

THE RAMOS FILES

Some things were buried for a reason

The Second Dig



Anthony Stovold

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By

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Car That Came.....4

Enjoyed the sample?.....8

Chapter One: The Car That Came

I had thought the ground had given me everything it was going to give.

The remains had been identified. The burial context assessed. My report was written, reviewed, and filed. The questions raised by the discovery were answered, as far as anyone was officially required or willing to answer them.

A young man had died during the building of a house.

The death was old. The witnesses were older still. Time had done what time usually does: it smoothed the edges until what remained could be carried without discomfort.

Silence settled, not because it was true, but because it was convenient.

The law does not require truth in its entirety. It requires sufficiency. In this case, sufficiency was achieved. No further action was recommended. No charges were brought. The file was closed with clean margins and a final date.

I believed that was that.

Oh, how wrong I was.

The car arrived on a Tuesday morning, just after the rains had stopped.

It did not belong on our road. Black. Polished. Its windows tinted so dark they refused to reflect even the mango tree that leaned over the gate. The chassis moved smoothly over potholes that swallowed tricycles whole. It suggested resources. It suggested intention.

I was in the garden, examining the irrigation lines Zan had installed the previous month. The soil was still damp. Chickens scattered as the tyres ground across the gravel.

The driver emerged first. White barong. Dark glasses. The bearing of someone accustomed to watching rather than speaking. He opened the rear door.

The man who stepped out was in his mid-fifties. Well groomed. Not ostentatious. The kind of man who occupied rooms without raising his voice.

"Dr. Letecia Ramos?"

His English was fluent, neutral. International.

"Yes."

"Federico Martínez. Thank you for agreeing to see me."

"You have not yet asked," I said.

A faint smile. "Then I am grateful in advance. May we speak privately? What I have to discuss is sensitive."

Inside, Alma withdrew without being asked. Zan watched from the doorway. He understood enough to recognise gravity when it arrived in a government car.

Martínez declined coffee. He placed a leather portfolio on the table between us.

"You assisted local police at the La Victoria site in 2009 and again in 2010."

"Yes."

"The deaths of Jun Sanos and Manuel Cordero."

"I remember."

"There was a third body," Martínez said.

I did not answer immediately.

"A young man was recovered from Bohol waters six weeks ago. His remains were caught in a trawler net. The trawler, I should add, was operating illegally."

"I was not informed."

"He has now been identified. A cousin of Mira Santos. Known as Al."

He paused, watching me.

"There was no identification on the body. It had been weighted with chains."

My throat tightened despite myself. "Good heavens."

"The identification was made through a distinctive birthmark. Medical records confirmed it."

"And the chains?"

"We traced them. One link bore a manufacturing mark. The person responsible removed most identifying features. He overlooked that one."

Silence settled between us.

"Do you remember Eladio Villaverde?"

The name did not surprise me. It confirmed something.

Villaverde had been on the periphery of the La Victoria site. Not an owner. Not a contractor. A facilitator. He appeared when permits stalled and disappeared when paperwork resolved itself. He spoke little, observed much, and never placed his signature where it might be examined too closely.

"Yes," I said. "I remember him."

"He was present on the day Jun Sanos fell."

"He was present on many days."

"But not recorded as such."

That was true. His name did not appear in my file.

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