

Excerpt of *Have You Seen Him*  
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Los Angeles, CA

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*Have You Seen Him*

A Novel

By Kimberly Lee

*Sic Parvis Magna: Thus great things from small things come.*

Any dead bank employee could tell you this simple fact—bulletproof glass only works if you're standing behind it. So if you were like Olivia, just promoted to loan officer with a lovely desk out on the floor, you were well on your way to essentially becoming a sitting duck.

Olivia's aunt brushed off her reservations as they sat in the orderly kitchen that night. Aunt Bernice was a no-nonsense woman; the shiny fixtures and appliances gleamed. "That's got to be one of the best opportunities you're gonna get without a college degree. Don't you dare tell me you're thinking about turning it down. You better accept that position like the smart girl I raised you to be."

"I know, Aunt Bernice," Olivia said, moving to the sink to rinse her teacup. "And you're right. I already accepted the spot." She wiped the sink with a yellow kitchen towel and folded it into a tight square, then placed it onto the counter.

"Well, good. You worked hard enough to get it." The dilemma resolved, Olivia's aunt returned her rhinestoned cat-eye glasses to her face, her attention back to her ledger.

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Despite the increased paycheck and enviable benefits, Olivia's initial anxiety about her new position never waned. She'd watched too many movies and was highly suggestible, easily spooked by the images she'd seen. She was drawn to crime thrillers, often centering banks, a morbid pull she knew wasn't good for her. And the little measures she developed to soothe her fears—entering and exiting the establishment only in the company of other workers, fingering the panic button under her desk—didn't have much of an effect. She tried to be as thrilled as Aunt Bernice was about the new position, but she would have done better to follow the older woman's more relevant, oft-repeated advice: "Always follow your gut."

Olivia's final transaction was a simple one—to close the accounts of a nice-looking family who was moving out of state. They'd arrived at her desk with pointed looks, their identification documents at the ready, their slips filled out. She worked more efficiently than usual, wondering about their backstory. \$75,000 was a lot to take in cash.

Olivia snuck long glances at the family as she handled their transaction. The mother had a soft, understated beauty. Something about her was fragile, almost sickly. The teen daughter was pretty, yet solemn. But it was the father's face, the last one Olivia was to see in this life, that would have haunted her, had she lived.

The robbers approached her desk with small guns in their outstretched arms. Some patrons gasped and others screamed, clutching the nearest stranger. The mother and daughter froze, but the father simply looked at Olivia with bemused resignation, a knowing that this was the end. As if he'd been expecting it.

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The handsome man had taken a visible and audible deep breath, slowly closing his eyes then opening them as a handgun was pushed into his neck. Olivia's ears registered the shots as if they'd taken place far away, on another planet, and she felt the muscles in her own neck clench while blood spurted out of the man. Frozen, she watched the client's body lean towards her and slump over, his eyes locked on a small, worn photo in his hand. The picture slipped onto Olivia's desk and she studied the boy's face, his gleaming eyes. But then the gun turned to Olivia, commanding her attention. The barrel's diameter was smaller than the ones she'd seen on TV. But just as effective.

## **Part I**

*25 Years Later*

### One

David placed his stack of files on counsel table, then glanced around the small courtroom. He surveyed the sullen faces of the other workers, their mouths in straight lines, their dull eyes. The prevailing sentiment was obvious—none of them really wanted to be there. Not the bailiff, the court reporter, the probation officer, and certainly not the minors seated with their parents just outside the tiny room. Even Commissioner Wong was checking her watch, as if she had more pressing things to do. David shook his head slightly. Sometimes he felt this whole thing was a huge waste of time and money, a misuse of precious resources. Truth and justice were rarely excavated here; it was all performative. The general public, duped by its addiction to ever-

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present legal fare on TV, was under the mistaken impression that courtrooms were dramatic, exciting places. Those employed in the field knew that on most days, a job at the dry cleaners—sending racks of clothes around an never-ending steel track—would be more thrilling.

David was once again covering for a sick office mate. This time it was Department 51 for Todd, out with the flu. Calling in sick and taking the day off was a luxury reserved for either the truly afflicted or the dishonest. David was neither. His secretary had practically salivated when she saw how much sick time he'd accrued—and how much he'd get if he cashed it out.

The items on David's calendar for the morning were nondescript, requiring little effort on his part. Kids on probation had to appear before the commissioner at regular intervals to show they'd performed community service, attended anti-bullying workshops, or otherwise followed through on some order given in lieu of more severe punishment. These matters were simple—either the kids had completed the prescribed tasks or not. If proof was shown, they'd get to go home; if not, off they'd go, into custody and on their way to boot camp in the mountains.

The courtroom's side door opened and David glanced over. A scrawny kid entered with the bailiff and took a seat. The boy sat at counsel table in a gray jumpsuit, looking around the courtroom with jerky, anxious movements. No lawyer joined him, making David wonder if the court would assign the matter to his office. He caught the eye of the probation officer, who just shrugged. Though he knew nothing about the child, David felt sympathy for the boy, a strange kinship.

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He opened one of his files and started reading a police report. The boy at the table popped up and his chair fell backwards to the ground. The bailiff leaped over his desk and went at the boy, who was brandishing a small weapon. A full-fledged struggle started; the kid was stronger than he looked.

“Call the other bailiffs!” Commissioner Wong yelled, then retreated to her chambers.

The probation officer and court reporter both cocked their heads, then looked at each other for a beat. *She’s just going to leave us here?*