



BLUE

RIBBON

WINNER

Bryan Cothrun

BLUE RIBBON WINNER

by

Bryan Cothrun



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The men scanned around the wash on foot through bronzing weeds and dry cobbled stones. A team of volunteer firefighters, teamed with the pair of police, paced the mile of a stream running from Patterson Wash and under the covered bridge that sparse traffic rolled through at the entrance of town. The men were filed several yards apart looking for some sign of life or death. The rusting bronze sunlight was becoming deteriorated in the shallow bucolic valley as the sound of sighs and leather boots scraped dry rock down the streambed. Several searchers went under the bridge including Detective

Singleton while the rest of the party paced down on its east side.

The detective bent down under the pine skirting and onto the access road, then stopped to examine. He silently waved the others to continue walking forward. There weren't many places in the town where someone could go missing. "Have to be in the woods or somewhere obvious," Singleton muttered beneath his dry nostrils. He glanced back at the Sheriff who was scanning the underbelly of the bridge with his flashlight and reaching around with his other hand.

"Gus? Oh, here we go."

“What is it, Fields?” the cop snapped and moved with a swift clip towards him.

The other men stopped, while some gathered around the policeman. Sheriff Fields held the light. Singleton commanded, “Stand back! Stand back,” holding his palms behind him and pushing his arms back and forth. He gazed at the luminous field where Fields held his light against the side of the bridge’s floor beam. A black and white saddle shoe straddled a crude wooden pole that held down tufts of straw, a pom-pom, and a burlap bag.

“Damn good eye Dakota!” said Detective Singleton.

“Better get our evidence kit,” said Deputy Fields with a smirk.

“Not bad for a local sheriff.”



Augustus Singleton sat in Dakota Field's office at the Cherry Creek Police Department, a small structure with five rooms adjacent to the local Post Office. The federal agent sipped his morning coffee while Sheriff Fields gazed out the window in contemplation as a rook flew past. He breathed heavily and stood still. A week had passed since they found the traces that could lead to them finding the missing Elizabeth Pollard. Her father was the

local bishop. The evidence they found contained no fingerprints or many clues. The makings of a scarecrow, but one that would have worn a poodle skirt and saddle shoes with bobby socks. The police seemed only to know there was a connection as Beth was a cheerleader at the local high school.

“It has to be someone who lives on her way to the church,” Dakota broke his silence.

“You’ve said that a hundred times this week. We don’t have any evidence, and the few houses on that route aren’t reasonable suspects, at this point,” answered Singleton, and slurped his black coffee.

“But we know the scarecrow must be linked, but still . . .” Dakota rocked with his hands folded behind his head and slapped his knees, “Don’t know how.”

“We think we know. It could mean nothing . . . obviously it is what we have. I say we question the cleaning crew again. They were the last ones at the church.” The detective stood with his ceramic mug and also looked out the window. “If it’s not someone on the way from her house to the church then it would be someone who knew her patterns, right? Every Wednesday night.”

“Right but we questioned damn near the whole congregation, which is also the whole cheer squad, and nobody seems to have a clue,” Dakota said.

“I say we question the cleaning crew,” said Singleton.

“I’ll talk to Bishop Pollard, but he said the church didn’t get cleaned that night.”

“Do you know why or who usually does it?”

“Yeah, Stan Bryant. I’ll talk to him.”

The intercom system beeped. “Sheriff? Detective Singleton?”

“Yes, Sandy.”

“I’ve got someone on the line says they read the *Cherry Creek Chronicle* yesterday, ’cause they were out of town and hadn’t read those editions delivered to their door during the week. Anyway, they said they read the article about poor little Bishop Pollard’s daughter and the article about the missing evidence this morning and . . .”

“Sandy. Is she still on the line? Who is it? I’ll let her tell the story.”

“Pamela Harvey. She used to work at Cherry Creek Elementary.”

“Can you put her through, please?”

“Yes sir. Is Detective Singleton with you? She said she read about him.”

“Hi Sandy, yes, I’m here. Good morning. Go ahead and put the caller through.”

The phone rang, and Dakota nodded at the detective and put it on speaker.

“Hello, this is Detective Augustus Singleton, and I’m here with Sheriff Fields. We were told you wanted to talk about the Elizabeth Pollard case, is that right?”

“Good morning, Detective and Sheriff. I read the articles about Beth missing and that there was a case where evidence may have been found. Is that right?”

“What is your name Ma’am?” asked Fields.

“Pamela Harvey, I used to be a teacher’s assistant at the elementary school.”

“Did you teach Beth Pollard?”

“No, but I know her, but not well and that’s not why I’m calling,” said Beth. The men looked deeper into the speaker and asked her to continue.

“Well, maybe it is nothing, but when I worked out there for a few years we would have our class make a scarecrow for a class project and submit it to the state fair. One year we were the blue-ribbon winner.” She cleared her throat over the receiver. “That year the

scarecrow looked like a blonde cheerleader.”

“Bingo,” Singleton mouthed to Fields, and said, “very good Missus Harvey. Now who made the scarecrow? But Beth was not in that class?”

“No, she wasn’t.” Pamela cleared her throat. “She was a couple grades below, and I left the year she’d have been my student, but the man I worked for—the teacher, was Roland Dial.”

Gus and Dakota exchanged glances and Dakota nodded at him as if knowing who Dial was. “I don’t know if there’s really a connection or if I should be saying anything. I really liked Roland and so did many students, but

after reading about it—it felt too coincidental.”

“Pam, Sheriff Fields here. Thank you so much for your information and yes, I know of Mr. Dial. Was there anything else you wanted to share?”

“No. Just that I was suspicious, but it felt wrong because Roland was always a sweet man even if I thought he was a little strange.”

“Strange how?” asked Singleton.

“Oh, I don’t know. He had a magnetic way about his ideas that seemed advanced, I’ll say for kids in this community. It is difficult to describe. Some of the students seemed mesmerized by him.”



Sheriff Fields knocked on the front door. Bishop Pollard answered.

“Evening Judd.”

“Hi Sheriff,” Pollard said.

“Hello. I hate to trouble you again, but I wanted to ask you about the other night. See we are working the case, but just wanted to make sure our ducks are in a row.” Fields waited on the stoop. The bishop stared. “Well, Judd, you mentioned the cleaning crew went to the church Wednesday night after seminary? I went to Stan Bryant’s house and called him and haven’t gotten ahold of him.”

“Oh, my,” Pollard waived his hand. “I am sorry, Sheriff, there’s a lot on my mind.”

“Understandable, Bishop Pollard,” Fields said and removed his hat.

“See, I forgot to tell you, Stan went on vacation and wasn’t around that night. I had forgotten at the time of the . . . Elizabeth’s disappearance.”

Dakota looked into the doorway behind Bishop Pollard. “I know things are tough, I can’t imagine really Judd. How is Mary holding up? You both must be worried sick.”

“She’s not here right now. I think she went to the movies.”

“Might do you some good too if you don’t mind me saying so. Clear out the cobwebs.”

“Oh, no. I leave her a little space. Well, thanks for checking in, Dakota,” Bishop Pollard said and stepped behind the threshold inside his home.

“Bishop. Sorry, but, if Stan wasn’t there, then who the heck locked up at the end of the night? You are sure you locked it when you left?”

“Oh, of course. I did. But I wasn’t the last one there, because the cleaning crew was there. I forgot to mention. Stan told me that he had one of his fill-ins cover that night.”

Fields pulled a pen from his shirt pocket and fumbled for a notepad. “What’s his name?” he asked as he held his pen into his bare palm.

“His name. Cy Springer. I don’t know much about him, but Stan said he’s reliable. Sorry, I forgot to call you.”

“Huh—you didn’t see him before you left the church?”

“No. I left. I left probably a couple hours before he would have been there.”

“I’ll go check on him,” Dakota said and began turning towards his cop car.

“Dakota, wait. Wait. He should be there tonight,” Bishop Pollard looked

at his wristwatch. "In a couple of hours."

"After seminary. Right, it's Wednesday."

Bishop Pollard lowered his wrist, "Oh no, it was canceled this week," Pollard then bunched his eyebrows and looked ahead, "but he'll still be there, I forgot to tell him it was canceled, because of last week. He doesn't go to church."

"Well, Judd, this could be a revelation in the case. Now you try to get some rest."

"I pray, Sheriff. I pray she is found, and that her assailant is taken care of by Our Lord." Pollard held his hand

out with his head bowed. Dakota went to shake it and Pollard gripped it. He began reciting a prayer and Fields took his hat off again, bowed his head, then put his hat back on as it concluded.

Just then headlines shined on the men at prayer. A gold Buick pulled into the driveway and shut off its engine. Fields looked at the car when the bishop said, “That’s Mary.” A woman in a long red dress and black high heels stepped out of the vehicle and began towards the porch.

“Back already?” asked Judd Pollard.

“Yeah, no traffic coming home,” she said. “Hey, Sheriff.”

“Hi Mary, how was the movie?”

“It was pretty good,” she said. She glanced at the men. “I don’t mean to interrupt you.”

“Oh you’re fine,” said Judd. “Dakota was just following up on Elizabeth’s case.” “Any news?”

“I’m going to look into who was at the church and question them again. Might have a lead with one of the cleaning crew folks,” Dakota said. He cleared his throat. “Say, Mary, you don’t happen to know the young man, Cy Springer?” Mary stepped towards the front door. “A little, he went to school with Elizabeth and they were kind of friends for a while, but we haven’t seen him around in years. Why?”

“Oh just curious. I thought maybe you could give us any thoughts you may have on him.”

“Gee, Dakota, Sheriff. I’m awful tired. He was a nice enough boy I thought.”

“He isn’t a member of the Church,” Bishop Pollard said. Fields and Mary exchanged glances in the bright porch lighting. Fields looked as if he had more to say.

“Goodnight, Sheriff Fields,” said Mary as she opened the front door and shuffled inside the house. “Goodnight Mary.” Bishop Pollard said he’d be in shortly and when the door closed. Fields asked why they didn’t go to the

movies together. “She sees those R-rated movies. I don’t approve of them, but it ain’t against the law I reckon. Just so much filth I wish she’d stop, but Fields, gotta give women their space,” he smiled. Fields nodded as if approving placed his hat on his head.

“Good night, Dakota, and God bless you,” Pollard shut the door.



Detective Augustus Singleton drove in his black sedan to the farmland owned by Roland Dial on the east side of Cherry Creek, a sprawling acreage of long yellowing grass and weeds. The home was a small wooden cabin with a

shed across the circular gravel driveway. Singleton got out of the car, walked to the screen door, and knocked. Small wind chimes and bells chimed gently in the afternoon breeze on the porch. A man older than the detective imagined answered and they talked through the screen.

“Detective Singleton I presume?” the man said.

“Good afternoon, you must be Mr. Dial, are you here alone?”

“Why yes, Detective, I usually am. Please, call me Roland. Would you like some coffee?”

“Thank you, Roland. Coffee sounds delightful.” The men went inside the small home.

The living room had dark wooden stained walls with a circular rug that had the planetary symbols woven into the black outer sphere with a single dot in the center. The Sun. Antique glass and Art Nouveau prints and mannequins decorated the room. Dial placed two yellow elliptical-shaped mugs on the coffee table that had a chessboard engraved on top and sat across from Detective Singleton. He looked in his eyes and then in the distance out the window.

“Where were you last Wednesday night Mr. Dial?”

“Here. Alone. Except my cat, Ceres.”

“I’m sure you may have heard about Elizabeth Pollard?”

“I read about her disappearance in the paper. I haven’t seen her in many years,” he stared long into the detective’s eyes.

“You have no alibi. When was the last time you saw Ms. Pollard, do you recall?”

“Alibi? Are you accusing me of something, Sir?”

“No. Not yet. Last time you saw the girl?”

“I don’t know, probably when I was teaching at Cherry Creek Elementary School, I believe she was a student, although I never taught her. I retired before she would have been old enough to be in my class.”

“I see.” Singleton leaned forward and sipped his coffee. He sat straight on the edge of the armchair. “I was told you were forced out, not that you retired, is that true?”

Roland shifted and said, “What is this about Detective Singleton? You mentioned I don’t have an alibi, as Ceres doesn’t speak English.” He bent his lower lip. “I haven’t seen the girl since then, if you want to

know more, I have a right to an attorney. You won't pull the wool over my eyes."

Singleton sat back and touched his fingers together. He said, "A little defensive, huh? I'm just trying to get some information and we found the remains of a scarecrow tucked under the bridge. The bridge that was on her route to the church on Wednesday nights. The night she went missing." The cop pulled a photocopied newspaper article from his jacket pocket and handed it across the chessboard to Dial. "As you may have read in the local tabloid. The scarecrow wasn't in-

tact but pieces around it resembled a cheerleader.”

Dial glanced at the article. It was a photo of him, and his class surrounded by a cheerleading scarecrow wearing an award ribbon. “Cherry Elementary is Blue-Ribbon Winner” the headline read.

“I see,” Roland said. “Detective I haven’t seen most of these children in years, notice that photo looks archived. I have not seen since Ms. Pollard since she was a student there, as I already stated.” Roland stroked his white braid behind his head. “I was let go because they didn’t like the curriculum I taught about Darwin—they thought my liter-

ature was blasphemy. They didn't want me around any longer and I was effectively fired."

"Who didn't want you around?"

"The school board," Roland said and pulled a cigarette out, and offered one to Singleton.

Singleton waived his hand flat, "Not anymore, thanks. Anyone specific?"

Roland lit and inhaled, "All of them."

"That's not very specific, Teacher."

Dial exhaled through his nose and smiled, showing small sharp canines. "They were all members of the church. Elizabeth's father Judd Pollard has been the bishop for many years as you

may know. Though his wife, Mary, was actually the one person who may not have been in favor of my release. I was hurt by the decision. I still feel it is wrong, but I remained here because this is my parent's old farmhouse, another thing the church was always fighting to claim."

"Why is that?" asked Singleton.

"Oh, because they want to run everything and thought it would make a nice summer camp for their congregation's extracurricular activities, but I never budged. That's all there is to it. I've said too much." Dial reached for his coffee.

“Why is it that Bishop Judd Pol-
lard’s wife wasn’t in favor of you getting
the axe?”

Dial sat and smoked breaking eye
contact with Singleton. “Maybe she’s
smarter than them. Who knows? Per-
haps she liked me from afar.”

“What makes you think that? She
could smell your patchouli oil?”

“That’s probably sage you smell.”

“Or Pall Mall. What makes you
think that?”

“It’s a small town with big ears. She
was more in the favor of the teachers,
and a little more open to curriculum
than the rest of the school board. Al-
though that’s not saying much.”

“Who told you that.”

“Nobody told me, it’s conjecture from past board meetings. Move on.”

“Conjecture and no alibi,” Singleton said as he finished writing. “A couple more things. Did you communicate with any other students in that photo outside of class?”

“Yes. I ended up having a book club and private studies with several students who enjoyed my teaching, and it was mostly the secular students who were outcasts from the school’s extracurricular activities due to the town’s sociopolitical aspects regarding the church.”

“Can you tell me who? You may as well save me the time because, I will find out Roland.”

Dial smirked, “Oh, it was only a few kids and the ones I recall.”

“Look at that photo and give me names. And don’t lie again. The caption doesn’t list them.”

“Okay,” Dial examined the paper and pointed at each face as he read, “Susanna Flores, Brianna Wilcox, Cy Springer, Robert Jameson, and Adam Hobart. They came for the summer after I got fired, but I haven’t seen any of them in years either. Is that enough information for you detective?”

“Anything ring a bell that would make you think any of them have a motivation?”

“Well, Detective, am I your partner in crime? I have no idea, perhaps the bumbling Sheriff Fife can assist you. Where’s he?”

“Sheriff Fields, Mr. Dial. Roland.”

“Right, Fife, Fields. A bumbling fellow, nevertheless. Where are you from if I may ask Detective?”

“Philadelphia, Mr. Dial. Now can we continue with my questions?”

“Ah, Agent Singleton, the City of Brotherly Love,” Roland said and held out one finger. “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land—”

“Unto all inhabitants thereof. I am not your student Mr. Dial.”

“Defensive, Detective. I was just curious of your background as Cherry Creek is a remote place, even if we have an old bell around here too.”

“What’s that?”

“The old town bell. It was the town bell for church, school, and community when the church settlers ‘settled’ this valley. It used to be near the creek but was relocated when the schoolhouse opened years ago. It’s not the Liberty Bell, but I was trying to find common ground with an FBI agent.”

Singleton sat back, “That’s very affable of you Mr. Dial, then you can

call me Gus, but really this is about my investigation of the missing girl, Elizabeth Pollard. And I have there that newspaper clipping of you with a scarecrow and children that were her age at the time.” He pointed, “Now please spare me your pedantry and oblige me now, if you think any of those students or anyone else would be motivated to kidnap or murder the girl.”

“You are an East Coast boy, by God, Singleton. Those streets must have been tough on you. After all, you must have done something to wind up way out here,” said Dial. Singleton sat still and Dial continued, “I don’t know

the answer to your question I'm afraid though. I have no idea."

Singleton shook his head, "Mind telling me what you taught those kids after you were fired?"

"Black magic, Detective," Dial clicked his tongue. Singleton did not stir. Dial said, "No. We read some literature about history, science, and philosophy. Since they were interested, I figured it was material that wouldn't be covered by the sanctimonious public schools. We did it a couple of summers and that was it. I haven't seen anyone since, save maybe at the post office or grocery store once or twice. Nothing that rings a bell as you said." Roland

stood. “Now, I must ask if you have more questions, perhaps a later date, or my attorney, for I think it is time for you to go Detective Singleton. I must feed Ceres.”

Singleton stood and offered his hand, “Thank you for your cooperation, Roland.”

“My pleasure,” Dial said and folded his hands behind his back.



The detective pulled into the parking lot and Sheriff Fields was sitting in his Crown Victoria. The sun was down. Both men shut off their engines and met between the vehicles. Singleton

nodded back to the truck parked by the side entrance, and the sheriff said, “I haven’t gone in yet. Might be nothing.”

“Why did you park over here? Let’s use the side. We can at least ask questions.” He flashed a photo of Cy Springer

“Both doors go inside the church, Detective. I can identify the suspect,” said Fields. Singleton put the photo back in his jacket and Singleton walked to the front and the door was locked. He followed Sheriff Fields around the side near the parked Dodge Ram and opened the door, one hand inside his jacket and Fields at his hip

holster. They looked down the hallway that went either direction. He announced their presence out loud. They waited. Singleton drew and nodded to his right and Dakota lifted his gun and ventured to his left.

Detective Singleton walked down a dim hallway past the plain wooden closed doors hearing nothing but an echo of his footsteps. Fields went down a similar hallway and approached a small foyer, a double door leading into the chapel hall was propped open and he stopped. Singleton called "Police. Please identify yourself." He held his pistol forward at eye level. "Fields?" he bellowed into the double door on his

side of the main chapel hall. He heard Fields from the opposite side and commanded him to enter the room. Singleton saw Fields holding his pistol at eye level across the pews, and quickly scanned both sides of the room. Singleton did the same. They walked towards each other. The bright hall lights were on, and they met in the middle and relaxed their grips.

“Let’s look at the other end of the church. Check the doors this time and meet back here.”

“How do you know I didn’t check the doors, Gus?”

“You are good Dakota, but you wouldn’t have had time.”

“You got me, Sir.”

Singleton sighed. They exited opposite sides of each other into the main hallway. They flung open three doors each to find empty rooms, both checking the bathroom stalls. They retraced their steps on the opposite end yet saw no one in any room. Both men congregated in the chapel and walked to the lectern. “Where the hell could he be?” asked Fields. The detective looked around in silence and placed his hand on the wheeled podium.

“What about the bell tower?”

“There’s no bell. The steeple is purely cosmetic and exterior to the main building.”

“No bell tower. A mobile podium. Where do they baptize?”

Fields pointed to a double wooden platform behind a single pew in the back of the chapel. They ambled down the aisle to view either side of the light pew, moving it forward so the door could open. Fields touched the light switch adjacent to the doorway. Singleton pointed his gun and Fields opened the first door. Singleton moved left. Fields lifted his pistol and opened the other door.

Inside the large baptismal font lay a stiff body. Fields cursed. Singleton tightened his lips and put on gloves. He leaned over and lifted the shoul-

ders. “It’s him,” Dakota said. He was lowered gently, his blue face touching the porcelain tub again. A leather strap grooved shallowly in his throat. A large key was tied to the other end and rested on his spine. He had bits of straw in his hair.

“Dakota. We’d better call the corner.”

“There’s a phone in the Bishop’s Office.”



They sat in the Cherry Creek Police Department drinking coffee and mulled over the same details. They had no evidence from the murder scene to

link anyone. Cy Springer's single-wide trailer and its small property contained few clues.

"The assailant must have had a key or stayed after seminary. The boy must have been familiar with the murderer. There was little sign of struggle, as if he was familiar with his attacker."

"All this scarecrow stuff points to Dial if you ask me," said Fields.

"He doesn't go to church there. He'd stick out like a sore thumb. Why would he be there?"

"I don't know Gus! That Springer kid was some kind of acolyte to that creep. Reading his satanic books or whatever."

“Calm down, Sheriff Fields. Let’s not let complete conjecture get in the way. We need some evidence. Now, are you sure Stan Bryant doesn’t have a spare key?”

“He was out of town, and he said he gave the boy his key. Why does it matter?”

“I’m just thinking. Dial has a woodshop looking building next to his house.”

“We don’t have a warrant, Gus.”

The policeman arrived at Roland Dial’s country home. He sat on the porch in a black robe holding a pencil and a drawing on a pad rested on his lap. The men approached and the wind

stirred the bells and wind chimes. Roland continued drawing and Detective Singleton glanced at his notepad.

“A crow,” he said. Fields jerked his head towards the page. Dial flipped it over and said, “A lone rook. Groups of rooks are called rookeries. Crows are a murder.” He put the pencil and tablet down. “How can I help you gentlemen?”

“Can we look in your shed Mr. Dial?” asked Singleton.

“I’m just curious what you do in there,” said Fields.

“Curiosity killed the cat, who I’ve already said I was with the night young

Ms. Pollard went missing. Gentleman, can I please be in peace?”

Fields said, “The detective here said you didn’t have an alibi.”

Roland stood. He continued, “I can show you my shop, just to appease you, but I’m afraid you won’t find anything of much use for your case.”

He led them to the door, lifted the padlock, switched on the lights, and went inside with the detective and sheriff following him. There were drawings of birds, Native American artwork, maps, and a display case with several blue ribbons. “That larger one is the state fair one year for our scarecrow that we discussed Detective Singleton.”

The cop kept following into the back of the room. A leatherworking kit and table were on one end, a table saw, and a key cutter. Bells hung around the room. A large skeleton key hung on a wooden pillar on a single nail.

“Okay Roland. Explain the key cutter and the leatherworking.”

“As you may see, I’m a fairly industrious individual Detective. I used to make book straps for my students. My father owned a hardware store, and I got this machine along with some of the other antique ‘junk’ you might call it in this room and around my house. I also did some handiwork for a little

money here and there when I was fired from the schools.”

“That’s bull,” said Fields. “We found a key with a leather thong around Cy Springer’s neck.”

The detective stepped between them. “Better explain yourself quick Roland.”

“I have an alibi for Wednesday night,” he said.

“I thought you were a loner.”

“Rooks are social animals just like us humans, detective. I have occasional social needs as well.”

“Give us the name.”

Roland looked down. Detective Singleton took a pen out, and Fields

against a wooden pillar. “Mary Pol-lard,” said Dial. The cops exchanged glances. Fields looked appalled.

“The bishop’s wife?” asked Singleton.

“Yes. I’m afraid so.”

“You said you hadn’t seen Elizabeth in a long time Roland, you want to come downtown now?”

“There is no downtown here. I haven’t seen Elizabeth, that’s true, but . . .”

Fields pulled his gun. Singleton shouted, “What are you doing, you crazy bastard? Put that away now, that’s an order.” Singleton put his hand on his gun and scanned the two men. “Put

it away Dakota!” Fields backed up a step and holstered his pistol.

“Jesus Christ,” said Singleton. Roland opened his eyes. “You said you hadn’t seen the girl’s mother. Spit it out, Dial, or come with us.”

“Mary and I have been having an affair for some time. I tell myself it isn’t out of vengeance for her husband.”

“Go on.”

Roland patted his eyes, “Judd Polard has a lot of power in this community Detective, as the reckless sheriff might tell you. He and the pious community he protects helped oust me from my position because they feared I was teaching things alternative to their

dogmas, primarily evolution, but also mysticism. I did teach Darwin, and I did have Native American stories I told occasionally, which involved mysticism that they didn't approve of. Bishop Pol-lard runs a few things around town," Roland Dial said.

"Explain," said Singleton. While neither he nor Dial were looking, Fields snuck the skeleton key off the nail and into his back pocket.

"The church runs the town. They run the city council and chamber of commerce in Cherry Creek, what little there is. The higher members of this ward where Cy was murdered ran development. The farmland Cy's father

owned was essentially taken by these men to develop a plot for Bishop Pollard's construction company. They are like crows. They eat the crops that need watered. The young minds in school. They trample them out and oppress like the crows to the crops."

"You are saying some weird shit buddy," said Fields.

"I don't have to appease them to get elected Sheriff. I bet you haven't been to church in a while."

"Don't react, Fields," Singleton commanded. "What you are saying explains the evidence found under the bridge, and the straw in Springer's hair at the church," said Singleton.

Roland folded his arms and smirked. “Have you considered Judd? He has access to the church. His daughter is missing. He also used to give book straps out to his wards to carry their scriptures. The bishop is a construction man, and his brother-in-law runs a hardware store that could cut keys, but he doesn’t need a key, does he?”

“What would be his motive?”

“I do know that at one point Cy was interested in Elizabeth. Of course, I didn’t mention that because I didn’t want to mention my affair with Mary, but she told me that Judd was not too happy about it and told Cy to leave her alone. Mary wasn’t thrilled. Cy

was very intelligent and handsome. Perhaps Elizabeth is like her mother. If she's still alive."

"That still don't explain the missing girl," Fields said.

"Perhaps not, even though you need no evidence or explanation to have conviction, Sheriff."

"What do you believe in, Professor? Hocus Pocus? Your star sign?" asked Fields.

"Faith is faith, but it isn't always blind or cynical. Now, we'll have to corroborate your alibi, Roland." Singleton said.

"You haven't any faith, Detective Singleton? What motivates you?"

Singleton stepped in front of Fields and pointed to the door of the woodshed. “We can do it without your assistance Roland. Thank you for your cooperation.” The police followed him out the door and a bell chimed as it shut.



Dakota Fields drove them off Roland Dial’s farmland. The men sat in silence as they approached town. “Let me stop at the church,” said Fields.

“Why? For the phone? This is going to stir some shit up in town.”

“You’re telling me. No. Not just that. He lifted his body slightly with

one hand on the wheel and pulled the skeleton key from his pocket. “I want to see if this works.”

“Jesus Christ, Dakota. You stole that? That’s tampering, now it wouldn’t be permissible even if the old coot is lying. I don’t know if he is, but now it’s out the window!”

“We’ll get a warrant. If it works. We plant the key back in his creepy shed. Case closed.”

“This is insane. I can’t believe you are doing this to me, the victim, and the missing person. What if he didn’t do it?”

“I think he did. Why would the bishop kidnap or murder his own

daughter? Maybe it was her hussy mother.”

“This is not how police work god damn it. You pulled a fucking gun on Dial and now you stole his property . . . Jesus Christ. No wonder he thinks you guys are all fucked around here.”

“You want to solve this case or not Mr. FBI? We aren’t used to missing girls here. We don’t deal with those inner-city sickos. Sorry.”

Singleton put his blinker on and Fields asked what he was doing. He pulled the car down a small dirt driveway and put his hazard lights on. “I don’t think I like what you are trying to say right now Sheriff, and if you don’t

listen up, I will report your ass. This isn't church softball league. This is the law—I am paid to uphold. That you are paid to uphold! I'm sorry you haven't ever seen an example of professionalism and you are letting your small-town politics dictate your actions right now, but this is not a personal matter. I will have your ass off the case.”

“You want to work it alone?”

“I would prefer that to some wild card—hell yes, I would. You wouldn't last in a city because you would get axed so quick, damn it. You listen up, now! We will try your little maneuver just because I am frankly caught off guard right now. But you do not do anything

else untoward so long as I'm working this case. You fucking got that?"

Fields began to talk, and Singleton asked if it was clear. The sheriff shifted in his seat and quietly said, "Yes Sir. Your wish is my command. Now, can we go to the church please?"

They pulled into the church parking lot. Fields jumped out of the driver's seat and ran to the door with the skeleton key. He tried the lock and it didn't budge. Singleton got out and stood in the car's doorway looking at the corrupt sheriff while he ran around to the side, key in hand. He came back with an expression of dissatisfaction. The policeman returned to the vehicle.

“Alright, Fields, now that your antics backfired, do you want to go to the station to use the phone or just drive there? I don’t want to cause a scene if we don’t have to.”

“Maybe just go to the station. There’s nothing between here and there. I’m sorry, Gus. I don’t know how you deal with those freakshows in the city. We just get a couple of bad eggs out here. I shouldn’t have lost my cool.”

“I have been there before, Sheriff. It hasn’t been smooth sailing, always. Look, just, you learn from it. That’s it. All you can do, God damn it, is learn. Now, let’s get to the station.”

“Maybe, we can drop in on someone, use their phone.”

“No, no stops. Follow the code, Dakota,” Singleton said and looked out the window with a smile. Clouds were forming in the twilight. “Between here and there,” he said. “Fields. Where was the first piece of evidence we found?”

“The bridge of course. Why?”

“Exactly. The bridge. The bridge is between the church and the old school.”

“And?”

“Dial’s big beef is that the church interfered with the school and the bridge is in between the two. First ev-

idence was the bridge, and the other was the church.”

“Oh shit. What about the alibi?”

“We’ll get to her. Oh, shit is right. Dial said he wasn’t sure if his motivation to have an affair with her was vengeance on Bishop Pollard. What if nabbing his daughter was?”

“That sicko. What if he’s right though? What if Judd has some motivation like she was screwing the football team and the Springer kid?”

“Let’s just get to the school.” Fields accelerated, turned right, and went through the covered bridge where they first found pieces of a scarecrow.



The school was dark. Defunct. All the students went 20 miles into town to a newer schoolhouse. Both men pulled out flashlights and walked around the building.

“These windows are painted shut. Should we ram the door or break a window?”

“Wait,” said Singleton. “The key. Use the key you stole.”

Fields approached the front door with Singleton and inserted the key into the arched hole. He turned it and the lock went unlatched.

There was a small gymnasium and a stage. Dusty and empty. The school consisted of 2 rooms, a small library, and two bathrooms. They saw nothing in the lower school rooms.

“I don’t even know what the hell we’re looking for,” said Fields.

“Elizabeth Pollard. A scarecrow. Something. He is obviously into symbolic stuff.”

“Crows. Scarecrows.”

“The bell. Remember the church didn’t have a bell, but Dial had all those bells.”

“The school bell.”

They went up the stage and there was a small staircase. They opened

the door and flipped the light switch. Nothing. The men climbed the stairs. At the top was a school bell. Where its rope would have been were strands of blond human hair braided into straw. They tugged the hair slowly. The bell rung lightly once and when they flashed their lights into the interiors there was a pair of saddle shoes tied together around the clapper.

“We better corroborate that alibi,” Singleton wiped his brow.

“I say we go get Dial first. Book him on reasonable doubt.”

“How are we going to do that since you stole evidence?”

“If the church ran him out of the school. We can put him in jail. Nobody else makes sense,” Fields said and stroked his moustache.

“Alright, let’s head back over there.”



When they pulled up to Roland Dial’s house it was all dark and his car was gone. His doors were locked. Fields walked over to the woodshed and lifted the padlock. He went in and put the key back and returned outside. “Shit,” Fields said.

“Alright, I say we go back to the station and call Mary Pollard.”

“One minute,” said Fields and approached the front door. He kicked open the door. Singleton yelled at him. Fields went in and turned on the lights and found a phone book. A cat bolted out the door. Gus drew his gun. Dakota laughed and dialed Judd and Mary Pollard. Mary answered and Fields looked relieved.

“Mrs. Pollard, hello. This is Sheriff Fields. Sorry for calling at this hour, but do you have a minute?”

“Yes, Dakota. What is it?”

“Were you with Roland Dial last Wednesday night from around 7 to 9 at night?” There was silence on the other end.

“I need to know the truth Ma’am.”

“I went to the movies.”

Fields cupped the speaker of the phone and whispered, “She said she wasn’t with him.” Singleton jerked the receiver out of his hand.

“Hello, Mrs. Pollard, sorry. This is Detective Augustus Singleton. I am sorry for bothering you over the phone. Now, I want to know if you are free to talk openly right now?”

“Oh, maybe if it can wait.”

“Is your husband home Mrs. Pollard?”

“No, but right now isn’t really the best time.”

“This is very important, unless you want to come talk in Sheriff Field’s office tonight. Now I know you are going through a lot with your daughter, and I am trying to solve this case. It makes no sense why you wouldn’t be forthcoming. Is your husband home Mrs. Pollard?”

“No sir.”

“Look I need to know if you were with Roland Dial the night of Elizabeth’s disappearance. Were you with him?”

“Detective, I already spoke with you . . . I was at the movies.”

“Who did you go with?”

“Nobody, I went alone.”

“Okay, what did you see?”

“Excuse me?”

“I said, what did you see? You didn’t go with anybody you said.”

“Oh, I saw *Young Guns*.”

The policeman paused for a moment, “Really, because I came to town and that wasn’t playing, *Midnight Run* was. I guess I’ll check with the box office and give you a call very soon, Mrs. Pollard. Just know obstructing justice is a major offense.”

“Okay. Okay. I can’t say where I was. You don’t understand how it is here. I’ll get run out on the rails. Excommunicated, if folks find out.”

“Ma’am, trust me, prison is worse. Now were you with Roland Dial on Wednesday night?”

“Oh God. I got married so young, Detective.”

“Please answer my question Mrs. Pollard. I’m not a marriage counselor, but I can protect my witnesses.”

“I was. I was with Roland that night, okay. I don’t feel good about it, but it is suffocating the way things are here.”

“I know, Mrs. Pollard. Now, just be calm, and nobody is going to know,” he looked at Fields, “Nobody is going to know.”

“Thank you, Detective.”

“Get some rest, Mrs. Pollard. I may be in touch soon, but rest assured you have nothing to worry about now. The important thing is we can be looking in the right direction for your daughter now.”

Several days later Roland Dial’s car was found parked at an airport. The forensics drew up no incriminating evidence towards him in the murder of Cy Springer or any links to Elizabeth Pollard. Dakota Fields and Augustus Singleton are still investigating both cases.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Cothrun lives in Tucson, Arizona where he enjoys film, literature, the sky, and Phoenix Suns basketball. He has a Bachelors Degree in Creative Writing and English from The University of Arizona. He is from Pinedale, Arizona.

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