

Shades of Murder

A Mac Faraday Mystery

By

Lauren Carr

Shades of Murder

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To My Beloved Family

Shades of Murder

Cast of Characters *(in order of appearance)*

David O’Callaghan: Spencer police officer, promoted to chief of police after death of his father, Police Chief Patrick O’Callaghan. Mac Faraday’s half-brother.

Police Chief Patrick O’Callaghan: Spencer’s legendary police chief. The love of Robin Spencer’s life.

Archie Monday: Personal assistant to world-famous mystery author Robin Spencer. Lives in the guest cottage at Spencer Manor.

Robin Spencer: Queen of Mystery. World famous mystery author. Upon her death, it is revealed that as a teenager she had a son out of wedlock, to whom she has left her vast fortune. She is the love of Police Chief Patrick O’Callaghan’s life.

Arthur Bogart: Spencer’s Deputy Police Chief. Best friend of Patrick O’Callaghan. David’s godfather.

Neal Hathaway: Multi-millionaire and CEO of Hathaway Industries, which builds and launches satellites.

Greta: Neal Hathaway’s housekeeper.

Susan Dulin: Neal Hathaway’s executive assistant.

Rachel Hathaway: Neal Hathaway’s daughter-in-law. Married to Scott Hathaway.

Ilysa Ramsay: Artist. Neal Hathaway’s wife.

Reggie: Package Delivery Service Trainee.

Kevin: Package Delivery Service Driver.

Gnarly: Mac Faraday's German Shepherd. Only dog to be dishonorably discharged from the United States Army. Don't ask them why. They refuse to talk about it.

Mac Faraday: Underpaid homicide detective. His wife leaves him and takes everything. On the day his divorce became final, he inherited \$270 million and an estate on Deep Creek Lake from his birth mother, Robin Spencer.

Archibald Poole: Millionaire Art Collector.

Peyton Kaplan: Vice-President in charge of security at Hathaway Industries.

Nancy Kaplan: Peyton Kaplan's wife.

Victor Gruskonov: Ilysa's business manager.

George Scales: Neal Hathaway's lawyer.

Joshua Thornton: Hancock County, West Virginia, prosecuting attorney, former JAG lawyer. Retired after the sudden death of his wife Valerie left him to raise five children on his own. He is looking forward to a relaxing two-week vacation as an empty-nester—until he agrees to do a favor for the last person he expected to do a favor for.

Reverend Brody: Prison pastor. Friend of Joshua Thornton.

Oliver Cartwright: Serial Rapist and Murderer. Serving life in prison.

Lieutenant Sherry Bixby: Head of Homicide Division with Pennsylvania State Police stationed in Pittsburgh barracks.

Detective Cameron Gates: Pennsylvania State Police's top homicide detective. She had investigated the Oliver Cartwright murders.

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Irving: Cameron Gates's cat. You'd have issues too if you looked like a skunk.

Priscilla Garrett: Senior Forensics Technician.

Admiral: Joshua Thornton's dog. The Irish Wolfhound-Great Dane mix has the heart of a chicken.

Special Investigator Harry Bush: FBI agent. He has one more case he wants to close before he retires.

Investigator Kenny Hill: FBI agent, training to replace Harry Bush, if he can survive this last case.

Jeff Ingles: Spencer Inn's nervous manager.

The one charm about marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties.

Oscar Wilde

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Chapter Three

SCI Greene, Maximum Security Prison
Waynesburg, Pennsylvania

Joshua Thornton hated pat downs.

While he was aware that some of the most violent men in the state were locked up on the other side of the security gate through which he was passing, Joshua felt violated when the guard ran his thick palms up and down his body in search of anything that could be used as a weapon.

“Joshua...” The slightly built, blond haired man waiting on the other side of the entrance greeted him with a hug and a slap on the back. “Thank you so much for coming. I knew I could count on you.”

“Only because you asked, Reverend Brody.” Joshua clasped his hand into both of his. “If it was anybody else ...” He slipped

his watch back on his wrist, and put his wallet and cell phone in the inside breast pocket of his sports coat. "Like I told you, my contract with Hancock County forbids me from taking on private clients—"

"This isn't about handling Oliver Cartwright's appeal. He's not looking for his conviction and sentence to be overturned. He'd confessed to killing those women and he's made his peace with God." Reverend Brody gestured at the cold block walls. "You'd be surprised how many people turn to God when they end up here. For many, it's only by the grace of God that some of them are able to survive."

"I'm a small town prosecutor. What can I possibly do for a monster like Oliver Cartwright?" Out of respect for the church reverend, Joshua refrained from spitting out the name of the man who had confessed to abducting, raping, and killing six women during a murder spree the decade before.

"He *was* a monster." Reverend Brody escorted him down the corridor to where they were to meet with the prisoner. "He's also a man and still is."

"Tell that to the families of his victims," Joshua told him. "I'm sorry. Have you forgotten that I'm the father of two girls who are now around the age of his victims?"

"I totally understand," the pastor replied. "Cartwright truly appreciates you coming to see him. We don't have much time. They're only allowing us fifteen minutes." He led Joshua down a barren concrete hallway and past a series of metal doors until they reached one with two guards standing outside.

"This is Joshua Thornton," Reverend Brody said to one of the guards. "He's on the visitor list."

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One of the guards checked his clipboard before nodding to his partner to unlock the door and Reverend Brody led him into the visitor's room.

Joshua regretted his grandmother teaching him to have the utmost respect for those people of authority, especially the clergy. To deny a request made by a reverend or priest was like saying no to God—something you never want to do.

What could a serial killer not fighting for an appeal of his conviction possibly want from me? What's listening to Grandmomma getting me into now?

From what Joshua had learned about Oliver Cartwright, that was the one thing the two men had in common. They had both been raised by their grandmothers, who were strong-willed women. Firm on discipline. Long on love.

How, but for the grace of God, did I ended up where I am and Oliver Cartwright grow up to become a monster? How is it that I grew up to have a distinguished career with five good kids; while this man has been locked up for the rest of his living days for killing seven women? Was it the reason behind why his own parents didn't raise him?

Joshua's parents had been killed in a car accident while driving back home from a second honeymoon.

Oliver Cartwright's father was unknown. His mother had run off to Hollywood to be a star, and had ended up a prostitute on Hollywood and Vine.

Joshua was startled out of his thoughts by the clearing of a throat. The reverend was waiting for him to join them at the table on the other side of the room.

The clang of the door shutting behind him made him jump.

The serial killer had his head bowed with his palms pressed together. Reverend Brody placed his hand on his shoulder to join him in prayer. Joshua remained on the other side of the room until they were finished.

The man in the orange overalls lifted his head and smiled so broadly at Joshua that his shiny scalp wrinkled around his ears. “Mr. Joshua Thornton. You did come.” He turned to the pastor. “It really works. Prayers are answered. I can’t believe he came.” He turned back to the lawyer. “I prayed you would come.”

The absence of words caused Joshua to answer with a silent nod. He wondered if this was some sort of mistake.

The serial killer that had held Pittsburgh and its surrounding area in a grip of terror during the summer of 2003 was a devil-worshipper with a full head of blond hair and bushy beard.

Is it really possible for a serial killing atheist to become a born again Christian? Has to be a trick.

“Sit down, Joshua.” Reverend Brody offered him a chair at the table.

“Thank you for your prayers, Reverend.” Oliver clasped his hand. “They’re helping. I’ve been sleeping better, and now Joshua Thornton is here—”

“I’m not making any promises,” Joshua sat in the chair across from him. “The reverend didn’t even tell me what this was about. I only came because he asked.”

“But now you’re here.” Oliver flashed a wide grin filled with yellow teeth. “I have faith that you’ll help, and God will make things right. He is just. That’s why I’m here.” He indicated the prison walls. “*This* is where I belong.”

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Joshua slowly nodded his head before casting him a sidelong glance.

The killer's smile dropped. "I know what you're thinking. I'm a monster. Right? That's what you're thinking."

Joshua couldn't stop the glare that he flashed across the table at the killer.

"You're right. I was a monster." Oliver let out an evil-sounding laugh. "I confessed. Hell, I was proud of what I did. Now, I'm ashamed of it. I'm ashamed of what I was. I pray for those women—and their families." The grin dropped from his face. "It took about seven years to sink in, but God did it. Suddenly, it all happened and—I'm not the same man I was when I killed those women. That man is dead."

"You were born again?" Joshua was still suspicious.

"I've asked for forgiveness—why He would forgive me? Anyone would forgive me?—but—" Oliver choked up. "I know I don't deserve it. That's why, I want there to be one good thing that I leave behind." Tears came to his eyes. "That's why you're here. I can't do it, but you can. Reverend Body said you're the one man who cares enough to do it—not for me—for her."

"Her who?" Joshua asked.

"Jane Doe," Oliver said. "Victim Number Four."

"He wasn't charged for her murder," Reverend Brody said.

"Because I didn't do her."

"That's why you weren't charged with her murder," Joshua said. "You were charged with six murders out of seven victims attributed to you."

"That's right," Oliver said, "Everyone thinks I did that fourth victim. I hear about it. The news says I killed seven

women, but I didn't do Jane Doe. Since they all think I did her, no one is trying to find out who did. No one even knows who she is. She has people out there, Mr. Thornton. Maybe they know what happened to her. Maybe they don't. But there's one thing I do know. Someone killed her and it wasn't me; and she deserves justice just like those women I did kill."

He reached out to touch Joshua's hand. During the long drive from Chester, West Virginia, to the prison, Joshua couldn't fathom how he could sit in the same room with this man. Now, he was touching his hand. Joshua could feel the sincerity in the warmth of his dry scaly fingers.

"I want one good thing to come out of my being on this Earth. Make it this. Don't do it for me. I don't deserve it. But Jane Doe does. Do it for her."

Looking down at the killer's hand on his, Joshua tried to recall what he had heard about Jane Doe.

Victim Number Four.

The police working the case didn't release much about her murder. A county prosecuting attorney in Hancock County, West Virginia, Joshua wasn't involved in the investigation. All he knew was what the media reported.

Like the other victims, her body was found naked in a field.

Oliver Cartwright had forced his victims into their cars and then drove them to a vacant field where he'd raped and strangled them. Leaving his victims naked where he killed them, Cartwright would return the victim's car to the shopping center from which he had snatched them, and leave their clothes neatly folded on the driver's seat.

Jane Doe was never identified. No one knew where she had come from or how she had ended up murdered in a field.

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Oliver squeezed Joshua's hand while gazing at him with tears in his eyes. "Help Jane, Mr. Thornton. Please."

The door opened to the cell. "Sorry, gentlemen. Time's up."

Joshua turned to Cartwright. "I will. I promise. I'll do everything I can to make things right for Jane Doe. I'll do it for both of you."



What a way to start a vacation.

For the first time in Joshua's forty-five years, he was home alone. All of his five children were gone and he had the whole house on the corner of Rock Spring Boulevard in Chester, West Virginia, to himself.

Home alone was a big thing. Joshua had gone from his grandmother's home to the Naval Academy, where he had lived in a dorm. From the Naval Academy, he had gotten married and lived with his wife, Valerie. They immediately began a family with their first born being twins. Valerie's sudden death had left him with five children, most of them teenagers.

Now, they were leaving the nest one by one. This summer seemed like one long graduation with one son, Murphy, graduating from the Naval Academy and moving to Washington to begin his first assignment at the Pentagon. Daughter Sarah graduated from Oak Glen High School and was taking her brother's place at the Naval Academy. Her summer consisted of plebe training in Annapolis.

The week after Sarah's graduation, Joshua Junior, Murphy's twin, graduated with a bachelor in pre-law from Pennsylvania State University. After a summer of teaching as an associate professor, he would be starting law school in August.

Daughter Tracy was thrilled to receive a highly coveted summer internship position at the Ritz Carlton in New York City. She was now learning top culinary secrets from some of the world's most respected chefs.

They grow up fast. The last Thornton left in the nest was sixteen-year-old Donny, who was spending the month at the Outer Banks with his aunt and uncle and their children.

While waiting for those pangs of empty nest to hit, Joshua planned for a two-week vacation from his job as Hancock County's prosecuting attorney to fly solo and enjoy every minute.

After waving goodbye to Donny when he rode off with Sarah to head east; Joshua went inside, stripped off his clothes, and went room to room naked. Then, he ordered a take-out pizza, drank soda straight from the liter bottle, and put it back in the fridge without the cap.

When he woke up that first morning, Joshua thought about Reverend Brody's request for him to visit Oliver Cartwright in prison. He hemmed-and-hawed before finally agreeing at the last minute to go. He'd feel guilty if he didn't.

Joshua wasn't going to embark on this investigation so much for Oliver Cartwright as he was for Jane Doe's family. He couldn't imagine what it would be like if Jane Doe was one of his two daughters, and he didn't know what had happened to her.

Modern technology had become a Godsend. While drinking a cup of coffee at Starbucks, Joshua searched the Internet on his smart phone to find the names of the lead investigating officers in the Oliver Cartwright murders. Lieutenant Hank Gregory, the lead officer, had died. The second lead investigator, Detective Cameron Gates was

stationed at the state police barracks in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania, off Interstate 79.

Within two hours of leaving Waynesburg, Joshua pulled his SUV into the police barracks, in hopes of having a sit down with the homicide detective. At least, that was his hope.

As expected, the state police barracks was more spacious and contained most of the coveted conveniences of modern technology. It was a big step up from Hancock County's small Sheriff Department.

After being directed to the homicide section, Joshua was greeted by an obese woman with dark shaggy hair and bangs that fell into her black eyes. On her way out, she made a U-turn on the other side of the door to follow him into the squad room. "May I help you?"

"I'm here to see Detective Cameron Gates," Joshua answered her.

"Who's asking?" Licking her lips, she looked him up and down.

Behind her, Joshua saw another woman watching him from behind her desk. Her short wavy auburn hair and tan jacket gave her a casual youthful appearance. She flashed him a wide grin that pushed her laugh lines up to frame her greenish-brown eyes. For most women, the wrinkles that come with age would be considered unattractive. Hers served to accentuate her high cheekbones.

Her grin was welcoming, while that of the short woman blocking his path resembled the sneer of a predator spotting her next conquest. Tapping the end of a cigarette on a black leather case, she undressed the man with silver wavy hair with her eyes.

He handed her his business card, which she read out loud. “Joshua Thornton, County Prosecuting Attorney, Hancock County, West Virginia.” Her big, grating, voice drew the unwanted attention of anyone who had not noticed them before. “So, Joshua Thornton, what brings you here from West-By-God-Virginia?” Laughing at what he did not know, she turned around for applause from the others in the squad room.

Judging by the amusement of everyone, except the pretty woman, the fat cigarette smoker was someone of authority.

“The Oliver Cartwright case,” he told her without humor.

The laughter stopped.

The grin fell from the smoker’s round face. “Are you his attorney?”

“No,” Joshua replied. “I’m here to ask questions about the victim he wasn’t charged for killing. Jane Doe. Victim Number Four.”

The pretty woman was now sitting up tall in her seat.

“You’ve come to the wrong place, Joshua Thornton,” the smoker said.

“This precinct has the lead on Jane Doe’s case. It’s never been closed.”

“Unofficially, it’s closed,” she argued. “Everyone knows Oliver Cartwright killed her.”

“If he killed her why wasn’t her murder brought up at his trial?” he countered. “Was it because you had evidence to prove he didn’t kill her? Evidence that could lead to identifying her and finding her real killer? That’s why the prosecutors steered clear of even mentioning her to the jury. If they had,

the defense would have been able to make a case for reasonable doubt.”

“There was no doubt,” the smoker yelled. “He was tried and convicted. He confessed.”

“Not to killing Jane Doe!” Joshua felt conviction that hadn’t been there before for finding out the truth about Jane Doe’s murder. Any uncertainty he had felt before about the killer’s innocence in this murder was now gone. “That’s why I’m here.”

She laughed. “To help a serial rapist and killer?”

Grins came to the faces of those around her, but not on the face of the pretty woman. Her mouth was tight. Joshua sensed that her heart was pumping as hard as his.

“No, to help a murder victim.”

“Well, you’re not getting it here.” She ripped his business card in half and tossed it in the direction of a trash can. “I know your game. You prove Cartwright didn’t kill Jane Doe, and then you make a case that he was wrongly convicted; and, the next thing you know, he’s out. I won’t have any part in it.”

“Cartwright was never charged with killing Jane Doe,” Joshua argued. “Finding out who killed her won’t have any bearing on getting him out, which he won’t since he’s not seeking an appeal.”

“Get out of here!”

Any possible unwanted attraction the fat smoker may have had for him when he first walked in was now gone. Her eyes glaring, she rushed to close up the small bit of space between them, thrust her double chin at him, and pointed a flabby arm towards the door.

As ugly as Joshua had found her before, she was even more so up close. The glares he saw on the rest of the faces in the squad room indicated that there was no hope for any of them coming to his defense. Even the pretty woman was no longer at her desk.

With a shake of his head, Joshua left.



Joshua's cell phone was vibrating on his hip before he reached the car.

"Have you had lunch yet, Joshua Thornton?" Her tone was much more pleasant than that of the fat smoker.

The question reminded him that he had left for the prison early that morning with nothing more than a pot of coffee. His stomach rumbled. "What do you have in mind?"

"I'm only going to say this once," she said in a low voice like a kidnapper relaying a ransom pick up. "Pull out of the barracks and turn right. Take the William Flynn Highway for ten-point-two miles. When you come to the fork, stay to the left. Stay on the Pennsylvania 28 South to Pittsburgh. Keep right at the fork and merge onto 279 South and then take Interstate 376 West. Take exit 68 at Parkway Center Drive. There's a burger joint off on the left. They have a drive-thru. Get me a double cheeseburger with lettuce, tomato, and only a swipe of mayo. Only a swipe. If I so much as see a drop of mayo, we're through. I want you to also order a large waffle fries with seasoned salt, a chocolate milkshake, and a small skim milk. It has to be fat-free. Milk with fat gives Irving gas. Oh, and don't forget the straw and napkins."

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Joshua was smiling. “Light on the mayo. Waffle fries with seasoned salt. Chocolate milkshake. Fat-free milk. Fat gives Irving gas.—Who’s Irving?”

“My partner,” she answered. “Feel free to get something for yourself. You’re buying. When you come out of the burger joint, turn right and get on Greentree Road. When you come to a fork, bare to the right onto Ridgemonst Drive.—”

“Is this a joke?” Joshua yanked open the door to the glove compartment for a pen and paper.

“No,” she replied. “When you come to Springfield Street turn right. Take the first left onto New York Street and follow that all the way to a dead end. You’ll end at a hay field with clover. You’ll know you’re at the right place when you see an abandoned barn with a Mail Pouch sign painted on the side ... unless it’s blown down since the murder, in which case you won’t see it, and will have to assume you’re at the right spot. Meet me there in forty-five minutes. Don’t be late.”

“What if I am?”

“I’ll faint from hunger and you’ll need to give me mouth-to-mouth to revive me.” She was still laughing when she hung up the phone.

Joshua stared at the phone in his hand. She reminded him of someone. Both her laugh and the warm feeling he got in his heart when he heard it. It was an eerily familiar feeling that made him wonder if he knew her from someplace.

When he hung up, he thought of how pretty she looked sitting behind the desk. *Oh, how sweet it would be to give her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.* Turning the key to start the engine in his car, he almost hoped she would be unconscious from hunger when he met her.



It wasn't until Joshua was waiting for their burgers and fries at the drive thru that the thought crossed his mind, *Suppose the caller wasn't the pretty woman? Suppose she turns out to be some lunatic even uglier than the fat smoker?*

Checking the time on the dashboard of his SUV, Joshua saw that he would have to wait another fifteen minutes to find out if his assumption was right.

When you assume, you make an ass of you and me.

The food smelled too good for a hungry man to resist. While watching for the street signs on the busy freeway, Joshua resisted the urge to reach inside the bag to chow down on the waffle fries.

He worked his way through the streets on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, where the landscape changed from high rises and office complexes to rural farmland waiting to be developed.

The broken down barn popped into view at the dead end of a subdivision road, which abruptly changed from paved to dirt without warning. Joshua didn't notice the end of the road until his SUV dropped off the end of the pavement with a jolt that sent the food flying off the seat. It was only due to his quick reflexes that he caught the bag in mid-air with one hand.

A white SUV was parked in the field. The pretty woman in the tan jacket was waiting on the tailgate. He saw that her lower half, clad in black slacks, was as pretty as the top.

Thank you, God! She looks even better outside the police station.

When Joshua pulled up to park behind her car, he saw that her attention was divided between him and something next to

her on the tailgate. At first, he thought it was a doll or stuffed animal that she was stroking.

Then, when he pulled his SUV up closer, it rolled over to let her scratch his tummy. It was a live animal with long black fur ... and a white stripe ... down the length of its back. *Is that a skunk she's petting?*

"Did you bring my bribe?" she called out when he climbed out of his car. She jumped down from the tailgate.

"Is that what this is?" He handed the bag to her before reaching back into the car for the shakes.

The animal paced back and forth on the tailgate.

As if she might be unaware of what she had been petting, Joshua asked her in a low voice, "Is that a skunk?"

"No." She dug into the bag for the milk. "That's Irving. He's a Maine Coon. He only looks like a skunk."

"That's a cat?" Carrying the shakes, Joshua went up to the tailgate for a closer look.

Irving was much larger than a skunk. With his long silky black and white coat, which had the identical markings of a skunk, and white tufts that shot out of his black ears, he could be easily mistaken for the odious forest creature.

Seeing food coming his way, Irving rose up on his hind legs to inspect the milkshakes. His mistress took a blue plastic dish from the back of the SUV and placed it on the ground. With a meow, he forgot about the shakes and jumped down to await the milk that was to serve as his lunch.

Joshua noticed a leash, cat harness, pet bed, and assorted cat toys in the back of the SUV. "Do you take him to work with you?"

“When you’re the department’s top homicide detective, they make some allowances.” She stroked the cat before standing up to dive into the bag for her lunch. “You didn’t notice him curled up in his bed under my desk, did you?” She laughed while dividing the food between them. “You should see the reaction we get from suspects and witnesses who’re under the influence.”

“I can imagine.” He took the burger she offered him.

“I’ll spill my guts while we eat.”

They sat on the tail gate with the food between them. Judging by how she dove into the double cheeseburger, she wasn’t joking about being hungry. He waited for her to wash down her first bite of the burger with the milk shake before pointing out that she had not given him her name.

“Haven’t you guessed?” she replied with a sly grin that brought dimples to her cheeks. “Detective Cameron Gates. I was the second lead detective investigating the Cartwright murders.” She shook his hand with greasy long fingers. “I’m the one you came in to see.”

“Who was the obnoxious woman that wouldn’t let me see you?” Since she was meeting with him on the sly, Joshua didn’t think she was a comrade of the fat smoker.

“My boss,” Cameron said. “Lieutenant Sherry Bixby. She wasn’t on the team during the investigation. She’s made some bad political moves and ticked the wrong people off. She’s got too many miles under her belt for the brass to fire her, so they were just looking for someplace to put her until she gets in her time to retire. That’s how we got stuck with her.”

Joshua pieced Bixby’s reluctance together. “If a murder attributed to Cartwright proves to be someone else on her watch, then her career is over.”

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“It’s already over,” she said. “People have told me that she’s a drunk. She claims to go out to her car for a smoke every hour. She does insist on having a cocktail hour, but then I know a lot of cops that stop for a drink after shift. It’s more with Bixby, though. She has wild mood swings and she doesn’t think straight. She makes bad decisions. That’s why she’s not out in the field.”

“What if she knew you were meeting with me to discuss the Cartwright case after she tossed me out?” Joshua asked between bites of his burger.

“What if?” she replied. “I’ve never cared about making friends and influencing people. I became a detective because I care about the victim who can’t ask for help. I’m not into making friends. Irving’s the first partner I ever had that worked out. Yeah, we fight and fuss; but Irving’s never asked to be reassigned to the bomb squad to get away from me.”

Unsure if she was serious or not, Joshua cocked his head at her. “Has that happened?”

“Do you really want to know the answer to that question?”

“No.” The reference to the skunk cat made Joshua smile. “If Irving is like most cats I know, he’s happy as long as you leave him alone.”

“And I’m happy as long as he leaves me alone.”

“Then why do you take him to work with you?”

Clearing her throat, she glanced down as if to ensure Irving wasn’t listening. He was still lapping up his lunch. She told Joshua in a low voice, “Irving has issues.”

“Who doesn’t?” he whispered back.

Smiling, she shook a fry in his direction while saying, “I like you.”

Holding up his shake to take a long sip, he asked “Tell me about your issues.”

“I’m pugnacious when I’m on a case. That’s one word that has been used to describe me. Another supervisor said I’m like a dog with a bone...I don’t know when to let go. That’s why I wasn’t picked to head the division even though Gregory recommended me for it after I helped him catch Cartwright.” She took a long drink of her shake. “Those are my issues. Want to tell me yours?” She ate another fry.

“No.” He watched her chew the fry she popped into her mouth before taking another bite of the burger. There was something familiar about her.

Seeming to sense him studying her, she looked down at the burger in her hand while wiping away a stray lock of hair that dipped into her eyes. The tan of her jacket brought out the green specks in her brown eyes, which were framed by minute laugh lines that added character to her face. With her shaggy, cinnamon-colored hair that fell to the collar of her jacket, Cameron looked like a girl. In her profession, calling her a girl was a slam. She didn’t look strong enough to handle herself when the situation called for it.

He told her, “You knew before I came into that station that Cartwright didn’t kill Jane Doe.”

“Gregory and I never said he did it. It was the media that assumed he did it because of the similarity between this murder and those he’d committed.”

They paused to take long sips of their milkshakes.

“Any idea about who she is?” he asked. “Do you have any suspects for her murder?”

“No, but I know someone who does know.”

“Who?”

“The Ghost.”

Digesting what she had said, Joshua was staring at her with his mouth hanging open when she turned to look at him. Her gaze was soft on him. The corner of her lips curled. When she reached out to him, his reflexes made him fall back quicker than he really wanted.

“You have mayo on your cheek.” She wiped his cheek with two fingers, which she kept on his cheek longer than necessary, while locking her eyes on his. When she leaned in to kiss him, he didn’t know which surprised him more: Her kissing him, or him letting her?

It hit him—He realized who she reminded him of. It was in her kiss. Valerie. His late wife. The touch of her lips. The warm feeling that raced from the pit of his stomach and up to his chest to quicken the beat of his heart.

His tone was low when he found his voice. “You move fast.”

Her eyes were still locked on his. “I’ve learned something in this job. Life is short. When you see a good thing, go for it. You may not live to get a second chance.”

The corner of her lips curled. “Irving likes you, too. That means a lot. Most men run away while screaming like little girls when they see him.”

Having completed his lunch, Irving was sitting on Joshua’s foot to give himself a bath. Meticulously, he licked his paws before wiping his face with them.

Sensing that the moment was getting hotter than he wanted, Joshua cleared his throat and turned his attention to their empty wrappers and bag. He rolled up the wrappers to put into the sack. “Who’s the Ghost? Are we talking about Jane Doe’s ghost?”

“Maybe.” She was still drinking her milkshake when she hopped down from the tailgate and turned around to reach into a worn leather briefcase tucked in alongside of the rear compartment. “I never met her. She started calling me before and during Cartwright’s trial. Of course, the media dredged up everything about the murders, and Jane Doe’s picture was splashed all over the television and Internet, asking for anyone who knew who she was to call us. Low and behold, I get a call from a woman asking *me* questions about the Jane Doe case.”

Joshua asked, “What did you tell her?”

“I’ve been at this for a while,” Cameron said. “I only told her what was for public knowledge. The thought even crossed my mind that it was a trick by the defense lawyers, but like you said, Cartwright was never charged with Jane Doe’s murder.”

“Did the informant tell you who Jane was?”

Shaking her head, Cameron pulled her briefcase forward and dug through it. “I got no names. Not for Jane or the informant. When I pressed her for something to call her, she said she was the ghost of Jane Doe. That’s why I call her the Ghost.” She slapped his thigh with a notepad. “Here are my notes for the case. My conversations with the Ghost are in the back.”

Joshua flipped through the pages to make his way to the end of the notepad. Cameron was organized. She had dates and times for everything.

“The Ghost had a thick accent,” she recalled. “She knew Jane Doe was a natural red head. One would have assumed she had a dye job. She also asked if Jane Doe had an appendectomy scar. That wasn’t released to the media. Only someone who knew her would have known that.”

Shades of Murder

“Then the Ghost did know who Jane Doe was,” Joshua said. “Did she tell you anything else?”

Cameron shook her head. “It was very frustrating. From that point on, she was asking me questions, which I couldn’t answer because it was an open case. I couldn’t get anything from her. I tried to get her to come in. She said she couldn’t. I sense she was scared. I explained that if she wanted us to find out who killed her friend or whatever—”

“Did she think Oliver Cartwright did it?” Joshua interrupted to ask.

“No,” Cameron said. “She knew from the get-go that he didn’t do it. She told me he didn’t do it. I think the killer was someone the victim knew. That’s why the Ghost kept asking me questions. She was trying to figure it out on her own. Thing is, she didn’t give me anything to help us. She started calling me out of the blue, and out of the blue, she stopped calling.”

Joshua noted the date of the last call.

Thursday, September 2, 2004. 4:30 pm. Ghost asks if forensics answered her question about murder weapon possibly being a piano wire. Answer that it could have been. Ask Ghost if she knows of someone who could have done it with such a weapon. No answer. Repeat request for Ghost to come in to tell us what she knows to help catch Jane Doe’s killer. Ghost says she’ll take care of it. Hangs up.

Cameron pressed her finger against the last entry. “Never heard from her again.”

“I wonder if she did take care of it.”

“Your guess is as good as mine.” She pulled a case file out of the briefcase and handed it to him. “My boot leg copy of the

Jane Doe murder case. We're going to be needing this if we're going to find out who really killed her."

He took the file and thumbed through the reports. "Is this the royal 'we'?"

"Of course." She backed up from him. "Gregory is dead. Bixby won't allow anyone in the department to work on it. You certainly don't expect me and Irving to do this all on our own, do you?" She let out a loud sarcastic laugh. "I'm just a girl."

She batted her eyelashes at him and whirled around. Her jacket lifted to reveal her police shield and gun clipped to her belt.

Joshua joined in her laughter. He had that warm familiar feeling again and liked it.

Now this is the way to spend a vacation—solving a murder with a stunning woman...and a skunk cat name Irving. What would my kids say if they knew?

Finished with his bath, Irving jumped up onto the tailgate. As if to thank Joshua for bringing his lunch, he rubbed the whole length of his long body against his arm from nose to tail and then back again.

"Picture this." Cameron came back up to where Joshua was sitting on her tail gate. "Jane Doe's murder was crying out copycat, but we had three other unsolved murders, and then Cartwright killed his next victim. Our top priority back then was to get Cartwright off the streets. All of our man power was focused on catching the serial killer, not the copycat. By the time we nailed Cartwright, everyone had virtually forgotten about Jane Doe, and we didn't get any heat from the media, who assumed and lumped her murder in with those of his victims."

Shades of Murder

“Meanwhile, Jane Doe’s killer goes free.” Joshua stood up from the tailgate.

Irving jumped down and trotted over to his mistress.

“Exactly.” She closed the tail gate.

He looked down at the thick folder in his hand. “Tell me what you do know about Jane Doe. She had an appendectomy.”

She led him over to the edge of the field. While she was speaking, they waded through the clover and tall grass. “A farmer found her body on June 10, 2003. He saw buzzards overhead and thought it was a dead deer.” She stopped to point down to her feet. “He found her right here.”

The growth of tall grass in fertile soil left no tell-tale sign that it was the spot where death had rested almost ten years before.

Cameron continued, “Good thing he checked. He was out here to mow the hay. If he hadn’t ...” With a shiver, she stared off across the field filled with clover swaying in the breeze. “She’d been dead over twenty-four hours.”

Joshua studied the crime scene picture of her body that was clipped to the top of the reports in the file. Her wavy red hair was fanned out behind her where she had been sprawled out naked in the bed of clover. Having grown up with family in the farming business, he recalled that farm animals love the sweet taste of clover.

The bruise across her neck was dark against her gray flesh. “She was garroted,” he said. “Cartwright strangled his victims from the front with his bare hands.”

Cameron nodded her head. “That was the deal breaker for trying to charge Cartwright with the murder.”

“Are there any signs of sexual assault?” He flipped through the coroner’s report to find the official statement.

“She had sexual intercourse shortly before she was killed, but not directly before. The ME said it was most likely consensual.”

Flipping through the report, Joshua led her back to the road where Irving sat waiting. “He collected semen from her body.”

“The sample wasn’t viable for DNA analysis.”

Joshua asked her, “Did you ever find any leads, besides the Ghost, in identifying her?”

“At the time of the murder, her picture was all over the news for more than a week,” Cameron said. “We never located her car. Cartwright would always drive the car back to the shopping center from where he’d snatched his victim.”

“Forget about Cartwright,” he said. “We’re looking for someone else. How about her fingerprints?”

“We ran her fingerprints through AFIS and there were no hits,” she said.

“Okay.” Joshua studied Jane Doe’s picture and the ME’s report. “No body piercings or tattoos. There’s some alcohol in her blood, but nothing significant. Appendectomy scar. Her lungs were clear. She wasn’t a smoker. Mid-to late twenties.”

“Cartwright’s victims were late teens to early twenties.”

“My point is this woman is not malnourished. No drugs, no—She was well taken care of. Someone cared about her.”

“The Ghost,” Cameron said. “But, according to her, she was taking care of it.”

Joshua was reading another line in the autopsy report. “X-rays show the victim had extensive dental work possibly originating in Europe, most likely Britain.” He turned to her. “Did you know that the most expensive dental work in the world is done in Britain?”

“I did not know that,” Cameron replied. “She may be European.” She slapped her forehead with her open palm. “The Ghost spoke with a European accent. Of course!”

She looked up in time to see a jet ascending overhead as it took off from the airport located several exits up the freeway. “The airport isn’t far from here. The killer could have snatched her from there shortly after she arrived from someplace else. She’s not local. That’s why no one recognized her picture on the news. Her body was dumped. That was another thing. The body showed signs of lividity and there were carpet fibers in her hair.” She showed him the place in the forensics report where it reported the carpet fibers.

“Can you run her fingerprints again?” Joshua asked. “This time run them through the international database. If she’s a foreigner, you may get a hit. Someone somewhere in this world has to know this woman.”

She laughed. “I’ll get into so much trouble if I go into evidence and ask them to run her fingerprints through the international database. Do you have any idea how embarrassing it would be for Bixby if we found Jane Doe’s real killer on her watch?”

“I don’t want you to get into trouble on my account.” He closed the folder and handed it back to her.

She hugged the case file to her chest. “I didn’t say I wasn’t going to do it, darling.” She brushed her fingers across his cheek while gazing into his blue eyes. “I just said I was going to have lots of fun doing it.”