

Greenville was a small town on the northern outer limits of Arizona. Save for a few traveling tourists stopping for gas, the town never saw too many visitors nor new residents. With a population around seventy people, the town found itself wrapped up in its own bow of secrecy and isolation from the outside world. They dealt with all of their issues within the geographical limits of the town, maintaining their own trials and arrests in their jail.

Since its founding in 1856, there were very few crimes reported. The most serious offenses were robbery, and, even then, the perpetrators would only spend a few months in the jail at most before being banished from the town entirely. They didn't take too kindly to crimes being committed in such a tight-knit community such as Greenville.

So when the town's sheriff, Sheriff Lyle, received a phone call about a body floating in the quarry, the news spread fast throughout the town. That on top of Sheriff Lyle's niece disappearing from a morning run was enough to send the town into a gossip frenzy.

"Sheriff, you got a call from Wallace Langley." Terry Frank, the town's deputy sheriff, knocked on Sheriff Lyle's door, holding a phone to his ear.

Sheriff Lyle looked up from his paperwork and sighed. "If he's calling about those damn crop circles again, tell him I retired." He rolled his eyes and shuffled his papers together, pushing himself up from his desk.

Wallace Langley was the town's leading conspiracy theorist. Since he was a boy, he'd chase around these ideas of aliens and skinwalkers like they were waiting for them to catch him. The folks always said he had a few screws loose in his tool shed. You could always find him reading a new book on something, just trying to find some sort of evidence to make himself sound less crazy; granted, no matter what Wallace did, he always found a way to make himself

the center of the town's gossip. He would do anything to make someone believe him. And no matter what, no one did. It had almost nothing to do with his stories and everything to do with his brain being a little too slow for the other townspeople to put up with.

"No, Sir. He said somethin' about a body down in the quarry." He furrowed his eyebrows and leaned against the door frame.

Sheriff Lyle stopped, rested his hands on the desk, and looked up at Deputy Sheriff Frank. He raised his eyebrows, creasing the stress lines into his forehead. "A body?"

"Yes, Sir. A body."

"Give me the phone, Deputy." He pulled his chair toward him and sat down, waving the deputy into his office.

Sheriff Deputy Frank approached his desk and held out the phone. He took it and waved him off, leaning back in his chair.

"Langley, what is this I'm hearing about a body in the quarry?"

"Yes, Sheriff. There's a girl in the quarry."

"Is she swimming?" Sheriff Lyle pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed.

"No, Sheriff. Floating face down. She ain't moved since I saw her an hour ago."

"An hour ago? Wallace, you saw the body an hour ago, and you're only calling me now?"

"Well, Sheriff, I wanted to be sure."

"I'm sending officers to you. Don't move." The sheriff said sternly. "And Wallace?"

"Yes, Sheriff?"

"The next time you see a body, don't wait to call. Alright?"

"Yes, Sheriff."

The phone started ringing, and the sheriff took the phone away from his ear to look at the caller ID. *Oh good God.* He rolled his eyes and exhaled heavily.

“I’ll see you soon, Wallace.” He ended the call and picked up the other one.

“Alice, you know better than to call me on the station phone when I’m working. What is it you want this time?”

“Lilly is missing, Darren.”

“Come again?” He furrowed his eyebrows.

“Lilly is missing. She went out for her morning run this morning, and she hasn’t been back since. She’s always back by five, Darren.”

“Now, hold on, Alice.” The sheriff leaned forward, resting his arm on the desk. “Don’t jump to conclusions.”

“Well, what do you want me to do, Darren? She was here, and now she’s gone. Girls don’t just disappear. You expect me to believe she just made a little detour and didn’t bother to let me know?”

“You’re getting all worked up over nothing, Alice. She’ll probably turn up soon. I’ll send out an officer to go walk her usual route. I’m telling you she’s fine.”

“I’m going out to find her, Darren. I’ll call you if I find anything.”

With that, she ended the call.

Sheriff Lyle set the phone down on the desk and ran his hands down his face. He took a deep breath and dropped his hands to the desk, looking over at the picture frame on the corner of the desk near the computer monitor. Lilly’s senior year school photo.

*Please, God. Don’t let that be my niece floating in the quarry.*

Sheriff Lyle pulled up the waist of his pants. He kept his head on a swivel, watching the officers come and go from the shore of the quarry as the medical examiner team worked to retrieve the body from the water.

Town residents gathered behind the yellow tape, calling out for the sheriff's attention. He willfully ignored them, adjusting his sunglasses every few seconds to make it look like he was focusing hard at the crime scene at hand.

"Sir."

Sheriff Lyle looked to his right as an officer approached.

"What is it, Officer Vought?"

"There is no form of ID on the body, but we know she's female. The medical examiner said he'd tell you more when he gets her back to the morgue for an autopsy."

"No one recognizes her?" He felt a ping of relief.

"Sir, we can hardly make out her face."

He did a double-take between Vought and the body.

"Alright, Vought." He exhaled heavily. "Finish canvassing the area, see if we can find any witnesses. She couldn't have been here long."

He looked out into the quarry with furrowed eyebrows. *How does someone dump a body here without being seen?*

"Sheriff!" A familiar voice called out from behind the yellow tape.

The sheriff exhaled and looked over his shoulder.

Wallace Langley flailed sheets of paper in his hands to get his attention.

"Let him in, Riggs." He yelled to the officer manning the tape.

The officer lifted the tape, allowing Langley the room to duck under. He stumbled toward the sheriff, gripping his papers feverishly. "Sheriff, you're never gonna believe this."

"What is it, Langley?"

"I was checking blog posts. You know, to see if there was any updates on anything that could help the case?"

"Naturally."

"You know what I found, Sheriff?"

"What is it, Wallace?"

"I think it was one of them skinwalkers. You know, what the Indians tell stories about? They were talking about some sightings here along the border not too far from town." He gestured down at the papers in his hands. "I'm thinking one of them could have gotten to - uh - what's her name?"

"Jane Doe, Wallace." The sheriff folded his arm across his chest.

"That's quite the name, Sir."

"It's for unidentified female bodies, Wallace."

"Right, Sir. But these skinwalkers they slit people's throats and they, like, play with them, and they-they-they don't leave much evidence behind. And well, uh, I was thinking that maybe I could help out. I figured it may be easier for us to -"

"Wallace, there is no such thing as skinwalkers. Now, I need to ask you some questions about what you saw."

"I already told Riggs everything I know." He shook his head, dropping the papers to his side. With his free hand, he picked at the seams of his pant leg.

“Well, you’re gonna tell me now.” The sheriff reached into his back pocket and pulled out his notebook and pen. “When did you discover the body?”

“Well, I was out on my walk early this morning about seven, Sir.” He nodded to himself. “Yeah, seven. I went out to the shore to look out, and I saw her. I thought maybe she was just trying to swim, Sir. But she wasn’t moving, Sir. Not even a little. I thought, oh no, the poor thing done drowned. Then, I called you, Sheriff.”

“Alright, Wallace. I think you’ve had enough for a day.” Sheriff looked over his shoulder and waved Officer Vought to him. “Officer Vought is gonna walk you home. You stay away from the crime scene until we clear it, understood?”

“Sir, the skinwalkers-”

“Understood, Wallace?”

“Yes, Sheriff.”

Sheriff Lyle stood next to Doctor Kilton next to the autopsy table.

It had been twenty-four hours since the body was found, and he was growing impatient as he waited for the medical examiner to call him to the morgue with answers. There had been no major crimes like this since before he was elected as Sheriff, and he sure as hell was not going to let this case get the better of him. He worked too damn hard to get where he was to be destroyed by a cold case.

His sister Alice had been nonstop calling the station since word got out of a body being found in the quarry. The quarry was one of the last stops on Lilly’s morning run.

“Please tell me you have something to ID her, Kilton.” The sheriff said.

“I have more than that I’m afraid.” Dr. Kilton chewed at the inside of his bottom lip.

“What did you find, Doc?”

“Lyle, I think you should prepare yourself for what you’re about to see. We identified Jane Doe after I cleaned her up and performed her autopsy.”

“What did you find, Doc?” He repeated sternly.

Doctor Kilton reached for the white sheet covering the body and lifted it, folding it down over her chest, revealing her face.

“Doc.” The sheriff’s face paled.

“You had better call Alice, Darren.”

“How did she die?”

“Her throat was slit, Sir.”

This was the worst part of the job: calling in the parents to ID the body of their child. Only, this time it was far worse than he could ever imagine. This time, it was his niece lying on the concrete slab in the morgue, waiting for her mother and step-father to come and ID her. This time, it was his sister losing her child.

Sheriff Lyle stood outside the doors of the morgue with his hands on his hips, taking in deep breaths. No training in the world could have prepared him for the moment he saw his sister stumble out of her pick-up truck as it sped into the parking lot. Nothing could prepare him for the look of pure terror on her face when her eyes met his.

“Is it her, Darren? Is that my baby in there?” She asked, her legs barely holding her up.

“You have to come in and ID her, Alice.”

“Is that really necessary, Darren? You know Lilly’s face. Can’t you just tell us?” Eric, Alice’s husband asked, stopping at her side to hold her up on her feet.

“We have protocols that I can’t break, Eric. I’m sorry.” He shook his head. A part of him ached for her, but he knew that it would be better for everyone if she identified the Jane Doe as Lilly.

“Darren, c’mon-”

“I want to see her now.” Alice whimpered.

“I’ll bring you in.” Sheriff Lyle pushed open one of the doors, holding it for Alice to walk through. “Last door on your right.”

He followed her down the hallway to the last door. She paused, closing her eyes and centering herself as her chin trembled. She swallowed hard, her eyes welling up with tears. Her nails dug into the palms of her hand as she stared at the door.

“Take your time. We can go in whenever you’re ready, Alice.” Sheriff Lyle said.

She nodded her head and stepped forward. Lyle pushed the door open and walked her into the morgue viewing room.

“Just up by that window.” He pointed to the giant window on the far side of the room. On the other side, Doctor Kilton stood at one of the autopsy tables next to a body underneath a white sheet.

“Oh my god.” Alice brought her hands to her mouth. “Is that her?” Her knees buckled beneath her, and Lyle reached down to grab her before she fell to the floor.

“C’mon, Alice. We’re almost there.”

“I can’t do this.”

“We need to know, Alice.”

She sucked in a sharp breath, nodding to herself.



They walked slowly to the window and stopped. Dr. Kilton looked to Sheriff Lyle for invitation, placing his hands on the end of the sheet.

“Are you ready?” Lyle asked.

She nodded weakly.

Lyle gave Dr. Kilton a nod, and he lifted the sheet, folding it across her chest.

Alice let out a gut-wrenching sob and collapsed to the floor, her hands covering her mouth. “My baby!” She cried. “Oh my baby. My baby. What did they do to you?” She leaned back against the wall, tucking her knees to her chest. “My baby.” She whimpered.

Sheriff Lyle sat at his desk, covering his face with his hands as he breathed shakily. He clenched his jaw, running his hands down his face. He leaned back in his chair and stared at the computer monitor, where Lilly’s case file was pulled up, mocking him, taunting him.

*How did he have no leads in his niece’s murder? How could he let this happen to her? He was supposed to protect her? What kind of sheriff couldn’t even protect his own niece?*

“Sheriff.” There was a knock on his office door.

“Yes, Vought.”

“I just wanted you to know that Wallace Langley is here. Officer Riggs caught him walking back into the crime scene.”

“Wallace Langley?” Sheriff banged his hands on his desk. “I told him to stay put in his damn house.”

“I don’t know, Sir. Something about his sandwalkers or runners or something?”

The sheriff paused and looked back at the computer monitor. *Skinwalkers.*

“Put him in interrogation one, please.”

“Interrogation, sir?”

“Interrogation one. Right now.”

Sheriff Lyle stood on the other side of the one way mirror looking into the interrogation room. Wallace Langley sat at the table, chewing at the beds of his fingernails, looking around the room as he bounced his right leg.

Sheriff Lyle took a deep breath, tucking Lilly’s file under his arm before opening the door into the interrogation room.

“Sheriff Lyle, they put me in a box.” Wallace said, sitting up straight as Lyle entered the room. “What is going on?”

“Do you remember what you told me earlier, Wallace?”

“Yes, Sir. I said I would stay away from the crime scene.”

“And what did you do, Wallace?”

He looked down, puckering his lips to the side. “I went to the crime scene, Sir.”

“Why would you do that, Wallace?”

He shrugged, bringing his hands into his lap. “I just wanted to see if I could find evidence that they were there, Sir.”

“Who, Wallace? The skinwalkers?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“And did you find anything?”

“No, Sir. Officer Riggs brought me back here before I could look.”

“Okay, Wallace. Can I ask you something else?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You can’t lie to me, Wallace. Alright? Good people don’t tell lies.”

“Good people don’t tell lies, Sir.” He repeated, his eyes wide.

“You remember that you told me skinwalkers like to slit people’s throats, Wallace?”

Sheriff asked, pulling out his chair. Wallace nodded. Lyle sat down across from him and set the file on the table between them. “Now, Wallace?”

“Mm, yes, sir.” He nodded.

“How did you know her throat was slit?” He opened the file and slid the photo across the table to him.

“Sir?”

“Before we even got the body out of the water, you said skinwalkers slit people’s throats. How did you know her throat was slit, Wallace?”

Wallace sucked in and held his breath, staring at his lap. He shook his head, closing his eyes tightly. He brought his hands up and started to smack the sides of his head. “No.” He mumbled. “No. No. No.”

“Wallace.”

“She didn’t believe me, Sir.” He kept hitting his head.

“Didn’t believe what?”

“Lilly said I was a baby.” He stopped hitting his head and dropped his hands to the table. He shook his head. “I’m not a baby.”

“No, you’re not. You’re very smart. You knew they were here, but she didn’t believe you, did she?” Sheriff asked, sliding the photo closer to Wallace. “She laughed at you, didn’t she?”

“She laughed at me. She said I was too old for stories.” He looked up and met the Sheriff’s gaze. “They’re not stories. They’re real.”

“Of course they are, Wallace.”

“She laughed at me. She said I was a loser.” He pointed at her photo. “She told me that everyone thought I was a joke.” He looked up, tears brimming in his eyes. “Am I a joke?”

“No, Wallace. You’re not a joke.”

“I told her to stop laughing at me, but she wouldn’t.” His lip trembled. “I begged for her to stop.”

“What did you do?”

“I took my knife from my pocket and told her to stop. She kept laughing. I wasn’t gonna hurt her, I swear. She just kept laughing at me. And I swung it at her. Hard. And she stopped.”

He leaned back in his chair and looked at Sheriff Lyle.

“I just wanted her to stop laughing.”

“What happened to Lilly?”

“She fell. There was blood everywhere. I didn’t know what to do.” He placed his hands on his head and tucked into his body. “So I pushed her over the edge.”

“You killed her.”

“I didn’t mean to, Sheriff. I swear it was an accident.”

“Wallace.”

“I just wanted her to believe me.” He looked up. “I went back. I called you.”

“I know, Wallace. I know.”