

Where it Ends

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Chapter 1

Detective Constable June Chen could see her squad leader Detective Inspector Saunders through the glass of the Chief's window. He and the Chief were seemingly in agitated debate over something. Their glances out to where she sat seemed to imply that they were discussing her, but June couldn't think of any reason why she'd be called into Chief Adam's office that morning. She had rarely been on this floor of the building, the carpet here was a lot less worn so she could actually tell that it was a navy blue colour and not a splotchy brown. In the last fifteen minutes she had even seen a cleaner stop at each office window for a quick morning polish.

Normally June would spend all day in the bullpen a few floors down, at the desk she shared with the newest hires to the unit. Maybe this was about the anonymous complaint she'd made about DI Saunders's behaviour last month but, she didn't think they would drag her into discussing that with Saunders - unless they wanted to contravene more internal policy. June watched the rising

red blotches across Saunders' face. June knew that look very well. Being a woman, Chief Adams clearly wound DI Saunders up the same way she did.

June fidgeted in her seat slightly and pulled down her skirt back towards her knees. She hated having to wear a skirt at work. They were impractical if she wanted to go out into the field but when her mother was in town it was easier to just give in before she got into an argument. Her traditional mother had managed to adjust to having a police officer daughter who investigated brutal crimes, but June wearing a skirt to look professional and respectful was still an argument they had after 10 years on the job.

The Chief suddenly stood and beckoned her in from the doorway.

'Good afternoon, Detective Chen,' said the Chief, 'We have an interesting opportunity for you.'

'Hello Ma'am,' June said, stumbling slightly as she sat.

'I got a call from Essex Police discussing the recent changes to the station in your old hometown, Bridge End, correct? Their Sergeant is stepping down,' Chief Adams said.

'Stepping down?'

'Yes, let's just say the job was too difficult to balance with child care.'

'Can't say I'm surprised,' said Saunders under his breath.

The Chief ignored him and continued, ‘So, I’ve been having a word with your inspector here and he suggested that given your connections to the place perhaps you’d want to work closer to home. Especially if we recommended you for that promotion you’ve been working towards.’

Heading back to Essex was the last thing June had been considering, especially given it would mean leaving the Met. The Chief seemed to think that this was a good choice for her. Still, it would mean moving back to the town she’d spent her first 18 years itching to escape from. Even if the Chief was genuinely offering a transfer, Saunders had clearly manipulated the situation to get rid of her. The man was not a big fan of hers.

‘Ma’am, I appreciate the opportunity. I don't even know if I want to go back to Bridge End. I’ve barely visited in the last ten years, London is my home now. Also, isn't a sergeant’s position opening here next month?’ she said, trying to keep her voice steady.

The Chief raised an eyebrow and glanced at Saunders slightly confused. Saunders huffed slightly before answering, ‘Chen, given your previous complaints the others may feel a promotion is unjust, or favouritism given your background. Perhaps given your goals this unit isn't the best fit for you.’

June was inclined to believe this was more about how she’d previously challenged DI Saunders about a questionable witness interview they'd

performed together. She was not someone he wanted looking over his shoulder. She'd eventually sent in an anonymous complaint about his behaviour but June was sure he knew about it. Saunders really liked his little boys' club here and any effort to change that had resulted in June being ignored by her peers.

A month ago, he'd dismissed the idea that this assault case they'd been called in on was in any way related to a previous sexual harassment case. It turned out that the 'victim' was being accused of stalking his assaulter's younger sister. Saunders had interviewed this young woman, after June refused to see it as an open and shut case. There he'd asked her if she'd 'set her brother on a man that found her attractive,' like her stalker couldn't have possibly been a real problem.

Saunders loved to victim-blame when he could. The poor girl was deeply upset by this and denied it completely. Although choosing assault was the wrong solution to stop a stalker, it was clear to June that the poor girl had simply confided in her brother about her fears and he'd acted from there. But Saunders couldn't see it and it took the Courts telling him there was no evidence to charge her as an accessory for him to back down. No wonder women don't come forward when men like DI Saunders are out there denying them any chance of moving forward without more trauma.

As much as she disliked Saunders, he did run one of the busiest units at the Met. The unit was supposed to bring opportunities to move up the ranks in a

fast-paced police environment. She didn't want to move back to Bridge End if she could help it. Her boss sucked but didn't everyone's?

Maybe she should consider it though.

'So, how long do I have to think about the position? If I say yes, it's a sure thing that I'll get the job?' June said.

'Well, we'd like an answer as soon as possible. As much as I'd like to vet the position a little more, I don't think we can wait too long given Bridge End's rising popularity as a commuter town,' said the Chief and she stood.

'Of course, I'll...um,' June stood again flattening the creased skirt, 'I'll get back to you as soon as possible, work out if I could move back easily... you know it...' she stuttered as she reached to shake the Chief's proffered hand, 'It would be a big change to all aspects of my life.'

Chief Adams gave her a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes and sat back down behind the desk, opening a file and placing her reading glasses onto her nose. June turned, accidentally making eye-contact with Saunders, 'Thank you, Ma'am. For the opportunity.'

Saunders smirked slightly at her as the Chief responded, 'I'll be speaking to you soon then Constable. I have high hopes.' The Chief then dismissed them both.

Saunders held the door for her and she awkwardly stepped around him. Anyone else would think he was a gentleman. June forced a smile and returned to her desk.

Her mother had been cooking up a storm in her absence. But until June had opened the door and been bombarded by the scent of a mixture of spices, she had forgotten her mother was staying for the week. There in a clean neatly tied apron was her mother, a shorter Chinese woman with a mid-length bob of black hair. Her mother gave only a slight nod in June's direction before continuing to concentrate on the sauce in front of her.

June left the overheated kitchen and living space for the cool and darkened bedroom she usually slept in. When her mother was in town, June always offered to sleep on the sofa and her mother never declined. She debated showering now, but her tired mind won out and she changed into her pyjamas instead. She sat on the neatly made bed. June forced herself to take a deep, cleansing breath. The conversation that was coming with her mother was not going to be an enjoyable one, June knew that her mother was desperate for her to return home. Despite the obvious benefits to the sergeant job in Bridge End, to her it felt more like a step backwards than forwards. But then again from Saunders' implications today, staying in London may lead to her career coming to a stagnant end anyway.

Following the comforting smell of her mother's cooking, June scooted through the cramped kitchen area to move the various bowls of vegetables and dipping sauces to the small round table. She normally used it as a makeshift home office and so June had spent the day before her mother's arrival hiding the boxes of paperwork and mismatched stationary in the back of her wardrobe.

'How was work today?' her mother asked, without looking up from the stove.

'Okay. I got through a lot of necessary follow-ups and paperwork.'

'No danger then today?'

'I worked the leads we have from the station; I did my job.'

'I'm sure you did, Junie, but it doesn't seem like it is worth it given your capabilities,' her mother said and placed the big bowl of white rice onto the table

'I can't have this argument again mamma. I don't have the patience today,' she said. June rubbed at her eyes and served herself a large helping of the rice. Her mother seemed to give in then, almost sensing June's exhaustion. Her mother gave her hand a slight squeeze across the table. They shared a reassuring smile.

'You just eat then, Junie.'

They ate in silence for a while. June preferred the quiet moments with her mother. Since her dad's death, her mother had become more worried about June living in London. But occasionally when they shared a meal like this, she was reminded of how her mum used to be a calming presence in their household, rather than one dominated by nervous fear of the world. Still, she had to tell someone about the Chief's offer and despite her mother's viewpoint on June's job generally, she didn't have many other people to use as a sounding board.

'I got an offer today,' June said quietly. She took another bite of food as her mother met her eyes quickly.

'A job offer?'

'They have an open Sergeants position but I'd have to leave the Met Police,' her mother's eyes lit up, 'I'd have to move most likely, possibly closer to you and Eric.'

'Really? You want to take it?'

'I'm not sure at the minute. Feels like giving up a little,' June said.

'Junie,' her mother said in that way only mothers can do.

'I know it's technically a promotion but I left Essex for a reason. It feels like a step back for me'

Her mother only responded with a hesitant nod and they ate in silence for the rest of the meal.

As June listened to the subtle sounds of her mother sleeping in the other room, she found herself restlessly turning on her couch in an attempt to sleep. June was always a poor sleeper when she had to make a big decision, deciding on where to go to university had led to weeks of insomnia. Finally, she gave in and pulled her silenced phone from under the couch – eight missed calls from Carter Tanner.

A text message appeared on the bright screen.

Wilson is missing.

And another

I think somethings happened.

And finally

Please come help.

Chapter 2

June found herself on the train on the way out of London, with only a small roller suitcase at her feet with her essentials packed. It would probably be afternoon before she reached Bridge End and yet for once, the poor quality of the British rail system may work in her favour. She felt almost overwhelmed despite the quiet train car, she hadn't been home in over five years. Given the reason for the visit was to help look for a missing child, it seemed a little pathetic to think about her own situation with a child in danger. However, she knew as the cityscape turned to orange and yellow fields that she had no real desires to return home at all. It was only her promise to Carter that had led her to leave for Bridge End as soon as possible.

June owed Carter.

She had booked last minute holiday from work and packed early that morning. Saunders had called midmorning and for once was not an immediate asshole, instead informing her that he'd reached out to the Bridge End police to make sure they knew she was coming. It was an oddly kind gesture, to have the forethought to at least make sure June wasn't intentionally stepping on a different force's toes. He'd finished by telling her that he hoped Wilson was found safe.

‘He’s too young to be without his parents. Get the kid home safe,’ he had said.

‘I’ll do my best, Sir. I could keep you updated if you wanted?’

She’d only heard a slightly appreciative hum in reply before he’d ended the call. She had been refreshing the news on her phone all day, in hopes of new information on Wilson Tanner.

When Carter had called her again around midday, he’d sounded so lost and out of breath. The Tanner family had started a small search party near the skatepark that Wilson was last seen at. The countryside that surrounded Bridge End was mostly hilly endless fields and thick woodland so, the chances of the young boy having an accident out there didn’t seem too unlikely to June. She remembered herself running those fields and building forts in the small woodland next to her house. Maybe Wilson had just wandered off. Teenage boys have always been known to be unpredictable. If he’d decided not to come home for dinner, it was possible he merely wanted to escape parental control for the day. Most teenagers would rebel but Carter didn’t seem to think so.

Carter was insistent that something worse was wrong, he said Wilson would have at least sent a text or even called. Wilson wouldn’t want to worry his mother like that. June didn’t know if Carter was a reliable source given that he too spent little time in Bridge End these days. As a trained army medic, he’d

been in Afghanistan for the last seven months. June had heard he'd got back a few weeks ago from her mother's town gossip but, June hadn't expected him to remember enough about her to call in the middle of the night. In fact, she didn't even think he'd still have her number.

The train was stopping every twenty minutes to pull into another countryside platform. Small rural towns and commuter communities seemed to alternate with the leaving passengers. But that was really all there was in West Essex, quiet farm lives pushed by rapid gentrification from London, turning rural communities into ever more bustling towns filled with white collar workers. Bridge End was no different with the M11 a five-minute drive away, like a needle injecting the town directly with London's urban sprawl.

June felt a buzzing in her pocket and found that it was her mother calling again. She declined it to take another look at the rest of her messages. She'd left early without saying goodbye. It would take too long to get her mother packed and on the train with her – unlike June, she never chose convenience. Instead, her mother packed her bags like every emergency would happen to her just popping to the shops. June had left a scribbled note on the coffee table and the door key to the flat, only asking her mother to lock up if she left. She also wrote that she'd been called in to help look for missing Wilson Tanner by Carter but left it at that. She couldn't explain now why she'd dropped everything for a man

she hadn't seen in six years. For now, that was enough, she had to dedicate her focus to Wilson.

At 4pm, she finally reached the train station about 4 miles from Bridge End on the Essex-Cambridgeshire border. Pulling her case along rough mismatched tarmac, she arrived at the pick-up zone. June was surprised to see a young uniformed officer waiting next to an older model police car. He had clearly been waiting for her, as upon seeing her leave the station he'd pushed himself up from his seat on the bonnet and waved her over.

'DS Chen!' he greeted in a warm tone. June hesitated at the odd change in rank he'd given but managed a reply of, 'yes, I'm Chen,' as the young officer quickly took her case and began rolling it towards the boot.

'Your chariot awaits,' she heard as he disappeared from view. June circled to the passenger door as the blonde-haired officer returned with a wide smile.

'Let's get going,' he said.

'I feel like I should ask who you are before I...' she trailed off; a little hesitant of this unusually warm spirited man.

'Oh right,' he said, 'PC Abbott, at your service, I guess. Connor if you prefer first names.'

He gave a wide toothy smile and climbed into the car. Chen couldn't help but follow.

'So, boss said you're here to help with Wilson Tanner? That's exciting... sorry, I meant interesting?' He made unsure eyes at her as they drove into town, clearly this guy was a nervous talker.

'I know the family,' she replied, 'actually more like I knew the family.'

'This must be hard for you then, personal even?' PC Abbott said.

'Something like that,' He looked confused and June realised that this guy had the kicked puppy disposition she normally hated in people - Usually an unnatural warmth that was usually a mixture of naivety and desire to please. She decided to give him a little slack anyway.

'I owe someone a favour, a big favour,' she clarified, 'and nobody likes a missing kid.'

'Right, of course,' he finished with a shy smile. Awkward silence filled the car for the rest of the journey, but she couldn't think of anything else to say to Abbott despite his occasional cautious glance in her direction.

June spent an hour at the station. The smaller single story police station only housed ten officers and only one room was dedicated to a shared detectives

office. PC Abbott showed her the current search grid and limited timeline of the evening of the 10th and Wilson's disappearance.

Now she was settling in the B&B hotel room she'd rented only a 10-minute walk from the town centre. Originally, she thought she'd stay at her mother's. But upon pulling up in front of the well-maintained cutesy cottage house – she couldn't stomach staying in that single bed in the tiny box room of her youth. June watched the street outside, small and winding like most of the streets here. They weren't designed for the massive influx of cars the last twenty years had bought. Roads first built when the town was merely a connective point for miles of farmers.

June had spread the notes she'd written and some predicted routes on a printed town map over the desk by the window. She presumed these would be Wilson's normal paths to frequented stops like school and the local corner store.

She watched the small car pull up outside in the glow of the street lamps. The car she spent most of her youth riding shotgun in. A beat-up Ford focus, that despite its age she knew was meticulously clean. Carter Tanner stepped out of the car. His hair was still a dirty blonde but cropped tighter than June remembered. The man's sharp features always made him seem almost ethereal and the sinewed muscularity he'd gained in recent years had clearly amplified that image.

June pulled on the hiking boots already slightly coated in mud from the morning and before Carter could knock, she'd pulled the door open. His surprise was evident even through the exhaustion that dominated his expression.

'Hey,' he said, raising a hand in greeting.

'Hey,' June replied, unsure if they should hug given the circumstances of her return, 'How are you?' she decided.

'Not so good,' Carter said. His eyes fell to the floor as he shoved his hands in his pockets and she could now see the thick stubble coating his normally cleanly shaven face.

'I'll bet,' she said and reached out to touch his arm awkwardly, 'I'm here to help though, so how about you walk me through it from the beginning and we'll go from there.'

'I honestly have no idea how this happened,' he said as he turned to return to the car. June followed behind.

'We will find him, I promise,' she said. Together, they left to join the police search on the fields behind the Tanner's Street.

The morning of the 12th February, Carter pulled up on the verge at the side of First Street just behind the 'Welcome to Bridge End' marker. Even back when

June lived here, this cut through to the ‘skatepark’ had existed. A small break in the overgrown treeline with a muddy and damp path that was made by hundreds of shoe treads leading to a broken up mixed dirt and concrete clearing. Ramps lined with wood plates and a few bolted in metal bars June presumed people would grind skateboards on. Last night, an older man called the newly established tip line. He said he saw kids Wilson’s age hanging out at First Street Park when he was walking his dog in the evening of the 10th.

Here there was a small gathering of people that clearly weren’t skaters,

‘Lots of other parents from the high school wanted to help, and any of us who were still around after graduation decided we’d start a search. We don’t know if we are searching the right place but this was where Wilson was last seen,’ Carter said quietly to June as they approached the group, ‘Dad thinks he’s just wandered off or got lost out there.’

‘You don’t?’ June asked.

Carter shrugged half-heartedly and shook his head. June knew that feeling – something was wrong but to what extent neither of them had any solid ideas.

The group were composed of about ten adults including Eddie and Richard Tanner, all dressed in walking gear and a few had hi-vis jackets on. Despite it being ten years later, Eddie still looked the same to June. He was well built from years of construction work and now had a salt and pepper beard with

permanent sun scarring to his face. Under that he was still that immovable force of a man she remembered. Eddie was never the best father to Carter, reasonably absent after the parents' divorce. When it came to the two kids with his second wife, Carter said that he had rarely even seen Eddie raise his voice at them.

Richard Tanner was probably 70 now. He, unlike Eddie, was skinny with spindly long limbs. June wondered if the man still walked for miles like he used to when they were all young. Carter would often talk about his grandfather's woodland walks around Bridge End that he'd tag along with occasionally. Richard probably knew the outskirts of this town better than anyone else in the county.

Richard had a determined look on his face and was passing out sheets to the others as Eddie spoke to the group.

'Dad!' Carter called, 'June's here.'

Mr Tanner turned and met June's gaze. She should have turned off the analytical study she was taking of his body language, but something about the man already read slightly wrong to her. Although he had that lost sleep look to his face, there was an anxious surprise layered underneath the clenched jaw. A moment passed before Mr Tanner broke into the same polite smile he'd given when he was trying to convince Carter to stay with him for a weekend with the 'new wife' – often Carter would deny him to stay at June's house instead.

‘Hey, thanks for coming. I didn’t think you and Carter were still talking these days,’ he said.

‘Mr Tanner, I came as soon as I heard. I wanted to make sure you would have all the information and help possible if this escalates,’ June said.

‘Right... you’re police,’ again hesitation filled his eyes as if there was something else he wanted to say, ‘Well, me and my dad are starting a grid search from here. Going out until we reach our house. You are welcome to join us,’ he finished and began to turn away back to the party of searchers.

‘Actually Sir, I think I’ll let you guys’ search. I want to talk to some of the folks here who may have seen Wilson the day he went missing.’

Mr Tanner looked confused, ‘we already talked to his friends, they all say he left at 6pm to come home for tea. We know he left here, so what else is there?’

‘I want to know his state of mind, if anything was different than usual, if he seemed upset or distracted,’ June said. She could see the rising frustration in Mr Tanner’s expression as he moved in closer to her.

‘Why would it matter if he was distracted? He is out there somewhere, not here and we’ve got to find him!’

Carter stepped in front of June, his wide shoulders and height nearly blocked Eddie Tanner completely from her view. June knew he was trying to keep this

calm, but she always found Carter's need to protect her from the slightest aggression of other men frustrating. Carter couldn't possibly believe his father would hurt June, so why did he feel the need to treat her like glass?

'Dad, June isn't just here to search. She's here because I asked for her help, and her asking questions might help us more than another person in the search line,' he said, putting a reassuring hand on his father's chest. June stepped around Carter to be back eye to eye with Mr Tanner.

'Mr Tanner, I want to find Wilson as much as anyone else here but I want to make sure we aren't missing anything by assuming that he has wandered off or gotten lost. I think it would be better if you weren't blindly searching these woods. If we knew how he was feeling at the time, we might be able to work out why he would go in any direction other than home,' June stated calmly. She could hold her own against anger and attitude from dominant men without Carter's help.

She placed her hand on Mr Tanner's arm, attempting to soften his boiling rage, 'I know that this is hard but, we should be doing everything we can to find Wilson. That includes making sure that we don't have the wrong idea about why he is missing.'

June watched Mr Tanner's face relax and the anxiety ridden expression upon her arrival returned, 'You do what you want, I need to find my son,' he said as he walked back to the search party.

'I'm sorry about my dad,' Carter said, 'I don't think any of us know what to do here.'

June nodded while watching the group of boys also gathering at the opposite end of the clearing.

'Do those boys know your brother?' she asked.

'I think so. Dad said Wilson spends a lot of time down here,'

June knew that those were her first stop to finding out what happened last night. But she didn't want to bring the missing boy's older brother over to interview them, that felt accusatory that they'd done something wrong and if June knew anything about teenage boys it's that they don't respond well to accusations. They clam up faster than grown criminals do. It was probably a good thing she wasn't seeing much police presence here for the time being, everyone would be calm enough to talk to her. June informed Carter of her initial ideas and he agreed to start the search with his dad and catch up with her later. Leaving June to start her own investigation.

Chapter 3

The 'skatepark' was about a twenty-minute walk from the Tanner house. Carter had told June that Wilson was supposed to be home at 6pm for a family meal. Upon talking to Wilson's friends, Wilson left the skatepark at 6pm exactly,

'He didn't want to have dinner with them,' said one of the boys.

'My parents aren't annoying like his, ordering me home when I don't wanna,' another said.

'If they asked him about why he was late, he said he'd tell them he left here when he was supposed to, which was 6. Like a subtle dig at them or something,' said Wilson's best friend, Matt Knowles, a boy who'd clearly touched the rough edge of puberty early. Despite being nearly 6ft tall, he was struggling with acne and thick but patchy facial hair. June spared a moment to compare Matt to Wilson who was clean cut, blonde, and tanned like his older brother. June knew what looking different from your peers could do to self-esteem, but Matt gave no indication that he was shy. Instead, he had relaxed shoulders and made strong eye contact.

Some people like Eddie Tanner felt threatened by questions, she expected more frustration from these boys given their age. It was interesting that none of them argued that Wilson left along the alley that led into Fulford street. Plus, Wilson gave no indications that he wouldn't return for dinner at all.

A slightly older teenager, maybe eighteen, certainly out of high school was the last person June talked to. Aaron Brown did not look happy with the presence of ‘adults’ in his space. He was sitting against one of the ramps picking at the dirtied skin around his nails and pushing his greasy hair out of his face.

‘So, you think little Willy’s missing,’ he said without looking up.

‘He hasn’t been seen in two days; don’t you think that’s reason enough to be concerned?’ June asked.

‘Not really. I go off all the time.’

‘Is Wilson like you then, the type to disappear for a few days?’

‘Maybe not, but it don’t mean he’s missing or nothin.’

‘Did you see him the night of the 10th?’

‘I mean yeah, he was here with Knowles and a few other kids. But they all left before I did.’ Aaron finally looked up at her with a lazy eyebrow raise.

‘When did the rest of his friends leave?’

‘Don’t know really, hours before me,’ he stood and picked up his board, ‘They all left around the same time though. Parents don’t want kids like that out past the lights going out,’ he gave her a conclusive half smirk and turned to

leave. Back through the break in the foliage across the main road rather than down the path into Fulford street.

June decided to do the walk herself to the Tanner house with the cut-throughs and shortcuts between streets that were the fastest way. Away from the town centre, the buildings were more modern than the classical village houses of the high street.

The seventies style beige painted flats, paired with red and brown brick semi-detached late 20th century houses reminded June of how these towns never really changed. Some contractors just buy out the land owners of fields and parks and replace the empty spaces with more style standard houses. Houses that now start too expensive and only drop to a manageable price when the neighbourhood's elderly die out or the county council buys them for cheap renters.

Approaching the house, June noticed a car parked across the street. She knew it was a detective's car because unlike the other cars on this quiet street, it wasn't parked in a drive. That and despite being an older model sedan, it was unnaturally clean and well cared for.

She knocked on the passenger window. Startled from the file balanced against the steering wheel, the driver looked up at her. He was late 40s with a

bulbous nose and grey side parted hair. He pulled the small reading glasses off his face and slid them into his front shirt pocket.

‘You that out-of-towner?’ he asked her, lowering the window.

‘DC June Chen,’ she told him.

‘DI Harold Grieves,’ he unlocked the car door and June sat down, ‘why’d they send you then Constable? Seems like an odd choice for a small-town missing person.’

‘I grew up here and know the family a little,’ June said. Grieves narrowed his eyes at her and felt the analysis of a man who was naturally suspicious.

‘That was enough for the Brass? I’ve lived in the Uttle’s county for nearly 40 years and police for at least half of that. I can handle a missing kid case,’ Grieves returned to his file, flicking through what had to be witness statements.

‘The Brass didn’t send me, Carter Tanner asked me to come.’

That clearly caught his attention as he turned his whole body to face her, ‘The army medic?’

‘I knew him in high school, we were close,’ June trailed off. Honestly, she didn’t know how to describe their relationship now. She dropped everything when Carter called her, even though they hadn’t spoken in over five years. Maybe she wouldn’t have if she didn’t owe him so much. Maybe he wouldn’t

have called. Maybe they're just strangers who knew one had skills the other needed, 'He knew I'd help and that I wouldn't stop until I found his brother.'

'So, he thinks something happened more than just the kid wandering off?' Grieves was staring intently at her now, telling him about Carter's feelings might have been a mistake.

'More than Wilson wandering off, yes,' June said, 'anything else would be speculation, that I don't think Carter's willing to think about just yet. There's a hesitation to... ' June struggled to find the words.

'Escalate from searching to handing the investigation completely over to us?' Grieves asked. June nodded and finally she felt the tension in the air settle as Grieves lent back against his seat and returned to staring at the Tanner house with a large sigh.

'Tell you what I think is weird behaviour, that in the last two days, Mrs Tanner hasn't joined in any of the searches. In fact, PC Abbott said she hasn't left the property at all.'

'you've been watching the house?' said June.

'I agree with your friend that something is off, and I think it starts with that house,' Grieves pointed out at the clone copied brick semi-detached house.

June eyes followed Grieves finger as Isla Tanner appeared in the kitchen window. Thinner than June remembered but still the mousy woman had that energy of a startled bird. Wide doll like eyes and the blonde hair she'd passed down to both of her children. From the distance of two houses back, it wasn't clear what she was doing but June could swear she was washing dishes.

'That woman refused to invite us in. We just wanted to have a look at Wilson's room,'

'Get to know him a little?' June interrupted.

'Cases like this, we need to know if there is motive to force the missing to leave. If behaviour indicates a mental health issue, rather than something criminal,' Grieves went on, 'She didn't want to hear it. She told us the house wasn't presentable, that Becca would be upset by strangers in the house, that she didn't want us to break anything by searching. Now if one of my kids were gone and weren't answering their phone even for more than a night, I'd be letting everyone in that could help.'

'I saw Eddie Tanner at the skatepark earlier, talked to some of Wilson's friends there, Eddie seemed desperate to find him,' June said, 'Although he did question why I'd want to talk to Wilson's friends. He was almost defensive about it.'

‘That’s what’s sticking out for me, he didn’t argue against his wife to let us in. He just wants more people out searching with no questions asked.’ Grieves said.

They sat in silence for a while, both watching the house. Watching Isla wash dishes. June didn’t want to be suspicious but Grieves was right that the whole situation was odd. It had been over 48 hours since Wilson had disappeared and that wasn’t good in terms of probable outcomes. Searching the fields hadn’t yielded any results, so someone had to talk to them.

‘Isla knows me, even if I am police, maybe she’ll talk if she knows that I know you,’ June said.

‘Pretty quick turn-around for us to work together,’ Grieves’ serious tone fell a little and a subtle warmth took its place.

‘Partners, for this case?’ June asked with a smile holding out her hand, ‘I might be able to open some doors for you.’

Grieves returned the smile but instead opened the car door, ‘Well let’s see what you got before we make a deal.’

He pulled himself out of the car and began walking toward the Tanner house. June followed in hopes of finally getting some answers.