

Found

Twenty years. It's been twenty years since this case begun, but I've finally found him. You could call me a Detective or even a Private Eye. I've been solving crimes, murders, and missing person cases since I started my own firm back in the 40's. I don't know why I took on such a vague case. At first it was just another case like any other, but the farther I delved into it, the stranger it became.

It all begin on a day much like today—a cold and rainy autumn afternoon in the heart of Manhattan. It had been almost two weeks since my last real case, so you could say that I was more than willing to take the first thing that came my way. I didn't need the money you see. I was just getting a little stir crazy.

It was a quarter past two and I had just returned from a lunch date I had with a girl named Sarah. She was a sweet thing. Reporter, if I remember right. Met her on the job a few months prior. I got back to my office and a small envelope had been slipped under the door. In it was a fifty dollar bill, a faded photograph, and a post card with only two words on it. 'Find Him' it said.

I didn't know what to make of it at first. Who gives away that much money upfront? If it was anyone else, they might have just taken the money and never given the photo a second look. Not me though. If I get paid for a job, I see it through till the end. Either way, whoever left the money had caught my interest. I went back to my desk and examined the photograph. It was old, slightly torn, and was a bit water damaged. However, I could see the man's face clearly. He was a tall and skinny young man with large glasses. He was wearing a striped shirt, had a cap on his

head, and he was leaning on a cane. On the back 'W' 1927 was written in a woman's handwriting.

I examined the post card again. It had a picture of the Las Vegas Strip on the front, however upon looking at the back again, I noticed it was in the same handwriting as that which was on the back of the photograph. Whoever wanted this man found had to have been looking for him for a while now if the most recent picture they have of him is over 30 years old. Who knows what he even looks like now?

I spent the next couple weeks using all my contacts and influence to figure out if anyone knew the location the photo was taken at or even the man in the photo himself. Two months passed without anything turning up, but finally an old friend I went to Yale with called me from his job in Florida. I was at my desk when the phone rang. I put down the homicide case I was working on and answered it.

"Hello?"

"Hey Frank, how are you doing?"

"Oh, hey Ben. I'm good, how the family?"

"They're fine. Jr. just started kindergarten last week and Lori got a raise at the hospital. How's things between you and your wife?"

I sighed and leaned back in my chair. "My ex-wife you mean. She moved back to London with Martin. Boy is only 2. He should have his father around, but enough of that. It's the middle of the day, aren't you supposed to be at work? Or does the FBI have nothing better to do than spy on us common folk now?"

I hear a faint grunt come through the line that didn't sound like Ben. "About that..." he began "You know the photograph you sent me a few weeks back? The one of that 'W' fella?"

I immediately lunged forward, and scrambled around my desk as I searched for paper and a pen to write with. "Yeah? Did something turn up?"

Ben laughed nervously. "Did something turn up? That's funny. That guy has an entire row of filing cabinets dedicated towards him down here. Thing is, I don't have high enough clearance to look at anything. Only the director and a select few have access to it. Where did you get this photo from anyways Frank?"

Confused, I replied "It was in an envelope that was slipped under my office door when I was out for lunch a few months back. Why?"

There was a long paused, then Ben finally responded. "...Ok. Frank, the director is next to me and has been listening in on our call. He wants to speak to you directly."

"Oh. Sure, put him on the line."

"Ok. I talk to you later then Frank."

Before I could reply, a new voice came on the line. "Thank you Benjamin. You can leave the room now." There was a pause, then the voice addressed me. "Hello, Mr. Handford? My name is Johnathan Hoover. As Benjamin stated before, I am the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"It's a pleasure, sir." I replied.

"I'm sure. Now let's get down to business here. Are you seriously telling me that this man contacted you directly?"

“I wouldn’t call leaving an envelope under my door contacting me directly, but yes he did. Why? ”

“So you never met him before? This ‘W’.”

“No. What’s this about? You heard what I said to Ben.”

“Yes, but frankly I don’t believe you.” the director said flatly.

I was taken aback at first, then replied “Excuse me?”

“Look kid. We’ve been trying to find this man before the FBI even existed. We’ve been searching for him for over forty years now and we still don’t really know anything about him. Hell, your photograph is the first thing we’ve gotten about this ‘W’ in a decade. The United States government has poured thousands upon thousands of dollars into this bureau just to find this man. We’ve chased every lead, no matter how vague, over the past forty years and have still come up empty handed. All we have to show for ourselves is a handful of blurred photographs and a few dozen post cards written in a woman’s handwriting mocking us at our failed attempts to find him. They leave post cards at random places and they’re anyways address to us. The last post card we found had been waiting for us at a random pub in Texas for over five years. Five Years! And you know what it said? ‘We’ve grown bored of waiting. Good bye Mr. Hoover.’ Bored! As if all this is just a game of hide and seek!”

The director exhaled a large sigh and continued. “At that point we pretty much had given up. Then you come out of nowhere with not only the first perfect photograph of this man, but also a post card saying ‘Find Him’. Do you know how insulting that is to not only me, but this whole bureau? So I’m sorry if I don’t believe your story.”

I was silent at first, then I asked. “What did this man do to have himself be hunted like this?”

“In all honesty, I don’t even know. When this bureau was founded in 1924, finding that man was one of the first tasks we were given. I’ve been leading this case for over thirty years and it infuriates me that I’m still in the dark on why it is so damn important that this man be found and brought in. I mean, I am the director of the FBI for Christ sake! You would think that I of all people would be informed of why we need to find this man.”

There was another pause, then the director continued. “Personally, I don’t trust you and I find that this whole case is a waste of both this bureau’s time and money; however it seems that the higher ups have already caught wind of this and are forcing us to help you in finding ‘W’. You will be given an office at our headquarters and whatever resources you need to complete this case. With that said, know that I will be personally overseeing all of your operations. Do we understand each other?”

I didn’t know what to say. The government couldn’t find this man after forty years? How the hell did they expect me to pull off what the FBI couldn’t? Similar thoughts ran through my mind until they were interrupted by the director’s voice.

“Mr. Handford?”

“Yes?” I replied immediately.

“Do we have an understanding?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Have everything you need packed and ready by tomorrow morning. I will have some agents sent to retrieve you and your belonging then. Oh, and Mr. Handford.”

“Yes sir?”

“No one really expects you to succeed, but you won’t be allow to leave this case until it is solved or you’re dead. No pressure.”

And that’s how it began. The next day I was moved to Boston and met the team of men and women I would spend the next twenty years working alongside. Over the years we followed a trail of post cards, all addressed to me, and I quickly understood what the director meant when he said they treated this like a game. In total we found twelve post cards and we discovered there was a patterned. Each post card held a hint to where the next card was hidden; when we found the post cards quick enough, ‘W’ would also leave a clue to where he was hiding as a reward.

The first card was in a jail in Vegas, the second in a tiki bar in Hawaii, the third at a ski resort in Colorado, the fourth at a camp site in Yellow Stone, the fifth in Grand Central Station in Manhattan, the sixth at an airport in Atlanta, the seventh at one of the ticket booths of Yankees Stadium, the eighth in a display at the Natural History Museum, the ninth in the captain’s cabin of a Royal Caribbean cruise line, the tenth was in the lost and found at a safari theme park called Kings Domain in Virginia, the eleventh was in King of Prussia Mall the largest mall in America, and lastly the twelfth was in the old office I used to run my firm from before all this started.

As a reward for finding the twelfth post card, we were given an address. We were all excited that it might finally be coming to an end, but we didn’t all make it. The director had died four years prior of a heart attack. It was a huge blow to the bureau, but we recovered in time. We

stormed the house yesterday and the only thing in it was phone with a postcard next to it. On the back was a phone number. I called and a woman answered.

“Hello?”

I didn't respond at first, then said “Is this ‘W’?”

The voice laughed and replayed. “Now why would you ask such a silly question when you already know the answer Mr. Handford?”

“Fine. Are you the one who has been hiding all those post cards?”

“Indirectly, but yes I am she. You can call me Wenda if you like.”

I was silent at first then I said “Is our game of cat and mouse finally over?”

“Now that's up to you.” She said with a gleeful voice.

I wasn't expecting that replay and asked the obvious question. “What do you mean it's up to me? You mean you're giving me the choice on whether or not we continue this game?”

“Of course. However know that no matter what your choice is, there is always a catch.”

“A catch? What do you mean by that?”

“If you want to know, meet me at the diner you went to lunch with Sarah twenty years ago. Alone.”

“What?! How do you know about that?” Before I could get an answer, she hung up.

The next morning I was waiting at the diner, not sure what to expect. People came and went, but no one approached me for hours. I finally decided she wasn't going to show up, and asked my waitress for my check. What I got instead was a post card. I looked up to see not my

waitress, but Sarah. She didn't look a day older since the last time I saw her. She winked at me and walked out. On the back of the post card was written 'I'll be waiting in a black car out back'.

I paid for my meal and walked outside. A car was running and Sarah was leaning against the driver's side.

"Care to go for a ride?" she asked. I didn't respond. She smiled and got in the car. All I could do was follow. We drove in silence for a while and it began to rain as we left the city. Finally I broke the silence.

"Your name isn't really Sarah, is it?"

She looked over at me dumbstruck and started laughing "Out of all the things you could have asked and that's what you say. I knew I liked you." I just sat there staring at her. This couldn't be the same girl from twenty years ago, could it?

"No my name isn't really Sarah, but then again I haven't gone by my real name in a very long time. Right now however, I'm going by the name Wenda. It good to see you again Frank, but I have to say the years haven't been all too kind to you."

"Well you and years must be best friends or something, because you look like you haven't aged a day." I said, trying to understand what was going on.

"It's both a gift and a curse, but it's a shame you know. I lost the bet."

"What bet?"

"I bet him that it would take you less than ten years to find him. It took you twenty."

That just confused me even more. "I'm...sorry? Who is he anyways? This mysterious 'W'?"

“Oh, he’s an old friend of mine. He’s always traveling, so I almost never see him anymore. But when I told him you won the game, he dropped what he was doing and came back.”

That made me a little angry and I said “So all this is just a game to you two?”

Sensing the tone of my voice, Wenda sighed and said “At first it wasn’t. You might have already guessed, but both ‘W’ and I don’t age like normal people. Luckily I was able to fake my death back in the 1890’s. However, he thought it would be too suspicious if we both ‘died’ at the same time. So he drew their attention, while I went into hiding. Over time I started leaving post cards with fake clues to throw off his pursuer. You see the government wants know why we don’t age. If we were ever caught, we’d be treated as nothing more than lab rats.”

“And what started as a way to help your friend just became a game for you two over time?”

“Exactly and you’re not the only one who’s come this far. The late director, Mr. Hoover, found us in the early 40’s. After he and his team learned why the government wanted us, he decided to continue hunting us as a ruse to fool everyone so we could live in peace.”

“So that’s what you meant by it’s my choice whether or not we continued.”

Wenda nodded and smiled. “Like I said, I knew I liked you.”

“So why don’t you age?” I asked.

“We don’t know. I’ve met others like myself in the past, but I’ve only kept in contact with ‘W’. I’ve been alive on this earth since the 1700’s, but ‘W’ is much older. Even I don’t

know how old he really is, but you can tell by the look in his eyes that he's seen what scientists, historians, and priests can only speculate."

We continued to talk until we finally arrived at a mansion in the middle of the woods. Hours had passed and it was night now, but the rain was still falling in a down pour. Wenda and I ran into the mansion. It was covered in vines, there were boards on most of the windows, and the right side of the roof had caved in.

When we got inside, Wenda took off her jacket and said, "Wait here. I'll check to see if he's still here." She walked off down a long corridor with a lit candle stick in her hands. I looked around the foyer and saw many portraits from different ages all of the same man. However, none of them were labeled or even engraved.

Wenda came back and said, "He's waiting for you in the study. Follow me." We walked down the hall way together in silence. We finally got to a set of double doors at the end of the hall. Inside the room were two armchairs that faced a large fireplace that had been lit.

"Come in. Have a seat." A voice said. I looked at Wenda and she nodded. I silently walked over and saw him. He appeared identical to the man in the photo. As he looked up, he gave me a wiry smile. "Hello detective."

"I finally found you 'W'."

"Please, call me Waldo."