

Chapter 8

Walking back to the loft, I text Gravy, my attorney: “Meet me for breakfast at CJ’s Kitchen 7am”

William “Gravy” Graves, Jr. handles all my newspaper’s legal issues, which aren’t many. He helps me when local officials don’t want to comply with a public records request or when I’m worried an article might invite a libel suit.

Gravy is in his mid-forties, committed bachelor, devote ladies man and one helluva trial attorney. Witnesses have had to get a change of underwear after he has disposed them. He got his nickname for his daily breakfast regimen of biscuits and gravy at CJ’s. No matter how late he was out the night before, Gravy can be found every morning in the corner booth of the little diner on the western edge of downtown eating two big, open-faced biscuits smothered in creamy sausage gravy.

Gravy holds the record for the shortest term on the county commission, twenty-three days. Ten years ago, the sitting commissioner died suddenly of a heart attack while watching his beloved Florida State Seminoles lose yet another football game when a last-second field goal veered wide right. The governor appointed Gravy to complete the term before the newly-elected commissioner could be sworn in.

Now when a new commissioner is sworn end, Gravy and I toast when the commissioner’s tenure hits the 24-day mark. Gravy’s record will never be broken.

At 7 a.m. Gravy is in his spot, well into eating his biscuits. He has the daily newspaper spread out in front of him. Dressed in Levi’s and a starched blue buttoned down shirt, he looks fresh and ready to take on the day. I feel and look like crap.

Gravy ignores the circles under my eyes and waves to Sally to bring me a cup of coffee. “What’s wrong now, Walker?” he says as he finishes his last bite, throws his napkin on top of the plate and pushes it away.

I hand him the note. “Who is S H E?” Gravy asks. He whistles when I say it’s Sue Hines.

“It was delivered anonymously to me last night,” I say between sips. “Dare confirmed it’s Sue’s handwriting.”

Gravy looks me directly in the eyes, “Well, you need to hand it over to the state attorney,”

“I’m going to let you give it to them after I publish it on the blog this morning.”

Pointing to front page of the daily, Gravy says, “Walker, it’s going to look like your attacking Bo Hines for opposing the maritime park. Is that wise?” The headline reads, “Hines honors wife, opposes park.”

“I’ve already written the blog post. It’s scheduled to go live before 8 a.m. Don’t worry. I’ve used words like ‘appears to be,’ ‘possibly’ and ‘awaiting confirmation by experts’ to cover my ass.”

Gravy just nods and stares ahead while Sally brings me my omelet. After she walks away, he asks, “What else do you want from me, other than being your errand boy?”

“What do you think will be the fallout from this?”

“Like I said, the state attorney will be pissed that you went public with the note. If it’s verified that his wife wrote it, then Bo Hines looks guilty as hell. The prosecutors will have to take him to trial. The public will demand it.”

Gravy took another sip of coffee. “Part of the town will applaud your investigative skills. The others will hate you for it. It definitely will help you sell papers.”

“My papers are free.”

“Then you’re a dumb ass.”

“I know.”

“Walker, you never cease to amaze me,” Gravy says. “I’ve never seen someone so bent on self-destruction, but I’m glad you’re here. I will try to smooth things over with the state attorney.”

“Gravy, all this is somehow linked. The blog post is how I will fish for more leads. Maybe someone will want to talk once they read it.”

“And the nuts will crucify you,” Gravy says as he gets up to pay the bill. “But you’re used to that.”

When I get back to the office, Big Boy is seating at the backdoor. Dare had tied his leash to a nearby lamppost. There is a note attached to his collar.

“I fed him two spicy burritos for breakfast. Have fun!
–Love, Dare”

Big Boy passes gas all the way up the stairs. He doesn’t even acknowledge that I am walking behind him. After a shower, I fell better. The dog demands that I take him for a walk. Considering his breakfast, I agree. Fortunately, there is a nice breeze blowing off the bay.

I pick up a copy of the Pensacola Herald and read about Hines and his brother-in-law during Big Boy’s many pit stops.

The two lavishly praised Sue and were quoted saying their efforts to stop the park are to create an environmentally-friendly park to honor her memory. One section would be kept completely natural and off limits to even the public. They aren't going to let a carpetbagger ruin the people's waterfront. A.J. Kettler could build his own ballpark elsewhere.

Hines hinted that his "legal troubles" were behind him and that his attorneys had indicated that all charges against him may be dropped. "It was a witch hunt perpetrated by someone trying to make a name for himself, someone I thought was a friend," Hines told the reporter, who was more than happy to include it in the article. "We have cooperated fully with the authorities and they agree I'm innocent."

Great.

My cell phone vibrates. It's Clark Spencer, the assistant state attorney handling Hines' case.

"You are an asshole," Spencer yells. "Why did you have to publish the suicide note?"

"Because I had it, Clark."

"I know you're upset that we were going to delay the trial, but this screws things up. I would have loved to have it without Hines knowing about it."

"The public had a right to see it," I said while Big Boy dragged me back to the office. "You and I both know Hines is dirty."

"Walker, after today's Herald article, my boss was already fired up to prosecute the case," Spencer said. "You've succeeded in redirecting his ire towards you. He wants to go after you for obstruction of justice."

"It's a bluff. He will calm down and thank me later."

"Go to hell, Walker," Spencer yells as he hangs up before I could come back with a witty reply.

My phone vibrates again. "Did Spencer call you?" Gravy asks laughing. Why do my friends so enjoy me getting kicked in the teeth? "He wasn't too happy when I left."

"Well, thanks for smoothing things over," I reply. "He made the usual threats."

"Call me, if the cops show up," Gravy says as he ends the call.

My phone vibrates yet a third time. I can see my office. It's still a block away. The vibration signals a text message from my private investigator "friend," Jim Gordon.

“I’ve found Pandora Childs. She wants to talk.”

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