

THE MAZE

Supposedly, if you go in deep enough, you will never come back. My assignment was to investigate the fourteen missing persons cases that seem to have a direct connection to the maze.

Today, I have another detective, two uniformed officers, and two dogs with me. The Maze of Shadow Valley sits at the rear of property owned by Shadow Valley Episcopal Church. Opening a wide chain link gate, we crossed the playground area of the church's day school. Passing under a large stone cross that was supported by two huge pillars, we entered the church's cemetery. While it was not officially part of the maze, it looked like it could be. Totally surrounded by an impenetrable six-foot-high hedge, the cemetery served as a channel to the entrance to the maze. When standing outside the entrance to the maze, I did not get the impression of anything sinister. But I have investigated too many cases over the years where first appearances turned ugly quickly.

The first ten feet in seemed simple enough, comprising sheared Japanese Boxwood about two feet high lining the path. We soon came to an

intersection that gave us three choices - straight ahead, left, or right. Everyone had rolls of flagging tape with them, so we could mark each turn taken. A mobile unit in the church parking lot monitored our GPS tracking devices.

I chose the left turn and as we continued down the path, the sheared hedge gradually got taller, became Podocarpus, and eventually reached about seven feet in height. We came to numerous side paths and always chose the first on the left, for no other reason than everyone always thinks right.

We continued for about another 30 minutes, choosing paths, and marking the corners. Then our path opened into a huge round landscaped area. I have seen some magnificent gardens in my time, but nothing like this. It was truly awe-inspiring. As I looked around the border of the perfectly circular area, I saw what appeared to be twenty other entrances like the one we came through.

“What are you thinking, Lieutenant?” asked Detective Wallace.

“Did anybody count the number of path choices we had?”

“I noted twenty-one,” answered Officer Wainwright.

“Bill, I count twenty-two entrances into this area,” I said. “What do you get?”

“One ... twenty-two,” answered Detective Wallace. “Meaning we could have taken any path and arrived at where we are?”

“Looks that way to me,” I said.

I noticed Officer Mills looking closely at a huge red rose. “Do you see something, Officer?”

“I was just admiring this rose. It looks like a Mr. Lincoln.”

“Anything of relevance, Officer?” I asked.

“No, sir,” replied Officer Mills. “I grew up in a plant nursery family and it just caught my eye.”

“Okay ...”

“Sir.”

“Yes, Officer Mills.”

“I just noticed something very odd with this rose.”

“What’s that?”

“As I was looking at the rose, it closed back up into a bud.”

“And that is odd?” I asked. “Don’t most flowers close up eventually?”

“No, sir. I have never seen a huge, fully open Mr. Lincoln rose close back up into a bud. Wait ... now the bud has drawn back into the stem and disappeared. This is creepy, sir.”

“Anybody else see anything unusual?” I asked.

Just then, one of the dogs strained against his leash. The handler let him go, and the dog made a beeline for a group of tall oleander plants. When the handler got up to the dog, he found the dog sniffing over a large pile of clothes.

“Lieutenant, over here,” said Officer Wainwright.

“Well, somebody has definitely been here before us,” I said. “Wainwright, check these clothes against the list of clothes being worn by our missing persons when they were last seen.”

The dog Officer Mills held began barking and pulling on his leash. He led his handler over to a set of footprints about twenty feet away.

“Lieutenant, look at these tracks,” said Officer Mills. “They start out as a large adult with a size 11 or 12. As we follow them, they appear to get smaller, and the person seems to greatly shorten his stride. Do you see it?”

“Yes, I do, Officer Mills. Bill, what do you make of this?”

“I’ve never seen anything quite like it ...”

“Over here,” yelled Officer Wainwright. “Here’s another set of tracks.”

“These tracks appear to be from a child,” said Detective Bill Wallace. “And look at the change about twenty feet ahead—almost like what a crawling baby would make.”

“Look at me, Bill,” I said. “Your mustache is turning from gray to black.”

“It is? ... And my arms feel funny, like the muscles are growing.

“Okay, people, I don’t like this. Officer Wainwright, bag up those clothes and let’s get out of here.”

“Chopper 1, we are coming out and hope to meet you in a little while at the rendezvous spot.”

“Do you need us to help with navigating the maze?”

“Negative, Chopper 1. I think we’ve got it figured out. But keep an eye on us.”

“Will do, Lieutenant ... Got a visual on you now.”

The exit path that we took did lead us back to the main path where we found one of our blue markers. From there, we progressed quickly back to the entrance of the maze. In our case, the entrance also served as our exit. We had found no other external exits in our preliminary scouting. Heading over to the mobile unit, everyone walked in silence. When we reached the mobile unit in the parking lot, the chopper crew joined us.

“I know what we encountered today was bizarre. It’s going to be a little difficult to fill out this paperwork for sure. We just need to tell the truth about everything we heard or saw. We’ll gather in my office in the morning, lay everything out, and try to make some sense of it all.”

The following morning:

“Let’s start with the chopper crew. I know you don’t have a lot but give us what you saw.”

“Yes, Lieutenant,” said Sergeant Jones. “We followed you for a good part of the maze until you went under a thick tree canopy. At that point, we circled for a while, but we didn’t see any other activity. We got your transmission at 1530 hours that you were coming out. At 1600 hours, we laid eyes on you and followed you out. We were on the ground at 1700 hours.”

“You’re sure about the times?” I asked.

“Yes sir,” answered Sergeant Jones. “As you can see in our report, both Officer Hazzard and I confirmed those times.”

“Why, Lieutenant?” asked Detective Wallace. “Do you have something different?”

“Yes. My notes say three hours earlier for all times.”

Bill and I just looked at each other, and then we made eye contact with Officers Mills and Wainwright.

“All right, Sergeant Jones, you and Officer Hazzard can go. If we think of anything else to ask

you, we'll call you. Naomi, you say everything seemed normal from the mobile unit ... except for a slight hiccup in the GPS signal at 0903 hours?"

"Yes sir," said Naomi. "That momentary signal loss only lasted about five seconds. I saw nothing else."

"Okay, thanks, Naomi. You can go."

"Lieutenant," said Officer Wainwright. "The clothes we brought back do match descriptions in the missing persons paperwork. Here are the individuals' names for those clothes."

"According to the church archives," said Detective Wallace. "The maze predated the church and the cemetery. The graveyard was added in front of the maze in 1865. The dates on some of the headstones confirm that time period. The maze sits off the church property, so they've never had anything to do with it."

"I don't know every species of plant that we encountered," said Officer Mills. "But the hedges that made up the maze were all plants that existed at that time. The Mr. Lincoln rose that showed the abnormal behavior has only been around since the 1960's. The open landscaped area undoubtedly contained varieties of a more recent era. The

density of the hedges shows they've been immaculately trimmed for a long time."

"But who?" I posed. "Who has maintained the maze? We've got no witnesses that have ever seen anyone working in there. The strange time anomalies that we experienced seem to lean towards something supernatural. But how is that possible? I've spent my whole career dealing with cold hard facts and live eyewitnesses, not the supernatural."

We sat in silence for a few minutes—each pondering our experience from a wider perspective.

Then Detective Wallace said, "I still feel like I'm about ten years younger. In one sense, that actually makes me feel good."

"You know, I think that is what all those missing people must have thought, too. Only, I don't think they realized that the 'Fountain of Youth' they had discovered had no stopping point. I believe those people kept going back in time until the point of conception and maybe to the point where they did not exist."

“That’s hard to fathom, John,” said Bill. “Very hard to grasp, but if it truly was supernatural, then I don’t imagine we will ever grasp it.”

“So, maybe the maze itself has been around for a couple hundred years, but the open area is much more recent?” pondered Officer Wainwright.

“Possibly,” I replied. “That would explain why nothing has ever shown up in the records about strange occurrences before. Historically, it has simply been an intricate landscape design by the original owner of the property. What’s also a little strange is that there is no structure or evidence of a structure ever being on the property. It seems unusual to me that someone would put in a maze such as this in the middle of nowhere.”

“So, on first appearances, it looks all too innocent, but it turns out otherwise,” said Detective Wallace. “And that otherwise is supernatural.”

“I can think of at least a hundred other questions, Bill,” I said. “But they can probably never be answered. It’s like you said, if it truly is something supernatural, then we will probably never grasp it.”

“You know, John, I can see a lot of symbolic parallels with the whole picture,” said Detective Wallace.

“What do you mean?”

“In the open area of the maze, time seemed to move exponentially fast towards the center, but in a backwards direction. We saw no evidence of it, but I think that we could assume it does the same coming from the center until you reach the edge of the maze. Then it slows down to a point where growth of the hedges is so slow that they never need trimming. When we are young, time seems to move so slowly that we can’t wait to grow up—kind of like a loaded freight train going uphill. When we are old, time seems to move so fast that we wonder where it went—like that same locomotive flying downhill. So, the concept of time is, again, all backwards. Then we have to look at where the maze exits—into a graveyard, someplace that all who exit will end up. The exit for the cemetery passes under the huge stone cross with the pillars. In Christianity, belief is that Christ overcame death giving us new life in heaven. So, the cemetery exits under the cross and into the church school yard filled with young kids just starting their life.”

“That’s very interesting, Bill, and ... I ... I can understand what you are saying. The problem is that metaphysics is not an option when filing our

report. Just the facts as we understood them. We've also got to be able to tell the family members of the missing persons something that will give them closure. And I haven't quite figured that out yet."

"I agree, John," said Detective Wallace. "We will have to have something plausible."

"By the way, Bill. Your mustache is still black."

"Yeah, I know. But in all that backwards time, my muscles grew slower than Wainwright's. How do you explain that?"

"I'm not even going to try, Bill."