

Killer Beez



PART I

THE ATLANTIC COAST



EAST

CHAPTER 1

AUGUSTUS VALENTINE

Icky Vicky was not icky. This was evident by the light beeps from the horns of the hi-los driven by the hombres at the Trove Import-Export Company as they passed by her. The men liked to see her big smile, and it was natural for Ms. Chavez to oblige. But then again, this was Vicky's style. Even when asking pointed questions, she would smile. Rare anger was the only emotion that sometimes took her grin away.

Her age was half past the hour, and she still fit snugly into jeans accentuating voluptuous hips. This made her feel good about herself. Her hips helped keep her lips pointed upward. Daily artistry on upturned lips made the cheeks go higher. Rouging the cheeks made the blue eyes smile brighter. The eyes would see how tight the clothes adhered to the skin, and the lips would swell a little. It was her version of the "knee bone connected to the hip bone" game. The difference was that the points of interest were not linearly connected, and the end bone was not in the skeleton song.

The start of this week was nice in that the Vickster was allowed to wear jeans today. The standard dress of US Customs Department inspectors is not normally so relaxed, especially so when at an import-export-company site. This day was to be spent in the warehouse of Trove Import-Export, looking over the opening of various container shipments that had arrived in the United States. This made today dress-down Monday.

Vicky's coworker companions were Julio Rios and Cameron. They were the grunt and the second pair of eyes and nose, respectively. They added legitimacy and protection on this visit. The legitimacy was added to make the trip look official and protected because one just never does know what one will actually find when one isn't looking for anything. At times in life, when one doesn't look for anything, one finds everything.

Vicky and Julio had paperwork on clipboards and various tools in hand and pocket. Accompanying them were Mr. Augustus Valentine and Mr. Francisco Garbey. Augustus was president of Trove Import-Export (which neatly acronyms to TIE). Cameron walked around on all fours and possessed a biological tool. Francisco, well, he may run the day-to-day operations at Trove, but some would just consider him to be a plain tool. Today they could work together and tie all things up.

US Customs normally does inspections at their own site for the x-raying or the opening of ocean containers. If there is to be a container inspection, then the inspection is usually only of one individual container. The single-container inspection will cover all the paperwork tying to all the goods in the container, tying out every single detail. If every detail ties up, then the customer is good to go for years. Fail any part of this compliance inspection and then Customs descends on the customer like a swarm of flies descending on a fresh cow patty. For today, US Customs made a decision to visit Trove and "eyeball" operations to get to know the company better. US Customs was legitimizing to make sure that TIE was on the up-and-up. The TIE employees were loving it. The eyeballs were on the operation they wanted to get to know better. With Vicky around, the employees were definitely on the up-and-up.

The customer is the end recipient who contracts with companies such as TIE to broker the receipt of the goods being shipped into the USA. The broker must, in fact, get power of attorney to be able to do this (a funny situation since most brokers are nothing shysterish like a normal attorney is). But if the broker fails to make sure the customer has their house in order for international transportation activity, then the broker and the customer get to have more fun with US Customs. No broker or customer wants that. This is the beauty of signaling theory. Since customs cannot inspect everything, they detail spot check. The signal has been

sent that a failure of any part of the spot detail check means life becomes difficult for the broker and the customer. Today was not a spot-detail-check day. Today was a day not to find anything out of the ordinary so that it could be said that nothing out of the ordinary was found.

TIE's operation is located outside of the gate at Port Everglades. TIE is a two-minute drive from the port gate. When exiting the terminal, it is a short drive up Eller near where Highway 1 has NE Seventh Avenue curve off it. Fifteen years ago, Aug and Trove had opened up as a small brokerage. TIE now was one hundred thousand square feet for bringing goods in and out of the country.

Spending a day in a warehouse this size is why Vicky was dressed down. July in South Florida is always hot and working in a pole-barn-style building can be even hotter. Fans blow but not much else cools the facility. The day starts muggy from the muggy night before. The heat sticks to the skin. The skin breathes cooling sweat, making the heat stick to both the clothes and the skin. Modern makeup may not run or smudge as poorly as in the past, but it can still break down over the pores. The pores want to breathe, but they are filled. All pores get filled with dust and dirt. And there was so much hot air to deal with too, like plenty of whistles from the floor workers who don't get to see attractive females in the warehouse that often. There is nothing like a building of baying wolves held in check to make a confident female smile. Vicky's dressing down delivered dingolike dalliances.

Bay doors open at the start of the morning, and heat and dirt start rolling in. Semi and hi-lo wheels kick it up. The rigs are covered in it. Even rigs with seemingly clean insides bring in their share. As containers are opened, dirt goes everywhere. At the end of the day, it is always time to sweep up only to start again the next day. Dirt is even blown out of nostrils into Kleenex. Yuck!

Much of what comes into TIE are perishables like various fruits and vegetables and loads of bananas. Those perishables containers get opened and closed early in the day to get them on their way. Next up are loads of apparels: menswear, women's wear, and infant wear. Vicky and Julio snooped and poked and prodded at the items. The apparels came from Latin America and China. Those Latin Americans and Chinese can be tricky, and one never knows what may be found hidden inside some underwear.

After the clothing, Vicky and Julio checked out containers of furnishings and electronics for a real estate development in the Florida Panhandle. Then the inspection turned to skids of bar stock metals shipped from Russia and destined for a manufacturing plant in Cocoa. After the silver and pewter inspection came inspections of containers of personal goods of people changing their lives and moving their personal effects to the United States. Also included were expensive home furnishings for rich people who could afford to build dream homes and furnish them however expensively they see fit with globally purchased wares. Then came raw materials such as chemicals consolidated in the Bahamas or elsewhere for shipment into the United States. It's all the industry of industry influencing industrious individuals in innumerable idiosyncratic manners.

The day was long as it took time to look inside crates or to open shrink-wrap around skids. They took poking and prodding tools and devices out of back pockets or from tool kits to rend open goods to look for contraband. Hi-los moved more goods in while completed containers were driven away. In the meantime, export loads were being packed for shipment out. Ghetto blasters were blasting, mechanical engines were revving, phones were ringing, the PA system was speaking, people were talking. So much noise to be followed at night by so much *silencio*.

Francisco Garbey owned the title of operations manager at Trove. He had arrived at TIE's inception in the year of some people's Lord 1990. Things were small and more chaotic back then (like fifteen years is really "back then"). Now TIE was much larger, and business was a more controlled chaos. Frank sported a thin mustache and a TIE shirt with his name printed in script in the fabric. His Spanish skin was a little wrinkled and darkened with age. Was he ten years from retirement? Fifteen years had been a long time, and so had the preceding forty years. Older and wiser, he smilingly directed *la niños* wheeling goods around while spending hours on the phone receiving and making calls for transportation arrangements—or maybe for box seats to a Marlins game or a J.Lo appearance. Transportation companies in the United States are one of the best places to get great complimentary tickets to all events. Frank's peerage had its rewards.

During the day, Vicky evaluated not only goods but also the men around TIE. When one is waiting for the next semi to back up to the docks, one has to do something! It had been a few years since she booted out her lazy *ex-marido*,

and she still kept a sharp eye out. Eduardo had been college educated, but he had no drive to build a career. He used her to do the work to generate the *dinero* that they lived off on. Here she saw men who at least appeared to show up for work every day. But they would not amount to much. They would love to have her pull their chain. Then they could go back to their *esposa legitima* and yell at her for being something other than what they wanted.

Francisco was older and wiser; he was not what Icky considered a good catch. Frank was a little shorter than she was, but at twenty years difference, he did not fit her classification scale of ranking candidates. Aug was a different tale altogether. Aug had built Trove, and by luck, today, he even happened to be around to go through the shipments. He'd be a great deal. Aug was tall, slender, possessed a tanned whiteness and hazel green eyes, with intelligence that would simultaneously smile and seem devious. There was almost always a smile on his lips. His curly hair was cut short and nicely layered. Even after a day of poking through containers, it seemed as if his shirt color was still an unblemished white with black cuff links beaoning. No sweat seemed to appear. He wore such a cool tie. The tie was blue and black with a clef note design. A blue note! His seductive cologne seemed as fresh at the end of the day as it was at the beginning of the day. The background music pulsed beats that unconsciously moved her body. It was time to freshen up.

Augustus Valentine was on his cell phone when Vicky came back. "Yes, well, I am sure that there is some present for you that came back with me." Pause. "Baby, it's a surprise. It won't be much of a surprise if I spoil it by telling you what the surprise is!" Pause. "Yes, well, I gotta go." He turned and winked at Vicky. "That Icky government agent of ours is calling, so I need to wind things up here." Pause. "HEY! You be nice! I'll call you later. Love you! Bye!"

Vicky looked at Aug somewhat lasciviously. "Hmmp! Who's that? Your hag from up the coast? The one that leaves you alone at night while she goes out and plays?"

Aug beamed. "Now, now, now, be nice. Jocelyn is a nice girl. I think you would like her if you ever got to know her better."

Vicky angrily retorted, "Is she Latino? No? Then I don't like her, and I don't want to get to know her better! She is no good for you! You could do so much

better. You need a good warm-blooded Hispanic from down here in your home area to take care of your affairs!" Vicky paused a second. "And furthermore, I wish you wouldn't call me Icky!" She posed with a wonderful smile for him. "Just what is so icky about Vicky? Hmmm?"

They both laughed on that one. His loud voice was always dominant. "First off, there is definitely nothing icky about Vicky. The words just rhyme nicely. Second, I may live here, but this is not my home area. There's never any snow on the ground here, and you never ever see your breath in the air. The place I remember as home is a place where one could make snow angels and go sledding down hills in the winter. Heck, we used to make ice hills and try to stand up on them while going down the hills. It's kinda dangerous 'cuz if you fall backward and crack your head, you can do some serious damage, but that made it fun too. Ya know, another thing we used to do as kids was we used to break icicles off the eaves of houses and eat them. Then again, in the summer, the weather would sometimes get hotter and muggier than it is here today. But here? Here, there is always heat and wet. No, I may live here, but it has never become home. Now come on, here is the next container ready to go. Let's get this over with. It's getting late."

Vicky replied, "See? That is just what I am talking about. If you had a good woman, you wouldn't feel that way about living here. There is beauty that you have not seen or tasted. You should enjoy the heat and the wet rather than reject it. Besides, listen to you, Mr. 'It's getting late.' Where are you going tonight? Anywhere? Maybe out to dinner and some wine and dancing somewhere? Hmmm? No?"

Aug laughed and parried, "No, I am not going out anywhere. I've been gone away for a few weeks. I need to work late tonight to catch up on things around here." Aug eyed Vicky. "And I'm thinking of eating Oriental for dinner tonight."

Vicky was indignant. "Well," she fumed, "you can just . . .," and Vicky let off an angry Spanish torrent of words that Aug did not fully understand. Her meaning was not lost on him. To accentuate her point, she hit him with her clipboard. Vicky ended with a "So there!"

Aug stared at Vicky with a large grin. He said nothing. Vicky started up again, "And another thing!" She smiled. "You should eat Mexican instead!"

Aug could not let that go. “Hey,” he quietly asked her, “what do the sharks in the Gulf of Mexico call Mexicans?”

Vicky suspiciously eyed Aug. “What?”

“Junk food” was his reply. After that quip, it did not take long for Vicky to break her clipboard beating him about the head and arms while he laughed at her.

The shipping office was next to the loading docks. They found a replacement clipboard for her among the utility tools and paperwork on and around the desk. Vicky had calmed down, and she was reorganizing her paperwork on an unbroken clipboard. “You know,” she told Aug, “you picked a very good time to be away. You missed Tropical Storm Anna.”

Aug replied, “Yes, after last year with Charlie and Frances and Ivan and Jeanne, we hardly need more storms. Man, that made a mess of shipping last year. Half my crew is still trying to work out paying for housing repairs. I think they all owe the company money. I’m very glad to finally miss one.

Aug thought about upcoming events. He thought about the lies to come. Softly and aimlessly, he sang to himself, “And I feel so much depends on the weather, so is it raining in your bedroom?”

Vicky heard him. “What is that all about? ‘Is it raining in your bedroom?’ See, what did I tell you? You need a new woman. One who is sunny. Not one who is stormy. You know, I might just happen to know some attractive, charming, happy female who is bright who just might be interested. Hmmm?”

Aug was amused. “Well, eagle ears! You are quite the word parser, aren’t you? Didn’t I just get done saying I liked wintry weather?”

Vicky chided him, “Wintry weather is not always stormy weather. I have been around, you know. I have been in snow and ice.” She shivered. “Rent-a-winter is nice, but I’d much rather be warm and tan all over—warm from shedding clothes to get a tan rather than warm from putting clothes on—wouldn’t you?”

Aug laughed. “You do got a point there!” He eyed her over and smiled. “You have plenty of points there!” They laughed. He said, “C’mon, we need to get this show on the road. Time’s a wasted go.”

Vicky flipped to her clipboard. “What’s next? This is a twenty-footer from . . . Grand Cayman Island. After what Ivan did there last year, I’m amazed that they

are even exporting anything yet! Let's see, what it says, we have . . . ten skids of Big Black Dick cigars, alcohol, clothes, towels, playing cards, shot glasses, hot sauce, and novelties? OK. This stuff has to be illegal. Let's pull a skid out and take a look." She smiled at Aug. "I've never seen a Big Black Dick before!"

The skid that was forked out had boxes of torpedoes on the top of it. Vicky called Cameron over for a quick sniff of the tobacco while Aug cut open the shrink-wrap and opened a box of cigars. Aug smiled at Ms. Chavez and said, "Here you go, Vicky. You can suck on a Big Black Dick for a while!" Even she had to laugh on that one. So did everyone within earshot.

Vicky picked up a random cigar and smilingly looked at the men around. "You know," she said as she smelled the stogie, "I'm sure that this cigar is like all the men around here." Vicky snapped the cigar in two and looked inside at the leaf and then at the men. "It's broken in two and dried up with nothing inside!" She sniffed the tobacco and wrinkled her nose. "PU! It doesn't even smell good either!" Satisfied that there was no contraband in the cigars, she placed the broken one back in the box and closed it.

They went through the rest of the skids. Upon clearing the goods, the contents of the containers were stashed on racks inside the building for various pickups later. The next container was a forty-foot-high cube container with a killer game inside. Vicky checked her paperwork and looked at Aug. "The Killer Beez game?" she quizzically asked. "One back cabinet, one front cabinet, eight lawn mower motors, boxes of parts? Lawn mower motors to go after killer beez? Wow! I didn't realize that the Brazilian superswarm had made it to Florida! What, are you going to go mow beehives?"

Aug undid the door locks and swung open the container. "Sorry, you don't wear your hair up! Anyway, well, I picked some old amusement games up in Italy to be fixed up at Refurbishments." Aug came close to Vicky and discreetly told her, "As for the bees, hey, you've never felt anything 'til you've felt their big sting!" Aug then told Frank, "We'll need all the boys to help get this back cabinet out. There's some bars inside for rolling the back piece out. But you know what yer doin'. We've handled these before, and they are a pain in the—"

Vicky cut him off, "Julio let's have Cameron sniff this stuff before Frank takes them off." She smiled at Aug. "Considering the source, I know there has

to be something illegal in there!” Cameron sniffed around, but the dog did not confirm her suspicions.

This particular Killer Beez game was a sixteen-player game (sometimes it is made for fewer players). When fully assembled, players stand at the front cabinet and aim a plastic gun that looks like a WWII fighter plane—mounted machine gun with a two-handled firing mechanism. Plastic balls automatically cannon out fired by the lawn mower motors. In the back cabinet are both drone bee and queen bee targets. Hit the drones and the queen drops down. As in real life, the first player to kill the queen wins the prize.

The boxes of skids and motors were forked out. Then it was time to tackle the front cabinet. The cabinet weighed one thousand pounds, which made it easy enough for eight men to maneuver. By pushing the cabinet upward, the fork truck teeth could be slid underneath without tearing up the side laminate. Bars to roll the cabinet forward out of the container to the warehouse could then be placed underneath. The cabinet could then be easily rolled out. After getting the cabinet out of the container and onto the warehouse floor, then fork teeth could be used to hold each cabinet end up so that the rollers could be removed, and then the cabinet was set on the floor. It would be loaded into a moving van the next day for reshipment locally.

The back cabinet was much harder to deal with. It was thirty feet long and weighed five thousand pounds of wood and metal. The frame was covered in laminate, and the unit was wedged into the back corner of the ocean container. It was too heavy to lift, but there was no way to stick the hi-lo forks underneath without tearing up the wood and laminate. To move the cabinet out of the ocean container, they had to get started by first pushing the cabinet out from the back corner of the container.

Five men bent down and moved inside the cabinet to help start pushing the cabinet forward. They repeatedly slammed their bodies against the wooden pillars inside the cabinet frame—a semi-self-defeating task as they were standing on the flooring of the item they were trying to push forward. But since no one could get behind the cabinet to push, it was the only option available to get the cabinet started moving forward. By slamming their bodies into the uprights while workers outside tried to push and pull any way they could—all at the count of

three—the cabinet moved inch by inch forward. Fifteen minutes and hundreds of swear words later, they had enough clearance where all of them could actually push upward, and the cabinet tilted back enough to get a starter roller underneath. Sweat of hard labor formed Lake TIE on the floor. They eventually got the cabinet to the floor and chocked the rollers in front of the loading dock so that the cabinet could be reloaded the next day.

The Killer Beez game and the games in the next and final container of the day were all redemption games that had been brought back to the United States. The containers had shipped from Salerno to Port Everglades. They were on their way to a small local business that Aug had a hand in named Refurbishments. Refurbishments did just that. They take broken things and make them look and work like new.

The Vickster was amused by the amusement games that were on the manifest for the last container: the Fireman's Ladder, a Whack-a-Mole, the Slam-n-Jam, the Wacky Duck, and many more. There were about thirty games listed on the manifest. Undoubtedly, they were strategically packed to maximize space and minimize damage.

The container doors opened. The first thing everyone's eyes went to were five giant white plush bunny rabbits sitting on top of Wacky Gator and Dino Spin games. The bunnies were three feet tall and smiling and oh so cute. The first thing to hit Vicky was emotion. The rabbits were lovely and wonderful. Then the customs agent kicked in. Where was the plush merchandise on the manifest?

"Aug?" she questioned slowly. "These . . . animals . . . aren't on my paperwork. Where are they? These aren't supposed to be in that container."

Vicky's paperwork problems did not matter to the TIE staff. Chum had been thrown in the water. It was a feeding frenzy to try and grab the plush and lay claim to whatever could be stolen. The laborers could get lucky for a day or a week with a cool plush present for a spouse, girlfriend, or child.

Frank bitched at the men to calm down and go clean the warehouse since it was the end of the day and getting toward time to go. Frank would personally see to unloading this container, and all employees would get their due.

Aug gave Vicky a look of surprise. "They aren't on your paperwork? They're on mine. What do you show for this container?"

Aug and Vicky matched up documents while Frank directed one hi-lo driver to move skids and animals out. Giant plush Popeye, Stewie, and Betty Boop came out on top of games. Smaller dogs and rabbits came out as well as teddy bears. Then there were a handful of six-foot pink flamingos in the back. A six-foot-tall panda bear came out.

When they matched up paperwork, they realized that they were looking at different documents. Aug tried explaining to Vicky what had occurred. “Well, what happened is that at the end of the trip, I was able to get the animals thrown in for free. Someone in Italy must have screwed up and prepared the paperwork based upon the wrong list. We can resubmit with everything corrected.”

Vicky was not amused. “Aug, this is not supposed to happen like this! And you know better! This is going to cost you.” She looked around at the plush material. A smaller dog about a foot and half tall caught her eye. He was Droopyish. Droopy was not outlandish like the other large plush. Puppy had a green body with a white chest patch and pink ears. Above all, puppy was a very cuddly smaller item. “I want this one,” she said and grabbed the animal. Cameron, who had been busy sniffing the plush, growled at her in jealousy.

“What?” Aug replied, smiling away as he took the canine from her. “I suppose you also want a Tiffany Case too? Talk about breaking rules! I can’t give you a present! That is definitely against the law. That’s worse than the paperwork being bad! Two wrongs don’t make a right, you know.” Aug paused and thought about that as he scanned the other plush. “And what would Cameron think about you having another dog? Besides, a giant flamingo would suit you better. C’mon. Let’s go up front and get the paperwork corrected and let people finish back here. That was the last load today anyway.”

Vicky directed Jose to take Cameron out for a walk and to leave for the day. She would wind things up with Aug. Augustus and Vicky started walking to the front office with Ms. Chavez playfully grabbing at the dog under Aug’s arm. “Awww, Aug, this one is soooooooooo cute! I can’t cuddle a flamingo when I am sleeping! Gimme gimme gimme GIMME!”

Aug held the dog behind his back while she pressed against him for the animal. “Hey, now stop that! Now, it just so happens that puppy here is spoken for. You’re just going to have to settle for something else!”

They had reached the door to the office. Vicky smiled at Aug. "Oh, I'm just going to have to settle for something else, am I? And so, mister, just what is that something else that you had in mind? Hmmm?"

"I told you. I think a flamingo is better for you." Aug gave Vicky a smile. "You never know. It could be the key to your happiness!"

Vicky rolled her eyes on that one. "Hmmp. A flamingo being the key to my happiness? That'll be the day. Now you tell me. Just who is my puppy for? Some crooked car saleswoman perhaps?"

"No no no. A friend of mine wanted something small like this to give to his niece, so I promised a puppy to them already." Aug stopped. "Hey! Jocelyn is not a crooked car salesperson!"

"Really! That's funny. I never heard of a car dealer who wasn't crooked." Vicky stepped back a bit to show her profile. "At least the only place I am crooked," she said with a big knowing smile, "is in all the right places!"

It was Aug's turn to roll his eyes. Vicky continued, "So that's the way it is, eh? Well, if you want to clear up this shipping issue, then you have to answer a question for me."

Aug replied, "Vicky, you know I always cooperate with the government. What is it you want to know?"

Vicky queried, "Aug, how come you never remarried?"

This did catch Aug by surprise. "I . . . uh . . . now where did this question come from?"

Vicky chidingly lay onto him. "You agreed to answer my question, not for me to answer your question. You want no paperwork problems with the plush? Then you answer my question! So tell me why."

Aug paused. They looked into each other's eyes; their pupils moved like rapid elevators up and down as an assessment process was occurring between two adults.

Aug explained, "Vicky, I like you a lot, and I would love to take you out sometime. But I can't do that, at least not right now. Trust me when I tell you it just wouldn't work." Another brief pause as he chose his words. "Ya know, when Laurie left, a lot of things changed for me. A lot of things changed me from when we first met years ago." Pause. "What I personally want out of life changed for me. It's hard to explain. Maybe it is a religious thing. Ya know," he philosophized,

“some religions believe when you marry someone that is it, that you are married for life.” Aug unconsciously felt his empty ring finger. “Maybe . . . maybe I still feel married. Maybe I am just not ready yet to take that step and move on.” Aug paused. “Maybe . . . someday . . . we can go somewhere and talk about it. I . . . I think I would like that. But the time is not now, and this building is not the place.”

Vicky saw a painful tiredness in his green eyes. The happy and in-control man she knew was suddenly somewhat defeated in nature. He had energy and was tired all at the same time. His tall, slender frame drooped a bit at the shoulder. She snorted at him, “Hmmp. I’ve never known you to be very religious at all, and I sure as hell don’t still feel married to that lazy bastard who was my husband. But if you are thinking about it, then maybe you should not wait too long ’cuz maybe, just maybe, when you do decide to move on, at least this puppy dog may have left the kennel.”

Aug softly and happily said, “If I have a change of heart, you’ll be the first to know. I’ll be the puppy returning to the kennel.” He sang again, “When the dogs do find her, got time, time, to wait for tomorrow.” He held up the puppy and looked in the plush eyes. “Who knows? Maybe tomorrow things will be different, and this dog will find her. I’ll be like Abel in the Bible, you know, the prodigal son who returned home?”

Vicky’s retort was swift. “I should punch you!” Vicky followed through on her threat. “Abel? The prodigal son? HELLO! You dummy! Abel wasn’t the prodigal son! Abel was killed by his brother Cain!” She thought a second. “Heck, the prodigal son didn’t have a name! He was a character in a parable. That’s it, mister! You’re coming to church with me this weekend! You do need some religion!”

Aug embarrassedly laughed. “Oh. My bad. Show’s you what I don’t know. You’re right. I guess I am not very religious after all!” He thought a second. “So you mean to tell me that the prodigal son was like a John Doe? That he was just another unknown nobody in the world? I guess that doesn’t sound too appealing a person to be to me.” Aug thought further. “That’s funny. Cain kills someone and you know his name. Abel gets killed and you know his name. But the guy who finds his way in life is a John Doe. Nobody knows who he is. Doesn’t seem like much of a way to make your name in the world, does it?”

Vicky placed a hand on Aug's chest. "Aug," she said, "that's why we go to church. Those are mysteries for the minister to explain." Vicky sighed. "It sounds like to me you still have a broken heart." Aug brought his left hand up to hold Vicky's hand. She once again noticed the large scar in the palm of his hand. The scar had always made her curious. It had to be another broken Aug thing.

"It was not my heart that was broken" was Aug's reply. "And I don't think any preacher is going to tell me how to think or what to do." He opened the door and beckoned her in to the front office.

"Well," Vicky said as she stopped before crossing through the threshold of the door, "you may be right. You may not have been the person with the broken heart." She paused a few seconds. "But I can't agree that your heart was not broken." With that, she crossed the threshold to the front office.