

Chapter 4: Polymerase Chain Reaction

Emma S. waved as Norma Bates and her son drove off from the command post's parking lot, off to start their new motel business and new lives. As much as living in a small town like this would drive her crazy, she almost envied them. Now she was possibly going to drop the most life-altering, mind-blowing news imaginable on their heads, if there was a DNA match.

It almost isn't fair. Why shake up their world any more than it already has been?

Because I have to know, and they need to know. That's why. Because if we're family, that's a missing part of all of us that needs to be brought to light.

Before she could give herself any more reasons to back out, Agent Spoole went back to her office, grabbed the shoulder bag with the DNA evidence, and headed out.

"I need to go to the Portland field office, be back in a few hours." she tossed that parting statement over her shoulder at Agent Rivera, and she was out the door before he could say anything. He'd be fine. Rivera was technically SAIC in her absence, and with the current state of the investigation--it was unlikely he'd have much to do other than collect field reports for the day.

Now I'm hinging the White Pine Bay leg of the case on Norma and Norman Bates as well. It's a serious wild card, but it could work. Just hoping against all hope they'll find something..

Emma S. got in her Bureau-issued sedan, put the address of the Portland field office in her phone's GPS, and connected it to the car's Bluetooth so she could hear the directions as well as take any calls. She was on the highway for about 20 minutes when her phone rang: Sheriff Romero.

“Agent Spooler. What can I do for you, Sheriff?” she answered.

“You can tell me what the hell you’re doing having the whole town crawling with your agents! They’re asking residents all kinds of questions, and my phone hasn’t stopped ringing all morning!”

“I believe that’s called questioning potential witnesses. As long as civilians have nothing to hide regarding Keith Summers’ alleged criminal activity, they have nothing to worry about.”

“Don’t give me that! That’s the same excuse all you feds use for wire-tapping, spying on innocent Americans, and who knows what else!”

“You didn’t strike me as being the conspiracy-theory type, Sheriff Romero.” She couldn’t keep the sarcasm out of her voice. He was starting to irritate her.

“There are powerful people in this town who are very dangerous. You’re going to stir up a hornet’s nest, and you’re going to put me right in the middle of it, Agent Spooler.”

“This is supposed to intimidate me exactly how? Sorry, Sheriff, nice try. But you’re out of your depth, and frankly: out of line.”

She wanted to add, “Would we even be having this conversation if I was a male agent?” But she thought better of it. Getting into a worse fight with Sheriff Romero was not going to help anything.

She did add: “As far as you being in the middle of it: tell your pot-growers the FBI wants nothing to do with them, so they can ‘chill out’ as I believe they say.”

“Yeah, and I’m going to be spending my days doing nothing but that.”

“That falls under the category: ‘Your problem, not mine.’ But I’ll tell you what: you want to be more involved in this investigation? I could bring over my case files on Summers and bring you up to speed. Then maybe you could help me fill in some gaps; you knew him personally, am I correct?”

“Yes, you are.”

“Good, settled then. I’m on my way to the Portland field office; I should be back in White Pine Bay in a few hours. How about I bring them by your office this evening, say around five?”

“All right. I’ll see you then.”

They said their good-byes. By this point, Agent Spooler had made almost half of the hour-long drive. She realized the call with Romero had been a welcome distraction, despite the verbal sparring. Being alone with her thoughts--about everything--suddenly became overwhelming. Her hands started to shake uncontrollably on the steering wheel, and she felt she was going to burst into tears.

Stop it! You can't fall apart! That's the absolute last thing you need to do! You can do this; you can handle it--all of it!

Emma S. took several deep breaths and managed to calm herself. She just needed to order the PCR tests at the lab, get back to White Pine Bay, meet with the Sheriff, and then tomorrow would be a brand-new day. She planned on having a stiff drink tonight. Probably two of them.

At the field office lab, Agent Spoole filled out the orders for the DNA tests she wanted and handed the forms, along with the swab and glass in their sealed evidence containers, to the technician.

“I need a comparative PCR run on these two samples, and I need a rush put on it. Can you have them couriered to the White Pine Bay command post?”

“Sure thing. I can have it done and sent to you by early Friday morning.”

Three days away. She wished it were sooner, but she took what she could get.

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Norma was startled by the doorbell, followed by insistent pounding on the front door, just after seven that Friday morning. Norman had left for school a few minutes ago, and it's not like she was expecting anyone. She opened the inside door and saw the blurry form of Agent Emma Spoole through the glass on the outside front door. She relaxed somewhat, but at the same time she hoped nothing was wrong.

“Agent Spoole! What brings you-”

“I need to show you something.” Emma S. cut her off. Norma saw right away the FBI agent was completely white-faced and stricken. She was wide-eyed, breathing rapidly, and looked like she was barely holding her emotions together. Her freaked-out-looking state of mind scared Norma. This woman was Gibraltar. She kicked ass and took names. She was scumbag criminals' worst nightmare. If Agent Spoole was this shaken up by something, it had to be REALLY bad.

“Can I...can I come in?”

“Of course, come on in. I was just cleaning up from breakfast.” Norma ushered her inside and into the kitchen. “Would you like some coffee?”

“No thanks, not right now; I don’t think my nerves could take it.”

Agent Spoole had a seat at the kitchen table and presented the thick manilla envelope she’d been carrying. Norma sat down across from her.

“What’s wrong, Agent Spoole?”

“Under the circumstances, you should call me ‘Emma’ from now on.”

“All right..”

Emma S. drew a deep breath. This was it. Both their lives were about to change. Forever.

“Norma, I don’t...I’m not sure where to begin, um...shit, this is...unreal...Anyway, I, um, my parents adopted me right after I was born, my mother was never able to have kids of her own, and I grew up in Toledo, Ohio. But I was born down in Akron.”

Emma S. opened the envelope and pulled out the first few papers. Norma was still confused as to why she was telling her this. Emma S. looked at the papers for a few seconds before looking Norma hard in the eyes.

“Norma...these are copies of my adoption records. Does the last name ‘Calhoun’ mean anything to you?”

It was Norma’s turn to take a sharp breath. That last name she hated, the one she tried so hard to forget, the one she associated with everything that had happened in that hell house where she grew up...

“It was my maiden name.” Norma’s voice was barely above a whisper.

Emma S. turned the adoption papers around and handed them to her. “My birth parents are one ‘Edmund and Francine Calhoun.’ That was their address at the time, too.”

“Oh my god..Those are my parents’ names. That’s where I grew up...Are you...are you telling me-”

“I know. I couldn’t believe it at first either. So that night when Summers attacked you, I did something kind of unethical, but I had to...I had to know. I took a DNA sample from the water glass I gave you and I had it analyzed against my own. It’s called a PCR test.”

Emma S. pulled out the last of the forms, including a couple of thick sheets of what looked like X-ray paper from a doctor’s office, except these had a bunch of odd squiggly lines on them. Norma picked up and read the top print-out sheet first. It had both their names on it, next to a box with a big green “97.78% FRATERNAL MATCH.” She then picked up the X-ray sheets; one was labeled with her name, age, and other basic information. The other was with Emma Spolee’s.

What Norma knew about DNA was very pedestrian; she vaguely remembered it was covered in high school biology--not that she’d been able to focus much on school at the time. But all she had to do was hold both sheets together up to the light so the labels lined up. So did the rest of the squiggly lines; they were exactly the same.

“They match.” she breathed, still barely able to process the truth. But the truth was undeniable.

“Yeah. It means there’s a ninety-seven-point-seven-eight percent chance--”

“You’re my sister.”

Both women stared at one another for several beats, struggling hard to process all the emotions running through them. Disbelief, shock, and confusion didn’t even begin to describe it. Underneath that, Emma S. felt an odd sense of relief, but relief mixed with fear. What now? What did this mean for both of them? Where were they going to go from here? Who was going to tell Norman? Probably best if they both did that, not to mention Emma S. still had no clue she had a second nephew, but more importantly: Why?

Norma voiced that last question first: “Why would they do this? They never said ANYTHING about you! They never told us, me and my brother! It’s like..they pretended you’d never existed! How could they do that?!” Her voice was rising as she went on. Even as the anger in her was starting to gain momentum, Norma also felt a weird sense of...happiness.. and hope..underneath it. If anyone was her long-lost sister, she was glad it was Emma Spooler. She liked her, admired her, respected her, had felt she could be trusted, could even be a friend, even in the short week they’d known each other. All of which made her even more furious at her parents. The “could-haves” started coming up in her mind. She could’ve had a protector, a confidante, a best friend, a big sister....who knows how differently things could’ve turned out? But all that had been ripped away from both sisters before Norma was even born. All of that rage welled up and spilled over as tears in Norma’s eyes.

Emma S. was struggling to keep from crying as well. “I don’t know!...I had no idea you existed until a week ago...Neither did my parents. They never again had any contact with your--my--birth parents after they adopted me. So they had no way of knowing either. I was able to look up my birth parents’ names when I was 18, but there was nothing about you, or our brother, in those records. There wouldn’t be, even if you two had already been born at the time. Only after I did some digging on my own did I find your name. It’s one big hell of a coincidence my work brought me

here, literally brought me to your doorstep. Who knows, maybe there's something bigger than ourselves at work here..."

Emma S. hadn't had any idea how her sister would react to the truth, especially when the truth was there in black and white. While she'd expected tears and maybe emotional shock, she couldn't have predicted the visceral hatred Norma expressed towards her--their--parents.

"I HATE THEM!!" Hate them more than I ever did! How could they do this??!! Why?!!" Tears were running down her face, and she was pacing back and forth across the kitchen, unsure what to do with her hands--so she kept bringing them to the sides of her head before dropping them again.

"I'm GLAD HE'S DEAD!! GOOD RIDDANCE!! I haven't spoken to Francine--our mother-- in over 20 years, but now I want to shake her by the neck and ask her why?!! Why did she give her own daughter--her first daughter--away?! Why did they do that, and why'd she let him? I know my...our...son of a bitch father did it!! I know it!"

She sank back against the counter, still crying. "There should've been three of us. The whole time, all those years! Not just me and my brother." Norma closed her eyes and shuddered at mentioning him. "They cheated me out of having a sister. And I HATE them for it! You were lucky, you know that? Growing up in that house was absolute hell!! They did you one huge favor!! But I still hate them for it!!!"

Emma S. couldn't stop the tears from spilling out of her own eyes. She got up and slowly went towards Norma. "Our father's dead?" she asked softly.

"Yes. Our dad was killed in a car accident when Norman was eight. The last thing I heard, Francine our dear mother was in a nursing home in Idaho. I want NOTHING to do with her!!"

The news sank like a heavy weight into Emma S. Chances were slim she ever get to find out the real reasons why they'd given her up. As far as real family, this was it: her younger sister, an unknown (to her) brother, and her nephew appeared to be what she had, as far as her birth family. She'd take that; she was thankful for it. More than thankful--these two were already pulling insistently at her heartstrings.

Emma S. stepped closer to her sister. "Were they really that bad?" she wanted to know, as she looked into Norma's eyes. What she saw told her everything she needed to know. She'd seen it before in hundreds of crime victims over the years: trauma, abuse, emotional damage, and pain--intense, deep-rooted mental and psychological pain that went all the way to a person's core. The kind that changed the way they saw the world forever. It was questionable whether even years of therapy could completely heal them. Her experience had shown her it couldn't, not fully anyway.

Still, seeing the mental and emotional damage that had been inflicted on her own sister felt like a sucker-punch. It was not the same as seeing it in victims she had no connection to other than the procedurals of her job. It was far worse.

"My god." Neither of them needed to say more, not that they could think of anything to say as the unspoken reality hung heavily in the room. Norma threw her arms around her older (and taller) sister's neck, and they hugged tightly for a long time, both of their breathing ragged from soft sobs. Norma rested her chin on Emma S.'s shoulder and closed her eyes.

The crying eventually started to subside. This felt nice--secure and solid. Her sister was strong for a woman, in better shape than she was, but Norma guessed she had to be. The closest she'd been to feeling this safe was when Norman was holding her in his arms.

"What the hell was done to you, Norma?" It was spoken in a way that Norma could tell she didn't have to answer. Not yet, not until she was ready.

They broke apart and wiped the tears from their eyes.

"Um, I've never had a sister before...well, obviously..." Norma's voice trailed off.

"Well, I've never had any siblings at all until now." They both started to smile at that.

"So, I guess we'll be stumbling through this together until we figure it out."

"Yeah, we will."

