

DEAD ON ICE

A Lovers in Crime Mystery

By

Lauren Carr

DEAD on ICE

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*To My Darling Duchess
Long Gone, But You are Always in My Heart*

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Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

Kyle Bostwick: Angie Sullivan's boyfriend. His last night with her will forever be on his mind.

Dr. Tad MacMillan: Chester's home town doctor and Hancock County Medical Examiner. Used to be the town drunk and womanizer. Married to Jan.

Angelina (Angie) Sullivan: Eighteen-year-old girl. Disappears June 3, 1978 after leaving Melody Lane Skating Rink in Hookstown, Pennsylvania.

Brianne Davenport: Angie Sullivan's best friend. Grows up to own Davenport Winery.

Cheryl Smith: Mean girl. Prime suspect in Angie Sullivan's disappearance.

Ned Carter: Cheryl Smith's former boyfriend. Grows up to become manager of Mountaineer Resort in Newell, West Virginia.

Gail Hildebrand: Friend of Angie Sullivan. Daughter of Mildred and Ralph Hildebrand.

Doris Sullivan: Angie's older sister. Owner of Sullivan Stables.

Albert Gordon: Criminal Defense Attorney. Elderly widower who lives alone on a small farm in Hookstown, Pennsylvania. Joshua Thornton and Tad MacMillan's distant cousin.

Joshua Thornton: Hancock County Prosecuting Attorney. Former JAG lawyer. Widowed father of five. Now his children are growing up and leaving the nest, which allows him the freedom to fall in love with Detective Cameron Gates.

Detective Cameron Gates: Pennsylvania State Police Homicide Detective. Joshua Thornton's love interest.

Irving: Cameron's Maine Coon cat. Irving has issues, including separation anxiety. You'd have issues, too, if you looked like a skunk.

Admiral: Joshua's Irish Wolfhound-Great Dane dog. Irving's friend. His only issue is climbing up onto the furniture when he thinks no one is watching.

Mildred Hildebrand: Elderly church lady. Leader and organizer of everything.

Donny Thornton: Joshua's youngest son. Sixteen years old. Last baby still left in the nest.

Jan Martin MacMillan: Editor of the Review newspaper in East Liverpool, Ohio. Tad MacMillan's wife. They're expecting their first baby.

Ralph Hildebrand: Mildred Hildebrand's cheating husband.

Peggy Lawson: Ralph Hildebrand's office manager and mistress.

Freddie: Brianne Davenport's personal assistant.

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Humphrey Phoenix: Publisher of pornography magazine and movie producer. Discovered Cherry Pickens.

Detective Harry Shannon: Original investigator in Angie Sullivan's disappearance.

Special Investigator William Walton: FBI Agent with Organized Crime Task Force.

Randy Vincent: Cheryl Smith's alibi.

Mona Vincent: Randy Vincent's daughter.

Lieutenant Miles Dugan: Chief of the homicide division. Detective Cameron Gates' boss.

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

Albert Einstein

DEAD ON ICE

LAUREN CARR

BOOK EXCERPT

“Unbelievable.” Joshua Thornton stepped back from the open freezer to let the Pennsylvania State Police medical examiner get to work.

Tad peered over the medical examiner’s shoulder to get a closer look at the body. Since Hookstown was out of his jurisdiction, he wasn’t allowed to touch. He could only watch another medical examiner work what was her crime scene.

It was killing him. This wasn’t his case. However, Albert Gordon was family. Professionally and personally, he wanted to dive in to clear his cousin’s name.

Out of professional courtesy, Pennsylvania State Police homicide detective Cameron had permitted them to ride along to the scene. In exchange, they would be expected to allow her the same leeway if she needed help in their jurisdiction.

The dented and charred ice box was one of the few things that had survived the explosion intact. The chief forensics officer told Cameron that it had been found tucked away in a room separate from the one in which the bomb had been placed. Even though the upper floors had collapsed on top of it, the drywall and mounds of junk surrounding it had protected the freezer from the explosion and fire.

Upon its discovery, the investigators pulled it out from the corner and opened it. The smell of death burst forth like evil escaping from Pandora's box. After regaining their senses, they peered inside to find a body encased in a stark white tomb.

She looked like she had crawled in and curled up to take a nap. Her makeup was still evident on her leathered flesh. They could see the blue of her eye shadow and thick false eyelashes. Her hair was draped over her face and shoulders. Its platinum color created the illusion of a mermaid captured in a fisherman's icy net.

Her jeans and matching vest were faded and discolored to the point of only holding a hint of their original hue, but intact. To fit into the tight confines of the freezer, she was curled up into the fetal position with her high-heeled sandals still on her feet. Her denim hat rested on her knees.

Cameron was gesturing at the now empty corner of the hole in the ground that had once been Albert's basement. "Was this thing plugged in when the bomb went off?" She couldn't see any sign of an electrical outlet where they had found the appliance.

With a shake of his head, the officer said, "There was no outlet near it. We found the cord wrapped up and tucked in behind the freezer. You can see the thing is ancient. I doubt if it works."

Observing the wrecked condition of the appliance, Cameron said, "Certainly not now."

The photo recordings of the scene completed, the medical examiner started her physical on-scene examination of the body.

Tad watched her. "Any ID on her?"

"Maybe." She reached down along the wall of the freezer and removed a blue canvas purse covered with beads. She handed it to the detective. "Let's hope we get lucky, and she

has the name of her killer in there.” The medical examiner continued to search the body.

Having no convenient place in the burnt-out basement to spread out the purse’s contents, Cameron climbed out of the foundation to empty the purse on the hood of her cruiser. With her gloved fingers, she picked through the assortment of what appeared to be the usual feminine fare, except for a few additional surprises. There was a pack of Camel cigarettes, a bag of marijuana with a couple of hand-rolled cigarettes, a wallet, and various cosmetics.

With gloved hands, Joshua picked up the pack of cigarettes. “We can trace the lot number on this pack of cigarettes to find out when they were made to give us an approximate time period of when she was killed.”

“I think you meant me. This isn’t your case, Mr. Thornton. So put that back.” Cameron was already checking out the driver’s license in the wallet.

Joshua placed the cigarettes back in the pile.

“Got a name, Cam?” Tad asked.

“California driver’s license. Expiration date: June 1985. Name: Cherry Pickens,” she answered.

Tad responded to the announcement with a wicked laugh.

“What’s so funny, Doc?” she asked.

Tad regarded the two of them. “We just solved a famous unsolved mystery.”

“*Famous* unsolved mystery?” Joshua parroted.

Tad gestured to the freezer. “Take a look, ladies and gentlemen. You are looking at Cherry Pickens, a genuine film legend.”

“*Cherry Pickens*,” Cameron countered. “Never heard of her.”

“You wouldn’t unless you were into porn,” Tad said.

“I didn’t know you were into porn,” Joshua said with a frown.

"I'm not into porn," Tad replied, "but I am into rock and roll. Back in the early eighties, Cherry Pickens was one of the brightest stars of artistic films." He held up his fingers in the form of quotation marks when he used the word "artistic".

"Sex, drugs, and rock and roll," Joshua said.

Tad nodded his head in agreement. "Drugs are a big part of the scene in pornography, and Cherry Pickens was in it up to her pretty blue eyeballs." He added, "But she wasn't just a hooker who did it on film. They have film awards, and she won a couple. In some circles, she was considered a true actress with the talent to break through into legitimate movies."

Cameron brought them back to the present. "How did she end up in a freezer, in a farmhouse, in Hookstown, Pennsylvania?"

"That's for you to find out," Tad told her.

"You said she won acting awards," Cameron reminded him. "Are you saying she was actually famous?"

"She slept with all the big hard core rock musicians, most of whom are now has-beens, the ones who didn't OD or kill themselves that is," Tad said. "Humphrey Phoenix, the owner of *Player* magazine, discovered her when she was dancing at one of his sex parties—"

"Now I heard of him," Cameron said.

"*Player* magazine was about as hard core porn as you can get," Tad said. "Humphrey Phoenix was twenty years older than Cherry. He spent a lot of money on her. Then he found out that she was also fooling around with a pop singer while Phoenix was paying for her breast implants and nose job. The FBI believed Phoenix made an example of her by making her disappear."

"Hookstown is a long way from Hollywood," Joshua said. "What would a missing porn star be doing here in Cousin Albert's basement?"

They stared at Tad who had no answer.

“If what you’re saying is true,” Cameron said, “this could be a mob hit, which would make this the fed’s turf.” She sucked in her breath. She really didn’t want the FBI butting their way into one of her cases.

“Albert had no ties to any of that,” Tad told them. “Until the forensics pathologist gets a go at her, we can’t determine the time of death. She could have played it smart and managed to get away from the mob only to get killed over something else years afterwards.”

“I don’t believe this,” Joshua muttered.

Stretching her back, which had become sore from bending over into the freezer, the medical examiner said, “Right now, the way she’s positioned in this freezer, I can’t find the cause of death. I need to do a full examination at the state lab.”

Joshua went over to peer into the freezer. “Can you find any evidence of sexual assault?”

The examiner poked at the clothes on the body. “Her clothes don’t seem to be disturbed.”

Joshua studied the cap, which contained silk lining. “Looks expensive.”

“They are.” With the point of her pen, the medical examiner opened the jean vest. “These jeans have a designer label. This lady had the best in clothes.”

“But what was she doing dying here?” Joshua asked.

“And in your cousin’s basement?” Cameron asked. “And was she the reason his house was blown sky high?”

“I think it’s safe to assume she was,” Joshua said. “As big as that blast was, whoever it was clearly wanted everything destroyed.”

“How ironic that the only thing not destroyed was this freezer,” the detective said.

"I can't imagine Albert not noticing that freezer in his basement," said Tad.

"You didn't see his basement," she countered.

Joshua agreed. "Donny did, and he's been keeping his room clean ever since."

Cameron said, "The only reason this freezer survived was because it was surrounded by a whole bunch of stuff that cushioned the impact. Maybe it was behind all that stuff in order to hide it from Albert. How long had he been living here?"

"As long as I can remember," Joshua answered. "I can see it in the headlines now."

In a gentle tone, Cameron told them, "At some point, we will have to release the name of the victim. When we do that, your cousin will be declared a closet sex fiend. Suggestions will be made that we dig up the floor with speculation that there are a dozen other women buried under the concrete."

"Albert was no sex fiend," Tad said.

Joshua agreed with his cousin. "We've known Albert all our lives. He didn't even date after his wife died."

"Publicly," Cameron said. "That's what they thought about John Wayne Gacy, and he butchered over thirty-three boys in his house, and the neighbors had no idea."

"Albert was no killer," Tad said. "He went to our church."

"The BTK killer was an elder in his church," Cameron said in a steady tone.

Unable to find words to argue in the face of her facts, Tad sighed. "Josh, you knew Albert. Tell her. He wasn't a killer."

"No, he wasn't." Joshua placed his hands on her shoulders. "Help us."

"How?" She held her breath.

"Keep this under wraps as long as you can."

"That goes without saying."

In a soft voice, he said, "Give us as much time and information as you can, to find out who did this."

"*You* find out who did this?" she replied. "You keep forgetting that this is *my* case. You two shouldn't even be here."

Joshua corrected himself. "Then *you* find out who did this. But, in the meantime, you keep this under wraps."

"Are you talking cover-up?" She shook her head. "I can't go—"

"Professional courtesy?" Joshua said. "We'll pay you back when your cases come over to our side."

She glanced over at Tad. "When I need info from forensics in West-by-God-Virginia ..."

"It's yours." He nodded his head.

Joshua cocked his head at her. "What do you say?"

The corner of her lip curled as it always did when a wicked thought crossed her mind. "Come over to my place later, and we'll talk about it," she said in a low, sultry voice.

Can Joshua seduce Cameron into keep the dead porn star under-wraps? How does a legendary porn star end up dead in a freezer in the basement of an old farm house? Was Joshua Thornton's cousin a closet sex fiend? Can Cameron solve the case without Joshua sticking his nose in it? the answer to that is obvious.

Order Dead on Ice to find out!

LAUREN CARR