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### Botox With a Capital B

My name is Cheryl Wright, but everyone calls me Cherry. When I took over my father's private investigative firm earlier this year, I assumed I would only be investigating cheating spouses. I never thought I would be looking into a murder, let alone, be tempted to get involved with a client. I'm thirty-three years old and am a private investigator, recently licensed by the State of California. I live in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom, single-family home in the suburban community of Turtle Rock, in Irvine, California. I have been married to my husband, Everett, for ten years. We have three daughters ages eight, six, and an almost four-year-old. I feel like I am just now able to sleep at night with the youngest finally sleeping in her bedroom without protest. I don't have much of a social life outside of my family and my assistant Victoria. I force myself to participate in Stroller Strides, a group of moms who meet twice a week to work out and gossip. I crave organization. I need everything to be labeled and put in its correct place. On the outside, I look like a super-mom living in one of the safest neighborhoods in the US. However, I often feel like I am living a double life, a loving wife and mother at home, a fearless private investigator at work. One of these days, this duality is going to catch up with me.

Brandon Martin was the first client in my newly inherited firm. I have an office space in a small shopping center on the Irvine-Newport Beach border on Jamboree Road off the 73 Toll Road exit. The shopping center consists of overpriced fast-casual eateries, clothing boutiques that charge three times more because it's called a boutique, and a few salons that each specializes

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in either hair, nails, or skin. Why they can't be combined into one salon, I will never know. My retail space and office are sandwiched between a fairytale themed bakery that sells more trinkets than baked goods, and an anti-trendy coffee shop that has become trendy because of its anti-establishment persona disguised behind the use of a skull as a logo and blue sugary blended coffee drinks topped with children's cereal and whipped cream for a touch of nostalgia. I own a professional home organization and retail space. I sell organizational supplies in the store and offer my services as a professional organizer. In other words, women in the area pay me to come into their homes and organize their expensive crap. I recently had to hire an assistant to help with this side of the business knowing that my workload would increase with the acquisition of my father's investigative firm.

I had just unlocked the double-glass doors to my retail space when Brandon walked in. My clientele consists of mostly overly done housewives, so the stark contrast of him threw me off for a moment. Brandon was in his late forties, with clean-cut dark brown hair that was just starting to gray at the temples, green eyes, and olive skin with the sheen of freshly applied moisturizer. He had a strong looking face with lines at the corners of his mouth suggesting a friendliness about him. He was about six feet tall with the build of a former athlete.

I couldn't help but stare at him, he had a familiar face, but I couldn't quite put my finger on where I had seen him.

"Good morning. Can you help you find something?" Victoria asked as she noticed my obvious staring.

"Yeah, I'm looking for Detective Wright." Answered Brandon.

"Oh, that's me," I said as I cleared my throat. I wasn't used to being referred to as Detective Wright yet. I think of my father when I hear that name.

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"You're detective Wright? I was expecting someone different? He said with reluctance in his voice.

"You were expecting an older man in his mid-sixties with the face of someone who's seen it all, weren't you?" I said trying to ease his uncertainty.

"Yes, actually. I was." He answered.

"I'm Detective Wright's daughter, Cherry Wright. James retired for the second time. Although, I think he retired for good. He's traveling the country with my mother in a newly purchased Winnebago. Come into my office. Victoria, would email the updated invoice to Mrs. Lee?" Brandon followed me into my office, which was at the back of the store. "Would you like some coffee?"

He took a seat in one of the white leather chairs facing my desk. I opened the reservoir of the Keurig machine and poured in a fresh bottle of Voss water into it. I took out a Diedrich Coffee Dark Roast coffee pod from the metallic silver mesh basket on my waist-high white cabinet that lines wall to the right of my desk in my office. I picked up one of the glass mugs that was upside down on the cabinet, placed it on the drip tray base of the coffee maker, put in the coffee pod, and pressed the start button. Once the coffee was made, I handed Brandon the mug and placed a small glass bowl with a selection of flavored coffee creamers on the edge of my desk. I sat in my white leather swivel chair behind my desk and took a sip from the luke-warm coffee I had made myself earlier in the morning.

"I'm assuming you're here to inquire about my investigative services rather than my organization services," I said breaking the silence.

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"I'll get straight to the point. I want you to investigate the murder of my wife." He said without skipping a beat and took a sip of coffee. He drank his coffee black, a sign of someone who doesn't mess around.

"Have you talked to the Police? That would be a good place to start."

"I did. They ruled my wife's death as an accident, an allergic reaction to Botox."

"That's how I recognized your face." I said trying to conceal the "Ah-ha" tone to my voice. "I remember hearing about your wife's death on the news. It was the talk of my Stroller Strides group for a week. Half of them participate in Botox parties, and they were all up in arms about it worried they would suddenly develop allergies and die. What makes you think she didn't die of an allergic reaction?" I asked trying to sound empathetic.

"She wasn't allergic to Botox."

"You know that for sure?"

"Yes. I know it for a fact. She never told anyone, but she suffered from horrible migraines and was getting regular Botox injections for that. I tried telling that to the Police, but they suggested she developed the allergy over time. I still don't buy it. I think she was murdered."

"Do you have any idea who you think would have killed her?" I asked.

"Honestly, I have no idea. That's why I'm coming to you. Or at least, that's why I decided to hire a professional, who I thought was going to be Detective Wright."

"You think I'm too much of a novice?"

He laughed a little embarrassed. "I was given a referral for Mr. James Wright. I'm sorry, you're just not what I was expecting. I'm sure you're good at what you do." He said with a smile as he was feeling the stubble on his face. A nervous tick I assumed.

"This won't be the first case I've ever worked on. I've been assisting my father for years. He was a detective for the Orange County Sherriff's department for 25 years before he started his private firm. I grew up with this kind of stuff. I guess you could say it's in my blood." I said trying to reassure Brandon of any doubts he had of my ability to get the job done. "How about this? I have to meet a client in an hour. I'll give you a call later this afternoon, and we can discuss the details. It will give you time to decide if you want to hire me, now that you know who I really am." I said.

We both stood up. Brandon shook my hand. "Thanks." He said as he left my office. I walked out into the store following behind Brandon. Victoria was staring at him as he pushed the glass door open and glanced back waving and was out the door.

"He's cute" Victoria commented with her eyes still on Brandon as he got into his silver Mercedes and drove off. "Are you going to take the case?" She asked.

"Victoria, the man just lost his wife. And, I don't know yet." I said giving her a you-know-better-than-that look. "I need to talk to Everett. See what he thinks. I'm not sure if investigating a murder is the first case I want to take on my own. This kind of case requires more time than a cheating spouse stakeout and taking a few pictures." I said as I walked back to my office. I needed to research Jennifer Martin before talking to anyone else about the case.

I sat down in my white leather swivel chair behind my glass "I" shaped desk. I took a sip of my now cold coffee. I started with a simple Google search of Jennifer Martin. As it turned out, she was a well-known interior designer in the Newport Beach area. I don't know how I didn't put that together before. She owned a home interior boutique in Fashion Island. I had been to her boutique many times, it was about a mile from my office, and I knew many of my clients hired her whenever they were redecorating. From what I knew of her, she was a brilliant designer and

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easy to work with. My clients always commented on how sweet she was. Her services were expensive too. Her designs had been featured in most of the local home magazines. She even was featured in a spread in *Luxe Magazine*, a national high-end interior design magazine. She seemed to have everything, a successful business, an incredibly gorgeous husband, not to mention, she had the beauty of a supermodel and the reputation of a saint.

I remember hearing about her death on the news. Jennifer had gone to a friend's house for a Botox party. These parties have been all the rage for a few years. I wouldn't be surprised if women in this area started having liposuction parties. Botox is the Tupperware of the modern housewife. There were five other women at the party, including Jennifer's best friend. According to her friends, she seemed fine when she left the party. Brandon was away on a business trip. He came home two days later and found her dead on the bathroom floor of their master suite. The autopsy report revealed that Jennifer had died of complications with a reaction to the Botox injections.

I was jotting down information in my notebook when my phone rang. "Cherry Wright," I answered.

"Hey, it's me." Said Everett on the other end of the line. "You busy? Want to grab lunch?" He asked. My husband, Everett, worked as a Probation Officer at a juvenile camp out in LA County, somewhere near Pomona. Calling it a camp was just some glammed up word for child prison. He once told me how odd it was to look at those kids with innocent faces, but he knew deep down they had already developed the mind of a criminal. He worked twelve-hour shifts like an ER nurse. Today must have been one of his days off, and the girls were still at school.

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"Hey, Babe. Sorry, I'm researching a possible case, and I have to meet a client in thirty minutes." I responded.

"A case already? How much is the wife trying to blackmail out of the cheating husband?" He said jokingly.

"It's not that kind of case. Remember that woman we saw on the news who died of after going to that Botox party?"

"Yeah, what about it?" He asked starting to sound concerned.

"Well, her husband is convinced she was murdered. He wants to hire me to look into it."

"Are you sure you're ready for that kind of case? This is going to take a lot more energy from you than you think. I mean, it's not like following some douche bag cheating husband around."

"I know. I want to work this case though. If it gets to be too much, I can just call one of my dad's contacts and hand it over."

"You promise? Our schedules are crazy enough with the work we have."

"I promise."

"Hey." Said Everett. "You think the husband did it?"

"Don't know yet. That's what I plan to find out." I said. We hung up the phone. Everett's last question had me thinking. Brandon was convinced his wife didn't die of an allergic reaction to Botox. However, he just happened to be away on a business trip when she died. It didn't make sense to me. Who would murder this woman? She had everything going for her. She had everything. The career. The husband. The looks. The money. Then again, that was reason enough to want to kill her.

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Synopsis for the rest of the story.

Cherry decides to take on Brandon Martin as a client and investigate Jennifer Martin's death. Cherry learns more information about the case from Brandon and discovers the party Jennifer went to was at her best friend, Kimberly Wilson's house. Cherry interviews Kim Wilson, who is distraught over her friend's death. They've been friends since they were in high school and Kim reveals that she was always slightly jealous of Jennifer. Kim thought Jennifer always had life handed to her, rather than having to work hard for it. Kim was the one who introduced Jennifer to Brandon because Kim had gone on a date with him when they were Freshmen in college. However, Brandon fell head over heels for Jennifer the moment they met.

Cherry also interviews the doctor and the nurse who were at the Botox party. The doctor is rather technical and doesn't show too much emotion about Jennifer's death. The nurse is more empathetic and confirms that Jennifer had been receiving regular Botox injections to cure migraine headaches.

While Cherry is investigating Jennifer Martin's death, Everett becomes annoyed that she is becoming almost obsessed with trying to solve the case. Cherry starts to doubt her abilities as a private investigator and questions her own marriage as she gets closer to Brandon Martin. This puts her in a difficult position because he is her client and she doesn't want to betray her husband. She also is too stubborn to call her father and ask for his advice, but she gets a break in the case while interviewing a friend of Jennifer's who was also at the party. The friend reveals that Kim had just got back from a trip to Mexico days before the party. Cherry is able to do more digging into Kim's trip to Mexico and finds out she had purchased some illegal Botox needles and another unknown poison that would slowly kill someone.

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However, Cherry questions Brandon's innocence because he seems to be spending a lot more time with Kim. Brandon tries to convince Cherry that he's not having an affair with Kim, she's the one who's been after him for years. Meanwhile, Cherry has to convince Everett that she's been faithful to him even though Brandon had been putting her in compromising positions.

Eventually, Cherry discovers while at Stroller Strides that Kim's husband had been having an affair with another woman. Cherry finds out Kim's husband threatened to leave her before Jennifer died. Cherry later stumbles upon evidence that incriminates Kim of the crime, Botox needles and the mystery poison in Kim's bathroom. In the end, Kim confesses to killing Jennifer because Kim felt her life was falling apart with her husband leaving her. She thought with Jennifer dead, Brandon would finally fall in love with her.

\*I still have a few kinks to work out with my story, but I plan to keep working on it over the summer.