

Excerpt from: The Rain Man Murders

Chapter One

The high pitched ringtone of Mark's phone cut the stillness of early morning. He reached across the bed and grabbed the phone from the nightstand.

"Detective Wilder." Mark listened, as an officer told him the body of a nude man was found beside a running trail at Bachmann Lake. Fully awake, Mark scribbled the exact location on a piece of paper and asked the officer a couple of questions. After hanging up the phone, he heard a clap of thunder, reached over and pulled the shade open. He tightened his jaw. "Shit!"

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Daybreak revealed the enormity of the storm. With the windshield wipers working furiously, Mark threaded his way along the wet, slippery streets. The red lights swirling on top of two police cars a block away led him directly to the crime scene.

A small crowd of dedicated early morning runners separated when Mark approached. Clad in his rain boots, raincoat, and all-weather hat, he stared grimly at each face. Anyone of them could have done this, but Mark's gut told him the murderer was long gone. He bent over the exposed corpse, noting every detail he could find on the body. If there had been any blood beside the body, it had been washed away by the torrential rain.

"Get me a tarp." Mark barked out to one of the young officers. Minutes later, two officers threw a black tarp over the body. *Rookies. When are they ever going to learn?*

He walked over to an officer who was interviewing a young man wearing a clear poncho. "Do you always run in a storm?" Mark asked.

"It wasn't raining when I got here. My three friends and I meet around six-thirty every other morning, and we were fifteen minutes into our run when the rain started. I saw the body first and ran across the street to that cafe and called the police." He pointed toward the diner.

Mark thanked the young man and returned to the corps.

The crime scene personnel arrived and erected a portable tent that stretched over an area of twelve square feet, giving some relief from those exposed to the pounding storm. Mark shook his head as he watched.

“Another murder in the rain?” his partner, Jack, asked as he approached Mark.

“It looks that way.”

“Think it’s a coincidence?”

“That could be a possibility, but unless the killer has a direct line to God, there’s no way he could plan something like this.”

“Why do you think he removes the clothes?”

“I have a feeling its personal and the perpetrator wants to exhibit them.”

Both men walked the perimeter of the tent going in opposite directions, expanding their efforts, and the area of their search. Mark stopped and bent down, taking a closer look at something on the ground. He motioned for the photographer to join him to take some pictures. Afterward, he pulled a plastic bag from his raincoat pocket, used some tweezers, and put an object in the bag. Jack joined him.

“What is it?”

“Looks like a piece from a keychain with the letter S. It could belong to a runner or maybe our killer.” Mark walked off the distance to the street and back to the tent. Taking out his small notebook, he jotted down some information.

Jack and Mark waited for the coroner to complete his initial examination of the victim. After Dr. Sneed zipped up the body bag, the two men approached.

“Decomposition usually sets in five or six hours after death. Based on these observations, the tentative time of death for this young man would be somewhere around midnight. Something crushed his skull. I’ll be more specific after my autopsy.”

Mulling over the situation while driving to headquarters, Mark knew he faced another perplexing murder case. He left instructions at the crime scene for the investigators to look for anything suspicious the killer might have used as a weapon. He

doubted they would find anything since the rain had cleansed the crime scene. The victim was most likely killed somewhere else and dropped there. There were no signs of a struggle or one piece of the victim's clothing.

Mark lowered the speed on his flapping windshield wipers as a steady mist of rain continued falling. *Two murders in a matter of ten days. Were they connected?*

When he arrived at the station, he pulled into his usual parking spot. Inside he was greeted by a fellow officer. "Chief wants to see you." Stopping to remove his raincoat, Mark hung it on the back of his chair and headed for the break area for a cup of coffee.

"I heard you were back." Chief Warner said refilling his coffee cup. "We need to talk. Let's go to my office. Do you know how many open murder cases we have?"

Mark didn't answer knowing full well the Chief was going to tell him.

"Sixteen. The mayor wants these two new cases solved before the next election. You are one of my best men, and I can't stress enough the importance of using whatever methods you can to solve them. Do I make myself clear?"