



# THE AVID ANGLER

*Mathiya Adams*

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### *About this Book*

First in a new series!

Betrayed by his wife and the system, former Denver Police Detective Mark MacFarland dropped out of the system...all the way. But now he has put drinking and homelessness behind him, bought a hot dog stand, and started a new life. He likes nothing better than listening to his language CDs (people should always try to improve themselves, right? And you never know when you might go to France!), giving away free hot dogs to his homeless friends, and chatting with the occasional customer.

Everything is fine until...

Until he is asked by a noted defense lawyer to prove that his client was wrongly accused of murdering her husband. Suddenly, MacFarland's past catches up with him. Aided by his former partner, Cynthia Pierson, and his longtime homeless friend, Vietnam Vet Rufus Headley, MacFarland discovers the husband's murder is actually part of a larger web of conspiracy.

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## Prologue

*Saturday, November 28, 1009 Hours*

There were three slices missing from the meatloaf.

A tendril of dread lifted the hairs on the back of her neck, though she couldn't say why. Otto would have laughed at her. "You worry too much," he always grinned at her. Then he'd put his feet up on the couch with his shoes still on, though he knew that drove her batty.

Maureen Freeman pursed her lips and shook her head. Otto must have made a sandwich to take on his fishing trip. The meatloaf was still edible, though not as moist and tender as when she first cooked the loaf on Wednesday. One sandwich wouldn't be enough, she thought. He'd headed out early Thanksgiving morning. Although he had tried to leave quietly so as not to disturb her, she'd still heard him. Besides, she always knew when he was gone. There was an emptiness in the bed that she could sense.

As long as Otto was gone anyhow, Maureen wanted to start the day bright and early. The grocery store would already be busy, but thank the Lord, not with the same crowds as the weekend before Thanksgiving. Last Saturday had almost been too much for her, what with all the lines. The store promised never more than three people in a line, but she'd been fifth in line, and at least two other lines had six or more. She'd counted. She would have complained to the store manager, but then she'd have lost her place in line. Hopefully, that would not be a problem today.

Thanksgiving had been depressingly lonely. She knew Otto would be gone for Thanksgiving, so she hadn't bothered sweating over a fancy meal. Just the leftover meatloaf she prepared on Wednesday. She gnawed again at the thought that he hadn't packed enough food--he never did. One sandwich would be okay for lunch on Thursday, but what about dinner, and all day Friday? Even today, he would need to eat. He always assumed he would cook and eat the fish he caught, but why not be prepared, she always asked. Could it hurt to take a few extra bites?

The kitchen was spotless, but out of habit, she wiped down the sink and counter. A strange scent in the air, an unpleasant tang that soured the usual smells in the kitchen of lemon-fresh dishwashing liquid and apricot hand soap. She decided to take out the trash. It wasn't even half full yet, and the smell didn't seem to be coming from there, but better safe than sorry.

She paused with her hand on the door to the garage connecting the house with the garage. Another twinge of disquiet shivered down her back. She almost changed her mind about going through the garage to reach the trash cans. But that was silly.

Maureen opened the door and stepped into the dim room. The single light on the far wall cast weird shadows. The garage wasn't heated, and the still, cold air was tinged with a foul odor. It wasn't coming from the trash at all. The unpleasant aroma was stronger here, in the garage. She wondered if the cat had

dragged in a dead mouse or bird. Maureen looked past her car, hoping to see Otto's car. There was only emptiness where Otto normally would park. So he wasn't home. He could have called and told her when she could expect him, she thought, suddenly angry. Otto could be so inconsiderate sometimes. Like going on this fishing trip. Who goes on a fishing trip on Thanksgiving?

That horrid smell. What *was* it? She shuffled forward, watching her steps carefully so she wouldn't step on some half-eaten animal, then froze when she rounded the end of the car.

There was Otto, lying on the floor, unmoving.

Maureen called out to him. "Otto? Are you alright?"

She hurried to him. His skin glinted unnaturally in the dim light, waxy and pale. She knelt down and touched his cheek. It was quite cold. Then she noticed the small hole in the side of his head, hidden beneath his hair.

Maureen stared at him for a moment before she fully comprehended that her husband was dead. Only then did she start to scream, the air leaving her throat so forcefully she was wheezing, almost suffocating. When she finally gulped down her tears enough to see and breathe, she opened the trunk of her car and pulled out an old Army blanket, one that they had used on many mountain picnics together. She wrapped his body up in it, and struggled to get him into a sitting position, so that he would look more comfortable.

Then she went into the house and called the police.

Shopping would have to wait



## Chapter 1

*Monday, November 30, 1153 Hours*

“Give me a brat with all the fixings,” said Jerry, flicking some lint off his expensive Valentino suit. He turned to his companion, Mel, another defense attorney. “What would you like? My treat.”

Mel stared at the menu, shivering in the cold wind. He would have preferred lunch inside the courthouse across the street, but Jerry insisted on coming outside. “I guess the same thing. But I don’t want onions on it.”

The hot dog vendor, listening intently to the sounds buzzing in his earphones, didn’t even look up, but he deftly pulled out two warmed buns, picked up a well-cooked hot dog, and nestled it inside the bun, then repeated the process with the second hot dog.

“Hey, I said bratwurst, not hot dog, you asshole,” said Mel.

The hot dog vendor ignored him.

Mel scowled in Jerry’s direction, annoyed that they were eating their meal at a hot dog stand on the corner of Fourteenth and Elati. “Sheesh, how hard is it to serve a brat? The guy has one job and he can’t even do it right?”

“He probably doesn’t even speak English,” shrugged Jerry. He actually liked the brats he got from this particular vendor. Besides, the cart was conveniently placed between the Detention Center, the Courthouse and the parking garage. You couldn’t beat it for convenience. “So, the Freeman case...”

“The Freeman case. Go on.”

“I get this call from this woman. Maureen Freeman. She’s accused of murdering her husband. I talk to her, and I get the strong feeling that the woman is innocent.”

Mel raised his eyebrows cynically. “Aren’t they all?”

He and Jerry exchanged knowing smirks. “Sure they are,” said Jerry, snickering, “And the more hours we can bill to them, the more innocent they are. But I think this lady is *innocent* innocent. And I’m not sure I can get her off.”

Most of Jerry’s clients were real scumbags. He knew, they knew, everyone knew it. He’d learned not to ask if they were innocent or guilty. It was a foregone conclusion that they were guilty as sin. It didn’t matter to him, not anymore. His job was to get them off or at least get them the best terms possible. No big deal, and he’d built up a good practice doing this. Just when he’d given up defending the innocent, a real innocent had crossed his desk. But if he was going to free her, he’d need some help, and he’d already realized it wasn’t going to come from the usual places.

Jerry reached out for the dogs.

The hot dog vendor leaned out past the cart and handed the two hot dogs to another man who shambled up to the cart behind them. The man’s unkempt beard, dirty clothes, and smudged skin proclaimed him as one of the many homeless people who prowled the streets of Denver looking for a handout. Jerry liked to be charitable to the homeless from a distance that did not involve any

danger of ketchup stains. He motioned for his friend to move to the far end of the cart, as far away from the homeless man as possible.

"Hi, Rufus," said the hot dog vendor. "Running a bit late today?"

"Just a little, boss. So many meetings to go to. Can't hardly keep up with 'em all."

"I saved you two dogs, slightly charred, just the way you like them. Help yourself to the fixin's."

"Sure thing, boss."

Jerry noticed that the grungy man did not give the vendor any money.

The hot dog vendor fixed a strangely intense gaze on Jerry. Feeling like a kid caught spitting paper wads at school, Jerry resisted the urge to squirm.

The hot dog vendor quickly assembled two brats and handed them to Jerry. "Condiments are on the side of the cart. You can put whatever you want on your own brat. Did you want a drink to go with that? Chips? Okay, that'll be six fifty. Drinks are in the cooler over there. Choose whatever you like."

He turned away from Jerry, as if dismissing him as unimportant.

"You know who this hot dog guy reminds me of?" Mel asked suddenly. "You remember that cop who went ballistic on Peterson in court four years ago? What was that guy's name?"

"MacFarland," said Jerry, squinting at the vendor, trying to discern what in the man might resemble the "Crazy Cop." The hot dog vendor was about five foot nine inches tall, probably weighed in at one hundred eighty-five pounds. Even with the winter jacket on, Jerry could tell the man was rock solid, the kind of compact mass that could burst through walls. He had close-cropped hair, clean shaven jaw, and piercing brown eyes. Still...

"He was a good detective, but I'm pretty sure he was a lot bigger than this guy," Jerry concluded. Privately, he added, *Though I could use a guy like MacFarland right now.*

Mel smirked again. "Peterson was a good client. It wasn't my case, but I wish it had been. The ADA handed that case on a platter to the defense. Screw up the chain of custody, problems with the prosecution...Hell, even a law student could have gotten him off."

Jerry smiled faintly. Peterson was rich, totally without scruples, willing to pay anything to get off and very, very good to his legal team. The Assistant District Attorney completely blew the case. Mismanaged chain of custody, lousy prosecution. When the jury came back with a not guilty decision, the cop went berserk. Leaped over the barrier and tried to choke Peterson.

"You ever hire a private detective?" Jerry asked Mel, following an early line of thought.

"Huh?" asked Mel.

"The problem is, there's a lot of evidence against her."

"Who?"

"Freeman. Maureen Freeman! I told you..."

"Yeah, yeah, the Freeman case."

"The police are convinced she's guilty. I'm pursuing a couple of avenues, mostly dementia or incapacity arguments. But I don't think I can get a doctor to really sign off on that. I need someone to find the real killer. I mean, if it wasn't

her, it's got to be someone, right? I need someone who can do what the police can't do. Find out who really killed Otto Freeman."

"Good luck with that! Admit it, Jerry, the woman probably did kill her husband. Didn't you say it was her gun, with her prints on it? And the body was in their garage! I think you ought to plea-deal."

"Nope. I need to find a good private eye."

Mel laughed, wiping the last traces of mustard from his lips. "You might as well hire this hot dog seller, Jerry." Mel laughed at his own joke. "Hey, I got to run. Thanks for the brat. I'll see you later this week. Want to get some racquetball in?"

Jerry shook his head. "Got too much going on. See you around, Mel." Jerry finished his brat and sipped the last of his soda. The homeless man, Rufus, had piled his hot dogs with condiments and had retreated to eat his lunch over in the doorway of the nearby parking garage, out of the direct path of the wind.

Jerry continued to stare at the vendor. The resemblance was uncanny. He tried to imagine the man in a suit.

"Was there anything else, Mr. Baker?" the vendor asked pointedly.

"How did you know my name? I never told it to you."

"Not all street vendors are complete idiots, Mr. Baker. Some of us are just as observant as the average defense lawyer."

Jerry felt his face heat up. *Oh shit, you've got to be kidding.* He tried to remember exactly how rude he and Mel had been, but couldn't recall just what they said to him, or about him. C'mon, it wasn't fair for a guy to expect to be treated politely if he dressed like a street vendor, right?

To cover his embarrassment, Jerry stepped forward, extending his hand. He withdrew his hand when the vendor didn't respond. "MacFarland! I knew it was you! You *were* that detective! Damn, whatever happened to you?" Jerry had a bright flash of insight. He lowered his voice. "Oh, I get it. You're working undercover."

MacFarland glared at Jerry. "I'm not undercover, Mr. Baker. I'm a hot dog seller."

Feeling a bit befuddled, Jerry Baker started to turn to go to the courthouse. He stopped, turning back towards MacFarland. Maybe he could salvage his pride. "I was serious when I said I needed a detective, Mr. MacFarland."

When MacFarland made no comment, Baker hurried away

## Chapter 2

*Monday, November 30, 1210 Hours*

A man and woman had been standing off to the side, out of Baker's sight. As he walked hurriedly away, they approached. MacFarland smiled broadly at the woman. "Detective Pierson. How have you been?"

"I've been pretty good, Mac. How are you doing?"

MacFarland shrugged. "I've had better days, I've had worse days. I don't complain about the day I've been given."

"Mac, this is Detective Benny Lockwood, the latest newbie the department has saddled me with. Lockwood, this is the guy I was telling you about, Mark MacFarland."

Detective Pierson gestured towards Baker, who by now was across Fourteenth Avenue and making his way towards the courthouse. Pierson smiled. "Have you met him before, Mac?"

MacFarland smiled at Pierson, almost ignoring Lockwood. "No, never saw him before today. But when he paid for his bratwursts, he dropped his business card." MacFarland pulled a card from his pocket, printed with gold embossed letters: **Jerome Edward Baker, Attorney at Law.**

"I've seen him in court a couple of times," said Pierson. "Defense lawyer." She said it in a tone that implied people like Baker crawled around with the roaches.

MacFarland couldn't help staring at Cynthia Pierson. Sunlight poured through a break in the clouds accentuating the gold highlights in her red hair. She was a few inches shorter than MacFarland, a few years older, and, in his opinion, the most attractive cop on the force. She also scared the hell out of him, and had from the first day he became her partner more than ten years earlier. Even back then, she had a reputation for chewing up and spitting out new detectives. Surprisingly, they had been partners for almost seven years.

"So you have a new partner," observed MacFarland. He stared at Lockwood for a long moment. Lockwood was tall and lanky, a modern day Abraham Lincoln, with clothes designed for a more manly man. He had a long narrow jaw and deep set, nervous eyes that darted everywhere. His narrow mouth was tight-lipped, as though he were afraid words would escape his mouth and betray him. Lockwood shuffled and checked the plaza across the street for potential dangers. "I wonder how long this one will last," said MacFarland.

"They keep foiling my desire to work alone by assigning me really good partners," said Pierson dryly. "I miss the days when I had an asshole for a partner."

"Funny, but I don't miss it at all," said MacFarland.

"Is that why you set up shop so near the courthouse? You are so transparent, Mac, it's positively frightening. Why don't you come back? I'm sure the Commander would put in a good word for you."

MacFarland barked out a bitter laugh. "He'd prefer to still have me in jail."

"It was only a contempt charge. Nothing really serious. Bob understood how

you felt. Hell, most of us would have gladly changed places with you."

MacFarland stopped cleaning up his cart and looked dourly at his former partner. "Aren't you forgetting that someone in the department screwed up the evidence files? One of our own, Cyn, helped get Peterson that not guilty verdict."

The new guy, Lockwood, turned bug-eyed at that. Pierson noticed and frowned. "Lockwood, how about I meet you back at the station?"

Lockwood seemed relieved for the excuse to leave. MacFarland could not tell if he was trying to get out of the cold or get away from the uncomfortable turn in the conversation.

Pierson lowered her voice, but not her intensity. "You don't know whether that's true or not, Mac! It could just have been a natural mistake. Human error. There doesn't have to be a conspiracy to explain everything."

MacFarland knew she was referring to his suspicions that Alison Wentworth had been paid off to lose the case. She hadn't stayed very long in the DA's office after that trial. She left Denver, but he wasn't sure where she had gone. Phoenix, perhaps? By the time she left Denver, he was lost in his drunken fog.

"I know what I know," said MacFarland bitterly.

"You don't know shit, Mac. Wake up, get over it. You are wasting your life out here. What are you doing? Selling hot dogs? For Christ sake, what a joke!"

"I like being one of the invisible people," said MacFarland in a quiet voice.

"The what?"

"The invisible people. Those people that most of us don't pay any attention to. The ones who wait on us in restaurants, or the ones who pick up the garbage every Tuesday. The people we all pretend don't exist."

"Nobody thinks like that, Mac. That's the booze talking. You're still wallowing in self-pity."

MacFarland started pushing the cart again. "Yep, Cyn, that's right. Wallowing, swimming, drowning. Told you, I'm not very good company these days."

Pierson snorted. "You flatter yourself, asshole. You never were good company. But you *were* a good detective. You're letting that go to waste."

"My values have changed, Cyn. Losing Nicole did that for me."

She softened and put a hand on his arm. "What values, Mac? Talk to me."

MacFarland shook his head. He couldn't talk about it. He realized he was being an asshole, but it would have been easier to take a bullet to the chest than drag it all back out into the open.

Pierson had difficulty looking at her former partner. "I don't know what went wrong with the trial, Mac. When we first indicted Peterson, it certainly looked like a slam dunk to most of us in the department. We had him dead to rights. But you have to keep in mind that even if there were no problems with the evidence, I think Peterson had the jury in his pocket. But guys like that eventually fuck up, Mac. Their arrogance puts them at a disadvantage. One of these days, we will get him."

MacFarland stared at her without speaking for several awkward moments. "Who exactly is watching Peterson? Who is waiting for him to slip up, Cyn?"

Pierson was silent. She couldn't answer his question because he was right. No one was watching Peterson. MacFarland barked a short laugh and turned back to his cart. "That's what I thought. Peterson will get away with killing my wife and

no one is going to do a damn thing to stop him. I think I have every right to be lousy company."

MacFarland packed up his cart in silence. His truck and trailer were parked in a small private lot behind a house. He positioned the cart at the back of the trailer, then connected a cable to it. Moving to the front of the trailer, he turned a winch, pulling the cart onto the trailer. He secured it to the trailer, then turned to face Pierson, who was silently watching him. "I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you, Cyn. You were--you are--a great partner. I miss working with you, but I don't miss the department. In fact, if you think about it, my not being there is probably a good thing."

"How do you figure?" asked Pierson

MacFarland unlocked his truck door and climbed in. "It's simple, Cyn. If I were still in the department, I would be using every resource at my disposal to bring that bastard down

## Chapter 3

*Monday, November 30, 1720 Hours*

MacFarland pulled his truck and trailer into the driveway and parked behind the carports that served to shelter the apartment building's vehicles from Denver's changeable weather. He arrived home early enough to ensure that he had access to the trash-strewn strip of dirt and gravel. Normally he had no problems parking behind the carport, except when Harry Shamus in Apartment 16B parked his pickup truck back there. Harry did this, MacFarland was convinced, just to piss him off, since there were plenty of parking spaces closer to the building. Harry clearly knew that there were not many other places MacFarland could park his truck and hitch, except on the street in front of the building, and in this neighborhood, that wasn't a safe option. Way too much vandalism from local gangs. If MacFarland wanted to avoid parking on the street, he had to unhitch his trailer, park that in one space, then park his truck in another space. A lot more work.

He climbed up the three flights of stairs to his apartment. It was only a studio apartment, about all he could afford. He probably could qualify for public assistance, but he had never found the time to apply. During the two years he had been a drunk, he hadn't even considered housing. Those had been his years on the street, a period of his life that he was glad was just a blurred confused set of memories.

As he opened the door to his apartment, he was surprised to find Stefanie sitting at what passed for his kitchen table. He'd forgotten that he had given Stefanie a key to the apartment when he moved into it a year earlier. For the past several months, they hadn't been on very good speaking terms.

"It's been more than a year and you still don't have any real furniture," she said as soon as he closed the door. MacFarland sighed. Apparently they still weren't on good speaking terms.

"It's good to see you too, Stefanie," he replied, not looking at her as he set his unused product on the kitchen table. He sat on the opposite side of the table, the packages of hot dogs and buns serving as a barrier between them.

Stefanie Cooper--Nicole's younger sister--sat with her hands crossed over her lap, wrinkling her nose disapprovingly at his apartment. Stefanie looked too perfect to be trapped in his apartment. Perfectly coifed hair, delicately arching eyebrows, full, pouty lips, almost like one of those models in a television cosmetics commercial. She was the exquisite rose, forced by rude circumstance to take root atop a heap of garbage.

He glanced around, trying to see his apartment through her eyes. His less than diligent attacks with a mop had failed to eliminate the inexorable taint of feline urine, the leftover evidence of the former inhabitant, an old lady who had been evicted because she kept a cat zoo. And clearly the apartment lacked furniture. All he had was a card table, three folding chairs, a salvaged recliner chair that needed a repair, a floor lamp, a small bookcase that held his language

CDs and a bunch of outdated cassettes, and a queen-sized mattress that rested on the floor. Most of his clothes were stuffed in the closet, in various boxes of assorted sizes.

What Stefanie didn't notice, in all probability, was that there wasn't a single bottle of booze or any cans of beer anywhere in the apartment. That was the only thing that MacFarland really took any pride in, though it was a very tentative sort of pride.

"I don't know how you can live like this, Mark," she said, ignoring his comment.

"The hot dog business isn't exactly the money tree I had hoped it would be."

"Who even buys hot dogs in the winter?"

MacFarland shrugged, choosing to ignore the question. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Stefanie glanced around the room, shaking her head. "I came over to invite you to come over to our house for Christmas Dinner. The kids missed you at Thanksgiving. We'll be eating at four in the afternoon. If you want to come over earlier, you could watch football or something. I am sure Randy would enjoy your company."

MacFarland seriously doubted that. Even when Nicole had been alive, Randy had never been particularly fond of MacFarland. Nor had MacFarland especially liked Randy, whose idea of forging friendship consisted primarily of snide comments about police brutality. Since Nicole's death, Randy's attitude towards him had cooled by several more degrees.

MacFarland gestured at the television, an old style tube model. "As you can see, I'm not much for watching television. But thank you for the invitation. I will consider it."

The ensuing pause stretched into awkward silence. MacFarland was not uncomfortable with silence, but clearly Stefanie couldn't stand the concept. "We really do want you to come over, Mark. It's been way too long since you've seen the kids. They miss you."

MacFarland could actually believe that. Ryan and Kaitlyn really did seem to enjoy his company, almost as much as he enjoyed being with them. Nicole had wanted to postpone children, then it had seemed like it was never the right time to bring children into the world. "Your job is so dangerous," she had once said. "What right do we have to bring children into the world if their father might someday get killed?"

That argument never made sense to him. Unless he was hearing the wrong argument. Perhaps Nicole was actually saying, "I don't want to have your children." Ryan and Kaitlyn represented the children that MacFarland felt were missing from his life. He had the sudden realization that he hadn't seen them in more than three years.

"They must be getting big by now. I'm surprised that they even remember me."

"Of course they remember you. You're their Uncle Mark. They talk about you all the time."

Which, of course, wasn't true. MacFarland had interrogated enough people to know when a person was telling a lie. But he didn't point that out to Stefanie.



What did it matter anyway? He knew that he would have to start all over with Ryan and Kaitlyn, re-establishing bonds that probably existed only in his imagination.

Just as he would have to start all over with a lot of people. His father. His brother. Even his former partner.

Stefanie had been there when he started to turn his life around. After all, she had helped him get this apartment, loaning him the money for the security and cleaning deposits. He at least owed her the decency to accept her invitation. "Okay, I'll be there. Is there anything I can bring?"

Stefanie laughed, then stopped herself, self-consciously aware that MacFarland might take her laughter as derisive. "No, everything is taken care of. Just bring yourself, Mark. That's all I want."

## Chapter 4

*Monday, November 30, 1835 Hours*

After Stefanie left, MacFarland put his product away, realizing that he had completely filled up his refrigerator. He definitely would have to get a second unit to store his product.

He went over to his recliner and sat down. Normally, he would spend this time listening to his language lessons, but Stefanie's visit had thrown him off schedule. He picked up the television tuner and turned on his old television. The television warmed up, giving rise to a sharp acrid smell that he found quite unpleasant. He didn't think his television would last much longer. He flipped through the channel button until he found a station that was broadcasting news. Most of the time, the local news did not affect him, and he was happy to ignore it. This time, however, one story in particular caught his attention.

"Neighbors were surprised Saturday morning when police arrived at the home of prominent businessman Otto Freeman, co-owner of Newsome Jewelry, who was found dead in the garage of his Sloan Lake residence. Freeman, who died from a gunshot wound to the head, was survived by his wife, Maureen Freeman. Mrs. Freeman was quoted saying that she thought her husband was away on a fishing trip and didn't even realize he was home. Police are investigating the circumstances of Mr. Freeman's death but had no comments on suspects or progress. However, a department spokesperson did describe Maureen Freeman as a person of interest in the ongoing investigation."

There was nothing particularly significant about the news report, yet something had set off a light in his mind. What was it? Then he realized this was the case that Jerry Baker had been talking about. Apparently Maureen Freeman was no longer simply a person of interest if she had been arrested.

MacFarland continued to stare at the television screen, but he wasn't seeing the images that flashed across the screen. He was wondering why he had let his past slip by him.

## Chapter 5

*Tuesday, December 1, 0900 Hours*

Tuesday started the same way the previous 532 days had started. Today was Day 533 of being sober, and he was thankful for that simple victory. He drove to the private parking lot across the street from his usual corner, unloaded his cart, and pushed it towards his favorite location. As he was setting up, he waved good morning to Jacinto Gomez, the vendor half a block away. Being closer to the U.S. Mint, Gomez tended to get more tourist business, while MacFarland got more business from the lawyers, jurors, and police officials who worked in the Detention Center and the Courthouse. While there were more jurors than tourists, the tourist crowd was a more dependable market. MacFarland and Jacinto had a friendly competition going as to who hustled the most business.

It looked like neither of the two men would get a lot of business today. Grungy clouds staggered around the skies like hungover drunks, pissing moisture into the air. MacFarland expected a classic hit-and-run Denver drizzle would erupt by late afternoon, just in time to slick the streets for the evening commute. He opened up the umbrella in case the rain caught him by surprise. He just hoped that when the front moved in, it would do so gently.

At nine o'clock, a little behind schedule, Rufus Headley shuffled up, two cups of coffee in his hands. "Good morning, boss," he said as he handed one of the cups to MacFarland.

"Good morning, Rufus. Did you sleep under a roof last night?" MacFarland took the cup of coffee and pulled off the lid. He took several gulps, then put the lid back on. "Your dogs will be ready in just a few moments."

"No hurry boss. They can't start the meeting without me." Rufus pulled out a crushed pack of cigarettes and lit one that looked less sorry than the others. He once had been a tall man, but now he was slumped over, his skinny body hidden by layers of sweater and jacket. His untrimmed beard had bits of leaf in it, and his hair was desiccated tufts of bleached straw. Yet his eyes flashed with intensity, and his craggy face was crenellated with laugh lines. MacFarland remembered a spare hat at home, someplace in that messy closet of his, that he wanted to give to Rufus. *Don't forget to bring it tomorrow, asshole!* he chided himself. He knew it wouldn't match Rufus' faded green army jacket, but it would at least help keep his head warm.

"I went down to the Creek with some of the boys last night," Rufus said. "We made a fire until this lady cop ended our party. But she let us stay there, which was right decent of her. Didn't even tell us to go to the Mission."

"The Mission was probably full," said MacFarland. "It usually is this time of year." He grabbed one of the heated dogs and put it in a warmed bun, then handed it to Rufus.

Rufus carefully snuffed out his cigarette, preserving what remained of it for later, and started to put relish and ketchup on the hot dog.

"Gotta get my veggies," he joked. Always the same joke, but MacFarland

laughed anyway. "Not cold enough for the shelters, man," mumbled Rufus between bites of the hot dog. "Just wait 'til there's snow on the ground."

MacFarland prepared a second hot dog for Rufus. "We might get a touch of snow tonight, Rufus," he said. "Looks like rain this afternoon, and if the temperature drops much, it will get really unpleasant. Maybe you should consider going to one of the shelters."

"Lotsa people more deserving than me, boss," said Rufus. "I wouldn't feel right takin' a bed away from one of them."

MacFarland shook his head in resignation. "You're as deserving as anyone, Rufus. Don't ever forget that and don't let anyone tell you different." He pulled a ten dollar bill out of his pocket and handed it to his friend. "Here's for coffee tomorrow, friend."

Rufus pocketed the bill and smiled. "Right on, boss. By the way, what language you studying these days?"

"Still working on Spanish," said MacFarland. "I'm hoping to be fluent by summer. When all the tourists from Mexico will be in Denver."

"You could always go over to Park Hill, boss, and use your Spanglish there."

MacFarland smiled. "And miss seeing all my friends over here? No, I think I'll stay here. Try to stay warm tonight, Rufus. And stay out of trouble."

"Always do, boss, always do."

As MacFarland watched Rufus Headley amble away, he thought back to the day they first met. MacFarland was not sure exactly how long he had been too drunk to know which day was which, but he did remember getting eighty-sixed out of a bar on Colfax. The bouncer apparently knew that MacFarland had once been a cop, and he didn't have very many pleasant memories of Denver Police encounters, so he took out his frustrations on MacFarland. Rufus had found MacFarland lying in a sticky pool of blood in an alleyway behind a row of stores a block away from the bar. One of Rufus' many assignments in Vietnam had been as a medic, and he used what few skills he retained to clean up MacFarland's wounds and cuts. They spent the night together, mostly for protection, since at that time the weather had been mild enough that sleeping outdoors was no great concern.

When MacFarland had regained enough consciousness and sobriety to know what was going on, he thanked Rufus for his kindness, then told him to piss off. Rufus had smiled, said his usual polite "Anything you say, boss," and left.

Two weeks later, they met up again. This time, it was a gang of black youths who were harassing MacFarland, and once more MacFarland was too drunk to even defend himself. It didn't require much more than Rufus to come along and tell the boys to go fuck themselves to stop the harassment. But when MacFarland woke up the next morning, knowing only that he had been involved in some vague altercation, Rufus told him a lurid tale of mass harassment and heroic rescue. When MacFarland finally told Rufus to piss off again, this time Rufus tried a different tactic. "No way, boss. You need me. Without me to look out for you, you're just gonna get your sorry ass in a major bind. I gotta stick around an' watch over you."

And for the next sixteen months, MacFarland and Rufus were practically inseparable.

Then, one day, 533 days ago, MacFarland had decided to sober up. He left the streets, the park benches, and the alleys that had been his home and tried to make a fresh start. It was difficult. His first meeting at Alcoholics Anonymous was painful, but he stuck to it. He found the courage to reach out to Stefanie, the younger sister of his departed wife. Stefanie had tried to help him several times during the previous two years, but each time he had rebuked her, as he rejected everyone who tried to give him a hand. But this time he accepted her help.

Stefanie located a small apartment, west of Broadway. It was primarily a working class neighborhood. She helped him get his truck back, re-establish his relationship with his bank, where he discovered quite to his surprise that he and Nicole had a joint account that he had been unaware of. Imagine that. At the time he hadn't given it much thought, but over the ensuing months, he had often wondered about that account.

There wasn't a huge amount of money in the account, but certainly more than MacFarland had expected. Nearly eighteen thousand dollars. He invested half of it in his hot dog cart, obtained the necessary licenses and permits, and then set himself up as an independent businessman.

Once he had what seemed like a quasi-dependable income stream, he set out to find Rufus Headley. Rufus had been pleased to see his former companion, even more pleased when he learned that MacFarland had been 95 days sober. But when MacFarland proposed that Rufus give up his homeless existence, the old Vietnam vet had become withdrawn. "Thank you, boss, but I don't think that's the life for me. I'm not sure I would be comfortable on a real bed, and the idea of four walls really frightens me, boss. I kinda like bein' out where I can see the stars at night."

"Rufus, I really want you to stay with me. Maybe not all the time. But when it's cold or when you have no place to go. I've got a real nice place right now, a studio. Just a mattress on the floor right now, so it's not really a bed. Think about it, man, think about it. Will you?"

"Of course, boss, I'll keep it in mind. Always good to have a spare hidey-hole where you can get away from the enemy, you know? But I have me a real good place right now, on the South Platte. Nobody else knows about it, because I got it camouflaged. Even the kids can't find it. An' it's really warm, even in the winter. I'm alright, boss. You don't gotta worry about me."

But MacFarland did worry about him.

All the time.

## Chapter 6

*Tuesday, December 1, 1734 Hours*

The drizzle started at about three in the afternoon. a light curtain of rain that veiled everything off in the distance. Fortunately there was no wind, but MacFarland decided to shut down his cart and head home. He checked with Gomez, who won their daily competition by about forty dollars. MacFarland didn't bother mentioning that he had given away at least that much in free food and cash to Rufus, a couple named Kirk and Gracie, a few others that MacFarland recognized but did not know, and a black man with the unlikely name of Bosworth. "Lord Bosworth, if you please!" That was why MacFarland rarely won their competition, since he felt an obligation to take care of his small coterie of homeless friends. Of course, MacFarland knew that Gomez had his own group of special people to take care of--his wife Francesca and a whole swarm of kids, none of whose names MacFarland was ever able to remember.

The drizzle had turned into a heavy downpour by the time he pulled up to the parking space behind the garage. Fortunately it was still empty, so he drove in and parked. He sat in his truck for a few minutes, listening to the rain drumming on the roof of his truck. Days like this, he wished he had a garage in which to sequester his cart. Rain wouldn't do it too much damage, but even so, the more it was left out in the elements, the more worn out it became. Then he laughed at himself. "Here I'm thinking like an average middle class bloke, worrying about protecting my assets!" he said aloud. "I have come a long way."

He bailed out of the truck and hurried around the carport towards his apartment.

And stopped.

Sagging on the lawn at the foot of the stairs that led up to his apartment was his mattress, card table and chairs, and piles of his clothes. Worst of all, his entire collection of language tapes, CDs, and books had been scattered over the sodden grass. Rain bounced off the CD covers and soaked into the soggy paperbacks.

*What the hell is going on?*

He grabbed one of the boxes that held his clothes and quickly salvaged as many of the tapes and CDs as he could. The books were already waterlogged, but perhaps they would dry out. He dumped them in the box, then carried it back to his truck. He made several more trips, trying to rescue his clothes and any other personal items that would fit in the cab of his truck.

The mattress and other furniture were not worth saving, so he just left them where they soaked. The television had been unceremoniously dumped on its screen, and water was collecting inside of it. Clearly ruined, though he had to admit it was no great loss. He went up to his apartment where he found an eviction notice taped to the door. The landlord had already changed the lock, so he was unable to get inside. All of his cooking supplies, his prize set of knives, everything related to his business, was still inside the apartment. Trying to contain his anger, he headed back downstairs and hurried over to the manager's

office.

The manager of the complex was not in. Of course. When was Mike Salazar ever in the office? The only person present was Shawna Jones, an attractive, young black woman who was often the only human face of management. As usual, Shawna had plugs in her ears and was bobbing to some hip hop beat.

"Oh, Mr. MacFarland!" she said as he stepped through the door, pulling the plugs from her ears. "I am so sorry this had to happen to you! I tried to stop it, honest I did, but it was out of my control!"

Clearly she knew he had been evicted, but the rest of her remarks were puzzling.

"Why was I evicted?" he asked. "I'm current on paying my rent. And there has been no notice that I have violated the terms of my lease."

"I don't know anything about any of that, Mr. MacFarland. All I know is that Mr. Salazar got a call saying that you were a criminal--are you really a criminal?--and that you was supposed to be evicted. Some men showed up with a policeman and a court order saying it was okay to remove all your stuff. I'm so sorry it had to be on a day like today, I really am."

"A court order? Who would have gotten a court order? Did Salazar go to court? Why didn't he talk to me first?"

"I don't think it was Mr. Salazar's doing, Mr. MacFarland. I think the owners did this."

"Owners? What owners? Doesn't Mike Salazar own this building?"

"Oh, no, sir, he's just the manager. I don't know who the real owners are. I've never met them. Maybe they are in California or something."

It was pretty clear to MacFarland that Shawna didn't really know much about what was going on. In fact, it looked like the entire eviction was timed so that anyone who might know anything at all was not available.

"Well, I want my deposit back," insisted MacFarland.

Shawna looked troubled and started biting her lip. "I will tell Mr. Salazar that you want it back, Mr. MacFarland. But I wouldn't count on it. The men who moved all your stuff said the apartment was pretty filthy and you would probably lose your deposit to pay for cleaning it up. But I'll tell him anyway. You should get your deposit back, after what they did to you."

MacFarland stood still for several moments, just staring at Shawna. Finally, muttering "Incredible!" he turned and headed back to his truck.

He sat in his truck for nearly half an hour, just staring at the rain pouring down, trying to figure out what his next steps should be. He noticed that most of his kitchen supplies had not been with the rest of his possessions. He wasn't sure how he would cook tomorrow's hot dogs and brats without his pans and racks. He wondered if they were still in the kitchen, and he even considered breaking into the apartment to see if they were there. After all, they *were* his belongings.

Shaking his head, he put a CD into the player and drove off.

MacFarland drove around for about an hour. The rain finally stopped. The headlights of cars glistening on the wet pavement seemed almost festive, but MacFarland was not in a festive mood. Where should he go? He supposed he could find a motel and spend the night there. He drove towards Lincoln and turned north. When he arrived downtown, he turned east on Colfax. Once he

passed East High School, he began to look out for a motel. Finally, after another twenty or thirty blocks, he pulled into a parking lot of the Colfax Inn and went to the office to register.

"You can't park that in the lot," said the manager, gesturing out the window at his truck and trailer. "You'll take up too many of my spaces. I got a business to run here, you know."

There was only one other car in the lot--probably the manager's. MacFarland didn't think the motel would be filling up, but who knew, maybe miracles did happen every day on Colfax.

"How about if I disconnect the trailer and put it in a separate space?"

The manager squinched up his mouth, given the difficulty of the decision processes going on in his brain. "How about another ten bucks for the extra space?"

MacFarland scowled but pulled out another bill and dropped it on the counter.

The manager slipped the ten dollar bill in his pocket and handed a key to MacFarland. "Room 202."

MacFarland went outside, unhooked his trailer, and then parked in the empty space next to it.

As he climbed into bed later that night, he wondered idly what else could go wrong in his life. Then he remembered that he was supposed to go to an AA meeting this evening.

It was the first meeting he had skipped in over seventy-two weeks. *Is this how your life falls apart*, he asked himself.



## Chapter 7

*Wednesday, December 2, 0800 Hours*

When dawn broke, MacFarland just lay in bed, staring into the dark shadows of the unfamiliar room. He had no product to prepare. He estimated that he still had about one hundred dollars' worth of product in his apartment. *Well, that's lost*, he thought. *Besides, how would I cook it?*

There seemed to be no point in getting out of bed. After a few minutes, however, guilt and shame drove him to get up and head for the shower. He found an elfin bar of soap and some cheap shampoo and he spent a lot of time soaping himself and scrubbing his hair. He didn't have any of his other toiletries, so he couldn't shave or even brush his teeth. He would have to go shopping pretty soon, he decided. He wanted to extend his stay at the motel, but he didn't have enough cash to cover any more than one more night. He would have to go to the bank and see if he could get some money out of his nearly empty savings account.

As much as he didn't want to make the call, he knew he had to contact Stefanie. She had invited him over for Christmas dinner, he reminded himself. Perhaps this meant that she would be more willing to help him. Not that she wouldn't be willing to do whatever she could. But for some unknown reason, he and Stefanie always found themselves confronting one another. He attributed their frequent tussles to her petty concern for propriety. She claimed it was because he was so stubborn. "I'm not stubborn," he would say. "I just have values."

He postponed the call for as long as he could. Finally, after going to the nearby Walgreens, and after getting some money from his bank, he found that he had run out of excuses. He pressed her number on his phone and waited for her to answer.

"What's up, Mark? This isn't a very good time to call. I've got to take the kids to school."

He hesitated only a fraction of a second. "Stef, I've got some problems. I need your help."

There was a brief moment of silence on the other end. "What sort of problems?"

"I've been evicted from my apartment."

"What? Haven't you been paying the rent? Were you late? Are you drinking again, Mark?"

"No, I'm not drinking! And I wasn't late."

"Tell me the truth, Mark. You know how I hate lying."

"Damn it, Stef, I'm telling the truth. I haven't touched a drop in almost two years."

"So why did you get evicted?"

"God, I have no idea! There was no notice, no warnings. I just got home yesterday and there was all my stuff, sitting out on the back lawn, getting soaked."

"When did they put it out? When it was raining?"

"It probably wasn't raining when they put it out," he said, not able to keep the annoyance out of his voice. Leave it to Stefanie to focus on the most trivial part of a problem. "Who cares when they put it out? The result is the same. They kicked me out of my apartment."

"Don't snap at me, Mark! I am just trying to understand what is going on. People don't just get evicted, not unless they've broken the terms of their lease or done something wrong. You know you're not the most responsible person on this planet."

MacFarland tried to control his temper. "I haven't done anything wrong. I haven't violated my lease, Stefanie. I don't know why they evicted me. The Goddamn manager wasn't there, just some poor twit who didn't know squat about what was going on. If I want to find out anything, I have to get hold of the manager. Let me get my hands on him, and I will get some answers."

"Don't do anything stupid, Mark. You can't afford any more trouble."

"Who the fuck cares? How can things get any more worse than they are now?"

Stefanie ignored his outburst. "So what are you going to do now? Where are you? Did you sleep in your truck last night?"

"No, I am staying at the Colfax Inn for the night. I think I can afford to stay here one more night."

"And then what?"

MacFarland hesitated. He hated asking anyone for help, especially Stefanie. He also knew that Randy would not appreciate Stefanie helping him. *Well, fuck Randy*, thought MacFarland. *I'm desperate.*

"I need a place to stay, Stef," he finally said.

Silence. Then Stefanie said hesitantly, "You know I want to help you, Mark. Maybe I could go talk to the Manager, pay the rent. There's got to be something that we can do."

"I already paid the fucking rent for this month, Stef. How many times do I have to say that? Aren't you listening to me?"

Why had he even bothered calling? Every conversation with Stefanie ended up this way. He had often gotten the same response from Nicole. He always suspected that just because they had college degrees, and he didn't, they felt they were superior to him. Neither of them had ever said so to his face, but a certain tone of voice conveyed more than words.

There were times when he thought it too.

"Don't you have friends you can stay with?" asked Stefanie.

MacFarland rolled his eyes, thankful that she couldn't see him. "Most of my friends are homeless, Stefanie. Or are you suggesting that I go back and live on the street?"

"No, no, I wasn't suggesting anything of the sort," said Stefanie hastily. "It's just I don't know what to say, Mark. We don't have any room here, though if you needed to, you could spend a night or two on the couch."

"Don't you have a basement?" MacFarland asked. "I could put a cot down there."

"I don't think that would be such a good idea," replied Stefanie hesitantly. "I am not sure that Randy would be too happy with you here. You know, around the

kids."

MacFarland was taken aback by her comment. "What, because I was a drunk? You think that I might get drunk around the kids or something? For Christ's sake, Stef, what kind of an asshole do you think I am?"

"I don't know, Mark. Let me talk it over with Randy and see what we can do."

"Don't bother, I'll find somewhere else to stay. A park bench would be more inviting than your place!"

He disconnected the phone and threw it on the bed. It was only when he found himself looking around the room, hoping to find a bottle of Scotch that he realized just how upset he really was.

## Chapter 8

*Wednesday, December 2, 1000 Hours*

There was only one recourse open to MacFarland. He had to locate Salazar and find out directly from the source why he was evicted. Salazar didn't live in the apartment building he managed. MacFarland wished he had known that before he rented the apartment. He harbored an innate suspicion of absentee landlords.

He would be able to get an address for Salazar if he could get access to a computer. Unfortunately, all of his possessions were either sold off or were in storage. He didn't know what had been put into storage and had never had the motivation to find out. He wasn't even sure he knew where the key to the storage unit was. Then he realized he didn't even know where the storage unit was located. Hopefully that was a piece of information that Stefanie could provide to him.

That is, she could if she ever talked to him again.

There was one place where he could get access to a computer. He headed west on Colfax until he found the combination bar and coffee shop that he was looking for.

The owner of Her Bar, Jody B, looked like a biker chick. Her arms were sleeved in bright, garish tattoos. MacFarland had it on good authority, but no direct personal knowledge, that the tattoos covered much of her torso. MacFarland wasn't certain if she had ever been part of a biker gang. She was sporting a tee shirt with two women kissing and the caption, "I'm not gay but my girlfriend is." In this part of Denver, sexual diversity was quite common.

"Hi Mac, it's been a while since you've been here," said Jody B.

"I've been trying to stay open seven days a week, though I have been reconsidering being out on Sundays. The only thing that keeps me there is that my friends need to eat every day. I don't make much money on Sunday, but at least I feel I'm performing a civic purpose."

Jody B laughed. "You won't get rich with that attitude, Mac. What can I get you?"

"Well, coffee and a favor. Do you have a computer I can use?"

Jody B poured a cup of coffee and placed it on the counter in front of him. She got a container of half and half and placed it next to the coffee. "Sure. You can use mine. Doing anything illegal?"

"As a matter of fact, I am. I need to access the DMV database."

Jody B raised her eyebrows as she reached under the counter and pulled out her Mac laptop. It was an impressive machine. MacFarland should have expected that. Jody B was never satisfied with mediocrity. "I'll pretend I didn't hear that. Will they be able to trace it back to my computer?"

MacFarland shook his head. "I know how to cover my tracks. Don't worry, you won't get burned."

"I'm not worried, Mac. I've done a lot more serious things than hack into the motor vehicle database. Let me know if you want more coffee."

It took MacFarland almost half an hour to get into the database. He had only limited use of computers since he had sobered up, so he had to experiment more than he expected to. But finally he found himself inside the DMV database. He typed in Mike Salazar's name. He stared at the numerous entries that popped up on the screen. None of them seemed right. Then he tried entering the name Miguel Salazar. An even longer list of names appeared. But this time, he saw an entry that included the model and year of car that he had seen Salazar drive. He pulled out a small notebook and jotted down Salazar's address.

Salazar lived in Littleton, a suburban community south of Denver. MacFarland thanked Jody B for the use of her computer, paid for his coffee and left an overly generous tip, then hopped into his truck and headed south. Half an hour later, he was parked in front of Salazar's house. He went up to the front door and knocked loudly.

The door opened a crack and a woman peered out. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm looking for Mike," he said.

"Oh, you missed him. He went to the property he manages downtown. I'm sure you can find him there. Do you need the address?"

No, he didn't need the address. He knew it quite well. He cursed himself for not going to his former apartment building first, but he had assumed that Salazar would avoid the apartment building. As his old boss, Bob Chamberlain would always say, if you assume something...

After another twenty minutes, he was back downtown. He drove to his former residence and parked his truck on the street. As he entered the office, he smiled at Shawna Jones, who was sitting at the receptionist desk. Shawna's had the look of a startled woodland animal, and as she glanced towards the back of the office, MacFarland saw Salazar hurrying towards the back door. Years of police training kicked in, and MacFarland leapt in pursuit. Salazar had nearly slithered out the door when MacFarland caught up with him, grabbing his shoulder and pulling him back into the office.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, Salazar?" he demanded.

"Don't hurt me!" said Salazar as he shrank back against the wall. Salazar was a weasel of a man, with a weasel face and weasel moves. He scurried as far away as he could.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Salazar. I just want some answers."

Salazar shook his hand at Shawna. "Call the police!" he yelled.

MacFarland grabbed Salazar by the front of his shirt. "Answer my questions, Salazar, and I will be out of here. Now, why did you evict me?"

Salazar tried to pull himself out of MacFarland's grasp. When he couldn't pull himself loose, he tried to shrink back, his hands like claws scratching defensively. "It wasn't me," he said. "I only found out about it after they started moving your furniture out."

"Who? Who started moving my furniture out?"

"I don't know their names," said Salazar. "I just know they were sent by the company that owns this building."

MacFarland was getting impatient. Angrily, he banged Salazar up against the wall. "What company? Who owns this building?"

"Don't hurt me!" cried Salazar. "It's owned by Consolidated Colorado Properties! The men work for CCP!"

MacFarland suddenly let go of Salazar's shirt and stared at the man in disbelief as the weasel crawled away. Consolidated Colorado Properties was the company Nicole had worked for. It was the company owned and run by Norris Peterson.

## Chapter 9

*Wednesday, December 2, 1400 Hours*

MacFarland turned abruptly and left the apartment building. *When had Peterson bought this building? How did he know I was living here?* There was no doubt in MacFarland's mind that Peterson had targeted him and illegally evicted him. MacFarland smiled bitterly. Peterson's hatred of him was almost as great as MacFarland's hatred of Peterson.

No, Peterson's hatred could never be quite as great as his.

While MacFarland didn't know what Norris Peterson's precise role in all of this was, the eviction, completely out of the blue, was too coincidental to be unintended. Why evict him?

There was only one person who could provide MacFarland with a satisfactory answer. MacFarland started his truck and headed towards the headquarters of Consolidated Colorado Properties.

He found a metered parking space across the street from the seven story building. Peterson's office was on the seventh floor. MacFarland didn't know how many floors of the building were used by Consolidated Colorado Properties. He knew that Nicole had worked on the fifth floor, but that didn't necessarily give any indication of how big the company was.

There was a guard on duty in the lounge, but MacFarland just walked past him and headed for the elevators. Like most people, the guard assumed that if someone looked like they knew what they were doing, then their purpose was probably legitimate. Not a very good attitude for a security guard to have. Once inside the elevator, he pushed the button for the seventh floor. As the elevator started to rise, MacFarland began to have doubts about why he was here. Did he really have any proof that Peterson was behind his eviction? And if he was, why did Peterson still have a vendetta for him? It would be a lot more logical for Peterson to put as much distance between him and the husband of the woman he had an affair with and probably killed. *Certainly* killed. The jury might have let Peterson go, but MacFarland wasn't prepared to assume justice had been served. Someday, Peterson would slip up, and MacFarland would be there to balance the scales of justice.

The elevator opened up to a large foyer. A perky blond, Joyce Hill, sat behind an immense desk in the center of the room. Her hair bobbed as she looked up expectantly. Then she apparently recognized Mark MacFarland, for her expression morphed into one of alarm. "Mr. MacFarland, what are you doing here?"

"Where's Peterson?"

"Mr. Peterson is busy, sir. He is getting ready for a trip to Chicago and can't be disturbed. Can I take a message for him?"

MacFarland didn't stop, but headed straight for the large office behind Joyce's desk. The secretary hopped up and tried to grab hold of MacFarland's arm. "You can't go in there, Mr. MacFarland!"

MacFarland shrugged her off, not too gently, and pushed the door of the office open. Norris Peterson was sitting at his desk, working on an interactive screen. His well-manicured finger nails slid across the surface as he moved files and data.

When MacFarland stormed in, Peterson did not react in any way to the intrusion, but continued to manipulate his display terminal.

Peterson leaned forward, his back arched like a snake ready to strike. His fingers jabbed at the screen, angry stabs that asserted his control over the virtual medium. His hair framed his face, like the hood of a cobra, and his thin lips curled in a triumphant smile. The terminal screen was like prey to this man, something to be toyed with, and then destroyed.

Peterson clearly expected to get his way in all things. Even now, knowing how much he hated the man, MacFarland felt himself affected by the man's calm assurance.

MacFarland moved rapidly to the desk and banged his fist on it.

"Why did you have me evicted?" he demanded.

Norris Peterson finally deigned to turn from his terminal screen to face MacFarland. His dark eyes pierced MacFarland like pins in the wings of a butterfly specimen. MacFarland wasn't a person, but an object to be studied, then later discarded.

"Now why in the world would I waste my valuable time having you evicted?" he asked calmly.

"I know you're responsible, Peterson."

Peterson showed his teeth. "It's not my fault if bad things happen to you, Mark. You're like a magnet, attracting all sorts of bad luck. Maybe this eviction was a sign that it's time for you to move on. Why don't you go to Florida before the snow starts falling? Take all your bad luck with you."

"You're crazy, Peterson. I don't know what this shit about bad luck is all about, but I do know that you're behind me getting kicked out of my apartment. I've been putting my life back together after you destroyed it. I guess that's not good enough for you."

Peterson smiled again and leaned back in his chair. "Ah, yes, now I remember. I have been trying to clean up my properties, you know, get the undesirables out. Like those who have been in jail. Those kinds of people make it hard to rent to decent, law-abiding renters. Perhaps you were caught up in one of my cleaning sweeps. Too bad. That's life." He glanced pointedly at his watch. "Now I think it is time for you to leave, Mark. I have important work to do, and I can't waste time on losers like you."

MacFarland was about to race around the desk when the office doors slammed open and two policemen burst into the room. They quickly grabbed hold of MacFarland and pulled his arms behind his back. MacFarland felt the cuffs ratchet into place and then he was being pulled from the room. The last thing he heard was Peterson's final quip. "Next time you visit, call Joyce for an appointment."



## Chapter 10

*Thursday, December 3, 1149 Hours*

It was late Thursday morning before Cynthia Pierson was able to post bail for MacFarland. She stood outside the holding cell, her hands on her hips, watching as the guard keyed in the code to open the cell. MacFarland stood up as the door hummed open. "Aren't you going to thank me?" she demanded.

He walked slowly into the corridor. "Thanks. Though I'm not sure why you did it."

"Beats me," she said. "Maybe it's because Rufus has been bugging me for two days about you going missing."

"Yeah, Rufus," said MacFarland. "I guess I've let him down."

"You let a lot of people down, Mac. Whatever possessed you to go barge in on Norris Peterson and threaten him?"

"I didn't threaten him. I went there to talk to him."

"Talk? Is that what you call it? According to the police statements, you forced your way into his office and were ready to leap over the table to assault him."

MacFarland pushed the door open, barely holding it open for Pierson. "Then the police report is wrong," he said.

"Why now, Mac? I know you have it in for this guy. I don't blame you for that. I want him behind bars too. But you can't go after him like this. He's too powerful. You need to be smarter about it."

MacFarland stopped and faced his former partner. "I didn't go after him because of that, Cyn. I went to find out why he had me evicted from my apartment."

Pierson blinked several times. "Evicted? You got evicted? How come?"

MacFarland let out a sigh of exasperation. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. I just found out that Peterson bought the building I live in. Correction. The building I used to live in. And the first thing he does is dump all my stuff on the back lawn."

"Why?" Pierson stared at her partner, searching his eyes and examining his demeanor. MacFarland knew the stare. He had seen it in hundreds of interrogations. Pierson was looking for any of the subtle behavioral tells that indicated the person was being deceptive. "Have you been going after him, Mac?"

"No, Cyn, this is the first time I've even gone near him since I sobered up."

Pierson could tell he was telling the truth. Pierson's instincts for being able to read people were nearly legendary, at least among the small group of homicide detectives in the Major Crimes Unit. She knew that MacFarland hadn't gone after Peterson, but she could also tell that he wanted to. She didn't know when the day of reckoning would come, but she knew that when it did, Mark MacFarland would be there. She just hoped that she would be there with him.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked. "You can't afford a motel for long, can you?"

"Nah, I've already used up most of my savings. And I have to buy new pans

and cooking utensils to stay in business. If I want to stay in business, that is," he repeated.

"What else would you do?"

"Peterson suggested I should move to Florida," he said, a touch of humor finally creeping back into his voice.

"Florida, huh?" Pierson sucked in her breath. What she was about to do was a huge mistake. She already knew that. But she couldn't help herself. "If you need a place to stay, you could stay with me," she said in a quieter voice than was usual for her.

He looked up in surprise. "Really? You have space?"

Pierson nodded. "Yeah, I have an extra room. I just store some junk in there now. Stuff I should have thrown away a long time ago, but haven't gotten around to doing it yet. Maybe you'll provide me the motivation."

"You don't have to do anything special," MacFarland said. "It's just going to be temporary, at least until I can find someplace of my own."

"Yeah, just temporary," she said.

## Chapter 11

*Thursday, December 3, 1830 Hours*

If Cynthia Pierson thought that letting MacFarland move in with her would be a simple matter, she was mistaken. First, she had to take him to retrieve his truck. It had been ticketed for exceeding the time on the meter. He was lucky it hadn't been towed. "I'm surprised that Peterson didn't contact the towing company," MacFarland said bitterly as he stared at the ticket.

"We'll find a way to pay it," said Pierson from her car. "I have to get back to the precinct and pick up my partner. Here's my key to the house. We'll get a duplicate made up this afternoon." She drove off, leaving him standing there holding the parking ticket. MacFarland glanced up at the seventh floor of the CCP building, but the windows were tinted and he couldn't see if anyone was watching him.

He drove to the motel and found the Manager in a foul mood. It seemed to MacFarland that the manager was always in a foul mood, but he admitted that only two observations were not sufficient to draw any truly valid conclusions. He demanded that MacFarland pay for the second day at the motel, and since it was past noon and check out time, he also wanted MacFarland to pay for the third night. Grumbling to himself, MacFarland handed over the last of his cash. He retrieved his belongings, loaded them into his truck, then hooked up the trailer and drove out of the parking lot.

Pierson lived in the Observatory Park neighborhood, near Denver University. She had inherited the house from her parents, who had been killed the year before MacFarland met her. They had been killed when a hit and run driver had broadsided their car early one Saturday morning. The driver, whom everyone assumed had been drunk, had never been found. Even though MacFarland was a patrolman at the time, he only knew about the incident from rumors and scuttlebutt heard around the station. Pierson herself refused to ever talk about it.

Pierson's house was located a block from Observatory Park on South Clayton Street. This was a neighborhood of quaint historical homes and massive modern monstrosities. Although her house was actually as massive as many of the newer homes, it was one of the older Observatory Park farmhouse style houses with a wrap-around porch. MacFarland parked his truck and trailer in front of the house, wondering if any of the neighbors would complain about having a hot dog cart parked on the street.

MacFarland let himself into the house and surveyed the ground floor. A faint smell of lilacs wafted through the air. Several of the rooms were closed off, and when he peeked inside, he saw most of the furniture was covered with sheets and plastic. In these rooms, the smell was stale, with just a hint of something that would make you sneeze. The only rooms used on the downstairs part of the house were the front hallway, the living room, dining room, library, and kitchen. He explored the kitchen critically, knowing that fairly soon he had to start cooking his meats again. The refrigerator was smallish. He opened it. The shelves were

cluttered with plastic containers of leftovers. He wondered if he could afford to get a backup refrigerator to store his product.

He returned to the library and began to look through the dusty volumes that filled the shelves that lined every wall. MacFarland had been unaware that Pierson was a bookworm. Perhaps the books were just part of her inheritance, though maybe not. He suspected there was a lot about his former partner that he simply did not know. What kind of a detective had he been that he had let someone he worked with remain such a mystery?

Pierson arrived home in the early evening. MacFarland heard the door open and started at the strong smell of melted cheese and spicy meats. "I've got pizza and a six pack," she announced, smiling broadly. "Six pack of Pepsi Cola, that is. Hope you're hungry. Have you been upstairs yet?"

MacFarland shook his head. "I found enough down here to keep me busy."

Pierson shrugged. "I'll show you what room I was thinking of after dinner. Meanwhile, eat up."

Eating was not the only thing that Pierson had planned. As MacFarland started wolfing the pizza, Pierson folded her hands in front of her. "I want you to promise me that you will not go after Peterson, Mac."

He looked up, surprised. "What, are you my mother now? What do you care what I do?"

"I care for two reasons. First, you're now staying here, and as long as you do, anything that you do that brings me to Peterson's attention puts me in his scope. I don't want that."

MacFarland's laughter was brief and bitter. "So you think he's dangerous too! Interesting."

Pierson nodded grimly. "He's a dangerous man, Mac. And too hot for you to handle on your own."

MacFarland put down his half-eaten slice of pizza. "You could help me," he suggested.

Pierson shook her head. "As much as I'd like to see him behind bars, his influence goes pretty deep. He has someone on the inside. We're not doing anything until we find out who that person is."

MacFarland nodded, as he tried to mask his frustration. He had long suspected that someone in the Department was dirty, but he didn't have time to find out who the person was before his career came crashing down around him. "Maybe we can draw him out."

Pierson shrugged, then picked up a slice of pizza. "We better eat this before it gets cold."

After dinner, Pierson led MacFarland upstairs, pointing out the location of the bathroom, her bedroom, and finally showing him the guest room he would occupy. As she had said, the guest room was cluttered with boxes. Together, they moved the boxes up against one wall, leaving considerable space in the room. There was a bed (*A real bed!* thought MacFarland. *Not just a mattress on the floor!*), a writing table and chair, an overstuffed chair with a floor lamp beside it (confirming that this had been a household of readers). Even this room had a built-in shelf filled with books. Most of the titles were travel books, primarily about East Asia and the Pacific.

"My grandfather worked in the foreign service and state department in Asia. He travelled all over, and obviously collected a lot of books." Pierson seemed almost apologetic about all the books. MacFarland knew that Pierson was quite smart, probably one of the smartest people in the Major Crimes unit. He also knew that she tried to keep her intelligence hidden. She didn't like being known as the brains of the department.

"I like to read." MacFarland felt a bit awkward with his admission, and immediately regretted it. Once again, he was apologizing for his lack of education.

"Good," she said. "Let's go get your stuff from the truck, okay?"

They soon had his limited possessions set up in the guest room. She looked at the stack of language tapes, CDs, and books. "I didn't know you were interested in languages," she said.

He glanced at the pile of language training materials. "I got interested in languages when I wanted to go to Iraq. I tried to pick up some Kurdish—not much really—but enough to talk to children. Now that I stand around all day at my hot dog cart, I find there's not much to do. I used to listen to music, but then one day I went to the library and found these language tapes. Now most of my money goes into more and more language tapes, CDs, and books."

Pierson laughed. "I've always assumed you were listening to music," she said. "What languages have you learned?"

"Je peux parler un peu de français," he replied. "I'm not terribly fluent, and one French tourist told me my accent was terrible." He smiled at the memory. "I was good enough to get her to tell me that, though, so I counted it as a minor victory."

## Chapter 12

*Saturday, December 5, 0800 Hours*

Friday morning, MacFarland got up early. He closed his savings account at the bank and purchased some more pots, pans, and storage containers for his product. He then went to a local Costco and replenished his meats, condiments, and other supplies. By the time he had finished replacing all the items he had lost, he was out of money. It was already too late to set up his cart for the day, so he returned to Pierson's house and listened to another Pimsleur Spanish lesson. After a few minutes of intoning Spanish phrases, he found himself feeling more relaxed. In spite of his problems, he actually felt good for the first time in a long while.

On Saturday morning, MacFarland made a point of arriving at his corner early. Even though the courts were closed, MacFarland wanted to get back into his normal routine. Surprisingly, Rufus arrived much earlier than usual. Rufus was glad to see him. "Sorry, boss, I didn't get coffee today. Wasn't sure what had happened to you."

MacFarland apologized, gave Rufus some money and sent him off to get coffee for the two of them. After Rufus returned, MacFarland explained in considerable detail what had happened to him.

"So this sonofabitch is going to get away with that too?" asked Rufus.

MacFarland nodded. "Seems that way." A couple of elderly tourists came up, eyed Rufus suspiciously, then ordered some hot dogs, chips, and drinks. MacFarland busied himself preparing their dogs. "Cyn says that he is too well-protected to go after. But one of these days, I will get him."

The tourists stood around eating their meal, apparently deciding that Rufus wasn't really much of a threat. The man even offered to buy a hot dog for Rufus, but Rufus politely refused. When it turned out, however, that the old man had been stationed at Da Nang the same time Rufus had been there, then everything changed. With thousands of people at the base, it was not surprising that they had never met, yet now it seemed like they had been friends forever. MacFarland and the man's wife smiled at each other as the two veterans relived the joys and sorrows of that pivotal period in their lives. Finally Rufus did have to leave, this time with a hot dog piled high with condiments. Both men swore they would stay in touch, but as MacFarland watched Rufus and the couple wander off in opposite directions, he knew that was a promise neither man would keep.

In addition to Rufus, his other regular homeless friends heard that he was back at his corner and resumed coming around. MacFarland once again gave away whatever he could to help them.

MacFarland was surprised when Jerry Baker showed up at his corner. He was even more surprised when Baker started discussing his clients and cases with him. MacFarland was himself unsure why Baker found him so trustworthy.

"Why are you telling me this, Mr. Baker?"

Baker twisted his mouth in thought. "I am not at all sure, Mac. I'm not telling

you anything privileged. I just need someone to bounce ideas off of, and I think I can trust you."

MacFarland suppressed a smirk. "Trust me? Why? I'm just a hot dog vendor!"

Baker finished chewing on a large bite of his bratwurst. "Nah, you're more than a hot dog vendor, Mac. You have insights and perspectives that few others have. I value that."

MacFarland doubted he had any special perspectives, since he hadn't even commented on any of the confidences Baker made with him. MacFarland just listened, and that was all Baker really needed. MacFarland concluded that just telling someone what was bothering him was enough to help Baker see how to get around his problem, solve it, or manage it in a way that would work out both for him and his client. While Baker attributed his insights to MacFarland, it was really Baker's own insights seen in a new light.

## Chapter 13

*Saturday, December 5, 1345 Hours*

Business also dropped off considerably as the day progressed, especially when a major Canadian cold front descended on the Denver metro area, bringing stronger and colder winds. MacFarland no longer had the hat he intended to give to Rufus, but when Rufus returned just before lunch, the veteran was sporting a new jacket. "I prefer my army jacket," he said when he wandered over, bearing another two cups of coffee. He handed one cup to MacFarland. "But it's more fair weather use." Rufus sat down and leaned against the building, shielding himself from the cold northern wind as he slowly sipped his coffee.

"Where is your army jacket?" asked MacFarland.

"Oh, I got it on, boss. Don't dare leave my jacket in my hidey-hole. Never know when some lowlife might find it and rip me off. I've had this jacket since '75, and I don't plan on parting with it."

MacFarland was about to get Rufus' daily dog when two patrolmen wandered up. One of them stepped over to Rufus and kicked his leg. "What are you doing here, you bum? You know the rules. No loitering, sitting, or sleeping around public buildings."

Rufus tried to get up. "I was just trying to get outta the cold, man. I'm not sleeping here."

The patrolman pushed Rufus back down. "Are you arguing with me, old man? Huh, are you?"

MacFarland stared hard at the patrolman, remembering his features. Oval face, widespread eyes, thin mustache, bushy hair. Old enough where he shouldn't be walking a beat. Probably supplemented his income as a bouncer at local clubs and bars. MacFarland had met his type before. "Leave him alone, officer, he's not doing anyone any harm."

The second patrolman turned to look at MacFarland. "Mind your own business buddy, or you might have to find another corner."

"I don't want any problems, officer, but this man is just waiting for his hot dog." MacFarland leaned over to hand a hot dog to Rufus.

As Rufus reached out to take the hot dog, the first cop kicked it out of his hand. The hot dog went flying through the air, finally falling into the gutter. Rufus looked up at the cop in surprise, then began slowly to inch away from him.

"I don't think that was called for," said MacFarland. He stepped forward to get a closer look at the cop's badge. "What's your badge number?"

The second patrolman grabbed hold of MacFarland's arm, pulling him back. "Watch yourself, asshole!"

MacFarland tensed up, then began to relax his body. Instinctively, he was ready either to defend himself or attack, but before he could do either, an authoritative voice cut through the cold air.

"Schmidt, what the hell is going on? Let go of him."

MacFarland turned and looked at the man who was striding rapidly towards



them. It was Gene Herbert, one of the detectives MacFarland had worked with for many years. MacFarland hadn't seen Herbert in years. Herbert moved like a bull and had the body to match. Broad shoulders, beefy chest. He looked older than MacFarland remembered him, but what had it been? Five years? His hair was starting to thin out, and his face was fuller than he had been five years earlier. But the man still commanded respect.

Patrolman Schmidt let go of MacFarland's arm. "I don't think this is anything for you to be concerned about, Detective," said Schmidt.

Gene Herbert arrived at the corner, saw Rufus cowering on the ground, and extended a hand. "Get up, Rufus. Don't you have someplace to be right about now?"

"Yes, boss, I got a staff meeting to go attend. Important decisions to make today." Rufus stood up, and tried to get past the first patrolman, who stood his ground, effectively blocking Rufus against the wall.

Herbert glanced at the officer. "Lucas, are you going to be an ass your entire life? Get the fuck out of the way." Patrolman Lucas scowled, then backed up. Rufus hurried off down the street, heading for Colfax. Herbert watched him scamper off, then turned back to the two patrolmen. "Now why are you causing problems for Mac here?"

"He was interfering, sir," said Schmidt, trying to make his voice a bit more gruff. "I thought he was going to attack Larry here."

Herbert shook his head. "You dumb shit. Mac wouldn't attack anyone unless the person deserved it. And if you try to restrain him, you better make sure you do it real good. Mac is one dangerous dude."

Lucas stared at MacFarland, who had retreated to pick up and dispose of the wasted hot dog and bun. "He doesn't look dangerous. He just looks like a God damn hot dog vendor."

"He's more than a --"

"It's okay, Gene," interrupted MacFarland hastily. "The officers were just doing what they thought was right. Rufus knows he's not supposed to loiter around these buildings. I'll talk to him about it next time I see him."

Herbert looked dubiously, first at MacFarland, then at the two patrolman. Finally he shrugged. "You guys watch your step. That badge doesn't give you the right to throw your weight around."

Lucas tapped his partner on the arm. "Let's go, Dwaine. I'll treat you to some coffee."

After the two cops left, MacFarland opened up the lid on his hot dog warmer. "Thanks, Gene. Can I get you a hot dog?"

Gene shook his head. "No, Mac, nothing today. Just watch your step. A lot of these guys don't know who you are. To them, you're just another civilian who makes their job difficult." Herbert looked up and down the street. "How much business can you do here? Why'd you pick this spot? Maybe you should find a better corner."

After Herbert left, MacFarland put his earphones back on and restarted the lesson he was studying. As he parroted the Spanish phrases, he looked over at the courthouse, the jail across the street from it, and then up the street in the direction of the police headquarters. *Why do I stay on this corner*, he asked

himself.

## Chapter 14

*Monday, December 7, 1525 Hours*

By the time Monday rolled around, MacFarland had forgotten all about his issues with Stefanie, his dislike of Randy, Officers Lucas and Schmidt, or murdered jewelry store owners. Typical of Denver, the temperature had risen into the high sixties, totally unseasonal for early December. Young men on skateboards sported shorts and tee shirts as they weaved through crowded streets. Office workers sat outside on hastily cleaned chairs, sipping their Starbuck's coffee, catching the rays of sun and soaking up the warmth of the day. Only the homeless still donned their winter coats, if they had any, knowing full well that this short burst of warm weather was merely a trick by nature to get them to let their guard down. Trust me, cried Mother Nature to her most downtrodden denizens. Trust me! Take off your coat! And as soon as any of them trusted her, she would punish them with arctic winds and freezing temperatures.

"That's the way she does it," Rufus stated with certainty. "Can't trust ol' Mother Nature. She's a bitch."

MacFarland handed Rufus his hot dog. "Are you sure it doesn't have anything to do with wind patterns?" he asked.

Rufus furrowed his eyebrows. "Well, sure, boss, of course wind patterns are involved. Everybody knows that. But who controls the wind patterns?"

MacFarland laughed. "You got me there, Rufus. Hey, stay out of trouble today."

"Always do, boss, always do."

Unfortunately Rufus didn't always stay out of trouble. Every once in a while, the demons that haunted him became too strong, and Rufus would sever whatever bonds tied him to reality. Then he would go on a rampage, trying to wipe out Charlie wherever he was hiding. Those were the periods MacFarland feared the most.

Business was good today. After the Thanksgiving break, the judicial system was anxious to dispense justice, so lots of people were coming in for jury selection. Both he and Gomez were doing a brisk business, so much so that MacFarland became alarmed that he might run out of product. He just hoped he would have enough to make sure his homeless friends got their fair share before he ran out.

In the late afternoon, two men in suits approached his cart. They looked to be in their late twenties, eager beavers who were out to prove themselves. He could tell they were lawyers. Few jurors bothered dressing up in business attire; and besides, most of the jurors had already been let go for the day. *They might be lawyers on the rise, but they're still eating at a hot dog cart*, thought MacFarland ruefully. They ordered two hot dogs each. One ordered a Pepsi, the other an Orange Crush. As MacFarland prepared their hot dogs, he tried to tune out their conversation and concentrate on his language lesson. But the men were speaking in voices loud enough to overcome the traffic on Fourteenth.

"Near as I can tell, she's going to get indicted in the next day or so. The gun was registered to her, had her prints on it, and the bullet was fired from the gun." The tall man took the hot dog that MacFarland held out and began to put condiments on it.

"What about motive?" asked the smaller of the two men.

"We're still looking into that. She works part time at her husband's store, and several other employees said that they've been arguing a lot lately."

"Arguing about what?"

The taller man started to eat his first hot dog. "I haven't gotten a chance to review all the police notes yet. Probably the usual. I'm processing a subpoena to get access to the store's records from the bank. The partner is putting up a fuss, and for some reason, there's been more red tape in trying to get access to the store's books. But we'll get it straightened out."

MacFarland handed the last of the hot dogs to the two men and stepped back, hoping that a little more distance would allow him to hear his language lesson more clearly. But he couldn't get his mind to focus on Spanish. The lawyers--he now concluded that they were prosecutors--were probably talking about the recent killing he had heard about on the news. Yes, this was Jerry Baker's case, for sure. As much as he didn't want to, his mind began to explore the facts and details of the case. How would he go about solving the man's murder? He knew that most of the time, the killer was a spouse. But partnerships often had a way of turning sour also, so he wouldn't rule out the partner yet. The fact that the partner was not being one hundred percent cooperative raised a suspicion or two in MacFarland's mind.

As the prosecutors headed back to the courthouse, MacFarland reminded himself that he was no longer a cop. What happened to Otto Freeman was not his concern.

He wiped down his cart, turned off his language tape, and packed up to go home.

## Chapter 15

*Monday, December 7, 1830 Hours*

Pierson was waiting for him when he got home. She must have gotten tired of having him park his truck and trailer in front of the house because that night she directed him to go around to the alleyway behind the house. "There is a gate in the back fence, and I've opened it for you. See if you can back your trailer into the yard. There should be enough space back there."

He did as she instructed, though the alley was already crowded with dumpsters, parked cars, and other peoples' trailers. However, he was able to maneuver the trailer into the yard and back up sufficiently so that the gate could be closed. When he got inside the house, he commented that his truck was going to ruin the grass.

"I've got a truck of gravel coming next Saturday," Pierson said, putting her hand on his. "They will make a parking area for you on the side of the yard."

He looked at her hand, resting on his, and tried to ignore the strange shivers that coursed up his arm. He had always regarded her as just a partner, when he was married, and avoided looking at her in any but a professional way. *She's gotten prettier since then*, he thought. Considering that he was only going to be staying with Pierson for a short while, putting gravel in the back yard seemed like a major expense and a considerable amount of work to go through. "I can always use the extra parking area," she commented when he mentioned his concerns. "Besides, I never have time to cut the grass."

When he had first moved in, MacFarland had noticed that Pierson had a lot of alcoholic beverages around. Now he couldn't find any sign of them. He was pretty sure Pierson hadn't drunk everything up in barely more than a week, so she must have hidden them or poured the booze down the drain. Strands of guilt tugged at his conscience, but he hesitated to mention anything about it. He actually felt better without having the temptation constantly in sight.

Pierson made spaghetti, meatballs, and sauce for dinner. When he finished his first helping of the meal, MacFarland sighed with contentment. When was the last time he had had a home-cooked meal? He couldn't remember.

Just after he had piled a second helping of spaghetti on his plate, Pierson started describing her day at work. At first, MacFarland paid little attention to what she was saying. All he had to do was feign polite listening, and what she said had little impact on him. But the longer she talked, particularly when she started mentioning people they both had worked with when he was in the department, he found himself becoming more and more depressed by the conversation. He was about to ask her to drop the conversation when she casually mentioned that they had brought Maureen Freeman in for questioning.

Suddenly, he became interested.

"I heard that it was her gun that was the murder weapon," he commented between bites.

Pierson looked at him in surprise. "How did you hear that? Nothing's been

released to the press yet."

"The District Attorney's office can't keep anything secret," he said.

"The assholes," snorted Pierson. "What else did you hear?"

"Not really that much," he replied. "Mainly that the gun is a match to the murder weapon and that the wife and husband had been fighting lately."

Pierson nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah. It seems she's been working in her husband's store. That's been causing problems between the partners."

"Really?" He twirled his spaghetti on his fork and raised it up to his mouth, but didn't take a bite. "What sort of problems?"

"Hey, it's not my case, so I don't know all the details. But I hear that the partner thinks Maureen Freeman has been pilfering money from the store."

"Any idea how much?"

Pierson shook her head. "We are trying to get our hands on the store's financial records, but the other partner says it may be upwards of fifty thousand dollars."

"That's a little bit more than pilfering," said MacFarland. "Who's handling the case?"

"Iverson," said Pierson, watching MacFarland for a reaction. Alan Iverson had been the detective who had screwed up the chain of custody in the murder trial of Peterson, a foul-up which had helped get Peterson acquitted.

MacFarland didn't take the bait. "Iverson is usually pretty thorough," he said unconvincingly. "He should be able to handle this case."

Cynthia Pierson's sixth sense kicked in. She could tell how MacFarland really felt about Iverson. No matter. She felt the same way. Iverson was a lazy cop. "Everyone in Major Crimes is pretty certain that the wife is the killer."

MacFarland looked at her out of the tops of his eyes. Even he could tell that Pierson was holding something back. "But?"

"But I don't think so, Mac. I'm not sure she is the killer. Something doesn't smell right with this case."

MacFarland sat quietly for a moment, concentrating on finishing up his dinner and attacking the last meatball which he had saved as a special treat. By now it had gotten a bit cold, though, and it didn't taste as wonderful as he had expected. Over the years, he had come to trust Pierson's instincts.

"Can you get copies of the case files?" he asked.

Pierson shook her head. "I could lose my job if I showed those to you. They're not public record yet."

MacFarland stared past her. Finally he slowly nodded. "It was stupid to ask," he said. "The case isn't important enough for that kind of a risk."

## Chapter 16

*Tuesday, December 8, 1138 Hours*

MacFarland tried to push the Freeman murder case out of his mind. He had enough of his own problems to deal with. First, someone else tried to encroach on his corner. "You weren't here last week," insisted the encroaching squatter. "I drove by and saw that it was vacant."

"It was just temporary," said MacFarland. "One or two absences doesn't give you the right to take over my spot. Go over to the other side of the courthouse. No one has been using that spot for several months."

The other problem he had to deal with was a customer complaining that the hot dog he just finished eating was nauseating. "Here's your money back," said MacFarland. "Sorry you didn't like the hot dog."

The man took the money, but was not finished complaining. "It's not the money that's the issue. You shouldn't be selling lousy dogs. How long have they been sitting around going bad?"

Since all of his product was recently purchased, MacFarland was pretty confident that his dogs were fresh. "I follow the health codes," he said. "I don't sell any expired meat here."

At that moment, Jerry Baker came up to the wagon. He listened for a moment while the customer continued his tirade. Finally he put a hand on the man's shoulder. "Friend, you have three options. First, you can file a complaint with the City. Not much will happen from that, other than you will cause this poor man unnecessary grief. Second, you can hire a lawyer and together you can sue the shirt off this guy. That's about all you'll get, since the lawyer will get most of whatever assets you win. And third, you can get the hell out of my way so I can order lunch."

The customer looked at the lawyer in surprise, then abruptly turned and walked away.

MacFarland smiled at Baker. "Thanks," he said. "Though I wish you hadn't told him to file a complaint. Those things do tend to come back and haunt you."

Baker waved off MacFarland's concern. "That kind of clown never follows up. They just want to make a scene. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't complain until after he had finished eating the hot dog."

"He did seem to be enjoying it," commented MacFarland. "You want another brat?"

"You remembered! Yes, with all the fixin's."

MacFarland pulled a brat off of his heating rollers and put it into a bun. "Condiments are your responsibility, Mr. Baker."

"Thanks," said the lawyer as he took the brat. "Please, call me Jerry."

"Sure thing, Jerry," said MacFarland. "And you can call me Mac. Most of my friends do. So, how's your day going?"

Baker laughed, then concentrated on piling relish, mustard, and onions onto his brat. "You know, in my business, I get my fair share of guilty people who need

me to get them the best deal they can get. And I usually deliver. I'm quite good at what I do."

MacFarland smiled. "Yes, I know. You've gotten a couple of my perps off Scot free. I always regarded you as the enemy, Jerry."

Jerry Baker didn't seem put off by MacFarland's candid remarks. "I was never truly the enemy. If I thought a guy was a real scumbag or would do the crime again, I got the best deal for him and for society that I could. Sometimes that meant jail time. Most of my clients, though, are rich bastards who are not likely to commit the same crime again. The way I play the game is they give me a comfortable slice of the lifestyle they've put in jeopardy, and I get them just enough jail time to convince them to behave in the future."

"They are still murderers and thieves," said MacFarland. "Don't the moral implications of helping that kind of person get away ever bother you?"

Baker was munching on his brat. He took a sip of Coke before he responded. "Frankly it does, Mac. But I have a job to do. I provide the best defense ethically possible; the DA provides the best prosecution ethically possible. And we let a jury decide who did the best job."

"So it's just a job for you?"

"Most of the time, yes, it is. But today, I have a real puzzle to deal with."

MacFarland cocked his head questioningly.

"Most of the time--hell, all the time!--I can tell when my clients are guilty or not. Most of the time, they are guilty, and I take that into account. Still do my job, mind you, but I know what's going on. But I now have a client who I know is innocent, yet everything points to her being guilty."

MacFarland looked up, his curiosity raised. "Yes, I heard you say that once. You're talking about the wife of Otto Freeman?"

"You know about the case? Yes, of course you would. Despite being a hot dog vendor, you're the kind of guy that would have ears and eyes in all the right places. Yes, Maureen Freeman. I've looked at the evidence the police have, and I can't see any way to put a dint in it. Of course, we're just starting. I've had to hire a private eye who is pretty good at finding out things the police don't want you to know about."

MacFarland showed his surprise. "Are you saying that the police are covering something up?"

Baker shook his head. "Nothing so nefarious as that. But you've been a cop. You know how the game is played. You have a huge caseload. The sooner you can solve a crime, the more successful you are. So lots of times, cops focus on the first obvious suspect, and sometimes overlook a less significant suspect."

MacFarland felt a bit defensive. "With good reason," he said. "Cops develop an instinct for this. Not that mistakes don't happen, but most of the time, we--they get it right."

"I'm not disagreeing with that. But all I need is a reasonable doubt. If I can put a reasonable doubt in the minds of the jurors, I can get my client off. But in this case, I am having problems finding any basis for that reasonable doubt."

MacFarland shrugged. "Maybe she is really guilty," he said.

Baker shook his head. "Nope. I've got instincts too, and Maureen Freeman is innocent. The police haven't caught the real killer yet. But they are building a



rock solid case against an innocent woman."

## Chapter 17

*Tuesday, December 8, 1840 Hours*

The next evening, Pierson handed MacFarland a folder. Her only comment was, "This was all I could get my hands on. There's more, but it's locked up in Iverson's desk."

MacFarland took the file up to his room and closed the door. He leafed through the photocopies and printouts for about an hour. The file consisted of crime scene descriptions, two interviews with Maureen Freeman, and several interviews with employees of the Newsome Jewelry Store, as well as victim's partner, Brian Newsome. He noted the case number, the detective (Alan Iverson) assigned to the case, and the names of the officers who first arrived on the scene. They were two officers he didn't know.

The victim was Otto Marvin Freeman, born November 4, 1962. He was a white male, five feet eleven inches tall, two hundred and fifteen pounds. A picture of him showed a pudgy-faced man with a pointed chin, narrow nose, and deep-set eyes. He had dark brown hair, thin eyebrows, but otherwise no other facial hair. In the photo included with the report, he wore wire-rimmed glasses. Overall, he looked like a happy and contented man. In the photograph included with the file, Otto was wearing a tuxedo, white shirt, and silver tie. He had the appearance of a very successful businessman.

Maureen Anne Freeman was four years younger than Otto. She had shoulder-length blond hair, brown eyes, a broad smile, and a narrow face. She looked older than her years, but that might have just been the photograph. She wasn't wearing any jewelry in the photo. MacFarland found that strange, since her husband sold jewelry.

The couple had no children. At least none were listed in the report.

MacFarland skipped over the formal police incident report, and instead focused on the primary documents. Most of the time, these weren't included in the file, but Pierson had somehow gotten copies of the detective's notes. Unlike the official incident report, the detective's notes often included speculations and side comments that told MacFarland what the detective was thinking. He focused his attention on one particular interview that caught his attention. This interview was with the victim's business partner, Brian Newsome. All police interviews were recorded but Iverson was old school. He still kept notes of his own interviews.

*Case 72236-MC24113*

*Interview with Brian Newsome, 30 Nov 2015, 1620 hours at Interviewee's residence*

*Has been partners with vic for more than ten years. Last saw vic Wed, 25 Nov, at 1700 hours. Said vic left store alone.*

*Keeps checking his watch.*

*BN says vic has been showing signs of restlessness, worry, anxious. "Something serious has been bothering him." Might be fights with wife over missing money. Wouldn't say more than that without talking to his lawyer. Pointed out that he is not a suspect, but he still shut down. Says he was home when vic was killed.*

*[Check with wife and neighbors.]*

*BN says no problems or conflicts with vic. Doesn't know if vic has any enemies. "Otto was the nicest guy you could imagine. I can't imagine anyone wanting him dead."*

*Asked if there were any business problems, but party was evasive. Asked if I could see the books for the business; Party said he would need to talk to his lawyer. [Something here - need to follow up.]*

MacFarland looked to see if there were any financial records, but he couldn't find any.

MacFarland checked the autopsy report. Although the body was found on Saturday, the victim had been killed on Thursday. The fatal shot had been a bullet to the left side of the head. The victim also had received a second post-mortem shot in the chest. This bullet had missed the heart, but since the victim was already dead, there was reduced blood loss.

There were several pages of notes of interviews of Newsome's neighbors, who seemed to confirm his alibi. The detective had a note appended to the bottom of his last interview. *No one can really account for his whereabouts for entire three day period. Might be problems for DA. Need to pin this down.*

He looked over the notes and information regarding the suspect.

Maureen Freeman apparently had been home all weekend. According to her statement, she had arrived home at noon on Wednesday, and hadn't left her house until Saturday, claiming that she had been feeling ill. She said her husband had gone off on a fishing trip, so she had spent Thursday and Friday in bed. On Saturday, at approximately ten in the morning, she had decided to go to the grocery store. She discovered Otto's body when she went into the garage. She thought an animal had gotten into the garage and died. When she discovered it was her husband, she tried to turn the body over. She stated that she was not aware that her husband was dead, and thought only that he had collapsed. When she turned him over, she saw the blood on his chest and realized that he was not breathing. She wrapped him up in a blanket because he was cold and left him in a sitting position. She went back into the house and called the police.

Maureen came under suspicion when a search of the garage found the murder weapon hidden amongst some cans of paint. Ballistics verified that the gun, a Sig Sauer Mosquito .22LR, had been used to kill the victim. No Gunshot Residue, or GSR, was found on the suspect. The gun was registered to Maureen Freeman and had been legally purchased two years earlier.

He then went through the original crime report, reviewing the procedures followed by the officer on the scene. He gave the autopsy report a thorough examination. The medical examiner on the scene had estimated the time of death sometime late Thursday evening or early Friday morning. Given the cold temperatures, the exact time of death was difficult to determine in the field. The

lab report indicated that Otto had dirt and debris on his clothes, consistent with having been outdoors fishing. MacFarland wondered idly where Otto was fishing at this time of year. Then he wondered why anyone in their right mind would be fishing in November. There was evidence that the body had been moved--from the actual crime scene?--and that there was very little blood found in the location where the police found the body.

Neighbors who were interviewed stated that they did not recall hearing any gunshots, although a neighbor across the street was certain that he heard shots fired on Saturday morning. Iverson had a note in the margin "Not consistent with TOD." Well, if Time of Death was two days earlier, of course the sounds would not be consistent.

After a couple of hours, he closed the report, then went downstairs.

Pierson was sitting in the living room, reading a book. She looked up as he entered the room. "Well?"

MacFarland shrugged. "There are a couple of anomalies, things that Iverson has to get resolved. But nothing jumps out at me that says she isn't a prime suspect."

Pierson scowled, then resumed reading her book.

Exasperated, he finally mentioned his meeting the day before with Jerry Baker and described Baker's concerns. "He claims his client is innocent," he summarized.

Without looking up, Pierson said, "He's right."

## Chapter 18

*Wednesday, December 9, 0930 Hours*

Rufus had just wandered off to visit with some friends over near the Capitol building when MacFarland saw Cynthia Pierson walking towards his cart. A young man, her new partner, Benny Lockwood, accompanied her. He was dressed in a light grey wool suit, more appropriate to early fall than this time of year. A cold front had moved in during the night, and this morning was almost thirty degrees colder than it had been the day before. A blast of frigid air blew in from the mountains, and Lockwood tried to pull his suit jacket tighter around him. MacFarland chose that moment to hold out his hand in greeting. "Pleased to see you again, Lockwood."

Lockwood looked at MacFarland's outstretched hand, then slowly reached and shook it. He shivered in the wind.

"Can I get either of you anything?" MacFarland asked. "Sorry I don't have coffee. That seems more appropriate than cold cans of soda."

Pierson shook her head. "No, we've already had enough shitty coffee. I just wanted to get out of the office for a bit. Needed some air."

MacFarland looked up at the grey sky. "Probably a good time to get out. Feels like snow in the air," he said. "We'll probably get a couple of inches by this evening." MacFarland went back to setting up his condiment trays and arranging his product. He knew that Pierson was here for more than fresh air, but he didn't want to be the one to initiate the conversation. Perhaps he had been on the street too long, but he was reluctant to instigate any interaction with a cop--even if he had been partners with that cop for more than five years.

Pierson didn't respond. Instead, she folded her arms and waited for MacFarland to finish prepping his cart. Finally MacFarland looked up. "You got something on your mind?"

"We had a drug deal go downhill," she said. "Someone outed our snitch and we found him in a dumpster in Aurora. The Aurora Police Department has the lead in the case, but we think the perp is from our hood. You know anyone who might know something?"

MacFarland started putting product on the rollers, even though it was still early in the morning. Cynthia Pierson hadn't discussed any cases with him for more than three years, yet now she was giving him internal police files and asking for intel on drug dealings. Farfetched as it might seem, he began to wonder if Jerry Baker had gotten to her. "Why now?" he asked.

"Why now what?"

"Why are you asking me about possible perps in a murder? We haven't discussed work in years."

Pierson smiled coyly. She could tell that he was trying to protect her sharing the file on the Otto Freeman murder. "You are always so suspicious! That's what I like about you, Mac. No good deed ever gets done without you questioning the motives behind it."

MacFarland feigned a pained expression. "How little you think of me! But seriously, what is behind this?"

Pierson rubbed her hand through her hair, making her red curls frizz even more. "I hadn't really thought too much about it, but maybe it's just seeing you every day. I remember what you used to be, and maybe I wonder if there is still some of that spark still in there."

MacFarland shook his head. "Nope. That's the past. Now I am just a hot dog vendor." He rinsed his counter wipe and started cleaning the surfaces of his cart once more.

Pierson sighed, then turned away. "Come on, Lockwood, we're freezing our asses off out here." Lockwood did not need any further encouragement to walk the two blocks back to Police Headquarters.

They had walked about ten paces away when MacFarland called out, "Check with Lord Bozworth. You'll find him over on Colfax. If the Lord don't know what's going on in Denver, no one does."

Pierson waved her hand in thanks and continued on back towards the police building.

When they were a block away, Lockwood spoke up for the first time. "You spend a lot of time with that loser," he said. "What's so important about him? As he said, he's just a hot dog vendor."

Pierson stopped, staring angrily at Lockwood. Lockwood had continued walking, then realized that Pierson was not by his side. He turned to face her, a bit surprised at the hardness of her expression. "He's one of the invisible people, you fucking asshole. If you want to be successful in this department, you better learn this real quick. The fucker who killed our snitch is also invisible. Only the invisible people will know where he is. Now get your fucking ass back to the office and next time, wear a fucking coat."

MacFarland watched Pierson and Lockwood until they turned the corner and passed out of his view. For the first time in many years, he began to feel good about himself. Cynthia Pierson didn't realize how much her opinion of him meant.

## Chapter 19

*Wednesday, December 9, 1315 Hours*

MacFarland was not surprised when Jerry Baker showed up again. Even before the defense lawyer had reached the cart, MacFarland had a brat ready for him. Baker smiled and began to pay for his brat.

"It's on the house," said MacFarland, waving off the money.

"Really? Why so generous?"

MacFarland laughed and shook his head. "I have no idea. Just part of my nature, I guess. Every once in a while, I like to treat my friends."

Baker started to put the condiments on his brat. "Well, I appreciate being one of your friends, Mac. It means something to me. It's the one good thing to brighten up my otherwise shitty day."

MacFarland looked at him curiously, but then he had to handle three customers who arrived one after the other. Rather than leaving, Baker stood around, eating his brat and munching on a bag of Fritos. Even after he finished, he loitered around the cart. Finally MacFarland looked over at the lawyer. "Something on your mind, Jerry?"

"Ah, today was one of those days when you wished you'd gotten up on the other side of the bed. Judge Clements refused to grant my client bail. Which I thought was entirely unreasonable. Hell, she owns a home, and now that her husband is dead, she has a jewelry store. What woman would run out on that?" He paused, then continued. "You know, I've been asking around about you, Mac. It seems that some years ago, you were a pretty good detective."

MacFarland shrugged indifferently. "Not good enough," he said. "I got kicked off the force."

Baker waited while another customer came up and placed his order. As the customer walked away, Baker moved to stand in front of MacFarland. "Here's the deal, Mac. I need your help."

MacFarland began to wipe off his cart, then put some more brats and dogs on the heating rollers. "What kind of help?" he asked hesitantly.

"My PI. He went skiing up at Loveland. The idiot missed a turn and went off the ski slope. He ended up really spraining his ankle. Now he can't walk. I need someone to take his place. Dig up the dirt on this case I'm working. Get the facts that the police are missing."

"In the Otto Freeman murder?"

Baker nodded. "Yes. I think I mentioned that I am convinced that Mrs. Freeman is innocent. I need someone to get me the evidence I need to get her off."

MacFarland hesitated. He had to be careful what he said. Jerry Baker was an officer of the court. If the judge found out that Baker had improper access to police records, he could get into a lot of trouble. Hell, it could get Pierson into trouble. On the other hand, everything he had was supposed to be turned over to the defense lawyer. Little difference it would make. MacFarland did not see that

there was a lot of wiggle room in the case. Maureen Freeman had the means, the opportunity, and probably the motive to kill her husband. It was only a matter of time before Iverson got all the facts together that would prove she was the killer. "From everything I've heard," said MacFarland, "the case goes way beyond circumstantial. I think you should cut a deal for your client."

"I'd cut a deal if I thought she was guilty," said Baker. "I won't take the easy way out knowing she is innocent."

MacFarland shook his head. How could he possibly help Baker, he wondered. He didn't even have an open mind about Maureen Freeman's innocence. Everything pointed to her guilt. "I don't think so, Mr. Baker," he said. "Besides, I have a hot dog stand to run."

"I'll pay you well," said Baker. "I really need your help."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for your client, Mr. Baker, I really do wish there was something I could do."

"Well, think about it, will you?"

"Yeah, I'll think about it, but I don't see me changing my mind."



## Chapter 20

*Wednesday, December 9, 1845 Hours*

By the time MacFarland got home Wednesday night, he was exhausted. He had been busier than he expected, especially for a Wednesday. A large contingent of the tourist crowd--about twenty young people--had gotten lost searching for the U.S. Mint. Since the Mint was only a couple of blocks away, MacFarland concluded that the group had collectively drunk a bit too much beer. Whatever caused their errors in reconnaissance, they had decided to camp out in the open area across the street near the courthouse. When some of them spotted his hot dog cart across the street, they had descended on him like vultures on a corpse. Despite their boisterous mood, and the fact that a couple of them were clearly intoxicated, they were generally well behaved. And quite hungry. He barely had enough product left to supply his homeless friends, most of whom waited until the cash-paying customers had moved away from the cart. MacFarland's friends didn't want to cause him any problems with any unexpected interactions with "regular" folk. Given the boisterous nature of this group, MacFarland thought their caution was a smart idea.

Pierson was already home when he arrived. She started telling him about her day. She had been assigned to work with Narcotics on solving the hit on their snitch, and she was planning on putting in long hours to follow up leads provided by MacFarland's contact.

MacFarland put away his product, cleaned his storage bins, and put his hand wipes into the washer, pretending to listen but mostly wondering if Pierson was going to make anything for dinner. When he asked her, she looked up at him and shook her head. "How about I order some pizza then?" he asked.

Pierson continued to stare into space. "Go ahead, but just order enough for yourself. I'm not feeling very hungry."

MacFarland put in his order, then went and sat down across from Pierson.

"What's bugging you Cyn? Problems with your case? It sounds like Lord Bozworth is already helping."

She looked up vacantly, then shook her head. "No, the case is going fine. Bozworth, he's great. I can't believe we haven't been using him in the past."

"He's been burned by the police before. Doesn't trust them. I am sure the only reason he is talking to you is because I put in a good word for you."

"Yeah, he only talks to me. Won't even talk if Lockwood is around."

"Can't blame him for that. No offense, but your partner is a jerk."

"He's not so bad once you get past his youthful stupidity. He's actually a pretty smart detective. Or will be one of these days."

MacFarland was glad that he finally got Pierson talking, though he could tell she was still holding something back. The doorbell rang, and he went and paid for the pizza. "Sure you don't want any?" he asked. "I ordered two large pizzas."

"Why the hell did you that, you asshole? It'll just go to waste."

"Not if you eat some of it," he replied. He opened one of the boxes and pulled

out a slice. It was New York style pizza, which he preferred. Pizza had an incredible aroma. Whenever MacFarland smelled pizza, he knew life couldn't get much better. He folded his piece over, trapping the tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese inside. As the spicy smell of the sauce wafted across the room, Pierson finally gave in and came over and picked up a slice. "The other box has one with your toppings on it," he added between bites. Cursing profusely, Pierson stood up and went to the kitchen to get paper plates, napkins, and some cans of Diet Coke.

After a couple of pieces of pizza, Pierson finally relaxed. "I'm sorry, guess I was in a mood, Mac. Sometimes, all the bullshit at the office just gets to me."

MacFarland nodded. "I can understand. That's why I always preferred to spend as little time in the office as possible."

Pierson scowled. "I thought you avoided the office so that I would have to write all the reports."

He laughed, picking up another slice. "Well, yes, there was that too. What sort of BS are you hearing these days?"

Pierson didn't answer but started to pick up the pizza boxes and clean up the remains of dinner. MacFarland grabbed hold of her arm, not too forcefully, since he knew that Pierson didn't like being touched. She glared at him, then visibly seemed to slump. She sat back down on the couch, still clutching the empty cans and paper plates.

"I walked into the squad room this morning, and as soon as everyone saw me, they all clammed up. But I had already heard what they were talking about before I arrived."

"What was it?"

"Nothing important. I am just over-reacting."

"Cyn!" said MacFarland, using his most authoritative and ominous voice. "Come on, 'fess up!"

Pierson looked up at him. "You'll think I'm just being silly."

MacFarland laughed, and then said the one thing that he knew would really infuriate her. "Of course you're being silly, Cyn. You're a fucking girl!"

"Bastard!" said Pierson, playfully slapping at him. "Alright, you wanted to know. They were talking about you."

Mac's eyes widened in surprise. "Me? What about me?"

"A couple of the patrolmen were badmouthing you. I think someone finally set them straight about who you are, but still, I didn't like it. I gave them some shit and that seemed to end it."

MacFarland had some idea of who the parties might have been, but he kept his suspicions to himself. "Don't let it bug you, Cyn. I don't give a fuck what any of them say about me."

"You're my partner," Pierson said. "I care."

As Pierson left the room, MacFarland stared after her, somewhat taken back and puzzled. Cynthia Pierson was one of the most hard-nosed, no nonsense women he had ever met on the police force. She wouldn't take shit from anyone, and she could easily dish it out when she had to. Even better than most, since she was probably smarter than just about everyone else in the department. It wasn't like her to let something as trivial and inconsequential as assholes talking shit about him to get to her.

*What is going on with her,* he wondered.

## Chapter 21

*Thursday, December 10, 0955 Hours*

Monday morning had started out fairly well. The cold front had passed through, heading towards Kansas, and once again Denver was experiencing one of its mild winter days. It was only ten o'clock in the morning and already the temperature was approaching fifty. *If this continues*, thought MacFarland, *I will have to break out the beach ball and swimwear.*

His good mood came to an end when he saw Benny Lockwood approaching him. MacFarland checked to see if Pierson was anywhere nearby, but she wasn't in sight. He was surprised that Lockwood would do anything without Pierson, but he was more surprised that Lockwood would be heading in his direction. As the young detective neared the cart, MacFarland put on his friendliest smile.

"Good morning, Detective. Looks like we're in for some pleasant weather today."

Lockwood was not in a mood to reciprocate. "I heard that you once were a detective," he said. "Then you fucked up and got kicked off the force. What were you, a drunk? Were you a drunk when you were partners with Cynthia?"

MacFarland stared at the young man for a moment, his good spirits rapidly dissipating. He worked hard to keep his annoyance with the young snot under control. He counted to ten, then stated as calmly as he could, "I don't see that my life is any of your business, Detective."

"I don't give a fuck about your life, MacFarland. I just want you to stay away from Pierson. She doesn't need a loser like you dragging her down or ruining her reputation in the department."

MacFarland suddenly found himself struggling to keep from laughing. Clearly Lockwood and Pierson were not close enough for her to let him know that MacFarland was living in her house. It would be pretty difficult for MacFarland to stay away from Pierson under those circumstances. Lockwood must have heard some of the crap that was going around the office about him. But why did it matter to the young man? Unless--was it possible Cyn's partner had an infatuation for her? The more MacFarland thought about it, the more certain he was that Lockwood was suffering from a case of puppy love. It would have been cute if it wasn't so pathetic.

"I don't think she needs you to decide who she hangs with, youngster. She's a big girl now and can make those decisions for herself. Now, why don't you go back to the station and leave me alone."

Lockwood stood frozen in place. He got a confused look on his face, as though he was unsure whether he should continue to bluster or think better of it. Finally he calmed down. MacFarland thought Lockwood was about to turn and go back to the station when instead, the detective stopped and asked, "Are any of those Polish sausages ready?"

## Chapter 22

*Thursday, December 10, 1020 Hours*

MacFarland was not at all sure why Lockwood's comments bothered him so much. Normally, MacFarland didn't concern himself with other people's opinion. But Lockwood was Pierson's new partner. Even though he was a jerk, he was Pierson's jerk. Somehow, that also made him MacFarland's jerk.

He tried to clear his mind by thinking about his future. Since he had lost his apartment, he had begun to think more about what he was going to do with his life. There were only fifteen more days until Christmas. Was his invitation to Stefanie's house for Christmas dinner still valid? He hadn't heard from her since he had been evicted. He wasn't sure he wanted to spend Christmas with his sister-in-law. Nor was he sure whether Christmas with Cynthia Pierson would be much of an improvement. He wondered if Pierson would invite Lockwood over for Christmas.

Perhaps he had just spent too many years living alone, without the benefits of holidays or relatives, for him to be comfortable with the idea of now spending time with other people. Maybe he would just bring his cart out on Christmas Day and give free meals to all the homeless people. *Yeah, that's a good idea*, he thought.

As he contemplated Christmas in Pierson's home, two ideas crossed his mind. The first thought was rather disturbing. He had to find another place to live. He was uncomfortable relying on Pierson's generosity for any longer than was absolutely critical. Yet how did he define critical? That brought up his second concern. He had no money, certainly not enough for the normal deposit on an apartment. He did qualify for subsidized housing, but he was reluctant to apply for the cheaper rent since he might not have much choice in where he lived.

A car pulled up to the stoplight, its windows open and Christmas music blasting into the morning air. *Too much Christmas cheer*, he thought, as he put his headphones back on. He noticed that Rufus was coming towards him from Civic Center Park. Rufus was wearing a red Santa hat, a small bell on the end jingling as he approached. He was carrying a bag, presumably with their morning coffee. MacFarland smiled good morning and wished Rufus a cheery greeting. "Where did you get the hat?"

"Found it in the park on a bench," said Rufus, handing MacFarland one of the coffees. "I watched it for a whole hour and no one came to claim it, so I claimed it. We need more Christmas cheer, don't ya think?"

"It never hurts," said MacFarland.

As they sipped their coffee, both men lost in their own private thoughts, MacFarland turned towards his homeless friend, wondering once more why Rufus was so adamant about not living in a shelter or any kind of a building. *If he wanted to live in a real room*, thought MacFarland, *I would definitely find a place to live. I owe him that much.*

"You've met my partner, haven't you, Rufus?"

"You mean that cute red-haired girl? Yeah, sure, I met her lots of times. You know, when you was missing."

"What do you think of her?"

Rufus held his coffee cup up to his face, as though he could hide behind it. Unfortunately, the cup was too small to afford much sanctuary. "What do I think of her? Hey, boss, she's okay, for a cop, ya know. I think she's a nice lady. I wouldn't want to get her on my bad side though. I think she could be really tough."

MacFarland smiled. "Tough? Cynthia Pierson?" But Rufus was right. Pierson didn't put up with crap from anyone--not civvies on the street, not her fellow cops, not from the brass. She followed the rules, followed the code, but she didn't let anyone take advantage of her.

"Why boss? You thinking of being a cop again?"

MacFarland shook his head. "There'd only be one reason to become a cop again, Rufus, and that is --"

"To put Norris Peterson behind bars," finished Rufus. "Yeah, I been hearing that for a couple of years now, boss. But even if you was a cop, you probably couldn't touch him. That man has protection. Besides, your cop days are over. You're one of us now."

MacFarland started warming up two hot dogs for Rufus. "Yeah, that's true. Though, something strange happened the other day. Remember that fancy-dressed lawyer that's been coming around? Well, he's asked me to help him solve a case he has."

Rufus stared in front of him, almost afraid to look in MacFarland's direction. He sipped the last of his coffee, suddenly aware of how cold the coffee had gotten. "You gonna help him?"

"I'm not sure," said MacFarland. "My instincts tell me to stay out of it. But there is something odd about the case they have against the alleged murderer. Cyn thinks she is innocent, Baker thinks she is innocent. And something I read or heard bothers me, but I can't put my finger on it. I find it very frustrating that I can't remember what struck me as odd."

"You ain't been drinking again, have you boss?"

MacFarland shook his head. "No, Rufus, I'm dry. Though I've been missing my AA meetings. It's not booze affecting my memory. You're right, though. This is my life now, and I shouldn't even consider helping this guy." He wrapped up the two hot dogs for Rufus, pulled out a ten dollar bill and handed everything to his friend.

Rufus looked at him intensely as he reached out for the food and money. Finally, after a long hard stare at his friend, Rufus shook his head. "I know you, boss. You're going to help this lawyer dude, aren't you?"

"No, Rufus, I'm not. Not unless helping him would help me put Peterson away." He laughed. "If I thought that, then hell yeah, I would take the case. But that isn't going to happen. I'll just stay here, selling hot dogs."

"At least you won't get hurt selling hot dogs, boss. Just keep that in mind."

"I'll do exactly that, Rufus. Now get going before your ugly mug scares all my customers away."

Rufus started to head towards Colfax, but he stopped and faced MacFarland.

“You know, there’s one other reason why you might help that suspect.”  
MacFarland cocked his head quizzically. “Why is that, Rufus?”  
“Because you think she really is innocent.”

## Chapter 23

*Thursday, December 10, 1125 Hours*

When it was this close to Christmas, many judges tried to get smaller cases resolved before the holiday break. Most judges didn't want a trial that extended over the holidays. Jurors didn't like it, but more importantly, the judges didn't like it. So trials were shorter, ended earlier in the week, and generally, those civic-minded people lucky enough to complete their one-day or one-trial duty within a few days, were in a better mood. Despite that good mood, the number of people coming around for hot dogs or bratwursts was quite low. Also, there were not many stores nearby--the court was quite distant from the Sixteenth Street Mall, which was the nearest major shopping area--so there wasn't much holiday traffic either. MacFarland didn't mind the lack of business. He put his headphones on and slipped another language CD into his player. For the next hour, he silently mouthed the correct responses to the language lesson questions and dialogs.

When a couple of detectives from MacFarland's old unit came by, MacFarland put aside his usual feelings of annoyance, took off his headphones, and greeted the two men with friendly holiday cheer. They didn't reciprocate. These two detectives had been new recruits at the time he was dismissed from the department, so though he recognized them by sight, he knew very little about them. If they knew, remembered, or cared that he had once worked in their department, their behavior indicated the opposite. They just ignored him, carrying on with their on-going discussion. MacFarland was once again one of the invisible people.

"I tell you, there was no blood at the crime scene," said one detective.

"There must have been some," said the other. "Wasn't the vic shot, twice?"

"Yeah, twice. Once in the side of the head, the other time in the chest. Sure, there was some blood, but it was just blood on his clothes. That got transferred to the garage floor. But no pools of blood."

MacFarland knew instantly that they were talking about the Otto Freeman murder. The crime scene report indicated that the body had bled out, but there was little blood pooling around the body. The forensic techs who examined the body believed that the bullet to the head had caused fatality, and the shot to the chest had been a second shot, fired after the vic was already dead. It had been cold the night the victim was shot, and perhaps the body had been on its back when that second shot was fired. Although the defendant said no one had moved the body, the CSI techs were quite certain that the body had been transported. But from where?

"Sounds like the vic was killed someplace else and the body deposited in the garage," said MacFarland. As soon as he had spoken the words, he regretted his action. The two detectives stared coldly at him.

"And what the fuck would you know about it?" asked one of the detectives. "We already know the body was moved."



"No, no, let's hear what the Hot Dog Detective has to say about this crime, Mike. So, where was the victim killed, smart ass?"

MacFarland tried to withdraw from the conversation. "I spoke out of turn," he said. "It's none of my business. You guys are the experts."

"Damn right, Hot Dog Detective! You just stick to your job and leave the police work up to the professionals."

The two detectives started back towards the police headquarters building, laughing at the temerity of civilians to try to do police work.

MacFarland angrily began to wipe off his cart. He put his headphones back on, but for some reason, his interest in learning Spanish had suddenly faded.

## Chapter 24

*Thursday, December 10, 1400 Hours*

Where exactly had Otto Freeman been killed? This question had been bothering MacFarland all afternoon. That night, when he got back to his room, he pulled out the copies of the file that he had made. He hadn't told Pierson that he had made the copies, knowing that she would object. She was taking enough risk by simply showing him the file.

He was really surprised at how fragmented the forensics and autopsy reports were. Perhaps he was only seeing a portion of the lab reports. One report that was included particularly interested him. This report described the particulates on Freeman's clothes. Leaf debris, pine needles, dirt and rock particles inconsistent with the scene where the body was found or with the surrounding terrain. The CSI had concluded that the victim had been killed elsewhere and moved to the garage. What made the evidence suspect, however, was that Mrs. Freeman, upon discovering her dead husband, had covered him with a blanket found in the garage. The blanket had been used on numerous picnics and mountain trip excursions, and effectively contaminated all of the particulate evidence.

The autopsy report had indicated that the victim had initially been shot in the side of the head. When he had fallen down to his knees (confirmed by dirt stains on his knees, although the CSI had stated that the stains could have been caused by the victim simply kneeling), he had been turned over and shot in the chest while lying prone. There had been a description of the angles of bullet entry, but MacFarland trusted the crime lab enough to believe that their scenario had been correct. The victim had lain on his back for some time, causing the blood to pool on the bottom side of the body. Yet when the uniforms who first arrived on the scene found the body, it had been placed in a semi-upright position. Mrs. Freeman initially denied that she had touched the body, but later admitted to the detectives that she had covered the body with an old blanket and moved it into the sitting position.

"I couldn't stand seeing him just lying there," she had said.

There was additional evidence that the body had been covered and moved on Saturday morning, yet time of death was established as late Thursday afternoon.

Iverson, the detective in charge, had written that the victim was probably killed in the back yard and dragged into the garage. That didn't make sense to MacFarland, and it wasn't even consistent with one observation by one CSI tech whose initials were CAB. MacFarland took particular interest in Item 138. This piece of evidence consisted of four pine tree needles, identified as *Psuedotsuga menziesii*, or Douglas fir. The tech had written a note on the evidence tag: "The pine needles have traces of the fire retardant TetraKO on them." The report went on to say that since TetraKO™ is biodegradable, its presence must indicate that it was applied within the last three months. Apparently the product had been field tested or used over that time period in a variety of locations. The technician had included a list of the most recent test locations. It was a relatively extensive list.

Just within a two hour drive of Denver, there were more than thirty sites where the product had been used. There was also a note that the product was available for commercial use by farmers and ranchers, but there was no record of whether the product was available for household use.

The CSI technician said that the grounds around the domicile had been examined, but no indication of TetraKO use had been detected. Nor were any containers of the product found in the garage.

Why hadn't Iverson followed up on this information? Perhaps he had. MacFarland had no way of knowing what direction the investigation was going. That was something he would have to ask Pierson about.

He stared at the list of sites where TetraKO had been recently used. Thirty possible sites within two hours of Denver.

The more he stared at that list, the more he was convinced that Otto Freeman had been killed at one of those spots. But which one?

On the other hand, what difference did it make? It wasn't his case to solve, no matter how intriguing he found the case. He was a hot dog vendor, not a detective, and the sooner he accepted those facts, the easier his life would be.

As much as he wanted to walk away from the case, he found it difficult to do so. Of course he liked the challenge of solving a crime. Even more, he wanted to bring whoever committed the crime to justice. And he wanted to protect those who were falsely accused of the crime. Rufus was right about him. MacFarland did not like to see innocent people accused of a crime. But he disliked even more the guilty going free.

In the case of the murder of Otto Freeman, he was becoming convinced that Jerry Baker's gut feelings of Maureen Freeman's innocence were true.

Why didn't anyone who was actually working on this case not see that simple truth? He knew the answer in the case of Alan Iverson. The man was an ass.

## Chapter 25

*Friday, December 11, 0830 Hours*

MacFarland waited in the kitchen for Pierson to come down for breakfast. Normally he was preoccupied with preparing his product for the day, then cleaning up before she got up. Since a lot of her work was done at night, she often slept late. He hoped that this morning would be one of her early days. He sighed with relief when she came downstairs at eight-thirty. She seemed surprised to find him still at the house. He immediately put a cup of hot coffee in her hand. Pierson was always easier to deal with if her shooting hand held something besides a gun.

She glanced up at the clock on the wall of the kitchen. "Don't you try to be at your corner before nine o'clock? You're going to be late."

"I needed to talk to you."

"Really? I don't have much time." Pierson had gotten home late last night, probably after MacFarland had gone to bed. Not that she needed to see him. She had gotten quite used to living alone, and while she had offered him a place to stay, she actually appreciated the fact that they actually saw very little of each other. Of course, his presence might complicate her life if she ever met "Mr. Right." Given her dedication to her career, there were very few Mr. Rights in the world, so she didn't think there was much risk of that happening.

"I needed to ask you a question about the Freeman investigation."

"I'm not working on that," she said almost immediately. "Now that the DA is preparing the case to go to court, it's going to be very hard to get hold of the files."

"I'm not asking you to do that," MacFarland said quickly. "I just wanted to know if you had any knowledge about what direction the investigation is going."

Pierson shrugged, then busied herself getting a cup of coffee. "I've only heard the usual scuttlebutt that floats around the office. Why? What specifically do you want to know?"

MacFarland sat down at the kitchen table, then gestured for Pierson to do the same. She frowned, looked at the clock, then reluctantly sat down. "I don't have a lot of time," she repeated, clutching her coffee cup nervously.

"Relax, Cyn, I'm not planning on keeping you here all day. I had a question about the case, and I was hoping you had the answer. It's not as if I could go to Iverson and ask him."

In spite of her impatience, Pierson smirked, then tried to hide her reaction by sipping her coffee. She only succeeded in choking on her coffee. When she stopped coughing, she said, "Go ahead, ask away."

"The CSI had some data on a chemical found on some debris on Freeman's clothes. They also provided a list of sites where he might have come into contact with this chemical. So I wanted to know, have they followed up by checking any of those sites?"

"Are the sites in the Denver metro area? If not, the answer is no. In fact,

Iverson's team has been cut back. Department belt-cinching, as you might expect. Though it seems to have hit Iverson's investigation pretty hard. Now that is something that he has been really vocal about. Can't blame him, either. If my investigation got ham-strung by the top brass, I'd be screaming bloody murder too."

MacFarland considered her comments carefully. "So no teams have gone to various mountain sites to see if the murder happened there?"

Pierson shook her head, then got up to get another cup of coffee. "I should have picked up some Danish at the store," she muttered to herself. She came back to the table. "No one has gone anywhere, Mac. A couple of the crime lab guys said that the murder didn't occur in the garage, and probably not anywhere nearby. But Iverson feels that he has enough evidence linking Mrs. Freeman to the crime that he isn't concerned about that."

MacFarland laughed. "Baker will rip that to shreds," he said.

"Baker?"

"Jerry Baker, Freeman's attorney. Remember, you met him the other day at my cart?"

Pierson nodded. "Yeah, I've seen him a couple of times. I don't hang with defense lawyers," she said. "My job is to put the scumbags in jail, not get them out."

There was a time when MacFarland thought the same way Pierson and most other cops felt. Once he had regarded defense lawyers as an undesirable evil, usually unscrupulous individuals who would do whatever it took to get their client off. He had especially thought that defense lawyers were scum when Norris Peterson walked free. Then he had learned that the sheen of corruption extended to the defenders of justice--the police department and the district attorney's office. "I think Baker is different. Or at least a little different. He asked me to look into Mrs. Freeman's case."

Pierson was surprised by his admission. "Are you going to help him?"

MacFarland shook his head. "I'm not a cop, and certainly not a PI. I just think there are some problems with the case. If Iverson would just follow up the leads and evidence, he would see that he's got the wrong suspect."

"That's the key, Mac. He's got a suspect. With the budget cuts, we have too large a caseload to follow up every lead. I am not saying that I agree with the way he's handling the case. I also happen to think that the defendant's innocent. But I also know what constraints the department is operating under. Remember, it's not our job to prosecute the case. We just get the evidence that the DA needs. The people driving this case, rightly or wrongly, are in the DA's office."

## Chapter 26

*Friday, December 16, 1620 hours*

The sky was overcast, and the threat of rain, or even snow if the temperature continued to drop, was quite real. A heavy, musty smell hung in the air, masking the smell of exhaust and soot from the passing cars. MacFarland buttoned up his coat and looked up and down the street. He didn't see any customers searching anxiously for a hot dog stand. Most people were hurrying home before the roads became slick and hazardous. MacFarland started packing up, looking at the amount of product he would have to trash. Even his homeless friends hadn't come around. He hoped they all found a nice warm place to spend the night.

As he loaded his cart onto the trailer, a cold drizzle started. He secured his cart and climbed into his truck. For a few minutes, he simply sat there, listening to the icy rain hit the roof of the cab. He held the key in his hand, thinking about his discussion with Pierson. He realized that even if he were still on the force, he would have the same limitations that Iverson faced. How could he honestly criticize the other detective's efforts, if someone in the brass was actually calling the shots?

This was turning out to be one of those days when MacFarland was almost pleased that he was off the force. He could never say that he didn't miss being a detective. It was the one job that gave him the most satisfaction. MacFarland had always been a "street" cop. He disliked rules and regulations, and while he always followed them, for the most part, he preferred a bit of freedom and spontaneity in doing his job. Pierson had always been a good partner for him, since she made sure that the two of them followed the rules. They had frequently joked together that he caught the crooks but she made sure that they would be locked up.

The problem with Iverson was that he was more of a "management" cop than even Pierson was. He took his orders, followed the book, and never, never stepped outside the boundaries that he was given. Surely, if MacFarland had been in charge of this case, he would have crossed many of those boundaries. And just as surely, he would have been in hot water with his commander and chief.

Ultimately, he had to admit that he was doing armchair quarterbacking. He didn't know all the facts of the case, he wasn't running the investigation, and he didn't know what else had been discovered. He hadn't spoken to the crime scene techs--all he had was an incomplete compilation of some of their observations.

And he had no idea whatsoever what the District Attorney was doing. What was his strategy for prosecuting the case? What deals had the defense suggested? What deals had the DA himself offered the defendant?

He was out of the loop, yet he had the audacity to think that he could solve this case just because he noticed a CSI had discovered some fire retardant chemical on some pine needles.

He hoped that Baker would come around tomorrow. Then he would be able to tell the lawyer that he simply wasn't qualified to solve this crime. It wasn't an admission he liked to make, but he owed it to Baker—and to Maureen Freeman—

to let them know the truth.

He angrily pushed the key into the ignition and started the truck. The ride back to Observatory Park was stop and go, but it gave him time to push his depression into the dark recesses of his mind, where he stored all his other frustrations and failures.

## Chapter 27

*Saturday, December 12, 0612 hours*

*What a difference a good night's sleep makes*, thought MacFarland as he woke up just seconds before the alarm clock went off. For the first time in many weeks, he had a calm, uneventful night. No dreams, no waking up two or three times in the middle of the night, no clammy sweats from whatever problems were troubling him. Was it simply because he had made the final decision not to take the case? Did he sleep better because he finally accepted his current limitations? Or did he sleep better because he was finally getting used to a real bed?

He finished prepping his product, made a pot of coffee, and was cooking some bacon in preparation of making an omelet. The strong smell of cooking bacon started to waft through the house. Pierson wandered into the kitchen, rubbing her eyes. Her curly hair was even more disheveled than ever, if that was even possible. She was wearing a faded cotton nightgown that did nothing to flatter her figure. *Too bad*, he thought, *she could look really nice*.

"Whadya doin'?" she asked.

"Making breakfast," said MacFarland.

"I can see that, asshole. Why are you making breakfast?"

"Hey, I'm in a good mood! I wanted to share it with you. After all, it's the Christmas season! Get in the holiday spirit!"

Pierson groaned and sat down. "Fuck you and your good spirit," she said. "All I gotta say is you better consider yourself lucky you didn't do this on my day off. Waking me up with the smell of bacon would have been grounds for justifiable homicide."

"Jeesh, why are you in such a bad mood?" He put the plate of cooked bacon on the table.

Pierson scowled and grabbed the plate. Before she even answered his question, she had devoured half the bacon. MacFarland wondered how she stayed so slim if she pigged out like that on a regular basis. Then he remembered. Pierson didn't cook as much as she wanted to. Instead of eating, she spent her time in the gym. "Running into problems with my snitch murder. Someone powerful is backing the drug gang, but no one can give me a lead on who that might be. The organization is much more sophisticated than most gangs."

"Is Bozworth any help?" asked Mac. He was afraid to ask if Bozworth was part of the drug gang. He didn't want to know the answer.

"Bozworth has been great," Pierson said, finally finishing off the rest of the bacon. "I thought you were making eggs?"

MacFarland looked forlornly at the empty bacon plate. "Yeah, I was," he said.

Pierson poured herself a cup of coffee and settled back in her chair. "Bozworth knows a lot about what's going on, at least on the street. But he doesn't know much about the organization. Just that it's fairly new, maybe with ties to Chicago, and backed by big bucks. He also told me something very interesting."

MacFarland looked up from the stove. He was trying to decide whether he



should make more bacon. "What?"

"Bozworth thinks there is another group of cops working this case. Not the murder, but the gang's financial backers. He thinks they're feds."

MacFarland furrowed his brow. "Are there Feds working this case?"

Pierson shook her head. "No way. No one in Major Crimes or Narcotics has any knowledge of liaison with any Federal agency, other than the usual ones. How reliable is Bozworth's knowledge of this sort of thing?"

MacFarland had to think about that. While Bozworth was not a gang leader, not in the traditional sense, he was a leader among the homeless population. He normally knew what was going on, who belonged, who didn't. To the extent that anyone protected the homeless people of Denver, it was Bozworth. But what did he know about federal agents working the streets? If there were any agents, they would have to be working under cover. MacFarland was fairly certain that even Bozworth would not know every single homeless person in the Denver area. It would be fairly easy for someone under deep cover to infiltrate the community, wouldn't it? As he recalled, when he was homeless, he had kept pretty much to himself.

It was also possible that the suspected federal agent wasn't actually in the homeless community.

"Where did Bozworth say this guy was?"

"He works downtown. Bozworth says he likes to socialize with the homeless crowd who hang out down there. The guy's a janitor working in a building over on Arapahoe. Actually, I think it's the same building where your wife used to work."

MacFarland suddenly became silent. "Why would a Fed be doing undercover work there?" he said more to himself than to Pierson.

"What did you say?"

MacFarland finished cooking the omelet. Hell with the bacon. She's had enough. He slipped the omelet onto Pierson's plate. "Eat up," he ordered.

He started to clean up the dishes. "Aren't you going to make any for yourself?" Pierson asked.

MacFarland thought about all the bacon she devoured. "No, I'm not really hungry," he said.

Pierson shook her head in puzzlement. "Suit yourself. The omelet was really good, by the way. You could easily get a job as a short order cook just about anywhere."

He laughed at her joke, but inside he felt a painful wrench of disappointment. Once he had been a good detective. Now all he was good for was making quick meals. That would be great if that was what he really wanted to do. But what he wanted to do was...

"Hey, Cyn, could I ask a huge favor of you?"

"Sure, what do you need?"

"Would it be possible for you to get the entire case file on the Freeman murder?"

Pierson stared at him with a blank expression. Finally, in an expressionless voice, she asked, "I thought you were going to give up on that case?"

"I should. I probably will. It's just--well, there are some things that puzzle me.

I can't put the matter to rest until I have an answer or two."

Pierson sighed deeply, then stood up and brought her dishes over to MacFarland to wash. "I can't promise anything, Mac. I used up a bunch of favors getting the material I already showed you. I don't know that there is much more I can do."

"Just do your best, Cyn. I promise I won't ever ask for any more favors."

She stood there, biting her lip and staring at him. "Yeah, like I believe that. Damn good thing for you that you make a great omelet."

## Chapter 28

*Saturday, December 12, 1850 Hours*

It was the end of the week, and it had been a cold, wet week. MacFarland was tired, and though he had given away a lot of his product to his homeless friends, he still had a lot of unsold product. He was clearly over-estimating how much business he would be able to do. It was only after he had unpacked his supplies and put his containers in the dishwasher that he noticed the folder sitting on the kitchen table. It was much thicker than the folder Cyn had given him before. He suddenly realized this was the entire file. He hadn't really expected Pierson to actually get her hands on the file. He was clearly going to owe her big time for this favor. He picked up the file and took it up to his room.

The first thing he checked was the list of evidence that the detectives had collected. It was not a very extensive list, a lot shorter than he expected.

Item 1 - Revolver, Sig Sauer, .22LR, white and black patterned design; 10 round magazine, two rounds fired, one round in chamber, seven rounds in magazine

Item 2a, 2b - Two bullets found in Victim's body (no casings recovered)

2a - Recovered from Victim's skull (Ref. Ballistics report for bullet trajectory)

2b - Recovered from Victim's chest cavity (Ref. Ballistics report for bullet trajectory)

Item 3 - Shirt, red plaid, cotton; blood-stains on front, bullet hole on upper left side

Item 4 - Wool blanket, military olive color; blood stains, plant and soil debris (Ref. Lab report CB36-278-F-3329)

Item 5 - Set of prints recovered from Item 1 - Revolver; prints are match for Defendant

Item 6 - Set of prints taken from Defendant

There was also a list of interviews. There were only nine people listed. This struck MacFarland as odd. In most of his cases, there were usually dozens of interviews. The typed interviews were attached to the list. He glanced at the names of the people interviewed.

Maureen Freeman - Victim's spouse

Brian Newsome - Victim's partner

Sarah Newsome - Wife of victim's partner

Shawn Sprowles - Neighbor

Debra Downs - Neighbor

Craig Meacham - Employee of Newsome Jewelry Store

Devon Brooks - Employee of Newsome Jewelry Store

Laura Rogers - Employee of Newsome Jewelry Store

## Thomas Ingram - Neighbor

He glanced quickly through the pages of interviews. The neighbors reported that they did not hear any shots fired, nor any sounds of conflict. One neighbor, Debra Downs, reported that she thought she heard a car drive up to the house sometime after midnight on Thursday, but she could not identify the car. Otto Freeman's car was parked in the driveway. Otto had taken his car when he went fishing Thursday morning. Maureen said that he must have driven it home, though she had no idea when. She stated, however, that he had not come into the house. According to the defendant's statement, Otto Freeman had not returned home either Thursday night or on Friday. She had assumed that he had stayed on his fishing trip all weekend.

MacFarland had read the detective's notes on this interview the first time he reviewed the file. Seeing Maureen's formal statement, however, raised some questions in his mind. How did Maureen not know that her husband's car was in the driveway? It was not surprising that she hadn't seen him in the house, since he had been dead since Thursday afternoon.

He rechecked Iverson's final report. Iverson wasn't as much of an idiot as MacFarland initially feared that he was. Iverson was convinced that the victim had been killed elsewhere and then moved to the garage. The CSIs did not find any blood evidence in the victim's car, nor any in Maureen's car, which had been parked inside the garage. They had examined the backyard of the house, but neither dogs nor astute Crime Scene investigators had found any blood evidence.

There was no doubt in MacFarland's mind, nor apparently in Iverson's, that Freeman had been fishing. He had fish scales on his shoes, though there were no fish in his creel. The scales must have come from cleaning fish. But where were the fish he had cleaned? Had he been fishing with someone else? When asked this question, Maureen said she was not sure. Otto Freeman had not discussed his fishing excursions with her. She did mention that he often went fishing by himself. Apparently no one followed up on the question of whether Freeman was alone on his fishing trip or with someone else. MacFarland wished there was some way he could ask Iverson about this omission. He wondered if Pierson had any information about the case.

The autopsy report was included in the file. It clearly established that the victim had been killed sometime between late afternoon and midnight on November 26. Given the cool temperatures, the condition of the body had been well-preserved. The coroner also confirmed the cause of death was the first shot in the side of the head. There was a rather graphic description of how the .22 slug had rattled around inside the skull, mashing Otto Freeman's brain to a pulp. Freeman was already dead when the second shot was administered. From this evidence, Iverson had concluded that the victim was shot from the side, probably by someone Freeman had trusted. The body had fallen forward, and then, to make sure the victim was dead, the assailant had turned the body over and shot it in the chest. Iverson wrote in a note that the time between the first shot and the second shot was several minutes, though he offered no explanation why there was a gap in time, nor was there any medical evidence for this gap. Was he trying to explain the lack of blood?

All of the Crime Lab evidence was kept in a separate report. As usual, there were hundreds of pieces of evidence provided by the CSI team, all listed on an evidentiary list. Every fiber, drop of blood, speck of dust that could possibly be pertinent to the case had been examined, analyzed, and documented. There was even a separate list of all the items of debris that they had found on the blanket. He glanced down the list, looking to see if anything popped out at him. At first nothing did seem out of the ordinary. Until MacFarland noticed that one of the evidence items was duplicated. Item 136 was an innocuous piece of evidence--a piece of lint covered with grease from the garage floor. But so was Item 195. Why weren't the two lint items numbered sequentially? That's when MacFarland realized that something was missing.

He searched through the folder, several times, but he could not find what he was looking for. He dug out his preliminary copies of the case report. Yes, there it was. Item 136 - pine needles with traces of fire retardant chemical residue, found on the victim's left shoe. He also found the notes the Crime Lab had included on recent uses of the fire retardant, TetraKO.

All of that was missing from the final case file. He stared at the piles of papers sitting on the table in front of him, his face blank with disbelief.

Someone had tampered with the evidence.

## Chapter 29

*Saturday, December 12, 2155 Hours*

"You made copies of the report?" said Pierson, trying to repress her exasperation.

"You're missing the important point," MacFarland said. "Someone has tampered with the evidence."

"Yeah, and the fact that you made copies proves that you had the file," she said. "I only intended that you look at it. See? The operational word is look. L. O. O. K. Look, not copy."

"Will you calm down? We have a bigger problem. Someone is manipulating evidence."

Pierson did calm down, and grabbed the list of Crime Lab evidence. She then looked at the earlier Crime Lab report for Item 136. "Okay, it's missing. There are surely several back-ups to correct this. First, the Crime Lab should have their own internal records. Second, the Records Section should have back-ups for the files. Third, there should be some physical evidence in the Inventory Control Unit. The report may be in error, but the evidence should still be there. And of course, the technician who prepared this report should be able to confirm what he originally found." Pierson spread her fingers in dismissal. "So stop over-reacting. We can get to the bottom of this. It's probably just a minor error in transcription." She looked at the kitchen clock. "It's late, Mac, let's go to bed. We can discuss this in the morning."

MacFarland shook his head. "I can't just let this go, Cyn, not even until morning. There are missing documents also, Cyn. This isn't simply a case of someone mistakenly double entering an item. Someone doesn't want anyone to know where Freeman was killed."

"Assuming you're right, someone in the department did this. Who would have reason to hide that information? Who would have the means to get access to the records, the evidence, everything that needs to be changed?"

"How the hell should I know?" asked MacFarland. "I haven't been there in several years. I don't know the players, the politics, who has power and who doesn't. That's where you come in."

"Me? Haven't I done enough for you? Hell, Mac, are you trying to get me suspended? Chamberlain won't put up with me interfering with another detective's case. I sure know I'd raise holy hell if someone interfered with one of my cases."

MacFarland got up and poured himself and Pierson a cup of coffee. She tried to push away the cup of coffee. "Oh, Christ in a cape, Mac, it's after midnight! This is why you're so wound up. Lay off the coffee."

MacFarland ignored her protest. He knew that sooner or later, Pierson would be drinking the coffee. She only had two addictions, and coffee was one of them. The other was solving crimes. "I'm not asking you to interfere with Iverson's case. In fact, I think someone else is already interfering with it. Maybe talk to Iverson,

see if he is feeling some pressure."

Pierson started sipping her coffee. "He has seemed grumpier than usual," she said. "He snaps at everyone, including me."

"Talk to him."

Finally Pierson nodded. "Yeah, let me see if I can get him alone. But I'm not going to mention any of the missing documents. If he is involved, I want more proof before I start fingering a fellow officer."

"I understand," said MacFarland. "You have to work with these guys. I don't want you creating enemies. Besides, as I said, I don't think Iverson is the guilty party." MacFarland suddenly had an insight. "Didn't the department recently civilianize some of the sections?"

Pierson nodded thoughtfully. "It's been an on-going process for the past several years," she said.

"What about the Crime Lab?"

Pierson pursed her lips. "That was privatized a year after you left the force."

MacFarland felt his throat tighten with the tension of his hunch. "Who is running it? What company?"

Pierson furrowed her brow. "Hold on, it's on the tip of my tongue. Damn, what is it? Oh, Colorado Forensics Bureau."

The name didn't ring any bells in MacFarland's mind. "Do you know anything about them? How long have they been in business?"

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, Mac, I don't know all this shit! Let me dig around and see if I can find anything out. I do know that CFB has been around for a while. They've done work with the Crime Lab before, I know that. Do you think they might have made the mistakes?"

"I don't think these are mistakes, Cyn. I think someone in the Crime Lab doesn't want certain evidence coming to light. The question is, who?"

Pierson sat quietly for a few moments, thinking about what MacFarland had said. "Are you now convinced that Maureen Freeman is not the killer?" she asked.

MacFarland got up and started pacing around the kitchen. "At first, I thought she was guilty. There were some quirks in the case, but nothing that a good prosecutor couldn't handle. But the more I dig into this, the more improbable it seems that she is the one who shot her husband. Here's the things that don't add up for me.

"First, where was Freeman killed? Not around the house. There's no blood evidence that he bled out anywhere around the house. The casings for the two shots that killed him have not been found. And I doubt that Maureen could actually carry her husband--"

"Maureen Freeman is actually a fairly strong woman," said Pierson. "But I agree with you, her husband weighs about fifty or sixty pounds more than her. I just don't want you underestimating what a woman can accomplish when she wants to."

"Whose side are you on, for God's sake?"

Pierson finished her coffee and, glancing at the clock, she shrugged and poured herself another cup. "I'm on the side of truth, Mac, always on the side of truth."

MacFarland shook his head in bewilderment. "Okay, that's all well and good.

Do you mind if I continue?"

Pierson smiled and waved him on.

"Second, it appears he went fishing, and presumably caught some fish. At least there was evidence that fish were gutted and cleaned. Yet there were no fish found.

"Third, at one time there was evidence that he had been around pine trees that had been coated with a very specific fire retardant. We know of at least thirty sites around Denver where that retardant was recently used, but none of those spots are in the city limits of Denver. This would indicate to me that the victim was killed near one of these spray sites and then planted in the victim's garage."

Pierson stared at him, waiting for him to go on. When MacFarland remained silent, she took a sip of coffee, then put her cup down.

"Okay, here's what you're not taking into account, Mac. Only the suspect's prints were found on the gun, which was registered to her. Her alibi for the time period in which the victim was killed and subsequently discovered is pretty lame. She claims she was alone in the house for several days and had no occasion to go out. The suspect admits that she moved the body and wrapped it up in a blanket that could have planted all of the debris that might indicate where he was killed. The suspect had a motive for killing her husband--"

"What was that?" demanded MacFarland.

Pierson scowled at her former partner. "Aside from the fact that just about every wife at some point wants to kill her husband, it appears that she was suspected of stealing money at her husband's business."

"Yeah, that was Newsome's testimony," said MacFarland, recalling the interview notes. "Something about that guy doesn't sit right with me. I just can't put my finger on it."

"You suspect everyone, Mac."

His expression was deadpan. "Usually, everyone is guilty of something," he said.

Pierson laughed, then picked up the empty cups and put them in the sink. "Despite the circumstantial evidence implicating Maureen Freeman, I tend to agree with you. I think she is being set up, probably by the real killer. So how are you going to find him?"

MacFarland stood up and headed slowly for the hallway. "I'm not," he said. "I'm no longer a detective. I just sell hot dogs. It's up to you guys to solve the case."



## Chapter 30

*Monday, December 14, 1222 Hours*

Pierson went in early on Monday morning to return the file that she had borrowed on Saturday. As far as she could tell, Iverson never knew it was missing. She tried to get some of the answers to MacFarland's questions, but she was generally unsuccessful. Nor was she able to find any time or opportunity to meet privately with Alan Iverson.

Meanwhile, MacFarland went about his business, selling hot dogs and giving away food to his homeless friends. He kept a lookout for Jerry Baker, but it was not until just after noon on Monday that Baker approached MacFarland's corner. MacFarland had mixed feelings about seeing the lawyer. On the one hand, he wanted to give him his assessment of the case. Surely the lawyer had access to the file, but would he know about the missing evidence? MacFarland knew that any doubts about the integrity of the evidence could be used to get the case thrown out of court. The problem was, how would Baker explain how he learned of this evidence tampering? There was no way of bringing that out into the open without getting MacFarland and, more importantly, Pierson into a lot of trouble. *Am I willing to go that far*, MacFarland asked himself.

As the lawyer neared the cart, MacFarland finally resigned himself to telling Baker that he couldn't help with the case. *I'm no longer a detective*, he reminded himself.

So MacFarland kept his concerns about the TetraKO evidence to himself. He described his other concerns with the case, but Baker had already formed very similar conclusions. "I can create enough doubt in the jury's minds," he said, "to probably get an acquittal. I will just have to work harder to get the right people on the jury."

MacFarland was very familiar with this aspect of court proceedings. Lawyers for both sides tried to get the jury stacked with people who would be sympathetic to their side of the verdict--defense lawyers wanted jurors who would doubt that the defendant could ever even harm a fly, while prosecutors wanted people who really wanted to see justice done. Each side could challenge the other side's choices.

"I'm convinced your client is innocent," said MacFarland quietly.

Baker looked up from his bratwurst. "But you can't help me?" he said.

"I don't see what I can do," said MacFarland. "It really is up to the police to gather the evidence."

Baker did not do anything to conceal his disgust. "The police only gather evidence to prove that the person they have is guilty," he said angrily. "Don't lecture me about leaving anything up to the police. That's why I hire my own private eyes."

MacFarland felt uncomfortable, and as he usually did, he started wiping the surfaces of his cart. Just as Baker was about to leave, MacFarland looked up and coughed. "There is one other thing that bothers me about the case," he said. "I'm

not sure how you can use it, but it struck me as odd."

Baker stopped, his body radiating his impatience. "What is it?"

"The interview with Brian Newsome," said MacFarland. "He didn't come right out and accuse her of theft, but Newsome sure seemed to implicate Maureen Freeman in possible losses at her husband's business. That seemed to give the police a motive for her to kill her husband. According to Newsome, Freeman was going to turn his wife in." He hesitated a couple of seconds, then added, "Something just doesn't jive in all that."

Baker came back to the cart. "Newsome's testimony bothers me a lot," he said. "But I find it odd that you give any credence to Newsome's statement at all."

MacFarland stared at Baker, frowning. "What do you mean?"

Baker barked a quick ironic laugh. "Oh, I thought you knew. Given your history, I am surprised you believe one word that Newsome says."

Now MacFarland was really puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"You mean you didn't know? Brian Newsome is related to Norris Peterson. They're cousins."

## Chapter 31

*Tuesday, December 15, 0911 Hours*

Baker's revelation left MacFarland speechless and conflicted. Baker had wandered off back to his office without MacFarland making any commitment to help him, even though Baker pressed him once more to do so. MacFarland said he needed to think about it, and that's what he did. For the rest of the afternoon and throughout the evening. The fact that the business partner of a murdered man was related to the man who had killed his wife and ruined his life did not logically imply that Peterson was involved in the crime. Yet that was exactly what MacFarland wanted to believe. MacFarland was shocked when he realized how much he wanted to blame Peterson for the jeweler's murder. Fortunately, his training and professionalism forced him to admit that there really was no connection between Peterson and the death of Otto Freeman.

But supposed Norris Peterson was involved in the murder? What exactly would his involvement be?

He wanted to discuss this new development with Pierson, but she came home and avoided him. She didn't want dinner. Instead she went to her room and shut the door. He knocked at her door and said he wanted to talk to her, but she told him to leave her alone. MacFarland shrugged, and went to bed.

He did not get an early start the next morning. He overslept, and when he went down to the kitchen to prepare his product, he saw how late he was going to be. He didn't think that it would matter much if he didn't go downtown at all. There were just ten days until Christmas, and the courts were practically deserted. On the other hand, he imagined Rufus, standing around waiting for him, cups of coffee in hand. He couldn't leave his friend like that.

He finished loading up his cart. He came back into the kitchen to get his coat. Pierson entered the kitchen just as he was about to leave. "I thought you had already left for work," he said.

"I thought you had already left too," she replied.

He smiled. "Guess we're both running late this morning. I wanted to talk to you about something Jerry Baker told me. Can you come by sometime today? I'll bribe you and your partner with free dogs."

She sat down wearily at the table. "I'm not going in today," she said. "I've been suspended."

He was not sure he correctly heard what she said. He closed the door he had just opened, and returned to the table. "Did you say you've been suspended?"

She looked up, her expression cold and withdrawn. "It seems that Iverson did notice that his case file was missing. It also seems that he complained to Chamberlain about someone taking it."

"Oh, Christ, I'm sorry. How did he find out that you took it?"

"I told him, of course," snapped Pierson. "It's bad enough I'm breaking rules for you Mac. I'm not going to compound it by covering up my actions. When I heard that Chamberlain was going to instigate an investigation, I went to him and

told him that I took the file."

"Did you tell him why you took it?"

Pierson gave MacFarland an exasperated stare. "Don't worry, I didn't mention anything about you seeing the file. I don't take friends down when I fall."

MacFarland was annoyed with her suspicions about his motive. You would think that after knowing someone for more than a decade, she would have better insight into what made him tick. Then he realized that he himself didn't know why this case had caught his attention either. Now he knew that his inner sixth sense, his detective insight, had told him right from the beginning that Norris Peterson was involved in the case. He didn't know how he was involved, but he would find out. So far the only thing linking Peterson to the murder was his cousin's business relationship with the victim, and that link was enough for MacFarland.

Now was not a good time for Pierson to be suspended from the department.

"How long are you suspended for?"

"Two weeks. I get to spend the fucking holidays at home! I think he suspended me more to give Iverson time to cool down than because he is really pissed at me. Iverson, the poor bastard, is really being fucked over by someone at the top. The DA is pissed at the department for screwing up evidence. Those pine needles you were worried about? Turns out that was evidence from another case that got mixed up with the stuff from Freeman's garage."

MacFarland looked at Pierson in shock. "You're shitting me! How could that happen?"

"Who the fuck knows? Supposedly some newbie in the lab didn't follow protocols and delivered a sample bag to the wrong work station."

"I can't believe that happened," said MacFarland. It was all too convenient to be coincidence. He tried to recall all the documents he had reviewed. "What case were the pine needles from?"

Pierson looked tired. "I don't know, Mac. I didn't think it was important enough to interrupt Chamberlain ripping into me to ask about that."

MacFarland shook his head in bewilderment. Then his memory clicked into place. He could see the evidence sheet with the mention of the pine needles. "Did they exclude the fish scales also?"

Pierson's eyes narrowed. "No, they didn't. Remind me why that is important?"

"The pine needles and the fish scales were both found on the victim's left shoe. Seems odd that they would claim the pine needles were now from another case, but not the fish scales. Is the Crime Lab that sloppy?" MacFarland knew now that it wasn't really pine needles they were worried about. It was the addendum list of possible sites where the chemical retardant had been used in the past several months. The actual crime scene was on that list!

Pierson shook her head. "No, they are not. Now I see why Iverson was so upset when he found his case file gone. He knows someone is tampering with his case, but he doesn't know who or why. Shit, what have I walked into?"

"I don't know, Cyn, but the more I see of this case, the more I am convinced that you were right all along. Maureen Freeman is not the killer. But someone doesn't want us to know who the killer really is. That someone has the power and influence to turn good cops bad."

Pierson stared at him, realization suddenly dawning in her eyes. "You know who this person is, Mac?"

MacFarland nodded slowly. "I think I do, though I don't know exactly what the connection is. But the money and power behind this case is the cousin of Freeman's business partner. None other than Norris Peterson."

## Chapter 32

*Tuesday, December 15, 1145 Hours*

MacFarland and Pierson spent the next hour discussing MacFarland's belief that Peterson was involved in this crime. Pierson could not deny that Peterson had some connection to the case--after all, Brian Newsome was related to Norris Peterson. Newsome had been identified as a possible person of interest in the case, especially when he had balked at releasing the financial records of the jewelry store. But after a day or so and some cat and mouse games with Newsome's lawyer, Iverson got his hands on the books for Newsome Jewelry Company. It didn't take long to find that there actually was over \$50,000.00 missing, which Iverson found sufficient motive for murder.

The problem was, who had taken the money? According to Newsome, Otto Freeman had hired his wife on a part time basis to manage the books. Although Newsome questioned her qualifications, according to his statement he had acceded to Freeman's decision to maintain harmony in the partnership. "I try to bend over backwards to make this business a success," he had said.

Apparently he did not bend over enough, for several employees stated that they overheard numerous arguments between the two partners over the continued employment of Maureen Freeman. On some occasions, the arguments took a turn towards violence as chairs were crashed and tables overturned. Neither man, however, ever physically assaulted the other one. The outbursts were usually short-lived. Even so, the animosity between the two men was quite worrisome to many of the employees.

As Pierson and MacFarland discussed the case, MacFarland realized that while Newsome had a motive for murder, he couldn't find any way to tie Peterson into it. Yet clearly, Peterson must be involved. Once before, Peterson had used his vast wealth to buy jurors and Assistant District Attorneys, to influence cops, to subvert the legal system. If he did it once, why couldn't he do it again?

MacFarland could think of no reason to doubt Peterson's involvement.

All he had to do was prove it.

Even though it was late in the morning, he drove his cart downtown and set up at his location. Jacinto waved at him, curiously glad to see his competitor still at his corner. Rufus was nowhere in sight, of course, since MacFarland was at least two or three hours later than usual. Rufus was not the kind of guy to stick around waiting for someone. He had "things to do, people to see, decisions to make."

MacFarland pulled out his cell phone and called the number on the business card that Jerry Baker had given him. When Baker answered, MacFarland said simply, "I think I want to help you."

Baker cut the call short and said he would meet MacFarland in person. Fifteen minutes later, Baker walked up to MacFarland's cart. "A bratwurst," he said. "With all the trimmings."

"I provide the brat," said MacFarland. "You put the trimmings you want on

yourself."

Baker smiled and took the bratwurst. "So you decided to be my PI," he said. "I am glad to hear that. I didn't want to discuss it on the phone. Never know who is listening."

MacFarland was surprised by that, since he doubted anyone would listen to Baker's phone conversations. But stranger things had happened in the world. Just maybe Baker's paranoia was justified. MacFarland nodded. "There's several things about the case that don't seem right. Have you seen the police reports?"

"I should be getting them today or tomorrow," Baker said. "If you've already seen them, I don't want to know anything about that. On the other hand... is there something I should be looking for?"

"Two main things. The first thing I noticed is that the crime didn't occur at the Freeman residence."

"I suspected that. But if not there, where did it happen?"

"I don't know," said MacFarland. "But I think I can find out. It might require some leg work, though."

"I can cover your expenses. We'll work something out for your time, too."

MacFarland smiled. "I'm not really a licensed private investigator, Jerry. I'm just a hot dog vendor."

"If you can solve this case, Mac, you'll be a life saver."

MacFarland smiled grimly. "If I can find the person who is really responsible for this crime and put him in jail, that will be more than enough payment for me."

## Chapter 33

*Friday, December 18, 2325 Hours*

It wasn't snowing in Denver yet. Up in the mountains, on the ski slopes, the weather experts predicted more than a foot and a half of snow--the ideal present for all of Colorado's skiers. Down on the Front Range communities from Fort Collins to Castle Rock, it wasn't cold enough to form snow--just a wet, messy slush.

Once he made his decision to help Jerry Baker and Maureen Freeman, MacFarland found himself in a quandary. While he knew what he would have done when he was on the police force, now that he was a civilian he found himself facing a lot of constraints. First, he didn't have the legal authority to help him get through doors, in front of people, or access to records. He didn't have the tools that he had depended on when he had been a detective. He didn't have the contacts he used to have.

While he lacked all these things, he discovered that he lacked something even more critical.

He lacked confidence in himself.

Two years as a homeless drunk took a lot out of you.

On the other hand, he had stopped drinking. He had a place to live, a job to do. Wasn't that proof enough that he could overcome all his limitations?

He smiled to himself. Yes, he may be lacking all of the things that gave a policeman an edge, but he still had some things that were uniquely his.

His mind, his determination, his skills.

Where to begin? He had the list of sites where the flame retardant had been applied. He could start going to site after site, but he knew that would be a pointless exercise. The list of sites was not as specific as he had hoped. Was the fire retardant used on actual burn spots, on structures, or on test sites? He only knew that it must have been used on pine trees. Douglas fir trees, *Pseudotsuga menziesii* to be exact. He had thought it would be easy to find a place where Douglas firs grew, there was nearby water, and recent signs of a fire.

On the contrary, finding such spots was a lot more difficult than he thought. He had spent most of Wednesday checking out just one of the sites on the list he got from the Crime Lab. After several hours traipsing along the shores of the Georgetown Reservoir and finding nothing, he realized that he had better find a more effective means of locating the site where Freeman had been killed. No wonder Iverson had not put out a lot of effort to find the place where Freeman had gone fishing. It was not a job that one man could reasonably do by himself. MacFarland was not even sure a search team would be successful.

Then MacFarland had an insight, what Pierson called one of his brain farts.



## Chapter 34

*Friday, December 18, 2330 Hours*

*Not a good evening to break into someone's house*, thought MacFarland. A cloudy night with no precipitation would have been ideal. But he couldn't put off this task another night. Pierson was still pissed off at him for "causing" her suspension, so he found it prudent to avoid any contact with her until she went to bed. Fortunately, she went to bed early.

He donned dark clothes, grabbed a pocket flashlight and his lock picks, and quietly left through the back door.

The Freemans lived on Quitman Street over in the Sloan Lake area. MacFarland parked a couple of blocks away from the house, then walked over to Quitman Street. The block was deserted and quiet, except for the soft splatter of rain on the pavement and the pinging of drops off of barren tree branches. MacFarland went to the side of the house and tried to open the gate to the backyard. It was locked, forcing him to pull himself over the wood slat fence. He lowered himself to the ground, making sure he didn't leave any footprints in the moist earth. He paused and listened for any indications that a neighbor had heard him scale the fence. A moment later, he was at the back door. Yellow police tape created an X over the doorway. He peered in through the door's window. He could make out a pair of men's boots on a low shelf, and several coats hanging on hooks against one wall. He took out his set of lock picks and inserted a torsion wrench. Then using a rake pick, he began to jiggle the pins until he found the shear line. In less than a minute, he had the door opened. He stepped inside, avoiding the police tape, and closed the door.

Once inside, he placed plastic booties over his shoes, then wiped up the moisture he had brought in with a paper towel. He put the towel in a baggie and put it in his pocket. The house was still considered a crime scene, and he didn't want any obvious indications that he had entered the premises. He took out his flashlight and began to move quietly through the house.

He did not have any specific objectives, but began to check out the spots where someone might record planned events. He found a calendar on the wall of the kitchen, but it contained notes and events that would be of interest to Maureen: dinner parties (all now cancelled, since she was in jail), work schedules, and birthdays. He didn't recognize any of the names associated with the birthdays. He did note that the last work day listed on the calendar was November 6th. There were some subsequent days listed, but they had been crossed out.

The house was a large sprawling ranch house. The house still had the smell of mountain flowers. He noticed one of those automatic deodorizers in the kitchen, the kind that sprayed out a whiff of scent every time you went by it. He went from the kitchen into a dining room, and from there into a living room. The furniture looked quite modern and oddly uncomfortable. The room did not look like it was used much, but rather was intended to create an impression of middle class

success. Floor to ceiling windows made the room appear open to the front yard. At the moment, draperies closed off the view.

MacFarland saw a hallway and went down that. He found an office on his left. Judging by the furniture, it probably was used mostly by Otto Freeman. MacFarland searched the desk for any signs of a calendar, diary, or other item that might record the man's whereabouts. An empty section of the desk showed where a computer had once been placed. Undoubtedly the computer was with the police. MacFarland had the impression that Freeman wasn't the type of man to keep really personal information on the computer.

He searched the piles of papers and file folders that cluttered Freeman's desk. Then, stacked up with a bunch of tablets and a bundle of three by five note cards, he saw what he was looking for. A small four by six inch notebook with the words Fishing Log embossed in gold letters on the front. MacFarland began to scan through the notebook, leafing through until he came to the latest entries. "November 14 - WA, Gunnison;" "November 21 - Gross Reservoir, WA;" and finally, the last entry was "November 26 - WA, Gross Res."

MacFarland now knew where Freeman had been killed.

## Chapter 35

*Friday, December 18, 2358 Hours*

As MacFarland stared at the small notebook, one question nagged at him. Why didn't Iverson and his detectives find this? Just a day earlier, he had been willing to forgive Iverson for any mistakes on the case when he realized how hard it would be to find the true murder scene. But overlooking this was simply inexcusable. Was Iverson deliberately trying to sink this case? Was it possible he was working with someone to get Mrs. Freeman convicted? Or was he just stupid?

MacFarland would rather believe that Iverson had been corrupted than to think that the man was simply incompetent. Corruption was a lesser sin than incompetence.

The notebook not only pointed out where Freeman had been, and probably the location of the true crime scene, but it also gave a strong indication of who the murderer really was. Someone whose initials were WA.

Unfortunately, "WA" did not match up with either Brian Newsome or Norris Peterson. Clearly, there was a third player in this drama.

MacFarland was about to put the notebook back when he had a disturbing thought. If he left the notebook here, it would certainly aid in proving the innocence of Maureen Freeman by demonstrating that her husband was with someone else the day he was killed. On the other hand, evidence in this case had a tendency to disappear. What would happen if this notebook also ended up missing?

Unless MacFarland could identify WA and apprehend him, Maureen Freeman might still be found guilty for a crime she did not commit.

He pocketed the notebook and was about to leave when he noticed a flashing red glow on the window blinds. He turned off his flashlight and went over to the window, cautiously looking out. A police car, its lights flashing, was pulling up in front of the house. MacFarland swore to himself and hurried towards the back door of the house. As he closed the back door quietly behind him, he heard someone climbing over the front gate, just as he had done half an hour earlier. MacFarland raced to the back fence of the yard. The fence was a decorative stone wall, about eight feet tall. A brick grill was positioned about four feet from the back fence. MacFarland jumped up onto the grill, then leaped for the fence. He swung himself over, dropping to the ground in the alley. He raced across the alley and jumped the fence of a house on Raleigh Street. He headed for the side gate of this yard, just as the cop who had climbed into the Freeman's back yard was starting to climb over the Freeman's fence. The cop shouted to his partner to drive around to Raleigh as he pulled himself over the wall. MacFarland did not wait for the cop to catch up with him. He opened the gate, then raced around the front of the house. He ran down past two more houses, then went through another gate into back yard of that house. He climbed over another fence, this one a chain link fence, and then within another minute, he was back on Quitman

Street. There was no sign of the police car, which had probably raced around the block to intercept him on Raleigh Street. MacFarland had parked a block further east on Perry Street. Rather than walk on the street, MacFarland hurried into another yard, scaled the back fence, and came out on Perry Street. His truck was parked two houses down on the east side of the street. Fortunately, other vehicles cluttered the street, so it did not immediately stand out. But he knew it would only be a matter of time before the patrol car made a sweep of the surrounding streets, looking either for someone on foot or for a car that did not belong in the neighborhood.

He got to his truck, then listened for any sound or sight of the police vehicle. He wanted nothing more than to start his engine and get away from here, but he knew that caution was far more critical. The police car would circle the streets of the neighborhood with its lights off, as slowly and quietly as it could, yet instantly able to respond to any movement or vehicle leaving the scene. He hoped that the patrolmen hadn't called for backup.

After ten minutes, he saw the patrol car pass by at the end of the block, heading east. He waited a moment, then started his engine. He drove up two more blocks, turned west, and headed towards Sheridan. Once he reached Sheridan, he turned south and drove until he reached Hampden. It was only when he was heading east on Hampden that he began to relax.

This was the first time he had ever tried to get away from police. He was annoyed with himself that the feelings of anxiety that he had felt were actually quite exhilarating.

## Chapter 36

*Monday, December 21, 1030 Hours*

Monday morning came around and MacFarland thankfully accepted the cup of coffee from Rufus. Then, as Rufus prepared to take his hot dogs and leave, MacFarland put a hand on his arm and asked him to stay. "I have a favor to ask, Rufus."

"Eh, boss? What do you need?"

MacFarland bit his lip. "I need to go do something, but I don't want to leave my cart unattended. Do you think you could watch my cart for me?"

"Me? You want me to be in charge of your hot dog cart?"

Being in charge wasn't quite the way MacFarland thought about it, but he decided not to argue the point. "Yes, I do. Make sure the homeless people who come around get something to eat. Sell to regular customers if they come around. I don't think it's going to be very busy, given the weather and the fact that this is a holiday week."

Rufus looked up and down the street, as if he were trying to predict how many customers would come along. MacFarland didn't think he needed to tell him that most of the customers came out of the parking garage or from the courthouse. If there were any customers, Rufus would discover that soon enough.

"Sure, boss, I can take care of the cart. How much do I charge people?"

MacFarland pointed to the sign posted beneath the condiments shelf. "Everything is listed there, Rufus. Here's some money to make change in case people only have large bills. Lots of people use a hot dog stand as a bank to get change. Don't accept any hundred dollar bills. If a customer has a hundred note, just give them the food, okay?"

"Whatever you say, boss."

MacFarland handed Rufus the money pouch, shook his hand, and headed back to his truck. He unhooked the trailer, then drove out towards the Cherry Creek Mall. He parked in the garage and headed into the mall. Crowds of people swarmed through the mall. Christmas decorations adorned every doorway, hung from the ceiling, and emblazoned every wall. Holiday music blared from the stores, and in the distance, MacFarland could hear a choir singing reverently, trying to imbue the holiday with a more serious tenor.

As he jostled his way through the crowds, he called Baker.

"Jerry, I'm at the Cherry Creek Mall. Going to interview the store employees. What can you tell me about them, the business, anything that might help?"

"Hmmm. I don't know much. Hold on, I got something here. Some notes I got from Maureen. Yeah, here we are. The Newsome Jewelry Store only recently moved into the mall. For years prior to the move, the store was located in the Cherry Creek area on a side street that did not get as much Cherry Creek traffic as the owners thought they needed for success. Newsome did some studies that showed if the store was located inside the mall, the store's sales would increase by more than forty percent and profits would nearly double. Otto Freeman was

opposed to the move according to Maureen. That was one of the things they argued about. She said that so far they don't know if Newsome's estimates are correct."

"Thanks, Jerry. What have you got about the staff?"

"Not much more than what was in the police interviews. My PI hasn't talked to them yet."

"Yeah, well, that's what I'm here to do."

As MacFarland approached the store, he had to admit that the store appeared successful. MacFarland did not know what made a jewelry store profitable, but Newsome Jewelry looked like it met all the relevant criteria. There were four sales associates inside the store when MacFarland entered, two men and two women. Oh, wait a minute. No customers. Given the crowds outside, the relative calm inside the store seemed disjointed. As he entered, all four of the associates turned to check him out. He felt like a rabbit surrounded by wolves.

One of the associates, a woman with the body of a Sumerian fertility goddess, approached him and asked if she could help him. She was five foot five inches tall, looked like she weighed approximately one hundred thirty pounds. She had large blue eyes, a beautiful smile, and a narrow face. Her hair flowed down past her shoulders in gentle folds. Her erotic physique was subdued by a navy jacket and skirt, with a white lacy blouse. Even so, her clothes did nothing to hide her large bosom and broad hips.

MacFarland struggled to look only at her name tag. Laura Rogers. He recalled her name on the police interview list. As he recalled, the police had only interviewed three of the employees, one woman and two men. The fourth employee, another woman, hadn't been interviewed. He wondered why.

"Hello Miss Rogers," he said in a pleasant tone. "My name is Mark MacFarland. I'd like to ask you a few questions about the recent tragedy." He handed her a card with his name and telephone number on it. She took it and without glancing at it, slid the card under a display case on the counter.

The Sumerian fertility goddess eyed him suspiciously. "Are you a reporter? A cop? We've already talked to the police."

"I'm not with the police," he said. "I'm just trying to help Mrs. Freeman."

Her face momentarily transformed into a scowl that made her look a lot less attractive. She recovered quickly and gave him one of her saleswoman smiles, which MacFarland now took to be part of her professional mask. "Do they really think Maureen killed poor Mr. Freeman?"

Since Maureen's arrest had been all over the news, MacFarland did not believe that this was news to Miss Rogers. He ignored her question. "Did Otto Freeman have any enemies or people he had problems with?"

Laura Rogers stifled a bitter laugh. "You mean besides his wife? No, I don't think so. Well, maybe with Mr. Newsome. They seemed to be arguing a lot lately. It was mostly over Mr. Freeman letting his wife work here."

"Did Mr. Newsome ever get violent with Mr. Freeman?"

"Sure you're not a cop? You sure sound like one."

MacFarland smiled. "No, I'm just a small businessman like Otto Freeman, trying to help out a friend in trouble."

"I'm not sure I can be of any help. I usually tried to avoid being around when

Brian and Otto were around. They didn't get physical, but sometimes the yelling would drive customers away."

"Do you know what they argued about? I mean, besides Mrs. Freeman working here."

"Mostly the books not balancing. It had us all worried for a while. We were afraid that Freeman would think one of us was stealing."

"How much are we talking about?"

"I don't know," said Laura Rogers. "All I know is it wasn't me who was skimming the cash drawer."

MacFarland was about to press her for more information about the missing money when a second associate came over. MacFarland smiled at the man, who had the body of a Russian Matryoshka doll, broad head, no neck, protruding midsection. He looked like he was in his early fifties, of Chinese descent, approximately five foot five inches and one hundred eighty-five pounds. He had close cut salt and pepper hair and herring bone glasses. "Couldn't help overhearing you asking about Maureen," he said as he came near. "Nice lady. Nice lady. Too bad about what happened. We will miss Mr. Freeman around here. He always had a good joke, every morning, a good joke." He held out his hand to MacFarland. "I am Devon Brooks. I know. I look Chinese. That's because I am Chinese. Everyone thinks I should be Harry Wong, but my name is Devon Brooks. Third generation. My grandparents came over, in the early thirties. Wanted to fit right in, so we became the Brooks. We've been the Brooks ever since."

MacFarland shook his hand and tried to steer the conversation back in a more productive direction. "Miss Rogers was mentioning that there was some concern about discrepancies in the books?"

Devon Brooks nodded, a difficult thing to do considering he had practically no neck at all. "That's just all it is, minor, unimportant mistakes. Easy to do with computers you know. Type in the wrong number, don't check the error catching routines because you think the computer makes everything all accurate. It's people you know, people make the mistakes. The computers just do what you tell them. I'm sure it wasn't Maureen's fault. After all, she was the one who found the discrepancy. If she was taking the money, why would she bring it up? Doesn't make sense. Just doesn't make sense. Though she did think one of us was responsible. Too bad about that. But it wasn't one of us. She was wrong there. It was just an error in entering data on the computer, that's all."

The other male employee finally walked over to where they were talking. He walked with his hips pushed forward, as though he were a bumper car, looking for someone to bang into. "Are you here to shop, sir?" he asked MacFarland. "If not, I'm going to have to ask you to leave. I think you are frightening our customers away."

"It's okay, Craig," said Devon Brooks, using a much more conciliatory tone and rolling a step or two back from the trio. MacFarland got an instantaneous understanding of the pecking order in this establishment. "We're just having a friendly chat. Just a friendly chat."

Craig glared angrily at Brooks, who bobbled another step back. "Brian told us not to talk to anyone," Craig insisted. He turned towards MacFarland. "If you

have any questions, you can direct them to Brian Newsome's lawyer. Now, if you don't mind, we have customers to take care of."

MacFarland looked around at the empty store. He considered confronting Craig, then decided that he had the information he wanted. He shrugged, then gave Brooks and Rogers a parting smile. "If you think of anything more, please give me a call."

Rogers gave him another of her fake friendly smiles. Then, as a young couple came into the store, the fertility goddess hurried over towards them.



## Chapter 37

*Tuesday, December 22, 1519 Hours*

MacFarland didn't say anything to Rufus about the amount of product missing from his cart and the lack of compensatory cash in the money pouch. Rufus' only explanation when MacFarland returned Monday afternoon was that there were "lots of hun'reds today, boss." MacFarland didn't think that there were that many people wandering around downtown Denver with hundred dollar bills on them, but he decided that it wasn't worth making an issue out of it. "I hope it was mostly homeless people who had the hundred dollar bills," he said.

"Oh, no, boss, I gave the poor people dogs for free. It was the lawyer types with all the big bills."

The thought of giving free food to people who could easily afford it rankled MacFarland, but again he kept silent.

On Tuesday morning, MacFarland added about thirty extra hot dogs and brats to his inventory, just in case he had to go off and interview more people. When Rufus arrived with coffee, however, Rufus said he couldn't watch the cart today. "Got important meetings to go to, boss." MacFarland never knew what these important meetings were. Even when they had both been on the street together, Rufus had his meetings to go to. MacFarland had made a point of never prying into where and what those meetings were. Some things are better not known.

With the exception of the homeless people, who came up to the cart throughout the day, carefully avoiding any regular customers as well as each other, MacFarland had very few customers. There was no courts in session this week, at least as far as he knew. He was able to listen to several hours of his Spanish language lessons, and was fairly convinced that he could converse with any Hispanic four-year old on a fairly equal basis. He was trying to decide whether to call it a day when he felt his phone vibrating in his pocket. He turned off his CD player and answered the phone.

"Mr. MacFarland?" A woman's high pitched voice. He detected a hint of urgency in her tone.

"Yes," he replied. "How can I help you?"

"You came in the store yesterday, right? Asking about Maureen Freeman?"

He nodded, then said, "Yes, that's right."

"We didn't get a chance to talk. I'm Brea Smith. I work in Newsome Jewelry. I got your card from Laura." Brea Smith was a short, round woman with a pear-shaped head and an infectious smile. She smiled even when she was trying to be serious. He suspected that she was the top salesperson at Newsome Jewelry.

"How can I help you, Miss Smith?"

"Craig--that's Craig Meacham--the older man at the store. He doesn't want us talking to you. But when I heard you were trying to help Maureen, I knew I had to call you."

"I appreciate that very much, Miss Smith. What did you want to tell me?"

"Just that I'm pretty sure--no, I'm certain--that Maureen Freeman did not

take any money from the store. The fifty thousand that's missing--I think Mr. Newsome took that money. That's what he and Mr. Freeman were fighting about. It's Maureen Freeman who discovered the shortage. I'm pretty sure it wasn't Mrs. Freeman who killed her husband. I think it might have been Mr. Newsome." Her voice became muffled, and then she said, "I have to go."

MacFarland put his phone away and stared over at the courthouse. He thought about what Brea Smith had told him. It did not constitute proof, but her information certainly hinted at motive. He wondered if he should call Jerry Baker with this news.

He pulled out his phone, stared at it a moment, then put it back in his pocket. Baker needed something more substantial than the speculations of a store employee. He would need something that would stand up in court. Also, where did "WA" fit in?

MacFarland cleaned up his cart and prepared to go home. He hoped that Rufus didn't have any meetings planned for the following day.

## Chapter 38

*Friday, December 25, 1200 Hours*

He couldn't believe it was already Christmas.

MacFarland had given serious thought to finding some pretext to avoid going over to Stefanie and Randy's house for Christmas dinner. He even considered joining Rufus Headley for one of the Denver Rescue Mission dinners. *That would be a worthy use of my time*, he thought. But eventually, he simply gave in and showed up at her front door a little after noon, consciously aware that he hadn't gotten anyone a Christmas present. He compensated with bringing apple cider. He didn't want to be empty-handed.

The Coopers lived in Highlands Ranch. Though he had been there several times, he always got lost trying to find their house. He preferred his streets rectilinear. Highlands Ranch did not seem to know the meaning of straight streets. Fortunately, getting there was fairly simple, since all he had to do was take University south until it started behaving in a non-Denverian fashion. Denver streets were well behaved, following nice rectilinear patterns. Once University passed under C-470, it started misbehaving. That's when MacFarland could count on getting lost.

But this time, unfortunately, he found the house with little difficulty.

Kaitlyn and Ryan both greeted him with unfeigned joy. Randy greeted him with feigned friendliness. Despite Stefanie's admonition that he shouldn't bring anything, MacFarland came with two bottles of Martinelli's Sparkling Apple Cider. He had considered bringing a bottle of wine, but more than seventy AA meetings had purged that option from serious consideration.

There was an immediate demand for his attention. Ryan wanted to kidnap MacFarland to play video games with him. Kaitlyn wanted to show him her collection of designer fairy princess dolls. At least he thought they were dolls. After she had named off about twenty of them and described what magical properties each had, he confessed that he had to go to the bathroom and was able to escape her clutches. By the time he came out, she had found something else to occupy her.

At one o'clock, he reluctantly joined Randy in the TV room. Randy had a beer and unthinkingly offered one to MacFarland. He only realized his mistake when Stefanie yelled loud enough for even the neighbors to hear, "Mark isn't supposed to drink!"

MacFarland hadn't watched any football in more than five years. He tried to get excited about it, but MacFarland had no interest in the game Randy had on. The Cowboys would be on later in the day, Randy assured him and that game would be considerably more enjoyable to watch. "If you say so," was all MacFarland could think of saying.

Stefanie called everyone together to eat at two o'clock.

"Turkey again?" complained Ryan. "We had turkey for Thanksgiving."

"I know, Ryan, but Uncle Mark missed Thanksgiving. This is his chance to

have a real turkey.”

Randy put on a good display of carving the turkey, giving Kaitlyn, Ryan and Stefanie their choicest selections. MacFarland asked for some white meat, which he smothered with gravy. He piled up his plate with mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, green beans, yams, and biscuits. He had to admit that the meal was exceptionally good, though conversation during the meal crashed when Randy asked MacFarland if he was looking for a real job.

"I operate a hot dog cart," said MacFarland.

"Yes, I know, but I mean, a real job. Something that pays well, has health insurance, benefits."

"I have health insurance," said MacFarland.

Randy blinked several times. "Is it really good insurance?"

"I don't know," said MacFarland. "I haven't been shot yet, so I don't know how well it covers bullet wounds."

Stefanie glanced at the children. "Mark, please try to be serious. That kind of remark can upset the kids."

"Have you ever been shot?" asked Ryan, suddenly interested in the conversation.

"No," said MacFarland. "I do my best to avoid situations where I might get shot."

After dinner, MacFarland and Randy retreated once more to the TV room, though MacFarland spent most of his time trying to find an easy way to escape. He thought he might just say, "Thanks for the meal, but I have to go," but Stefanie, ever cognizant of his propensity to flee from her presence, said that everyone had to wait until later for dessert. "I want dessert now!" shouted Ryan, a sentiment that MacFarland shared but did not dare to express.

MacFarland suffered through the first half of the game. The game was boring. MacFarland could not get interested in the Dallas Cowboys. The only interesting event occurred just as half-time started. A commercial came on, advertising Newsome Jewelers. The spokesperson was Brian Newsome, who was hefting a football and trying to encourage jocks to propose to the cheerleaders in their lives. As Stefanie served dessert, she glanced at the television screen. "Isn't that where you got our rings, Randy?" she asked.

Randy glanced at the screen. "Yeah, but I didn't buy the rings from him. That guy is a real slime ball. I bought the rings from Freeman. He was the original owner of the store, and my dad knew him from way back. Freeman will give you a good deal. The other guy will just steal the shirt off your back."

MacFarland was surprised by two things. First, he never suspected that Randy had any strong feelings about anything, other than sports. Second, he hadn't known that Randy had a friend in the diamond business. He found that idea strangely amusing.

Figuring that having even those incongruous good thoughts about Randy was sufficient for the day, as soon as he finished the dessert, MacFarland thanked everyone for their hospitality and raced towards the front door.

"What about opening presents?"

MacFarland looked helplessly at Stefanie. "I really do have to go," he said.

"You'll come over here for New Year's Eve, won't you?" asked Stefanie as he

tried to get through the door.

MacFarland felt a knot in his stomach, but he cheerfully said he looked forward to it. Her smile convinced him that she almost believed him.

On the way home, he tried not to exceed the speed limit.

## Chapter 39

*Friday, December 25, 1840 Hours*

MacFarland was not sure what kind of mood he would find Pierson in. Perhaps it was because she had gotten quite drunk on Christmas Eve, but that morning, Pierson had woken up with a terrible hangover. In spite of this, she demonstrated a determination to be a better person. He could tell this because she came downstairs and greeted him in a relatively pleasant way. At least, it was what MacFarland interpreted as a pleasant manner for Pierson. Then ensued five minutes of awkwardness.

"You're not working today?" she asked as she got a can of Sprite out of the refrigerator. She sat down, trying not to jar her pounding head, and slowly sipped the can of soda.

"Uh, no. I'm supposed to go over to Stefanie's house and watch football with Randy."

Pierson gave him a disbelieving look. "You have zero interest in football, Mac. Do they even play football on Christmas?"

"I suppose. I don't know." He tried to avoid looking at her.

"It's still early. Oh, it's nearly eleven. Where does the time go?" She watched. "What time are you going?"

"I guess I should leave now." But he hadn't wanted to leave. He wanted to spend the day with Pierson.

When he got home, he decided to do something to make up for abandoning her. He started to get out his pots and pans. Pierson heard the noise and came into the kitchen.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to make a roast beef and Yorkshire pudding," he said.

"We have a roast beef?"

"I bought it yesterday. I was going to surprise you."

"You're going to start cooking now? It's late, Mac! What if I was going out?"

MacFarland gave her a look of skepticism. "When do you ever go out? Except to work. Or maybe the shooting range. You have the social life of a rock, Cyn."

Pierson made a rude noise and took her headache back into the living room. MacFarland continued with his food preparations, prepping the roast, putting it in the oven, mashing potatoes, preparing vegetables, and making the batter for the Yorkshire pudding. Pierson came back in after a while and poured herself a cup of coffee. She seemed in a much more cheerful mood than she had been this morning. She even offered to set the table for the two of them.

Despite the late hour, the simple meal tasted great. The roast was succulent and juicy, the Yorkshire puddings came out perfectly. Apple cider helped wash everything down. Pierson made a fresh pot of coffee, and after MacFarland had cleaned up the dishes, they both retreated to the front room to sip coffee and stare out the window at the decorated houses across the street. Pierson wasn't one for putting up holiday decorations, though she claimed she liked seeing what

other, more imaginative people did to make their houses look monstrously garish.

"How's the hot dog business going?"

MacFarland laughed. "I'm afraid I am losing my shirt," he said. "I've been letting Rufus take care of my cart for me, but he insists on giving everything away for free!"

Pierson stared at him with a bewildered look. "Why are you letting Rufus take care of your cart? Is something wrong? Is that even allowed? What about health code regulations?"

MacFarland wasn't sure if he wanted to tell Pierson what he was doing. He knew that she was very particular about following the rules. She had already gotten into trouble because he asked her to break them. How would she react if she found out that he was functioning as a private investigator without proper licensing? He reminded himself that he wasn't charging for his services; he was just helping out a friend. Well, sort of a friend. Well, actually somebody he hadn't even met yet.

"I got him checked out and certified," he said, trying to deflect the conversation. "I did get a health code violation the first time they found him watching the cart, but I've gotten it fixed." Then, watching her expression of disbelief, he realized that he couldn't keep anything from Pierson. "And I'm helping Jerry Baker with his case," he admitted.

Surprisingly, Pierson did not raise any objections. On the contrary, she seemed elated to hear the news. "That's great, Mac! Does this mean you'll reapply to come back onto the force?"

MacFarland blinked in surprise. Where did that come from? "No, not really. I'm just helping out. Trying to find out a little more about the case. Follow up those loose threads that Iverson seems to be ignoring."

"Such as? Are you referring to the evidence mix up?"

"I'm not convinced it's a mix up. I still think that the pine needles and fish scales came from the same location. And..."

She looked at him, her eyes telling him to continue.

"I think I might even have a suspect that the police aren't looking for."

Pierson sat up in her chair, more alert than ever. "Really? Who?"

"I don't have a name. But I know that Freeman went fishing several times with this individual, including on the day he died. I even know where he might have died."

"I should tell Iverson about this," said Pierson.

"I don't have anything concrete yet, Cyn. I think it is too early to share just wild-ass speculations with the police."

She looked at him suspiciously. "You'll tell me as soon as you get something definite?"

"Absolutely," he said. "After all, you're my partner."

"Former partner. But you are freeloading in my house, so you still owe me."

In spite of her comment, MacFarland felt this was the best Christmas he had in a very long time.

## Chapter 40

*Wednesday, December 30, 1000 Hours*

Wednesday morning was bright and warm, a welcome relief from the cold, dreary days over the Christmas weekend. Or maybe it was just a brighter day because MacFarland felt he was finally making progress on his "case." He had wanted to discuss what he was doing with Pierson, but today was the first day back on the job after her suspension, and she had no time for him. Since he had been the primary cause of her suspension, he thought it seemed prudent to avoid bugging her.

Rufus, thankfully, did not have any meetings planned for Wednesday, and was pleasantly surprised when MacFarland asked him to monitor the cart again. MacFarland knew what a commitment this was for Rufus. Rufus didn't like staying in one place too long. "Gives Charlie time to find you," he once explained. MacFarland didn't bother pointing out that Charlie--the Viet Cong--weren't anywhere around Denver. He knew better. After all, as most homeless persons knew, Charlie could take many forms.

When MacFarland had agreed to help Jerry Baker, the lawyer had given him a small folder with background information on the Freemans, the Newsomes, and several of the witnesses. MacFarland opened the folder and located the sheet with Brian Newsome's home address on it. Newsome lived in Lakewood, over near the Lakewood Country Club. MacFarland retrieved his truck and took Sixth Avenue west to Sheridan, then turned north. Newsome's home was actually not that far from Freeman's home. However, as he drove up to the house, MacFarland realized that Newsome and Freeman would hardly share the same social circles. MacFarland parked across the street and down a couple of houses from Newsome's driveway. He sat in his truck and waited, studying the neighborhood in which Freeman's partner lived. As he stared at the car parked in Newsome's driveway, he began to feel just a bit conspicuous.

Newsome drove a Porsche 918 Spyder. Even though it was a couple of years old, it must be worth nearly a million dollars. Why would anyone park a car like that out in the driveway, where everyone could see it?

*Well, that's the reason,* thought MacFarland. Newsome had money and he wanted everyone to know it. *What an asshole,* thought MacFarland.

Newsome's house matched his car. It was new, gaudy, and huge, one of many similar homes going up in this area. This was a neighborhood that had seen a lot of recent development and a major influx of money. MacFarland was no expert on real estate, but he doubted that any of the houses in this area went for less than two or three million dollars. Why would someone who lived in a house like that be embezzling a piddling fifty thousand dollars from his store, wondered MacFarland. Then the answer seemed obvious. Newsome was the kind of guy who believed the rules didn't apply to him.

At around ten in the morning, MacFarland spotted Newsome coming out of the house and walking towards the car, his head thrust forward like a chicken



pecking at the ground. Newsome was a tall, lanky man with grey hair and a tanned complexion, a narrow face and a pointed chin. He looked like he was about six feet two inches tall, and probably weighed about one hundred and ninety pounds. He didn't look very athletic, though MacFarland could easily imagine him on a golf course or a tennis court. He was wearing a suit and a long, grey coat. As Newsome backed out of his driveway and drove off, MacFarland started his truck and took off after him.

Newsome drove to a nearby mall and parked in the open lot. He went inside, with MacFarland following at a discreet distance. Despite having been out of detective work for nearly four years, MacFarland found that his old skills were rapidly returning. He was fairly certain that Newsome was not aware that he had a tail.

It also turned out that Newsome was merely trying to take advantage of post-Christmas sales. After watching him for several hours buy two pairs of slacks, a bottle of perfume (presumably for his wife), and a food blender, MacFarland decided to call it a day. Reluctantly, he returned to his hot dog cart to see how much of his product Rufus had given away today.

## Chapter 41

*Monday, January 4, 1049 Hours*

MacFarland continued his surveillance of Newsome after the New Year. Despite his promise to go to Stefanie's and Randy's house on New Year's Eve, he finally declined, claiming that he didn't want to be out with all the drunk drivers. Stefanie, of course, had said that he could spend the night at their place, but MacFarland persevered. As their phone call ended, he was sure he heard Randy say, "Just as well."

Newsome didn't do much of anything over the weekend. Finally, on Monday, Newsome drove to the Cherry Creek Mall and parked in the ground level. MacFarland parked a few rows over, then followed Newsome into the mall. Newsome went into his store, which was already opened by his staff. MacFarland could see a couple of the associates handling customers. Newsome spoke briefly with Craig Meacham, then the two men went into a back room. They only remained there a short while, and then Newsome and Meacham came back into the store's main sales area. Meacham called the other associates over and there was a brief discussion. MacFarland couldn't hear what was said, but judging by the expressions on the faces of the other three associates, whatever message Meacham communicated was not received with favor. During all of this, Newsome stood to the side, his arms folded across his chest. The impression MacFarland got was of a shepherd watching as his sheep dog performed its maneuvers, rounding up and controlling the flock. When the meeting finished, the three junior associates went back to their stations, their expressions clouded and angry. Meacham and Newsome spoke again briefly. Afterwards Newsome started to head back into the mall.

MacFarland let Newsome get a short ways ahead of him, then began to follow him back to the parking garage. He caught up with Newsome just as the man reached his car.

"Brian Newsome?"

Newsome turned to see who had called out his name. He did not give any indication that he recognized MacFarland, although he was suspicious of being accosted in the parking lot. He tried to unlock the door to his car in order to get into it, but MacFarland came up and stood next to the door, preventing it from opening.

"Who are you?" demanded Newsome, looking around to see if there was anyone around who might provide him aid.

"Just a friend," said MacFarland. "A friend of Otto Freeman's."

Newsome looked troubled. "Otto is dead," he said. "He died last November."

MacFarland nodded. "Yes, I know. It was in all the papers."

"Well, then, what can I do for you? What do you want?"

"I wanted to talk about who murdered him."

"It was his wife," said Newsome hurriedly. "She killed him."

MacFarland smiled and rubbed his chin. "Now we both know that's not true,"

he said. "Let's talk about who really killed Otto Freeman."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Leave me alone before I call the police!"

"Fine, let's call the police. But do you really want the police here? They might start taking a closer look at your books, Mr. Newsome. This time, they will dig deeper, and they might discover that it wasn't Maureen Freeman who mismanaged the funds. Is that what you want?"

"Who are you? What do you want? Money?" Newsome was trying to get the door of his car opened, but MacFarland had his body pressed against it.

"I don't want money, Mr. Newsome. I want some answers. Did you have Freeman killed when he discovered that you had taken the money from the store?"

"You're the guy who was in the store last week! What do you want? You're not with the police, I know that."

"Do you ever go fishing, Mr. Newsome? Did you and Otto go up Boulder Canyon last November for some trout fishing?"

Brian Newsome blanched, then became very agitated. "I don't fish," he insisted. "I've never gone fishing with Otto. You can't pin that on me."

"I'm not trying to pin anything on you, Mr. Newsome. That's not my job. I just need to know who went fishing with Otto Freeman on November twenty-sixth and where they went."

Newsome finally got forceful enough to pull the door opened. MacFarland stepped away and let the man get into his car. He grabbed the door before Newsome could slam it shut. "It's going to come out soon enough, Newsome. The sooner you cooperate with the police, the better it will be for you."

Newsome's look of fear started to morph into a look of desperation. "Look, I don't know anything about what Otto did in his spare time. Maybe he liked fishing. Who the hell cares? But there has been a guy in the store, he came by a couple of times, and he was talking to Otto about fishing in the mountains. That's all I know, I swear! Now, let me go!"

"Can you describe this guy? Tell me his name?"

"He was short, pudgy, nothing remarkable about him. Oh, he said he was from Chicago. He's probably gone back to Chicago by now. Go there to find your murderer."

Newsome started his car and started backing out of the parking space. Another car, moving down the aisle, honked at him, then sped by. Newsome jerked to a sudden stop, and MacFarland got out of the way of the door. Newsome pulled the door shut and, as MacFarland watched, resumed pulling out and sped away.

A short, pudgy, unremarkable man from Chicago. "WA" was beginning to take shape.

MacFarland turned back towards the mall, now armed with some specific questions for the staff of the Newsome Jewelry Store.

He smiled as he entered the mall. He was finally beginning to feel like a detective again. Maybe he was a real person after all.

## Chapter 42

*Monday, January 4, 1444 Hours*

Getting past Craig Meacham's defenses had been challenging, but when MacFarland suggested that he and his sales associates could either talk to him or to the police, Meacham decided to wipe his hands of the issue. "Fine, talk to whoever you want to. I for one have nothing to say."

He spent about thirty minutes with Brea Smith and Devon Brooks. They remembered the man from Chicago, though neither of them recalled hearing his name. "Wayne," insisted Laura Rogers, standing a few feet away and eavesdropping. "His name was Wayne." Between the three of them, they were able to give him a general description of Wayne the fisherman: a short man, about five foot six, two hundred pounds, in his early forties. He had almost no neck--a point on which Devon Brooks was quite insistent--an oval face, brown mustache, thinning brown hair, heavy jowls and double chin. "His teeth were yellow," said Laura, her voice snarled up with disgust. "Like he smoked a lot. Or didn't ever brush."

Once more, MacFarland regretted that he couldn't get his witnesses in front of a sketch artist, but he did the next best thing. He gave them the telephone number of his former partner, Detective Pierson, to ask her to get them with a sketch artist. Brea Smith promised that they would.

That afternoon, after he rescued his hot dog cart from Rufus, he called up Jerry Baker's office. "I need to talk to him," he told Baker's secretary.

Baker showed up at two forty-four. "You needed to see me?" he said as he neared the cart.

MacFarland took off his headphones and turned off the Spanish lesson, "*Tomar el tren a Barcelona.*" "I think I have a pretty solid lead," he said. "I know that someone else saw Otto Freeman on the day he was killed."

Baker's eyes widened. "You do? Who?"

"Just have a first name right now. Wayne. Wayne A something or other. Early forties, short, about two hundred pounds. He and Freeman went up to Gross Reservoir on Thanksgiving day."

"How did you find that out?"

"We still can't prove that he was murdered up there, or even that this Wayne character actually murdered him. It may just be coincidence that they were fishing together that day. The prosecutor will still try to say that Otto came home and was killed that night by his wife. Or he might say that Maureen hired this man."

Baker nodded, a grim smile making him look oddly boyish and evil at the same time. "True, but now I have some reasonable doubt. Do the police know about this guy? I haven't seen anything about him in discovery."

"Iverson doesn't have the resources to scour all of Gross Reservoir. In fact, I'm fairly certain Iverson doesn't even know where Freeman went fishing in the month or so before he died. For that, I need to talk to Maureen Freeman."

Baker became tight-lipped. "She's over in the Women's Correctional Facility," he said. "The judge wouldn't grant bail. Still can't figure that out. I'm going to see her tomorrow morning. What do I need to ask her?"

MacFarland could tell that the lawyer didn't want his client to know that MacFarland was working on the case and didn't want her to see him. Was that because MacFarland was just a hot dog vendor, and that fact might lower Maureen Freeman's confidence in her lawyer? MacFarland pushed the sudden flux of resentment he felt back into the darker corners of his mind. "Ask her if she knows who the man was her husband went fishing with. Where they went. What side of the reservoir they fished from. Anything that she can remember that might help us locate this man or the place where they went fishing. Assuming your client didn't kill her husband, we need to work on discovering the motive that the real killer had. I have some leads on that, but I need more evidence. Right now, they are just suspicions."

"What leads to you have?"

Baker played the game of protecting his turf with his client, so now it was MacFarland's turn to protect his turf. "They are just hunches right now," he said. "Let me flush them out a bit, and then we can talk about them. Just see if you can get anything out of your client about her husband's recent fishing activities. Hopefully she has met this Wayne character and will be able to give a description of him."

"She hasn't mentioned anyone like that yet," said Baker. "But up to this point, I was just searching blindly. Now I have a direction to go in. Thanks, Mac."

## Chapter 43

*Wednesday, January 6, 1425 Hours*

MacFarland went over to Newsome's house early Tuesday morning and parked his truck across the street. After about an hour, he saw a police car patrolling the neighborhood. Fortunately, the police car was more than a block away, and MacFarland decided to end his stake-out early.

On Wednesday morning, he tried once more, again getting an early start. On this day Newsome seemed to be housebound. Finally, in desperation, MacFarland went to see Pierson.

"How's it going, Cyn?" he asked. Always a good idea to start off with pleasantries. Pierson had returned to duty the previous Wednesday, but had avoided him for the past week. MacFarland wasn't sure if she was still angry, but the plan to avoid her was probably the best strategy. Now, however, he was desperate.

"Aside from the knowing stares and snide remarks, it's going great. I've been getting a lot more advice on how to avoid getting caught than I ever expected. One detective even told me if I was going to lift someone's case files, I should select an investigation that was going good. By the way, I got a call from an employee from Newsome Jewelers. She wants to come in and help with a composite for a person of interest. Do you know anything about that?"

"What answer would win me the most brownie points with you?"

"The truth, Mac, you know that."

"Okay, the truth. Yeah, I talked to some of the Newsome employees. They confirm that someone named Wayne had come into the store several times. I have reason to believe that this is the man who was fishing with Freeman on the day he was killed."

"How do you know he was really fishing with someone?"

MacFarland hadn't revealed his illegal break-in at the Freeman residence, nor the fact that he had taken evidence from the scene. He knew what Pierson's reaction would be. No matter how long she had been his partner, no matter what their relationship was, she would turn him in. On the other hand, she had bent a few rules when he asked.

"Just a hunch," he said. "Freeman doesn't strike me as the type who likes to spend a lot of time alone in the wilderness."

Pierson looked at him skeptically. "What do you know about fishing?"

"Cyn, I need your help."

She looked at him suspiciously. "I thought you promised that you wouldn't get me in any more hot water."

"It isn't like that. I need to borrow some money."

Pierson laughed. "Is Rufus giving away all your hot dogs?"

MacFarland tried to smile. "Something like that."

"No problem, Mac, how much do you need?"

"Two hundred," he said.

Pierson furrowed her brow, but handed him what money she had. "What are you going to use it for? And don't tell me to buy hot dogs. I already know that's not the reason for the money."

He hesitated, unsure how much to tell her. "I need to get a tracking device," he finally admitted.

"Oh, Christ, don't tell me! Am I going to have to arrest you for this?"

He shook his head. "But it may help us find out who we do have to arrest."

"Get the fuck out of here, Mac, before I take the money back."

GPS trackers had come a long way in recent years. MacFarland was able to find a small module that would allow him to follow it with his phone from anywhere in the world. The tracker would last for more than a month, even if used twenty-four hours a day. The best feature was that it could be easily attached to any part of a vehicle, using either a magnetic holder or a tactile adhesive. Even though the sales clerk insisted that the adhesive could not be traced back to the unit, MacFarland knew that wasn't true. He knew of instances where the Crime Lab boys had been able to match up a tracker with the vehicle it was on based on the debris that adhered to the adhesive.

When MacFarland returned to Newsome's house, he was pleased to see that the man's car was still in the driveway. He drove around the block and parked at one end, out of sight of Newsome's house. He then walked up the street, and stooping near the rear of Newsome's car, he slipped the tracking device beneath the car and next to the vehicle's trunk. It clicked into place. MacFarland tied his shoe, then continued his walk on around the block until he got to his truck. Checking his phone, he found the signal that showed the location of Newsome's car. Satisfied, he returned to his hot dog cart.

Rufus was glad to see him. "Selling hot dogs is a lot of work, boss," announced Rufus. "Trying to figure out what to charge people is not easy."

"Rufus, the prices are all posted here on the sign," said MacFarland, clearly confused.

"Yeah, boss, but that's for each item. What if someone buys two or three dogs at a time?"

MacFarland sighed. "I suppose you give them a cheaper price. What do you charge for two Long John hot dogs?" The posted price was \$2.75 for one.

"Well, I want the customer to keep coming back. So I charge them \$2.00."

"Two dollars each?" *That isn't too bad*, thought MacFarland.

Rufus smiled. "Oh, no, boss, that would be too much. I charge them two dollars for both of 'em." He smiled broadly. "The customers love it!"

*At least Rufus isn't giving my product away*, thought MacFarland.

Just before four o'clock in the afternoon, MacFarland noticed his phone vibrating. He checked it. Brian Newsome was on the move! He asked Rufus to stay and take care of his cart for another hour or so, and the homeless man cheerfully agreed to continue selling hot dogs. Hopefully, very few people would be buying hot dogs on their way home to dinner.

MacFarland was able to determine where Newsome was going by watching the red dot move across the rendition of streets. Newsome wasn't heading towards Cherry Creek but rather was going towards downtown. Traffic was heavy, and it took Newsome nearly twenty minutes to get into the downtown

section of Denver. MacFarland drove closer and closer until he finally had a visual on Newsome's car.

Now, why wasn't he surprised when he saw Newsome park in front of the Consolidated Colorado Properties Building? Brian Newsome, aware that the noose was beginning to tighten around his neck, had run to the offices of Norris Peterson.

MacFarland smiled to himself. He knew all along that Peterson was involved in this murder. All he had to do was figure out exactly how.

And then...then, he could put the bastard behind bars!



## Chapter 44

*Friday, January 8, 1839 Hours*

Thursday passed without incident. MacFarland was able to go to work in the morning, knowing that every time Newsome moved his car, MacFarland would receive a text alert. And while Newsome did leave his house on Thursday, it was only to go to the Cherry Creek Mall where he had his store. Not quite the suspicious behavior that MacFarland was hoping to catch Newsome in. MacFarland realized that he had no idea whether Newsome might be meeting someone at the mall, though he suspected that it was unlikely Newsome would be meeting Otto Freeman's killer there.

By the time Friday arrived, MacFarland decided that he preferred having eyes on his suspect. GPS surveillance was helpful, but it wasn't really a substitute for basic police work. Not that he was a policeman any more. But years of training were hard to ignore. Some of the younger cops had chided him on his "flatfoot" mentality. "With technology today," one of them had told him, "we don't even need to leave the office. We can monitor just about anyone anywhere in the city if we want to."

"Who would arrest them if someone broke the law?" MacFarland had asked.

The young bucks didn't have an answer for that. Finally one of them said, "We'd just send an old fart like you out after them." Even five years ago, MacFarland didn't find that funny.

MacFarland wasn't anti-technology. He appreciated and used technology as much as anyone on the force. But he also felt that there had to be an emotional connection between lawbreaker and law enforcer. A human being had to confront someone who violated the laws of society. Without that human interaction, society lost its humanity and the criminal lost the one bond that would bring the offender back into the fold.

"You're a hopeless romantic," Pierson had once told him.

Romantic or not, knowing where Newsome's car was did not tell MacFarland where Newsome was, nor did it tell him what Newsome was doing. He asked Rufus to mind the hot dog stand and drove out to Newsome's neighborhood.

He was about to park across the street from Newsome's house when a squad car turned the corner, then flashed its emergency lights. The police car pulled up behind him. Even though Newsome's house was in Lakewood, it was a Denver Police vehicle. Of course, they were only a short distance from Denver, and it was possible that the officer was responding to a dispatch. MacFarland rolled down his window as the officer approached. "Yes, Officer?" said MacFarland.

"Do you live in this neighborhood, sir?" asked the officer.

"No, as a matter of fact I don't," said MacFarland. "That's why I can't find the house I'm looking for." He cautiously held up his phone so the officer could see it. "I was going to put in the address to find the house, but I didn't want to be doing that while driving. You know, never text and drive."

The patrolman eyed MacFarland suspiciously. "What address were you

looking for?"

MacFarland gave him an address on a street further east.

"Depew doesn't go all the way through in this neighborhood, sir." The policeman then gave MacFarland directions to find the address. MacFarland thanked him, and started his truck. As he drove off, MacFarland watched the policeman get back into his vehicle, then make a call on his cell phone. Why his cell phone instead of his radio? Was the cop really on duty or was he operating on his own time?

As he drove past Newsome's house, he observed Newsome's vehicle still in the driveway.

At least the GPS tracker was working properly.

He returned downtown and relieved Rufus who was happily distributing hot dogs to Kirk and Gracie, a couple who had been on the streets for more than two years. As MacFarland walked up to the cart, Gracie started to hand the hot dogs back to Rufus. "We can't take these, Rufus," she said.

"Sure you can, Gracie," said Rufus. He saw MacFarland approaching. "Ain't that right boss? I can give these fine folks some free food, can't I?"

MacFarland smiled and gently pushed Gracie's hand back. "Of course, Rufus. Gracie, I'm surprised at you. Don't I always give you and Kirk some food?"

Gracie smiled shyly. "Yes, I know. I just wasn't sure if it was okay for Rufus to give away the food."

"I trust Rufus' judgment, Gracie. If he feels it's okay to give you some food, I'm not going to stop him."

"Thanks, Mac," said Kirk, as he put an arm around Gracie's shoulder and led her off.

After they left, MacFarland did a quick assessment of his remaining inventory of product. There was not much left. It was a Friday, and most of the courts had dismissed their juries before noon, so it was unlikely that Rufus had actually sold many hot dogs or bratwursts. MacFarland smiled ruefully to himself. He began to wonder if he would go bankrupt before he solved this case. Then he laughed aloud. He was already broke. How could he go bankrupt?

"What's so funny, boss?" asked Rufus.

"Just a private joke, Rufus. The world is a crazy place, isn't it?"

"It sure is that, boss. Uh, I gotta ask you. It is ok for me to give them dogs to our kind, isn't it?"

MacFarland put his hand on Rufus' shoulder. "We never leave a man behind enemy lines, do we? We never abandon our brothers."

Rufus smiled. "That's right, boss. We never leave a man behind. We take care of our own."

Rufus headed back to his refuge along the banks of the Platte River, and MacFarland prepared to close down his cart. Although it was only four-thirty in the afternoon, he decided to call it quits. He waved goodbye to Jacinto, who waved back. Then he slowly began to push his cart back to his vehicle.

He had pushed his cart nearly to the end of the block when he heard a scuffle behind him. Instincts and training both kicked in at once, and as someone tried to jump him from behind, MacFarland twisted to the side. The man who jumped him fell into MacFarland's cart, but did manage to knock MacFarland off balance.

MacFarland jabbed his fist out defensively, feeling the satisfying flash of pain as his fist squarely impacted the man's cheek. MacFarland struggled to regain his balance, but a second man punched him in the back, then pushed him down onto the ground. MacFarland tried to roll away, but before he could get away, both men began to kick him viciously. MacFarland used his arms to cover his face and head, but his assailants were clearly not amateurs. MacFarland felt an excruciating pain in his stomach and back, and then one of the men started to kick his head.

Mercifully, the pain disappeared and everything went dark.

## Chapter 45

*Friday, January 8, 1847 Hours*

MacFarland was not sure how long he was unconscious. He slowly became conscious of all sorts of pains, including a dampness on his jacket. As he became more aware of his surroundings, he realized that someone was kneeling next to him, holding a cloth next to his face. MacFarland's first reaction was to defend himself, but the man held MacFarland's arm in place, saying softly, "Calm down, you're safe now."

MacFarland stopped resisting and tried to focus his eyes. The man's appearance gradually took on more clarity. The man was white, mid-forties, dressed in business attire. He was clean shaven and had thinning, close-cropped hair, a long, narrow face, and rather sad world-weary eyes.

"What happened?" asked MacFarland. He was aware that he had been attacked, but had no idea what transpired after he lost consciousness. How long had he been out?

"I saw two men kicking you," said the stranger. "I can't say that I was successful in stopping them, although they did run off when I started yelling for the police to come."

MacFarland tried to sit up, then groaned loudly when the bruises in his side and chest exploded in blinding pain. The man tried to keep him quiet.

"I can call an ambulance," he said. "Just try to take it easy for a moment."

MacFarland stopped trying to sit up and just lay back, trying to catch his breath. He gingerly felt to see if any of his ribs were broken, but he couldn't tell. He reached up and put his hand on the cloth that the man was holding against his face. As he put his hand up, the other man took his hand away. "It's not a serious cut," he said. "I don't think you will need stitches, but we should get it properly cleaned to avoid infection. Where's your trailer?"

MacFarland gestured down the street. "It's in a lot around that corner." MacFarland noticed that the man had stopped suggesting calling an ambulance. He now began to wonder if his rescuer had even called for the police. They were only a block away from Police Headquarters. How long could it possibly take them to get here? MacFarland tried to focus on the man's features, even though it was still hard to concentrate. He began to wonder if he had a concussion.

The man helped MacFarland stand up. Since MacFarland was still a bit wobbly, he had to hold onto the man. MacFarland was able to estimate his height at just over six feet, his weight at about two hundred pounds. The man felt quite muscular and in very good physical condition. MacFarland did not get the idea that this guy sat behind a desk, and despite his office-like attire, the man probably spent more time outdoors than inside an office. "Thanks for helping me, Mr.--uh? I don't think I got your name."

"Wilson, Grey Wilson," said the man. "Can you walk?"

MacFarland took a tentative step. "Yeah, I think so." He let go of Wilson and took another step. He felt a bit dizzy, but that soon passed. "I think I can manage

now," he said. He went over towards his cart, which had rolled up against a fence. He quickly examined it, reassuring himself that it wasn't damaged. It suddenly seemed important to him that his cart was okay. Then he remembered the plastic pouch in which he kept the day's receipts. Had his assailants stolen it? He checked the drawer on the side of the cart. The pouch was still there. *Maybe they didn't have time to rob me*, he thought.

"I should report them to the police," he said. "Where do you work, in case they have to get in touch with you?"

Wilson shook his head. "I wouldn't bother going to the police," he said. "Here, let me walk with you to your truck."

MacFarland wondered briefly how Wilson knew he had a truck, then surmised that it was an easily made assumption. He tried to shake his head to clear his mind, then immediately regretted doing that. He needed some aspirin badly. All he wanted to do right now was lie down and go to sleep. It occurred to him that was one of the indications of a concussion, but he no longer knew what to do with that information. Should he just lie down and go to sleep? It had been a long time since he simply slept on the sidewalk. Or had it just been yesterday? He wasn't sure. He started to sit down on the sidewalk.

Grey Wilson looked around anxiously, then went over and helped MacFarland back to his feet. "Don't go to sleep, buddy. Let me get you home."

That sounded like a good idea to MacFarland, though he was not sure exactly where home was. He couldn't remember if it was an alley or some vacant building. Wilson was able to help him walk towards his truck, and then get into the back seat. Oh, yes, he remembered sleeping in his truck. That must be his home.

Something was bothering him, but at first he could not think exactly what it was. Oh, yeah, now he knew. "Why not call the police? We should put those bastards behind bars."

"Because I think those were the police," said Wilson quietly.

MacFarland nodded, not really sure what Wilson meant. He would have to think about that later. That is, if he could remember what Wilson had said. Already, the memory was lost in a gray fog. *Oh, that's rich*, he thought. *I have a grey fog and I'm being helped by a Grey Wilson.*

Wilson loaded the cart onto the trailer, then retrieved the truck keys from MacFarland's pocket. As he started the engine, he took out his phone. "It's me. I'm with MacFarland now. I think he's got a concussion. No, I don't want to take him to a hospital. I can't afford to get involved. I'm taking him to his home. Yeah, meet me there. Call his partner. We'll let her take care of him."

## Chapter 46

*Saturday, January 9, 0842 Hours*

MacFarland woke up and looked around him. His surroundings were certainly more pleasant than any alleyway he ever slept in, even more pleasant than any abandoned building he had taken refuge in. In fact, it looked a lot like a hospital room. He tried to sit up. Someone put a hand on his chest and urged him to lie back down. He looked over and recognized his former partner, Cynthia Pierson. "Hi Cyn, what am I doing here?"

Pierson smiled at him. "Judging by the bruises and contusions, someone beat the holy shit out of you. You're in the hospital. Nothing's broken, and although you had a mild concussion, the doc thinks you will be alright. You were lucky, Mac."

He thought about what she said. He wasn't sure how lucky he was. "Yes, now I remember. Two men jumped me as I was packing up to leave downtown. How did I get here?"

"I got a call from a woman. She didn't identify herself. She said you had been mugged and I could find you on my front porch. I opened the door, but you weren't on the porch. Your truck was parked in the front of the house, and when I checked it, I found you passed out in the back seat. Someone must have driven you home, Mac. Who was it? What is the last thing you remember? Was it the people who beat you up?"

MacFarland shook his head. "I don't know, Cyn. Oh, wait, I do know. Some guy helped me. Said he scared the attackers off. He said his name was Grey Wilson."

"Do you know who this guy is?"

"Never saw him before in my life. How did he know where I lived? I haven't told anyone about staying with you."

"Apparently, he's working with someone, a woman, who not only knows where you live, but knows who I am and even knows my telephone number. Did he say anything else to you?"

"Hell, I can't remember much of anything, Cyn. Two men jumped me from behind. I tried to resist, but I guess I'm a bit rusty. You don't get an awful lot of exercise selling hot dogs, you know. I must have passed out, and when I came to, this Grey Wilson was standing over me."

"What did he look like?"

MacFarland described him as Pierson scribbled in her notebook. "I will see if he shows up anywhere," she said.

MacFarland was thoughtful for a moment. "He was dressed in business attire, but I didn't get the impression he was really a businessman. Despite his age, he looked and felt like he worked out. I wonder if he is on the force."

Pierson shrugged, staring at her notes. "He doesn't sound like anyone I've seen, but he might be from some other jurisdiction."

"Oh, he seemed to think my attackers were cops."

Pierson glanced at him sharply. Cops don't like to hear that other cops might be rogue.

"Look for someone with a female partner," he suggested.

Pierson rolled her eyes in exasperation. "For crying out loud, Mac, I know how to do my fucking job!" she snapped.

MacFarland blinked in surprise at the suddenness and intensity of her response. "Fuck, what brought that on?" he demanded.

Pierson suddenly became quiet, got tight lipped and looked away from him. She got up. "Nothing, Mac, nothing at all. I'm late for work, I've gotten no fucking sleep since I've been with you all night. I have more important things to do than take care of you."

MacFarland stared at her, his expression one of confusion. *Pierson can handle anything*, he thought to himself. *What's wrong with her now?* Did she know something that she wasn't telling him? Did she know who had beat him up? "I didn't ask you to take care of me," he said defensively.

"Yes, you fucking did. You called me and said you needed a place to stay. Now I find that you're all mixed up in some shit and I don't know what it is. You tell me it might be cops who attack you, and I'm wondering, why the fuck would cops beat up a God damn hot dog vendor? It doesn't make sense, Mac!"

MacFarland was thoughtful, then his face lightened up. "It might have something to do with the cop who stopped me this morning. Yesterday morning."

Pierson looked at him, her brow furrowed and her look questioning. "What? Where did you get stopped?"

"It was nothing," he said.

Pierson glared at him angrily. "Nothing? You get stopped by a cop and later in the same day get beat up by someone you think might be cops? What kind of shit is that?"

"I don't even know that it's related," he said sullenly.

"Why did the cop stop you?" she asked, ignoring his clarification.

"How should I know? I was looking for directions, so I was parked on the side of the road." The best lie, he reminded himself, always contains a large chunk of the truth.

"Who were you looking for?"

"What makes you think it was a who?"

Pierson stared at him, unblinking and trying to contain her anger. "Alright, be that way. What the fuck do I care? Except that you're now bringing this crap to my doorstep. Whoever is pissed off with you, Mac, knows that you are staying with me. That makes it my business."

"Maybe I should move out?"

Pierson shook her head in disbelief. "The longer I know you, the stupider you become! Fine. Do it your way! Whatever the hell it is you're doing." She turned and started to walk towards the door. Then she stopped. "Does this have to do with the Freeman murder?" When MacFarland didn't say anything, she made a rude noise. "I thought so. Mac, you're getting in way over your head on this one." She pivoted and headed once again towards the door.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

She stopped by the door. "To work, you asshole. I still have a job to do." She

was about to leave when she hesitated once more. "And I have to warn Rufus. Whatever it is you've gotten into, he might get caught up in it too. You might not care about the people around you, MacFarland, but I care about them. I don't want Rufus getting hurt too."

He stared at the empty doorway for several minutes after she left. He realized she was right. He wasn't thinking about his friends. He hadn't thought about anyone else in several years.

*I need to get my act together, he told himself. Right after I nail Norris Peterson for this murder.*



## Chapter 47

*Saturday, January 9, 1645 Hours*

Pierson picked him up from the hospital at three in the afternoon. They didn't speak, except for the barest minimum communications necessary to get out of the hospital. Pierson did not seem inclined to say anything, and MacFarland was feeling oddly intimidated by her silence. Never in their long partnership had she seemed so angry with him. He wasn't sure why she was angry, and he certainly did not know how to respond to it. His normal strategy of just ignoring her mood swings did not seem to be working. Yet it was the only strategy he had.

Finally, as they neared the University Park neighborhood, he spoke up. "Did you see Rufus?"

She stared at the traffic ahead of her. "Yes, I did. He gave me your cup of coffee."

"Did you tell him what happened?"

Silence. Then, curtly, "Yes, of course I told him. He doesn't remember seeing the two men who beat you up, though he did mention two cops that were rousting him and you a while ago. Could those be the two men who attacked you?"

MacFarland tried to remember what had happened. Most of the events of that evening were still hazy in his mind. Although he did not get a good glimpse of his attackers, his recollection was that they were bigger men than either Larry Lucas or Dwaine Schmidt. On the other hand, Schmidt did have a mean streak in him. MacFarland could easily see him stomping on his head.

But he didn't think his assailants were either of these individuals.

"Did you get anything on Grey Wilson?" he asked.

Pierson shook her head. "His name didn't pop up any of our databases. I even contacted the FBI and they didn't have anything on him. Except..."

"Except what?"

Pierson shrugged. "They just took a long time to get back to me. I almost had the impression that he was a person of interest for them, but they didn't want us interfering with their case."

He considered this information, but it didn't really ring true to him. Then, as he tried to order his thoughts, he had a sudden flash of insight. "Wilson said that he called for the police, but I don't think he actually did. No patrolmen ever showed up, even though we must have taken a much longer time to reach my truck than usual. And then he told me not to contact the police. Why would he not want the police involved?"

For a few minutes, Pierson didn't say anything. "I don't know," she replied.

"How did he know where I lived?" asked MacFarland. "How did his friend know your cell phone number? Maybe he's a cop too. That would explain how he knows who was attacking me. Hell, Cyn, for all I know, maybe he is one of the guys who attacked me."

"I wish you had seen something that would identify your assailants."

"Well, I didn't see them. They came from behind me, and normally, that close

to the courthouse and police headquarters, you don't think anything is going to happen. But wait...I did hit one of them in the face. I had my ring on, which is pretty bulky. I think it must have scratched him." He smiled, holding up his hand. "I'm pretty sure my ring has his blood on it."

Pierson stared at the ring intently. "There does seem to be blood on it," she said thoughtfully. "I could get it analyzed for DNA. The question is..."

He looked at her expectantly. "What is the question, Cyn?"

"Are you sure you want to know who it is if it really is a cop?"

He looked at her, his face a stony mask. Finally he nodded. "Yeah. Yes I do, Cyn. But more importantly, I want to find out who is giving these cops their orders."

She grabbed a tissue and held out her hand for the ring. "I hope you don't regret this, Mac. You do realize that you're close to the bottom of the food chain these days."

He smiled ruefully. "I've been at the bottom of the food chain for a long time, Cyn. At least now, I'm high enough on the food chain to be able to fight back."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that, Mac."

## Chapter 48

*Tuesday, January 12, 1425 Hours*

Despite the attack, MacFarland was anxious to get back to his corner and resume his business. He was also concerned because he had not been able to keep tabs on Newsome. Except for some activity on Friday, by Saturday, the transmitter he had hidden under Newsome's car had gone quiet. Or else Newsome had stopped using the car. On Monday morning, MacFarland had sent a signal to the transmitter, asking it to identify itself, but it remained silent. There were two possibilities. First, the transmitter had somehow malfunctioned. That possibility was somewhat unlikely, but not impossible. The second possibility was that someone had found the transmitter and destroyed it.

By Tuesday morning, MacFarland was pretty sure that the second possibility was the correct one.

So much for his sophisticated surveillance methods. Once more, MacFarland lamented not having access to the resources of the police department. He shrugged, put on his headphones, and repeated the lesson on catching the damn train to Barcelona.

By ten o'clock, MacFarland, who by now was getting pretty proficient at telling the conductor that he was on the wrong train, saw Jerry Baker walking towards him. He took off his headphones and greeted the lawyer when he reached the corner.

"I heard what happened to you," said Baker. "Was it a typical mugging?"

MacFarland was not sure what a typical mugging actually was. Since he was the victim, he didn't regard it as typical at all. "I don't think it was robbery," MacFarland replied. "Although someone interrupted the dirtbags and maybe that prevented them from ripping me off."

"Someone stopped the mugging?"

"Affirmative. Guy named Grey Wilson. Ever heard of him? He disappeared before I had a chance to properly thank him."

Baker shook his head. "Doesn't ring a bell with me," he said. "Tell you what, though. I will see what I can find out about him and let you know. We need more good Samaritans these days." Baker paused a bit, then decided to order his usual bratwurst. "I asked the DA about the pine needle evidence. He was surprised that I was asking about it. I suspect he was more surprised that I even knew about it. He came back the next day with the story that it was a mix up in the crime lab, though he seemed more concerned with who I was talking to in the crime lab."

"Did you tell him how you found out about the evidence?"

"Of course not," laughed Baker. "My sources are always confidential." He slowly finished his bratwurst, then sipped on a soft drink. How anyone could drink a cold beverage in this temperature always eluded MacFarland's understanding, but a lot of people did.

"Any more progress with finding the real crime site?"

MacFarland shook his head. "Too much snow up in the mountains to be able

to find anything, at least without dogs. I'm fairly certain, though, that Freeman was up at Gross Reservoir on Thanksgiving Day. It's a day use area, so it is unlikely that they were up there after dark. Although I can't prove it, I'm fairly certain that he was killed up there, then brought down to Denver to the residence."

Baker looked despondent. "Here's my problem, Mac. Unless I have some way to introduce that evidence, I can't do anything with it. I need a witness or some hard physical evidence that clearly puts the deceased up at the reservoir at the time of his death. Even that won't get Maureen off, but it might mess up the prosecutor's case."

MacFarland nodded, wondering if there was any way to put Freeman's fishing log back in the house. Had he really messed up this case? "I'm doing what I can, Jerry. But I won't manufacture evidence."

Baker took a step backwards, his eyes wide with surprise. "I wasn't even suggesting that, Mac! I've gotten a lot of questionable defendant's out of trouble, but I've never had to resort to anything illegal."

MacFarland was surprised at Baker's reaction. *He is protesting too much*, thought MacFarland. On the other hand, what did he really know about Jerry Baker? Nothing, except that the man dressed fairly well and was defending an innocent woman. MacFarland had a bad habit of allowing many of his stereotypes to cloud his judgment. Sometimes those stereotypes saved his life, but just as often, he found them impeding his thinking. Not all husbands were wife beaters. Not all blacks were criminals. Not all gang members carried guns. Not all women standing on a street corner were whores. Not all defense lawyers were scumbags.

On the other hand, MacFarland was getting too old to change his views of the world. Baker probably wouldn't fake evidence, but he sure would distort its importance if he could influence a jury. Lawyers didn't search for truth. They worked to get a jury to see the truth the same way they did.

"I know that Jerry. I'm sorry for even suggesting it."

The morning was quiet after Baker left. Business picked up as the lunch hour came and went. The afternoon looked like it would remain quiet, until two twenty-five. Pierson was able to sneak up behind him as he was struggling to tell an irate train traveler that she mistakenly had picked up his luggage. He would have just taken his luggage back, but apparently in Spain you had to use language to get your luggage returned. And worse yet, you had to be polite while doing it.

"How's business?" asked Pierson.

MacFarland looked up in surprise, then turned off his CD player. He smiled at his former partner. "It's good to be back at work."

Pierson raised an eyebrow. "Which work? Selling hot dogs or solving crimes?"

MacFarland coughed in exasperation. "I'm hardly solving any crimes," he said. "I was referring to my real job, of course. Selling hot dogs."

"Guess who I saw in the squad room today?"

MacFarland looked at her questioning. "Someone I know?"

"Probably quite intimately. Patrolman Orlando Mendoza. He had an interesting scratch on his cheek. He got it trying to restrain a suspect last Friday. But there wasn't any arrest on the blotter. In fact, Mendoza wasn't in service that

night." She was thoughtful. "I don't know much about Mendoza. He moved here from LA about a year ago. Used to be with the LA County Sheriff out there. Everyone says he is a pretty good cop."

"Who is Mendoza's partner?" asked MacFarland. All cops regarded each other as pretty good cops. It took a real bad apple for anyone to badmouth one of their own.

"Peter French. Both of them were originally assigned to District Two, and then about a month ago they got re-assigned to District Six."

"I wonder why," mused MacFarland. District Two covered north central Denver, while District Six covered the downtown area.

"That's a good question. An even better question is, who engineered the transfer? If we could figure that out, we might figure out the why." She looked around. Like most cops, she was constantly checking her surroundings.

MacFarland handed Pierson a hot dog. He figured that if Pierson was going to stand around a hot dog cart, she better look like a customer.

"The fact that he has a scratch doesn't prove that he is the one who attacked me. Wish I could find that asshole who came to my defense. Maybe he could identify the guys. After all, he seemed to know they were police."

"Well, we don't have him. We don't have a lead on him."

MacFarland scowled, then started wiping down his cart. "Why did those two cops attack me?" he finally asked. There was no longer any doubt in his mind that his assailants were cops.

Pierson shrugged and finished putting condiments on her hot dog. "How much do I owe you for this?" she asked. MacFarland shook his head no. "That's another good question, Mac. Here's my answer. Someone is feeling uncomfortable with you doing your unofficial investigation. I would surmise that you are getting close to someone who doesn't want any light shined on him. Who are you checking out?"

"The partner--Newsome. But I might also be getting close to Peterson. The other day, Newsome went to see his cousin."

Pierson hurriedly tried to swallow her bite of hot dog. "That is really stretching it, Mac. As you say, they are cousins. They are business associates. We've looked into that jewelry store, and it turns out that Peterson fronted a large portion of Newsome's investment. You know that. Of course they would see each other every once in a while. You need to do better than that."

MacFarland nodded. "I know. But I also confronted Newsome in the parking lot outside his store. I think that spooked him because it was right after that when he went to see Peterson."

"So you think it was Peterson who got a couple of cops to beat you up?"

"Nothing quite so direct. But I've suspected for a long time that Peterson had a contact inside the Department. I just don't know who that person is. For all I know, it's Iverson."

Pierson shrugged, finally wiping her hands with a napkin. "So where are we?"

MacFarland stared over at the court building. "Not much further along than we were when Baker asked me to help him," he said.

## Chapter 49

*Wednesday, January 13, 0909 Hours*

"Rufus, I need some help."

"Want me to watch the wagon, boss?"

MacFarland shook his head. "It's more than that. I need eyes and ears."

Rufus looked at his friend. "You got eyes and ears. I don't understand what you're getting at, boss."

MacFarland had thought all night about the two cops who had beat him. He had found them on the internet. Surprisingly, there were sites for everything on the internet, including one that posted the pictures of just about every police officer in Denver. Ostensibly, the site was intended to be a method of rating the quality of service provided by an officer, but MacFarland thought the site served a more sinister purpose. It exposed cops to public scrutiny, but not everyone in the public was a friend of the police. Such a site could be just as easily be used to ruin a good cop's career as well as do any social good.

Yet, in spite of his disgust at the mere existence of the site, MacFarland found himself printing out copies of the pictures of Mendoza and French. He checked out the comments posted for each of the officers. Mendoza had one complaint of excessive force and two complaints of racial profiling. French, on the other hand, didn't have anything negative about him posted on the site.

MacFarland pulled the pictures from his pocket. He put the pictures on the work area of his cart. "I think these are the two men who beat me up, Rufus."

Rufus stared intently at the pictures. "You mean them was cops?"

MacFarland nodded. "I'm not positive. I would like to think that I'm wrong. But I need to know more about these two. Do you know anyone who might have come in contact with them?"

"Well, boss, I seen one of them." He pointed at French's picture. "He's been down near the shelter. We all have seen him."

"And what about the other one? Have you seen him too?"

"Yeah, I seen him too. He's not so bad. Not like this one."

"Can you ask some of your friends to keep an eye on them for me? See who they talk to? Don't go up to them, you know, stay out of sight. But let me know if they talk to someone who looks like they don't belong."

"Sure, boss. Spy on the cops! Sounds like a plan." Rufus laughed, a short, cynical laugh. "Wonder what could possibly go wrong with that?"

## Chapter 50

*Thursday, January 14, 0930 Hours*

MacFarland was not certain who Rufus had contacted to keep a watch on French and Mendoza. He was a bit concerned when Rufus didn't show up on Thursday with his usual two cups of coffee. Was Rufus himself trying to keep an eye on the two officers? MacFarland was beginning to have doubts about his request. He should have given more thought to the entire plan.

He was listening to the next lesson in the Spanish series, one that concentrated on talking about really wonderful experiences at a movie theatre. Cynthia Pierson, closely shadowed by Benny Lockwood, walked up to his cart. "I'll be just a minute, Benny," she said, pulling on MacFarland's arm. Benny dutifully stood off to the side, watching the heavy morning traffic pulling into the parking garage.

"Mac, those two cops I told you about yesterday. You better be careful with them."

"I'm always careful," he said.

Pierson blinked, then tried to suppress a cynical laugh. "You've gotten sloppy since you've been off the force, Mac. If you were careful, you wouldn't have had the crap beaten out of you. When we worked together, you would have been able to take three guys like that."

"That was five years ago, Cyn. I was a cop then."

"Yeah, and you're a hot dog vendor now. That's my point exactly, asshole. So watch your back."

MacFarland was puzzled. "What's got you spooked about these guys, Cyn? Yesterday they were just a couple of problem cops."

Pierson looked towards where Lockwood was standing, watching people emerge from the parking garage. Then she lowered her voice, speaking in a whisper. "I've heard rumors that the guy who got them transferred over to District Six was Lieutenant Griffin. It seems that Griffin has a lot of guys under his thumb. Mendoza came to us from LA. He had some problems there, but Griffin took him on anyway. Mendoza brown-noses Griffin so much, he practically lives up Griffin's ass."

MacFarland rubbed his chin. "When I knew Lorne Griffin, he was a captain, in line to become a Commander. Why is he now a loo?"

"It happened about the same time as when you got kicked off the force. The new mayor wanted his own guy in charge of the Department. They found some dirt on Griffin, and he got bumped back to lieutenant. Lucky even to keep his job. He had a lot of friends in command, though, and with their help he got transferred to Internal Affairs. He's been there for at least three years."

"So what's the problem with him?"

"Aside from possibly using his position to get back at the ones who screwed him? Well, probably nothing. Except, it seems that Griffin and Norris Peterson went to college together. They were even roommates for a year. I think we found

the link between your snooping and your mugging. I think Griffin is the plant in the department."



## Chapter 51

*Friday, January 15, 1300 Hours*

The Friday lunch crowd had finally thinned out enough for the shadow people to come back out into the open. MacFarland greeted his friends Kirk and Gracie, then noticed that they seemed more reserved than usual, particularly Gracie. While Kirk was a dour individual, Gracie usually had a smile on her face. No matter how bad things got, she always anticipated better times ahead. To see her looking crestfallen and despondent was totally unexpected.

"What's wrong, Gracie?" asked MacFarland as he handed her a hot dog.

Gracie looked over at Kirk, who tilted his head to stare at the pavement. "The cops beat up someone last night," she said. "Over by the Mission."

MacFarland immediately became alert. The Denver Rescue Mission should be a safe haven for homeless people. "Who got beat up?" he asked. Rufus hadn't shown up again this morning. It was not like Rufus to miss two mornings in a row. Unfortunately, MacFarland had no way of locating Rufus, other than by word of mouth through the network of homeless people. MacFarland didn't even know where Rufus' hidey-hole was; Rufus made sure no one knew where he hid, just in case the Viet Cong had spies even in friendly camps.

Kirk lifted his head to look MacFarland in the eyes. "There was two men who got beat up by the cops, Mac. One was your friend Rufus, but he was able to get away. I think the police is looking for him now. The other was Arnie Jones. Don't know if you know him. He always stays on the other side of town. He's always in trouble with the cops, on account of he tries to panhandle the baseball crowds. He got beat up real bad. They had to take him away in a ambulance."

"Christ!" said MacFarland. "Why'd the police beat them up? What were they doing?"

"They weren't doing nothing," said Gracie. "Just bein' themselves. Somthin's got to be done about the cops, Mac, but what can any of us do? We just have to stay out of sight, you know what I mean? We can't even go over to the Mission any more. That just ain't right."

As Gracie and Kirk wandered away, presumably to go someplace where they would be out of sight, MacFarland stared after them, having the disturbing realization that he had caused this to happen. It was his fault that Arnie Jones and Rufus Headley had been assaulted by the police.

## Chapter 52

*Friday, January 15, 1705 Hours*

MacFarland closed down his cart earlier than usual and headed back to Pierson's house. He had already called her three times, leaving messages that all went to voice mail. He finally recalled that she said she would be on a stake-out that morning, and might not return home until quite late at night. In fact, she did arrive home just a minute or so after five in the afternoon. MacFarland wasted no time in confronting her.

"What have you heard about two cops beating up homeless people last night?" he demanded.

Pierson glanced at him in surprise, then put her badge and gun in the drawer where she stored them. "I haven't heard anything," she said. "Who got beat up? Who did it?"

"You haven't heard anything? Where the fuck were you all day?"

"God damn it, I was on a stake-out for a scumbag meth dealer. He never showed, so our entire trap was a waste of time and manpower. I don't know anything about what happened while I was out. Now, will you calm down and tell me what you know?"

MacFarland took several deep breaths, then sat down at the kitchen table. He realized that he was over-reacting, and he needed information, not someone to blame. "I heard that Rufus and another homeless person were detained and force was applied. It seems that Rufus escaped, but the other party resisted and may have sustained injuries. I need to find out who was hurt and who the cops were who did it."

Pierson raised her eyebrows. "Okay, Mac, I get it that you're upset and concerned. Fuck, Rufus? He would never be involved in any conflict with a cop. Certainly not intentionally. Let me get on my computer and see what I can access."

MacFarland followed her into the library and over to her computer. She logged on, then accessed the District Six website. She checked the logs for all five precincts. "There doesn't seem to be anything," she said. "No, wait a moment. Last night, at 1010 hours, there was an EMT call for an ambulance. A homeless man was found mugged around the corner from the Denver Rescue Mission."

"Who was it?" asked MacFarland.

"No identification. Description is black male, late sixties; grey hair, beard, and mustache, approximately five feet eight inches, weight one fifty-five. Wearing a brown pullover cap, dark blue coat, red shirt, jeans, and boots."

"Thank God, it isn't Rufus," breathed MacFarland. "My contacts said it might be Arnie Jones."

Pierson looked up at him, her eyes not concealing her concern. "I'll put a note in the computer to cross check against his records," she said. "We should have a positive ID by morning."

"Is there any description of the injuries he sustained?"

She started cross-checking records. "He was unconscious when the EMT team brought him in. It looks like he has a concussion, cut lip, broken nose, several lacerations on the back of his head, and at least two broken ribs."

"Is there any mention of any arresting officer?"

Pierson shook her head. "He wasn't under arrest. There's no be-on-the-lookout for Rufus either. If someone is looking for him, it's not official. From this, it looks like the guy in the hospital was simply mugged by some unknown party as he was heading towards the Rescue Mission. There's no mention of Rufus or any second party."

"I don't think that's how it went down," said MacFarland. "Rufus wouldn't stay at the Mission. He should already have been inside his hidey-hole at that hour. I think Lucas or French got to him."

"Why would they go after him?"

"Because I asked Rufus to keep an eye on them, Cyn."

"Shit, Mac, tell me you're not playing with fire here."

"Cynthia, I'm convinced that Peterson is behind the murder of Otto Freeman, and as I get closer to proving that, he is using his influence with some rotten cops to try to put a stop to it. First me, and now Rufus and Arnie."

Pierson looked at him in disbelief. She started to shut down her computer. "Mac, you have no evidence, no proof. And if you are asking these men to spy on the police, you are putting their lives at risk. I'm telling you, Mac, back off."

## Chapter 53

*Friday, January 15, 1830 Hours*

After enduring Pierson's rant about his total lack of responsibility, MacFarland spent his time cleaning his pots, pans, and holding bins. Perhaps he washed his pots with a little more energy than he usually had, but he needed some venue for his anger. And for his disappointment with himself. What made him think that he could make a difference? Pride. *It's always my pride, my damn conceit*, he thought. Where did all this arrogance come from? The reality was that he was a failure. He had always been a failure. He should have gone to college. He was smart enough. That's what his teachers all told him. Instead, he took what he thought was the easy way out. He joined the Marines. Becoming a Marine had been pretty tough, but he actually was pretty good at being a Marine. Why did he quit, then? He had a chance to do something right with Nicole, but he had made a mess of his marriage. He let his wife drift off into the arms of another man. When that man destroyed the one good thing in his life, he did nothing to bring the bastard to justice. He just stood on the sidelines, letting other people botch the prosecution. And then he ruined his own life and career by not controlling his temper.

He should have just poisoned himself with booze. He should have stayed on the streets.

He should have just told Baker that he was just a hot dog vendor.

Pierson was right. He should back off, drop the case. Tell Baker that the lawyer needed to find someone else to help him save Maureen Freeman. Someone who was a real detective, not an arrogant son of a bitch who just got innocent people hurt. In total disgust, he knocked his pans off the counter, letting them crash onto the floor.

Pierson came back into the room, followed by Benny Lockwood. "Fuck, Mac, can't you be a little quieter? And don't destroy my fucking kitchen!"

He looked up. "Sorry, Cyn. You're right, I've fucked everything up. I should back off."

"Well, not so fast. After we talked, I asked Lockwood to see what he could find out about the homeless man in the hospital. Benny has tracked him down. You were right. It was Arnie Jones. We're going to see him. Do you want to come along?"

MacFarland looked at Pierson and Lockwood in surprise. "Yeah, I do. Why are you two going to see him?"

Pierson and Lockwood exchanged questioning looks at each other. Finally, it was Lockwood who answered. "Arnie Jones was one of Bozworth's contacts on our drug case. He's been helping us. If anything happens to him, it could affect our case too."

Pierson went to the drawer and retrieved her badge and gun. "It may not be the men who mugged you who got to Jones, Mac. It may not have been your fault that Jones got hurt. But we have a good reason to dig further, don't we? So are

you coming?"

MacFarland nodded, dried his hands and grabbed his jacket.

Arnie Jones was still in Intensive Care. The physician on duty said that his condition was guarded. Jones had regained consciousness, yes, but they would only have limited time with him. Pierson and MacFarland stood on one side of the bed, Lockwood on the other. Jones became aware that they were there, then carefully looked from one person to another. When he saw MacFarland, his face took on a troubled expression. "Hi Mac," he said. "I'm sorry I let you down."

Pierson looked at MacFarland, then at Lockwood. "Mr. Jones, we need to ask you a few questions. Do you feel up to it?"

Arnie looked in her direction, then smiled. "Hi. Didn't know you was friends with Mac here."

Pierson nodded briefly. "Yes, Arnie, I know Mac. Best hot dogs in Denver. We're here to find out who did this to you. Did you recognize the person who attacked you?"

Jones tried to speak, but coughed instead. "Yeah, I know 'em. They seen me following them, and then when Rufus and me come around the corner, they jump us. Used their clubs on us too. Hey, what happened to Rufus? I seen him running. I tried to create, you know, a diversion, yeah, that's it, a diversion, so's Rufus can get away."

"Rufus got away," said MacFarland. "You did a good job, Arnie."

Jones tried to smile. "Good. Good. Good." He coughed again, his face scrunched up with pain.

Pierson leaned closer, trying to get his attention. "Who attacked you, Mr. Jones? Did you recognize them?"

Arnie closed his eyes, as though he were trying to see them in his mind. "Yes'm, I recognized them. They was the man who walks that beat down there. Ossifer Lucas and his other guy."

"You're sure it was Lucas?" asked Lockwood. He spoke in a whisper to Pierson and MacFarland. "He must be talking about Lucas' partner, Dwaine Schmidt."

Jones turned and looked at Lockwood for the first time. "I knows who beats me up, man. You don't forget things like that. It was Ossifer Lucas."

## Chapter 54

*Saturday, January 16, 1000 Hours*

Nobody spoke much in the car as Lockwood drove Pierson and MacFarland back to her house. MacFarland was thinking that he truly was responsible for getting Arnie Jones in the hospital. Pierson and Lockwood were clearly disappointed that this incident had interfered with their investigation. And no one was discussing the obvious elephant in the car--that Lucas and Schmidt were engaging in potentially illegal behavior. Neither Lockwood nor Pierson were assuming that the patrolmen had done anything inappropriate--there were too many variables unaccounted for to make that determination. But MacFarland noticed that they had not yet reported the incident. That did not bode well. MacFarland was surprised that Pierson didn't insist that they call the infraction in. Was she waiting for Lockwood to suggest they report it?

Nor did MacFarland want to discuss his thoughts about the incident. He already felt like an outsider, and he knew that if he made any disparaging remarks about the two bad cops, Lockwood, and even Pierson, would turn on him. Nor was he entirely sure that the two cops hadn't acted in accordance with departmental policy regarding use of force. After all, Jones had indicated that he had tried to create a diversion to allow Rufus to escape. In MacFarland's mind, that meant that Jones had probably gone on the offensive. MacFarland could remember his days on the street. Police exhibit an attitude of authority, readiness, power--but the reality is that they always were on the lookout for something that might go wrong, for someone who might cause problems, or for someone who was on the attack.

The moment a cop didn't think like that was when the cop ended up in the hospital instead of the perp.

But no good cop would leave a man lying on the side of the street. That alone meant that procedure had been violated.

The next morning, Pierson went off to work, presumably to find out how Jones' hospitalization affected her case. She didn't mention whether she or Lockwood had reported the police involvement with the mugging. MacFarland first considered staying home, but then decided that duty--always the hot dog vendor!--called, so he dragged himself out of bed, prepared his product, and arrived at his corner only half an hour later than usual. He looked around for Rufus, but apparently Rufus, if he had shown up this morning, had already left.

At ten o'clock, MacFarland saw Rufus coming over from Colfax. Rufus wasn't carrying any coffee this morning. Well, their routine had been disrupted for the past several days.

Rufus came over and stood next to the cart. "Morning, boss," he said, his eyes downcast.

"Good morning Rufus," said MacFarland. "Are you hungry?"

"I'm always hungry, boss."

MacFarland got out a hot dog and a bun and handed it to Rufus. "I saw Arnie

at the hospital last night, Rufus. I think he is going to be okay. You don't need to worry about him."

Rufus took the hot dog and started to eat it. Finally, between bites, he tried to look directly at MacFarland. "I do worry, boss. I worry about all my brothers. I shoulda known this would be dangerous, but I didn't really think it through."

MacFarland frowned and nodded slowly. "I didn't either, Rufus, and for that I'm sorry. I should have realized that if these guys would beat me up, they would beat up anyone." He had to remind himself that he didn't know if they were, in fact, the men who beat him up. Can't assume anything, he reminded himself.

"They're not good cops, boss. Most of you guys are okay. You treat us okay, and we understand the rules we all gotta play by. But those two are outta control, you hear me, outta control! They should be stopped."

"Do you or Arnie want to press charges?"

"Fuck no, boss! Shit, we got enough trouble without adding to it. We jus' want it to go away. Some of my friends are saying that now the cops are watching us more close than ever. We don't want that, boss. You have to change your tactics. We can't keep walking into ambushes. The dinks will get us every time."

"I want to stop these bad men too, Rufus. I can't do it alone."

"I know that, boss, but how many casualties we gonna have?"

MacFarland suddenly found himself annoyed with Lockwood, Pierson, Rufus, Baker--everyone. All he wanted, the only thing he wanted, was to put Peterson behind bars, but everyone he encountered kept throwing roadblocks in his path. If they would just do what he asked them to do, what they were supposed to do, then everything would work out better.

"I said I'm fucking sorry, Rufus!" he exploded. "What more do you want me to do?"

Rufus took a couple of steps back, looking around to make sure there were no cops nearby who would blame him for the outburst. "Nothin' boss, nothin' at all. Just don't want nobody else hurt."

MacFarland tried, unsuccessfully, to control his anger. He spoke through clenched teeth, his hands balled into fists. "Let me tell you something, Rufus. I intend to get Peterson, even if it's the last thing I do. He killed my wife, and I will have his blood. And I frankly don't care how many people get wasted in the process!"

Rufus stood there, staring in shocked silence at his friend. "If that's the way you feel, boss, it's a good thing to know. I gotta go."

As Rufus quickly headed back towards Colfax, MacFarland stood there, thinking he had one more reason to kick himself. Why was he alienating the only true friend he had?

The answer was simple. If someone wasn't helping him put Peterson away, then they were actually helping Peterson cement his victory.

That just was just not something MacFarland could accept.

## Chapter 55

*Monday, January 18, 1150 Hours*

MacFarland spent most of Sunday trying to avoid Pierson. He was disappointed in her for not reporting Lucas and Schmidt. He realized that he should just go and talk to her about his disappointment with her, but it was easier to hide in his room.

Rufus didn't show up Monday morning. MacFarland realized that the Vietnam Vet was doing to him what he had done with Pierson. Avoidance. After nearly a morning of telling himself what a useless shit he was, MacFarland inwardly groaned as another reason to berate himself walked up to the corner.

"Good morning, Mac," said Jerry Baker, his voice ever pleasant and cheerful. "How about one of your wonderful brats for lunch today?"

MacFarland got out one of the brats, not sure how wonderful it was, and placed it in a warmed bun. Handing it to Baker, he couldn't help but notice that behind the cheery disposition, Baker looked tired, his eyes bloodshot, and his expression strained. "Something up, Jerry?" he asked.

Baker sighed, then busied himself putting condiments on his bratwurst. "There are times when I envy you your lifestyle, Mac. I wish all I had to do was stand out here, listening to music and serving hot dogs."

MacFarland didn't bother telling Baker that he didn't listen to music, but rather tried to improve himself by learning foreign languages. Hell, for all the good it did him, he might as well listen to music. When was he ever going to go to Mexico and actually use his Spanish? He thought about telling Baker to just go to hell, but instead he decided that the man probably would get there soon enough as it was. After all, he was a lawyer, wasn't he? "What's getting you down, Jerry?"

Baker wrapped up his bratwurst as if to take it with him. "Just the case, Mac. The judge refused to grant several of my petitions. He set a court date for February 22. I have only a month to find some way to get the case thrown out."

MacFarland knew this was Baker's subtle way of saying that MacFarland had a month to find some exculpatory evidence that would free Mrs. Freeman. Another arena in which MacFarland had failed.

"Are we making any progress?" asked Baker. He moved closer to the street corner and ate his brat.

MacFarland shrugged, then proceeded to wipe down his cart. "I'm shaking things up," he said. He then went on to retell Baker about how he got beat up, presumably by two cops, and how the cops beat up a homeless man who was keeping an eye on them for MacFarland.

"So you have a team of deputies?" asked Baker incredulously. "Damn, I never would have thought of using homeless people like that. Who would even pay attention to them? Got to hand it to you, Mac, you're a genius!"

MacFarland didn't feel like a genius, so he just let the comment go right past him. "I'm still no closer to finding out who really killed Freeman," he said. "Just some suspicions."



Baker finished his brat, then stood next to MacFarland, who took a step back to keep some distance between them. Baker reached out and shook MacFarland's hand. "You're doing a good job, Mac. I have a lot of confidence in you. I realize it is difficult at times, and I'm here to support you in any way you need. Just don't give up. Maureen is depending on both of us. She's depending on you, Mac."

MacFarland shook the lawyer's hand, then watched as Baker walked back towards his office. His only thought was that Baker simply had no clue just how incompetent MacFarland really was. Poor Mrs. Freeman. She was doomed!

## Chapter 56

*Monday, January 18, 1510 Hours*

By mid-afternoon, MacFarland's mood improved considerably. He liked the days when business was slow. When he was alone, he could listen to his language lessons, practice speaking out loud without feeling self-conscious about his poor accent or mispronunciation of the language, and even act out the scenes he was studying. MacFarland found that this really helped him learn the language, for after all, a language was more than a collection of sounds. It was a way of expressing yourself, and MacFarland had discovered that if he put physical movement to the sounds he was making, he learned faster and more efficiently. So when he was alone, he was constantly gesturing, moving, even dancing as he repeated over and over the phrases of the language lesson.

That's what he was doing at three-ten in the afternoon when Lord Bozworth strolled up behind MacFarland, pushing his shopping cart loaded with the homeless man's prize possessions. Bozworth leaned on his cart and stood there, staring at the crazy white man, dancing around on the street corner. MacFarland became aware that someone was nearby watching him. He stopped, turned to see who it was. Bozworth tilted his head, a smile on his face. "I'll have whatever you're drinking or smoking, my young man," he said with a very distinct British accent. Bozworth had grown up in Jamaica and studied in England. It was rumored that he had even attended Oxford, a fact Bozworth neither confirmed nor denied. A lot of people made up tales about Bozworth. Very few of the tales were based on any shred of truth.

MacFarland smiled sheepishly, then held out a fist. The two men bumped fists. "Bozworth, what brings you to this corner of town?"

Bozworth--or Lord Bozworth as all of his subjects called him--lived over on Colfax and rarely came west of Broadway or Lincoln, except for PrideFest and Taste of Colorado. On those two occasions, he could be found camped at the base of the On the War Trail statue near the Greek Amphitheater. Otherwise, Bozworth wandered up and down Colfax, from Greek Town to Capitol Hill. Bozworth always had his shopping cart with him, except when he was at Civic Center Park. His grey knit cap and heavy grey coat blended in with his grey beard and mustache. He had deeply set grey eyes, prominent round cheekbones, and a stubby broad nose. Although he never took his cap off, even in the summer, MacFarland knew that Bozworth was nearly bald. He was a barrel-chested man, and with his slight scoliotic stoop, it was hard to tell just how tall he was.

Surprisingly, Bozworth smelled of baby powder. Smelling good was something of a badge of honor with Lord Bozworth.

"I came to see you, Mr. MacFarland."

Bozworth rarely came to see anyone unless it involved a major breach of protocols or a world-shattering political crisis. MacFarland swallowed, wondering what he had done wrong. Then he remembered that Arnie Jones was one of Bozworth's lieutenants. "Is this about Arnie?" he asked.

Bozworth nodded. "Yes, it appears that my man got himself hurt the other day."

"I didn't mean for that to happen," said MacFarland quickly. "I told Rufus to keep a low profile."

Bozworth smiled. "I'm not blaming you, Mr. MacFarland. I know you were a copper in your former life, but I don't hold that against you. Mr. Jones is quite capable of making his own mistakes. I have heard that you feel responsible for the actions of the miscreants who incapacitated my man."

MacFarland nodded. "I did ask Rufus to get some people to keep an eye on these two—uh, coppers, so I do feel responsible. He wouldn't have gotten hurt if I hadn't asked them to do that."

"Your actions have revealed a blight on our fair city, Mr. MacFarland. The state of the city is not under your control, so you have nothing to be ashamed of, my friend. As for poor Mr. Jones, the City of Denver is taking good care of him as we speak, and while his wounds are unfortunate, none of them are fatal, and he has the singular great fortune to have gained considerable notoriety within our community for his brush with the law."

MacFarland stared at Bozworth in surprise. "I still feel bad about it, Lord Bozworth."

"Let the issue not trouble your mind, my good friend. In point of fact, this incident has, as I have alluded to earlier, revealed an infestation of contagion that I feel we must isolate and eliminate. As a consequence, I have assigned others of my brethren to keep an eye on the two Bobbies, and any others with whom they come into contact. I have also asked my associates to keep you informed of any developments. I hope this meets with your approval?"

MacFarland nodded, not really sure at all if this arrangement did meet with his approval. "Bozworth, why are you doing this? I would think that you would want to stay as far from the police as you can. What you're asking is very dangerous for a lot of individuals."

Bozworth smiled. "Denver's Finest provide a useful service to the citizens of this community, of which we are an integral part. After all, without us to remind them of how fortunate they are, the bulk of society would fall into a state of despondency that would topple civilization. For the most part, the Men in Blue treat us fairly well, and they assist me in maintaining order within our community. I could hardly do my job without their help. As for danger, we are the most vulnerable segment of society, so none of us are strangers to danger. But danger is not the most debilitating thing we face, Mr. MacFarland. You yourself should know this quite well. The one thing that destroys us more than physical harm, more than cold temperatures, more than hunger is the death of our spirit. That is why I tell my men to find work, for work provides dignity and purpose. I tell them to take care of each other, because caring ennobles the spirit. I tell them to follow wrongdoers and bring them to justice, since justice gives a man hope. The men who beat up Mr. Jones did not just harm him, Mr. MacFarland. They harmed every one of us. But as our friend Mahatma Gandhi showed us, suffering in the pursuit of righteous objectives elevates the spirit." Bozworth pointed to the hot dogs and bratwursts cooking on the warming rollers. "Those certainly look quite delicious, Mr. MacFarland. I wonder if they are designated for anyone in

particular."

MacFarland grinned and began to reach for a bratwurst and a bun. "Would you like one, Lord Bozworth?"

"Indeed I would, sir, but alas, I have nary a penny to my name."

"It's on the house, Your Lordship," said MacFarland.

"Then how could I possibly turn down the copious bounty of this fair city?" said Lord Bozworth.

## Chapter 57

*Wednesday, January 20, 1550 Hours*

MacFarland didn't think much more about his meeting with Bozworth until Wednesday, two days later. It was getting late in the afternoon, and a cold front was rapidly moving in from Canada. The air tasted metallic and bitter. MacFarland was just starting to close down his cart when one of the homeless people who lived near the Civic Center slowly and cautiously approached. The man seemed nervous, as though he were afraid someone would jump out at him at any moment. MacFarland stopped cleaning his cart and started to get a couple of hot dogs ready to give to the man. MacFarland didn't recognize this individual, but with more and more homeless people every day, that was hardly surprising. It was clear, however, that this was not one of MacFarland's regular homeless people. The man came within ten feet, then stopped.

"Are you Mark MacFarland?" he asked.

MacFarland nodded, trying to recall if he had ever seen the man before. Gibbs was a black man with incredibly sad eyes. MacFarland would have remembered someone who looked that unhappy. He had the face of a man who once had known comfort, security, and self-respect, and then had lost all of it. "Yes, that's me. Are you hungry? I've got some hot dogs left, no sense throwing them away." He held out the hot dogs for the man to take.

The man eyed the food with suspicion, then finally reached out to take them. "Thanks," he said. "Lord Bozworth told me to come see you if I seen anything."

"Really! What have you seen, uh...uh?"

"Oh, my name is Aaron Gibbs. Lord Bozworth asked us to keep an eye on the downtown cops, you know, and so I've been doing that, you know. When I see a cop meet a guy, you know, over by Coors Field. The man is one rich dude, you know, driving a Porsche. I know this car, because you don't see many Spyder's in Denver, no sirree! Man, I sure would like to drive one of those things! He parks near the baseball field, and he calls the cops over to his car, and I'm thinking, what is this rich dude doing talking to these two cops? And they come over to the car and they start to talk. It's mostly the Mexican cop who does the talking to the man, and he's talking like he knows him real good. The other cop just stands and watches out for everyone."

A Porsche Spyder. MacFarland only knew of one man who drove a Spyder, but he needed confirmation. "Can you describe the man they were talking to? The one in the car?"

"Sort of. I didn't get all that good a look at him, but the car was open, so I did see his face. He was a thin man, he had grey hair. No beard, pointy chin. Dressed nice, you can tell even when he is in the car. You know he is important because the cops act like he is god, you know. And with a car like that, yeah, he must be a god. So I figure, I need to watch this guy. So I watch him, and when he is done talking to the cops, he drives away."

"Were you able to follow him?"

"No, because I'm on foot, see, and he's driving, so I lost him. But I found him again. I ask around and his car is easy to find. Not so many cars like that. I asked one of Lord Bozworth's other people, and they know where this car goes."

"Where did he go, Aaron?"

"It goes to the 2500 block on Arapahoe, Mr. MacFarland. He parks out front and goes inside."

"How long was he in there?"

"Oh, not long. I was across the street, watching the car, you know. Then, after maybe half an hour, out comes the rich dude, but now he is with someone else. Another guy, but this guy is not rich. What he is, is angry. They are arguing a lot, even though the rich guy is trying to keep the other man quiet. I can't understand everything they are saying, but I figure the other guy wants money from this rich guy."

"Can you describe this other guy?"

"Well, he is younger than the rich guy, shorter, and has an oval face. He's overweight, has a fat neck. He has short hair. I couldn't see his eyes, because he is wearing sunglasses. He's dressed in jeans, a blue shirt, and a vest jacket. Oh, and he's wearing a cap with army logos on it. I think it was Afghanistan Veterans maybe."

"What happened next?"

"The rich guy gets in his car and drives away. So I followed the other guy, but I think he saw me."

MacFarland wondered if this was the man who had been seen in the jewelry store, talking with Freeman. Was this the man who went fishing with Otto Freeman and probably killed him? MacFarland had no real evidence to support this assumption, only his gut feeling that someone had finally seen the real killer. And what was the reason he was talking with Newsome? Did Newsome pay this guy to kill Freeman? "How do you know he saw you?"

"Maybe he didn't see me. I just thought that he seemed to change his actions after a bit, and I wondered to myself if it was because he knew I was following him. You know? He went into a coffee shop and sat in there, looking out the window. He mighta seen me, but I don't know. So I had to leave. I came here to tell you what I seen today."

MacFarland did know. It was an instinct that many cops developed, that they knew when their quarry got spooked. That's why the best covert surveillance was done by teams of observers. That way, the subject was never sure if anyone was really following them because the individual changed. He could hardly expect Bozworth's homeless people to be that well organized. As it was, he was quite impressed with the network that Bozworth set up. No wonder he was proving to be such an asset to Pierson and her team in the narcotics investigation.

"You've done a good job, Aaron. You don't need to follow this guy any more, okay?"

Aaron nodded, then, slipping the hot dogs into the pocket of his jacket, he wandered off to wherever he spent the night.

## Chapter 58

*Friday, January 22, 0940 Hours*

MacFarland was frustrated throughout all of Thursday. He wanted to drive by Newsome's house to check on his activities, but Rufus didn't show up with his usual morning coffee. MacFarland thought about putting his cart back on his trailer and leaving it there, but he realized that he didn't really have any leads anyway. He couldn't just park outside of Newsome's house all day, and unless he got a better handle on the mysterious man Aaron Gibbs saw him talking to on Wednesday. MacFarland simply didn't have any option other than to monitor his cart and listen to his language tapes.

Another comment that Aaron Gibbs made bothered him. He said that one of the cops was Mexican. But neither Schmidt nor Lucas was Mexican. Just who were these cops?

MacFarland had plenty of questions, but what did he actually know? He started ticking off the facts (presumptions?) that he had. Otto Freeman was killed on Thanksgiving Day, with two shots from a .22 caliber handgun that was found in the victim's garage. The gun had been hurriedly hidden and only had the defendant's prints on it. The defendant claimed she found the body on Saturday morning. There was evidence that the victim had been moved, but all trace evidence was tainted by a blanket the defendant used to cover the body. There was a strong possibility that the victim had been fishing, most probably at Gross Reservoir. There is also a possibility that the victim had been killed up there, then brought back to Denver and left in the garage.

As for possible suspects, MacFarland couldn't rule out Maureen Freeman as the killer. Her motive wasn't too clear to him. The prosecution theory was that her husband was putting pressure on her to quit her job at the jewelry store because of suspicion of her embezzling money, and this led to an altercation between the two of them. This theory didn't make sense to MacFarland. Maureen Freeman had no control over the management of the store, so why couldn't either her husband or Newsome just fire her? He realized this might cause problems in their marriage, but it would have been the simplest solution. There was also evidence that there had been conflict between the victim and his partner, Brian Newsome. In addition, there was the possibility that it was Newsome embezzling the money, not Maureen. So Newsome had motive to kill Freeman, especially if Freeman knew about the missing funds.

Then there was the mysterious customer in the store who went on several fishing jaunts with Freeman. MacFarland was pretty certain that someone with initials WA was the fishing buddy. This same individual had later been seen talking or arguing with Newsome. Far more significantly, this individual had been seen coming out of Norris Peterson's office building. Was the individual seen by Aaron Gibbs the person with initials WA?

And finally, what was Peterson's connection to this case? Why was WA--if that person was indeed WA--in the CCP building? Was he meeting with Peterson? Or

had Newsome arranged to meet him there? If so, why?

As much as MacFarland wanted to tie Peterson to the murder of Otto Freeman, it was looking like a stretch to make that connection. On the other hand, Brian Newsome was looking more and more like a prime suspect. While it was unlikely that Newsome would have actually pulled the trigger, he might have hired someone like WA to do it for him.

MacFarland was about to congratulate himself when he noticed Rufus Headley walking resolutely towards him. It was nine-forty in the morning, much later than Rufus' usual schedule. Rufus was not only late; he also did not have the predictable morning coffee.

"Good morning Rufus," said MacFarland pleasantly.

"Know where I jus' been?" demanded Rufus.

MacFarland had no idea, though he was pretty sure it was not the coffee shop. "What's the matter, Rufus? Is something wrong?"

"Wrong? Boss, what are you doing? You're gonna get us killed!"

MacFarland had always had some difficulty distinguishing between Rufus' Vietnam memories and his current real-time existence. Rufus clearly did not distinguish the two sets of events, and often mixed up what happened in Vietnam with what was going on in the present. So when Rufus announced that MacFarland was getting people killed, he could not be certain if this was something happening now or something that might have happened forty-six years earlier. He tried to calm Rufus down.

"Rufus, I don't know what you're talking about. Tell me what's concerning you."

"It's Gibbs, boss. Poor young Gibbs. Jus' a boy really."

MacFarland's face hardened. "What about Gibbs, Rufus? What happened to him?"

"He's been wasted, boss. Taken out by Charlie. Those cops that got Arnie and almost got me, they musta done this."

MacFarland was stunned. Aaron Gibbs was dead? "How did this happen?"

"I don't know, boss. All I know is that I wake up this morning hearing all sorts of noise down the river from me. I reconnoiter and see cops and dogs, so I figures I better get to higher ground. But they're not coming for me, they are checking under a bridge. Now I know this is where Gibbs usta hang out, so I begin to wonder, maybe something's happened to the boy. So I maneuver until I'm nearer the bridge, and I can see that they have a body and are searching the area. Now I'm worried, because they might come to my hooch and force me out. But so far, they don't. So I ask some peeps standing nearby what's going on, and they tell me that Gibbs was shot last night. It was afore midnight, and several people musta heard the shot, but what can we do about that, boss? Call it in to 911? So it wasn't 'til morning that someone tells the cops what they heard. And the cops come out and find Gibbs, all dead."

MacFarland was silent. He couldn't believe that Lucas or Schmidt would do something like this. Was Gibbs killed because he was keeping surveillance on WA and Newsome? Or was this just another unfortunate poor-on-poor killing? "I'm sorry to hear that he was killed, Rufus. I had no idea that you knew him."

Rufus stared back at MacFarland in disbelief. "It ain't like I ever left here,



boss. You don't know many of the people on the street anymore, because you got a place to live. You forget what it's like being on the street. Now those two cops have gone and killed him. Boss, you're getting' us killed. You gotta stop this!"

"I don't think it was the cops who killed Gibbs," said MacFarland. But he couldn't deny what Rufus had said. He probably was the reason people were getting killed.

## Chapter 59

*Tuesday, January 26, 0805 Hours*

For the next three days, Rufus Headley avoided the downtown area, specifically the corner where MacFarland had his cart. Finally, on Tuesday morning, just as MacFarland finished moving his cart into position, he saw Rufus heading up the street. He smiled, glad to see that his friend had finally decided to forgive him for putting people's lives in danger. Rufus was the kind of individual who didn't hold grudges, and if something went wrong in his life, he was usually convinced it was due to Charlie ambushing him or HQ screwing up again. While MacFarland was concerned about Rufus' absence, he found himself reflecting on other events that had happened this weekend, events that should have meant more to him than they did.

The first incident on Saturday morning at ten o'clock. Benny Lockwood approached MacFarland's cart. MacFarland was surprised to see him, since Pierson was at home that morning. He assumed Lockwood would have the day off also.

"Good morning, detective, how are you today?"

Lockwood held up four fingers, indicating everything was okay. "Mac, do you know anything about Bozworth's--uh--operations?"

MacFarland smiled. "I don't really think Bozworth has operations per se, but I get your drift. I have no idea how they work, other than a significantly large number of the homeless people look to him for protection and leadership."

Lockwood nodded, checking out the sparse number of people on Fourteenth Avenue. There wasn't much business on cold, Saturday mornings. "How do you make any money doing this?" he asked.

MacFarland looked around. "It's usually busier in the summer," he said. He didn't add that he really wasn't trying to make money. That had never been one of his motivators. As long as he made enough to replenish his product, pay for coffee, and give a little to Pierson for rent, he was happy. "What's up with Bozworth?"

"We were working with one of his guys, and he's disappeared. I was supposed to meet with him this morning, but he was a no-show."

MacFarland frowned, wondering just how involved Pierson and Lockwood had gotten with Bozworth. It seemed strange that Bozworth would work that closely with any cop. Lockwood didn't have the skills to persuade someone like Bozworth; it must be due to Pierson's influence. MacFarland found himself feeling proud of his former partner. She had matured quite a bit since he last worked with her.

"Who was your contact? Maybe I know where he is."

"The party's name is Gibbs. Aaron Gibbs. Black, male, one sixty-five pounds, dark hair, brown eyes, slight build. You ever see him?"

MacFarland stared off in the distance, unable to focus. Yes, he had seen Aaron Gibbs. Didn't Lockwood know that his Confidential Informant had been killed

the day before? It seemed strange that there was so little communications even within Major Crimes. He could almost understand there being little contact between Major Crimes and maybe Special Operations, but this murder should have been brought to everyone's attention. Then he remembered that Pierson and Lockwood were on loan to Vice and Narcotics. It might be days before those idiots realized that their CI had been killed. No, he told himself. Communications couldn't possibly be that bad!

MacFarland was about to enlighten the young detective when he stopped. He didn't know if there was a connection between his case and the Gibbs killing. He didn't know if there was a link between Pierson's and Lockwood's investigation and the Freeman murder. What he did know was that if he mentioned the circumstances under which Lockwood's contact was killed, then any leads MacFarland might get were going to be lost in the ensuing confusion as Major Crimes and Vice competed for control over the case. *Besides*, thought MacFarland to himself, *I'm not a cop any longer*. He had no professional reason to make Lockwood's life any easier.

He shook his head, as though to clear troubling thoughts. No, he couldn't withhold the information he had. With a deep sigh and the depressing realization that he was going to regret this, he told Lockwood about Gibb's murder.

Lockwood had a lot to say in response to MacFarland's revelation, but not one word of it was thanks.

When he got home that night, Pierson met him with an icy greeting. "Why didn't you tell me last night that Gibbs had been killed?"

"Well, shit, Cynthia, first of all, I figured you would have heard about it at your morning briefing, and second, how the fuck was I supposed to know that Gibbs was a person of interest in your case? How much have you shared with me?"

Pierson looked sullen and turned to go upstairs to her room. "You're not on the force any more, Mac. I didn't think it mattered to you."

For the next couple of days, that remark continued to bother him. *I'm not on the force any more*, he kept repeating over and over in his mind. He had thought that he had accepted not being a detective, but clearly he still had issues. He had convinced himself that the only concerns he had was the loss of access to police resources. If he had the ability to work with the forensics team, the investigators and detectives, and the technicians that made the Denver Police Department one of the best in the country, he could have solved this case long ago. But after hearing Pierson's comment, he began to wonder if he missed more than the ability to use the resources of the department.

Maybe he missed the daily contact with people who felt the same way he did--other cops.

Maybe he missed working with Cynthia Pierson.

"Morning, boss," said Rufus, bringing MacFarland back to Tuesday. Rufus handed MacFarland a cup of hot coffee. "There's no more cops down by the river. Don't know that they arrested those two bad cops, though."

"I don't think it was cops that killed him, Rufus," said MacFarland. MacFarland suddenly realized that three different suspects might have killed Gibbs. The cops Gibbs was following; the man Gibbs saw coming out of the CCP

building; or someone associated with the undercover case Pierson and Lockwood were working on. But here was the one possible deciding factor. Only one of those three options might also have murdered other people.

Rufus glanced at MacFarland out of the sides of his eyes. "You know who did kill him, don't ya, boss?"

Slowly, MacFarland nodded, his mouth set in a grim line. "I may not know who pulled the trigger, but I'm pretty sure that I know who was responsible for Gibbs getting killed."

"That's great, boss! Let's go capture the bastard and make him pay!"

MacFarland felt his shoulders slump. "It may not be that easy, Rufus. It may not be easy at all."

## Chapter 60

*Thursday, January 28, 1314 Hours*

Rufus was disappointed that MacFarland had not already apprehended Gibbs' killer. MacFarland tried to explain that arresting someone was not simply walking up to them and slapping handcuffs on their wrists. "I need probable cause, for one thing. I also need a real suspect." He wiped down his cart, looking up at the massive dark clouds flowing in from the north. The weather forecast called for dropping temperatures, increasing winds, and up to a foot of snow by midnight. *What a miserable day*, he thought. "I know who the suspect is, in a general way, but I don't know his actual identity."

"It just don't seem right someone getting away with it."

MacFarland agreed with that. Justice was no longer concerned with making the guilty party pay for his crime. It also involved doing things in a specific way that supposedly protected the rights of the accused. *Who protects the rights of the victim*, he wondered. Pierson had once told him that the weight of society protected the rights of the victim. Society had the resources to prove its case against the suspect, whereas the suspect often had no resources to protect himself. For this reason, she insisted, we have to do things the right way.

But what about suspects who could afford million dollar cars and multi-million dollar homes? Or other suspects who could afford to buy juries, prosecutors, and judges? How did the victim protect herself from that kind of situation?

MacFarland hadn't heard anything from Jerry Baker, another contributing factor to his depressed mood. He wondered how soon the snow would start falling. Perhaps this was going to be a short day for him.

Rufus finished his coffee, got his daily hot dogs, and wandered off towards the park, seemingly unconcerned about the impending storm. Once the snow started falling, however, Rufus would seek the shelter of his hideaway. With the temperature dropping, MacFarland worried about Rufus staying warm. MacFarland wished once more that Rufus would let him bring him to Pierson's house. Even Pierson's basement was warmer than it would be outside along the river this evening. This was just one more factor that added to his sense of helplessness.

At one-fourteen in the afternoon, the sun peeked through the clouds long enough to fool the casual observer into thinking that the storm was just a figment of the National Weather Service's over-active imagination. Walking in the midst of the bright sunlight was a figure familiar to MacFarland--Lord Bozworth. MacFarland began automatically to prepare a bratwurst for his Lordship.

"Depressing news about young Mr. Gibbs," said Bozworth when he drew near to the cart.

MacFarland nodded. "Yes, it was. You wouldn't happen to have any information about the crime or the perpetrator?"

Bozworth took off his gloves and reached for the bratwurst. "Thank you, my

fine fellow." He started eating, then, between bites, he mumbled, "It is very difficult to separate fact from fancy in situations like this, Mr. MacFarland, as I am sure you well know. There have been rumors that Mr. Gibbs was done in by the very same coppers who assaulted poor Mr. Jones, though I discount these rumors. Firstly, Mr. Gibbs had excellent relations with said officers. Secondly, he has had little contact with them in the past several weeks, devoting himself to the services of aiding your former Partner, Mistress Pierson. And thirdly, he told me that he had been following an individual who might be of interest to you in regard to the incarceration of Madam Freeman."

"The fisherman," said MacFarland.

Bozworth smiled broadly, his face glowing with some private joke. "Ah, I surmised from Mr. Gibbs description that the individual he was following was indeed a man who pursued the fine sport of fly fishing. From descriptions of the man's clothing and demeanor, I concluded that he spent much of his time in the high country, fording streams, wading along the edges of mountain lakes, perusing the idyllic sport of matching wits with a fish."

MacFarland stared at Bozworth in disbelief. There was no way he could have gleaned all of that from the scant descriptions of the man's clothing. How had he discovered that the man was the fishing buddy?

Bozworth smiled sheepishly. "Ah, I guess there were some other elements in the equation that I considered. When Mr. Gibbs reported to me that he thought the suspect had observed his clandestine surveillance, I asked another of my fine men to assist in the pursuit of this subject. He observed the gentleman going into a tackle shop near the Sixteenth Street Mall, and, using the ruse of having found some keys that the said gentleman 'dropped' outside the store, ascertained from the shopkeeper that the man was, in fact, an avid angler, visiting from Chicago."

MacFarland burst out laughing. "Lord Bozworth, you are incredible! I don't think even the police have discovered the identity of this man."

Bozworth tried to wave off the compliment. "I am simply performing my civic duty, my fine fellow. No more, no less." He finished his bratwurst and wiped his mouth with his coat sleeve. "Now, what is your specific interest in this gentleman?"

MacFarland spoke slowly, but with increasing conviction. "I think that he is the man who killed both Otto Freeman and Aaron Gibbs."

"If that is indeed true, my friend, then you or whatever constabulary we may bring to bear on this situation must apprehend this culprit."

MacFarland looked Bozworth in the eyes. "I fully intend to do that, Lord Bozworth. I promise I will get justice for Aaron Gibbs. He deserves nothing less."

## Chapter 61

*Saturday, January 30, 1745 Hours*

Despite the overcast skies and the foot of snow on the ground, MacFarland was in good spirits. He was fairly certain that the fisherman was the killer. But what was the killer's name? He couldn't very well go to Pierson and say, "I think some fly fisherman killed Freeman." She would want to know who this individual was, what he looked like, how to identify him. Unless the killer bumped into him on the street, MacFarland had little hope of catching him. It was unlikely that the man would walk up to his hot dog cart and ask for a Coney Island Special.

There was one person, however, that MacFarland was certain knew who the man was.

Brian Newsome.

MacFarland still was not really sure what Newsome's involvement in the murder was. Had he hired the fisherman to kill Freeman? Had the fisherman tried to extort money from Newsome and used the murder of Freeman as a warning? It didn't matter. Newsome would be able to answer all of his questions. As Saturday warmed up enough to turn the streets into dirty, slushy rivers, MacFarland closed down his cart, drove it home, and left it in the yard. He then got back into his truck and drove out to Lakewood.

He parked across the street from Newsome's house. The streets here had already been plowed. Even though none of these streets were snow routes, the average price of the houses in the neighborhood warranted good service from the city of Lakewood. In Pierson's neighborhood, local residents with plows mounted in front of their trucks removed most of the snow. Who needs city services? Only the incredibly rich or the incredibly poor.

MacFarland looked at his watch. A quarter to six. The lights were on inside the house, though he could see no signs of movement inside. Most of the windows were covered, and Christmas decorations, though still up, were not lighted. The walkway up to the front door and the sidewalk in front of the house had been shoveled clean. The ostentatious car was not visible. It was probably parked inside the garage. MacFarland decided that Newsome drew the line on exhibitionism if it meant getting snow on his car. In fact, he probably had a second car that he used just for days like today.

MacFarland walked up to the front door and knocked loudly. He waited a moment, then knocked again. Still no response. He tried ringing the bell, but that had no effect either.

MacFarland tried to peer in through the curtains, but he had only limited view of the front hallway and living room. If he were still on the force, he would call in that there was no response to his attempt to get access to the house and come back at a later time. But he wasn't still on the force. He was a hot dog vendor, and he suddenly discovered that change in roles also resulted in a change in attitude. He walked to the side of the house, unlatched the side gate, and walked around to the back of the house.

The Newsome's had a large back yard. A separate building contained either an enclosed swimming pool or a greenhouse. A large gazebo sat directly behind the house. At this time, the gazebo looked cold and bleak, covered with drifts of snow and decorated with thin slivers of icicles. He could smell the odor of smoke.. Someone was burning pinewood in their fireplace. He walked over to the back door, then peered in.

He blinked in surprise, instantly alert. He saw a foot and shoe extending from behind a cabinet. It looked to him as though someone was lying on the floor.

Once more, he was torn between his police training and his instincts as a civilian. On the one hand, he wanted to call in for back-up and enter the house with probable cause. But he didn't have any means of calling for back-up, except to call 911. He pulled out his phone and dialed. He identified himself, gave the address of the Newsome house, and described what he saw. The 911 operator informed him to remain where he was and that police were on the way.

MacFarland did not follow her instructions. He tried to open the door, but it was locked. He banged his elbow against the window pain, stuck his hand inside, and opened the door. As he entered the kitchen, he wished that he had his weapon, but he had left it at home, hidden away so Pierson wouldn't find it. He moved quickly but cautiously towards the body. As he rounded the corner, he found two bodies on the floor, about four feet apart, one male and one female. Both were lying face down, though MacFarland was pretty certain that the male was Brian Newsome. Blood was still pooling from wounds on the woman's body. As he moved closer to examine the bodies for signs of life, he noticed that most of the wounds were downward thrusts, centered on both victim's face, neck, and chest. As he was looking over the wounds, he heard the front door slam closed. He jumped up and ran towards the front door, certain that it was the killer trying to escape. He raced towards the front rooms of the house. He grasped the handle of the front door and pulled it open. As he was about to exit the house, he found himself staring down the barrels of four guns pointed directly at him.

He stopped, raised his hands, and let the police pull his arms down to cuff him.



## Chapter 62

*Sunday, January 31, 1140 Hours*

"What is it with you and jail?" demanded Pierson as MacFarland sat down across from her. "Don't you like the room I gave you?"

MacFarland blinked, then smiled grimly. He had originally been arrested by the Lakewood Police, but when someone in the Denver Police Department—presumably Commander Chamberlain—heard he was arrested, he had been transferred to the Van-Cise Simonet Detention Center. Lakewood had grudgingly agreed to the transfer, though it was still clear that they wanted to charge him with the double homicide.

"I think I'm beginning to like this place," said MacFarland. "While it's hardly the Waldorf Astoria, at least here, I have plenty of room. You still have half the room filled with boxes of junk."

Pierson frowned. "I don't have any place to store them. I don't want to put them in the basement or the garage."

"You have that other guest room."

"The one with the frilly lace comforter? You'd want that room?"

"You could always change the comforter."

"No, that room is for special people."

MacFarland didn't like thinking he wasn't special. "What about that big room at the end of the hall?"

Pierson became silent, then looked down at the table. "That was my parent's room," she said. "Yeah, I suppose I could store the boxes in there. I just didn't want to disturb it."

"They're not coming back, Cyn," said MacFarland gently.

"I'm not here to discuss my fucking parents," she snapped. "Mac, you're in trouble. Why did you go to Newsome's house? Did you kill them?"

MacFarland looked at her in surprise. "How could you even suggest such a thing, Cynthia?"

"Hey, I have to ask. I know you wouldn't do any such thing, but I also thought you were not stupid enough to go to Newsome's house. But you did."

"I think I know who killed Otto Freeman," he said quietly.

Pierson looked up, then looked around. She was sure the conversation was being recorded, since she had no lawyer-client privileges. MacFarland had been interrogated late into the night. The officer in charge let her talk to him, probably to see if he contradicted his statement to the police. "Who?"

MacFarland shrugged. "I don't know exactly who, but it was the same person who killed Newsome and his wife."

Pierson rolled her eyes in frustration. "That doesn't help much, Mac. Do you have a name, a description, anything other than a bullshit theory?"

"No, not really. That's why I went over to see Newsome. He knows—he knew—who the killer is."

"How do you know that?"

"Because Gibbs saw them arguing over money."

Pierson's eyes opened wide in surprise. "My Gibbs?"

"Affirmative," nodded MacFarland. "Problem is, he's dead too. Give you one guess who killed Gibbs."

Pierson pushed her chair back and took a deep breath. "Wait a minute. You're saying that this guy has killed four people? These crimes are all related?"

MacFarland raised his eyebrows. "That's the way it looks to me," he said.

Pierson shook her head in dismay. "Unfortunately, that's not the way it looks to the police."

MacFarland leaned back in his chair, momentarily amused by Pierson's concern. "How does it look to the police?"

"God damn it, Mac, it looks like you killed the Newsomes! And from the way you're talking, I wouldn't be surprised if they try to pin the murder of Gibbs on you."

MacFarland was puzzled. "How can they charge me with any of those murders? Sure, I was there, but I discovered the bodies. I phoned in the crime to 911."

Pierson looked very grim. "There were two calls into 911. The first call came in at about five thirty-five. Yours came in ten minutes later."

"That explains how the police got there so quickly. There was someone in the house when I went there. I didn't see them, but they escaped out the front door when I was in the kitchen. Didn't the police see anyone running away from the house?"

Pierson shook her head. "No, they didn't. And what is worse for you is that they found the murder weapon."

MacFarland looked questioningly at her.

"It was a carving knife from a rather expensive carving set. It had your prints all over it, Mac. They are absolutely certain it was one of your knives."

## Chapter 63

*Wednesday, February 3, 1105 Hours*

Jerry Baker stared disconsolately across the table at his new client. "I hardly expected to be defending you when I asked you to help me," he said.

"It wasn't in my set of expectations either," said MacFarland. "Nothing about this case has been going the way I expected."

"The evidence against you is pretty solid," said Baker. "But here's the good news. They didn't find any blood splatter or traces on your clothes. Some on your shoes, but you picked that up walking past the bodies. They did find blood on your hands, though, which isn't good."

"I was feeling for a pulse, God damn it," said MacFarland angrily.

"Don't snap at me," said Baker. "I believe you. But the fingerprints on the knife are pretty telling. They will be able to prove that it was your prints and only your prints on the knife handle."

"If I'm not mistaken," said MacFarland, finally calming down, "they should be able to determine that my prints on the knife are the reverse of a downward stabbing hold. If I remember correctly, I've only ever held that knife in a carving position. Besides," he added with a look of disgust on his face, "I would never kill someone with a kitchen carving knife."

Baker stared at him, perplexed. "Uh, what does that mean? What's wrong with a carving knife? Seems like it would do a pretty good job of killing to me."

"It means that the knife is too large, too likely to get stuck in a wound. I would use a smaller, sturdier knife."

Baker squinted as he processed that information, then he started nervously checking his notes. "Hmmm, there is nothing in the forensics file about how the prints appear on the knife handle. I wonder if it might be worthwhile to get an independent assessment."

MacFarland stared at him with an open-eyed expression. "It would be worthwhile in my assessment," he said in an exasperated tone.

Baker looked at MacFarland in surprise. "I am taking your case pro bono," he said. "Your partner can be very persuasive. But I agree with you, it seems odd that the Crime Lab overlooked that point. I can check with them. Maybe it was just an oversight."

"The Crime Lab doesn't make oversights," said MacFarland. "But somebody in the crime lab is doctoring the reports."

Baker frowned. "That's a pretty serious accusation," said Baker. "Is this related to the Freeman case?"

"Absolutely," said MacFarland. "I think the same person who killed Otto Freeman killed the Newsomes." He paused a few seconds, then continued. "When I got evicted from my apartment, all of my possessions were dumped on the lawn in the back of the building. Everything except the items in my kitchen. Those items included all my cooking pans, storage containers, product, and my utensils, including a set of carving knives. I haven't had that knife in my possession since

the day I got evicted. But someone had it and gave it to the person that killed that couple. They're trying to frame me for it."

Baker was scratching notes on his tablet as it transcribed what MacFarland was saying. "Are you saying that someone conspired to murder Brian and Sarah Newsome?"

Sarah Newsome? Was that her name? Somehow putting a name to the victim made the murder more real to MacFarland. Then he remembered seeing her name on the witness list for the Freeman case. He nodded. "Yeah, I guess that is what I'm saying. At first I believed that Newsome was responsible for the murder of Otto Freeman. Not that he fired the actual shots. I thought that he hired the killer--a man with the initials WA, a fisherman from Chicago--to do the killing. I was going to confront Newsome with this, but finding him dead means the killer is tying up loose ends. I had the case all figured out, until this wrinkle about my knife being the murder weapon entered the picture. Now I realize there is another party involved in this crime. That person is the real conspirator."

"Do you have any idea who?" asked Baker.

"I'd rather not say, Jerry. I need to get out of here, then I can get the evidence I need to prove my case."

Baker shook his head. "Getting you out of here won't be easy. The judge has denied bail. I might be able to use the evidence of the lack of blood splatter and the position of the prints on the knife to get the District Attorney to drop the charges, but first, I need that fingerprint evidence. Give me a few days, and I will see what I can do. But you really should tell me who you suspect."

MacFarland shook his head. "This guy is too well positioned to allow himself to get caught. I need to find a way to bring him down. I depended once on other people to do that, and they failed. I won't fail."

Baker slumped in resignation, then his eyes brightened as he realized who it was that MacFarland suspected. He nodded slowly. "You're right. It's going to take a lot to bring that man down."

## Chapter 64

*Wednesday, February 3, 1425 Hours*

"I'm only here because Pierson is such a pain in the ass," said Bob Chamberlain.

MacFarland stared intently at his former boss. Chamberlain had aged since MacFarland had last worked with him. His beard had turned grey, though his hair was still many shades darker. His eyes drooped, whether from too many late nights or general weariness with the depravity of human beings, MacFarland could not tell. Even so, the man still exuded feelings of trust. This was a man you wanted to follow. "Thanks for the vote of confidence," he said. He had been surprised when he was told he had a second visitor today. He was even more surprised when he discovered that it was the Commander of Major Crimes. While they had once been friends, their friendship had become strained when Chamberlain had been forced to dismiss MacFarland from the department. "It's not something I want to do," he had insisted. "I would much rather just put you on leave and let you get the treatment you need." MacFarland had not made it easy for his Commander. Chamberlain had tried to maintain contact with MacFarland, but MacFarland had rebuffed all his attempts at reconciliation.

"She's convinced you're innocent, though she can't give me any real details. I don't know. I trust her judgment, Mac. I trust her judgment as much as I used to trust yours." Chamberlain folded his hands on the table. "Tell me, what's going on?"

How much could MacFarland tell the Commander? It was one thing for an insider to claim there was corruption in the department. Police trusted each other. It was another thing for a civilian to make those claims. They didn't trust outsiders. He knew how he would feel if he were still in the department and someone outside started accusing the department of improper procedures. He would close ranks. He was also uncertain of just how much Pierson had told her boss about the problems with the evidence. He decided to take a chance.

"I think something rotten is going on in the Crime Lab, Commander," he said.

Chamberlain stared stonily ahead, then slowly nodded. MacFarland was not sure if this was old news or news that Chamberlain didn't want to hear. "Go on, tell me what you suspect."

"Remember a few years ago when Chief White proposed outsourcing some of the department's services? There was some concern about ensuring the integrity of the Crime Lab."

"Affirmative. But we've instituted a lot of procedures to ensure chain of custody integrity, oversight of laboratory procedures, validation of results. We've also tried to insulate the lab from some of the cost cuts that constantly threaten it."

"Despite all those efforts, I think there is a problem."

"What makes you think that, Mac?"

"I've seen an altered evidence log from the Lab."

Chamberlain didn't say anything for a moment. "Does this involve that evidence from the shoes of Otto Freeman?"

MacFarland nodded.

"Pierson pointed that out to me. I checked with the Senior Lab tech, and he claimed that the evidence bag got dropped off at the wrong desk. Human error, supposedly."

"It's not human error," said MacFarland. "It's human misdirection."

Chamberlain nodded. "I can check to see who had access to the evidence. But I think you are barking up the wrong tree, Mac. At least, I sincerely hope so."

Chamberlain's reaction was much as MacFarland expected it to be. No one wants to believe that the organization they belong to might be corrupt. MacFarland still wanted to believe that the explanation was a simple one--just a mistake, nothing sinister intended. But too many pieces of evidence had been tampered with for this to be just a mistake.

Being an outsider had contributed to MacFarland's cynicism. He couldn't expect Chamberlain to share that cynicism. When your life often depended on the people you worked with, you had to believe that they shared the same values and goals that you had.

Sometimes, however, even those you thought you could trust valued different things.

"Maybe I am," said MacFarland finally. "I'm sure there is a simple explanation for everything."

"I'm sure there is," said Chamberlain. "Look Mark, I know you didn't commit these murders. I've known you for more than a decade, and I just can't believe that you would get involved in something like this. But it doesn't look good. You have to give me something to work with."

MacFarland wanted to believe that he could trust his former boss, but once again, he became cautious. He hadn't told his lawyer everything he knew, simply because he wasn't sure how much he could trust Baker. Chamberlain, as good a friend as he had once been, was working for the group of people whose job it was to get the evidence that would prove MacFarland guilty.

MacFarland decided he couldn't trust anyone. It was a lesson learned on the streets, one that every homeless person learned through painful experience. And although MacFarland was no longer homeless, he found that he was closer to that segment of society than he was to the Denver Police Department. They had abandoned him once; they were threatening him now. Was Chamberlain sincere in his assurances of help?

"I wish there was something I could give you, Commander. All I can say is that I didn't kill those people. Someone is trying to frame me."

Chamberlain looked at MacFarland. The Commander's expression was unreadable, then he stood up. "I'll do what I can, Mac. You hang in there and trust the system."

*Yeah, sure,* thought MacFarland as he was being led back to his cell. *Trust the system to screw me. Damn, I'm thinking like a homeless person again.*

## Chapter 65

*Thursday, February 4, 1002 Hours*

MacFarland did not like being in the Denver Detention Center. It was not a pleasant place to be. Oh, sure, it was one of the most modern and luxurious jails MacFarland had ever seen, but still, it was jail. None of the guards mistreated him. Because of the nature of his crime, he was kept in one of the cells reserved for more violent prisoners, so he had no one to talk to. Except for the few hours a day he was let out to eat or exercise, he had nothing to do. He was not able to listen to his language tapes, nor was there much to read, other than a newspaper. Most of the time, he just lay on his bunk, staring at the ceiling and thinking about the case. He went over all of the evidence he had collected, reviewing each item in his mind, piecing it together so that he had a picture of what had happened. He contrasted his interpretation of the facts with the police and prosecutor's interpretation.

The first problem he saw was that the police saw three separate crimes, whereas MacFarland saw them as all related to each other. How could he get the police to see connections between the three crimes?

The police version was that Maureen Freeman had been having heated arguments with her husband in the days and weeks prior to the incident. She then shot her husband, at some undisclosed location, moved his body to the garage, wrapped it up in a blanket that had been in the contact with the ground on numerous occasions. She had used a .22 caliber gun that was registered to her and had only her prints on it. She had waited two days, then "discovered" the body in her garage before notifying the authorities. The waiting period was intended to make it harder to determine time of death. Not surprisingly, the decision to wait also confirmed a presumption of premeditation. The whole murder was carefully planned.

The police were aware that the victim had been having problems at work, but attributed those problems to conflicts with his partner over the Maureen's employment in the store.

There were several facts that the police did not seem to be aware of. First, it was Newsome who was embezzling the money (though why was not clear) and who was trying to blame Maureen for the missing funds. Second, there was an unidentified man who had been in the store several times, who had struck up a friendship with the victim, and who had gone fishing with him several times. Third, there was a journal book that listed Freeman's fishing trips, placing him on the day that he was killed up in the mountains.

The trace evidence that placed the victim up in the mountains, particularly the pine needles with the TetraKO residue, had been excluded from the evidence. MacFarland wished he had had an opportunity to talk with the lab tech who had examined that evidence. Who was that technician? All he could remember were the initials CAB. He would have to ask Pierson to check out this individual.

The second murder, which in all probability was given a very low priority, had

been that of Aaron Gibbs. The police probably regarded this as a robbery murder, and while it was unusual for a gun to be involved, he suspected that the police would regard it as a gang killing. They wouldn't link this crime to the Freeman crime, since they had no knowledge that Aaron Gibbs had been following a person of interest in the Freeman murder. Also, Aaron Gibbs was a homeless person. What possible relationship could he have to the men who owned and ran a jewelry store?

And now the third and fourth murders. The deaths of Newsome and his wife might be linked to the Freeman crime, but only in the most tenuous way. The police had evidence that MacFarland had been seen on many occasions near the Newsome house. Pierson had said that they interviewed several neighbors who reported seeing MacFarland's truck parked in the vicinity of Newsome's home. As far as the police were concerned, the only connection between Newsome and Freeman was that MacFarland was trying to pin the murder of Freeman on Newsome.

His situation certainly didn't look good.

As he sat on his bunk, he realized that most of his problems were of his own creation. He had decided not to tell anyone about Freeman's fishing journal. Of course if he had, he probably still would have ended up in jail, charged with interfering with a police investigation. That would have been an improvement over being charged with murder.

Jerry Baker arrived at the jail just after ten in the morning. In stark contrast to MacFarland's mood, Baker was loud and jovial. "Good news, Mac," he announced when both men sat down across from each other in the conference room. "Denver has jurisdiction over your case."

"Was that a problem?"

Baker had a lopsided grin. "You have more friends in Denver than you do in Lakewood, Mac. Right now we need all the friends we can get."

"It's that bad?"

"Everything is relative," said Baker. "There are some advantages to a Lakewood trial, but we will play the hand we are dealt. Yesterday you suggested that someone might be pulling strings from behind the curtains. Mac, I need the name of that individual!"

MacFarland shook his head. "I don't have enough evidence, Jerry. If I'm wrong, this whole thing could explode in our faces."

"How do you get the proof you need?"

"I sure as hell can't do it from in here," said MacFarland impatiently. "Get me out of here!"

Jerry Baker's ebullient mood evaporated. "I'm working on it, Mac. I'm working on it."

Baker was about to get up, when MacFarland held up a hand stopping him. "There is something that might help. The Crime Lab tech's initials on one of the reports I saw was CAB. Maybe you could talk to Pierson and see if she can follow up with this person. He might be able to explain why the evidence logs were changed."

Baker raised his eyebrows and nodded. "CAB. I'll get right on that, Mac."



## Chapter 66

*Monday, February 8, 1038 Hours*

The Denver Detention Center was used to house suspects who were in the preliminary stages of their arrest, at least until bail was set or a trial was scheduled. MacFarland found that he was moved several times in the first week he was in jail. Most of the detainees tried not to interact with each other. Except for meals, a daily shower, and administrative interactions, there was little to do. When a visitor did arrive, it was an occasion for rejoicing.

Baker arrived at the Detention Center on Monday, at ten thirty-eight. He was somber, and MacFarland could tell that he was not here with good news.

"I tried to get the judge to lower bail, pointing out that you were actually living in the house of a Denver detective, but no dice. Someone has it in for you, Mac. Who have you pissed off?"

MacFarland glared at the lawyer and said nothing. Baker shrugged. "I have my suspicions, Mac. Ah, but I do have some good news. Well, not good news, exactly, but news nonetheless. I've been working with Pierson and Lockwood, and they followed up with the lab tech you mentioned to Pierson. It turns out CAB is actually Colleen Annabel Beltane. She had been with the Lab for about two years."

MacFarland's face lit up. "That's great news, Jerry. What did she say?"

"Nothing," said Baker.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"I mean she is not there anymore. Sometime in December, she got dismissed from the Laboratory. Some report she falsified, though Pierson says she is suspicious of the charge. And then in January, her mother in Chicago had a stroke, so Miss Beltane is now back in Chicago taking care of her mother. We've put in several calls to her, but she has not been very cooperative." Baker loosened his tie. "I'm trying to find someone to go to Chicago and interview her in person, but I'm not sure what we will get. Pierson told me to ask you why this person is so important to us."

MacFarland explained how he had looked at the Freeman case file two different times in December, only to discover that the evidence log had been changed. As he described the pine needle evidence, Baker became more excited. "This would clearly prove that Otto Freeman was not killed near the home," he said.

MacFarland shook his head. "Two problems with that, Jerry. First, unless we find evidence at the spot in the mountains, we can't prove that he was killed there. And it's still possible that Mrs. Freeman killed him up there and moved the body to Denver."

Baker looked skeptical. "Why would she do that? Why not just leave the body up in the mountains?"

"It doesn't matter, Jerry. There is no reason to move the body. Logic rarely has much to do with murder, in my opinion. The important issue is, did the lab

tech--Colleen Beltane--make a mistake on the pine needle evidence? My gut feeling is that she didn't make a mistake, and got fired because she might just say something she shouldn't. Those pine needles are the only clue we have to locate his actual place of death. I'm pretty confident that if we knew that location, the crime lab would be able to actually get enough evidence to help solve the murder. Did Beltane make a mistake or did someone else change the evidence log? I have to tell you, it isn't easy to change those logs. It requires someone who has access to all aspects of the lab. I doubt that a lab tech could do that."

"But someone in a management position might be able to," speculated Baker.

"Affirmative. Somebody in management could do it. They could also fire any technician who could testify about any such changes."

## Chapter 67

*Monday, February 8, 1155 Hours*

MacFarland had just been brought back to his cell when the guard came back and announced that it was MacFarland's lucky day. "You're really popular today," he said.

MacFarland returned to the room, surprised to find both Pierson and Lockwood waiting for him. He greeted Pierson and gave a nod to Lockwood. "Jerry says he's been working with you," he said.

Pierson nodded. "We're doing everything we can to get you out of here. Even the DA is wishing that the case was back in Lakewood's lap. He already thinks that the evidence is shaky. They can put you at the scene of the crime, but they can't really connect you with it. Except for the knife."

"They can't connect me because I didn't commit the crime. As for the knife, you know I didn't have my set of knives."

"Yes, but Jerry says I can't very well testify about something I didn't see. All I know is you don't have that set of knives at my house. Is there anything else that might help?"

MacFarland shrugged. "I am pretty sure Newsome knew the man who I think killed Aaron Gibbs, Freeman, and probably the Newsomes. He's a fisherman." He smiled. "Bozworth described him as an avid angler. Maybe Newsome had his contact information, for all I know. I wish I could search his house."

"Well you can't. You can't even make bail, it seems. I just don't see what is taking them so long to set bail for you."

"Baker says that someone is deliberately holding things up."

"Did he say who?"

MacFarland looked as though he were going to give an answer, then he shook his head. "No, Jerry doesn't know who the person is."

Pierson bit her lip. "Well, maybe we can figure that out. Benny has done some digging and he found out something interesting."

MacFarland looked in Lockwood's direction.

Detective Lockwood moved closer to the table and opened up his notepad. "I started looking into who was running the Denver Crime Laboratory since it was outsourced a few years back. It turns out that is not as simple a task as it might seem. The DCL is run by Colorado Forensics Bureau, which is a division of National Forensics. They run about four labs around the country--one in Denver, one in Chicago, one in St. Louis and one in Los Angeles. It turns out that National Forensics is owned by Euclid Industries, which has a variety of businesses, most of them over in England and Europe. The major shareholder of Euclid Industries, however, is a company based out of the Cayman Islands. This company is called Cygnus International. You would be surprised at the companies that Cygnus controls."

MacFarland stared at Lockwood blankly. "None of those companies mean anything to me," he said.

"Well, perhaps this does. One of the companies owned by Cygnus International is Consolidated Colorado Properties. I'm sure you know what that means."

MacFarland slowly smiled. If the Detention Center rules would have permitted it, he would have hugged Lockwood. As it was, all he could do was punch a fist into his open hand. "Peterson," he said. "Norris Peterson has his fingers in the Crime Lab."

## Chapter 68

*Thursday, February 11, 1545 Hours*

MacFarland was surprised when he walked into the meeting room to see his visitor. He expected to see Baker, or perhaps Pierson.

He didn't expect to see Lockwood. Not by himself, at least.

Lockwood did not look very friendly. In fact, he looked quite hostile. MacFarland sat down and stared at him questioningly. "Why are you here?" he finally asked.

"I checked out the Newsome house again. The Lakewood police didn't know what to look for, and by the time our boys got the case, everyone assumed that all we were looking for was evidence of how the crime had been committed and who committed it. So no one bothered searching the house or Newsome's entertainment room other than in a very cursory fashion."

MacFarland listened, not sure where Lockwood was going with this line of discussion. When MacFarland didn't say anything, Lockwood continued.

"I found it in a Rolodex file. Right where you said it would be."

MacFarland blinked in confusion. "What the hell are you talking about, Lockwood?" He didn't remember mentioning any Rolodex.

"The contact information. A card with the name of the man who you claim we should be looking for. The man with the initials WA. You said it would be in Newsome's house."

MacFarland opened his eyes wide in surprise. "You found out who WA is? Who is he?"

"His name is Wayne Ashland. He is from Chicago. I did a check on him when I got back to the squad room. He's got two priors on his record, mostly for aggravated assault. The Chicago PD, who I took the time to contact, says that he was picked up in conjunction with a hit on a businessman in Cicero, but they couldn't pin the crime on him." Lockwood stared intently at MacFarland. "I haven't told Cynthia yet, MacFarland. I wanted to hear it from you first."

MacFarland shook his head as though he were trying to shake off cobwebs. "What the fuck are you talking about, Lockwood? You're not making sense, man."

Lockwood's expression was one of disgusted disbelief. "I found out what you were doing at the Newsome residence, MacFarland. Planting evidence. Trying to throw suspicion on a guy who is just dirty enough to be a suspect. And then you try to get me to be an accomplice in your fucking scheme. Well, I didn't fall for it, asshole. I got rid of the card. I should have turned it in to the Commander. That would have opened his eyes. But then Cynthia would find out, and as much as I think she should know what a shithead you are, I can't do that to her."

MacFarland could only focus on one fact. "How did you get rid of the card?" he asked incredulously. "My God, you didn't destroy it, did you?"

"No, I didn't destroy it. But don't worry, no one will be able to trace it back to you. I'm holding on to it. But here's how it's going to be. I want you to stay away from Cynthia. No more contact with her. Understand, asshole? Your plan didn't

work, and I have the evidence to prove it."

"I didn't have any plan, Lockwood. I didn't plant any evidence in the home. You've read my statement, haven't you? It happened exactly the way I said it happened."

Lockwood didn't say anything but continued to glare angrily at MacFarland. Then his face twisted into a frown. "You didn't put the card there?"

MacFarland's laugh was a short, bitter bark. "No, I didn't put any card there, you dumb ass. If I knew who the killer was, I would have told Pierson. All I had was initials. What makes you think that I planted the evidence?"

Lockwood fidgeted in confusion. His body seemed to relax, then shrink back into the chair. "I got a call from you. I thought it was you. Fuck, the caller said it was you, Mac."

MacFarland tried to remain calm. "Benny, every one of my calls out of here is monitored. All you have to do is check with the Admin office and they can tell you that I have made no calls. I have no doubt that someone called you. Someone wanted you to find that card."

Lockwood looked deflated, even contrite. "Who called me then? Is it the person trying to frame you for the murders?"

MacFarland laughed and stared up at the corner of the room. He smiled when he realized he was looking right into the camera. "I realized someone was trying to frame me the moment they found one of my knives at the scene. But the card? No, It's not just me they're trying to frame. Don't you see it, Lockwood? Someone is trying to frame Brian Newsome."

## Chapter 69

*Friday, February 12, 1000 Hours*

It was only after Lockwood left and MacFarland had returned to his cell that he realized once again that Lockwood had an unnatural fixation on Pierson. If he didn't know better, he would think that Lockwood was in love with Pierson! What did the young detective see in her, other than an authority figure? Not that Pierson wasn't a beautiful woman. Nor was she cold and impersonal, despite all the times he jokingly chided her chilly side, she really wasn't. She always claimed that men believed that a woman's looks were the only thing that got her ahead in the department, so she tried to downplay her attractiveness. She was--well, professional. And for that reason, MacFarland knew that she wouldn't have any kind of a relationship with another cop.

Which was too bad, because when he thought about it, Cynthia Pierson was really desirable.

Someone needed to take young Lockwood aside and set him straight.

On Friday, Pierson and Baker arrived at the jail to see MacFarland. MacFarland wondered where Lockwood was. Almost as soon as Pierson started speaking, MacFarland knew where the young detective was. In the dog house.

"That fucking idiot told me what he did," she said, her words pressed through gritted teeth. "God, I could have killed him. At least he had the sense to use proper procedures to recover the fucking evidence."

MacFarland cocked his head. The kid's training was clearly better than his deductive skills. "Were there any prints on the card?"

"None that we could recover," said Pierson. "Whoever put the card there used gloves, I suspect."

"Anything else that forensics could get from the card?"

"Mac, they just got the card last night. The lab is good but it doesn't work miracles."

"Well, I need a miracle," said MacFarland. His voice was resigned. Jail time takes a toll on a person's spirits.

Baker was used to dealing with people who were not used to being incarcerated, and he always thought his job included finding ways to provide encouragement to these individuals. "We just need you to hang in there another couple of days, Mac," he said. "We've got some good news. Commander Chamberlain is going to bat for you. He is trying to get a judge to grant you bail, given this new evidence."

MacFarland looked perplexed. "That's nice, but how does this evidence help clear me?"

Baker smiled grimly. "It doesn't clear you. But it gives the judge a basis to grant bail, since we now have another suspect. We showed a picture of Ashland to the employees at Newsome Jewelry and they confirmed that he was the man who had been in the store. We have enough of a connection between Ashland and Newsome to establish some doubt that you were the only one in the house that

night."

MacFarland still looked dubious. "I think Chamberlain is stretching the connection. I think he's right, but I'm not sure how you convince a judge of that. Wouldn't it be easier to get the DA to drop the charges?"

Pierson gave MacFarland a look of frustration. Her jail-side manner was not nearly as sympathetic and reassuring as Baker's was. "Give it a rest, Mac. Just be glad that we were finally able to get Chamberlain on our side. The fact that he's going to bat for you is a damn good thing."

MacFarland changed the subject. "What happened to Lockwood?"

Pierson shook her head in disgust, then glancing briefly at Baker, she said, "After I found out what the asshole did with the card, I made him follow up on the lead. He ran a check on the individual. That's when we found out Ashland had priors in Chicago. Lockwood flashed the picture around and the employees confirmed he had been there several times talking to Freeman. Then one of the employees said Ashland had been in the store two weeks earlier, demanding to see Newsome."

"How long will it be before I get out of here?" asked MacFarland.

When neither of his visitors would look him in the eye, he figured he was probably going to be stuck here for another three or four days. "It's not so bad in here," he finally said pleasantly. "Hey, on the bright side, at least I'm losing weight," he said.



## Chapter 70

*Saturday, February 13, 1100 Hours*

It turned out that he didn't have to spend another two or three days in jail. Chamberlain arrived the next morning at eleven with a court release order. He apparently had used his position to cut through a lot of the procedural obstacles and paperwork normally associated with release. MacFarland was surprised that Chamberlain himself was getting this involved with his case. What did Chamberlain know that MacFarland did not know? He asked him.

At first Chamberlain dismissed the question, saying that he was just helping a friend.

"The Commander of Major Crimes doesn't come to the Detention Center to release a prisoner," said MacFarland. "Not even for friends. And I can't believe I was ever on the top of your dance card."

Chamberlain looked at him, his eye drooping sadly. "You're right, Mac. I don't like to have close friendships with my officers. On the other hand, who else is a cop going to have as a friend? I guess we weren't all that close, you're right about that. But I always considered you a good cop. You were a great detective. You're only problem was that you weren't much of a team player. You didn't rely on others to help you. When you over-reacted in court--"

"The fucker killed my wife," said MacFarland bitterly.

Chamberlain's lips were pressed tightly together as he controlled his own temper. "As I was saying, when you over-reacted in court and attacked a man who had just been found innocent by a jury, you did not leave me with a lot of options. Someone, I was never really sure who, wanted you off the force. I didn't like it then, I don't like it now."

"Now?"

The two men exited the Detention Center and stood on Colfax. A cold breeze blew from the north. The snow on the ground was stained with car exhaust and street filth. After the institutional smell of the jail, freedom smelled very good. The bare trees wobbled sadly in the wind. Normally, on a day like today, MacFarland would be standing a block away from here, listening to his language lessons and selling the occasional hot dog to a passer-by. He found that he missed doing that, and he wondered idly how his homeless friends had fared during the time he was in jail.

"Pierson told me about your suspicions regarding the Freeman file. I knew that she had taken the file--well, the second time she took it, I knew. I went over that file pretty carefully, Mac, and I didn't see anything wrong with it. But then, I didn't see the file just a week or so earlier. Two things bothered me about that. First, why didn't Iverson catch that change? Why is it that a God damn hot dog seller is the one who sees it? And the second thing that bothered me was, what the fuck is going on at the Lab? Our Lab is one of the best in the region. We employ only the best people. We are not supposed to make mistakes like that. And if we do make a mistake, we document it. So what could have gone wrong?

I'll tell you what is wrong. The new Crime Lab Director is a political hack. He runs the lab like a business, not like an arm of the police department. Years of good work, wasted!"

MacFarland listened to Commander Chamberlain rant, then said quietly, "Someone higher up told you to mind your own business, right?"

"Damn fucking right," snarled Chamberlain. "And I don't like it. No one is going to fuck up my cases, Mac. No one. My men and women put their lives on the line, and for those kinds of risks, we all need to be working as a team. There are times when I don't think we have that team spirit anymore."

"If you want to find out what happened in the Crime Lab, find out what happened to Colleen Beltane."

"Who is Beltane?"

"She is the techie who identified the fire retardant residue on the pine needles. She even had a list of places where the fire retardant had been used in the past three months."

"What happened to her?" asked Chamberlain.

MacFarland shrugged. "I don't know, Commander. Remember, I've been stuck in jail for the past two weeks."

"I'll look into it," said Chamberlain. He put a hand on MacFarland's shoulder. "The reason I've been telling you all of this, Mac, is--Well, I want you to come back. Come back onto the force. I'm sure I can work it out with the Chief and get you reinstated."

MacFarland stared up the street, looking vaguely south to where his hot dog stand normally would be positioned. He had wanted to be back on the force, many times. He regretted not having the resources available to help him do something that he now realized he really enjoyed doing--solving crimes, helping victims, stopping bad guys. He missed the camaraderie of the department, working with people who understood what it was like to run towards danger, even as sensible people ran away from it.

He missed working with his partner, Detective Pierson.

But the reality was that he wasn't a detective, at least not anymore. He was just a recovering alcoholic trying to make his way through life.

Besides, he reminded himself, lots of my friends need me to provide them with their daily fix of hot dogs and brats.

"Thanks, Commander, that's really nice. But I'm just a hot dog vendor now. My police days are behind me."

Chamberlain stared sadly at MacFarland, his look clearly one of disappointment. "Come on, my car is over here. I'll drive you to Pierson's house."

## Chapter 71

*Sunday, February 14, 1202 Hours*

Valentine's Day. MacFarland had decided to go back to his corner at Fourteenth and Elati, hoping that he still had a corner. While his location was not the best spot to place a hot dog cart, he had found a strong affinity to the location. Besides, with the new construction going on down the street, it might get a lot more traffic some day.

It was particularly cold this morning, which MacFarland regarded as a good thing. He did not have a lot of product, since he had to buy a smaller amount of supplies from the local King Soopers. He wasn't able to get the bulk discounts he depended on, so he compromised by having a smaller inventory.

Pierson had given him a warm reception when he got home the previous day. Lockwood and Baker were also there. The three of them took turns congratulating him on getting released and warning him about what dire consequences would befall him if he violated any of the terms of his release. The terms, quite simply, were not to jump bail ("I'll lose my fucking house," said Pierson. "And you don't want to share a cardboard box shelter with me, Mac, I can promise you that."), not to leave Denver ("Does that include suburbs?" "Yes, damn it!"), don't consort with criminals ("I haven't been tried for anything. Can they really restrict me that way?" "Don't argue, asshole, just follow our advice." "Actually, I don't think they can restrict him like that. I wonder if we can make a case out of it?" "No, Jerry, no case, don't even think about it."), and be sure to show up for your arraignment ("But I'm innocent." "Well, if you're innocent, maybe the DA will drop the charges.").

Pierson had repeated all the instructions again that morning when he was getting ready to take his cart out. "Don't try to do anything on the case, Mac," she warned. "We're working with Iverson to re-examine the evidence. I think he is coming around to agree with you that maybe his case against Maureen Freeman is rather weak."

"It's non-existent," said MacFarland derisively. Was Iverson suddenly the sunshine boy in the department? The guy was a complete ass.

"Don't give me grief, Mac. I stuck my neck out for you. And, for your information, we now have a BOLO for Ashland. He's not yet a suspect, just a person of interest."

He nodded, wondering how much good a "be on the lookout" could be for someone who had probably already fled the state. Deciding to come clean, he went into the library. He came back a moment later and handed Otto Freeman's calendar book to Pierson. She looked at it suspiciously. "What's this?"

"It's something I got out of the Freeman house. It's how I knew that Freeman was off fishing when he got killed."

Pierson took the book as if it was a red hot coal. "Oh, God, Mac, you're worse than Lockwood!"

MacFarland got a pained expression on his face. "Hey, he's a cop! I'm just a

private citizen."

"Who broke and entered a crime scene and took evidence!"

"Okay," admitted MacFarland. "Maybe I crossed a line or two I shouldn't have. But I was trying to solve a crime that Iverson supposedly had already solved. So don't give me grief. Give that sunshine boy grief for not doing his job!"

"Sunshine boy? You mean Iverson? Oh, Mac, give me a break. Go sell your fucking hot dogs. And stay out of trouble!"

He had just finished setting up his cart when Rufus showed up. "Sorry I don't have coffee, boss. I don't seem to have any money left, and the coffee shop person won't give me credit."

"Are you a good credit risk, Rufus?" asked MacFarland, handing the veteran a warmed up hot dog.

"Probably not," said Rufus. "But boss, the strange thing is, the only way you can get credit is by going into debt."

MacFarland smiled, shaking his head. "Sometimes Rufus, you amaze me. Would you mind watching my cart today?"

Rufus considered the proposal for a moment. "Do I get benefits for this job, boss? Jerry says I need benefits."

MacFarland furrowed his brow in surprise. "I guess you can have as many hot dogs as you can eat. But go easy today. I don't have very many in inventory."

MacFarland went back to his truck, unhooked his trailer, and drove over to Colfax, then turned east. The Civic Center was deserted, though the sun was out and it was starting to warm up. *Maybe today it will get up to freezing*, he thought. When he came to Lincoln, he turned north, only then realizing that he was unconsciously driving towards the Consolidated Colorado Properties building. He drove past the building, then went around the block and parked across the street from the building. As he sat there, wondering why he was watching an empty office building on a Sunday morning, he smiled. At least he could tell Pierson that he had stayed within the city limits.

After two tedious hours, he looked at his watch. Twelve oh two. He shook his head in disgust and started his engine. He was about to pull out of his parking space when a movement by the side of the CCP building caught his eye. He put on the brake, and stared into the shadows between the two buildings. Yes, there was someone coming out of a side door to the building. MacFarland stared in surprise. While he had never seen a picture of Ashland, he recognized the man from the various descriptions of him that he had received. He should have gotten a copy of the mug shot that Lockwood had distributed.

He had hoped to see Peterson, but instead, he found the one person he was convinced was involved in all of these murders. Ashland emerged from the alleyway, looked up and down the street, then went over to a blue sedan and got in. As Ashland started heading north, MacFarland turned on his engine and took off after him.

## Chapter 72

*Sunday, February 14, 1224 Hours*

MacFarland caught up with the suspect's car, noting automatically that it was a blue four-door Ford Focus, plate number 724 Edward Union Lincoln. He wished he could run the plate, although he suspected that the car was stolen. He also wished he had a less conspicuous vehicle, since after a couple of blocks, he could tell that the suspect had discovered he was being followed. What then ensued was twenty minutes of racing through downtown streets, as Ashland tried to lose MacFarland. MacFarland knew the downtown area better than Ashland did, however, and even if Ashland managed to get through a stop light before he did, MacFarland was able to find a way to keep the blue Focus in view.

Ashland finally turned onto Colfax and headed west, often going considerably faster than the speed limit or conditions warranted. Although it was Sunday, there was still considerable traffic on Colfax, and Ashland's constant weaving in and out of traffic was bound to attract the attention of a patrol car sooner or later. As the Focus crossed Lincoln, it swerved into the left hand lane and swooped through on-coming traffic onto Broadway. Cars screeched to a halt, horns blared, but the Focus made it through without a mishap. MacFarland, approaching more conservatively, used the clogged traffic to his advantage, and followed the Focus through the congested intersection. He saw Ashland's car race through the light on the far side of Civic Park, then turn into through traffic on Thirteenth. MacFarland, stuck at the light on Broadway and Fourteenth, swore when the car disappeared around the parking garage across from the library. The light changed, and he gunned his way through the intersection, and turned on Thirteenth. He could still see the Focus ahead of him, racing down the nearly empty street. The Focus turned left and MacFarland strained to see which street it was. He knew this neighborhood intimately, since this was where he positioned his hot dog cart. He suspected that the suspect was trying to get to Colfax, and then over to Speer or to the interstate. As he turned the corner, he banged his foot on the gas pedal and his truck shot forward. He then stared in horror as the Focus swerved around the corner onto Fourteenth way too quickly. Ashland went up over the curb, and clipped the corner of MacFarland's hot dog cart, sending it crashing backwards. Rufus, standing a few feet away, jumped towards the parking garage as the umbrella snapped off and flew in his direction. MacFarland screeched to a stop and jumped out of his truck. He ran over towards Rufus and helped the man get up.

"Fuck, boss, that man was in a hurry!"

"Are you alright, Rufus?" asked MacFarland, checking to see if there were any signs of bruises or wounds.

"Yeah, I'm okay." Rufus looked over towards the hot dog cart, which lay on its side, smashed to pieces. "I can't say the same for your cart, boss. It's a total wreck. Did you get the license number of that asshole? We should report that dude."

MacFarland nodded grimly. "I suspect that he is going to be wanted for a lot more than destroying my hot dog cart."

It was then that MacFarland realized that Ashland knew who was following him, knew where his hot dog stand was usually located, and had deliberately tried to destroy it, knowing that MacFarland would have to stop to see if anyone was hurt.

He had been played.

As he went to retrieve his trailer so that he could load up the remnants of his cart onto it, he wondered if Pierson would give him a dressing down for not following her advice.

## Chapter 73

*Tuesday, February 16, 1900 Hours*

MacFarland was pacing in the kitchen when Pierson arrived home at seven in the evening. As soon as she closed the back door, he confronted her. "Any results from the BOLO?" he asked.

Pierson shook her head. "So far, no sign of the guy, Mac. But I do have some good news. We found the car that smashed up your hot dog stand. As you suspected, it was stolen. The owner, Paul Sikorsky, didn't even know it was gone. He and his wife had been in California for the past month and had left the car in the alley behind their house. He reported it stolen yesterday, when he got back from Los Angeles. We confirmed his story that he was out of town."

"Were there any prints on the car? Or anything else?"

"The crime lab is still checking it out. There are some traces that seem consistent with the Freeman crime scene. It's beginning to look more and more like the person who drove that car is the killer. Are you sure it was Ashland, though?"

MacFarland nodded. He stopped his pacing and stared at the door, as if he were about to walk out. "I'm just afraid that Ashland is going to get away," he said.

"Where can he go? No matter where he runs, we will get him," said Pierson confidently.

"Yeah, but you're not the one who has a murder charge hanging over his head. I just can't figure out why he is hanging around Denver."

"Maybe he is tying up loose ends," suggested Pierson. "I wouldn't be surprised if you are now one of the loose ends." She hesitated a moment. "I also got back the results on the blood trace on your ring."

"Whose blood was it?"

"It wasn't Schmidt's or Lucas's. It belonged to Orlando Mendoza, one of Griffin's goons. Did you want to press charges?"

MacFarland considered the options. "No, for now I'll just keep an eye out for him. Have you told him that his blood was found on the ring?"

Pierson looked at him sharply. "Don't do anything stupid, Mac. No, we haven't. We're keeping an eye on him too."

MacFarland wondered who 'we' was. "Of course not. When do I ever do anything stupid?"

Pierson rolled her eyes, refusing to answer his question. Instead, she found the number for Domino's Pizza on the refrigerator door.

As Pierson went off to order a pizza for dinner, MacFarland considered what she said. Let's assume that Ashland was hired to kill Otto Freeman. The person most likely to have hired him was his partner, Brian Newsome. How much would a killing go for these days? For someone from out of town, it would probably be more than ten thousand dollars. Was it possible that Newsome paid half the money up front and promised to pay the rest upon proof of death? With the

scrutiny on the jewelry business and anyone associated with it, perhaps he had been unable to get the balance of money to pay off the hit man. That would be incentive enough for Ashland to stick around. But why was he hanging around the CCP Building? Was that just a convenient place to meet? Or was it because Peterson was somehow involved in the crime? Had Peterson hired the hit man? If he had, what was his motivation? Had Peterson hired the man to kill both Freeman and Newsome? Somehow that didn't make sense. How did framing Maureen Freeman play into that scenario? Or had her arrest just been a fortuitous consequence?

On the other hand, where had Ashland gotten the carving knife with MacFarland's prints on it? Although MacFarland could not place the knife set in Peterson's hands, it did not take a stretch of the imagination to believe that Peterson had access to the items left in MacFarland's apartment. If Peterson had examined the items, what was he looking for? Certainly not a knife set!

Was Peterson looking for possible evidence that MacFarland might have about Nicole's murder? MacFarland didn't have anything of that nature, unless it was Nicole's personal effects. Those were still in boxes over in Stefanie's garage. The police had already examined all those items and had found nothing incriminating. MacFarland himself had not actually had the courage to rummage through those boxes, afraid of the memories that might resurface.

He came back to the carving knife. The knife had MacFarland's prints on it, and Ashland had preserved those prints to ensure that MacFarland would be a suspect. That meant that Ashland knew MacFarland was pursuing him as early as three weeks ago. MacFarland would not be surprised if Ashland knew MacFarland was on his tail when he killed Gibbs. So, first Freeman, then Gibbs, then the Newsomes. Who was Ashland going to kill next?

MacFarland sat down at the kitchen table and stared off in the direction Pierson had gone. As the doorbell chimed, he jumped up and raced to the door. "Don't open it!" he hissed at Pierson, who stared at him in surprise.

"Okay, you pay for it," she said curtly.

"Oh--the pizza. I forgot about that." He opened the door cautiously, afraid that it would be Ashland standing there, his gun drawn. It was just the Domino's Pizza delivery man, holding an insulating bag with a large pepperoni, sausage, and mushroom pizza.

"You better get it, Cyn. I don't have any money."

"Again? Maybe you should get a real job."



## Chapter 74

*Tuesday, February 16, 2100 Hours*

They finished the pizza in silence, though Pierson did mention that she was planning to go to the next Nuggets home game and did Mac want to come with her? MacFarland shook his head, not really focusing on what she was saying. He wasn't much into watching sports. He found his mind coming back to the role Peterson played in this whole scenario. He kept trying to recall something Pierson had said, but he could not quite get his mind around it. Oh, that's right, she had said that Ashland was tying up loose ends.

And then, suddenly, he saw how the whole drama had played out.

Otto Freeman had discovered that Brian Newsome was embezzling money from the store. There were conflicts between them, undoubtedly with Freeman threatening to go to the police, and possibly with Newsome trying to find someone else to blame--Maureen Freeman, perhaps. But Newsome needed a more permanent solution to his problem, one that would eliminate the threat of Freeman taking him to court and breaking the partnership. He needed a solution that would get rid of both Freemans. Killing Otto and framing his wife would be the ideal solution.

But how? Newsome was not the kind of guy to get his own hands dirty. Of course, he would hire someone else to do his dirty work. So he goes to Chicago to find a hit man...

No, that didn't make sense. First, Newsome hadn't been to Chicago in more than a year.

But, but...suddenly MacFarland had a flash of insight. A brain fart! Peterson had been to Chicago. Peterson spent a lot of time in Chicago. In fact, MacFarland recalled several trips Nicole had taken to Chicago because Peterson needed his administrative chief of staff with him. Had Peterson hired the Chicago-based hit man?

Again, the question came to why. One possible idea was that Newsome went to his cousin for money and Peterson suggested a more permanent solution to Newsome's partnership problems. MacFarland found himself enjoying that idea, because then it would clearly make Peterson responsible for all the murders. Unfortunately he had to admit that he had no proof of Peterson's involvement.

He needed evidence. He needed Peterson's confession.

MacFarland smiled.

If Peterson had really suggested the hit man, or even hired the hit man, then Peterson was another loose end. "Maybe he is tying up loose ends."

As soon as he made that connection, MacFarland understood why Ashland had not left Denver yet. It wasn't to kill him. It was because Ashland had to kill Peterson!

"Would you take the garbage out to the dumpster?" asked Pierson.

"I know where Ashland is," said MacFarland. "Or at least where he is going to be."

"Fine. Tell me after you take the garbage out."

"I thought you were a cop," he grumbled.

Pierson smiled condescendingly. "I am a cop," she said, "but I'm a cop with a dirty kitchen and a bag full of garbage. Get your priorities straight, Mac."

Still grumbling, MacFarland put on a jacket, grabbed the garbage, and took it out to the dumpster. As he walked to the back gate of the yard, he saw his trailer piled with the debris of his shopping cart. Maybe tomorrow he would salvage what he could and throw the rest of the pieces in the dumpster. Or at least put them in the alley for large item pickup. As he stared at the shadowed pieces of debris, he wondered what he was going to do with his life. You can't sell hot dogs without a cart. Go back into law enforcement? Take up Bob Chamberlain's offer?

If he had just followed Pierson's advice, his cart would not have been destroyed. He would know what he was doing with his life.

He went back into the house. Pierson was sitting at the table, a cup of coffee in front of her and one by the empty chair. "Okay, Mac, sit down and tell me where we're going to find our fugitive."

MacFarland sat down and began to sip the coffee. "Something you said just earlier tonight, it just put all the pieces in place for me. I think I figured out where Ashland--well, the suspect who I think is Ashland--is going to be."

Pierson looked at him impatiently. She was not very tolerant of dramatic pauses. Being interrogated by her was like going through a hurricane. "Where the fuck is he going to be?"

"At Peterson's house," said MacFarland. Somehow the revelation had seemed more dramatic in his mind. "I think Ashland is blackmailing Peterson, because I'm convinced that Peterson is more than just involved. Like maybe he is the guy who put this whole thing in motion."

Pierson pursed her lips, her brow furrowed, then shook her head. "I honestly think you are searching for some reason to get even with Peterson, Mac. You have to keep in mind that your obsession with Peterson could just as easily be used by a prosecutor to explain why you killed the Newsomes."

MacFarland looked surprised. "I didn't kill the Newsomes."

"I know that, asshole! I'm just saying that your suspicions of Peterson are as well founded as the prosecutor's case would be. But since you have an alarming habit of being right more often than not, usually for all the wrong reasons, I think we should put a watch on Peterson's house. You wouldn't by any chance know where Peterson lives, would you?"

MacFarland nodded. "He lives in Lakewood also," he said. "Newsome lived east of the Country Club, Peterson lives on the other side."

"Lakewood again," she said. "Okay, let me go call this in."

"Great," said MacFarland enthusiastically. "See if you can get assigned to it, Cyn. I can go with you."

Pierson laughed. "No way, asshole! You're a civilian. I'm not taking you with me on anything. Besides, it won't be us who watches Peterson's house. It will be the Lakewood police. I'll call this into them."

MacFarland watched forlornly as Pierson went off to find her phone. Somehow this had not worked out as he had hoped. This looked like the murder trial of Norris Peterson all over again.

No, not this time.

Once again, he would have to handle this himself. *Well, if Cyn gets pissed at me, it's her own damn fault*, he thought to himself.

## Chapter 75

*Wednesday, February 17, 1545 Hours*

MacFarland was fairly certain that going back out to Lakewood was a bad idea. The police there had not taken kindly to Commander Chamberlain stepping in taking control over their case. Police were funny that way. Even if they did not have the resources, they wanted control over crimes committed in their jurisdictions. Competing jurisdictions were one of the things that made police work challenging. Cooperation and teamwork solved many of the disputes, but like world peace, cooperation and teamwork were often in short supply.

The Lakewood Police force was as professional and competent as any other police force in Colorado. But Lakewood was a fairly large city and the Police Department only had four hundred employees. MacFarland was hoping that it was unlikely that they would be able to position a squad car outside of Peterson's house for any extended period of time.

Assuming the Lakewood police weren't there, then MacFarland only had to worry about whether Peterson would be at his home or at his office. If he were in transit, he would be harder to locate and keep an eye on.

Just after lunch, MacFarland placed a call to Peterson's office. His secretary, Joyce Hill, answered, her voice friendly and helpful. "Mr. Peterson's office. How may I help you?"

"Is he in?"

"Mr. Peterson is at an offsite all-day meeting, sir," she said, somewhat mechanically. "May I take a message?"

MacFarland hung up. Her voice had sounded hesitant, uncertain. MacFarland wished he had been able to watch her when she answered the phone. He would have been certain that her throat had tightened, often a sign of deception. Clearly, Peterson wasn't in the office, but he wasn't at any off site meeting either. Had anyone notified Peterson of the possible danger from Ashland? It seemed strange to MacFarland that Peterson would remain at home if he had been warned that Ashland would look for him there. Perhaps Peterson felt safer in his home. Having lived on the street for several years, MacFarland didn't feel safe in a home. He knew that four walls offered no protection--the walls just made it harder to see the dangers that surrounded you. In that respect, he and Rufus weren't so far apart.

At three forty-five, MacFarland grabbed his jacket. On his way downstairs, he passed the library, then paused. He had hidden his gun in there, in a place where it was unlikely to be found, yet easily accessible. He considered taking the Glock with him, but then he considered the consequences of violating the court order. His court release forbid him having it in his possession. He could end up back in jail if he had the gun with him. *On the other hand, going to see Peterson is a violation of the court order too*, he thought to himself. *In for a penny, might as well be in for a pound*. He retrieved his gun, slipped the holster onto his belt, then got into his truck and headed out towards Lakewood.

Peterson lived on Reed Street. MacFarland had been to his house a couple of times with Nicole, mainly to attend parties hosted by Peterson and whatever woman was currently his girlfriend. As far as MacFarland knew, Peterson lived alone, though he sometimes had houseguests. The house was fairly isolated, hidden from its neighbors by trees and shrubbery, which even in winter still provided considerable concealment. The Lakewood Country Club was on the opposite side of the street, and at this time of year, no one would be out on the golf course.

As he raced west on Sixth Avenue towards Wadsworth, he felt his phone vibrate. He pulled it out and put it on the hands free holder. He glanced at the screen and scowled. Damn! It was Pierson!

## Chapter 76

*Wednesday, February 17, 1555 Hours*

He pressed the talk button. "What is it, Cyn?"

"Where are you?"

"I'm out for a drive," he said, as innocently as he could.

"Where do you have to drive to? You're not supposed to go anywhere, Mac."

"I got tired of sitting around the house. So I'm out for some fresh air."

There were some vaguely dangerous sounds from the phone that could only have been Pierson growling. Clearly she was not in a good mood. This was a call that MacFarland realized he should end as quickly as possible.

"Did you go over to Peterson's house?"

MacFarland wondered if she had GPS tracking on him. Knowing Pierson, she didn't need it. She had a strange instinct for knowing when people she cared about were in trouble. "Why would I go over to Peterson's house?" he asked.

"Because you're an asshole," snapped Pierson. "I just got word that Peterson told the Lakewood Police not to harass him. They tried to insist that there was a possible danger to him, but he got rather nasty about it. So they have backed off. My friend in Lakewood let me know, so I'm heading over there just to look around."

The concept of having Pierson showing up almost caused MacFarland to gag. "Isn't Lakewood out of your jurisdiction?" he asked pointedly. "What about your rules?"

"Fuck my rules. Since when have you ever been concerned about rules?" There was a slight pause as her instinctual radar kicked in. "Holy shit! You're there! Mac, get your ass out of there right this minute!"

MacFarland hesitated, then finally said, "I need to know, Cynthia. I need to ask Peterson directly. I think he is the person who framed me. I'm pretty sure he is involved with all of these murders. I just want to get some answers from him."

The phone went silent. MacFarland stared at it for a few seconds, then turned it off. He put the phone back in his pocket and continued driving.

There were three approaches to Peterson's house. He could take the frontage road that bordered Sixth Avenue and turn north on Reed, or take Wadsworth to Highland Drive or come south from Eighth Avenue. If the police were patrolling the neighborhood, they would probably enter from Highland, follow Reed south, then take the frontage road back to Wadsworth. He drove to Highland, turned north on Crescent Lane, then east on Eighth. He parked his truck, and got out and walked down the street towards Peterson's house. He looked around. There was no sign of police, no indication that Ashland was here, no hints of danger. He smiled to himself. It looked like he lucked out. Deciding that now was as good a time as any, MacFarland walked up to the front door and knocked loudly.

The door opened. Norris Peterson stood there, staring in surprise at MacFarland. "You! What the hell are you doing here?" he demanded.

## Chapter 77

*Wednesday, February 17, 1615 Hours*

"Are you going to invite me in?" asked MacFarland. Peterson was expecting someone, just not MacFarland. That meant he expected Ashland. The fact that he didn't have a gun in his hand was a strong indicator that he expected his meeting with Ashland to be a friendly one. The idiot didn't know that Ashland was coming here to kill him!

"No, get out of here!"

"You certainly invited me in often enough when you were fucking my wife," said MacFarland, pushing his way inside. Once he was through the door, he pushed it closed behind him. He looked around, primarily to see if anyone else was in the house, but also because that was what he was trained to do. He was in a large hallway, a red oriental print runner rug stretching down the hall. A living room with a large domed ceiling lay off to his left side; doors opened up to a dining room on right side. The hallway had a sidebar table in it, decorated with an expensive looking Oriental vase. There was also a small sports bag sitting at the far end of the table. A cell phone was on the near end of the table.

Peterson backed up, surprised by MacFarland's aggressiveness. "You never give up, do you?"

"I'm not here about you killing Nicole, Peterson. You've been up to other things lately, haven't you?"

Peterson spied his cell phone lying on a sidebar table and reached for it. MacFarland was faster and swept the phone away. It slid off the table and along the polished wood floors of the hallway and into the adjoining dining room. MacFarland stepped out of the hall and backed into the dining room, preventing Peterson from getting close to the phone. Peterson backed up against the wall, looking back behind him and trying to judge if he could get away before MacFarland would be able to stop him. Apparently he decided that he couldn't move fast enough. He quickly regained his customary bravado. "Get out of my house," he demanded once more. "I don't have time for your bullshit, MacFarland."

"I'll leave soon enough," said MacFarland, "but only after you answer a few questions for me."

"I don't have to answer any of your questions."

MacFarland ignored him. "Why did you kill Otto Freeman?"

Peterson scowled in disgust. "I didn't kill anyone, you prick. If anyone killed Freeman, it had to be my cousin, Brian. The guy's always been a bit unstable."

"Why did you kill Brian Newsome?"

"I thought you were the one arrested for that crime," said Peterson.

MacFarland nodded. "Funny thing about honest forensics, Peterson. It tends to prove that I didn't kill the Newsomes."

Peterson scowled. "Don't be too sure, MacFarland. I am pretty sure a good lawyer can get a jury to buy a version of the truth that shows you are guilty."

MacFarland nodded. "You're right, Peterson. I can't afford the high priced lawyers you can. I can't buy off a jury the way you can. But you will slip up one of these days, and I will put you away for good. You're not above the law, no matter how much money you have."

"Good luck with that, MacFarland. You're a loser, and losers like you just don't know what's going on in the world. You think the law will stop me? The law is a tool I use to accomplish my goals, MacFarland. You're an idiot if you haven't learned that lesson yet. The law is on my side, not yours. Now get the fuck out of my house!"

For once in his life, MacFarland was not sure what to do. What Peterson said was true, in one disturbing sense. He was a loser. *Peterson not only has money on his side*, thought MacFarland ruefully. *He has brains on his side. I should have listened to Pierson.*

He was about to turn and leave when the front door exploded open and Ashland burst into the house.

"You better have my money, Peterson," shouted Ashland, pointing a .32 semi-automatic in Peterson's direction.



## Chapter 78

*Wednesday, February 17, 1625 Hours*

MacFarland realized that Ashland did not know he was in the house. He reached behind him to pull his gun out, but MacFarland's slight movement must have alerted Ashland to his presence. He whirled to face MacFarland, his face registering recognition. He raised his gun to shoot MacFarland, but he had to duck as Peterson grabbed the vase from the sidebar and threw it at Ashland. Ashland's shot went wild as he dodged the vase. MacFarland pulled his gun loose from his holster, but as he pulled his gun around in front of him, Ashland got another shot off. This shot hit MacFarland in the shoulder. A sudden pain streaked down his arm. He lost his grip and dropped his gun. MacFarland realized that he had to stop Ashland from getting another shot off. Before Ashland could shoot again, MacFarland leaped across the short distance between them, crashing into the heavier Ashland. MacFarland hoped to knock the man down, but his larger size gave him an advantage. MacFarland had a vision of the man standing in rushing streams, maintaining his balance. Too late now! Ashland fired again, fortunately this time missing MacFarland. MacFarland grabbed hold of Ashland's shooting arm and tried to dislodge the gun. The two men struggled for what seemed like a long time, as MacFarland shouted for Peterson to help him.

Peterson stood mutely off to the side, staring in shocked silence as the two men wrestled. Apparently too afraid to help MacFarland, he was also too afraid to run. MacFarland thought he was about to wrest the gun from Ashland's hand when the gun discharged again. MacFarland felt a searing burning sensation in his leg, and then he started to lose his balance.

Ashland felt MacFarland teetering and pushed him away. MacFarland fell back onto the floor. He lay there, staring up at Ashland who pivoted and shook the gun in Peterson's direction.

"My money, Peterson," shouted Ashland. "You said you'd have it!"

"What did you have to shoot him for?" yelled Peterson.

"I'm going to shoot you if you don't get my money! I told you, no cops! What is he doing here?"

MacFarland saw his gun lying on the floor near the door jamb of the dining room. He estimated how far it was from him and whether he could get it and shoot Ashland before the man noticed what he was doing. Everything depended on Peterson keeping the man's attention.

"He's not a cop, damn it! I don't know why he is here! He's supposed to be in jail. How did you fuck that up, Ashland?"

"The money, Peterson, or I swear I will put a fucking bullet through your skull!"

Peterson pointed at the sports bag. "It's right there," he said, reaching for it.

"No you don't," said Ashland. "I'll get it myself." He was about to step forward to retrieve the bag when MacFarland stretched out for his gun. He got his fingers

around the gun grip before Ashland noticed his action. Ashland quickly swung his gun around and pulled the trigger. MacFarland felt the bullet hit the side of his chest. He lost his grip on gun as he slumped back onto the floor.

Suddenly, the sounds of police sirens reverberated outside the house. Ashland took one last look at MacFarland's bleeding body, then MacFarland heard him mutter "Oh, fuck!" as he sped towards the door.

## Chapter 79

*Wednesday, February 17, 1627 Hours*

MacFarland was barely conscious of the events of the next minute or so. He heard a car screech around the curved driveway in front of the house, its tires kicking up stones and gravel as the driver slammed on the vehicle's brakes. A voice--was that Pierson he wondered?--shouted for Ashland to stop. Instead of stopping, Ashland started firing his weapon. There were more shouts, this time from a man as well as a woman, and more shots rang out. Then there was silence.

MacFarland couldn't see the scene outside, but he suspected that Ashland had been shot. Had either Pierson or her partner been shot? He didn't know. All he knew at that moment was that he should have been Pierson's partner. If she was hurt, it was his fault for not backing her up. He had abandoned her, and now he would suffer the guilt if she had been killed.

He was having trouble seeing clearly. He was certain that he was shot, but the pain had become a hazy cloud of abstract discomfort. His throat felt dry and he couldn't swallow. He had trouble breathing; it felt like he was lying under a heavy pile of smelly blankets. He had this image of Maureen Freeman wrapping him up in a soiled Army blanket. If he focused real hard, he could feel a distinct pain in his leg, and maybe there was another pain in his shoulder. Actually, he wasn't sure he had a shoulder any more. Had it been blown entirely off his body?

He perceived rather than saw Peterson moving in the hallway, but he couldn't be sure what the man was doing. Was he getting help? Was he running away? He had the feeling that it was very important to keep Peterson here. Was he going to arrest Peterson? What had the perp done? Oh, yes, he had fucked his wife. And killed her. And he was doing something bad with Ashland. What was it? Yeah, that's right. He was paying Ashland for killing people. That's what MacFarland had to arrest him for.

Where was MacFarland's gun? He needed his gun so that he could arrest Peterson. He had to arrest Peterson, but he was having problems remembering for what crime. So many of them. Yes, Peterson had slept with his wife and ruined his marriage. Peterson should die for that. He had to kill Peterson. Is that what he came here for? He couldn't remember any more.

## Chapter 80

*Wednesday, February 17, 1630 Hours*

MacFarland was suddenly aware that Peterson was by his side. At first he thought the man was going to help him, though he could not imagine what the man could do. Then he saw that Peterson had picked up MacFarland's gun. Now why was it so easy to see that, yet not much else? Peterson stood up and pointed the gun at MacFarland.

"You've ruined everything," he said. "I should just kill you and tell them Ashland did it."

MacFarland had trouble keeping his eyes opened. At first he wished Peterson would just be quiet and let him go to sleep, but the man seemed very insistent on disturbing him. Then Peterson's words wound their tortuous way to his mind. MacFarland laughed, then regretted doing so because any movement just produced sharp jabs of pain.

"That's my gun, Peterson," he said, trying hard to get the words right. "It will be very hard to convince a jury that Ashland killed me with my own weapon. And guess what? It has your prints on it. I can see now that you're too stupid to have killed all these people. But you're not stupid enough to kill me." He coughed, finding it difficult to speak. He was searching for another stabbing comment to make, when the door banged open and Lockwood and Pierson jumped into the room. He had a short burst of joy. His partner was not dead!

Then everything went black.

## Chapter 81

*Wednesday, February 17, 1633 Hours*

The first thing Cynthia Pierson saw was Peterson holding a pistol as he stood over MacFarland's body. "Drop it, scumbag!" she shouted, pointing her gun at Peterson. Peterson looked blankly at her, then let the gun fall to the ground. Lockwood immediately grabbed hold of Peterson and spun him around, pulling his arms back and snapping handcuffs onto Peterson's wrists.

At that moment, it seemed that all pandemonium broke out. Sirens screamed as several police cars pulled into the driveway. Some of them pulled onto the lawn as the officers inside of them jumped out, guns already drawn. The Lakewood Police force had arrived. Both Lockwood and Pierson had put away their guns and pulled out their badges to hold them up to show they were police officers.

Peterson was trying to see what had happened to Ashland. "Is he dead?" he asked. Pierson ignored him, shouting instead to the Lakewood officers who raced up to the door. "We need an ambulance here! An officer--a man is down with multiple gunshot wounds."

One of the Lakewood Police nodded. "We've got two on the way, ma'am. What's the situation?"

She knelt down and checked MacFarland. "Hang in there, Mac, help is on the way." She looked up at Lockwood. "He's still breathing, but it looks really bad."

"We're still trying to sort the situation out," said Lockwood to the Lakewood cop.

"He saved my life," said Peterson quietly.

"What?" said Pierson, suddenly aware that Peterson was still standing there.

Peterson turned and looked at her. "MacFarland. If it weren't for him, I would be dead. He's a hero."

Pierson looked up at him. "Yeah, he's a hero. Just keep your cool and don't make any sudden movements, Mr. Peterson. You don't want the cops outside thinking that you did this, do you?"

## Chapter 82

*Thursday, February 18, 1500 Hours*

Pierson sat next to his bed in the recovery room, watching him anxiously. MacFarland had spent several hours in the Emergency room. The doctors were all very optimistic about his chances, constantly reassuring her that none of his wounds were life-threatening. The most serious wound was the one to the shoulder, but the bullet had avoided most of the major osseous and vascular systems, but the doctor insisted it would be months before he would sufficiently recover to have full use of his arm. The leg shot hit primarily muscular tissue and was expected to heal fairly cleanly. The wound to his side was superficial, though it would leave a very noticeable scar.

*Undoubtedly one he will proudly show to future girlfriends,* thought Pierson.

Around three in the afternoon, Bob Chamberlain came to see how he was doing.

Pierson looked over at MacFarland. "Four years in the Marines, eight years on the force and he isn't shot once. Now he gets shot three times."

"At least it was by the same person," said Chamberlain.

Pierson gave him an angry look.

"Hey, I was just joking. The way Mac treats people, we're lucky it wasn't three different people shooting him. How soon will he be out?"

"Probably by the end of next week. He might have some problems walking, but he should be up on his feet fairly soon."

"Any idea why he was there?"

Pierson hesitated. There was no denying that Chamberlain knew of Mac's hatred of Peterson, so there was no point in sugar-coating that. The truth was always the best course. "He thought Peterson might be involved with Ashland in some way. He wanted to talk to him about that."

"I got Peterson's statement. He claims that Mac came over to warn him about Ashland, but may have actually led Ashland to his house. MacFarland tried to take out Ashland, but got shot in the process. Peterson says he picked up MacFarland's gun and chased Ashland out of the house."

Pierson's look was dubious. "Anything else?"

"The forensics lab was able to match fibers from Ashland's jacket to samples found at the Newsome crime scene. I'm pretty sure that we will be able to get the DA to drop the charges against Mac for that crime. Judge Clements may not be too happy though about Mac going to Peterson's house or possessing a weapon."

"Do what you can, okay Bob? Despite being an asshole, Mac is a good guy."

"And he's still a pretty good detective. If it hadn't been for him, I don't think we would have caught Ashland. And here's another thing you might be interested in. Chicago Police think that they might be able to pin a couple of homicides on Ashland. It seems our boy has been doing this kind of work for quite some time."

Chamberlain left as Pierson continued to sit beside MacFarland's bed. Finally, she took his hand and held it. "I just wish you would learn to listen to me, Mac."

You don't know how much you mean to me, you stupid ass. What am I going to do if you get yourself killed?"

MacFarland, of course, didn't respond, so Pierson gathered up her coat and headed for the door. As she walked out of the hospital room, MacFarland opened his eyes and stared after her. *I wonder if that means she likes me*, he thought. He smiled and then fell back asleep.

## Chapter 83

*Friday, February 26, 0945 Hours*

The Denny's store at Santa Fe and Alameda was always busy, and it was sometimes difficult to find a table. Jerry Baker had gotten there before everyone else and was staunchly defending a table. When he saw Pierson and MacFarland enter the store, he waved them over. Pierson helped MacFarland navigate his way through the tables. MacFarland tried not to wince when stabs of pain tore at his shoulder or when Pierson inadvertently pressed against his side as she tried to help. Surprisingly, his leg was doing quite well, and though he felt a dull throbbing sensation in his upper thigh, the pain killers he was on numbed most of the pain. It was just his shoulder that hurt with every movement.

"Let me sit on the outside," MacFarland suggested when they reached Baker's booth. Pierson nodded, and sat down, sliding over to the far inside corner of the booth.

"I think I saw Benny Lockwood pull up, looking for a parking space," said Baker, peering out the window. "And there's someone else here, Mac, who wanted to see you."

MacFarland settled himself gently into the booth, wincing briefly and trying to cover up his pain with a grin. He looked around, seeing at first only a lot of noisy, chattering customers. "Who?"

"He's in the restroom, trying to get cleaned up. I brought him a suit."

A waitress stepped up to the table, a coffee pot in one hand, her order book in another.

MacFarland was puzzled by Baker's comments, but he had the sense to focus on highest priority things first. "Coffee," he told the waitress, who was automatically pouring him a cup already. "A stack of pancakes, a side of sausages, two eggs over easy, and a glass of orange juice."

"It's good to see you have your appetite back," said Baker.

"He's never lost it," grumbled Pierson. "All he wants me to do is cook for him."

MacFarland stage-whispered to Baker, "She's really quite a good cook! A woman of many and diverse talents!"

At that moment, Rufus walked up, incongruously pulling a dark maroon carry-on luggage case. MacFarland stared dumbly at his friend, his coffee cup poised in transit to his open mouth. "Rufus, is that you?"

"Yeah, boss, it's me," said Rufus. Not only was Rufus pulling a piece of luggage he would never have, he was wearing a suit! His face was shaved, probably for the first time in years, and while he still had his beard, it was somewhat trimmed and neat. His hair, however, still looked like birds nested in it. Rufus spoke to Baker. "Sir, I got all my stuff in the suitcase. I can keep this, can't I?"

"Of course, Rufus," said Baker. "And I don't expect you to wear the monkey suit all the time, but if I am going to hire you, I wanted you to be able to get into my building without the security guards having a conniption."

MacFarland was puzzled. "Why does he have to get into your building?"



"I'm hiring him," said Baker. Baker gestured for Rufus to sit down next to him who did so, although he looked quite uncomfortable.

"It's been a long time since I sat in a restaurant," he explained sheepishly.

Lockwood finally arrived and sat down next to Rufus. Benny stared at him a moment. "Rufus?"

Headley grinned at the young detective. "Yep, it's really me."

"What are you hiring him to do?" asked Pierson.

Baker smiled, patting Rufus on the shoulder. "Several things. Courier primarily. He will have a bicycle that he can use to get around the city. We will store the bicycle at the office, so he won't have to worry about it being stolen. That was his idea. It's a personal services contract, and it will give him a little money every month."

MacFarland looked at his friend hopefully. "Will you get off the streets?" he asked.

Rufus began to get a glazed look on his face, and Baker quickly interceded. "We are keeping options open, Mac. As Rufus has pointed out to me, we have to be careful of Charlie and all their sympathizers. Right Rufus?"

Rufus seemed to breathe a little easier. "That's right, boss. I need to reconnoiter before I move into a new territory."

"What prompted all of this?" asked MacFarland. "I think it's great, but I am just surprised."

Baker gestured nonchalantly. "While you were out investigating for me, Rufus often supplied me with my daily nourishment. We got to talking, and I discovered that beneath his gruff exterior was a man of exceptional talents. So, I've decided to use those talents to our mutual benefit." Baker laughed. "Besides, I have to repay him for all those free bratwursts he gave me!"

MacFarland looked pained. "Hey, those were my bratwursts he gave you! What do I get out of this?"

Baker grinned from ear to ear. "Well, pertinent to that, I have some very good news. With the death of Mr. Wayne Ashland, and the statements by Mr. Norris Peterson, all charges against Mrs. Freeman have been dropped. She was released on Wednesday." Baker reached into his inside jacket pocket. "Yesterday, in gratitude for what you have accomplished, Mac, she asked me to give you this." He handed an envelope to MacFarland, who took it uncertainly. MacFarland opened the envelope and pulled out a check.

"This is for twenty-five thousand dollars," he said. "I can't accept this."

"Yes, you can," insisted Baker. "Without your help, Mac, I'm not sure if I would have been able to get my client off. I might have raised some reasonable doubt with a jury, but you got her cleared of the charges. That's a big difference, and she appreciates what you've done."

MacFarland was momentarily choked up. "Hell, I've never even met the lady."

"We can fix that," laughed Baker.

"Now that we're sharing good news," said Pierson, "I have something to say. Chamberlain was able to get in touch with Colleen Beltane and got her reinstated in the Crime Lab. She's back at work in the Lab, thanks to you, Mac. She examined the clothes and car used by Ashland, and was able to confirm that he also had been at the locale where Freeman had been. Bob thinks that we will be

able to wrap up the Freeman murder fairly quickly and close that case."

MacFarland nodded thoughtfully. "I'm glad to hear that," he said.

"So, what are you going to do with your money?" asked Baker.

MacFarland stared at the check. "I guess that I will get a new hot dog cart," he said. "After all, I'm just a hot dog vendor."

Lockwood shook his head. "No, Mac, I think you are a lot more than that. You are one helluva detective, too!"

## Chapter 84

*Friday, February 26, 1005 Hours*

MacFarland was embarrassed by Lockwood's comment, but thankfully their breakfast orders arrived, and he could hide his confusion by eating his breakfast. He thought once more about Chamberlain's offer to bring him back onto the force. The fact that Lockwood had finally decided that he was acceptable as a detective meant a lot to him. Maybe he would be accepted back into the community that he had abandoned, and which had in turn abandoned him. Normally he was not the kind of guy who worried about what other people thought, and he certainly didn't need anyone's approval. But he did miss being a cop. There was something about the job that grew on you, unlike just about any other profession. He had felt the same way when he was in the Marines. Perhaps it was just an extension of the same thing. But while he would always be a Marine, he had turned his back on the police department.

Besides, he had a new group of people who needed him. If he didn't keep selling hot dogs, who would take care of the homeless people he counted among his friends?

"You know," said Pierson as she took a sip of water, "Peterson has really been singing your praises."

MacFarland looked up, his brow furrowed. "What?"

"I said that Peterson claims that you were a hero."

MacFarland smiled. "Get real," he said.

Lockwood nodded in agreement. "Yes, it's true. His story has changed a bit, because when we first went to his house, he was suggesting that you had brought Ashland with you, but in his written statement to the police, he claims that you came to warn him that Ashland was coming for him and when Ashland did show up, you fought with him."

"Well, some of that is true. I certainly didn't go there to warn him though. I went there to question him."

"At least you didn't go there to kill him," said Pierson.

MacFarland didn't say anything, but he wondered if Pierson was wrong. Had he brought his gun with him along with an unconscious desire to kill Peterson? He wished that he could definitively say no, but he knew that wasn't true. What he did know, however, was that he did not want to be called a hero by Peterson. The thought of having done a good deed for that scumbag really nauseated him. He pushed his plate away from him, unable to finish his breakfast.

"If Peterson is singing my praises," he said, "then that means he is covering something up. Do we know anything more about the relationship between Ashland and Peterson?"

Pierson shook her head. "The official statement, provided by his lawyer last Tuesday, is that an unknown party--presumably Ashland--tried to extort money from Peterson to keep quiet about Newsome's role in killing Freeman. Supposedly Peterson contacted the police--and we have corroboration that the

Lakewood Police did get a call from him--but that he had no real specifics about the extortionist."

"What about Ashland going to Peterson's office? How does Peterson explain that?"

"He doesn't," said Pierson. "He says Ashland was never in his office, never came to see him. His secretary, when shown a picture of Ashland, said she had never seen him before."

MacFarland had only seen Ashland around the CCP building, so he couldn't say who Ashland had seen inside the building. He could tell by her tone that Pierson wasn't convinced Peterson or his secretary were telling the truth. Like him, she had no way of determining what the real facts were.

"He can sing my praises from now to the end of time," said MacFarland. "I still think he is guilty of something."

Rufus looked up from his empty plate. "Whatever you say, boss. Say, are you going to finish those pancakes?"

## Chapter 85

*Friday, February 26, 1046 Hours*

They finished their breakfast, and Baker offered to pay for everyone's meal. Pierson and Lockwood made faint attempts to pay for their own meals, but quickly let Baker cow them into accepting his largesse. They exited the Denny's and Rufus headed west on Alameda, awkwardly dragging his luggage carrier behind him. Lockwood offered to drive him to his destination, but Rufus was too smart for that. The fewer people who knew where your hidey-hole was, the longer you survived, and while Rufus trusted Lockwood, he couldn't undo years of caution. Lockwood shrugged, then got into his car and drove off.

Baker shook MacFarland's hand as they prepared to part. "You know, I really do think you did a great job on this case," he said. "And while my man is recovering from his ski accident, I might still need you to help out in the future. I hope you'll be open to that."

MacFarland shrugged. "I'm a hot dog seller, not a detective, Jerry."

Baker nodded. "Yeah, right. Well, I know where you'll be, I hope, and you know where to find me. And you can always get a message to me through my new courier."

Baker went over to his Lexus, checked it over for parking lot dings and scratches, got in and drove off. MacFarland and Pierson watched him drive away.

Pierson walked him over to her car and helped him get into the passenger side. As he sat down, he muttered something. "What did you say?" asked Pierson.

"I said that this little victory celebration was nice, but I don't really think the case is closed."

Pierson sighed, closed the door, and went around to the driver's side. As she got in, she said, "Maybe you should just give it a rest, Mac. Everyone else thinks the case is closed, and you should too."

"It will be closed," he whispered, more to himself than to Pierson. "It will be closed when Peterson pays for killing Nicole."

## Author's Note

Although I've lived in Denver for more than thirty years, my job as a management consultant and corporate trainer often kept me away from the city I loved. Finally I got the courage to follow my dreams and stay home and write about a character who has lived inside my mind for several decades: a disgruntled detective who runs a hot dog stand and studies foreign languages (both of which I have often dreamed of doing). Mark MacFarland is my idea of the ultimate hero. Not the kind who can single-handedly save the world, but the kind who cares about what he is doing and does his best. He makes mistakes, often because he acts without thinking. Fortunately, he has Cynthia Pierson to do his thinking for him. He just needs to come to his senses and realize that.

The idea for the Avid Angler came to me from a story I used to tell in my training programs about a superstitious fisherman who never went fishing without his wife's sun bonnet on his head. Except now, my fisherman was also a professional hit man, but without the bonnet. I brought the Avid Angler to life two years ago. Developing the discipline to write every day was critical. Then my editor, Tara Maya of Misque Press, suggested I look into using the Blake-Snyder plot outline approach. I've been adapting that to mysteries and it has vastly helped my writing. Since then, Mac MacFarland's stories have practically written themselves.

I like to think of the Hot Dog Detective series as being a "semi" cozy mystery (though one reviewer feels that it is more of a hard boiled mystery). It follows some of the rules of cozy mysteries, but deliberately violates others. My hero is a man searching for himself, trying to put his life back together. The stories take place in metropolitan Denver, not exactly a small town, but a small enough city that you can feel at home here. MacFarland's occupation is one that has always fascinated me, being one of those jobs filled by the "invisible people" most people don't pay attention to. Being somewhat squeamish, I try to keep as much of the violence and gore out of my stories as I can. And, much to MacFarland's chagrin, the Hot Dog Detective is a master sleuth, but not the ladies' man he might wish he was.

The Hot Dog Detective series is not a forensics mystery, nor a police procedural mystery. On the other hand, forensics and police procedure cannot be ignored. Never having been a cop, nor even ever have been in jail (which might actually be a good thing), I have to do a lot of research in order to make my stories seem remotely realistic. Most of the time this includes book research; sometimes, interviewing subject matter experts; other times, going to locations to see what the site looks like. This is the fun part of being a writer—learning new things about the world around you.

Modern crime solving techniques are team efforts. Many critical skills go into bringing miscreants to justice. MacFarland lacks those. Helping MacFarland find suitable replacements for the systemic crime-fighting structure we call a police department is one of the other challenges the Hot Dog Detective series presents.

If you have suggestions for improving my series or just want to say hello, please contact me in the following ways:

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The next book in the Hot Dog Detective series is The Busty Ballbreaker. You can get information about this and subsequent stories in the series by adding your name to my email list by sending your contact information to [editor@misquepress.com](mailto:editor@misquepress.com)

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