

# THE MILE MARKER MURDERS



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**CHAPTER**  
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**ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

**T**he cell phone vibrated on top of the antique desk where FBI Special Agent Tyler Bannister had placed it when he got home that afternoon. He recognized the number as the one assigned to Gary Witt, the Atlanta FBI's Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC). Bannister frowned as he set his wine glass down and picked up the phone. Witt rarely called agents directly, especially on a Sunday evening.

The street agents referred to Witt behind his back as "Dim Witt." He'd been in the Bureau thirteen years, but he'd never managed investigations in the field. After his first five years as an agent, he was promoted to FBI Headquarters as a manager. Seven years and three assignments later, the career board in DC decided to launch him to Atlanta where he could share responsibilities for Georgia investigations. Witt was slick, an excellent speaker, and always immaculately attired. He was a classic ass-kisser who believed perception was reality.

"I hope I'm not interrupting your dinner, Ty," Witt said.

"What's going on?" Bannister asked, hoping Witt would get to the point.

"Caleb Williamson is missing."

"What the hell do you mean, missing?"

"You haven't seen him, have you?"

Bannister thought a moment. "Not since he left to start his new job."

"Nobody else has, either. Apparently he never showed up for work."

I can't discuss details on this line, but two agents from Washington Field and an Agency rep are on a flight to Hartsfield-Jackson airport. They want to talk to you in the office first thing in the morning."

"How long has he been missing? Who reported it?"

"An Assistant Director called on a secure line from Washington an hour ago," Witt said. "He didn't tell me much, but he emphasized that they need to interview you. I'm sure you can appreciate the official concern, knowing Williamson's situation."

Bannister was stunned. Williamson was his best friend.

"Do you know the Bureau agents involved?"

"Not personally. The names provided were Doug Gordon and Steve Quattrone. Do you know them?"

"I don't think so," Bannister lied. He didn't want Witt pumping him for information. Doug Gordon was one of the best agents in Washington at investigating espionage. Although Bannister had never worked with him, he was aware of his reputation. Gordon was experienced, bright, and painstakingly thorough. One of his past major assignments was determining how much damage the United States had suffered from the treason of FBI supervisor Robert Hanssen. The name Steve Quattrone didn't register. Bannister didn't bother asking for the name of the Agency officer. His experience with CIA headquarters people was that they drove a one-way street. They listened to what you said, but never volunteered anything.

"Is there anything I need to know?" Witt asked.

"No," Bannister replied, hoping Witt would be tied up tomorrow during the interview. His wish was short-lived.

"Then I'll see you in my office in the morning."

"Does the Special Agent in Charge know about this?"

"Not yet."

"I'm not trying to tell you how to run things, Gary, but I'd give the boss a heads-up call. Atlanta may be able to provide some background. You want to cover your ass."

"I was just going to do that."

As Bannister hung up, his mind was already racing ahead. Caleb “Cal” Williamson was an experienced CIA officer. The Agency would never have assigned him as their Chief of Station in Vienna if he hadn’t earned the reputation as a high achiever. As Chief of Station in Atlanta, he was responsible for clandestine activity in five states. Bannister had last seen Cal ten days earlier when they’d met for a jog on a Thursday morning. Because of his promotion to Washington, DC, Cal’s last day in Atlanta was to have been that Friday.

During their run, Cal had told Bannister that he’d already moved all of his belongings to Virginia the weekend before. He was anxious to hit the ground running on his new assignment and didn’t want the hassles associated with a move. Cal said he was driving up Saturday to his new place in Forest Hills and planned to get there in time for dinner in Old Town Alexandria. He figured Monday would be a long day jammed with briefings by everyone at Langley trying to impress him with current source information and state-of-the-art technology.

Bannister thought back to their jog. Cal had been upbeat. He was talking so much he had to slow down and catch his breath on a couple of hills he normally just flew up. He was looking forward to motivating his Washington staff.

It didn’t make sense that Doug Gordon was on the case. Why put an FBI spy chaser on a missing person investigation? It sent the wrong message. It put Cal at the wrong end of the magnifying glass. Both the CIA and FBI had received criticism for their failure to detect the treasonous activities of the Agency’s Aldrich Ames and the Bureau’s supervisor, Robert Hanssen. Neither agency could afford to make mistakes if Williamson’s disappearance was in any way connected to a foreign power.

Bannister couldn’t do anything without more information. He resisted the urge to start making calls. He poured another glass of wine and settled back into his chair, listening to the boom of thunder in the distance. He often spent Sunday evenings reading a good book, but tonight he couldn’t concentrate. Grabbing the remote, he switched on

his plasma TV, scrolling up and down the channels a few times before realizing he wasn't watching the screen. The only thing he could think about was Cal.