

# CrazyA1 Jimena Mendes Project

## Part 1: New Blood

by K9Lupus

No matter how you slice it, change sucks. Cradled in the guise of unfettered opportunity, it weaves itself unbridled through a person's life. In the best cases, new experiences are met with a childlike hopefulness and surprise, but often change is as soundly capable of undermining facts, disrupting routines and beliefs, and destroying whole lives in the blink of an eye. I should know.

Now please don't get me wrong. Change is well-meaning; the bold, entrancing accent and firm handshake compound its salesperson-like refusal to accept no for an answer. However, in the span of my life I've had its illusory cloak brandished across my back far too many times, and now the seeds of shortcomings and setbacks had sown themselves deep into the etched lines of disbelief still clinging to my face. They were the same sights and sounds, over and over, replayed in a tireless loop. Some would argue change is necessary, the chief metric by which life is measured by. They're full of it. People only make such statements while elevated safe and high on their lofty perches shielded from the hurts of the world.

I did, by some unimaginable miracle, hold onto hope though it all. It was my faithful companion as I slowed down approaching Hayden Falls for the first time amid its quiet storefronts and ample greenery. It was a sleeping town, wrapped cozy in its willful disconnection from the larger world; the perfect place for someone like me to make a fresh start. Hayden Falls would act as filler for the worn cracks grooved into my mind from years of torrential thoughts. New rules, no familiar faces. It was best this way.

I had almost stopped believing anything could erase the muffled scream and the wet slap of blood which had played through my mind a thousand-times over now, but somewhere between the friendly greetings of "Heyo newcomer," and sights of kids chasing each other on grassy playground fields while their parents lazily sipped coffee nearby I relaxed, at least somewhat, and that feeling was also new and welcomed.

I went forward into that sleeping town and my new life with a desperate, almost hungry energy. Making something of myself here had to be enough, because beyond it was simply a blank void, and I did not wish to visit that place again. However, I came to learn in time towns like Hayden Falls are true masters of hiding their secrets because they are not buried in the shadows of shame or regret, but built

upon them in the light until you can not tell the difference between the two. Hayden Falls was awake and alive, and stepping forward into its open-armed smile I was now a part of it too.

\*\*\*\*\*

Trembles crept up along the back of my neck as the double row of officers seated before me scrutinized my every move like bored hawks. These were men and women who had already seen it all throughout their time on the force, but they still attended to me with a begrudged curiosity. New homicide detectives were a novelty for Hayden Falls, and my thoughts wandered to imagining hidden betting pools comprised of hauls of cigarettes and coupons for Arco's Pizza Palace based on how long I'd last here. Would it be a year, a month, or, with a swallow of dry spit clinging to the back of my throat, only until the end of the week? I was new blood in the water, and already I was floundering. At best my presence would be an inconvenience to the well-oiled cogs of the Hayden Falls precinct, and at worst a mistake to be tossed out when I couldn't keep up with everyone else.

My toes curled within my shoddy leather boots, feeling clammy and damp like my hands. A soft stream of tensed air loosed itself as I braced to address the group. The chief of police gestured, a veiny hand waving in my direction off the stack of papers which comprised my initial application and credentials.

“My name is Jimena Mendes, and it’s a pleasure to be working alongside you within your department,” I stated in a single, rushed breath from my practiced mental speech. I relayed the rest of my introduction thereafter, speaking of my excitement to be in a new town and continue my learning among the best, eliciting a non-restrained chuckle from one of the chiseled brutes lurking in the back. My speech ended with a stiff-armed salute, and I finally remembered to breathe properly for the first time in minutes. The entirety of the squad was unfazed and unmoved, save a single individual who waggled his tapped his pen against his palm in mock applause.

Rings beneath the man's eyes bore the weight of chronic insomnia, a feature I was intimately familiar with. Then when my eyes met his, the man with the strong brow and bundled brown dreadlocks pulled his lips back into a mocking grin, the tinge of after-hour coffee staining his teeth a faint yellow. Satisfied and smug, he returned his gaze back to his notepad where his pen-holding hand glided to scribble nonsensical shapes and figures in the margins.

“You’ll be partnering with Officer Kaine,” the chief affirmed, and the man with the coffee-stained teeth slid back in his seat until he was delicately balanced on two chair legs, his knees beneath the table as a counterbalance. His sudden groan filled the room in a disregarding bellow, and the chief’s stern glare flashed cold in his direction. Officer Kaine settled back down with a quiet *clack* of metal against the linoleum floor, an impromptu gavel of his firm judgment against me.

\*\*\*\*\*

The remainder of the briefing went by with no further incident. Through the refresher course given to the other officers and investigators on updated protocols in the field, I quickly learned Hayden Falls wasn't the sparkling gem I had held in my imagination. The men here wore the weight of the town's income-restricted burdens leading to desperate action by its citizens heavy upon their brows.

Afterwards, I was able to catch up to Officer Kaine whom I found rummaging through the vehicle key box. His thumb was pressed hard into the center of his forehead as he quickly glanced back and forth scribbling down the vehicle ID number he was registering for the day.

“So, it looks like we're going to be partners huh? Clayton, right? Do you prefer Clay instead? I'm Jimena,” I offered, figuring it was as good a time as any to get this show on the road. However, when Officer Kaine turned back to face me, his eyes were stepped in begrudged hell-fire, yet another setback to his day before him.

“I heard what your name was in the meeting. You can wait in the parking lot until I'm done here,” he curtly responded.

“Sorry, I'm just trying to start up some conversation. If we'll be working together then –”

“–I don't know what they taught you back at the academy or whatever hodunk offshoot from the interstate you hail from, but here you'll be better off keeping your head down and your mouth shut if you want to go any farther than the starting line. I'm going to shoot things straight with you; I don't have patience otherwise. Everyone else might be happy playing their games, but I'm here to do what I need to do and clock out. No one's getting in the way of that, especially you. And just to make it clear Ms. Mendes, I didn't ask for this. I didn't want you, and I was fine on my own. Now go wait in the car,” he ended, the metal shine of a set of keys dazzling my eyes before their weight crinkled in my hand.

A spattering of peachy phrases floated through my mind, but the distraction of the keys digging into my clenched fist was enough to pull me away from saying what I might regret later, however well-suited to the occasion it may be. I was silent, only managing a cursory nod as I left the room to head down to the parking lot. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Officer Kaine slump forward against the desk, a heavy sigh filling the room as he finished what remained of his paperwork.

\*\*\*\*\*

My neck had grown stiff from its awkward position staring out the passenger side window. Despite the discomfort, it was the best I could do. Any distance, however figurative, between myself and the dreary

reality that comprised Officer Kaine's personality was to my benefit. The car radio was busted, only offering garbled static before Officer Kaine spun the dial off so quickly I feared he would rip off the part entirely. Silence pervaded the space between us, and the overcast clouds with ghastly streaks of grey amid struggling swaths of blue sky did little to bolster either of our moods. The sudden appearance of the dilapidated neon sign of the Yum-E-Burger rekindled fleeting hope I was mistaken and was actually riding alongside another human being.

*“Any investigative units around Trilaway Park please respond,”* a voice called through on the two-way police radio. Officer Kaine snatched up the receiver with one hand still guiding the car to park.

“This is Unit 453. Receiving now, over.”

*“Report of a possible 187. Body discovered along the river bank. Initial area has been secured and is awaiting clearance from homicide operative. Are you available to respond?”*

His brow furrowed, his gaze long and wistful as he shifted the car back into reverse.

“Yeah. I'll be there in seven,” he answered, swinging the car around into a forceful 180 back into the street. He tried the radio again, but nothing still, and Officer's Kaine's expression stayed solemn and statuesque the rest of the way to Trilaway Park.

\*\*\*\*\*

I exited the car with Officer Kaine, gripping at the frayed trim of my coat as we embarked out into the gray afternoon. The park was unremarkable by most standards; it could have been inserted into any gas station post card without fail. However, the misfit sight of the yellow “DO NOT CROSS” tape broke through the layered stonework and green surroundings.

We descended down into the muck of a disregarded riverbank, and not even a quarter mile off trail I saw a pair of officers standing in front of a stout fisherman with a buoy-like waistline jutted over his tightened belt who was detailing his story again.

The fellow affirmed he'd only been out to try and beat the other fishermen to his morning spot before it got taken when he noticed something odd out of the corner of his eye. At first he thought it was a homeless man sleeping; the park had been subject to occasional pop-up tents in the past, but then he could see the slack-jawed horror of sunken eyes looking out at him, quickly coming to understand the full implications of the scene he had stumbled upon before calling authorities.

And who could blame the poor guy for being a bit shook up? Covered beneath a heavy black drape were the mutilated and partially devoured remains the fisherman had seen. A torn-open cavity in the

chest led to scrapped remnants of internal organs. Strangely however, the man's windpipe had been crushed by a powerful bite force, and signs the man had been dragged away from the original site of the attack lay strewn about the clumps of leaves and shallow furrow of mud.

“Third body in a little over two months,” one of the attending officers relayed after dismissing the fisherman from their questioning.

“Same kind of pattern with each of them. Some say the killer travels with a group of feral dogs, and that's how they get rid of most of the evidence by the time we get here. This guy is the cleanest of the bunch if you can believe it. We have a possible lead: Cadel Louvel; some deranged lunatic thinking himself a werewolf. Been a real firecracker to pin down.”

While I spoke to the other officials at the scene, Officer Kaine looked wholly in his element, caught in a strange, trance-like dance as he moved about the crime scene, his eyes growing unfocused for periods of time. Then, all at once, an expression of deep serenity washed over Officer Kaines' features, the most content I had seen him, and he stood up from his crouch and beckoned me back to the car with a wave of his hand.

“What'd you find?” I tentatively inquired.

“We've been looking at this case all wrong. What's been transpiring here in Hayden Falls has been a much more intimate affair between man and beast.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Officer Kaine and I worked into the night back at the station reviewing photographs and piecing together likely attack spots for the next victim.

“When you put together a grid of where the victims are estimated to have been attacked, excluding our second-victim runaway that managed to get further than the rest, you get this layout for the town. So other possible locations are here, here, or here.” I stated, drawing connection points between the large map of Hayden Falls laid out across my desk.

“Too simplified. You're still thinking too rationally about all of this. You have to be in their head; figure out why they do what they do, and what they get out of it they can't get elsewhere. Look.”

His pen carved pale blue X's besides my circled connections, and then above each of the locations he

wrote a single word: “Shelter, Food,”—and over the most recent attack site at Trilaway Park—“Water.”

“Whoever this Mr. Louvel thinks he is, he's acting in a manner that's consistent with trying to meet basic needs during the evening hours which each of the victims have been found.”

“For his dogs you think?”

His gaze narrowed, lips drawn tight into his mouth with a nearly imperceptible shake of his head. “That is the piece I'm not so sure about. You'd think we would have been able to find some DNA evidence through scraps from the dogs instead of the circumstantial runaround we've been going through, but there doesn't appear to be anything at all, and that's most suspicious for such brazen violence.”

“That's...actually helpful. Thanks.”

Officer Kaine quickly turned back to studying files on his computer in silence.

“Hey, I'm going to get some air for a sec,” I said after a few more quiet minutes between us had elapsed. Caught up in the flow of events today, I had saved my breaks throughout the day. I walked out of the station, my mind whirling with the case, not wanting to entertain the slim, yet still possible chance that maybe there was some substance to everything we had been finding. Perhaps we were biting off more than what we could chew. My feet wandered aimlessly, until the dark, night air gave way to a colorful glow, and I knew some act, however small I could do to help push the case forward.

I returned back to the station sometime after, a pair of greasy white bags held in my hands, one of which I plopped beside Officer Kaine's desk.

“Wasn't sure if you were allergic to tomatoes or anything so I got just cheese on it. Been a crap day for both of us.”

He studied the bag as if it held an ancient object lost to history, then clutched it slow with a low crinkle as the all-too-indulging aroma of meat filled our shared office. He then looked at me, not through me as he had done countless times today, but surely and truly at me.

“Clayton,” was all he said.

“Excuse me?”

“You asked me before what I preferred. It's Clayton. Not Clay. You don't know me like me like that. Now come on. We have work to do,” he affirmed before sinking his teeth into a big, juicy bite of cheeseburger.

