In Albuquerque, Abandoned

Tower Lowe

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To Nick, Alice, and Rob, because family is everything.

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While I have beta readers and editors, pesky typos creep in. Please feel free to contact me with any proofreading errors at [www.towerlowe.com](http://www.towerlowe.com)

**1**

*Tuesday, Noon*

*Maxwell Museum, Albuquerque*

Ice-cold air blew in Booth’s face, and a funeral urn stared at him with protruding eyes. Formed to watch over the dead, this urn huddled with other static objects isolated from their cultures in the basement of the Maxwell Museum of Archeology in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Booth walked among them every day and pretended to be intensely engaged in problems with an overhead plumbing leak.

In spite of the cold air, he sweated, his heavy frame seated on the concrete floor across from that jerk Calder and Dr. Bandel’s unstable son, Eric JJ. The two of them looked cool and at ease.

“If Angela flakes out, turns over, gives in…we’re done for, Booth.” Calder knew Booth needed money, so he played on that.

Eric JJ’s shirt glowed green in the florescent light. “We’re here for your own good, Booth.”

“I’ve done everything you said, Calder. Didn’t skip any steps.”

“That brother of yours –”

“León is harmless. Because of that illness, he doesn’t know what day it is most of the time. Don’t start putting this on him.”

“How about those two detectives you talked to?”

“Those two are do-gooders want to help my brother get a better doctor. They got nothing to do with this job.”

“As long as you didn’t mention this to them in passing or in a panic,” Calder said. Booze felt dizzy and knew his diabetes was acting up. He had skipped lunch to deal with these two a-holes, and now he needed a nutrition bar or an apple. He turned to look behind him for his toolbox. He usually kept snacks in there.

“You planning to fix this problem, Booth?” Calder asked. “‘Cause you need to.”

Booth found an apple, pulled it around and took a bite. “I’m not feeling too good. Let’s talk later.”

“Sure, sure, okay,” Calder said. “Look, we’ll all leave this place, and get lunch to go, settle our problems outside the museum.”

Booth felt better after the apple, and he followed the two men up to the office. Dr. Bandel was perfectly dressed in a gray jacket and black skirt. Her deranged kid hovered behind her.

“I don’t like the way this is going,” she said.

Her glossy black heels made her look menacing, like the bad girl in a porn movie. He felt dizzy again looking at her bright red lips, turning down because he had screwed up. Arrhythmia bumped by his heart. The plumber’s life didn’t do anything for a man’s health. Booth spent most of his time stationary under a sink or driving around in his utility truck. He stressed about León and Angela every minute. This museum job promised to set him free, but he sure didn’t feel liberated this afternoon. He felt trapped between these two men, who had given him the job, and his wife and brother, neither of whom seemed to give a damn about Booth but sure wanted the safety and security this money would bring.

They all drove to Del Taco in Calder’s car, including Bandel and her son. Dr. Bandel didn’t order any food, but watched over the others with squinted eyes. She turned them on Booth while they waited for the food.

“Mr. Baca, I like you, and I admire your plumbing work. I remind you, we have a deal, and I trust completely that you and your wife and your brother, León, will stick to our deal.”

“Right.” Booth was fed up with the lot of them, but he needed to eat before he lost touch with reality.

Calder leaned into the backseat of his black Audi to hand a bag to Booth. “Here’s a taco and a Mr. Pibb.”

He grabbed the bag more because he needed to eat than because he wanted the food. Indigestion followed him back to the museum. He even drank the Mr. Pibb, though he was addicted to Diet Coke. The drink burned his throat and threw his blood sugar into convulsions.

When he got home, Angela was in a foul mood.

“Don’t start on me about these creepy burial items or your crazy brother León,” she said. “And if you’re sick, it’s your own fault.”

“I’m going to lie down for a few minutes,” Booth told her. “Then we need to talk this through, figure out what‘s going on.”

“What’s going on is you ruined my life.”

Booth shook his head and recognized a losing hand.

“Get me a Diet Coke and ice,” he said.

“You need to stop drinking that crap,” Angela responded.

But he heard her dispense the ice and pop the top of the can. Maybe that was a good sign.

He awoke during the night with cramps and diarrhea. As he headed back from the bathroom, he fell to the floor, his arms and legs twitching. He tried to stop it all, but his mind was disconnected from his body. The room swirled, and he slipped into unconsciousness, his head on the dingy brown carpet.

Angela and the maid found him there the next morning, his pajamas soaked in vomit. He was dead.

**2**

***3 days earlier***

*Saturday, 3:00 pm*

*Counterculture Café, Santa Fe*

A black lab and a small brown poodle flopped under the next table, chins to the pavement. A wind gust picked up the napkins, and the two women grabbed them off the ground. Cinnamon, private investigator and lost child, sat next to her half sister, Alice. They shared a large, round cinnamon roll, the signature pastry of the Counterculture Café.

“I’m taking a class at UNM on Mesoamerican prehistory,” Alice said. “It’s difficult, you know? So I asked Magan for help. He seemed smart.”

“How did you find out that he knew Momma?”

“I mentioned finding an unknown sister named Cinnamon – you, of course. He said he knew an older woman named Cinnamon who lived at his old apartment complex.”

The investigator nodded. Alice was an unexpected connection to her past. They had met in Roswell, New Mexico while Cinnamon and her partner, Burro, were investigating the murder of a friend and seeking out Cinnamon’s lost mother at the same time. Alice was connected to Cinnamon through her father, a man named Dr. Phillip Stuart. It appeared that Momma had fallen in love with Dr. Stuart and married him.

Her mother had left Daddy and their Virginia farm when Cinnamon was six years old. She heard little to nothing about the woman who gave birth to her until Grandma died when she was twenty-two. She and Daddy discovered a closet full of letters Momma wrote from New Mexico. Many of them were scented with ground cinnamon or contained ribbons like the ones Momma wore in Virginia.

Cinnamon headed out to New Mexico as soon as she was able and brought the letters with her. She joined up with Burro, and the two worked for the state as civil rights investigators before later getting a license as private investigators. The point of it all, for Cinnamon, was the search for Momma. The story of Dr. Stuart and his daughter Alice resulted from one of those searches. Alice was now a part of her family and the hunt for her mother. Cinnamon shook away the cobwebs. Alice was still talking.

“…a hard course, so I started going to study groups with Magan. He’s a refugee from Somalia, but he’s really interested in archeology. His family grew up near well-excavated sites there – sites lived in by his ancestors.”

“What made you bring up Momma to him?”

“Are you listening?” Alice leaned towards Cinnamon and touched her arm. “It was in passing, a coincidence – like a lot of the leads you’ve gotten. We studied together a lot, drank coffee, ate lunch – and we became…like friends, college student friends.”

Cinnamon nodded again.

“Don’t you get it, Cinnamon?” Alice asked. “When he heard your name, he recognized it. A woman who lived a few doors down from him at his last apartment had the same name. So I started asking him what she looked like, and she looked like you – except older. So I thought, maybe, because of what we heard in Gallup, that she could be your mother.”

In Gallup, Cinnamon and Burro had traced Momma through an old roommate named Mirage. And Mirage reported that Momma had moved to Albuquerque.

“Look, if she moved to Albuquerque, why not? Magan only recently moved out of Southern Ridge, a group of low-end apartments in SE Albuquerque. We think your mother was low on money when she left Gallup, so it makes sense.”

“Have you got Magan’s phone number?”

“Of course – and his address. He said it was fine to visit. He’s intrigued.”

“I’ll look into it this week.” Cinnamon finished the last of the pastry. “Burro and I have a new case in Albuquerque.”

“Burro told me about it – a disturbed man named León who looks for a baby in a dumpster. Pretty odd.” Alice said.

“Burro will get one of his visions, and we’ll start there.” Cinnamon’s partner had treatable schizophrenia. The solutions to their cases were based on the clues he noticed in his visions.

Alice offered a small hug and left the Counterculture patio. Cinnamon stayed behind, ordered another coffee, and watched the black and brown dogs, who remained with their owners, sleeping under the table, completely trusting that they would be cared for and loved each and every day.