

# Mystery of Purity Springs

By

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## Chapter One

The shrill-beeping of the smoke detector jarred Bradley from a sound sleep. Untangling his arms from beneath the covers, he reached over, as was his habit, and slapped the alarm clock several times. To his dismay the shrill sound continued to beep.

Groggy, he was now confused at what was taking place. Tossing off the covers, he felt for his slippers using his big toes as he slowly ascended from the four-poster bed his endearing mother had given him just ten years ago for his twentieth birthday.

Yawning and rubbing the back of his neck, and naked as a blue-jay, except for his tan slippers, he stumbled through the darkness searching for the bedroom door, where he kept his power-blue robe. Slipping it on and tying it around his waist, he now proceeded through the door which led to the narrow hallway bathroom. Bradley was stopped by the sudden unbearable heat and loss of air as he opened the door.

He recoiled immediately as the thick gray-smoke penetrated his nostrils. Coughing and gasping for air he slammed the door shut and leapt backward.

Losing his footing, he fell hard upon the blue carpet, his eyes now stung from the smoke. His

rubbing only caused irritation and swelling to set in which preceded the fear and panic he was now experiencing by a few minutes.

Part of the ceiling and plaster had now collapsed allowing heavy-black smoke to start pouring into the dark bedroom. Bradley crawled into a nearby shoe closet and closed the fragile door trying desperately to shield himself.

Splatters of fire now fell from the ceiling and soon engulfed the entire room. He felt the intense heat as the blaze started to burn and crack the outside of the closet door. The fire had consumed most of the oxygen as his lungs screamed for air. As death called for his soul, no life flashed before his eyes as some people have spoken of, only darkness as he passed out from lack of oxygen. Death comes for us all, sooner or later, and now it was Bradley's time to meet Jesus, his heavenly maker.

The small-framed, one-bedroom house was engulfed in flames as the fire trucks rolled up, it was just a few minutes past midnight. Before the firefighters could even unroll their hoses the roof of the house was crumbling down into the center of what was left of the charred structure.

The fire marshal had been overheard to say if anyone was in there; they're 'dead as dead can be,

may god rest their souls.’ It took less than an hour to bring what was left of the smoldering home under control. Burned to the ground, only the concrete frame still stood as evidence that a home had truly been there.

Shouts from the next-door neighbor could now be heard and alerted the firemen to the presence of a body laying next to a fence that divided the two houses. Old man Peppercorn was leaning over the three-foot wooden picket fence pointing at the naked man who was face down and not moving.

Bradley Richards was a tall, slender man with a small pot-belly. Short brown hair which matched his heavy brown eyes. No glasses or facial hair to be found as he enjoyed the clean-cut appearance as did most men in the year 1962. He wore short-sleeve white shirts with a long, thin tie, which usually matched the trousers he was wearing. Didn’t care much for a jacket or hat as he preferred the more laid-back approach to life.

As he awoke, his eyes finally focused in on the hospital room and bed he now found himself in. The last thing he remembered was crouching in the corner of the hot, smoky closet waiting for the Angel-of-Death to appear.

“You’re lucky to be alive,” Marie said as she fiddled with the fresh flowers, trying to get them

into a small vase filled with tap-water. Finally managing to secure them, she placed them on the table next to his bed. "I know you dislike roses, but these were on sale at the pharmacy," she grinned.

Bradley turned to face her, "My house, what about my house, is it gone?"

"Burned to the ground," she replied, "Nothing left but a pile of ashes." Marie laid the morning newspaper on the bed, "See for yourself, you made the front page."

Sitting up, he surveyed his limbs, torso, and then felt his cheeks and touched his hair even to see what had been burned and how bad the burns were. To his shock and amazement there were none to be found. He sat for a moment in sheer disbelief.

Marie watched him as he sat motionless, "What's wrong?"

"Who pulled me from the burning house?" He now thought to ask.

"You weren't in the house, they found you unconscious, completely nude except for a ratty old pair of house-shoes, next to the side yard fence. Not a scratch on you, just unconscious." She explained.

“Wait a minute, there was no way I could have gotten myself out of that inferno, I was trapped in that small closet. I was a dead man, no way out, period.”

“Well honey, I don’t know what to tell you. You’re here, not a burn anywhere in sight, maybe what caused your unconsciousness caused you to forget running from the house.” She said with little fanfare.

Bradley shook his head in disbelief, “Somethings not right, I should be dead.”

“Well, you’re not dead, so let’s move on, shall we. The fire marshal said the fire was arson. The police have been notified and have started an investigation. Looks like someone wanted to Bar-B-Q your sweet little ass.” Marie said with a smirk on her face as she scooted a chair close and sat next to his bedside.

“Damn it Marie, you know I don’t like that kind of saucy talk,” As he pretended to fain disgust, for he, himself used foul and filthy language when he felt it was appropriate.

Marie Thomas was a short, slender feisty woman who worked as Bradley’s assistant for nearly fourteen years in his private detective business. She pretty much took care of everything, office wise that is.

Long blond hair pulled into a bun style, dark-framed glasses, shapely curves for a woman of thirty-seven. Deep blue ocean eyes that observed everything in her purview. She didn't miss a trick.

Marie grinned, "I telephoned your mother just a few minutes ago and told her everything. She offered to let you stay in her garage."

"In her grimy little garage?" Bradley mumbled.

"Yes, she doesn't want you in her home, she's afraid you'll burn it down too," Marie now chuckled at her little white lie.

"Very funny, ha ha, smartass. Now, what did she say?"

"You're more than welcome to stay with me, I have plenty of room," Marie offered with a sincere smile.

"Ah, let me think about it," he knew all too well she had always had a thing for him, but he just wasn't ready to commit to that type of relationship. "So, what did my mother really say?"

"She'll be down directly to check on her little boy," She said cutely. "Mama also asked me if you saw a bright light at the end of a long, dark tunnel, and was your drunken bastard-of-a-father standing there?" She now broke out into hysterical laughter.

Bradley flushed red, “That’s not funny, you know my mother is a saintly woman, so just knock it off, please!” He shrieked. He held his head, “You’re giving me a headache, don’t you have nothing better to do?”

Dabbing her eyes with a tissue, she regained her composure, “Alright, I’m going. Your doctor was in earlier, said you can go home tomorrow morning if you woke up without any problems. You look fine to me, I’ll be by to fetch you early, so be ready.”

“I think I’ll be staying with my mother, she likes taking care of me when she can.” Bradley waited for her reply, not sure what she would say.

“Fine honey, have it your way, but she can’t take care of all your needs like I can.” Marie licked her lips slowly.

Bradley looked away, “Very well then, I’ll see you tomorrow at the office, I need to rest now.”

She made her way over to the doorway and turned to face him, “By the way, who’s trying to kill you sweetie-pie?”



## Chapter Two

### **ONE WEEK EARLIER...**

Marie sat at her desk in the office typing, her attention averted to the heavysset woman in the wheelchair coming down the hallway toward the office glass door. Mrs. Paula Grimes had telephoned yesterday seeking an appointment. Marie watched with a little amusement as the woman was unable to stop her forward motion and bumped into the door with a cracking thud.

She observed as the lady, who looked to be in her middle thirties, sat back and read the door signage, 'Bradley Richards - Confidential Inquires.'

Marie now got up and in her socking feet, made her way to the door. Pulling the door open, yet not saying anything, she motioned for the short haired brunette with the green eyes to roll herself into the reception area.

Not very accustomed to the rented wheelchair, she slowly manipulated herself through the doorway and seemed to be short-of-breath as she stopped near Marie's desk.

"I know I'm early honey, I wasn't sure how long it'd take me to get here," she panted and dabbed sweat from her brow and cheeks with a long, lily-white cheap handkerchief.

"It'll be a few minutes, Mr. Richards is speaking on the telephone to a very important client," Marie said lying. He was trying to mollify his headstrong mother who stuck her nose into anything and everything her son was involved with. "Would you care for a cola or glass of cold water?" She asked as she closed the door.

"Why yes, a cola sounds fine, thank you." The plain looking, overweight female answered.

Bradley Richards had operated the small investigation business for over ten years, he was the only investigator the town of Purity Springs had.

The town was home to some eight hundred inhabitants. The mineral springs which were popular many years ago were said to cure illness and rejuvenate the sick and weary.

Bradley handled only those cases his mother permitted, although at times, he'd take on clients his mother wouldn't have approved of as well.

He sat and listened intently and took notes as his mother rattled on about things he considered unimportant, "Yes mother...I know mother...I'll not forget, thank you...I know mother...yes...okay mother, enjoy your trip to Aunt...yes, I won't forget to...I know...Yes, I love you to...what...yes, I know...goodbye mother."

Several minutes later Marie tapped lightly and opened his office door wide as she pushed Mrs. Grimes into his private office. Marie didn't realize how hard it would be to wheel the big woman in over the plush-green carpet. She hit both sides of the doorframe with the wheels as she pushed with all her might. At one-point she almost caused Mrs. Grimes to spill her drink, at which Paula flashed Marie a glaring look.

The inner-office was painted light green just as the reception area was. No fancy furniture, just a simple wooden desk, a small brown couch and two wooden office chairs. No pictures except that of an oversized portrait of his mother hung behind the desk. A few filing cabinets and a small trash can were not far from the desk. There was a desk calendar and a beige rotary telephone with an

electric pencil-sharpener on top of the modest desk.

Bradley stood and presented a smile as he gave a slight half-bow and welcomed her into his office. Mrs. Grimes introduced herself to Bradley and then drew a .38 revolver from her purse and waved it wildly about causing Bradley to duck down behind his desk as Marie absconded from the office. Mrs. Grimes shouted, "Someone is trying to kill me!"

As Bradley peered over the desk Mrs. Grimes whispered, "Oh, honey, it ain't loaded. I can't figure out how to get the bullets inside the thingamajig," she plopped the gun onto his desk with a thud.

Slowly he stood, now examining his desk where the gun had landed. He drew a light-blue handkerchief from his back pocket and started to rub the desk finish after he picked up the revolver. "My mother gave me this desk ten years ago, it would break her heart if it became marred," he whined.

Marie had now returned and rolled her eyes at the whole exchange between the two. Paula apologized for the fright she had given over the pulling of the revolver as she scratched both sides of her head. When she finished, she smiled at Marie, "Dear, could I have another cola please?"

Her open-mouth smile revealed several missing front teeth.

Oh, dear god, Bradley thought as he sat, I hope she isn't infested with something, and within moments his own head began to itch. Gritting his teeth, he overcame the impulse to scratch and finally managed to speak, "While she fetches you another drink, perhaps you could explain your situation."

"I've been separated from my husband for over two months," she grunted as she adjusted herself to a more comfortable position in her wheelchair. "I moved out of the house into an apartment. Now, I'm being stalked. All kind of terrible things are happening to me," she wiped tears from her eyes.

"Do you suspect your husband?" Bradley asked as he scribbled notes.

"No, he's as baffled as I am. When most of the things happened, he was out of town on business."

"What kind of business is he in?"

"I'm not sure, he never speaks about it when I'm around."

Bradley continued, "What kind of things are we talking about here?"

“A week after we separated, I was mugged, and my purse was stolen. A slight, mid-sized man knocked me to the ground, but I wasn’t injured.”

“Did you report this to the police?” He asked.

“I sure did, for all the good it did me. I may as well have told them the ‘man-in-the-moon’ did it. They didn’t seem concerned about it at all.”

“Please continue,” he urged as Marie placed a coaster on his desk and set the drink upon it.

“Oh, thank you dear,” Paula took three large gulps before continuing. “The next scare I had was a taxi tried to run over me. I had to jump out of its way or I’d be dead right now, I fear for my life. He came right up on the sidewalk after me and drove on, never stopped. Then, two days later, someone set fire to the apartment building I lived in. I was rescued and rushed to the hospital for smoke inhalation. The fireman said it was arson,” she took another big gulp of the cola, smacked her lips and continued, “Then last week, I was heading down the stairs at the department store and someone from behind shoved me, I fell all the way to the bottom, broke my left ankle. Sprained my back and have a small knot on my forehead,” she stopped to take a breath.

“Are you sure you just didn’t trip down the...”  
Bradley was cut off.

“Trip my ass! He placed his foot in the middle of my back and pushed me down the stairs!” she squealed.

“Okay, lets settle down.” He slipped a small keychain from his pocket and locating the correct key, unlocked his top drawer. Placing her revolver inside he relocked it.

“Yes, it does sound like someone is angry with you and may even be trying to kill you. I want you to give Marie every detail of these horrendous assaults, so she can type them up for me to study later. Please include your current address and telephone number. Marie handle’s the money, so she will explain what I charge and all that. I’ll start on this early tomorrow morning.”

“Oh, thank you so much, I hope you can get them before they get me.” She said as Marie took hold of her wheelchair and started for the reception desk.

As Marie closed the door behind her, Bradley quickly picked up the sweaty glass of cola and coaster and began to wipe the area with his hankie. Mother would have a fit if she knew about this he thought.

Now slipping off his alligator shoes, which needed a good old-fashioned polishing, he sat crossed legged on the plush carpet and assumed his

favorite yoga position. He would now meditate on the situation at hand.

Bradley's father, Joseph Richards, was a functioning alcoholic, that is to say, he could work all day without the desire for a drink, but at night, he'd drink until he damn-near passed out. Yet, come morning, no hangover and was ready to go again.

Joseph was a career police officer and his last six years, before his untimely death, was as Chief-of-Detectives in Purity Springs. Death came late one night for Joseph as he saw several men squatting under a street light near the tavern he liked to frequent. Being in plainclothes he approached and identified himself as a police officer, at which time he saw the men shooting dice, which just so happened to be illegal.

Ordering the men to drop the dice and money on the ground, he then produced his Smith and Wesson model 64 revolver from his shoulder holster. The men obeyed and then scattered in all directions to avoid arrest, which is what Joseph wanted to occur, since he was going to keep the money and dice for himself, which was his usual way of handling this kind of petty crime.

Fatefully, this time would be the last straw for one of the regulars who was himself inebriated and



decided he wasn't going to take this kind of shit from the Chief of Detectives no more. Stepping from the alleyway just after Joseph had holstered his gun, he came from behind and stabbed him seven times in the back and neck areas with an old icepick.

Joseph made no sound as he slumped to the ground, yet still alive as the man ran off into the shadows. Joseph bleed-out as no one came out of the tavern until closing time, several hours later. His murderer was never apprehended.

His death affected Bradley very deeply, but his mother, Beatrice seemed undisturbed and almost happy. It was common knowledge, and town gossip, that Beatrice and Joseph didn't get along well because of his boozing-it-up problem.

Bradley had at one point in time applied for the police department, hoping to follow in his father's footsteps as it were, but his mother put a stop to it, and forbade her son from bringing up the topic ever again.

Most who knew Bradley understood him to be a mama's boy. He never married because his mother's strong influence always found a mountain of faults with his intended. As time slowly passed, he resigned himself to live out his days as a bachelor, one devoted to his endearing mother.

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