

Wrong Man

“Hi Peter, how are you ?” The FBI agent asked. Peter didn’t know it was the FBI yet. The agent had removed Peter from school during music class. The principal motioned that Peter should go with the agent. Peter and the agent had then driven to a nearby office building.

Peter responded: “I’m just fine, what’s this about ?” The agent seemed friendly enough.

Hi, I’m FBI agent XXXX. Please take a seat in the interview room. FBI agent closes door behind himself.

Peter notices two guards at the door which makes him nervous.

FBI Agent: “We would like to talk to you about a series of outstanding criminal cases. I’m from the FBI BAU (behavioural analysis unit), local law enforcement asked us to investigate a suspicious number of deaths in the area. Based on all the information we have and a detailed statistical analysis, we’ve tracked the central point of all the deaths to you and you alone. You and you alone fit our profile of the killer. We studied your background so we know how this could have happened.”

Peter’s eyes went wide with shock and surprise.

FBI Agent: “So which is it ? Are you a serial killer or just some sort of a vigilante out for justice ? We noted all the deceased had criminal records, some including violent offences.”

The agent continued: “You have one, and only one chance to come clean and potentially save yourself from a death sentence.”

Peter started crying. Then he explained. “Sorry, there’s nothing more depressing or degrading than having your fellow man think you are a murderer. You’ve got it wrong, I’m neither a serial killer nor a vigilante. I’m just a guy who’s had a terrible string of bad luck.”

FBI Agent somewhat annoyed with the response: “Really, how’s that ? Explain it to me then. How is it that a guy can be involved in over 20 murders and consider it a string of bad luck ?” The FBI agent began laying out photos of the deceased on the table. “You call this, and this, and this bad luck ?” The agent laid out more photos. The accused vomited.

The accused continued: “I didn’t kill all those people. Just those three there.” And he pointed out the photos. “Those three I also reported to the police myself. They went to trial and were ruled justifiable by a judge.”

The FBI agent looked visibly upset for a moment and excused himself from the room. Nobody had told them that the accused had already reported three of the deaths himself. It didn’t fit with their profile. The suspect, if he was genuine wasn’t fitting the profile of a cold-blooded serial killer. Local law enforcement had included three deaths that had already been processed by the system.

An FBI specialist quickly reworked the statistics noted that if you excluded the three deaths from the case, that the central home location for the killer changed slightly. It was no longer the accused's home location. It also changed the profile of the killer slightly.

A few minutes later the FBI agent re-entered the interview room. Peter had had time to study the photos.

Peter began talking. "You've got both victim and perpetrator files mixed up in this dossier. I've been the victim not the perpetrator twice in these files. I was classified as essentially deceased in those two files. Check the date, they happened when I was a kid. Look at the victim info, that's me."

Peter continued talking, figuring it wouldn't matter much: "You know you've really got about four or five different killers here. The MO for the killings is different. Didn't anybody notice? Look at the photos. Six people were beaten to death. Eight people were stabbed and carved up, and another eight people were shot. Three different means of death."

The accused continued on: "Of the six people beaten to death those three were killed with one or two punches by someone tremendously strong (Peter). The other three people were killed by someone not nearly as strong, and with a lot more malice. They were struck and kicked thirty to forty times. Is that a woman's shoe-print on the corpse there?" Peter continued on: "Of the eight people shot, five people were killed with a shotgun, and three people with a small calibre firearm." "It looks like all eight people might have been carved up by the same person."

The FBI agent was momentarily flabbergasted. This was something he hadn't expected. But as he looked at the crime scene photos himself, he realized it was probably true.

The FBI agent excused himself from the room again. A few minutes later he was back.

FBI Agent: "Here's what it comes down to: it's still a suspicious number of deaths which seems to be centred around you. But we're going to let you go for now. We checked out your story about reporting the deaths to the police and found out it was true. Don't try and leave the area. We thank you for coming in to see us. We obviously have more investigation to do." The FBI agent was hiding his anger well. He had just put a probably innocent man through the ringer because of a poor investigation. Something the FBI doesn't like to see happen.

An FBI specialist separated out the murders by the MO. It was determined that there was likely a cluster of murderers living within a few blocks of each other. Over the course of several weeks there were a number of additional arrests made of other suspects.

FBI had been too hasty in trusting local law enforcement's analysis of the situation and had not taken the proper amount of time to assess the situation themselves. Local law enforcement had given them a ready-made suspect with a background, and they had only analyzed the location of the deaths without actually examining the crime scenes themselves.

