

9/29

He was the only witness to the murder and this hung heavy on his shoulders.

He sat hunched on the breezeway floor, rocking rhythmically, directly under the mirror image of the gold and blue Nashville Metropolitan Police Department.

His long sleeved button down was creased along the arms and tucked into a ragged pair of cargo shorts. His hair was semi-dreaded but secured into a tight ponytail and his face had less than a day's stubble.

When I entered the bullpen, Detective Dawson stood with his foot wedged in the breezeway door. He was holding out a folded bill to the witness.

"Here's ten bucks," he said. "Why don't you head down to Mr. Whiskers. You still have time to grab a fifth before they close."

The witness stopped rocking, but otherwise did not respond.

Dawson glanced over his shoulder at me, yanked the door shut and sat back at his desk.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Just a bum who won't leave."

"Why haven't you called a uniform to drag him out?"

"Says he knows what happened but won't tell me. He's obviously full of shit."

"I can take a crack at him."

"Nah. I'll handle it. Let him sweat it out. He'll move along eventually."

"Come on. He's stinking up the precinct. If I can't get him to talk then I'll call an officer down to get rid of him and it'll be on me."

Dawson shrugged.

"I'm not the boss, but I'm pretty sure the lieutenant wouldn't want you wasting your time on this."

"I'll take the risk."*

I entered the breezeway, letting the door shut behind me.

The witness pulled his knees tighter to his chest.

"I hear you have a crime to report."

"You're not the lieutenant either, are you?"

"I'm not, but I'm the best bet you have of—"

The man's eyes lifted to meet mine. They were red rimmed and wet. His lip quivered.

"No, uhuh," he said, shaking his head. "I'll only talk to the lieutenant."

"Why?"

"You asking me why I don't trust some random cop? Are you retarded?"

"Sir, if you have evidence, you have to share it with the police. I could arrest you for obstruction."

"I'm not obstructin' nothin'. You call the lieutenant in here and I'll tell you everything I saw."

10/13

He sat rocking back and forth in the breezeway hunched against the glass. The mirror image of the gold and blue Nashville Metropolitan Police Department logo looming over his head.

It was obvious he'd tried to pull himself together for the visit. He wore a long sleeve button down that was still creased along the arms and tucked into a ragged pair of cargo shorts. He'd had shave in the previous twenty-four hours and pulled back his matted dreads into semblance of ponytail.

Dawson strung together a litany of curses as he pushed back from his cluttered desk and got to his feet.

He wedged the breezeway door open with his loafer and held out a folded bill.

"Hey asshole, would you take ten bucks to leave? You still have time to grab a fifth at Mr. Whiskers before they close for the night."

The man stopped rocking but otherwise ignored Dawson.

I could see the pulsing vein stand out on the aging detective's forehead from across the bullpen.

"What's this?" I say, stepping out of the hallway.

"Nothing for you to worry about," Dawson says, pulling the door shut and shoving the money back in his pocket. He plopped down into his chair and scooted close to his desk. "Just another vagrant working an angle."

"Why don't you have a uniform come clear him out?"

"He's claiming to know who killed Barnes but will only talk to the lieutenant."

"You call the big man down?"

Dawson huffed.

"For this? No way."

"I can take a run at him," I say, taking a step towards the breezeway.

"No!" Dawson shouts at me. I stop midstep.

The old detective forced calm back into his voice.

"I got it. If he wont talk to me after awhile, *then* I'll call the lieutenant down."

I held Dawson's gaze for several seconds. He'd been on the force two decades longer than me but we were technically equals. He couldn't stop me from talking to the witness.

I took the three last steps to the breezeway door in quick succession, and pushed it open.

"Wilson!" Dawson yelled behind me, but I ignored him.

The man looked up at the commotion, then quickly back to the floor when he saw me.

“Hello sir, my name is Detective Watson. My colleague tells me you witnessed a crime.”

“You’re not the lieutenant are you?”

“No sir, but I’m working on this case and will make sure—”

The witness shook his head.

“No. Uhuh. I’m only talking to the lieutenant.”

The man’s voice quivered on that last word. He wasn’t working an angle. He was petrified to be in a police station.

“Can I ask why?”

“You two don’t give two shits about me. I need to talk to a cop who will actually listen to me.”

“You came to us. We’re just trying to hear what you have to say. If you won’t talk then you should leave.”

“I will talk. To the lieutenant. Y’all go get him and I’ll spill everything I saw.”

—

I entered the bullpen at roughly 23:10 and observed the witness, Randall Perkins, squatted down in the breezeway, his back against the glass directly under the mirror image of the Nashville Metropolitan Police Department emblem.

He wore a clean, plaid button down still creased along the arms. The shirt was tucked into a ragged pair of khaki cargo shorts. His face was clean shaven and his matted dreads were pulled back into a tight ponytail.

He rocked rhythmically back and forth as he waited.

Detective Dawson approach the breezeway. He wedged the door open with his foot and held out a ten dollar bill.

“Hey asshole,” he said. “Would you take ten bucks to leave? You still have time to grab a fifth at Mr. Whiskers before they close for the night.”

Randall stopped rocking but otherwise ignored the detective.

“What’s this?” I asked.

Detective Dawson returned to his desk.

“Nothing for you to worry about. Just another vagrant working an angle.”

“Why don’t you have a uniform come clear him out?”

“He’s claiming to know who killed Barnes but will only talk to the lieutenant.”

“You call the big man down?”

“For this? No way.”

“I’ll take a run at him,” I said and approached the breezeway.

Dawson shouted at me to stop.

“I got it,” he said evenly. “If he won’t talk to me after awhile, then I’ll call the lieutenant down.”

I continued across the bullpen, ignoring Dawson's protest, and entered the breezeway.

The witness looked up at the noise, then lowered his eyes back to the floor.

"Hello sir," I said. "My name is Detective Watson. My colleague tells me you witnessed a crime."

"You're not the lieutenant are you?"

"No sir, but I'm working on this case and will make sure—"

The witness shook his head.

"No. Uhuh. I'm only talking to the lieutenant."

Randall's voice quivered as he spoke. I came to the conclusion this man was not working an angle. He was petrified to be in a police station.

"Can I ask why?"

"You two don't give two shits about me. I need to talk to a cop who will actually listen to me."

"You came to us. We're just trying to hear what you have to say. If you won't talk then you should leave."

"I will talk. To the lieutenant. Y'all go get him and I'll spill everything I saw."