

No Dominion

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A lot of people think homicide investigation is easy these days, now that you can just interview the victims.

Generally, they're right, at least in the industrialized world, and increasingly elsewhere as death prevention gets more affordable. The majority of homicides anymore are crimes of passion or stupidity, committed by people who didn't stop to think about emergency cerebral oxygen supplies and secondary circulation pumps. Typically you just have to wait until the victim wakes up and ask who killed them.

(I know you're wondering, why not call it attempted homicide, then? Some people do. I don't. I've died myself, and let me tell you, reversible or not, there's nothing impermanent about it.)

But those aren't the cases I get called in for. The local cops can handle those. For a victim like Isabelle Warner, a specialist has to be summoned. Which is part of what makes it difficult right there. Homicide used to be so common that every city had experts within minutes of the scene. That's still true in places where death prevention is a luxury of the rich, or where governments still think keeping the death rate up is better population control than limiting the birth rate (as if that ever worked before). In a place like Onogoroshima, though, a killer's trail can have hours to cool before an expert can arrive.

Of course they sent me the full sensory record of the crime scene, which I studied in depth on the flight in from Brisbane. "Crime scene" was a misnomer, though, since the site of the murder hadn't been identified. This killer had been smart — an exception to the rule. Onogoroshima was an arcology complex in the Philippine Sea, one of many such artificial islands springing up around the world these days — compact, self-sustaining greenhouse ecosystems that accommodated tens of millions apiece without placing heavy demands on the Earth's biosphere. Onogoroshima itself was a huge artificial atoll with a freshwater lake in the center. Enclosed and protected from ocean winds, the lake had slow and turbulent currents that resisted prediction. So Isabelle could've been dumped from just about anywhere on the eastern shore and drifted an unknown distance and direction before she was discovered by an early-morning boater.

I viewed the scene as the local cops had experienced it, sharing everything they'd seen, heard, felt, and smelled. Isabelle Warner was a tall, attractive woman with strawberry blond hair, no less than thirty-five years old. Her file said sixty-five, born 1993. Her killer had stripped her naked and wrapped her in a white sheet before setting her afloat. There were no obvious signs of sexual assault, or of any assault aside from a diffuse burn mark on the back of the neck. That was odd. Generally, if you wanted to kill someone these days, you had to destroy the brain past any possibility of regeneration and eliminate any backup memory and cognitive implants as well. So smart, premeditated murder tended to be a messy business. To see an assault this subtle was unusual for me. It looked like the work of a surgical laser tuned to focus underneath

the skin. The killer had probably targeted her backup oxygen supply and memory chips as well as her brainstem, but hadn't destroyed the gross structure of the brain. It was a risk for a killer; natural anoxic damage could be repaired if caught within six to eight hours, and Isabelle was found within the margin. Memory, skills, and identity would be lost, but the survivor could develop a new personality. But maybe that was enough for this killer. Maybe Isabelle had seen something or known something she shouldn't have. Some killers didn't mind if their victims survived, so long as their memories didn't.

Still, with the murder scene unidentified and the evidence washed away by the lake, I'd have my work cut out for me. If I didn't piece this together quickly, the killer could disappear, adopt a new identity (in the more conventional sense), and be free and clear to kill again – maybe permanently this time.

But I wouldn't let that happen. I had enough death on my conscience already.

I was met at the airport by a nervous, hopeful man I immediately pegged as the lead investigator. "Detective Chief Inspector Craig?" he asked. "Tamara Craig?"

"That's right."

"Hi. Welcome. Assistant Inspector Istfan Majid. Call me Steve."

I shook his hand. "Inspector." He blinked, but didn't react beyond that. He seemed a pleasant enough man, a bit heavysset but fit, probably fortyish. Warm brown skin, a few shades lighter than my own. No wedding ring, but he probably had little trouble finding dates. Still, I wasn't here to socialize.

Majid offered to take my minimal luggage – a classic gentleman. I indulged him; I didn't want anything slowing me down. He offered to show me to my hotel, but I asked to go straight to the victim.

"We're in luck," Majid told me in the pedicab as we rode into the arcology proper. "The perp underestimated how well-equipped Ms. Warner was. Made sure to fry all her cerebral implants, but missed what was in her blood."

My brows lifted. "Genetic memory?"

Majid nodded. "She's really on the cutting edge."

Nearly a century ago, an experiment with flatworms seemed to show that memory was stored in RNA and could be transferred from one organism to another. But the experiment had been an unrepeatable fluke – pardon the pun – and later research showed that memory worked in a completely different way, unfortunately for the science fiction writers who'd embraced memory RNA as a plot device. But decades later, nanotechnologists had begun researching the possibilities of engineered DNA as a data storage medium, and in time they made science fiction into reality (yet again). Now it was possible, with the help of transcriptor biochips, to have your memories redundantly recorded in DNA packets that traveled throughout your

bloodstream, an extra backup in case something happened to both your brain and your primary backup chips. But it was barely out of prototype stage, only recently approved for human use and still quite costly. Had Warner had reason to take extra precautions against death?

“So she’ll recover her full memory?”

“Most of it, probably,” Majid said. “Though it’ll take time to retrain the nerve pathways, assimilate a whole lifetime all over again. It could be weeks, maybe a month or two before she’s lucid enough to tell us who killed her. If she even remembers. The DNA encoding isn’t instantaneous, apparently.”

I nodded. She wouldn’t remember the murder itself, which would be a mercy for her, but an inconvenience for us. But hopefully her memories could point us to the most likely suspect. “Any way of reading the memory traces from her bloodstream?”

He shook his head. “No more than with any other kind of backup memory. Otherwise people could steal each other’s memories just by punching them in the nose.”

“Right. Good point.” Personal memory encoding was too subjective – not discrete data files, but a web of associations unique to each brain. The engrams would only make sense to her own brain once it reassimilated them and fit the pieces back together in the right pattern. Human memory and personality weren’t something you could copy and transfer like software files; that was one sci-fi conceit that remained a fantasy. Survival of the self still depended on survival of the brain; technology could supplement and protect it, but never replace it. And so humans remained mortal, and murder remained a crime.

I knew I should look into getting a genetic memory upgrade myself; given my specialty, I could justify the expense. But I hadn’t gotten around to it yet. There were some painful memories I wouldn’t mind losing.

But then, those were the very memories I could least afford to forget.



Isabelle Warner was slowly coming back from the dead. She was on full life support, but her blood was flowing again and she looked less like a corpse. The doctors were taking care to restore oxygen to her tissues gradually to minimize ischemic damage. That could be repaired, but there was no point in doing more damage than necessary.

Takeshi Ozaki, the grey-haired medical examiner, grunted as he, Majid, and I looked her over. “Not much to see here,” he said. “So busy saving a life they don’t bother to preserve any evidence.”

I gave him a sour look. “Your job would be easier if they just plain died.”

“Damn straight.”

"So what *can* you tell me?"

He looked to Majid. "Cause of death was what you thought, Steve. Laser probe to the base of the skull. Someone didn't want to make a mess."

"But there were burns on the skin," I said. "We're not talking about an act of surgical precision."

"No. Someone trying to be surgical, but failing. There's collateral damage to the surrounding tissues."

"Their hands shook?" Majid asked.

"Maybe. But most of the collateral damage preceded the targeted destruction. I'd call it hesitation marks. He hasn't killed before, not this way at least. Some of it came during, though, so yeah, there was some shakiness."

"Emotion," I said. "The killer cared for her. Didn't want to damage her beauty. In their own way, they cherished her. Wanted to honor her in death. Hence the ritual quality. The killer didn't just wrap her in plastic and dump her, but swathed her in a pure white sheet and set her afloat on the lake."

"Just one problem there, DCI Craig," Ozaki said. "Nobody's had sex with her, consensual or otherwise, for at least two weeks."

"Maybe we're not dealing with a 'he'?" Majid suggested.

"Lesbian sex leaves traces too," Ozaki told him.

I looked over her body. "No signs of a struggle?"

"Nope."

"Any drugs or foreign nanites in her system?" Ozaki shook his head. "Then she knew her attacker. Let them in, let them get close."

"Let them take her clothes off," Majid added.

I threw him a look. "If you were the killer, and she was willing to get naked for you, wouldn't you wait until after you rooted her?"

"Oh. Damn, yeah. So first he kills her, then he strips her." He frowned. "But not to rape her. Just to . . . why? To humiliate her?"

"Then why wrap her in a sheet? Why remove her clothes yet try to preserve her modesty?" In an old mystery story, it might have been done to make her harder to identify. But now we had genetic testing, biometrics, phones in our heads, traceable biochips and nanofibers throughout

our bodies . . . it just didn't add up. I shook my head. "Maybe it's part of the ritual. We'll find out when we get the killer."

"One more thing," Ozaki said. "There's evidence that she may have died once before."

"Violently?" I asked.

"Natural causes," he said, his tone apologetic. "Signs of a brain aneurysm, almost completely healed."

"How long ago?"

He shrugged. "No way to be sure without an autopsy. Anywhere from three to six years ago. There's nothing about it in her medical records. But they're pretty sparse. Nothing from before she came here four years ago."

"And have you considered checking elsewhere?"

"We've been trying," Majid told me. "Nothing's turned up yet."

I didn't like it. There could be any number of reasons for that, from a dark, hidden past to sloppy data-handling practices. I hoped the reason for her murder could be found closer at hand.



The only physical evidence we had besides Isabelle herself was the sheet she'd been wrapped in. It was a dead end. The outside had been washed clean by the lake, and the inside bore no fingerprints and no DNA besides Isabelle's. The killer had worn gloves and possibly even a surgical mask. The sheet itself was a standard type, synthesized from a fabricator of the sort found in most of the hotels and stores in the arcology complex. We couldn't match it to the specific fabricator unless we knew which one out of thousands to test.

There was no way to track her movements either. She'd put her neurophone on private mode several weeks ago, making its location untraceable. And Onogoroshima didn't have video surveillance in most places; it was redundant since most people had cameras in their clothes or eyeballs, and not in great demand since there was little violent crime here. Any resident might have video of Isabelle with her killer, but unless we could narrow down just where and when the murder took place, we'd have to subpoena and search the private videos of over twenty million people. Even if we could narrow the number, no judge would consider such a subpoena unless the victim died permanently.

Isabelle lived and worked on the local university campus, a bioengineer working on a project to modify methanotrophic bacteria and integrate them safely into the ecosystem. "Methane's twenty times more potent a greenhouse gas than cee-oh-two," explained Rosa Manzano, a cute, diminutive Filipina who was Isabelle's colleague and roommate, as she led us toward their apartment. "So the more of it we can scrub out of the air, the more carbon-producing humans

the planet can safely support.”

“Isn’t that just a stopgap, though?” Majid said.

“There’s no magic formula for the atmosphere,” Manzano said with a flip of her short brown hair. Nearly everything about her was what they used to call “perky,” though her perk was subdued under the circumstances. “It evolves like everything else. We can’t go back to the way things used to be, even if we killed off most of humanity – which, well, isn’t so easy anymore. Thank God,” she added, crossing herself. I looked away uneasily. “So we need to find a new equilibrium, one that works for humanity *and* the Earth. It’s about stability, not nostalgia.”

“Is this research critical enough to require advanced memory security?” I asked. “Such as a genetic memory backup?”

Manzano frowned. “It’s important, sure, and Isabelle’s a valuable part of the team. But there are people working on this all over the planet. It’s not like she had some unique knowledge worth killing for or something. I mean, I knew she’d gotten the upgrade, and she convinced her insurance to cover part of it because of her work, but it’s not a requirement.”

The researchers’ apartment didn’t reveal much about Isabelle. It wasn’t Spartan; on the contrary, it was cluttered with all sorts of trendy art, gadgets, and clothes, all the latest things. But Isabelle’s half of the apartment contained nothing *but* the latest things. There was no evidence of a life nearly seven decades old, no family photos, no childhood toys or heirlooms, nothing.

“Yeah, that’s Isabelle for you,” Manzano said when I pointed this out. “She’s always looking forward to what’s next, what’s new. Always looking to the future. Me too. It’s why we’re in this job. We’ve got a long future ahead of us, so we’d better make it a good one, right? But Isabelle’s even more . . .” She frowned. “Is? Was? Will she be the same person after this?”

“No,” I said. “You’re never the same.”

At Manzano’s worried look, Majid threw me an irritated glance and told her, “Of course it’s a traumatic event, and it will take time for her to heal. But she should recover her memory and her familiar personality almost completely. It helps having friends and familiar surroundings to reinforce the memory pathways.”

“Old memories would help too,” I said. “Does she keep anything in a storage facility? Possessions that aren’t this recent?”

Manzano shrugged. “She didn’t bring anything with her when she came here. And she generally just recycles her old stuff when she gets tired of it. If it’s not new, she’s not interested.”

“People who look to the future are generally running from something in their past,” I said. “Did she ever talk about her life before you knew her?”

“Never,” Manzano said after a moment’s thought. “Whenever I brought it up, she changed the subject back to me.” Her cheeks colored adorably. “It’s easy to get me to talk. I kind of monopolize our conversations, and she lets me.”

“What about her present?” Majid asked. “Does she talk about her social life? Friends, coworkers, lovers?”

“Oh, I know pretty much all of them. We travel in the same circles.”

The list of names Manzano proceeded to give us wasn’t very long. Lack of serious commitments at Isabelle’s age wasn’t surprising in an arcology dweller. Universal death prevention was one of the incentives that drew people to places like this, easing the population burden elsewhere; but the tradeoff was a stricter-than-usual set of limits on childbirth. So a lot of the people who chose to emigrate here were career singles. Isabelle was a wallflower next to her roommate, though. They both attracted male attention about equally (female too; with childbirth out of the equation, arcology dwellers tended to be flexible about preference), but Isabelle was willing to defer to Rosa most of the time. While Isabelle wasn’t chaste, neither was it surprising to Manzano that she hadn’t had sex in weeks. “Well, except virtually,” she added. “She’s a lot more active there.” Most people were, so that didn’t strike me as immediately significant.

“And how about the two of you?” Majid asked. “Have you ever been . . . involved?”

She gave a nervous giggle. “Just casually, a few times. But only virtually!” she insisted. “As a game, you know. I mean, to see each other’s real faces while we did it — that would be too weird.”

“For you, or for her?”

“Both of us. We’re friends! Coworkers! We’d be too busy giggling in embarrassment to get anything done.” She shrugged. “Look, it wasn’t anything serious. Even in virt, we mostly just giggled a lot and messed around. You can probably find the sessions in my database, I never bothered to delete them.” She smiled at Majid. “Feel free to watch.”

Majid blushed. I thanked her and led Majid out the door before he embarrassed himself any further. “What were you going for?” I asked. “That maybe she had an unrequited crush on Isabelle?”

“Just exploring all the possibilities. You said yourself, the killer cherishes her beauty. And it sounds like Rosa is the closest person to Isabelle.”

Police-manual boilerplate: the ones closest to the victim are the most likely suspects. In my job, I run into so many detectives who’ve never dealt with homicide before and have to wing it based on half-forgotten courses and old cop shows. Well, I guess it’s better than the alternative. “Majid, she’s tiny. She couldn’t carry Isabelle across the room, let alone to the lake.”

“She could’ve had help.”

“She didn’t show a trace of guilt or defensiveness. No fear of being caught. Save your energy for when we find a more likely suspect.”

He conceded the point. We walked in silence for a while, and I concentrated on running Manzano’s list of names through the local databases I’d downloaded into my neurophone. Nothing jumped out, so I began running them against Isabelle’s computer records. Then I noticed Majid studying me. “What?” I asked, minimizing the text window on my retina with a thought.

“People don’t only look to the future because they’re running from the past. Sometimes it’s just because the future is worth looking forward to.”

“Is that what you think?”

“Tamara — DCI Craig — look at what we’re doing. Just thirty years ago, even twenty, that woman back there would’ve been in grief, devastated because she’d never see her friend again. Now, death is just a temporary setback. So yeah, I can understand looking forward to what comes next.”

“People still die, Majid. People who don’t come back. That’s the reason for what we’re doing. Remember that.”

“I do,” he said. “I remember that we have a chance to prevent it, not just punish it. If you ask me, that makes our job even more important.”

“It’s just as important either way. Murderers need to be punished.” I turned away and went back to the name search.

But his gaze stayed on me. “Tell me, DCI Craig. What are *you* running from?”

Surely he didn’t expect an answer. It was hard enough to relive (*the blood, the flames, Jason screaming*) without talking about it.

Fortunately, I didn’t have to dwell on it for long, since the search turned up a hit. “Interesting.”

“What?”

“Russell Takizawa. Manzano called him a passing acquaintance, but his username shows up on the same virt sex site Isabelle used, and at a lot of the same times she was online. They must’ve been virt sex partners pretty regularly.”

Majid nodded. “Manzano said he dated Isabelle two or three times, only got to first base, but then she broke it off for no apparent reason.”

“It seems he sent her a lot of calls and mails that she didn’t answer.” I sorted through the files in my field of view. “She had him spam-blocked . . . even set up a warning cordon.” That was a do-it-yourself restraining order; if his neurophone came within fifty meters of hers, she would

be notified and he'd get an automatic mail warning that the police would be called if he didn't leave the proscribed zone. That explained the privacy block on her locator signal. "What do you want to bet it wasn't her idea to meet in person?"

"He liked her in virt, she turned down his invitations, so he cracked her personal data and tracked her down, pretended it was their first meeting."

"But then he let something slip that clued her in that he was stalking her, and she couldn't get away from him fast enough."

"But he could shut down his locator signal too. Get close without her knowing."

I called up a map. "I'm getting a location for him now."

"If that's not a fake signal," Majid said.

"We'll soon find out."

We broke into a run. Jason's screams followed behind me, accusing me. But Majid was wrong. I wasn't running away from them. They were what drove me to hunt murderers so relentlessly.

Because I was a murderer too.



Russell Takizawa was exactly where his locator said he was — until he spotted us. Then he ran. His locator signal shut off a moment later, but we'd called in backup and already had him surrounded. We tracked him down the old-fashioned way, with eyeballs and feet.

"Look, I didn't do anything to her!" Takizawa insisted later in the police station's interview room. "How could I? I couldn't even get near her."

"You could cut off your locator signal easily enough," I told him.

"So I could do what, sneak up on her? Then I'd just scare her off even worse. I didn't want that."

"And what did you do to scare her off before?" Majid asked.

"Nothing! I don't know! All I did was ask a few questions and she just went nuts on me. I was just trying to patch things up, not hurt her."

"Then why did you run from us?"

"Are you kidding? The way she kept threatening to sic the cops on me? As soon as I heard she was dead, I figured she'd try to pin it on me the minute she woke up."

“So what did she have against you, exactly?” I asked. “What kind of questions did you ask her?”

Takizawa looked away, his nervousness belying his words. “The usual. Just the questions you ask anyone when you’re trying to get to know them. Where are you from, where’d you go to school, what were your folks like. She didn’t like to answer those.”

“Yeah, we got that. But you kept prying, didn’t you? You don’t like to leave well enough alone. You don’t let privacy keep you from finding things out about a woman.”

He sank in his chair. “Okay. I admit it. I know you’re not supposed to track down your virt sex partners if they don’t invite you. But it’s not a crime. And we really hit it off in there. We made a connection. It was more than just sex. The way she talked about the future . . . it was inspiring. I got the feeling she was part of something important, part of making the world better. She wouldn’t say what exactly, but there was just this air about her that she was doing something special. I wanted to be connected to that. To her. But she kept saying no.”

“So you ignored her wishes,” Majid said, “hacked her private info, and approached her under false pretenses.”

“Yeah, I didn’t tell her we’d met before. I didn’t want to scare her off. I was going to tell her eventually, once we’d . . .”

“Made virtual into reality?”

Takizawa glared at Majid. “Not like that. Once we’d gotten close enough that she’d understand I wasn’t a creep or something — that I was inspired by what she did, who she was, and wanted to share it with her.”

“But something tipped her off before you were ready,” I said. “Did your ‘questions’ get a little too pushy?”

He sighed. “Maybe. Okay, maybe I don’t like not having answers. I’m a Googler. So’s half the human race. I wanted to know more about her, to get close to her, but she wouldn’t open up. So I searched. I didn’t get any hits on her name more than four years old, so I put her picture online, looked for matches. I didn’t get anything definite. But then a guy mailed me. He wanted to know about Isabelle. Said he was an old friend looking to get back in touch. Wanted to know where to reach her.”

“Did you tell him?”

“Sure. Seemed harmless enough. Next time I saw Isabelle, I mentioned the guy, asked how it went. She went ballistic on me! Accused me of invading her privacy, stalking her, all sorts of things. I tried to explain, but it just freaked her out worse. She put that cordon on me and stopped answering my mails. I haven’t seen her since.” He blinked rapidly several times. “And when I heard what happened to her, I couldn’t even go see her. Hell, I don’t know if she’ll even remember me.”

"Maybe you'd like that," Majid said. "If she lost her memory of what you did to her and you could start all over again."

"God, no! We had something. A real spark, intangible, you know? Take away her memories, that changes who she is. She might as well be really dead then. And what about her work? That knowledge in her head, that's our future! I couldn't jeopardize that."

His expression hardened. "You want to find the guy who did this, find that old friend. His name's Charles Trendler. It was after I gave him her address that she freaked out." He winced. "Oh, God, maybe this is my fault. How could I have been so stupid?"

"We only have your word this Trendler even exists," Majid said. "You've already admitted you're capable of lying when it suits you."

"Hey, I have proof. The mail's still in my database. Just like I have proof I was nowhere near Isabelle that night." One of the first things he'd told us was to check his jacket's memory. The garment had recorded video and audio of his visit to a nightclub that evening.

"You're a pretty good hacker. You could've forged the video."

"Maybe. But I was in a public place. Find the other people there. They'll have vids too, and I'll be in them. They can't all be forgeries."

Takizawa's lawyer arrived then and made him shut up. As we left the interview room, Majid asked, "So what do you think?"

"I think he's a creep and at least a borderline stalker. Whether he's a killer . . . well, we have some alibi evidence to check out."

"I don't know," Majid said. "He sounded pretty . . . idealistic."

"Majid, this whole arcology is full of idealists. Easy enough to perfect the act."

Majid was quiet for a moment, fidgeting as we walked down the hall. "You know . . . just looking into someone's past doesn't make you a stalker. Sometimes it's out of concern."

I caught the subtext — he wasn't talking about Takizawa. I pulled him into an empty room. "What do you know?" I asked with heat in my voice.

"Don't take that betrayed tone, Craig. I saw the way you looked me over like a suspect when we met. Trying to figure me out. It's what we do. We're as nosy as Takizawa, we just do it for the law."

"What . . . do you . . . know?"

He sighed. "What's in the public record," he said in a gentle voice. "The car crash. You and your

son. You didn't have any kind of death prevention. The doctors were able to bring you back within an hour, but your boy was too far gone." Silence for several moments. "I'm sorry."

"It's not *your* fault."

He caught the emphasis on the pronoun. "It's not yours either, Tamara."

"The hell it wasn't! I was a stupid Luddite. Thought it was wrong to tamper with God's design, outlive our Biblical threescore and ten or some such bullshit. I don't even remember exactly." I didn't have a backup to reload once they regrew my brain, so a lot of who I was is gone forever. Good bloody riddance.

"A lot of people feel that way. You were entitled to make that choice."

"For me? Maybe. But for my son?" I took a deep, shaky breath. "I thought I was giving him a moral life, securing his place in the afterlife. But all I did was make sure that a six-year-old boy had no chance to live the life *he* was entitled to.

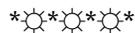
"Idealism's nothing admirable, Majid. If all you care about is an abstract ideal, that can make it easy to sacrifice real live people to it."

I hated the sympathy in Majid's eyes. "So you're the one murderer you can't bring to justice . . . since nobody blames you but yourself."

"This is justice. It's penance. I stop other killers."

"And punish yourself by isolating yourself from other people. How can you fight against death if you refuse to embrace life?"

I met his gaze coldly. "Because it takes one to know one. It's what makes me good at my job. And it's time we got back to it."



Takizawa's alibi was inconclusive. His video footage showed him at the nightclub, but hanging around in the dark areas in the rear while everyone else's eyes and cameras were focused on the strippers onstage. Checking the other patrons' data storage showed us a lot of medically enhanced flesh, but no faces or voices in the audience that could be unambiguously identified as Russell Takizawa.

Charles Trendler turned out to be a 73-year-old resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The most recent photo showed a man who actually looked his age, with gray hair, wrinkles, age spots, the works. He looked frail and weak, but did nothing to prevent his deterioration. Another Luddite. There was no record of him leaving Pittsburgh, and when we contacted him, the signal was routed through a North American server. He had no implants, just an old-fashioned handheld phone, and he asked to conduct the interview by texting, saying he was in a public place and preferred not to discuss such grisly matters aloud. It made for a slow interview. I THOUGHT THE

WOMAN IN THE PHOTO MIGHT BE MY WIFE SARAH, he told us. SHE DISAPPEARED FIVE YEARS AGO. I'VE BEEN SEARCHING EVER SINCE.

I asked if it had been Sarah. He said no, and I asked how he could be sure. I SPOKE TO THE LADY, he said. I REALIZED IT WASN'T HER. THE WAY SHE SPOKE, THOUGHT. AFTER DECADES TOGETHER, YOU JUST KNOW.

I asked Trendler if he'd mentioned Russell Takizawa to Isabelle Warner. He said he had explained how he'd learned of her through Takizawa, and that Isabelle had grown upset when he'd mentioned how long and how well Takizawa claimed to have known her. SHE CALLED HIM A STALKER. SAID HE'D INVADED HER PRIVACY, SPIED ON HER. DIDN'T BLAME ME, SHE SAID, BUT I APOLOGIZED ANYWAY AND LET HER GO. DIDN'T HEAR FROM HER AGAIN. A pause. SUCH A TRAGIC LOSS.

"Haven't you heard?" Majid sent, verbalizing it for my benefit. "She's expected to make a full recovery. Send."

HER BODY, MAYBE. NOT WHO SHE WAS.

Majid told him about the genetic memory. The pause was so long we thought we'd lost him. "Mr. Trendler?" I sent.

PARDON. OVERCOME WITH RELIEF.

Why would it affect him so strongly? "One more question," I sent. "About your photo. Do you object to longevity treatments? Send." Majid threw me a look.

A PERSONAL CHOICE, he said. I DON'T JUDGE OTHERS. I'M JUST NOT INTERESTED IN LIVING LONGER THAN NATURE INTENDED. I exhaled sharply at that.

After the call, I began a Web search on Sarah Trendler. "I have to admit, it's looking pretty bad for Takizawa," Majid told me. "Maybe you were right."

"I'm not so sure," I told him. "A lot of it doesn't add up. We know the killer had to be someone she trusted enough to let him get close. But she wouldn't let Takizawa anywhere near her."

"Maybe something changed," he said, playing devil's advocate. "He convinced her to patch things up. He does have a sincere way about him. Like you said, it could be an act."

"Speculation. And we still haven't explained why he'd strip her and not rape her. I think maybe we have it backward — stripping her wasn't about her body, it was about her clothes."

"The killer wanted to remove any recording devices, sure," Majid said. "But why strip off everything? Who keeps data storage in their panties?"

"You'd be surprised how much redundancy some people want. Maybe the killer didn't know where she kept her data, or in how many places. So he had to be thorough, take everything. But he couldn't stand to see her exposed, hence the sheet. That's not the act of a sexual predator."

Majid leaned forward. "Let's cut to the chase here, Craig. You were the one who liked Takizawa for this, but now you've suddenly changed your song. Don't tell me you suspect Trendler? What, just because he rejects longevity treatments? Because he reminds you of the Tamara Craig who refused death prevention for her son?"

"Don't question my objectivity, Majid. Or I'll bring up how you couldn't resist prying into Rosa Manzano's sexual dalliances with Isabelle."

"Hey! Now, that's — " He broke off, calming himself. "Okay. Let's not go there. But Trendler never came here."

"We communicated by text. We don't know how great the transmission lag was. It could've been routed to North America and back here."

"But why is Trendler a better suspect than Takizawa?" He pressed.

"I don't know that he is," I shot back. "But it really threw him to learn Isabelle would recover her memories. He claims he barely knew her — why be so 'overcome'?"

"Maybe he's just a compassionate guy."

"A man who doesn't believe in outliving his allotted time, and he's overjoyed that technology's brought someone back from her natural death?"

"You're saying Isabelle really is Sarah Trendler. That she disappeared, and now Charles tracked her down."

I showed him my search results. "Sarah Trendler, born 1989."

He studied the images. "It could be Isabelle. The hair is different, the nose . . ."

"Look beneath the surface." I called up her medical records. "She suffered a brain aneurysm five and a half years ago. The doctors brought her back, with partial memory loss. Her backup chips failed."

Majid's eyes widened. "That's a pretty good incentive to get genetic memory."

"Mm-hm. And she disappeared seven months later."

He frowned. "But wait. She trusted her killer. If she ran away from him, why let him get close when he found her again?"

"Maybe it wasn't him she ran away from. Or not everything about him." I sighed. "Here's a woman on the cutting edge of death prevention. She's pushing seventy and looks half that. She's determined not to go gentle into that good night. And here's Charles Trendler, a man just as determined to keep his appointment with the Reaper. If you were determined to live forever and had a husband just as determined to deteriorate and die, could you stand to stay with him

and watch it happen? Maybe it wasn't hate or fear that made her leave him. Maybe it was love." I saw Jason's face again, that beautiful, terrified face in that last moment. I blinked away tears. "Maybe she couldn't bear to live with witnessing the death of someone she loved."

Majid's hand came into my field of view, holding a tissue. He made no further comment or gesture as I dried my eyes. "And maybe he couldn't bear to see her live on without him," he finally said. "Let's see where Trendler really was that night."



It didn't take long to confirm that Trendler's texts had actually originated from here on Onogoroshima. Facial recognition at the airport soon found a match for his photo — two, in fact. Not only had he arrived here the day before Isabelle was attacked, but he had just bought a return ticket — right after speaking to us — and was waiting in the airport at that very moment. A single call to port security ensured he wouldn't be leaving.

He didn't try to deny it. He knew that, now we had the name of Sarah Trendler, we could subpoena her records to verify that Isabelle Warner had her DNA. He told us where he'd disposed of the surgical probe and Isabelle's clothing, and what fabricator he'd used to make the sheet and the gloves. He didn't boast, didn't take any pride in his accomplishment. He was a sad, broken man, unhappy at what he'd had to do. But he was more unhappy that he'd failed.

"Why did you kill her, Mr. Trendler?" I asked as Majid looked on.

It was several moments before he answered. "Sarah and I were married forty-two years ago," he said. "We saw ourselves growing old together, eventually dying together, maybe living on in some afterlife if we were lucky.

"But as time passed, as science kept coming up with new ways to keep people young, Sarah gave in to vanity. It didn't matter to me how young she looked, but it mattered to her. And once she could stay young-looking, she began thinking that maybe she didn't have to die at her allotted time. She was tempted by every new breakthrough, every kind of brain protection and regenerative therapy and backup memory.

"But I argued against it. It wasn't natural. Look what technology has done to the Earth. The more we fight against death, against the natural cycle, the more we become a cancer overrunning the planet. We have to build whole new land masses just to hold all the people, now that they refuse to let go and die. It's selfish, it's irresponsible. I refused to be a part of it."

Trendler lowered his head, weeping now. "Then . . . she died. It was so sudden. I was devastated. But . . . it was worse when the doctors revived her. I asked them not to, but they told me she had a resuscitation request on file. She'd never told me.

"The . . . woman who came back . . . it wasn't my Sarah. She'd changed, lost too much. She was some kind of technological zombie. She claimed she still loved me, but I wanted nothing to do with her. So she left."

"She did more than leave," Majid said. "She went to a lot of trouble to disappear completely. Did she have a reason to hide from you?"

"It wasn't like that," the frail old man insisted. "What I did wasn't an act of hate. It was an act of mercy."

"You'll need to explain that," I told him.

"I am dying, Ms. Craig. I suppose that's a sentence you don't often hear in these parts. I have terminal cancer and I'll stop being a burden on the Earth in a few more months." He paused to breathe. Even for him, it couldn't be easy to say those words. "I could get treatment, but I've lived a full life, and it's my duty to let my life end for the good of the planet. I have no regrets for myself.

"But I couldn't bear the thought of that . . . artificial person still walking around, desecrating my Sarah's memory. When I discovered she was here, I came to her, told her I was dying, begged her to join me in returning to the Earth.

"But she refused. She clung to this unnaturally prolonged existence, this selfish indulgence at the Earth's expense. She even begged me to join her in it. She claimed it was out of love, but she didn't know what love is. Love requires the willingness to sacrifice." He blinked, the tears coming more heavily. "So I . . . I decided I had to free what was left of Sarah. She wanted to meet me again, one last time, to say goodbye. I came prepared. I took her in my arms, and held her . . . and I raised my hand to her neck . . . and I set her free." The tears ran forth, but he gave a shaky smile.

I couldn't take his sanctimonious crap anymore. "Oh, don't even try! Don't pretend this was some act of moral responsibility. Don't think I don't know how that works. You make decisions for a loved one, force them to live according to the rules *you* think are best for them, but in the final analysis, you're only doing it to satisfy your own ego. Your own conviction that you can't be wrong! You tried to kill another human being so that you could feel self-righteous!"

I felt Majid's hand on my shoulder, and somehow it calmed me. Somehow I let it calm me. I sat down again, facing Trendler. "You talk about responsibility, but you've got it backwards. Yeah, the world's overpopulated, but it got that way before we had death prevention. And since then, the birth rate's plummeted."

"Because of the draconian, unnatural laws the governments impose."

"No. If people didn't like those laws, they'd change them or just break them." I thought about Isabelle, about Rosa, about Takizawa. "The thing is, when you know you'll still be around in a century or two, you start to think more about the big picture, the long term. You take more responsibility for the future. People don't just go along with one child per couple because they get bribed with death prevention, they do it because they understand it's the right thing to do. Not just for themselves, but for others.

"And yeah, the arcologies are a stopgap. But the longer people live, and the longer their view

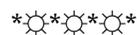
becomes, the more time and incentive they have to figure out new solutions.”

I leaned forward, catching his gaze. “You know what dying is, Charles? It’s jumping ship. Washing your hands of the future because you won’t be around for it. You don’t save the world by dying, and you sure as hell don’t save it by killing. You save it by taking responsibility for the people around you. Working to improve their future, not just stamping an expiration date on it. All your self-righteous talk about nature, it’s just your excuse for giving up. And giving up doesn’t help anybody.”

After a moment, Trendler calmed himself and gave a small but confident smile. “It doesn’t matter,” he said. “Call it what you like, but I acted on my convictions. I didn’t murder anyone, since my Sarah was already dead. And I will die content that my death has meaning. Maybe I’ll even be reunited with Sarah somewhere beyond.”

I met his smile with an even bigger, more smug one of my own. “Don’t bet on it, Mr. Trendler. You’re going to be in the care of Onogoroshima’s penal system from here on. It’s a very enlightened system. Big on rehabilitation. They treat the psychological conditions that turn people into criminals, help them become healthy members of society again. And of course they take care of your physical health too. You’ll get that cancer treatment – and even though your general deterioration is fairly advanced, I’m sure it can all be reversed in time. You’ll have a long, long stay on this mortal coil, Charles.”

The look on his face was priceless. I’ve never before seen anyone so horrified at being sentenced to life.



“All right,” Majid said once we’d freed Russell Takizawa. “I admit it. Your past issues didn’t blind you. They helped you recognize the perp.”

“Bloody oath, Majid,” I affirmed. “I’m good at catching murderers because I am one.”

He caught my arm, stopping me. His grip was gentle but unyielding. “No, Tamara. You’re a victim. You understand death and loss, you understand guilt, and that’s valuable in your job. But there’s a difference between understanding them and letting them define you.”

I didn’t object to the continued warmth of his hand on my arm. But I couldn’t meet his eyes. “You don’t know what it’s like. I know I’ll never forgive myself. So I accept that, and I use it.” I sighed. “You think I’m a cynic, that I’m blind to how much better the world is getting. You’re wrong, Majid. I believe in that better world. I’m determined to help make it happen. But I know I don’t belong in it.”

“Well, I think you do. The things you said in there, Tamara, those were the words of a good person. A person who truly understands how to make the world better. But there’s something in those words that you’re not hearing.”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

"You said that what matters in life is taking responsibility for how we treat each other. That our self-serving beliefs are no excuse for hurting each other."

Again Jason's face burned in my eyes. "No. There's no excuse for that."

Majid clasped me by the shoulders. "Then doesn't the same go for how we treat ourselves? And isn't guilt just as bad an excuse for treating ourselves unfairly?"

I had no words to give in answer. All I could do was look into his eyes. "Maybe you can't forgive yourself," he went on. "But that doesn't mean you have to punish yourself every moment, does it? You did good today, Tamara. You got to look in a murderer's eyes and tell him he'd failed. You even saved his life, whether he wanted it or not. I think you're entitled to celebrate that."

I surprised myself by kissing him on the cheek. "I appreciate the thought, Ma . . . Steve. But there are other murderers to catch. And if I don't stay on the job, some of them might actually succeed."

"Well, we can't have that," he said, smiling. "But could I at least take you out for coffee?"

After a moment's thought, I nodded. "Sure."

We walked out with my arm in his. As the sunlight hit us, I really looked at him for the first time, and decided I could stick around for more than just coffee.

After all, I had plenty of time ahead of me.