

## Chapter

"Jonathon Bromwell." His name echoed around the half empty courtroom. The clerk pointed April Malone in his direction. "Jonathon Bromwell, I see you there." She smiled. "Judge Fellmare wants to see you in his chambers right away."

His heart sank. *What have I done now?*

"What's this about, Miss Malone?"

"I don't know. He specifically asked me whether you'd be in court this morning and said to send you right into him before court convened. This way, Mr. Bromwell." She led him through the door in the front of the courtroom and down a short corridor lined with the stern faces of judges long dead and book after book of their collective decisions. At the end of the corridor, she knocked on the closed door. A gruff 'Yes' came from behind the door.

"I have Mr. Bromwell for you, your Honour" said Miss Malone as she opened the door.

"Good... good. Thank-you, April. You can leave us." With the door shut behind him, Jonathon's palms began to sweat. "Thank-you for coming so promptly, Mr. Bromwell." Judge Fellmare stared at him as if he was studying him. "How's your practice doing? How do you like our little town?" he asked.

"Very well to both, your Honour."

“So you’re getting use to living in the small town after being in the big city for all those years. That’s good. Are you getting to meet people? I know this bunch can be very tight and they don’t take to new comers too well.”

*You have that right* thought Jonathon. He’d been in Ballymore for almost eight months and didn’t know a soul outside of his work. Sure he knew the clerks, court reporters, and a couple of the town’s lawyers but when his office shut down for the night, the town ignored him. Once, on a hot September Saturday, he tried to talk to the group congregated in front of McBride’s pharmacy but that conversation was one-sided and eventually he moved on. Emma and Isabella, being young, had no problem making friends at school, but for Jonathon, his shyness and the town’s cliqueness worked against him.

“It’s coming slowly, your Honour,” said Jonathon. Judge Fellmare nodded his head.

“I guess you’ve heard the news. There’s been an arrest in the Morrison girl’s murder.”

“No, I didn’t know that.”

“Late last night. Eli Mourning. Do you know him?”

“Mourning. No, I haven’t met an Eli Mourning.”

“Lives up on the ridge near Sutton’s Meadow. That’s where they found the girl. Been up there all winter. Poor thing. Did you know Jamie Morrison? She was always such a pretty young girl. Her parents have taken this... well... how else would you expect them to take it.”

“No, I didn’t know the young girl personally. My daughters are only six and eight. I understand she was sixteen when she went missing?”

“Yes... Everyone loved Jamie. So full of life and energy. My niece baby-sat for the Morrisons.” Judge Fellmare looked off into the distance and wiped his eye. “Jonathon, you don’t mind if I call you by your first name? I need a big favour from you.”

Jonathon’s stomach dropped.

“I’ve got this problem. It seems that our friend, Eli can’t get anyone to represent him. No one in town will touch him. He needs a lawyer.”

“Your Honour, I don’t practice criminal law.”

“I know. I know but we’ve got a real pickle here. As far as I’m concerned you passed the bar and that’s good enough for me. I’ll give you as much leeway as I can under the circumstances. Now, Mourning’s got no money so it will be legal aid.”

“Your Honour, I just don’t think this is a good idea.” He knew it was a terrible idea; contrary to everything Dr. Connelly warned him against when the idea of getting back into law was raised near the end of the previous winter.

“Listen, Jonathon. Eli is a strange duck; probably the strangest one I’ve even seen. He’s never fit in here from wherever he came; living up there all alone. No friends, no wife. I’ve never been up to his place but the talk is that he’s got these bizarre statues all over the place up there. Look like metal monsters. The kids around town tease him relentlessly. He’s good sport for them, that odd bird.” Judge Fellmare paused and shook his head. “Hell, the whole town probably thinks he did it. I can’t trust the regular fellows to handle this one and it’s got to be done right. You’re new. No loyalties and the boy’s got to have a fair trial. There’ll be no lynch mob mentality in my courtroom... in my town. The boy’s probably killed the poor girl but I’ll be damned if he won’t get his fair trial in my court room.”

The judge's words were blurs of sound to Jonathon. He was nauseous at the thought of any trial, let alone a murder trial. His head swirled. "I hardly think having a real estate lawyer representing Mr. Mourning is a fair trial, your Honour."

"You've got to give yourself more credit, Jonathon. You've always been a good litigator whenever you've come in on my civil days." Judge Fellmare paused and looked at Jonathon. The antique clock on the credenza behind the judge's desk ticked once... twice... a third time.

"I can tell from your silence you want to say no."

Jonathon looked at the Judge straight in the eye. "Is it that obvious? I just don't think I'm your man for the job." He wanted to tell the judge about Dr. Connelly's warnings about avoiding stress but in a small town like Ballymore it might amount to professional suicide. He couldn't find his voice.

Judge Fellmare leaned forward on his arms that were folded across his mahogany desk. "Well, I'm going to make this simple for you." Fellmare's breaths were deliberate and full. "You are my man and it's no longer a favour." The judge brought his index finger to his mouth. "I would have thought you'd have jumped at the opportunity—a chance to make a good impression with me... with the town." The judge stared at Jonathon as if was some misbehaving schoolboy in the principal's office. "No, I decided this morning you'd be doing this little chore for the town and me. Think of it as a long overdue house warming present." The judge's friendliness was gone, replaced with sternness. "Miss Malone will take you down to the holding cell. I brought Eli over this morning before any excitement could get the better of the folks. Go meet with him. He needs your help. If he did it, get a plea done. This town doesn't need this trial. It's busting

at the seams right now. I've never seen it like this. A trial will tear it apart. The memory of that dear sweet girl doesn't need it. Bring me that plea, Mr. Bromwell." The judge patted Jonathon on the back as he ushered him to the door. "Miss Malone," he bellowed down the corridor. "Don't worry, Jonathon. I know your perfect for the job. You'll do just fine."

April Malone appeared quickly as if she had been waiting for the call. "Take him," he ordered. "We'll start court in ten minutes." Miss Malone nodded. The judge smiled and returned to the briefs on his desk as Miss Malone led Jonathon away towards a stairwell near the entrance to the courthouse.

Sheriff Brightman was waiting by the door. "Signed him up, did he?" he asked.

"It appears not without some reluctance," answered Miss Malone.

Brightman giggled. She gave him a dour look and rolled her eyes in Jonathon's direction. In her position of authority, she had no time for Brightman or his antics. "Sheriff Brightman doesn't mean to laugh Mr. Bromwell but Judge Fellmare always gets his way in and out of court," she said. "I've seen it too many times."

"You never had a chance," said Sheriff Brightman. "Leave him with me, April. I'll take him down to meet our celebrity. This way, Mr. Bromwell."

Dimly lit lights hung from the ceiling. The air was musty as the two descended the stairwell deep into the basement. "You're getting to see something that only the old timers remember. This is part of the tunnel system below Ballymore. They lead everywhere. I could take you to McBride's or Hestor's restaurant, just about everywhere from here. Old man Hestor showed me the tunnels himself. There's even one entrance under my office. That's how we brought poor Eli over here today. Poor sap. Safer down

here for him right now. Well, he'll get what he deserves. He's right around the corner here."

The makeshift cell looked like it was built at the turn of the century. If the prisoner had the time and the inclination he could scrape at the cement and pull the bars out one by one over time. Inside sitting on the worn, stained mattress of a wood cot sat Eli Mourning. He didn't move. He stared beyond the bars into the nothingness of the wall ahead of him.

"Eli, I've brought you your lawyer. He's going to save your sorry ass if he can but we both know he ain't going to be able. Because you killed that girl and we both know it. So do the right thing by her memory. Hear me, Eli?"

Eli did not move. He didn't show any acknowledgement.

"That's enough, Sheriff. Last time I looked a man had a right to be presumed innocent until convicted," said Jonathon snapping into attention.

"That stuff's for you. He did it. I've seen the evidence and twenty more minutes talking to your client, he would have told me directly. The Morrisons are good friends of mine, and Jamie, she was a peach. She probably felt sorry for this.... weirdo and he took advantage. Tried to take more than was offered. Yeah, there's no doubt in my mind. He killed poor Jamie."

"While I can appreciate your grief, my client doesn't need to hear it. Now, leave me alone with my client, Sheriff."

"Okay but I have to lock you in. I don't want Eli missing his date upstairs." Sheriff Brightman opened the huge padlock with a large iron key. There was rust at the joints of the lock. The cell door creaked as it opened. Jonathon stepped into the cell and the door

crashed shut behind him. “Twenty minutes. Judge Fellmare wants him brought up for arraignment by no later than 10:30 am. I’ll be back for you in twenty.”

Jonathon turned to look at his client. A tall, frail man, Eli’s thin brown hair hung over his forehead and fell into his eyes. His hair looked greasy, like he had not showered or bathed in days. It was his eyes that caught Jonathon’s attention first. There were empty and distant; the type of look you see in someone’s eyes after years of neglect. There was no life in Eli’s eyes; only pain.

“Hello, Mr. Mourning. My name is Jonathon Bromwell.” He extended his hand to his client. “Judge Fellmare has asked that I represent you this morning in court.” Eli did not move. “Alright then,” said Jonathon dropping his right hand back down to his side. “I haven’t seen the particulars of your case so I can’t really comment at this point. In a few minutes, we’ll go upstairs and do what is called an arraignment. You’ll hear the charges and the judge will look for a plea from you. What do you want to plead? I assuming at this point you’ll want to plead ‘not guilty’ at least until we’ve had an opportunity to review the evidence against you.” Eli did not stir. He continued to look blankly at the wall ahead of him. There was only silence and the occasional drip from the condensation in the basement. “Do you understand me, Mr. Mourning? Nothing. “I can only help you if you talk to me. I represent you and anything you tell me stays between us.” Eli said nothing.

Frustrated, Jonathon turned to the bars of the door and wrung his hands through them. They were rough and cold. *They were right. There’s something definitely wrong with this guy. I’m going to look like an idiot out there.* Jonathon looked down the corridor for any signs of Sheriff Brightman. Once he got out of here, he would go straight to the judge and

tell him that he could not help Mr. Eli Mourning. The man would not talk to him. How could he possibly help a man that would not speak to him? His head dropped against the bars. From behind, a soft timid voice spoke.

“My dog needs to be fed. Can you feed Toby for me, Mr. Bromwell? I don’t have anyone else that I could ask.”

Jonathon turned around. The eyes that had been so dead just moments ago were filled with fear.

“They came for me more than a day ago now. Toby hasn’t been fed since then. He won’t know what’s going on. He’s my only friend now. You’ve got to feed my Toby.”

Jonathon filled up with compassion at the sight of this frightened creature more animal than man at that moment.

“Of course, I’ll get someone to feed your dog,” said Jonathon as he sat down on the cot next to his client.

“Good because Toby is all I can think of right now. He’s at my house. There’s a key under the big pot in the front.” The two sat silently on the cot, side by side; one in jeans and the other in a suit and waited for the Sheriff; both frightened in their own way of the future and the prospects it held. Outside, the crowds began to swell.