

Time is running, Follow the *Tips*

"... and for lack of evidence or witnesses, I demand, Your Honor, the acquittal of my client."

We had been working on this case and looking for solid evidence for weeks. My feelings told me he's guilty. But the offender acted in a clever manner. Decades ago, he had shot an entire family, emotionlessly, and had burned down the house. We had recently received tiny clues, but not enough for an indictment. And this lawyer was as smart as the accused who had destroyed all the evidence and witnesses by burning down the house. Refined.

"Enough for today, we are going to continue the trial tomorrow".

Gradually, people left the courtroom and it began to empty itself until I was the last one left. This case didn't leave me alone, I had to think about it all the time. Slowly I packed my things and left the room. I walked through the courthouse to my office, closed the door and sat down. As usual, the chair creaked loudly and I look around the room with an empty gaze. Suddenly, I noticed a conspicuous red notice. It was stuck on the case's file.

Hesitantly, I got up from my chair and walked with small steps towards the pile of files. In the meantime, I wondered how that note had got there, I didn't use these types of notes and my office was completely locked up the whole time I spent in courtrooms. My name was unreadably written on the note "*Grace*". I reached my hand out, turned and took the note into my hand.

"Tip 1: He is guilty."

A clear, readable and significant statement. I looked around, down the hall and out of the window. But far and wide no one was to be seen. Ever since I found this note, it had been swirling around my head. Who had written it and especially what was it supposed to mean? Was someone just trying to distract me? Or was there a spark of truth in that little red notice.

I couldn't concentrate for the whole afternoon. I tried to distract myself, tried to clear my head, but nothing worked. Suddenly, with a loud sound, I was pulled out of my thoughts, "new message" by Anonymous appeared on my phone. A strange, indescribable feeling spread inside of me. Hesitantly, I unlocked my phone, before I opened the message, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath

"Tip 2: Research the Date. Research your Date"

I reread the message and reread it once more, but it just didn't make sense to me. I thought about the message for a long time. If the tips had something to do with each other, then it could only be about the date of my current case? I quickly fetched the files and the conspicuous red notice "Tip 1" caught my eye for a second again. I ignored it and opened the file and searched hectically for the report. "time of the crime 13th May 1990". I really could not find a connection and I also wondered about the statement "research your date". The only, but not really conspicuous fact was that 1990 was my year of birth, but my birthday was in August?

Hours passed in the afternoon and I kept on thinking. I decided to get some fresh air. So, I went for a run, the distance between my apartment and my parents' house was perfect, over there I had some more, but less important, documents on the case, so it fit perfectly for me to have a try with these. Armed with headphones I started my run. But it kept me busy all the time. What if I could prove the guilt of the accused with these tips? But instead of researching further, I spent my time with a run. I have the possibility to prevent an acquittal of a murder tomorrow. While I was lost in thoughts, I did not even notice that I stopped running. Until a passer-by bumped into me strongly. He or she, I couldn't really tell, was dressed completely in black and before I could react the person had already disappeared into the darkness. All that remained was a conspicuous red note which was slowly moved

across the ground by the wind. When I noticed it, my breath stopped for a moment, with big steps I moved towards and picked it up.

"*Tip 3: Continue your way to your parents' house. Office, 3rd drawer from above, on the right. Time is running, Grace. Follow the tips*"

With quick glances I checked my surroundings, but not a single person was in sight. I continued my way quickly without stopping until I approached my father's office. Without hesitation I went to the desk and opened the 3rd drawer from above. But even after searching for the 5th time I found nothing except from bills, scribbles and insignificant papers. I desperately let myself fall back into the chair. Looking from the empty drawer to the chaotic desk, I lowered my eyes and looked back into the drawer. Then suddenly, under a black mat in the drawer, a corner of white paper looked out. I tinkled a bit around and after a few minutes I pulled the sheet out.

“Adoption process Grace...”

These were adoption papers, these were *my* adoption papers. Before I could do anything or feel anything my parents or rather adoptive parents rushed into the office. My mother was slowly approaching me. “Gracie, I think it’s time to tell you something,” she said with a trembling voice “You have to promise to me that you’ll listen to me until the end?”. I didn't really react, I couldn't describe my feelings in that moment. “Grace, promise it!”, my mother repeated. I nodded my head and whispered “I promise”.

“I really don't know how to start. It was a really strange day, indescribable. I was your mother's best friend. On that day, 13th May 1990, your mom was stressed out, your sister Lily was sick, your brother Dean, oh, he was a troublemaker, and as usual he had caused trouble at school. Your father left early after your birth and actually your mother managed three kids very well, but that day nothing worked. Since your birth I had been in love with you and promised God and your mother to take care of you forever. So, I offered my help to your mother to get you out of day care. From then on, everything went so fast. Under all the stress, the violent and obtrusive ex-boyfriend of your biological mother became aggressive to her to get her back and terrorized her in front of the house. In panic she called your dad, a policeman.”

“You mean my adoptive dad” I interrupted her.

“*We are* your parents Gracie, we raised you,” my dad mentioned. “But when the police patrol arrived at the house it had already been in flames. We couldn't save anyone in there, only a few remains of their dead bodies could be found. It was our duty to raise you up. Your mother would have wanted it that way. To protect you from her ex-boyfriend we concealed your survival because if he really was the offender and still wanted to kill all members of the family, you had to be safe. We faked your date of birth, your name and pre-existence - everyone thought you had perished in the fire like the rest of your family. It was the best. Besides, we wanted to protect you from the fact that your mother and siblings were killed and the murderer was still a free-living person. We didn't want you to live your life in restlessness and uncertainty, Grace. I know, it’s a lot to take in right now and to process, but can we do anything good for you? Do you want anything? A glass of water?”, my mother asked lovingly.

“No”, I answered in an absent voice and continued with a stronger, clearer one “The only thing I want is justice for my family and a fair punishment for the murderer of my family.”

"... and for lack of evidence or witnesses, as yesterday, I demand, Your Honor, the acquittal of my client.”