

The Turning Shadows

Chapter Six

Business continued for the precinct detectives and staff of the 92nd, and the flames of curiosity sparked by the Beldam girl burned down to embers with the regular cases that were managed over the next several weeks.

On a chilly Monday morning, Detective Beck arrived, two coffees in hand. His partner, Detective Miles, noted his arrival.

Glancing knowingly at her watch and then at Beck, she said, "Is that liquid crack the reason you're late this morning?"

Beck smiled ruefully and shrugged, continuing with plans to pass through the squad room on his way to Hainey's office with a Monday morning offering.

He froze half-way through the squad room as the captain's door opened, and his boss, Captain Victoria Page exited her office. As usual, Page looked polished and alert, showing no signs of Monday morning doldrums. Exiting the office behind her came two more detectives, Jeff Lutz and Denis Galloway, neither of whom looked particularly polished. Both were average height and build, wearing casual street clothes, and both men looked like they could use a haircut. Lutz was clean shaven, but Galloway sported a brown beard that could use some grooming.

As Beck pondered their presence on a Monday morning, Captain Page fixed her gaze upon him and said, "Ah, Detective Beck, so nice of you to join us." Glancing at the Starbucks cups in both his hands, she added, "But at least you didn't arrive empty handed."

She began to raise her right hand, like she might claim one of cups for herself, but Hainey appeared out of nowhere, moving in from Beck's right and sweeping the cup from his right hand.

Captain Page shook her head. "It's amazing, Hainey. When there's serious computing to be done, you are nowhere to be seen, but when there's coffee to be had, you appear as if by magic."

Hainey said nothing, choosing instead to offer his captain a little, left-handed salute, while his right hand raised the Starbucks cup to his mouth for a satisfying quaff.

“Well, since everyone is here now, we might as well get to business,” Page said. “You all know Detectives Lutz and Galloway with Vice. They have been investigating a high-price prostitution ring which has been operating in the hotels in our district. The facilities are shabby enough to be avoided by honest businessmen, but still adequate for the type of rendezvous that the lecherous ones enjoy.”

Detective Miles stepped forward and asked, “And what will our involvement be?”

“We received a tip on Friday,” Lutz said. “It indicates that the services of a girl with the ring we are investigating have been secured for a lunch-time tryst with one the group’s regular customers. Based on the tip, the meeting will happen today, but it could be taking place at one of a half-dozen locations.”

Lutz added, “What we need is manpower to stake out the possible hotels that might be used today. Uniform officers would scare away our suspect, so we need plain-clothes detectives.”

Captain Page nodded at her detectives. “I have assured the C.O. that will cooperate fully.”

With a clearly skeptical look on his face, Detective Beck asked, “And how sure are you that this tip is solid?”

“Very solid,” Lutz replied. “This is actually the third tip this source has provided. We didn’t act on the first two, but a little backchecking confirmed they were 100% solid.”

“Video surveillance is problematic as some of the hotel staff may be involved,” Captain Page added. “Our best bet is to put feet on the ground, staking out the entrances to each possible location. If any suspicious activity is observed, call it in, and we will proceed as circumstances warrant.”

A smile and nod from Beck, who liked having his feet on the ground, countered Detective Miles’ scowl.

“You will receive your assignments shortly,” Captain Page concluded, and the vice detectives headed for the elevator while the captain returned to her office.

Miles turned her scowl on Beck. “I can’t believe you actually enjoy assignments like this,” she challenged.

“New Yorkers are an interesting species,” Beck said with a shrug. “Observing them in their natural habitat is always educational.”

Miles just shook her head, resigned to the futility of this particular debate with her partner.

Three hours later, Detective Miles sat uneasily upon a bench with a wooden-slat seat that kept attempting to pinch her butt cheeks. The Hotel Sashay stood across the street, and if it was as rundown within as it was without, she could understand while numerous pedestrians passed it by, but none one of any interest went inside.

Just a block away, Detective Beck relaxed far more comfortably on a similar bench across the street from the Swank on 87th Street, a structure of similar age. The exterior of the Swank had benefited from a facelift within the past few years, and Beck considered the facility adequate enough for a potential stay.

The usual herds of pedestrians passed by the Swank, and for the first half hour of his stakeout, Beck had nothing to report. Then a black Mercedes-Benz E-class pulled up, sliding into a space reserved for hotel use only. The driver's door opened, and a large African American man exited from the sedan. He wore a black two-piece suit with white shirt and a plain black tie. The hat on his head marked him as either a pilot or a professional driver, and lack of airports on 87th Street suggested the later. With a quick word to a passenger in the back seat, the driver closed the door, circled the vehicle, and entered the hotel.

Five minutes later, the same driver emerged, walking purposefully to the passenger's side rear door which he opened. A passenger emerged, but from his vantage point, Beck could tell the passenger was male and middle aged, but nothing more. The passenger took the lead with the driver falling in a step behind to his left as he passed through the double doors into the hotel.

Beck was on a hand-held radio before the doors closed behind the pair. "This is Beck, in front of the Swank," he reported. "I think we may have something here."

A staticky reply from Lutz answered, "Please explain."

"A passenger from a black Mercedes sedan was just escorted into the hotel by a driver. The passenger was a middle-aged white male.... wait one," he said interrupting himself.

"Aye, Chiwawa," Beck said suddenly. "A second vehicle has just arrived, probably a ride share. The passenger who just exited is female, wearing a black cocktail dress, which is just barely containing her."

"Okay Beck," Lutz replied, "Hold your position. We are incoming now."

"Uh, Detective Lutz," Beck said tentatively. "We may have a problem."

"Explain," Beck said tersely.

"Another person just entered the building, female, blonde, wearing a red coat."

“And why is that a problem, Beck?”

“Because on her way in, she stopped, turned, and waved at me.”