

## **Blueberries...Blue buries**

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The open road flew under his tires as Zane Meriwether (most recently known by his cooler and more modern pen name, Zenn) drove the empty streets of his hometown USA. Death hung in the air as he passed the splintered welcome sign that suddenly seemed less welcoming. The drive from Boston, where Zenn worked as a successful author of *The Bellview Mysteries*, to the small town of Fallmoth just outside Portland, Maine was roughly 112 miles of memories that Zenn didn't feel like reliving. Fallmoth once was a booming industrial town, where everyone and his brother worked at the factory downtown. However, the recession hadn't treated the town well, and the only booming came from the neighborhood kids playing with firecrackers near the abandoned site. Zenn pulled onto Main Street, the desolate mask of foreclosure draped over the buildings where he once ate soft serve and read his first mystery. It seemed the town had died along with his father. He drove the empty streets, keeping eye for anyone he might know as he traversed toward his childhood home. He hadn't even know his father was sick.

Pulling his convertible onto the cracked pavement that used to be his driveway, Zenn honked his horn a few times and his mother immediately surfaced through the semicircle window in the front door. He used to think that it looked like the sunrise. Somehow it appeared the opposite way on this gloomy morning. Overall the house looked the same, save the faded paint and worn welcome mat. He unloaded his suitcase from the trunk and stepped onto the creaky porch steps that he'd walked a thousand times and into the arms of his obviously heartbroken mother. He wrapped his free arm around her frail frame and knelt his head into the soft crook of her neck, the scent of her White Rain hairspray reminding him of home.

"I didn't even know he was sick" Zenn told her, as they sat in the living room, each drinking a mug of black coffee.

"None of us did" his mother replied. "You know your father; he'd rather die than admit a fault. I'd never thought his pride would actually kill him, though" she said, raising a hand to her forehead, her usual sign of distress.

"I'm sorry I haven't been home more. Julia and I just moved into our new place, and between that and the book tours, I've been busy." Zenn tried to explain himself, but the guilt left a bad taste in his mouth.

"No no," she said, "your father and I have been taking care of ourselves for fifteen years now, and we couldn't have expected you to drop everything and rush home every time we need something" she said, and she rose from the couch and as she passed him on her way down the hall and placed her soft, wrinkled hand on his shoulder. "I think I'm gonna rest a while," she said, patting his shoulder reassuringly.

Zenn walked downstairs to his father's workshop. Having been an assembly line worker at the factory, he was a man who kept everything neat and in its place, so when Zenn scanned the pegboards where his father's tools were hung, his eyes focused on a hole in the pattern where his father's shovel should've been. He soon found the shovel in a tarp on the ground, as well as a weathered crowbar, both covered

in mud. He was both confused and skeptical, as his father was the kind of man to clean his tools. Since his mother was sleeping, he decided to leave it alone and go into town to get some food.

Harry's Diner was just as inviting as he'd remembered, as the little bell above him rang when he entered; the smell of Fallmoth-famous blueberry cobbler, steak, and too much perfume greeting him as he sat at a booth in the corner. After ordering his usual from fifteen years ago, he pulled out his portable mini-laptop and started writing, using inspiration from Fallmoth for his next mystery.

"You're Zane Meriwether" a voice said, and Zane looked up to find a woman in her late twenties with dark auburn hair and eyes that saw right through him.

"Uh, yeah, I am" he replied, "and you are" he questioned.

Getting up from her booth and moving into his, she reached out her hand. "Annie Grey, P.I."

After talking to her for a few minutes, Zenn discovered Annie was in town investigating a string of grave robberies that had taken place the past few months. She explained what had been taken, her list of suspects, and asked if he had any ideas. "Why would I know anything?"

"Well you write mysteries, right? You've got to be pretty skeptical of everything" she argued.

"Not really"

"Oh"

"Yeah" Zenn said, before finishing his sandwich, wishing her well, and heading home. "What a character" he mumbled under his breath, as he walked out.

The next day, Zenn stood at the bottom of his family cemetery, looking up the hill where he would eventually lay his father to rest. He held the casket bar in his hand and he held his breath, the other attendees forming a cloud of black around him as he and the other pallbearers slowly trudged up the hill. Somehow it seemed that with every step up the hill, he was sinking further into both the mud and his sorrow. When the service began, he noticed Annie Grey in the back of the crowd. Had she known his father?

That night as he sat in the floor of his parents' room, sorting through clothes in his father closet, he uncovered a small cedar chest in the corner under a pile of old flannels. Zenn looked at it, puzzled, and when he picked it up, he could hear the scattered pings of metal touching. Upon opening it, he was taken aback. "Usually they steal things like wedding rings, necklaces, sometimes even keepsakes that the family puts in" Annie had told him, and Zenn sat looking at a box of similar items. "What the hell?" he'd whispered to himself, and tucked the box under his arm and returned to his room. That night he paced the floor of his childhood home, searching for answers somewhere in his mind. The box, the shovel, the crowbar, Annie Grey, it all made sense to him in theory, but he knew his father. Why would he do this? Zenn then remembered his mother saying his father kept his illness a secret. "He must've needed the money to pay for medical bills" Zenn concluded.

In the cool air of the early morning, Zenn could hear the whistling of the wind through the trees in the dense forest where he stood, tossing soil and gravel over the box, the scrape of rock against metal chilling his blood. Another scoop, he covered the crowbar in the tarp, and finally his father's own

weathered shovel, and as he felt a bit of himself was hidden in this shallow grave, he pressed down the soil, tossed his shiny new spade over his shoulder and trudged back toward the life he'd once known