

Murder in Criville

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There had been many theories about how she had been murdered. One of them involved me.

It happened in a small town named Criville, on the border between Nevada and Utah. Don't try to look it up on a map. You won't be able to. Now, this specific incident happened just after my grandfather's 88th birthday. I say specific because this isn't the only murder case that has shown up in Criville. With a population of 386, it doesn't take much time for news to spread around here. The first big case I remember happened when I was about 3 years old. The murder of Allen and Emilia Jones. My parents. I don't remember much. Just loud sirens, bright lights, and the continuous weeps that came from my grandparents. Even worse, I don't remember my parents much either. Just two small details. The rough scratch from my father's overgrown beard on my cheek, and the faint smell of my mother's perfume. I've been looking for years, but I still cannot find that perfume. I would ask my grandmother, but there's just two problems. 1. My grandmother is dead, and has been dead since 2008. And 2. I haven't mentioned my parents to my grandfather in 10 years.

Now, you probably don't know much about me. Correction: You know nothing about me. Except for the exact name of the town I currently reside, and the names of my dead parents. Well, my name is Cameron Jones. I am 17 years old, turning 18 in one week. That's all you need to know about me. My name and my age. I can't risk getting caught again. But just in case anyone asks, my name is not Cameron.

But this isn't exactly a story about me, is it? Actually, it's a story about my dead, and murdered best friend, Camelia Andrews. She was the only thing that ever was mine. My parents were taken from me, my grandmother, and now my best and only friend. There is something about this town I don't like. A type of uneasiness you feel as soon as you pass the boundary line. I don't like it. And it's something I don't understand. And I typically don't like things I don't understand. I don't understand how someone could allow all of their anger to build up inside of them and explode out of them, taking the form of a bullet, traveling at 2,500 feet per second, at 1,700 miles per hour, and shoot someone in the heart. Maybe there is just something about this town that makes other people want to shoot another human being. I don't like it.

Oh, and do you remember the theory about her murder? They think it was me.

I swear it wasn't. I promise. Nobody has given me the chance to explain myself. Yes, I was extremely close to her. Camelia was my best friend since I was four. Just one year after my parents died. And yes, I knew everything about her. But she also knew everything about me. And maybe I do strange things sometimes, like walk down to the lake and stare into the water. But that is just my way of relaxing. And maybe I take walks from the RV park through the woods to that "one creepy house on the corner", which just happens to be my grandfather's house, my only living relative. But just because I might look like I would "murder my best friend" doesn't mean I did. People around here just slap stereotypes on me like I'm stupid. Maybe because I'm parentless or because I dropped out of high school at 17. But I would never do anything to my best friend. And whoever did, is going to pay the price. My price.

It was Sunday afternoon. By then, I had already been hiding in my house (which was actually my father's old RV) for one week. That's how long ago the rumors started. And I got strange stares. Then, I began getting death threats from people I haven't even met. One through the mail. And two in my email's inbox. Apparently, Camelia talked to more people besides me. I had enough food and water for two days, so I was planning on going to the corner store tonight. I had to carefully devise a plan to make it out without being seen, and make it back before morning. You may be wondering, "If I'm so afraid of being seen, why don't I just leave town?" That's a good question. But something is telling me that I should wait until the cops arrive at my doorstep. A way I can explain myself. Enough people should have reported me by now. Even though I swear I didn't do it.

It was 11:35 PM by the time I decided to go buy food. But guess what? I heard a knock on my door, and two loud male voices. I panicked. I knew this was what I wanted. To sit down and explain myself to someone that will listen. But I just didn't know what to do. I was frozen. I didn't have anywhere to go. I was in a 20-foot RV for crying out loud! So, they just kept knocking, and knocking, and knocking. Until I heard something about forced entry. Then I panicked about that. As you can probably tell, I don't deal with stress well. Then, I finally snapped out of it when they started counting down from ten. I rushed over to the door, and swung it open. Maybe I did it a little too hard, because it swung back and hit an officer in the arm. After apologizing three times, I calmed my nerves and let them in.

"Cameron Jones. Everyone's been talking about you, you know? Your name has been pretty big around here. Looks like you've been getting into trouble." Said a blonde cop. His voice was deep. I was confused. Why was he talking to me like we have known each other for years? He had high cheekbones and a sharp jawline. He looked like he should have dark hair and eyes. But his eyes were the brightest of blue and his hair was almost white. Something about him didn't match up. But there was still something about him that seemed familiar. I was too busy analyzing him that I barely noticed the other officer. His complexion was the exact opposite from Mr. Nice Cop. Dark brown hair. Extremely tan skin. Caramel colored eyes, and surprisingly an overly large nose. Oh, and he was tall. Probably about 6'2. He probably has to bend down to get through doors. I would ask, but I'm too nervous to get the lump out of my throat that is my voice. I excessively describe when im anxious. It's one of the other weird habits I have. And by what he said next, I would guess he's the bad cop. "The murder of Camelia Andrews has been well known throughout this town. And we have gotten multiple reports from your neighbors seeing you sneak out late at night and coming back even later. The murder happened at exactly at 1:35 AM, and you were reported gone. And, you are the only suspect. Because of that, I will have to take you down to the jail for further questioning. Turn around. Hands behind your ba-" The blonde officer interrupted. " Aw, come on David! He's only just a kid. We don't know that he did it. Just calm down." "CALM DOWN!?" Yelled Officer David "This is a murder we're talking about! Not a little shoplift! So, don't you tell me to calm down!" And the cops continued to argue, as I thought of a great idea.

"All of this is happening to me because someone else murdered my best friend." I thought. "They think I'm guilty, because I go to my grandfather's house at night?! I can't believe it. Nobody is ever going to know the reason why I do. It would put him at too much risk. This murderer is going to pay. And I'm going to be the one to find him. But first, I can't go to jail."

I noticed that the officers were in a deep argument. And had both their backs turned to me. I quietly picked up my backpack and threw it over my back. Not even checking what was still in my bag, I quickly slipped out the back door. "Those cops must have been dumb." I thought. Then I realized something as I was sprinting through the woods: "I am running from the law."

I made it out of the RV park, surprisingly, without being seen. I quickly stepped behind a tree to catch his breath. And it quickly hit me, I can't stay here. But it was so late. And he was so tired. My knees buckled and I slid down the tree, scratching my back in the process. The pain woke me up quickly. I got to my feet and hid farther into the woods. I needed a new plan. One with a better outcome than jail. "To come up with a solution to a problem," I thought. "I need to start from the beginning."

I had to go somewhere, and I had to think of a place fast. I didn't want anyone to see me, but I can't stay behind this tree. And my grandfather's house is not an option. You don't know about my grandfather yet, do you? Ok. I will tell you. But don't tell anyone else.

My grandfather is not a citizen. He came in illegally from Mexico, and met my grandmother when he got here. As a kid, I was always told not to associate myself with police. My grandfather was so afraid to be seen, or to be questioned. He doesn't want to be sent back. He thought about applying for a green card a while back, but he was too afraid that he wouldn't be approved. That's also why I go to his house at night. That and because he lives in a very creepy looking house. People at school are always talking about his house, and I didn't want to be put in the middle of that. If they ever find out that he lived there, or that I did, they would start asking questions. And grandfather was always scared that any conversation about him would lead to his background. When my grandfather found out that people thought I murdered Camelia, he sent me out of the house, and to live in my father's RV. He didn't want anything to be traced back to him. He believed me. But he was scared that everyone else might not.

Without thinking, I ran without stopping. It was only about a mile and a half to the main road, which I was planning to take to Utah. I was freaking out. "I'm running from the cops. I'm running from the cops. I'm running from the cops." I kept thinking. They have to notice I'm missing. The only comfort I gave myself was that I'm running in the woods, and it continues till the Utah train station. I don't know where I would go, but I'm pretty sure I have enough to make it to Salt Lake.

Then I heard it. The wailing sound of a police car. The cops must have figured I was missing. I didn't know what to do. Instead of running forward down the road, something told me to run into the woods. I went deeper and deeper until I heard the sound of the car pass. I was finally able to slow. That was the moment when I was able to look up. The sky was beginning to lighten, and I realized that I was overly tired. I couldn't continue walking. But I still pushed myself to move. I dragged my legs for what felt like hours, until I came upon a clearing. The grass was overgrown, and to me, in that state, it looked like the best place to sleep. I started into the clearing, and collapsed. Falling into a deep sleep as soon as I hit the ground...

I had a dream. I was half expecting to have another nightmare. But something about the soft grass and weeds below me was comforting.

I saw my mom. And my dad. They were both standing over me and looking upon me. I tried to get them to talk, but they wouldn't say a thing. I begged and pleaded. I needed to know that they

were real. I needed to know that they were with me. Not until I was crying in my sleep did my mother say, follow where your heart and mind takes you. You would be surprised at how far you'll be able to go. And my father gave a single nod. And they both disappeared.

I woke in the morning with a heavy breath. I was extremely confused, until I remembered what had happened the night before. And all I could remember were the words from my mom. "follow where your heart and mind takes you. You would be surprised at how far you'll be able to go." And I did exactly that. But first, I was hungry. I didn't have time to pack an escape bag, so my backpack contained only a few things; An old hoodie, a half empty water bottle, an umbrella, 10 dollars, and an oatmeal creme pie. I was disappointed in myself for not rethinking my only source of food. But that only meant one thing: I needed food, and I needed to get somewhere.

I stood up, threw my backpack on, ate half of the pie, and started walking. Only to find that I didn't know where to go. Then I remembered my mom's words. And I turned around. And walked deeper into the woods. I was walking for a while, somewhat enjoying myself. I watched the birds hop from tree to tree, I watched leaves fall, and I think I saw a raccoon. For about two hours, I forgot about everything. I forgot about the murder, I forgot about my grandpa, I even forgot about my run from the police. Until I reminded myself, and it felt like my heart dropped ten stories. And I entered reality once again.

I stopped at a nearby tree to eat lunch, which just happened to be the other half of my oatmeal creme pie, and the last sip of my water. Now I was really worried. I was down to nothing. I started crying. I've never been in a situation like this. I'm tired. And hungry. And all because I was being blamed for something I didn't do. And now it will look like I'm guilty. I ran instead of explaining myself. But they wouldn't have let me. They would have taken me to jail just because I'm the only suspect. I couldn't stop crying. I cried till my eyes were red. I cried till my face was numb. And here I am, a skinny 17-year-old boy, crying. I didn't think anything could stop this type of pain I was feeling. Until this happened.

A small girl, maybe 10, was staring at me. I wouldn't have noticed until I heard the crunch of the dry leaves under her feet. I quickly stood up and dried my face. "What are you doing all alone?" This girl asked. "Ummm..." I had to think up a quick lie. I didn't want her telling anyone about me. "I'm taking a hike." She looked confused. "Were you crying because you lost the trail?" She harshly asked. "Ummm...no. I wasn't crying. I was just... taking a break. I accidentally took the Long trail and you know how difficult those can b-" She interrupted me. "The trails are back there. There is no way you are coming from there. I may look small, but I'm not stupid." I sighed. Sighing is all I could do. "Are you hungry?" She asked. And before thinking, I blurted out "Yes!" She walked towards me, and picked up my hand. "Come on." She told me. "Mamma's making meatloaf."

I was nervous. How did this little girl find me? But still we kept walking. It was only about a 5-minute walk. I was wondering how I didn't see the house before. Or at least smell the food coming from the inside.

She brought me to the door. And knocked on the small wooden house. A large lady opened up the door and immediately said, "Winnie! What have I told you about going off into the woods alone. You know something could get yo-" She looked behind Willie and met my gaze. Her face dropped. "Winnie, who is this?" She asked her daughter. Winnie cupped her hand around her

mother's ear and started whispering. I didn't hear much except, crying, alone, and can we keep him?

Winnie's mom slowly looked up to meet my gaze. I felt embarrassed. I've never had to depend on anyone other than my grandparents. I wanted to turn around and walk away, but I was in too much pain, and I was too hungry. She was still looking at me, but her concern got the best of her. "Come in. You look tired." She said, in a surprisingly kind tone. "Thank you, thank you..." I kept repeating. Willow was more than excited to have someone in the house. I stepped inside. The house was warm, and comforting to my freezing body. The smell of the meatloaf was overpowering but amazing at the same time. I shuffled farther into the house and stood there kind of awkwardly. I looked down at Winnie, whose hand was still attached to mine, with a big smile on her face. She must not get many visitors. "Can we eat now mamma?" She asked. And without hesitation she replied, "Of course Winnie. And will our visitor be eating with us?" She looked at me once again. "Yes please." I answered, maybe a little too eager. She led me to the table and watched me collapse into the chair. In seconds after the plate was set in front of me, it was gone. And 3 helpings later, I was ready to answer their questions. I was just kind of sitting there until Winnie's mother started talking. "What's your name, honey?" I quickly cleared my throat and replied with a fake name. "Jackson." I don't know what made me do it. Maybe by the fact that I was far enough away from home to be recognized. I just felt like starting over. "Well Jackson, how did u get here? What led you to us." And I told her my story. It might not have been my actual background, but it was believable enough.

"When I was ten, my parents died in a car accident," I lied. "I got sent to Salt Lake City to live with my Aunt and her two kids. And ever since I moved in, I could tell my cousins didn't want me being there. They pretended I was invisible for two years. And they could tell that I didn't want to be there early. I wanted to be adopted by someone else, but my aunt and cousins were my only living relatives. So I lived there, and I was fine. Up until about a month ago. My Aunt got cancer. And it was really hard for both of us. I was the only one living at home still because I was the youngest. Her kids were traveling and they never showed up. And a couple of weeks ago, she passed. And her kids still weren't there. And I didn't know what to do. I was never allowed to get a job, so I didn't have money. And rent was past due. I knew I was getting evicted so I ran for it. I did what I had to do. I was trying to make it to Nevada and try to find a job there. But I guess I went the wrong direction because Winnie found me in the woods. And now I'm here. With you." I finished, feeling proud of myself. That came in the spur of the moment. Who knew I could talk like that when I'm running off of two hours of sleep. "Wow, Jackson." Winnie's mom said. "You have been through so much. Bless your soul. You just stay with us as long as you need." I felt so grateful. I needed to leave everything behind in Criville. Where It can't find me. I wanted to stay here. With these two. Something told me that they might need me to. I don't believe in this type of stuff, but just this once, maybe a mixture of fate and god let me be here. They saved me. And I would do anything to protect them now.

I got up from the table and Winnie's mom, whose name I later learned was Cara, led me to the couch. I layed down as I felt sleep take my body over. I just remember my two last thoughts, I need to stay here, and I hope they find out who committed the murder.

Author Bio:

My name is Isabella Pergament. I am 14 and in 9th grade. My main hobbies are dance, volleyball, painting, and writing. I like writing because I am able to make up anything I want and make it my own. I like people reading my work and giving me feedback so I can become the best writer I possibly can be!