

A Utopia Sparks Mystery

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Utopia

A Whip Smart Tale

Chapter One One Body, Beached

CASSIDY CALLS AT least once a day. Texts too. Little bullets like Valentine's Day candy hearts only written by a hungry wolf. She never bothers to leave a voicemail when she calls. What would be the point? She knows Utopia knows who it is, and Cassidy knows Utopia has a pretty good idea of what she wants. When Cassidy's name pops up on Utopia's phone she lets it go. She's sure not ready to start up with Cass again, not after how it went last time, but since when did Utopia's feelings interfere with Cassidy's plans and designs?

Utopia stirs a heaping tablespoon of sugar into her coffee and downs the sweet mud in one gulp. Her phone vibrates on the counter—*Murder by Numbers*, Frank Silva's ringtone. Too early for a social call. Utopia's stomach clenches with uneasy anticipation.

'Morning, Frank.'

'Spahks. Got a bad one on my hands', Chief Silva drawls in his nasal New England accent. Frank sounds exactly like a man who looks like Frank should sound. Gruff. Beefy. Bullish.

'Took a call early this mornin' from a joggah who came on a body washed up out heya on the Nub, prob'ly some time last night. It was a ways up on the beach, left theya by the high tide. Young woman. Naked. Fresh. Wasn't in the watah all that long.'

'Oh, God. How old?'

'Twenty-somethin' girl.'

'Oh. Frank... Any marks on the body? Trauma?'

'Well...theya's the usual you would expect on a body's been raked up on the rocks. Face is in bad shape. It'll take a bit o' work to figure out what's what. We'll know more after we get her back to the lab. Perk's heya. He's gonna take the body up to Pottsburgh.'

'So...what do you need from me?'

'Just get down heya now. Tide's comin' in and the whole area will be washed away in an owah.'

'Where exactly are you?'

'Weya down on the bluff behind the Worthington place. You can come up the drive and theya's a track off to the left when you get to the house that leads down to the beach. You'll see us.'

'Alright. I'll be there in twenty, maybe less.'

'Thanks, Spahks. I'll look fa ya.'

Utopia pockets her phone. Charlotte is lingering, listening in.

'That the Chief, huh, Sparks?'

Utopia pulls her billfold out from her back pocket, removes two one-dollar bills, and stuffs them distractedly into the tip jar.

'Bye, Charlotte. You be safe.'

The door chimes jangle as Utopia strides out into the cool, salt air, and heads for her pick-up, the green Tacoma with the one black right fender. She tells her dog. 'Come on, Buster. We gotta go and see what it is that Frank found on the beach.'

As soon as they round the corner onto Milkwood Street, there's Cassidy leaning up against her truck, relaxed in the morning sun.

Damn...

'Hey, Utopia.'

Jesus. I need this like a hole in the head.

She keeps on walking.

'Hello, Cassidy. Great to see you, but I've got an emergency on my hands.' She reaches around Cassidy to open her truck door and let Buster climb up, gently brushing her shoulder.

'Come on, Buster. In you go,' she says to the dog.

'Can I catch up with you later?'