

Module Reference: HPEN5018 / HPEN6018

Student Number: 2400613

Agent number: 0556\*\*\*\*

Case File: [REDACTED]

Copy of handwritten letter found at: [REDACTED]

As requested, please find enclosed my notes on case file  
[REDACTED] in the investigation regarding Dr. Walker.

From: Dr. G. Walker

Greengate Medical Facility

May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2083

My Darling Daughter,

You were right. If you gain nothing else from this letter, just know that.

I am aware that you never approved of this job, but it was an opportunity I simply had to **take**. I mean to tell you what led up to it, and the likely outcome, as fully as I can in the time I have left.

It's been quite a while since I put pen to paper, but I'm afraid it's the only form of correspondence they allow us here. I never thought of myself as tech-savvy, but it

seems I've got a bit too comfortable with tech over the years. Firing off a voice text or giving you a quick fifteen-minute video call was effortless. Now I find my hand aching after a few short sentences. But you deserve the full story.

I arrived safely at my hotel on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, after being picked up at the airport by private limo. The driver said that both the car and my hotel fees had been sorted by Mr [REDACTED], my new manager. I had never met the man, but the complimentary champagne and chocolates I enjoyed on the drive over made me quite fond of him. It's funny, isn't it, how we can be swayed by simple acts of decadence. I'd give anything for a chocolate right now, but all they allow us are three meagre bowls of something I think is supposed to be stew. Now, darling, we both know my cooking was never something to rave about, but this is just diabolical.

But I digress. That night was uneventful, apart from the fact I spent the whole of it tossing and turning. You'll think it silly of me, but I slept with my equipment on the pillow next to me the entire night. **Astin** asked me how the camera worked once. I know you told me not to tell him, but I couldn't resist. I wanted *someone* to see the labour behind my work; capturing an animal's essence takes a lot of skill, after all. I'll admit, I even let Astin hold the camera and pretend to Capture a couple of pigeons that had landed on the windowsill— don't worry, the shutter was tightly closed.

[Case Note 1. Agent number: 0556\*\*\*\*. The exposure of a child to controlled equipment is of considerable concern. I believe a full investigation of both the child and his environments should be carried out to ascertain that that he remains uncompromised. A reminder to Upper Management that exposure to highly charged photons, such as those in a

Capturer's camera, can cause considerable unwanted side effects.]

After that first night, we headed into the countryside as soon as dawn broke, to a location no one would disclose to me. I sat in the backseat, wedged between two suited goliaths. They didn't move a muscle the entire journey, but it wasn't long before I was wriggling in my seat. The heat radiated off the two men, making me feel like a roast pig in an oven. As we bumped along through winding back roads, I began to forget about the sweat beading along my spine. A thrill ran through my entire body. Working on such a high-profile job was unheard of for someone like me, though the incessant rain did lend a sober air to the whole arrangement.

After a good four hours, in which we only pulled over once for a comfort break, the car pulled up to a beautiful stately home. It was the type you see on those auction programmes your father used to watch. Long sweeping lawns, a glittering fountain in the middle of the driveway, whitewashed walls and carvings of leaves on all the doorways. I even spotted a misshapen gargoyle attempting to **hide** behind a parapet.

I stepped up to the door, flanked by my two minders and feeling extremely underdressed. My smartest jeans seemed suddenly ill-fitting; my new blouse cheap and unflattering. I raised my fist and knocked sharply on the door. There was no answer. I raised my fist to knock again when one of my minders cleared his throat and discreetly tilted his head towards a brass chain hanging to one side. It took me a long blank moment to realise it was a doorbell. Heat flooded my cheeks, and I avoided eye contact as I reached over and gave it a sharp tug. A resounding gong

echoed through the depths of the house. I wondered whether it made the occupants vibrate like tiny bells themselves, wobbling as they hurried about their duties.

The door swung open moments later. To my surprise it was Mr [REDACTED] himself who stood in the doorway, smiling at me. He greeted me with a 'Pleasant journey Dr. Walker?' and ushered me inside as I scrambled for an appropriate answer. My two giant companions followed me inside but remained by the door, hands clasped before them. With how still they stood I could have been forgiven for thinking they'd been turned to stone.

I followed Mr [REDACTED] into what had probably once been a dining hall. Now, it served as a boardroom, with a massive rosewood table sitting centre stage and surrounded by the most comfortable leather chairs I'd ever seen. Every seat was occupied, save for one at the head of the table and another next to it. I swallowed and shifted my equipment more firmly on my shoulder.

Following a gesture from Mr [REDACTED], I slipped into the free chair. The leather squeaked as I lowered myself down. To my delight, a steaming mug of coffee was placed in front of me. Its rich scent curled up my nose and made my dry mouth water. It took all my willpower not to snatch the mug and drain it in front of everyone. Instead, I took a polite sip. As I placed the mug neatly back down, my gaze strayed to the insignia burned into the centre of the table. I hadn't been able to make it out when I first entered the room, but now I could see it in all its glory. A black lotus, with its petals unfurled. I recognised the symbol as belonging to [REDACTED], a company experimenting in energy harnessing. My reasons for being here started to become a little clearer.

Mr [REDACTED] started off by introducing me. He said that my portfolio was one of the best he'd seen. [REDACTED] at the Roslin Institute had given me a glowing recommendation. He displayed the residual images I'd Captured on the screen for his colleagues to see. It made me look at those images in a completely different light. The way the Cambodian moonlight gleamed off the pangolin's hard plates was suddenly ethereal. You know **they're** no longer endangered because of the work we did with them? I can't take all the credit, of course. George McKendrick Captured a beautiful female pangolin about a month after I left Cambodia. Her essence was sent to the lab, along with the essence of my male pangolin. Three hundred offspring resulted from a single Merging, if you can believe it. The bodies of the creatures lived a long life too, though I'm unsure how many natural offspring they had between them. Most of my jobs were like this. Every successful snap made me feel like I was making a difference. Saving the world.

Well, darling, I do believe I shall have to put down my pen for the night. My hand is beginning to cramp, and I can hear the guard approaching with my second meal of the day. I like this guard. He's more agreeable than the morning one and sometimes slips me a piece of bread with my stew. He reminds me a little of your father, rest his soul.

[Case Note 2. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. It is pertinent to note that the competency of the aforementioned guard - a Mr [REDACTED] [REDACTED] - is being investigated in view of the possibility that he may have aided in the disappearance of Mrs Walker from cellblock 2W, on the 28. 05. 2083.]

It's been a couple of days since I last picked up a pen. I woke up yesterday morning to a commotion – a fight had broken out between three of my cellmates. Something about stolen menstrual products? Unfortunately, with the guards so busy, they didn't have time to follow up on my lowly request for a simple ballpoint.

So, my darling, continuing from where I left off. I'd expected questions from the board members, and was pleased with the breadth of them, at first. The first to raise her manicured hand was a well-coiffed woman in a dress I was certain cost more than all my savings combined. She smiled at me when I acknowledged her, though the smile didn't quite reach her eyes. 'How can you ensure the essences are undamaged? We work with delicate subjects and can't afford any mistakes.'

'It all depends on the exposure, the shutter speed and the camera lens,' I explained. 'A smaller, faster animal requires a quicker shutter speed and a larger lens. If the Capturer gets this correct and knows their subjects, the essence should remain intact.'

Another woman raised her hand. She was smaller and dumpier than the first and she didn't smile. Her lilting voice put me in mind of frozen fjords and snowstorms. 'Have *you* had any accidents?'

I'd always been taught honesty was key, and I resorted to it now. 'Once. When I was still in training. I was Capturing a Sabrewing hummingbird and didn't use a fast enough shutter speed. The essence was torn in two. But the biologists I was working with at the time were able to get enough data to create a rudimentary blueprint for the species. With subsequent Captures this was expanded, and a reliable working database was created.'

The woman opened her mouth, but I had anticipated her follow-up question and interjected. 'In the result of an accident, the effects to the creatures' bodies are very minimal. Lethargy, depression, mild disruption to the central nervous system. It's the essence that takes the most damage. But that's unlikely to happen in the hands of a professional.'

It didn't take long for the questions to become more unusual.

'How much energy does a single essence produce?'

'What happens to the essence when the body dies?'

And then downright disturbing.

'Would you Capture a human in the same way that you would Capture an animal?'

'Is it true that a human's essence is stronger than an animal's?'

'Would a human know if their essence had been taken?'

[Case Note 3. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. It would be prudent to obtain a copy of [REDACTED]'s minutes to confirm the accuracy of these questions. The nature of them is, as Dr. Walker states, 'disturbing'. Further investigation required.]

I stumbled through the questions as best I could. [REDACTED] hadn't told me much about the company before he put my name forward for the job. From my understanding, they focused primarily on energy conservation and [REDACTED]. It didn't matter how outlandish the questions were, I'd signed a contract and I meant to follow it through. Besides, now it was my turn to ask the questions.

I decided to start off small. I turned to Mr [REDACTED] with a pleasant smile on my face and said, 'What exactly is it that you would like me to locate and Capture?'

'You misunderstand, Dr. Walker. We have already obtained the specimens. Your only job is to Capture them and ensure the essences are viable.'

I must admit, in that moment I was confused. It must have been apparent by my expression for Mr [REDACTED]'s face softened. 'You are a master in your craft, Dr. Walker, and well known for your discretion. We wanted only the very best for this operation.'

My following questions were answered in much the same way. Lunch was served, with more of that heavenly coffee, and then I found myself alone in the boardroom with only Mr [REDACTED] and the two burly bodyguards from earlier. 'I would like you to begin at your earliest convenience,' said Mr [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] will escort you to the location, but you'll have to wear this, I'm afraid.'

He held up a silken blindfold and I felt myself blanch. Up until now, the whole operation had seemed at least close to what I was used to from a job. This, however, was a step in a direction I'd never taken before. I made myself do one of those breathing exercises you're always going on about. Breathe in for four, hold for four, breathe out for eight. It helped a little, and I allowed [REDACTED] to slip the blindfold over my eyes. These were important people, I told myself, and they could get into trouble if their work was exposed to the wrong sort of person.

I was taken on a winding trek through the great house and then outside. A gentle hand guided me into a car, and a short drive later we were pulling to a stop

again. We were no longer outside, and my footsteps echoed off the walls. I had the distinct feeling that I had been driven deep underground. With my eyes blindfolded, the steady drip, drip of water on stone seemed to roar in my ears. The air was cold down here and carried the distinct scent of ammonia – bat guano, I thought. Which comforted me. I'd Captured bats before and had quite a fondness for the little creatures. You had a stuffed bat that you carried everywhere with you when you were about five. I wonder if you remember it? The poor thing got ripped to pieces by the next-door neighbour's dog. I think I told you that he'd flown away to find his real family.

Firm hands wrapped around my upper arms and guided me on another winding walk. I'm unsure how long we walked, but by the end of it my feet were aching and my breaths came in short, sharp gasps. I'd barely had time to recover before the blindfold was ripped from my eyes.

I don't know what I'd expected – a huge echoing cavern, perhaps – but it certainly wasn't the stark hospital room that lay before me. Beds lay in rows against the walls, each occupied by a sleeping patient. Their breaths rose and fell in unison, stopping and starting like an amateur's attempt at morse code.

[Case Note 4. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. There are no official records or blueprints of a basement area, cave system or bunker being built anywhere within the grounds of [REDACTED]. An in-person sweep of the premises to confirm or deny Dr. Walker's claims would be advisable.]

[Addendum: With the abscondence of Dr. Walker and the subsequent disappearance of Mr [REDACTED], it is my

professional recommendation that this case should be upgraded to urgent. Any information on the so-called 'patients' mentioned would also be of substantial use.]

That reminds me! Do you remember when you were a little girl, and the two of us would make up secret codes? It would keep you entertained for hours! We were closer then. I recall that your favourite code was always format-based text steganography. I wonder if you would recognise that same code if it was put in front of you today? It would be **bold** of me to think otherwise, no?

[Case Note 4. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. I find this to be an intriguing detail. See Case Note 8 below.]

But I digress. I'll admit, I'm worried about committing my next few memories to paper, but they need to be said. My hands are shaking, even thinking back to that day. I turned from the hospital beds to check who had guided me into the room. Mr [REDACTED] stood behind me and, next to him, my two earlier handlers. I quirked a questioning smile towards Mr [REDACTED], my hands suddenly sweaty. 'You must have misunderstood me Mr [REDACTED], I'm a doctor of science, not medicine.'

'Oh, we're quite aware,' he said, his own smile grim.

Now, darling, you may think me slow. It had, after all, taken me rather a long time to grasp the intricacies of the situation I found myself in. But as my eyes flitted from the unconscious patients – no, victims – in their hospital beds, to Mr [REDACTED] and my handlers, the pieces slotted into place. I stumbled away from the three men, towards the beds, my hand twisting on my camera strap. When I spoke, my voice was barely above a whisper. 'Capturing a human is prohibited.'

‘So is grave robbing, my dear doctor, but that never stopped the archaeologists.’

Mr [REDACTED] stood with his hands behind his back, a sympathetic look on his face. I wasn’t fooled for a moment, but it did distract me enough that I didn’t see [REDACTED]’s gigantic form lunging towards me. In my shock and panic, I found myself frozen. All the self-defence techniques you’d taught me went tumbling out of my head like an upset champagne pyramid. His hands curled around my upper arms, pinning me in place with an unbreakable grip.

‘Now,’ said Mr [REDACTED] , meandering through the beds towards me, ‘You’re going to do the job we require of you – the job you signed off on before you came here. A simple Capture and transference of essence is all that’s required. If all goes well, we’ll both get to walk out of here tonight. Understood?’

To highlight his point, he swept aside the front panel of his blazer, revealing a holstered gun. At the time, I didn’t wonder how it had come to be in his possession. He was clearly a man of means. I had no doubt that he would use it if I didn’t do as he said.

[Case Note 5. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. Despite the implausibility of Dr. Walker’s claims, the syntax and tone used when relaying Mr [REDACTED]’s words is accurate to the accounts we have on file. This is not to be overlooked.

Follow-up required regarding [REDACTED]’s potential acquisition of an illegal firearm.]

I'm sorry, I had to take a break there. My hand was shaking so much even I was struggling to read what I had wrote. After Mr [REDACTED]'s little speech, I was dragged through the ward to a door I hadn't noticed. I was forced through with a shove between my shoulder blades. What I found inside was unnerving in its familiarity. You have seen my studio and are aware of the set-up I have for Capturing local specimens. The room I found myself in was not so different. A parabolic umbrella stood on a tripod next to a white backdrop, casting shadows over the material. Dead centre sat a metal chair laced with restraints on the arms and legs. On the far side of the room was a gently humming machine crowned with three glass chambers. One was empty, but two were filled to the brim with undulating silver essences. I could tell immediately from their sluggish movements that they were both incomplete. I scanned for a way out, but there were no windows, no vents and only the single door I had entered though.

Moments later, that door reopened as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] shouldered their way into the room, a limp patient supported between them. It crossed my mind to dart behind them and out of the door, but Mr [REDACTED] followed closely behind, blocking the doorway with his body. He shook his head when his eyes landed on me, as though he had guessed what I was about to do. Still maintaining eye contact, he locked the door behind him with a beep and slid the keycard into the breast pocket of his suit.

'You might want to start unpacking your equipment,' said Mr [REDACTED]. His hand had slipped into his blazer, and I could see the curl of his fist outlined against the material. I could do nothing in that moment but obey him. I slid my equipment from my shoulder and padded over to the chair that my former handlers were strapping the patient into. The patient was a man, middle-aged, with a shock of

bushy greying hair. His eyes flickered behind the lids, as though he were dreaming. I hoped it was a pleasant dream.

‘They’re drugged?’ I asked as I unfolded my travel tripod and placed the camera on top of it.

‘Every hour on the hour.’

‘Do they know why they’re here?’

Mr [REDACTED] nodded. ‘Every person in that ward is a volunteer. They would be unable to live independently anyway for one reason or another. Their families are recompensed generously.’

‘It’s still immoral,’ I said, sliding the cover from my lens, ‘Not to mention illegal.’

Mr [REDACTED] only laughed. He seemed almost fond of me, in that moment. Like an indulgent parent questioning their child’s ignorant beliefs. ‘There are billions of humans on the planet. Every one of them requires power – for their homes, their jobs, their cars. With what we’re doing here, we can give them that. A single human essence can power a neighbourhood for up to a month. You call me immoral, yet *you* are the one harvesting essences from endangered creatures. Your work is quite controversial amongst some circles, you know?’

My fingers froze on the camera buttons. ‘We capture essences to help preserve the species, not use them for power!’

‘A shame,’ Mr [REDACTED] sighed. ‘Think about what you and your colleagues could do for humanity if you were channelled in the right direction. Well, one must start somewhere, I suppose.’

[Case Note 6. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. It is pertinent to note that, in all her previous employments, Dr. Walker has strictly adhered to guidelines regarding the bodily viability of the specimen Captured. I have attached to this file a case report on a Capture Dr. Walker was employed to carry out in Ghana, on a Roloway monkey. As you can see, Dr. Walker terminated her contract due to her observations that the animal was sick and would not have survived essence extraction. In such a controversial line of employment, Dr. Walker's moral compass is exemplary and may be the key to discovering what has become of her.]

There is only so much you can delay when setting up a camera. I briefly entertained the thought of whipping it around and turning it on Mr [REDACTED] or his guards. You wouldn't have hesitated, but a Capture takes time. <sup>1</sup> my daughter, and I look better when I'm not riddled with holes.

'I'm ready,' I said.

The two guards immediately backed away from the patient, **coming** to flank me. Their closeness was suffocating, but I tried not to let it bother me. I made some final adjustments, increasing the brightness, lowering the shutter speed and accounting for any tiny movements a human might make. Then I pressed the Capture button.

The patient arched up off his seat, his limbs straining against the restraints. His eyes still flickered gently behind the lids - somehow still asleep. I flicked a switch

on the side of the camera, compensating for the patient's unexpected movement. His body relaxed a fraction, and a viscous silver material began to seep from his pores.

'Come on, come on, come on,' I whispered beneath my breath. I wanted the essence to be whole. I owed him that, at least.

Another few adjustments and the essence began to creep towards the camera, slithering across the floor and pooling near my feet. Now came my least favourite part. I screwed an essence vial to the bottom of the camera with deft movements and slowly began to press down on the Capture button. The essence surged upwards, barrelling towards the camera lens. I lessened my pressure on the button, and it slowed. Bit by bit, I encouraged the essence through the lens and into the vial. I was practically panting by the time it was complete. The entire process couldn't have taken longer than a minute.

As soon as the last of the essence oozed into the vial, I flicked off the camera and slammed on the lens cover. The patient's body slumped in its seat. His eyes were open now – a striking brown so pale they were almost gold – but glazed over. His chest rose and fell rhythmically.

'Here,' I whispered, slipping the vial free and passing it to Mr [REDACTED]. He instantly strode over to his machine, which was buzzing against the wall, and replaced the clear vial with the new essence-filled one. As he pressed his thumb against a panel on the side of the machine, two meaty hands grabbed me by the shoulders.

I should have expected that our deal wasn't enough. I was a loose end, and loose ends must be snipped. [REDACTED] uncuffed the patient from his chair and gently guided him upright. He went willingly, his eyes still carrying that familiar glazed

look. Like the animals I'd captured, he would eat and sleep and defecate and mate, but something essential had been taken from him. In the past, I'd told myself it didn't matter. That the subjects were still alive. That excuse didn't quite seem good enough anymore.

I was dragged towards the now-empty chair, my legs flailing, my nails drawing sharp lines across my captor's arms. He grunted, but my struggling didn't seem to bother him. I was manhandled into the chair, my arms and legs forced into too-tight straps. My pulse throbbed in my neck, battering against the confines of my flesh. In my peripheral vision I could make out Mr [REDACTED], bathed in the light of a now-glowing machine. Even with the two incomplete essences, it appeared that he'd harvested enough to get his machine to work.

'Your dedication to your work has made this very easy for us,' he said, his voice raised over my protests. 'Thank you for your help in properly calibrating the camera. Now, all we need is to put it to the test without your help operating it.'

My blood ran cold at the words and I increased my struggles. The restraints were tight against my wrists, but my joints were bendy. If I could just fold my thumbs in towards my palms...

Mr [REDACTED] came up behind the camera, running a finger over it reverently. Then he pressed the Capture button. I felt a sharp tug in my chest, as

though someone had hooked a fishing line under my ribs and pulled it taut. I yanked at my restraints, thumbs tucked in. My joints popped, pain exploded through my wrists and thumb, but I slipped loose. As Mr [REDACTED] slowly pressed down on the Capture button again, I slumped sideways out of view of the camera lens. At this odd angle, half in the chair, and half on the floor, I was able to see my own essence curling out of me and into the camera. Unable to Capture me properly, the essence was broken and sluggish and I was, miraculously, still myself.

[Case Note 7. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. This is not unheard of when it comes to the art of Capturing. It is known that the essence animating the living is made up of three components. The Rational, the Spiritual and the Appetitive. When harvesting the essence, it is primarily the spiritual component that is separated from the whole. In a being that is cut off from their own emotional experiences, harvesting the spiritual component can make little difference to their overall sense of self and their bodily function. I mention this as Dr Walker's official medical records state that she is emotionally blunt, delusional and apathetic. However, by analysing what is written here I do not believe that to be the case.]

I'll admit, in that moment I thought of you. I'm aware that you would never nominate me for a 'Mother of the Year' award. But giving in and not trying to get back to you was unthinkable. I did the only thing I could think of. I played dumb.

Mr [REDACTED] ranted and raved at the incomplete essence he'd retrieved from me. I stared through him the whole while, my eyes as unfocused as the patient's at

my feet. When he realised he wasn't getting a reaction, Mr [REDACTED] sighed and gestured sharply to his guards. They jumped to work immediately, hauling me and the other patient out of the studio and into the makeshift hospital room. I was placed on an unoccupied bed, and I remained there until Mr [REDACTED] left and the room went dark.

I don't remember much of my escape. It was a whirlwind of dark corridors and stifled breath. Neither do I much remember my report to the authorities. What I do remember is a blur of interview rooms and court appearances and my experience dismissed at every turn. I was called delusional, mentally disturbed, *unwell* and incarcerated here in Greengate Medical Facility until my trial. I didn't know it then, but Mr [REDACTED] had eyes and ears everywhere, and more than enough money to pay off anyone he wanted.

My trial is coming up next week, but I fear I won't make it until then. If that's the case, I wanted the opportunity to tell you the truth of what happened. I'm sorry. For what happened here and how I may have treated you over the years. It's funny where hindsight gets you. I don't know what else to say. But remember, despite it all, I love you.

Your mother,

Gail Walker

[Case Note 8. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. I have discovered a rudimentary code hidden throughout this letter. Words

highlighted in bold spell out: Take Astin. Hide. They're coming. CID should have picked up on this, and I expect them to be reprimanded promptly.]

[Case Note 9. Agent number 0556\*\*\*\*. Addendum: on 02.06.2083 a body was discovered in the moors near Greengate Medical Facility. Due to the likelihood that this body belongs to Dr Gail Walker, it is recommended this case be elevated from a Missing Persons to a Murder investigation. Prime suspect remains Mr. [REDACTED] [REDACTED], who is also missing.]