

DEFENDERS OF JUSTICE | 01

FATAL FROST

**NANCY
MEHL**



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Nancy Mehl, Fatal Frost
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2016. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2016 by Nancy Mehl

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016942747

ISBN 978-0-7642-1777-7

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible or from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

The poem “To My Son, the Officer” by Shaen Layle has been used by permission of the author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents, and dialogues are products of the author’s imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Wes Youssi / M 80 Design
Cover photography by Steve Gardner, PixelWorks Studios, Inc.

Nancy Mehl is represented by The Steve Laube Agency.

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to the brave men and women of law enforcement. Thank you for your incredible commitment and sacrifice. You are true heroes, protectors of the people. I'm proud to bring you to life on these pages, and I pray that in some small way I've shone a light on your indomitable and courageous spirit.

God bless you.

TO MY SON, THE OFFICER

We started out so differently, you know:
you were the helpless one—suspended, unseen,
in the cradle of my ribs. My body, a shield for yours,
a galaxy of starry future. But years passed until

you were the helpless one (suspended, unseen)
no more. A protector yourself, shelter for others.
A galaxy of starry future. But years passed until
the scent of lilies hung thick in the air.

No more a protector yourself. Shelter for others
now only in the Redeemer, an embrace at your casket.
The scent of lilies hangs thick in the air,
as blue turns to eternal gold.

Shaen Layle

CHAPTER ONE

The seemingly deserted street was lined with empty houses, their windows as blank and vacant as the eyes of those who had become casualties in St. Louis's war on heroin. Deputy U.S. Marshal Mercy Brennan gazed out the window of the black van as cold tendrils of rain slid down the darkened glass next to her, reminding her of tears. It was as if the tortured city of St. Louis wept because of the treacherous drug that had invaded her. The influx of cheap heroin had turned neighborhoods into war zones. The gangs that claimed ownership over their communities were killing men, women, and children for the right to rule. Crime was out of control, and many good people were trapped in their homes, praying they or their loved ones wouldn't become the next victims of the violence that raged around them.

In the background, her team leader barked out orders. Tonight, the U.S. Marshals, in conjunction with the police, were hitting a beehive—a house used for the distribution of the noxious poison. Normally the Marshals would leave an

operation like this to the local police or the Drug Enforcement Administration, but this time there was a good chance they'd be able to get their hands on Darius Johnson, a notorious gang leader who had recently started calling himself D-Money. Just a few hours before the planned operation, the police received a tip that Johnson had been seen hanging around this house. It was possible he was hiding out here. The Marshals had been trying for months to apprehend him on a federal fugitive felon warrant, but Johnson had evaded them. He'd actually been in custody a year ago, arrested for the distribution of narcotics. Unfortunately the prosecutor's office had released him back out on the streets for reasons no one in law enforcement could understand. One week later, Johnson hunted down the officer who made the arrest and shot him. Thankfully, Officer Mike Galloway was still alive, but he'd never walk again.

Mercy's best friend, Lieutenant Tally Williams, looked at her and winked. The nervousness in her stomach quelled some. She and Tally were both worried about this raid. Just before they left the station, they were informed that Johnson may have been tipped off. That the gang knew they were coming. She could only hope it wasn't true. Bringing Johnson to justice had become more than a job. It was a mission.

Their team leader cleared his throat, the sound reverberating in the silence as the van slowed and turned off its lights. "Intel says our target was seen in the residence three doors down and to your right," he said in a low voice. "We're not sure where the players are positioned, so we're playing hide-and-seek tonight. As always, try to approach the residence without alerting anyone. Our main goal is to find Johnson, but we also need to shut down the beehive, arrest whoever's inside, and confiscate drugs,

weapons, and money. Thankfully the weather is cooperating. There's a good chance our targets are holed up inside. Sergeant Morris will lead the search." He pointed to several officers, including Tally. "You'll go with me through the front door. Stay alert. There are definitely guns inside. We don't want anyone hurt if at all possible." He pointed at Mercy and two other deputy Marshals. "You set and hold the perimeter. Be on the lookout for runners. Don't let anyone get away." He paused for a moment. "Look, we're all hoping Johnson is here, yet we have to stick to normal procedure. If we get lucky, I want to make one thing very clear. I want him alive, folks. I mean it. We won't honor Mike by killing this scumbag. We need him to answer for his crimes. We can't allow this bust to get dirty. Got it?"

Everyone in the vehicle nodded or grunted their assent. Many times, raids were exciting. Adrenaline-charged. But tonight officers and deputies were quiet. They all wanted Darius Johnson off the streets. There was absolute silence in the van as they waited for the order to start the operation. Mercy clasped her AR-15 rifle against her vest. All LEOs had on their tactical gear. Underneath it, most of the cops wore uniforms. The Marshals and the police detectives were dressed in plain clothes. With their coats zipped up against the cold, the only way to tell the difference between the various law enforcement agencies represented were the words stamped on the back of their jackets. But tonight, departments, even rank, didn't matter. They were one unit with one goal.

Mercy's grip tightened on her rifle as the sound of the rain intensified. It was as if it were directly connected to the increased concentration surging through all the members of the unit. Seconds later, the commander yelled, "Go! Go! Go!"

The doors of the van burst open and everyone jumped out, intent on taking their assigned position. Mercy ran around to the back of the house, keeping as low to the ground as possible, thankful for the dark and the heavy showers. They were shields of protection until the residence was breached. She crouched down near the back door. Seeing another deputy take his place at the back of the yard, she signaled him with a wave of her hand to let him know she was in place. He signaled back. They were set. They both had to be ready to move quickly. If they had the right house, there would be runners. There were always runners.

Seconds later, she heard a shout. “Police! We have a warrant!” Several other voices echoed the same warning. Then came a loud bang, making it clear the front door had been broken down. Everyone inside the house was now aware of the raid. Mercy pulled the flashlight from her belt and trained it on the back door, her rifle held firmly with her other hand.

“Over there!”

Mercy swung her flashlight toward a lone figure running away from the house. He must have exited through a basement window. “Watch the door,” she shouted to the other deputy. She sprinted after the runner, identifying herself as a police officer and commanding him to stop. Even though she was actually with the Marshals’ office, calling herself a cop made it simpler for everyone to understand, especially the perps.

It was obvious this guy wasn’t going to make it easy for either one of them. As she raced through an adjoining yard, a woman came out onto her back porch and began screaming obscenities at Mercy, ordering her to get off her property. Mercy swung her flashlight toward the woman and instructed her to get inside the house, but this seemed to incense her even more. Mercy

had no choice but to ignore the irate resident and stay focused on the fleeing suspect. The icy rain not only made it hard to see, but the ground was also slick and Mercy slipped several times. Hopefully the suspect was having the same problem. As she rounded the backyard, she spotted someone in the alley. As she approached, the figure turned to face her. A streetlamp revealed a gun in his hand.

Mercy dropped her flashlight and took her stance. She raised her rifle to firing position. “Put it down now,” she shouted. “Drop the gun or I’ll fire.” She was close enough to see fear on the man’s face. Unfortunately it wasn’t Darius Johnson.

She didn’t want to shoot him, but if he didn’t comply with her order, she might not have a choice. Instead of lowering his gun, he raised the barrel. In that instant, Mercy hesitated. For just a moment. That one second of uncertainty cost her. She felt the first bullet strike her vest. The second pierced her shoulder, and searing pain knocked the gun out of her hand, sending her to the ground. The shooter advanced slowly, the apprehension gone from his expression. It had been replaced with hate and victory. He pointed his gun at her, and Mercy prepared herself for the bullet that would end her life. She wanted to scream out that she was only twenty-six. Too young to die. But she knew the man with the gun wouldn’t care.

As expected, she heard the sound of a shot, but surprisingly the expression on the suspect’s face changed once again. This time he looked shocked. As he fell to the ground, Mercy heard Tally’s voice calling her name.

Then there was only darkness.