

DEE HENDERSON

FULL DISCLOSURE



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Dee Henderson, Full Disclosure
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Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23–24

PART ONE

PAUL FALCON

1

I'm pulling into the scene now. There are four dead, but Jackie wasn't hurt. I'll be back in touch, Dad, as soon as I know more.” FBI Special Agent Paul Falcon parked behind a Chicago squad car within sight of the blue-and-white restaurant awning with *Falcons* scrolling across the fabric. He shoved the phone back in his pocket. It was just after eleven p.m. and the dark street was bathed in the flashing lights of squad cars. FBI Agent Sam Truebone met him as he cut between the medical examiner's van and the crime-scene van.

“I've seen Jackie, talked to her,” Sam said immediately. “Your sister is furious, but fine.”

Paul felt the sharp edge of his tension ease off. Being on the other side of town when the shooting occurred had made the drive a slice of private abyss. “Who's got the scene?”

“Lieutenant Sinclair.”

Chicago PD had sent one of their top homicide cops. The woman wasn't hard to spot, as she controlled the scene, people flowing to and away from her. Paul headed her direction.

“Hello, Kate.”

“Your sister's fine.”

“I heard that.”

“One of your father's places,” she added.

“When is it not?” His father’s empire ran to so many corners of the nation, pockets of family business showed up everywhere he turned. “Need some help?”

She smiled at him. Not the one she normally gave him—warm, welcoming, and often amused—this was her cop’s smile, cool and assessing, but willing to play nice. “I don’t mind working with the Feds when it suits me, and in this case it does. This shooter is one of yours.”

“That fits the night this is becoming. Which one?”

“Andrew Waters. We’ve got him on tape. Rick Ulaw, undercover narcotics cop with the sixteenth precinct, was having dinner with his wife. Waters walked up to the table and shot him twice in the back and once in the head. He then killed three civilians who got in his way. He left the scene in a dark blue sedan. His photo is out to every cop in the state, and newscasts have just put it up. If he’s in Chicago, he’s ours. If he’s slipped out, you can help haul him back so I can bust him.”

“You’ll have everything we have on him within the hour. And I’ll personally take any assignment you want to give me. You want flyers plastered on telephone poles in Mexico, I’m your guy.”

“I’ve already called Marcus and told him I want Quinn on it tonight coordinating the manhunt. Leave Sam with me, and give me Christopher Zun. I like him.”

“You’ll have them.”

She was married to an FBI agent, had the head of the U.S. Marshals as a close friend, and called the Chicago Police her territory. Kate would get whatever she needed to run the case. And he was wise enough to let her have a clear field to do it. If Waters could be run to ground tonight, Kate would get it done. Paul could delegate the work, but he couldn’t delegate family. And right now he had family to deal with.

Kate must have been thinking along the same lines. She nodded toward the restaurant. “Go convince your sister to go home. We’ve got the scene handled. As ugly as this case is, it is also

simple. I backtrack to figure out who hired someone to kill a cop, and I chase the shooter into a rathole somewhere.”

“Waters has no known family or friends in Chicago, but he’s got a connection to the Lacombe crime syndicate, and they work this far north.”

“Thanks.”

Paul nodded and headed into the restaurant. He knew whom he could trust, and he could trust Sam and Kate. The case and the chase were in good hands.

Waters. The name had actually crossed his mind as a possible suspect when word of the shootings first hit. Paul knew the man’s work, and the original report had sounded like his MO. Waters had been hired for nine murders and managed to chalk up a body count of sixteen. Now he was at ten and nineteen. Cops had clipped Waters’s car in Virginia, cornered him in Boston, and shot him once in Philadelphia, and no one had ever been able to get a good enough hold on him to snap on cuffs. He’d disappeared into Mexico three years ago, and they had been working a cold case trying to stir him out of the muck. This time cops were on the trail within the hour. They might have him tonight.

The restaurant main dining area showed the chaos of events—chairs overturned, meals abandoned, the violence at table twenty-two. Officer Ulaw’s body had been removed as well as two of the civilians. The medical examiner was still working over the waitress who had been shot. Paul could smell the blood and lingering gunpowder, overlaid with the burned smell of overcooked food.

This was absolutely senseless violence. Waters could have shot the detective in the parking lot, or walking into the precinct, or in his car at a stoplight. Waters had chosen to shoot his victim in a crowded restaurant. He liked others to see his violence; he enjoyed killing bystanders who got in his way. They would have to catch him to end this. Waters reveled in killing too much to ever stop. If Kate didn’t get him tonight, Paul would on one

of the tomorrows. It was a small corner of family truth that a Falcon didn't stop hunting.

Observing the scene, Paul found himself wishing his lady shooter had been hired for this hit instead of Waters—at least then there would have been no bystanders killed. She'd never shot other than her target. She had never killed her victim where the family would see the death or where a child was present. She'd shot thirty people in the head, but treated it as business to be done carefully and precisely. She'd been quiet for nine years. He'd never come close to catching her, but she remained on his mind. And he was still quietly hunting her.

He was the FBI's top murder cop, and hired shooters stayed at the top of his priority list. Tonight he regretted more than ever that he hadn't caught Waters in time. Paul stepped carefully around the room and moved toward the voices in the kitchen.

His father would be here by first light, to do what could be done to help the victims' families, to do what could be done to help those who had seen this violence. The Falcon restaurant would reopen, after it had been gutted, after the image of this tragedy had been erased.

It would reopen with his father at the doors and welcoming the first guests. Paul knew his dad.

And he knew his sister. "Don't throw that, Jackie."

He ducked as a white mixing bowl came sailing toward him. It hit the door and then the floor and cracked into pieces.

"You've been hunting this guy for years and you haven't caught him yet? You let him stay out there and do this to my guests, my place?"

He ducked another bowl. He'd taught her to throw as a kid and done a good job. He held up a hand and pointed a finger at her. She wavered on the third bowl and set it back on the counter.

"Rough night. Sorry about that."

He was near enough now to simply wrap his arm around her shoulders and hug her.

“Four dead, Paul. Four.” Her voice was muffled against his shirt.

He rubbed his hand across her hair and let out a harsh breath. “Glad you weren’t one of them.”

“Trish worked for me for a year. She’s a sweet kid.”

“No one is going to rest until this guy’s caught. It’s what is left that we can do, and we’ll get it done.”

“He killed a cop.” Her voice trembled. “That’s your table when you come for a meal. It could have been you.”

“It wasn’t.”

He could feel the energy and passion burning out of her. The crime-scene tape marked the area she couldn’t enter, but what was within her reach had been scrubbed down and set back to order. The grills and the stoves were glistening clean, the food in process packed away. At least she wasn’t running away from it; she was reclaiming the place. The Falcon family would help.

“Let’s go home, Jackie. Let me take you home, and tomorrow we’ll deal with the rest of this.”

She picked up a satchel holding her recipes and personal chef knives, along with the cluttered pad of paper she liked to think of as her business plan. “Can you drive with sirens so we’re not crawling home an hour from now?”

“Lights, but not sirens. You were the one who wanted to live out in the suburbs.”

“You’re on the fourth floor of a building that has no grass. I want better for myself.”

He smiled, relieved to hear the normal complaint. He took her out the back way, through the alley and around to his car, managing to bypass the media hunting for a photo and a story. He took his sister home.



Paul walked into Chicago PD headquarters at 4:17 a.m., cleared through security, and found Lieutenant Kate Sinclair in the third-floor command center. The darkened room was crowded with

people watching a live video feed on the wall shot from a police helicopter.

Sam walked over and handed him a coffee. “He’s on Interstate 74 heading west. Two cops identified Waters and the car at a light just outside Peoria, gave chase. He took a few wild shots, then tried to drive down an embankment to cut away from them and busted up his car. He’s running ahead of them now, leaking oil, and they are bringing in cars and boxing him in. State police are going to stop him at Sanders Point.”

A flash of bright light tore through the room, turning it into instant daylight.

The helicopter’s camera adjusted, and a burning wreck filled the screen—stationary, crumbled, and tossing off flames.

Cop cars that had tracked in behind the fleeing car began pulling into the frame, stopping well back. The pilot in the air had jerked away at the explosion and now panned around an oddly dark area and moved to hover back from the crash site.

“What happened? Back the tape up and toss it on the second screen,” Kate ordered.

The crash replayed.

“Doesn’t look like he lost control. That was a hundred miles an hour right into a power pole,” the cop beside her said.

The tape looped and replayed again. The cop nodded and used his pointer to trace part of the image before and after the crash. “Transformer blew up and took out power to the homes around it. Look at all the lights no longer on.”

Sam shifted where he stood to better see the video. “I did not expect this ending.”

“I’ll take this outcome over a shootout with cops,” Paul decided. It was done. Waters died without taking out more cops, and that was its own relief.

Kate, standing in front of the screen, hands shoved into her pockets, watched the cops on the ground now using fire extinguishers to control the blaze. Paul moved forward to join her. “Sorry, Kate. You won’t be able to ask who hired him.”

“I’ll still figure it out.” She turned to look at him. “This side of the case is over but for the paperwork. Mind if I keep your guys a few more hours working on the why?”

“No problem. Thanks for doing my job.”

She gave a small smile. “You could have rightfully made a fuss about taking over the case. You didn’t, so I’d say we’re even. Sorry it was your family’s place where this happened.”

“You can come over and be my guest when it reopens next month. Anything you need to help find out who paid to have your cop killed, don’t hesitate to ask. Wiretaps, warrants, extra coffee for your guys—let me know.”

“I’ll do that.”

He nodded and headed to the door.

“Paul.”

He turned back.

“When they offer you the top job, take it.”

He smiled. “Now why are you squeezing me like that, beautiful Kate?”

“It’s the first time in my memory local cops and FBI haven’t wanted to push each other into the Chicago River. I’m getting used to you.”

“Have to say I’m beginning to feel the same.” She’d married a good friend of his, and he was coming to like this Chicago cop more with each passing year. “Oh, and, Kate?” He held up the cup. “FBI has still got the better coffee.”

He left with her laughter following him. The day ahead would be run on two hours of sleep, for he had meetings beginning at seven a.m., but it would be a good day all the same.



The Chicago FBI office had blast barriers at curbside, and layers of check-in and security to reach the elevators. Having waded through the process a few times in the past, Ann ran an experienced eye around the lobby and chose one of the more seasoned

officers working the check-in desk. She offered her badge. “Officer Ann Silver. I’m here to see Agent Paul Falcon.”

“Do you have an appointment, ma’am?”

“No.”

He didn’t recognize the police department on her badge but was polite enough not to say so. “I’ll need to check your credentials, ma’am. Do you have a business card with department phone numbers?”

She offered one from her pocket. “Ask for the acting sheriff.”

He picked up the phone and made the call.

Her office transferred the call. The phone in her pocket rang.

She pulled her phone out and answered. “Hi, again.” She closed the phone with a small smile. “Sorry, couldn’t resist.”

He leaned against the counter to share the smile. “Small department?”

“You just talked to the entire staff.”

“This does present a quandary.”

“How about we try this. I came to Chicago to see the Cubs-Cardinals game tonight—I scored third-row seats behind first base. Make a call and ask Agent Falcon to come down to the lobby. Let me show him two photos. If it turns out it’s not worth his time, you can keep the tickets to the game.”

“You’re that sure?”

“I am.”

“Which case should I reference?”

“I have no idea what he calls it. Tell him it’s regarding the lady shooter he’s been hunting for several years.”

The desk officer made the call. “He’ll come down,” he told her, “but it may be a few minutes. You’ll find the bench is more comfortable than the chairs.”

“Thanks.” She settled in to wait, out of habit pulling out a paperback she was reading. She didn’t mind the wait. Today was as close to a vacation day as she’d had this year, and if she could pass one more case off her desk, all the better. She planned to head home after the game without much of a voice left and half

sick on hot dogs and popcorn, and if she timed it right she'd be at the ballpark early enough to watch batting practice and get an autograph or two.

"Officer Silver." The check-in officer nodded toward the man getting off the south elevator. "There he is."

She got up from the bench and waited while Agent Falcon came through the security barriers. He was a tall man with authority in his stride, wearing a business suit that didn't come off the rack. She had done enough digging to know his reputation and what was on his desk. Despite his rank and seniority, he stayed working cases rather than lead a bureau office. He was as far from the politics of the bureau as a murder cop could get, and that made him the guy who could do something with what she had. He was presently working on too much caffeine and not much sleep, she thought, noting the coffee mug in his hand and the grim tightness around his eyes. She would wonder at why, but she'd spent too many days working without sleep herself to find it unusual.

"Agent Falcon, this is Officer Ann Silver."

She stepped away from others in the lobby, opened her flight bag, and removed two photos. She didn't bother to explain; she simply offered them. He took the photos. His watch looked expensive, and the ring was FBI academy. She had assumed he was married, but his left hand was bare.

She saw the flare of heat in his eyes as he recognized the murders. Since the photos were copies of ones in his own files, she had assumed they would hit a chord. His gaze shot to hers. She took the punch of annoyance in his gaze because she deserved it, because she had set him up for it. She had chosen those two murders out of the thirty the lady had done for a reason, but the photos themselves were merely cover for her visit. The news she had come to share wasn't something she planned to write down anywhere. "I've got the guy who arranged her services in my morgue," she said quietly, simply, and let the words hang in the silence between them. She knew their implications.

He did too. He studied her face, weighing the way she had said it, scanned the badge displayed on her belt, and nodded toward the elevators. “Come up with me.”

The check-in officer smiled as he handed her a visitor pass. She clipped it onto her jacket, followed Agent Falcon to the security scanners, and emptied her pockets into the basket.

“You’ll need to check your weapon, ma’am, and pick it up when your business is done,” the security officer said.

“No. You can issue me a weapon clearance. Please do so.”

“I can’t issue a clearance without—”

“I’ll vouch for her.” The bureau’s Midwest counterterrorism chief coming around behind them interrupted. “Give her the weapon clearance. How you doing, Ann?”

“Catching the game tonight.”

He was now at the elevator, but he held the door before stepping in. “Yeah? Want company?”

“Lisa beat you out.”

“My loss. Call me before you head home. I got your wiretaps approved.”

“You couldn’t keep that news to yourself until after the game?”

He grinned. “Take good care of her, Falcon. I still owe her for two speeding tickets.”

She clipped on the weapon clearance and re-stuffed her belongings into her pockets. She waited until they were alone in the elevator. “His mom is my next-door neighbor,” she said, not needing to explain but figuring it didn’t hurt to cut politics out of the equation.

Agent Falcon half smiled. “I didn’t ask.”

“Didn’t have to.”

She followed him onto the sixth floor and down a long hallway. Paul worked in a decent-sized office, but both chairs across from his desk looked uncomfortable. She chose the one near the wall and dumped her flight bag on the other one. She set her recorder on his desk and clicked it on.

“Four weeks ago there was a wreck on Interstate 72. The driver died. Something was off about the scene, and the patrol officer called me in. Think heavy rain, absent quarter moon, and truckers hauling grain in a steady parade as the barges on the river got jammed up by a damaged lock gate. Not an ideal situation for working a car crash. The car rolled, flipped, smashed, and ended upside down in a bean field. It took out a small metal storage bin, six fence posts, and twenty feet of electric fencing and barbwire. The Angus bull in the field with the downed barbwire was not happy with the flashing cop lights and constant truck traffic, and since he was worth six figures, the bull for a time got as much attention as the wreck, once it was confirmed the driver was dead and that it would take the fire department to cut him out.”

She watched Agent Falcon as she talked and gave a half smile as she reached for the pause on the recorder. “Get a drink, pace, make faces at your window, whatever, because I tell long stories, enjoy the telling, and don’t plan to repeat myself to whomever else you want to hand this case to later. So I’ll tell it my way, record it, and you’ll have what I’ve got. I’m not inclined to fly north again just because I missed a detail you might one day need.”

She was enjoying herself, Paul thought, and she was going somewhere interesting with her narrative. She’d delivered her statement in the lobby with exquisite timing. She had the tempo of a good storyteller. She liked telling stories. And he had a feeling she would back up that initial statement with just as exquisite timing. “What can I get you to drink?”

Ann decided she liked Paul’s smile and offered a full one of her own. “Caffeine-free Diet Coke if you’ve got it, hot chocolate if you want me to shut up for a while, lemonade if you’re being ornery.”

He opened the small refrigerator under his desk and handed her a Diet Coke, no caffeine, pulled a root beer out for himself, and settled back in his office chair.

“Brownie points for it being extra cold.” She popped the tab and started the recorder again. “As the patrol officer was a suspicious sort, and I run that way on even my good days, we took enough time to flip a tarp over the car before we dealt with the six-figure and very angry bull. The tarp couldn’t do anything for the flood dumping out of the sky, but it kept the volume of water accumulating in the wreck to a minimum.

“The Caldwell County Fire Department arrived to cut open the car frame, the ME removed the body, and everything that wasn’t dirt, beans, or grass was hauled onto a flatbed, covered with the tarp again, and taken into evidence for review at a secure and thankfully dry warehouse.

“There is enough video and stills of the scene to count as being there, including a large number of fascinating lightning strikes that washed out otherwise perfectly focused shots. Lightning split three trees that night, and one tree closed a lane of the Interstate shortly after three a.m. I figure we earned the overtime. I doubt the front row of a rock concert would have been any louder than that storm.” She paused to take a long drink before continuing.

“The patrol officer didn’t like the car crash. It didn’t make sense to him. I had the same sense of unease. Why was the guy speeding during bad weather? Unless he had suicidal intentions, his actions made no sense. He wasn’t a twenty-something who thought he’d have fun hydroplaning on a wet highway. He didn’t have a heart attack and swerve around with chest pain. He simply decided to go a hundred plus on an Interstate, weaving around truckers and running faster than his lights could see in the rain. He was going to crash, and he had to know that. So why was he speeding?”

She let the question hang in the air while she stretched out her legs and crossed her ankles, trying to accommodate her body to the chair that was not very comfortable.

“Truckers on that stretch of Interstate are a friendly bunch in the middle of the night. We’ve got a string of eyewitnesses

to the wreck and its aftermath, most interviews done verbally over the open air of the radio, but real-time enough and varied in detail enough they piece together a mosaic.

“According to two truckers, the sedan pulled onto the Interstate at mile marker thirty-five. The sedan was rolling with traffic until mile marker fifty-two, when he began to speed. By mile marker sixty-five we’ve got truckers complaining to each other about the idiot speeding around them. A patrol officer hears the chatter, turns around to come back on the Interstate.

“The driver lost control and crashed at mile marker eighty-two. Overlapping radio calls reported the crash to the emergency dispatcher at 10:19 p.m.

“Statements from four truckers confirm a second car stopped to render assistance. A white sedan with Missouri plates, two guys in jackets and ball caps. All said it looked like the two guys were attempting to assist the driver. We’ve confirmed the second vehicle was two miles back when the crash occurred.

“The second vehicle was not at the scene when the patrol officer arrived.

“I now have security-camera footage from every truck stop, warehouse, and business that faces the Interstate from mile marker twenty to mile marker one hundred for the night in question. The second car was also speeding, but not excessively. The two cars were never closer than a mile to each other. It wasn’t a bump and crash or a high-speed chase. After stopping to render assistance and then departing, the white sedan left the Interstate between mile marker eighty-five and mile marker ninety. The only options along that stretch of highway are back-country roads, which suggests the men were locals who knew the area. Four weeks of poking around should have given me another look at the car if it was local, but it hasn’t been spotted again. So it’s a mystery.”

She wasn’t one to like a mystery, even though she spent her workdays solving them, and she frowned a bit as she thought back on the search for the second vehicle. She’d managed to

peel back most of the layers of this case, but a few unknowns remained. She glanced up, found Paul watching her. She appreciated a guy who could listen without interrupting. “Because I’ve got a curious streak to go with my suspicious bent, I backtracked the driver for the day before the crash.

“The dead man entered First National Bank in Dorado Springs, Missouri, at 11:17 a.m. on the day he would die and closed a safe-deposit box. The teller who assisted him with the box stated it was eight by seventeen by two, heavy when he carried it to the privacy booth and empty when he returned it to the safe-deposit box vault. He had rented the same box for thirty-eight years. The security tape has a decent photo and shows him carrying a black briefcase in and out of the bank.

“He ate a late lunch in Jefferson City and carried the briefcase inside with him where he set it on the bench beside him but did not open it. He had roast beef, ate alone, and the waitress remembers a quiet guy who paid cash and left a generous tip. He filled up with gas at the Shell station in Farber. Security cameras show him alone. He pulled onto Interstate 72 at mile marker thirty-five and was dead at mile marker eighty-two.” Ann paused, struck again by the sadness of the last day of his life. She could find answers, but not change the tragedy.

“Back to the crash. At dawn, the patrol officer and I walked the bean field and the roadside, compared notes, and then headed to the evidence warehouse where the wreck had dripped mostly dry.

“The first thing recovered from the car was a nice Glock, two full clips, no shots fired. It was taped under the passenger side seat.

“The glove box held an owner’s manual, car registration, insurance card, half a roll of quarters, and maps of Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa.

“The trunk was crumpled shut, forced open, and found to be empty but for a spare tire, jack, and an extra gallon of windshield wiper fluid, now busted open and splashed around the space.

“A hanging clothes bag in the back seat had one change of clothes, toiletries, and a pair of dress shoes. Nice stuff, but not new.

“Miscellaneous items recovered from the mud under the car once it was removed from the bean field were a fast-food sack from McDonald’s, a windbreaker, and two old pocket day planners, brown and blue covers respectively, from ten and thirteen years before.

“A broken briefcase handle was pulled from the mangled passenger door frame. The clasp had sheared off the case. We still haven’t recovered the damaged briefcase itself. It wasn’t in the car wreck, and it wasn’t in the bean field or thrown out on the roadside.

“Personal effects taken into evidence at the scene were eye-glasses, a nice watch, a plain wedding ring, and a current day planner from his shirt pocket. His wallet had forty-eight dollars in cash, two credit cards, a gas card, driver’s license, and a receipt from a bookstore in Missouri for two newspapers. No photographs. No health insurance card. No checkbook.

“He had no phone on him. We went back through the wreck looking for a phone or any signs a phone had been there—a charger, a case—and came up with nothing. Security tapes of him in the twenty-four hours before the crash never show him on a phone.” Ann was still surprised she hadn’t found a phone.

“We headed from the car wreck to the ME’s office. The deceased is a Caucasian male, early to mid-seventies, one sixty, five nine, hazel eyes, in good health, taking no prescriptions. The cause of death is impact injuries.

“His fingerprints are not on file. His DNA gave no match. There has been no missing-person report filed anywhere in the U.S. that matches his description.

“His license is a nice forgery. His credit cards are clones for cards owned by a man in hospice in Oregon. The VIN numbers on the car don’t match the registration. The car registration and plates belong to a junked same-make-and-model in Indiana. The

gun trace disappears into a police stolen-items report from a gun store robbery six years ago in Nevada.

“The day planner in his pocket reads like gibberish, as did the two day planners recovered from the mud under the car. One from ten years ago, another from thirteen years ago, a current planner in his shirt pocket. Where are the rest of them? I figure the ripped-open and now-missing briefcase had a stack of them.

“Working assumption—he emptied out a bank safe-deposit box, someone knew that, tailed him, planning to acquire the contents of the box. He made the tail, tried to outrun them, failed miserably and crashed. They stopped, confirmed he was dead, retrieved the briefcase and probably a phone, and got as far away from the scene as they could before the patrol officer arrived.” She paused and tipped the soda can toward him. “A nice story, since I like to tell them, and a pure guess, but it’s a tidy theory.”

She couldn’t tell if Paul liked her tidy theory or not, but it was a good one just the same. He was turning his pen end to end, his fingers sliding down and turning it a hundred and eighty degrees in a steady twenty-second beat, and he was still carefully listening. She liked a guy who could listen to a story, appreciate its telling, and not interrupt the flow of it. She would know she had him when that pen stopped its graceful path, and what was the point of a good story if she couldn’t touch a moment of surprise in its telling? She settled her cold drink back on the coaster and turned the story to the reason she was sitting in his office on, for her, a rare vacation day.

“A day planner written in some kind of code had my attention even in the rain of a stormy night, and it was still holding my attention over the next few days as leads to chase worked themselves into the weeds. My driver remained a mystery, and I was stalled for a name. As the day planner in his pocket began to look like my best chance of identifying him, I started working on the code. Being stubborn along with suspicious, I kept eliminating what it was not, on the assumption I’d eventually find what it was.

“I cracked the code four days ago. He was offsetting his alphabet based on what day of the week the first day of the month came on, reversing his numbers right to left, and swapping first and last digits. It was the same code in all three day planners. He’s been a creature of habit through the years.

“The day planners are boring reading on the whole.

“He recorded the price of gas, baseball game scores, the DOW index closing price, and occasionally lunch expenses. Nothing looks like a phone number. There are some appointments—place, time, and initials—including several appointments coming up over the next few months. By the time I transcribed and read the three planners there was a nice tug going on about a few of the notations. Toss out everything trivial and they stand out as unusual.

“Since the only thing I like to do better than tell a story is to remember odd and trivial facts, you’ll have to trust me for now that the following quotes are accurate.

“MAY 22, 1999

Call from TM

Called Miss LS

JULY 7, 1999

Saw news YM died

JULY 20, 1999

TM \$250,000 deposit cleared

Paid Miss LS \$220,000

“And another:

AUGUST 14, 2002

Call from GN

Called Miss LS

OCTOBER 7, 2002

Saw news VR died

OCTOBER 25, 2002

GN \$300,000 deposit cleared

Paid Miss LS \$270,000

“July 7, 1999, and Saw news YM died, turns out to be a rather unique combination. My search turned up the name Yolanda Meeks. And I landed in the middle of your murder investigation.”

His pen stopped moving.

“VR and October 7, 2002, gave me Victor Ryckoff. And there I was again. In your murder investigation.”

She waited a beat. She had him.

“So—I know it is thin, but is it enough I can dump this guy and this wreck off my desk and onto yours?”

“I’ll take it all.”

She grinned. “I knew I’d like you.”

He had gone from politely listening to seriously focused, and she could almost see the speed of his thoughts as he ran the prior cases in his mind looking for initials. He’d probably interviewed one of the people who had hired the lady shooter to make a hit. She would not want to be in Falcon’s crosshairs when he came hunting with this new information.

“I’ve got the wrecked car, its contents, his personal effects, the body, a bunch of photos, security disks, and a stack of interviews. You’ll need to send someone to pick them up.”

“Done. I need to see the day planners as soon as possible.”

She opened her flight bag and held up a manila envelope sealed in an evidence bag. “Three day planners and my code-breaking how-to guide, driver’s license, car registration and insurance, credit cards and gas card, a still image from the bank security camera of the man before he died, and as an added bonus I tossed in fingerprints and photos of the two who might have acquired the briefcase. I just need a signature for the evidence chain of custody.”

He held up the pen. “Got the paperwork?”

She handed it to him.

He signed with a bold, legible signature, printed his name, and added a federal case number beneath it.

She handed him the evidence bag.

“We didn’t have her initials,” he said. “And the guy in your morgue might be Charles Ash.”

“See? You’re already making more progress than I did. You can have fun with it, and I can go enjoy a ball game.”

“You don’t want to stay on the case?”

“Why would I? Assuming my idea of a tail is accurate and someone intentionally took the briefcase and the rest of the day planners, they know by now three day planners are missing. They are going to want them back. I’d just as soon they try to take them from you than from me.”

“The wreck was four weeks ago. They likely would have tried by now.”

“I’m reasonably sure they have, and failed in the attempts. They tried for the wreck and found it guarded by a very unfriendly police dog, who was keeping a restored Corvette in the same warehouse safe. They tried for the evidence room, but it’s a former bank vault. Jesse James tried to rob the bank back in 1871, blew a hole in the building, and still couldn’t get it open. They may have tried to hack the department computer system, if you can call a couple connected PCs a network. I’m hoping they made it to the case files, because if they got a copy of the property inventory, it lists three day planners with the notation *destroyed by water, unreadable.*”

“Nicely played.”

“I wasn’t sure, but I was working a hunch even back then. The pictures from the warehouse break-in didn’t give me much to work with—two middle-aged white guys, jackets, hats, gloves—but they didn’t stay ghosts. They tried a tail on and off for the first couple weeks, but it’s hard to tail me in my own backyard. I reversed it back on them a couple times and showed them some very boring countryside and dead ends. Restaurant staff

said Southern accent for both of them, which gets interpreted in my stretch of the world as Georgia rather than Texas. I haven't seen them in the last couple weeks. I figured they would send someone representing a loved one of the victim and try to claim the driver's possessions, but there have been no inquiries. I'm still surprised they haven't gone that route.

"They may have concluded the risk is passed, so why stir up trouble by pursuing it further. As far as anyone watching could tell, I worked the case for three days, touched it again briefly in weeks one and two, and haven't done anything on it the last couple weeks. The ME is done and the body will be cremated in three months by the county if a loved one isn't located. The car wreck will go to scrap once the paperwork goes through the bureaucracy. The personal belongings will linger in storage for a year or so depending on when space is needed to be reclaimed. The case is over."

"Who knows about the day planner code and what you figured out?"

"Me. You."

"You've told no one the day planners were in code, told no one you had a puzzle to solve?"

She liked the fact he was a skeptic, and smiled at him. "I recovered the day planners at the scene, including the one from his shirt pocket, and it's my handwriting putting them into evidence. No one else ever opened them. And I'm good at keeping my mouth shut when it suits me.

"I burn my trash—it's the country. My scratched-out attempts to crack the code no longer exist. I'm about six months behind in finishing my reports. I have them transcribed from audiotape so the law clerk has enough work and can keep her job. The tapes for this case and several others are still in the evidence vault in a box I misfiled a decade ago, where I keep all kinds of personal things, including a few nicely autographed baseball cards. When I say it's possible for you to collect and have everything that exists on this case, I'm being literal."

She rose. “You want to get busy with those documents, and I want to get to the game, so I’m going to head out. Why don’t we leave it that you’ll call me tomorrow when you have arrangements made to pick up the wreck and the rest of it.” She clicked off the recorder, ejected the digital card and the tape duplicate, and handed them to him.

He stood up. “Better yet, let me head down with you. We’ll stop on three and get an evidence guy scheduled to pick up the wreck and then talk to the ME about transferring the body. I can at least escort you to the lobby before I dive into this.” He locked the evidence bag and the tapes in his office safe. “Can you have the rest of it, the security tapes and interviews, packed up and under seal to be picked up tomorrow?”

“I can.” She picked up her bag and followed him. Falcon led the way to the elevators and pushed the down button just as the stairway door opened and an agent walked through, scanning a report in his hand.

“Dave,” Ann said.

Kate’s husband, Dave Sinclair, glanced over and his face lit up with a smile.

“Ann’s in the house.” Dave slung his arm across her shoulders and hugged her. “I gotta feed you, woman, and bug you with toddler pictures.”

“Got them on you?”

He reached for his wallet and dumped out a handful of photos.

“Holly’s got her mom’s smile.” Ann turned one of the photos toward him. “I told you she was going to love the wrapping paper.”

“She’s eaten the ear off your fuzzy kitten.”

“I figured she would.”

“Coming to dinner?”

“Lisa and I are hitting the game.”

“Perfect day for it. Come for breakfast then. Kate would love to see you. She’s setting you up with her new hire, some guy from Scotland Yard.”

“Not this trip, but I’ll enjoy dodging her attempt.”

“Something interesting bring you our way?”

“Just dumping what I can stretch to be federal.” The elevator opened. Ann held the door but didn’t step on. “You still need me to ferry the plane to Wichita Saturday?”

“I’d love it if you could,” Dave replied. “They gave me a six p.m. slot, and promised a seventy-two-hour turn. They are dropping out the rudder assembly to replace a recalled actuator.”

“I’ve got to be in Salina Monday anyway. Henry Stanton got a new trial.”

“How did he manage that?”

“A very fine lawyer. I’ll handle the FAA for you, then maybe do a checkout ride south on the loop home.”

“It’s an enjoyable ride.”

She smiled. “It is that. Tell Kate I’ll tag her once I link up with Lisa.” She stepped onto the elevator. The doors closed. She glanced at Falcon across the elevator. “Sorry about that.”

“No problem.” Paul pressed the button for floor three. Something special there, he thought. He’d known Dave for too long not to recognize the delight when he had looked up and seen Ann. She had to be nearly family for him to have that relaxed joy show up just on seeing her. It would be easier to ask Dave about that than Ann. “How long have you been flying?”

“I paid for college ferrying planes around. Now it just cuts down on travel time.”

“That sounds like serious fun. What did you fly in on today?”

“I took a Cessna with a flaky autopilot into Milwaukee for repairs, and caught a lift south with highway patrol. There’s a stranded floatplane on Lake Michigan that needs someone to baby it home. If waters are calm enough in the morning, I may fly that one back.”

“You enjoy the air time.”

“Like some guys enjoy fast cars.”

The doors opened on three. Paul got an evidence guy assigned to head south, and the ME to agree to arrange the transfer of

the body by the end of the day. They headed from the third floor down to the lobby. Ann turned in her visitor credentials.

“Enjoy the ball game, Ann.”

“I plan to. It’s been a pleasure, Falcon.”

He watched until she cleared the front doors and caught a cab. He hadn’t been expecting to meet someone today, the kind that went on the personal side of the ledger and deserved a second look, and he thought he just might have. *Ann Silver*. He was going to come back to that name before the day was done. Paul pulled out his phone and headed back to the elevators. “Sam, push off sleep for a few more hours. I need everyone to the conference room. We just got a break on our lady shooter.”