

## 45. Red Cap

accident, the injuries would still match those found on Chase Andrews?”

“Yes, that possibility cannot be ruled out.”

“And is it possible that Chase Andrews was attempting to back away from something—perhaps an animal or someone that startled him—leading him to accidentally fall through the open grate?”

“That is a plausible scenario.”

“Regarding the red cap found in Miss Clark's residence, could you conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that Miss Clark was wearing the cap on the night of Chase Andrews's death?”

“There is no direct evidence linking her wearing the cap that night to Mr. Andrews's death. The presence of her hair in the cap only proves she wore it at some point.”

“So, there's reasonable doubt that Miss Clark played a direct role in Chase Andrews's death?”

“That would be for the jury to decide, but yes, there are other plausible explanations for the evidence.”

“Thank you, Dr. Cone.”

The courtroom settled into a hush as Tom Milton's questions opened a crack in what seemed like an otherwise shut case. All eyes were on Kya, who hadn't spoken since the trial began, her silent figure a mystery that somehow tied together the disparate pieces of evidence—the red wool fibers, the missing necklace, and the backward fall of Chase Andrews.

As the proceedings moved on, Kya's mind drifted again, this time to the marsh and the countless hours she spent alone, observing the natural world. She remembered the lessons learned from the behavior of the creatures around her—survival, deception, and the intricate dances of courtship. These thoughts provided a stark contrast to the human complexities unfolding in the courtroom.

The vivid memories served as a stark reminder of the life she once had—a life of freedom in the wilderness, now confined within the sterile walls of the courtroom, fighting for her freedom once more.