

## BIOLOGICAL 68

Chapter 68: Martin Hais

Mary and Lucy, mothers of Conal and Logan, moved doggedly down the bustling streets. It had been many days since their sons disappeared, but their resolve to uncover the truth, and maybe save them, remained unshaken.

Despite the police's grim conclusions, the pair refused to accept them. Their maternal instincts rebelled against the idea of their sons falling victim to street violence, and they were not ready to concede to such a tragic fate.

Since they couldn't accept this outcome and that their son's killers would get away with it, they took matters into their own hands. They were going to the private investigator Mary talked about, hoping he could shed light on their son's disappearance.

While navigating through the eastern district, an area unfamiliar to them, they found themselves in a less savory part of town. The streets were teeming with the downtrodden—beggars and addicts lingered in every corner, casting a pall over the neighborhood. The air was heavy with the tension of survival, an atmosphere alien to the two women.

As they progressed, they noticed an unusually high police presence, almost as if the area was under a state of informal martial law. This observation heightened their anxiety, but fear of attracting unwanted attention kept them silent.

Lucy, her frustration mounting, broke the silence. "Where the hell is this detective's office?" she asked, her voice edged with impatience.

"Just a bit further, don't worry," Mary said, trying to reassure her, though uncertainty colored her tone.

They pressed on, weaving through the crowd until they arrived at a secluded alleyway. The narrow passage was flanked by buildings that seemed to loom over them, their walls devoid of windows save for small openings high above around the third floor.

Nervousness gripped them as they ventured deeper into the alley. It was eerily silent compared to the bustling streets they had left behind.

Amid this desolation stood a solitary door, its black metal surface adorned with graffiti. The artwork was a chaotic mix of symbols, many of which hinted at occult practices, though their meanings were lost on Mary and Lucy.

The two women exchanged a glance, a silent agreement passing between them. Despite the foreboding setting, they knew they had to proceed.

The possibility of finding answers about their sons' fate outweighed their growing unease. With a shared sense of purpose, they stepped towards the mysterious door, ready to face whatever awaited them beyond its graffitied surface. However, Lucy was skeptical.

Lucy's eyes widened as they approached the graffiti-covered door, her voice tinged with uncertainty. "Are we sure this is the right place?" she asked, her gaze scanning the ominous symbols.

Mary, standing a step ahead, nodded with a determined yet anxious expression. "This has to be it," she said, though her voice wavered.

Lucy fidgeted, her hands wringing together. "And now what?"

"We go in," Mary said. She took a deep breath, steeling herself, and pushed forward toward the entrance. Her stride was cautious.

While glancing back at Lucy, Mary offered a reassuring smile, though it did little to mask her own apprehension. "It's just stairs," she said, trying to sound more confident than she felt.

Ascending the steps, the two women reached a landing where a black wooden door stood. A modest sign that had "Martin Hais, Private Investigator," written on it.

Lucy's confusion was obvious as she looked at the door. "Who kind of Private Investigator would have their office in such a place?" she mused aloud, her brow furrowing in puzzlement.

Mary could only offer a helpless shrug in response, equally baffled. With a deep inhale, she knocked on the door; the sound echoing in the silent hallway.

Moments passed with no answer, amplifying their anxiety. Lucy glanced around the corridor, her discomfort growing. "You said he's always here, right?"

Mary, feeling the irate tone of the other woman, went on the defensive. "That's what I was told!" Her voice carried a mix of frustration and hopelessness.

Mary tried again. She knocked on the door one last time, but as she did so, the entrance suddenly opened, revealing a man dressed in dark clothing, wearing sunglasses inside, with short brown hair and a mustache; he was probably somewhere in his sixties.

The man's voice was gruff, tinged with annoyance. "Can't you at least give me the time to get dressed?" he said, grumbling, his posture slouching.

Lucy, taken aback by his unkempt appearance and brusque manner, bit her lip to hold back her immediate reaction. She glanced at Mary, her eyes wide with apprehension, silently communicating her unease.

"There is no need to worry," Hais said, having noticed the woman's subtle facial expressions.

"I'm sorry," Lucy said, her voice faltering. "We need your help..." Her gaze darting around the room behind the man, hesitant to step inside.

The man retreated into the chaos of his office, leaving the door open for the women. "Come in." He sounded more resigned than welcoming.

As Mary and Lucy stepped inside, they were assaulted by the overpowering scent of vomit. The stench seemed to emanate from around the cluttered desk, making their stomachs churn.

The walls were also stained by something, but they could not figure out what it was. Alcohol bottles, overflowing ashtrays, and crumpled newspapers formed a disordered mosaic on the floor. Leftover pizza slices, now a breeding ground for mold, adorned the couches like grotesque decorations.

"You can sit down," Martin offered nonchalantly, seemingly oblivious to the state of his surroundings. However, he noticed their disgust. He simply didn't care.

Mary and Lucy exchanged a glance, their expressions a blend of repulsion and resolve. "We'll stand, thank you," Mary responded. "Look, we came here because we want to hire you..."

Martin raised an eyebrow, his interest piqued despite his haggard appearance. "What's the issue?" he asked, his tone shifting to one of professional curiosity, albeit still tinged with the weariness of a man who had seen too much of the world's darker side.

The two women, their faces etched with worry and resolve, spoke in unison, their voices quivering slightly. "Our sons went missing... We asked for the police's assistance, but they weren't helpful and gave up soon."

Martin scoffed, his lips curling into a cynical smirk. "Ah, the police! That bunch of morons wouldn't know a clue if it bit them..." he said, his tone dripping with contempt.

Mary, undeterred by his brashness, leaned in. "And you're different?" she asked, her eyebrows raised in skepticism.

Martin's chest puffed out a little, a glint of pride in his eyes behind the dark shades. "I could track a flea across a city if I had to." His confidence was unshaken despite the surrounding disarray. He could talk confidently, as his skills were the real deal.

He slightly turned to his left, as if he was thinking. The two women were puzzled, that until he said something else. "Damn, I could even tell you who put the beer on the store shelf when it was taken out from its packaging..." Martin then said.

Lucy, her arms crossed, gave a small nod. "You have confidence in your skills." Her eyes flickered, as there was a hint of hope in them.

"I've been in this line of work for nearly thirty-five years," Martin said, his stance embodying the experience he claimed.

Mary's voice grew steadier. "So, the police couldn't help us, but you can?"

Martin's expression hardened, his gaze meeting theirs with a newfound intensity. "I'm not like them." His gaze was firmly locked on the woman's eyes.

"And why is that?" Lucy asked, her curiosity piqued, her eyes searching his face for sincerity amidst the chaos of his office.

"Ma'am," Martin said with a tone of certainty, "it's an open secret that the police force is riddled with corruption. I've even gathered substantial evidence to back this up. I just can't share it."

The two women exchanged knowing glances, their suspicions affirmed. In a city patrolled so densely by law enforcement, it was inconceivable that none had witnessed anything related to their sons' disappearances.

They had long suspected that whoever was responsible for the harm that befell their sons had strong ties to the police. Initially, they thought it to be the work of a gang, but now doubt crept into their minds.

The two women could not understand why they rooted out the possibility that another student, or more than one, killed their sons. It made no sense! Was it possible they knew what happened to them but that they covered the real culprit?

If so, was the school related? Was the principal hiding something? The two women didn't want to leave things as they were.

Mary and Lucy, both visibly distressed yet determined, posed their question hesitantly. "Okay, Okay. Let's say we believe you. Would you be able to find out what happened to our sons?"

Martin leaned back in his chair, scratching his chin. "I can't tell much if I don't have at least a general overview of what happened. I'll need more than just speculation. Details, anything you know could be crucial."

The women recounted everything - the police reports, their sons' characteristics, and the events leading up to their disappearance. As they spoke, Martin's expression shifted from skeptical to pensive, his eyes narrowing in concentration.

Martin's voice interrupted them and took on a serious tone. "Are you suggesting a student might be responsible? While it's a distressing thought, it's also possible they fell prey to organ traffickers. This is not a rare occurrence here in New Alexandria."

"It could be, but we need to be sure that it wasn't a student!" Lucy said, her voice tinged with desperation. "If it has been done by a gang, then fine, we can't do anything about it, but if it was a student or multiple of them, then we can at least bring them to justice!"

"HAHAHAHAHAH!" Martin erupted into raucous laughter, a sound that grated on the women's nerves. "Justice? In Frant, especially New Alexandria? That's a good joke!" His laughter echoed off the dingy walls, filling the room with cynicism.

Mary, struggling to ignore the room's foul odor, interjected, "Just help us, please."

Martin, still chuckling, wiped a tear from his eye. "Alright, I'll take your case. But let me warn you, my services don't come cheap."