she didn't want, she didn't need.

Then it came to her, something just came to her and it felt disloyal. However, it was a disloyalty to death, who waited patiently for her. Doyle grabbed a fist full of her hair and twisted it before the first blow. His teeth was so bad they wiggled in his mouth when he growled. He eyed her up and down, but didn't initiate impact.

There was a bang, but it wasn't her skull crushed. There was blood, but it wasn't oozing out of her face. Death wasn't going to be disappointed, because someone died, but it was not her. Doyle looked at Kimber's right hand, as the gun she was holding still had smoke coming from the barrel.

"Good ole back up pistol," she whispered as he crashed to the floor. "Die you bitch."

She moved herself forward and kicked Doyle in the face knocking out the rest of his teeth, and that's when she heard a muffled sound coming in through the shattered sheet-rock. The door popped opened behind her and a man stood in her field of vision. Back-up, too late, but it was there offering no comfort.

Kimber opened her eyes, looked at the two figures standing in front of her and smiled. "Next time I'll be sure to wait for back up."

"Don't forget that."

She nodded slowly.

"So what do we do with him?" O'Brien said while pointing his lit cigar at the suspect.

"I'm going with Laura's gut," said Chambers. "Let him go."

Kimber smiled.