

Sunday, 12/15 9 AM

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The conference room is full. Brown made sure there would be only enough chairs for the families so that it looked like his deputies were forced to stand. The real reason he wanted his people standing was in case the Hook father lost his cool and started yelling at Else's mother. Or if Troske's stepfather showed up three drinks in. Or...

The Vaneks quietly take up position behind Mr. Hook. Deputy Anderson, the only female deputy working this morning, stands behind Mrs. Else. Sheriff Brown walks in, crosses to the other side of the table, and doesn't sit.

"We found their SUV. We have not found them yet." Three sets of mouths open, but Brown ignores them. "A witness spotted a gray Nissan XTerra XTerra up State Road 1126. The one that goes over to Elksville. The witness also reported seeing six young men around his vehicle earlier that evening. When the witness tried to call to them from the woods, they didn't respond. We searched the vehicle, drew fingerprints, and searched the immediate surroundings. Since this area is part of a national forest, it falls into the forestry service's jurisdiction. The person in charge there is named Dan Spencer. We're going to assist him in his first search this afternoon, starting at 1 PM. The road is snowed in, so we'll be taking snowcats on loan from CalTrans up there. At this moment, we're not looking for volunteers. We've asked the county to clear the snow so more vehicles and people can get up there and more people. But the county has insisted that it's on national forest land, so it's a national forestry problem. We're working that out."

“What the hell were they doing up there when there was snow coming in?” Mr. Hook shouts at him.

“We don’t know. And we have to approach this search with the possibility that they might not have even been in the vehicle when it was abandoned.”

“What does that mean? Where else could they have been?” A woman, crying. He’s not sure until Deputy Anderson mouths the word “LED-FORD” from her position behind the parents.

“We don’t know, Mrs. Ledford.”

“What do you know?” asks the man next to her.

“At this point, not much more than you. And by the end of this briefing, you’ll know as much as ~~us~~we do. We’re continuing to make phone calls. As some of you may know, this case is starting to garner some media attention. That can be a blessing and a curse. We’ll have a lot more people aware of the situation and on the look-out for your boys, but we’ll also get a lot more cranks calling us with made-up reports.”

“I had one of those reporters call me. I ignored him. But are we allowed to talk to them? Is that legal?” Mrs. Ledford asks. Other heads nod in the room, indicating they’ve also been contacted.

“You are all free adult ~~s~~ citizens of the United States of America and, therefore, allowed to talk to whomever you so choose. I would advise you to exercise some caution on which organizations you choose to speak with. But again, that’s your choice.”

“So you called us down here to tell us you don’t know shit about where my son is?” the speaker begins to rise from his chair. Anderson mouths the word “~~Mutz~~UTZ,” but Brown doesn’t need it. He needs

Vanek to inch a little closer to the man. He glances at Vanek. Curtis would know to move, but he's not sure which one is closer.

"Mr. Mutz, we called you down here as a courtesy. We know how worried you must be. We wanted -"

"How could you possibly know how worried we are? How could you possibly know what it feels like to have a kid go missing?" Mutz demands. The room goes silent. Even Mr. Hook won't look up from the table. Mutz must have expected more support from the other parents because he quiets down when it doesn't come.

"Mr. Mutz, you may not believe me, but I know a great deal about losing a child. Too much. And it's my job to make sure none of you have to experience that. We've found their vehicle. We're going to comb that area this afternoon. Even with the snow, we'll have a pretty good idea if they were in the area or not."

"Who was the witness?" Mr. Hook asks.

"You know I can't give you a name. But we have reason to believe it's a credible witness. He has photographs that corroborate his story and put the ~~X~~TerraXterra at that location by 1 AM Friday morning."

"How do you know this witness of yours wasn't involved in their disappearance?" Mutz asks.

"We're investigating that possibility."

"This doesn't make any sense," Mrs. Ledford tries to say. She's almost on the verge of sobbing. "Horatio wouldn't leave that car, right, Horace? He wouldn't abandon it out in the woods. AJ tried to borrow it from him once so he could wash it for him, and Horatio wouldn't let him."

"That's right," Hook nods. "There's no way he'd leave that car. That car was basically part of him. And there's no way he'd let someone else drive it. Anywhere. Ever."

"So that means someone probably took it from them?" is the first thing Mr. Troske decides to say. Mrs. Ledford folds over crying. Her husband puts his hand on her back.

"We don't know what it means. We don't know much right now. All we care about is finding them." He looks at the Ledfords, remembering his a time when there was nothing for him to do but cry, too. "Mrs. Ledford, Mr. Hook, all of you. We're going to find your boys. Five adult men don't go missing. One does. Two, yeah. But not five. They're somewhere. And they're probably looking after each other right now."

"Bullshit," Mr. Hook shouts, turning towards the only end of the table that's still quiet. "You don't have much to say, do you, Mrs. Else? That fucking twinker son of yours got them into this. Your son never had no father in his life, and he grew up to be a piece of shit, and now I might never see my son again!"

"Hey, that's enough - -" Brown attempts, but Hook's voice only grows even louder.

"You knew my son. You knew he'd go along with anything your asshole kid said. And look where we are. This is your fault!"

Brown nods to Vanek, who stands directly in front of Hook.

"It's time to go. Now," Vanek says. Hook takes a look at him as if sizing him up for a fight. "Bullshit," Mr. Hook shouts, turns towards the only end of the table that's still quiet. "You don't have much to say, do

Commented [TT1]: Here would be a good place to put more information about his experience with losing his child. It could be anything from a few sentences to a few paragraphs. A brief but vivid thought about his kid or an in-depth flashback. This will help readers connect and sympathize more with him.

you Mrs. Else? That fucking tweaker son of yours got them into this. Your son never had no father in his life and he grew up to be a piece of shit and now I might never see my son again. You knew my son. You knew he'd go along with anything your asshole kid said. And look where we are. This is your fault!" Brown had attempted to interrupt throughout his rant, but it just made Hook talk louder. The sheriff nods to Vanek, who stands directly in front of Hook.

"It's time to go. Now," Vanek says. Hook takes a look at him, as if sizing him up for a fight.

"He said *now*," his brother's voice echoes from behind Hook.

Hook seems to contemplate it for a few seconds longer, glaring at the two of them. When he realizes this isn't a fight that he's going to win, he shoots one last dirty look toward Mrs. Else before grabs snatching his jacket from the back of the chair and, pullings his wife's chair out so she can stand up and walk out of the room first. She shoots them all an apologetic look, keeping her head down as she walks out of the room. Hook storms out behind her, slamming the door on his way out.

There's a stiff silence in the room that lingers for a few seconds too long as everyone looks around at one another, awkwardly glancing at Mrs. Else when they think she won't notice. But it's clear by the color on her cheeks and her refusal to look up from a random spot on the table that she *does* notice.

Sheriff Brown clears his throat to dissipate the tension.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Else. You didn't need to hear that."

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Commented [TT2]: You can, of course, change any of these details if they don't fit the characters, but I added them to do a little more 'showing' instead of telling.

Adding subtle details like these throughout the story helps bring the characters and story to life. You want to make your writing as vivid as possible so readers can become immersed in this world and invested in its characters. You want it to feel as if they're watching a TV show because they're able to visualize everything so well.

Things like a character's looks/style can even be helpful during scenes like this. Take Hook and his wife, for instance. Does Hook's wife have tired, wrinkled eyes from lack of sleep since she's so worried? Is her hair and clothing a mess since she hasn't cared to take care of herself since her boy is missing? Or maybe she's still trying to make herself look presentable. Is Hook dressed in his usual attire? Did he try to wear something more formal for this meeting—and if so, does he look awkward and out of place in the unusual attire? How does he smell? Maybe he's been drinking more since his child has gone missing and reeks of beer. Or maybe he smells like overly expensive cologne.

Just seemingly minor details like this are what really bring the story to life. They may seem insignificant, but they absolutely are not.

Don't feel as if you have to add these kinds of details for every character present in every scene. But for the main characters the scene involves, adding things like this can be helpful.

Your writing is great aside from just needing to add more details and do more showing instead of telling. Since these are the main critiques, I won't keep harping on them! Going forward, I'll just continue to point out areas where more details could be added. I'll add some myself, but you know these characters better than anyone so please take my changes with a grain of salt.

Also, in case you're wondering what I mean about 'showing vs telling,' here are a few articles that can help you distinguish the difference:

<https://jerryjenkins.com/show-dont-tell/>

<https://www.autocrit.com/editing/support/showing-vs-telling-indicators/>

“What if he’s right?” ~~she asks so quietly~~ Her voice is so quiet that Brown isn’t sure what she said.

“Excuse me?”

“What if he’s right?—What if Tristan did this?—What if he’s the reason for... all of this?” She’s speaking to the floor.—Deputy Anderson inches behind her.

“We have no way of knowing that, Mrs. Else,” Brown starts.—“We don’t know what happened.—And until we start getting some evidence that tells us what did happen, none of you should start thinking this way. We’re using all of our available time and resources to find your sons.—We can’t spare any to be breaking up fights and arguments around town.—...I have your numbers. I’ll call you when we get back from the search this afternoon.”—The parents begin to stand, sensing that it’s their cue to leave.—~~I have your numbers. I’ll call you when we get back from the search this afternoon.~~—I’m bringing a satellite phone up there so I can be in touch immediately if there’s any news.—And if you hear from any of your sons, anything at all, call us immediately.”

The parents shuffle out, careful not to make eye contact with one another.—Deputy Anderson lingers behind.

“Man,” she says as she sits across from the sheriff, “it’d be awful to lose a kid like that, but then to have no one to share it with, you know? I mean, the only other people going through the same thing might be partly responsible for it.—Just a room full of—suspicion.—Shit.”—She removes the her wide-brimmed hat and rubs her forehead.—“Hey, Ian told me about what you guys heard last night up in the woods.—Pretty spooky.”

Commented [TT3]: What does she look like and what are her mannerisms like?

“Ian told you some cock and bull story because he’s got a crush on you. Ain’t nothing spooky but five missing young men.”

“Ian’s engaged. Curtis has a crush on me.” She smiles. “But he’s too young.”

“Ian’s engaged? And how old are you?”

“27.”

“They’re, what, 25?”

“Yeah, that’s too young for me.”

Brown looks at her quickly. Prior to this conversation, he didn’t know if Anderson was married or not. He assumed that all of his deputies over the age of 25 were. Anderson is an attractive woman with a good career, so he assumed she was already off the market. “Anyway, you’re dodging my point, Sheriff. You guys heard a loud scream. Ian says it didn’t sound human.”

“Must’ve sounded human enough for him that he grabbed the shotgun right quick. Never seen him move that fast before. Who’s he engaged to?”

“I dunno. Some girl who works in the hotels or something. Probably came up here to work the farms like the rest of them and found more reputable work. She’s young. 20? Which isn’t that surprising. At least Curtis has the courage to pursue an older woman...”

“You’re 27.”

“Exactly. Older. So what do you think it was?”

“I don’t know.”

“How long did the screaming last?”

“10 seconds, maybe?”

Commented [TT4]: I will say that I think readers will find Brown’s perpetual confusion about the twins amusing, so great job with adding that!

“And you couldn’t find the source?”

“No.”

“Three officers accustomed to the woods couldn’t find the source of an impossibly loud scream?” She smiles as she asks.

“Here’s the weird thing,” Brown says as he. ~~He~~ sits down and leans back. ~~“I coulda sworn the screaming came from behind me~~ ~~---~~ ~~f~~From behind the boulder. ~~But one of the Vaneks claimed it came from my right.~~ ~~And Vanek number 2 claimed it came from my left.~~ ~~So we spent the first thirty seconds arguing over which way to look first.~~ ~~Didn’t matter,~~ ~~though.~~ ~~We spiraled outward from that spot to a radius of at least three hundred yards.~~ ~~Two feet of fresh snow and not even tracks of a raccoon.”~~

“What boulder?” ~~She’s~~ sitting straight up, engaged.

“What?”

“You said the screaming came from behind the boulder. ~~What boulder?”~~

Brown drops his head into his hands and, ~~rub~~s the stubble on his head. ~~“There was a rock in the road.”~~

“What do you mean, ‘a rock in the road’?” ~~He~~ looks up to see Anderson staring at him intently, the way she would if she were asking a drunk witness to a bar fight. ~~“Like, how big of a rock?”~~

“Bigger than me.”

“So too big for a person to move by himself?”

“Yeah. ~~Why are you so interested in all of this, Deputy Anderson?”~~ she slouches down a little at the reminder of her position. ~~She~~ pulls out her notebook and begins to write something down.

“Sheriff, I’m going to do you a big favor. Someone in my book club works at Mountain College. She’s an anthropology professor. I’m going to call her and tell her you’re coming in to talk to her. Today.”

“Anderson, we have a lot of work to do. I have to be back up that mountain by 1. Which means I have to get the county snowmobiles out of storage and—”

“We’ll handle that. You’ll get up there at 1, don’t worry. But you need to talk to Katie. Kathryn. You need to tell her everything you just told me.”

“You still haven’t told me why I’m going to take time out to do this.”

“Sheriff, who’s the best deputy you got?” Brown makes a show of trying to think about this when they both know the answer. Anderson has a weird knack for arresting felonies. Routine traffic stops have more than once led to big arrests. Welfare checks for a truant student, and she uncovers a father pimping his step-daughter out for pills. Her paperwork is always immaculate. The first question the county DAs ask is, “Was Anderson the arresting officer?”

To Ian’s (or Curtis’) credit, part of her attraction was how good she was at her job.

“That’s what I thought. Go talk to her. Trust me.” She stands to leave. “And, since you’re going to want to ask but probably don’t know how to anymore, I’ll just save you the embarrassment: yes, she’s single.”

The only reason he stops at the college is because it’s on the way. And because Anderson asked him to and Anderson is a good cop. With

this whole thing getting bigger and bigger, Brown knows he'll need her more. If Vanek's threatening phone call lead goes anywhere, he'll need her help.

He enters the college off Mountain Road and, as directed, drives straight towards the gym. Before he can even look for directions, he sees a woman standing out of the rain under the covered walkway. He parks in front of her and steps out of the car with a quiet grunt.

"Sheriff Brown?"

"The car give it away?"

"Lisa said to look for an intelligent man with the word 'sheriff' across his chest," she smiles and Brown probably looks-stares for a second too long. She's almost his height, slim, and has a smile that's hard to look away from. He extends his hand and she takes it, giving it a firm shake. "I'm Kate. I know Lisa from our book club."

"Sheriff Brown."

"Your parents named you 'Sheriff'?"

"Steven. Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I have an appointment and—"

"I understand. You have a lot on your plate. Lisa gave me the outline, but I'm afraid I'm kind of hearing it third-hand. Do you mind telling me what happened last night?" Brown looks at her again and feels a bead of rain come through a crack in the aluminum awning, hit his neck, and trickle down his back. Kate is almost his height, slim, and has a smile that's hard to look away from. "I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm a professor of American folklore, and I study how Native American oral histories have been passed into settler American oral history."

Commented [TT5]: Why does he stare? It's likely because he thinks she's attractive but the reader might not know that. You have to hint at it. You can do that by describing her attractive features or his thoughts while looking at her.

What does she look like? What is her smile like? It may be mentioned later, but it's better to mention it here in her introduction.

Commented [TT6]: Is her dry humor more sarcastic or flirtatious? What is her facial expression like when she says this? Does she raise a brow and look smug or is she wearing a bright smile and tilting her head, etc.

Commented [TT7]: I moved this sentence up a few paragraphs, but this would be a great place to put a more in-depth description about her appearance. What are her hair, eye, and skin color? Does she smell of flowery perfume? Etc.

Commented [TT8]: This doesn't flow smoothly and seems a bit out of place, so a transitional sentence would be great here—or maybe he can send her a confused look and she explains why she decided to mention this.

~~“Where did you do your Ph.D.?” “I understand. You have a lot on your plate. Lisa gave me the outline, but I’m afraid I’m kind of hearing it third hand. You mind telling me what happened last night?” Brown looks at her again, feels a bead of rain come through a crack in the aluminum awning hit his neck and trickle down his back. Kate is almost his height, slim and with a smile it’s hard to look away from. “I’m not a psychiatrist. I’m a professor of American folklore and I study how Native American oral histories have been passed into settler American oral history.”~~

~~“Where’d you do your PhD?”~~

“Uhhh...UCLA.”

“I got my law degree in LA. ~~Not UCLA.~~” He’s not sure why he shared this.

“You’re a sheriff with a law degree?”

“Sure,” he looks at his feet, kicks water off his boots. ~~He looks at her feet and sees;~~ ankle high boots with a heel and the zipper up the side. His wife never wore shoes like that.

“So, you want to tell me what you saw?”

Brown begins talking ~~after;~~ check~~ings~~ his watch. ~~It takes him two minutes to tell Kate his story. She nods throughout, staring at him with wide eyes that he can hardly bring himself to meet the whole time.~~

When he’s done, she asks, “So what do you think it was?”

“I dunno. ~~Someone trying to scare us. There are a lot of illegal marijuana operations up in that part of our county. Some of them are pretty sophisticated.~~”

“Sounds dangerous,” she says.—There’s a look of concern on her face.—“Anyway, what you described is a fairly common narrative in Bigfoot encounters.—People—”

“Hold on, Dr....”

“Professor Giannini.—But call me Kate.”

“Right.—I never said anything about Bigfoot.—There’s no—”

“Sheriff—, Steven, that’s not what I’m saying.—I’m saying your experience matches up with what a lot of people say they’ve experienced. It matches up so well, in fact, that it’s a very real possibility that whoever is doing security at this marijuana grows farm uses that narrative to protect their properties.”—Kate looks directly into his eyes when she speaks; the same way Anderson does.—It takes him a second to realize it’s his turn to talk.

“So, you’re saying that what I saw was probably trying to scare me off with Bigfoot stories?”

“I don’t know what you saw.—No one does.—But it sounds a little too complete and perfect.—The boulder too big to be moved by a human, the loud screaming coming from all directions at once?—You probably heard the same stories a hundred times growing up here.”

“I didn’t grow up here.—My wife did.”

“Oh.”

“She’s buried next to her father in Elksville.”

“Oh. Oh.—I’m sorry.”

“It happened a while ago.—But anyway, I never heard any of these stories growing up in Sacramento.—She might’ve.”

“Well, for someone from here, those things that happened, ~~they’re~~ are like something off a checklist of Bigfoot encounter stories. ~~Remote~~ part of the woods, heavy boulders come flying, unearthly screaming. ~~..Check,~~ check, and check. ~~Look, you’re a cop.~~ ~~But you’re a lawyer,~~ too. I don’t need to tell you about the importance of evidence. ~~No one’s ever~~ captured any hard evidence of this creature’s existence, so it probably doesn’t exist. ~~But it exists in a lot of people’s imaginations.~~ ~~Seems like~~ you could buy yourself a lot of privacy exploiting that.”

Brown nods along. ~~He look~~ings at his watch.

“Sheriff, I understand that you’re busy. ~~I’ll let you go.~~”

“No. ~~I’m sorry.~~ ~~I didn’t mean to...~~”

“It’s okay, really.” ~~She smiles.~~ Really smiles at him for a second, ~~and so that~~ he sees wrinkles around her eyes. ~~She’s older than~~ Anderson. ~~Closer to his age than he expected.~~ “I’m getting cold standing out here when I could be drinking coffee back in my office right now anyway.”

Brown imagines book-lined shelves, a low, overstuffed chair under a reading lamp, music playing softly on an expensive speaker, and rain running down the window. He could use a cup of coffee right about now himself. He almost wishes he could follow her into her cozy office and enjoy a warm cup over some small talk.

Her voice rips him out of his thoughts.

“If you want to talk to someone about this ~~--~~, someone who also doesn’t believe all the Bigfoot bullshit circulating, let me know. ~~Lisa has~~ my number.”

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“Uhh...okay.” there’s an awkward pause as he tries to figure out what to say—and why he’s struggling more than usual to find the right words. Finally, he settles for putting on his most professional voice. “Look, I’m really sorry to cut you off.—Thank you for your time; I know you’re busy.”

“We both are.—Get up there and find those guys.”

“I’m trying,” which gets him another smile.—She gives-murmurs a soft goodbye and walks away.

Brown stares-at-herstares at her for a few moments, watching her legs move in a-the long, thin skirt that hugs her figure, then, tddrudges back to the police vehicle, letting the rain soak his coat a little more than necessary.—When he looks up again, she’s gone, having ducked into one of the buildings.

It’s noon.—20-Twenty minutes later than he wanted to get on the road.

He looks at his eyes in the rear-view mirror.—Old and tired.

His eyes flicker to the backseat, drooping as soon as they do.

Jake would’ve been 12-twelve this year.

What do a 12-twelve-year-old’s eyes look like in the rear-view mirror?

Commented [TT9]: You did a great job of inserting his brief thought about his son here!