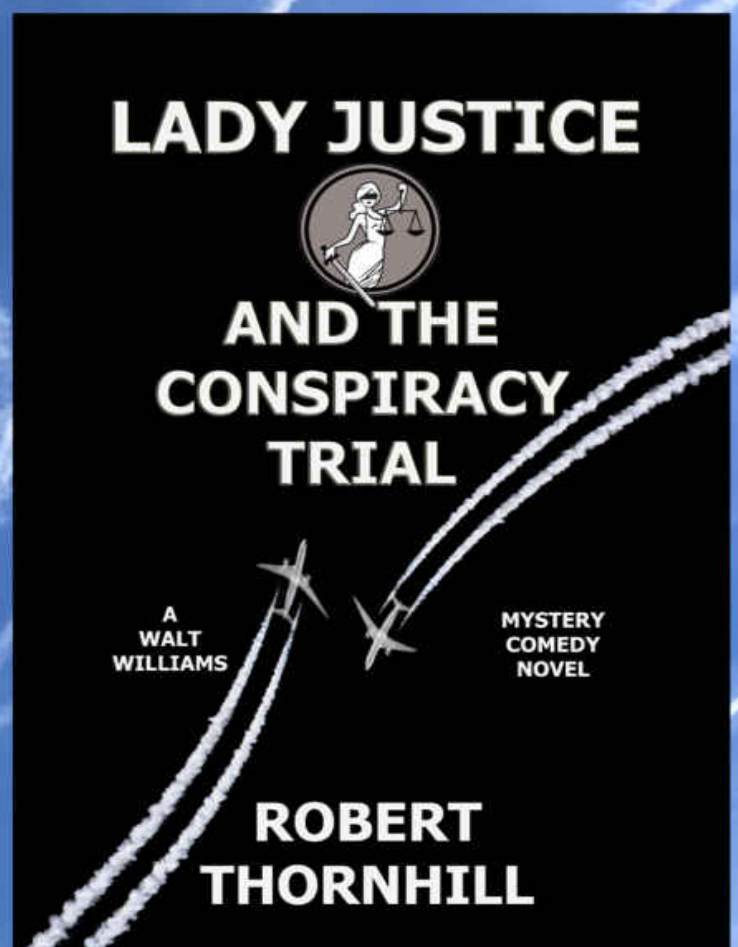
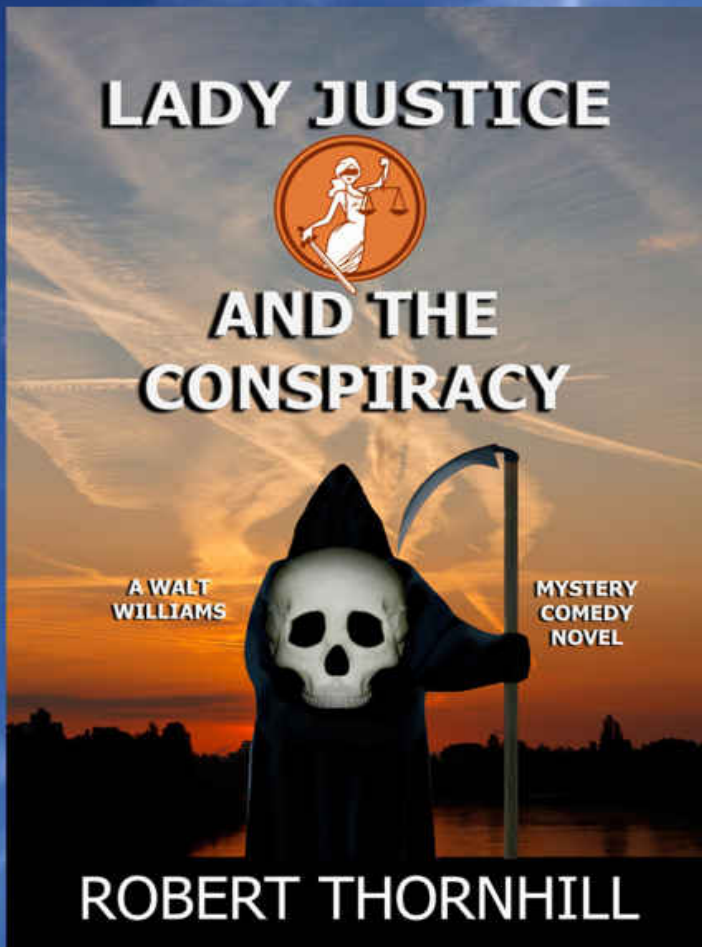


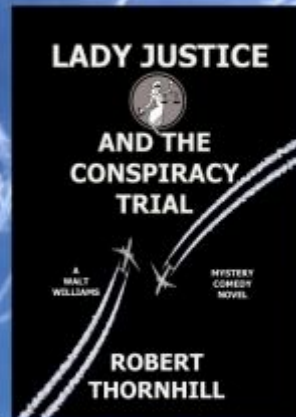
The Chemtrail Conspiracy Set



Are We Being Poisoned?

ROBERT THORNHILL

The Chemtrail Conspiracy Set



Are We Being Poisoned?

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LADY JUSTICE



AND THE CONSPIRACY

A WALT
WILLIAMS

MYSTERY
COMEDY
NOVEL



ROBERT THORNHILL

LADY JUSTICE



**AND THE
CONSPIRACY**

A WALT WILLIAMS
MYSTERY/COMEDY NOVEL

ROBERT THORNHILL

Lady Justice and the Conspiracy

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1. Fiction, Humorous
2. Fiction, Mystery & Detective, General

What People Are Saying About The Lady Justice Mystery/Comedy Series

He takes what goes on in the world at the moment and incorporates it into his books. C. Toste – Amazon Review

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LADY JUSTICE AND THE CONSPIRACY

CHAPTER 1

Jack Carson switched on the dome light of his car and looked at his watch for the fourth time. The man he was supposed to meet was forty-five minutes late.

His first contact with the man who would only identify himself as 'Falcon' was two weeks ago. He had told Carson he had contacted him because he had seen his name in numerous bylines in the *Kansas City Star*. It certainly made sense. Carson was the number one guy working the *Star's* crime beat. His name was connected to at least a half-dozen stories every day; everything from drive-by shootings to domestic disturbances.

Carson had nearly hung up on the guy when Falcon announced he was an Air Force pilot who had been recruited to fly missions solely for the purpose of dispersing deadly chemicals into the atmosphere. Carson received bogus calls every day which included everything from Elvis sightings to alien spacecraft landings, and part of his job was to sort the newsworthy tips from the obviously absurd.

He was about to dismiss the guy as just another crackpot when he happened to glance out the window and see a series of fluffy white trails crisscrossing the sky. The trails had become so commonplace he hardly paid any attention to them anymore, but he remembered wondering once, why there seemed to be so many more and why they lasted so long before dispersing and forming a grey haze which blocked the rays of the sun.

What the hell, he had thought. It was a slow news day and what did he have to lose other than an hour of time? He agreed to meet the man for the first of what turned into three clandestine meetings; all were at secluded locations and all were under the cover of darkness.

The first time they met, Carson had halfway expected to see a guy wearing one of those tin foil hats which are supposed to keep evil forces from reading your thoughts, but quite the contrary, the man could have been the poster boy from an Air Force recruiting ad. He could have been Tom Cruise's stand-in as Maverick in the movie, *Top Gun*.

Falcon made it clear from the beginning he was to remain anonymous and under no circumstances could the information he would give be attributed to him. If his identity was disclosed, at the very least he would be court martialed --- or worse.

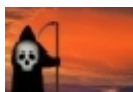
Just like Woodward and Bernstein's 'Deep Throat' in All the President's Men, Carson thought as he listened to Falcon's demand for anonymity.

At that meeting, and the two which followed, Falcon shared details which turned Carson's blood cold. He took meticulous notes about the men who were recruited to fly the covert missions, the planes that were loaded with deadly chemicals and the purpose of the 'chemtrails' which stretched from horizon to horizon across the entire United States.

After each meeting, Carson would spend long hours trying to verify what Falcon had given him. He found enough evidence to give some credibility to the frightful scenario which Falcon had painted --- enough that he was willing to move forward if Falcon could provide him with the one piece of evidence which would convince him the story was true --- a sample of the brew Falcon said was pumped into barrels in the huge bellies of the Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers. Falcon had agreed and was supposed to deliver the sample at tonight's meeting.

Carson looked at his watch again. Falcon was an hour late and probably not coming. His story had been captivating, but when pressured to produce the one thing which could verify his wild claims, he would come up empty, because his story was just that --- wild claims which could not be substantiated.

Carson sighed, started the car and headed home. On the one hand, he was relieved. It would be far better for our country if Falcon's assertions were figments of his imagination. On the other hand, if what Falcon shared was true, the story he would have written had Pulitzer Prize written all over it.



The next morning, Carson was at his desk reviewing the stories from the night before. There was nothing earth-shattering, but one piece about a fatal car wreck caught his eye. The accident had taken place just a mile from where he was to meet Falcon. He vaguely remembered hearing sirens as he waited for the whistleblower to make his appearance.

Naturally, the name associated with the story meant nothing to him. He had only known the informant as Falcon.

Finally, his curiosity got the most of him and he headed to the county morgue.

His position on the paper's crime beat had taken him to the morgue many times and he knew the people running the place by name. All he had to do was ask and the attendant led him to the vault where the body from the previous night's wreck was stored.

A cold chill ran through his body when the attendant pulled out what was left of the man who was supposed to bring him evidence of a massive covert plan which, if true, was affecting every citizen in the United States. The attendant identified him as Dale Fox, a pilot in the US Air Force.

He thanked the attendant and as he headed to his car, he pulled out his cell phone and scrolled through the names until he found the name of the officer who had filed the report, George Wilson.

Nearly everyone called the officer Ox, because of his robust size. Carson placed the call and a sleepy voice answered, "What do you want Carson? I worked last night and I'm trying to get some shut-eye."

"Ahh, caller ID. The age of technology. Actually, that's why I'm calling. You made a report on a car wreck with a fatality last night. I have a few questions."

"If you read the report, there's not much more I can tell you. It was pretty cut and dried. It looked like the guy lost control on a curve and rolled into a tree. Probably died on impact."

"So you didn't find anything out of the ordinary?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. Just something which didn't look right."

"Nope, nothing like that."

"One more thing and I'll let you go. Did you happen to find a vial of some kind of liquid in the car?"

"No, again. What kind of liquid? You mean like booze? There was no alcohol in the car."

"Okay, thanks for your time. Sorry I woke you."

As Carson pulled out into traffic, he remembered Falcon talking about his commanding officer's dire predictions of what might happen to any pilot divulging information about the program known among the aviators and crews as 'Indigo Skyfold.'

Falcon had done just that, and now he was dead.

A coincidence?

Carson didn't think so.





CHAPTER 2

Surveillance is boring and mind-numbing and I had been doing it for three solid hours.

Actually, I should have been grateful for the boredom. During my five years as a Kansas City police officer, I had been shot, beaten, thrown off a roof and nearly blown up so many times, I finally made the decision to turn in my badge and at the ripe old age of seventy-two, open my own private investigation company. I figured I could choose the cases I wanted to work and avoid any which put life and limb in jeopardy.

Unfortunately, that had not been the case. In the few short months Walt Williams Investigations had been in business, I had tangled with the Russian mob, a serial killer, and terrorists with ties to Al-Qaeda.

Three of my previous cases had involved tailing a subject and taking a few photos from the safety of my car, all of which paid handsomely and totally avoided personal injury to my aging body. I figured my current gig would fall into that category.

I had been hired by a woman who suspected her husband was fooling around. My job was to tail the guy and catch him in the act. I had followed him to a motel on Broadway and got a shot of him entering one of the rooms. To my dismay, his lady friend didn't step outside so I resigned myself to sitting in the parking lot hoping to get her on film when their tryst was over.

I figured if he was like most men, he would take care of business and be out in twenty minutes tops, but the guy must have had exceptional stamina and the clock had ticked off three hours.

Otto Kruger was certainly a healthy specimen. He was a nose tackle for a semi-pro team and had to be at least 6'6" and weigh 320 pounds. He was used to pounding an offensive line for sixty grueling minutes, so maybe three hours in the sack wasn't such a stretch.

I had come prepared with all the accoutrements of a P.I. on surveillance. In addition to my binoculars and digital camera, I had a full thermos of coffee and a bag of snacks. I would have preferred a box of Krispy Kreme donuts, but my sweet and protective wife, Maggie, had nixed that idea and provided me with protein bars and a bag of trail mix.

As I sat there, listening to my Elvis CD's and munching on the nuts and seeds which came in my trail mix, I thought about Euell Gibbons, the old guy on the Grape Nuts cereal commercials and wondered what ever happened to him. Strange how your mind wanders when your butt's been glued to a car seat for 180 minutes.

I had just poured the last of my coffee when the motel door opened. Kruger came out, paused, and turned for a good-bye kiss from his illicit lover. She was visible just long enough for me to snap her picture.

Job well done.

I was feeling quite elated until Kruger turned and saw me checking the shot on my camera screen. Our eyes locked for just a moment, and my elation turned to concern and then to sheer terror as the behemoth charged toward my car.

I quickly checked to make sure my doors were locked and reached for my keys which had been in the ignition powering my accessories during my vigil. I figured that discretion being the better part of valor, my best bet was to make a hasty exit. I had what I needed and there was absolutely nothing to be gained by hanging around.

Imagine my disappointment when I turned the switch and all I got was a low growl. Three hours of Elvis tunes had sucked the life out of my battery. Kruger was charging hard and I was dead in the water.

I thought about escaping on foot, but there just wasn't time.

As he approached, his face was flaming red, eyes bulging and jaw set. It was then I remembered his wife telling me he had been cut from the Oakland Raiders for anger management issues.

His fist was as big as a Honey Baked Ham and the moment he reached the car, he slammed it into my hood, leaving a cantaloupe-sized dent.

"The camera!" he shouted. "Give it to me. Now!"

I didn't respond. I just sat there in shock trying to figure a way out of the mess.

He pounded the roof. "Give me that damned camera or I'll rip off your head and shit down your neck!"

I recognized the line from Stanley Kubrick's 1987 war movie, *Full Metal Jacket*, and I briefly wondered if Otto was a film buff or if his act was just something that came naturally to him. Either way, it didn't really matter. He had made his point.

As he beat on my roof, I regretted I had left my gun at home. I have a concealed carry permit, but I never dreamed I should be packing heat on a lame surveillance gig. Live and learn.

When the pounding didn't produce the desired result, Kruger adopted a different tactic. He began rocking the car back and forth. The specter of this huge man moving two tons of steel brought to mind Lou Ferrigno as the *Incredible Hulk*.

I hung onto the steering wheel for dear life while coffee splashed and trail mix scattered. When this was all over, I would have a nasty mess to clean up, assuming, of course, that I would survive.

After one final shove, he glared at me through the window. "Hand it over or I'm coming in to get it!"

When I didn't respond, he stormed off, searching the parking lot for something to bash in my window. It didn't take a genius to know once he was inside, I was toast.

I reached for my cell phone and punched the speed dial for my former partner, Ox.

"Hey, Walt! What's up?"

"Where are you? I hope to heck you're close by."

"Main and Linwood. What's going on? You sound terrible."

"Get over here as fast as you can. I'm in the parking lot of the motel at Linwood and Broadway. A 300 pound Neanderthal is about to rip off my head!"

"On my way. You can explain when I get there."

I heard the siren in the distance and I just hoped Ox would get here in time to save my ass. Kruger had just wrestled a handicapped parking sign out of the asphalt parking lot and was heading my way.

He had just aimed the sign post at my driver's window when Ox roared into the parking lot. I ducked for cover and heard his booming voice on the loud speaker.

"Drop the sign! Do it now!"

The sight of Ox and his new partner, Amanda Parrish, bailing out of their cruiser with guns drawn evidently got Kruger's attention. He didn't hit the car, but he didn't drop the pole either.

As Ox and Amanda advanced, I saw Kruger scowl, raise the six foot sign over his head and fling it at my friends. They both ducked, but the metal pole struck Ox in the head and knocked the gun out of Amanda's hand.

Seeing they were both temporarily distracted, Kruger charged at Amanda, ignoring Ox who was on the ground, dazed. Amanda deftly side-stepped the huge nose tackle's charge and as he stumbled past, turned and planted her foot squarely between his legs.

The big man stopped in his tracks and I could see his body quiver as the blow to his gonads resonated through his body. He staggered a few steps and crumpled, face down, into the asphalt. Amanda was on him in a flash and cuffed his hands behind his back.

It occurred to me that like Euell Gibbons, Otto Kruger would probably have grape nuts the next morning.

As soon as he was down, I rushed to Ox's side. He had a nasty cut on his head, but seemed to be okay otherwise.

He looked at the beached whale lying beside him in handcuffs. "Unbelievable! I thought you were only taking cream puff cases. I guess not."

"It was supposed to be," I replied. "Thanks --- again. The two of you pulled my fat out of the fire."

I shared my side of the story as we waited for the paddy wagon to arrive and haul Kruger to lock-up.

After Otto, still reeling from Amanda's well-placed punt, was loaded, I got a jump start from the meat wagon before it headed back to the precinct.

I stopped at the Soapy Suds car wash and vacuumed the trail mix from the front seat.

As I headed home, I marveled that once again, Lady Justice had prevailed, the bad guy was in jail and I had avoided another encounter with the grim reaper by the skin of my teeth.



I was about to call my client and tell her I had the goods on her cheating husband, when the phone rang.

"Hi Walt. This is Jack Carson."

I knew Carson very well. He was the top crime reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. He must have a police scanner because he was johnny-on-the-spot at most every crime scene Ox and I worked. Inevitably, he

would press us for information about what was going on, and without exception, I would always reply, "No comment."

I knew the guy was just doing his job, but the last thing I wanted was to be the source he quoted in the next day's paper.

I figured he had gotten wind of my encounter with Otto Kruger and was fishing for a story.

"Look, Jack, I'm not a cop anymore. If you want information on a case, call the precinct."

"That's not what this is about. I'd like to come by and talk to you."

I was still in my clothes which were wet and stained from the coffee that was sloshing around while Otto was rocking my car. "It's not a good time. Can't we just talk on the phone?"

He hesitated. "I'd rather not. What I want to discuss is rather sensitive and you never know who might be listening."

His comment aroused my curiosity. "Give me a half hour."



Thirty minutes later, Carson was sitting in my office.

"I know what I'm about to tell you will sound crazy, but please hear me out."

For the next hour, Carson told me how Dale Fox, whom he knew only as Falcon, had come to him with the incredible story of being a pilot in a clandestine, black ops program whose mission was to alter and control the world's weather by spraying chemtrails of deadly poisons into the atmosphere. He gave me details of their three meetings, and ended by sharing what he knew of the accident which had prevented Falcon from delivering the evidence which would verify his claims.

When he finished, I sat in stunned disbelief.

"Why are you telling me all of this? What can I do?"

"The reason I've come to you is the officer who covered the wreck was your old partner, Ox. You must know if I went to the cops with this story, they'd laugh me out of the precinct and my credibility would be gone forever. All I'm asking you to do is talk to Ox and ask him to take a closer look at the accident scene. On the surface, it appeared to be just another traffic mishap, but knowing the background of the situation, wouldn't you agree his untimely death just as he was about to blow the whistle on a covert government scheme is quite a coincidence?"

I had to agree that it was.

"I'll talk to Ox, but I can't promise anything."

"That's all I ask."



I gave Ox a call, but he was at the hospital getting his wound dressed.

I finally reached him an hour later.

"Hey, Partner, how's the head?"

"I've got a killer headache and five stitches. This thing is gonna leave a scar."

"I'm sure it will only enhance the vision of your rugged manhood."

"Thanks a lot."

"I need a favor."

"Another one! I just saved your ass. How many do you want in one day?"

"Just one more, I promise."

"Well, as long as it doesn't involve a 300 pound gorilla coming at me with a traffic sign, I might consider it."

"You worked a case the other night, a Dale Fox wrapped his car around a tree."

"You're the second person who's called me about that case. The crime reporter, Jack Carson, called too. What's going on?"

"It's a long story. What I'd like you to do is have the crime scene guys take another look at the car, particularly the brake line. Remember the young couple who bought a house from Maggie and ran into the

back of a semi on the way to sign the contract?"

"Yeah, I remember. Their brake line had been cut just enough to cause it to rupture. Do you believe something like that is going on here?"

"It's certainly a possibility. What about family? Have you notified his next of kin?"

"Dead end. His parents are deceased, he had no siblings and he was never married. The guy was all alone."

That certainly lined up with what Falcon had told Carson. He said the pilots were chosen from the top ranks of the Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard. One of the qualifiers was lack of familial connections. They wanted men who were 'hardened' and had no qualms about spraying toxic substances into the atmosphere. He actually referred to them as 'Tanker Terminators.'

"Even more reason to take a second look. Will you do it?"

"I will. I just hope you're not getting me mixed up in another of your crazy cases."

I didn't have the heart to tell him I just might be doing that very thing.



Later that day, Ox called back.

"You were right on, Partner. The brake line had ruptured, causing him to lose control on the curve. The bad news is there is not sufficient evidence to support the idea the line was deliberately cut. It could have just been worn and ruptured on its own."

"Well, we both know someone with skills can cut the line just enough for the thing to rupture when pressure is applied."

"True enough, but in this situation, there is nothing to suggest that happened, so the case is closed. Sorry."

"Thanks, I appreciate you looking into it."

"Glad to help."

Just as he was hanging up, I had another thought. "One more thing. Did you get an address on the guy and has anyone from the department gone by his place?"

He thought for a moment. "Yeah, I got an address, but no one's been there. Once it was determined it was an accident, there was no reason for us to pursue the matter further. You want the address?"

"Yes, please." As he was looking it up, I recalled my days as a landlord. More than once a tenant had died or disappeared and I didn't know about it until the rent was late and I came knocking for payment.

Ox came back on the line. "Got it. An apartment on Brookside, south of the Plaza. I'm guessing you're going there."

"Probably will. I need to tie up a few loose ends."

As far as the cops were concerned the case might be closed, but for me, it was just beginning.



CHAPTER 3

The moment I hung up from Ox, I dialed Kevin McBride, my brother-in-law and partner in Walt Williams Investigations.

"Hey Walt! How'd it go with Otto Kruger? Was he playing 'hide the salami' with some chick like his wife suspected?"

"Indeed he was and I got it all on camera, but that's not why I'm calling. Can you come over? We need to talk."

"Geese Walt, Victoria will be home any time now and I was thinking about hiding some salami myself. Why can't we just talk on the phone?"

I had already considered that possibility, but then I remembered Jack Carson saying, "You never know who might be listening." If Dale Fox was about to expose a government conspiracy, it wasn't a stretch to believe Big Brother was listening to anyone and everyone even remotely connected to the case.

"Come on, Kevin. This is important. You can dip your wick tonight."

"Okay, okay! Give me a half hour."

Thirty minutes later, Kevin was in my office listening to what I knew about the chemtrail conspiracy.

He listened quietly and when I finished he just shook his head. "It was bound to happen sooner or later."

"What was bound to happen?"

"One of those pilots would have an attack of conscience and the balls to tell the world we're being poisoned by our government."

I was in shock. "So you believe in this conspiracy thing?"

"I believe chemicals are being sprayed into the air. For Chris' sakes, Walt. All you have to do is look up most any day of the week and see dozens of fluffy trails crisscrossing the sky. The official word is those are water condensation trails, but that's bureaucratic bullshit. We have them almost every day here in Kansas City, but it was much worse in Phoenix."

Before coming to Kansas City, Kevin lived in Phoenix for thirty years and worked as a private investigator.

"Angel hair," he continued. "That's what we would call the stuff which fell on us after the sky had been obliterated by the chemical emissions. They looked like very long cobwebs, but unlike cobwebs they would completely dissolve into our skin when we touched them. When we held a match to them, they would blacken and curl like plastic or some polymer burning. Scary stuff!"

I was stunned by what my partner was saying. "If that's true and the stuff was falling everywhere, why didn't someone report it?"

"Oh, they did!" he replied. "The Air Force denied they were spraying chemicals and the EPA said there was nothing to worry about. So who you gonna call next? Ghostbusters?"

"Unbelievable!"

"No kidding. If it's the government doing the dirty work, it's not going to do much good to go to them for help."

"Back to our present situation. If Dale Fox was telling the truth, there just might be some evidence in his apartment. The cops think his death was an accident and didn't even take a look. Are you interested?"

"You bet I am!" he replied with a grin.

"Got your lock picks?"

"Does Howdy Doody have wooden balls?"



Dale Fox's apartment was on the second floor of a brick four-plex on Brookside.

It took Kevin less than a minute to pop the deadbolt and get us inside. The place was a typical bachelor pad, small living area with a TV, an eat-in kitchen, bedroom and bath.

Falcon's kitchen looked a lot like my own before Maggie and I were married. There was a carton of milk which expired two weeks ago and a loaf of bread with green stuff around the edges in the fridge. A can of

Spicy Hot Spam, a can of chicken noodle soup, and a box of saltines were on the shelf beside the stove. Typical fare for a single guy who spent most of his time flying jets across the country.

We found nothing of interest until we opened the drawer of the nightstand beside his bed.

"Bingo!" Kevin exclaimed as he pulled two photos out of the drawer.

I looked over his shoulder. The first photo was of airplanes with no visible names or lettering. On the back were the words 'Pinal Air Park, Arizona.'



The second photo showed the interior of a huge jet which seemed to be filled with canisters of some kind.



"This must be some of the evidence Fox was going to give to Jack Carson," I said, taking a closer look.

"So what do we do with it?" Kevin asked.

I thought for a moment. "We can't just take it. We're not even supposed to be here and if we did take it, we could never prove where we got it. Let's leave it here. I'll call Ox and tell him what we've found. He can say he received an anonymous tip that there was incriminating evidence in Fox's apartment, then when they search and find it, it can be used as evidence --- if this conspiracy thing ever goes anywhere, and that's a big 'if.'"

"Sounds good to me," he said, tucking the photos back where we'd found them.



I called Ox and made arrangements to meet him in the precinct parking lot after his shift. For the second time that day, I didn't want to chance a phone conversation which might be overheard.

"What's up?" he asked, sliding into the seat beside me.

I told him the story and what we had found.

Like me, he was stunned. "Holy Crap, Walt! You're telling me the government is filling the skies with poison and this Fox guy was one of the pilots and was going to blow the whistle. Then you're saying he got

whacked before he could verify his story and the proof is in the nightstand by his bed!"

"That's it in a nutshell."

"Do you know how utterly ridiculous that sounds?"

"Of course I do, but don't you think it would be worth your time to get those photos and establish a chain of custody just in case it isn't?"

He shook his head. "How in heaven's name do you get mixed up in all this weird stuff?"

"Just lucky I guess. Will you do it?"

He sighed. "Yeah, I'll do it, but I think you're way out in left field on this one."



At ten the next morning, my phone rang.

"Walt, it's Ox. We went to Fox's apartment and went over the place with a fine toothed comb and guess what --- no photos! Nothing but some stale milk and bread. Are you sure you and Kevin aren't smoking something?"

"But --- they were there yesterday!"

"Well, they're not there today. Sorry, Pal."

"Someone must have been there after we were. Probably the same people who sabotaged Fox's car. You can see that, can't you?"

"What I see is a crazy theory and no proof to back it up. I really am sorry, Walt. Well, I've got to concoct some story as to why I wasted the department's time. Talk to you later."

The missing photos were just one more bit of evidence Jack Carson was on to something. I was really pissed they had disappeared.

It was a good thing I had photographed them with my phone.



CHAPTER 4

I had just hung up from Ox when the phone jingled again.

"Walt, Jack Carson here. Sorry to bother you but I was just wondering if you persuaded Ox to take another look at Fox's accident."

So much had happened so fast I had totally forgotten to keep Carson in the loop. Since he was the one who opened this can of worms, I figured I should bring him up to date.

"Actually, I've got a lot to share with you, but I don't think we should discuss it on the phone."

"I agree. I know you like Mel's Diner. How about we meet there and I'll buy you a piece of pie?"

Carson had certainly done his homework. Mel's was indeed my favorite greasy spoon. "Sounds good to me. I can be there in fifteen minutes."



"So you're telling me the accident was caused by a ruptured brake line, but there's not enough evidence to confirm it was tampered with?" Carson asked, shoveling a huge bite of coconut cream pie into his mouth.

"That's what the CSI guys are saying, so as far as the cops are concerned, case closed."

"Quite a coincidence don't you think, that a brake line would rupture on the very night Fox was bringing me evidence of a conspiracy?"

"That's exactly what I thought, so that's why my partner, Kevin McBride, and I took a look inside Fox's apartment."

"You did? How in the world did you get keys and permission?"

"Do you really need to know that?" I asked with a grimace.

"Never mind," he replied with a knowing nod. "So did you find anything?"

"Sure did," I replied, pulling out my cell phone. "We found these photos in the drawer of his nightstand."

"Son-of-a bitch!" he exclaimed, examining the photos. "The unmarked planes and the canisters inside which hold the chemicals. It's just like he described them to me. So where are the actual photos?"

I sighed. "That's another story. We left them where we found them and I persuaded Ox to get a team together to go through Fox's apartment. We wanted them to be found by the cops to establish a chain of custody."

"That's real smart," Carson said. "So the cops have the photos now?"

I shook my head. "Ox's team went through the entire apartment and didn't find a thing. Now, unfortunately, both he and I look like fools."

"Damn!" Carson muttered slamming his fist on the table. "They cleaned the place out after you left and before the cops arrived."

"So it would seem, but who is 'they'?"

"That's the question, isn't it? This all fits with what Fox shared with me. Apparently he and a number of other pilots have questioned their superiors about what they had been ordered to spray. They were told in no uncertain terms to keep their mouths shut and do their jobs --- that it was a matter of national security. He even went on to say the planes were equipped with a cyber program called Flash Point or FP-03. He said the program was a self-destruct sequence that could be remotely activated from any ground, water surface, under water base or mobile air unit. He said the signal is encrypted through three satellites and cannot be blocked or jammed. They were told FP-03 exists so damaged planes could be detonated over safe zones instead of going down in populated areas, but the pilots were pretty sure this was a fail-safe program to prevent pilots from turning over incriminating evidence to any public, private or civilian authorities."

"I can imagine that would be pretty effective, knowing at any moment, 'they' could blow you and your plane to smithereens."

"Exactly! And if they're willing to blow up a plane rather than to have its clandestine mission revealed, I'm sure they wouldn't think twice about whacking a pilot who was about to spill the beans."

"So what now?" I asked. "We have no real evidence of any kind. Everything Falcon told you is hearsay. If you try to go public with what we have now, you'll just be written off as another nut case."

"Sadly, you are exactly right, but I'll tell you this, I'm not going to give up. I'm going to keep digging. Dale Fox was brutally murdered for trying to expose the truth and I'm not going to let that brave man die in vain."



On the way home, I kept thinking about the photo of the canisters inside the belly of the huge plane and wondered what kind of chemical was being spewed into our beautiful blue skies every day.

Then I remembered going out onto my front step one afternoon. My tenant, Leopold Skinner, or the Professor as he likes to be called, was gazing into the air.

"Beautiful day," I remarked.

He pointed to the white trails streaking the sky. "It was," he replied, "until the government intervened."

He went on to talk about the toxins which were polluting our air, but I was preoccupied with other things, and like most Americans, I had seen the trails in the sky for years. Besides, who in their right mind would even consider the possibility our very own government, sworn to protect its citizens, would do something so despicable.

Being a retired professor with doctorates in Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy, I figured he might be able to shed some light on the mysterious streaks in the sky, so I parked my car and headed to his apartment on the first floor of my building.

"Walt! Come in please. What brings you to my door this fine day?"

I pointed up. "Tell me what you know about the streaks across the sky."

He smiled. "What was it --- a year ago, maybe two --- I pointed those out to you but you just weren't interested. What's changed?"

I plopped into one of his easy chairs and told him everything which had happened since the first call from Jack Carson.

"So, I guess at this point I'd like to know what's being sprayed, who's doing the spraying and why are they doing it."

"My, my, you are an inquisitive lad. What makes you think I have the knowledge you're seeking?"

"Well, for one, you're the smartest person I know and I figured you would have the information or tell me where I could get it."

He rubbed his chin. "Very well, let's see what your attempt at flattery will get you. In a nutshell, the answer to your 'why' is weather control and national defense. Are you, by any chance, familiar with a paper titled, *Weather as a force multiplier. Controlling the weather in 2025?*"

I shook my head.

"I thought not. It was a paper published by the Air Force in 1996. It laid the groundwork for what we are seeing today. Hang on a minute."

He went to a bookcase and ran his fingers across a row of titles.

"Ahh, here it is."

He returned and opened the book to a dog-eared page.

"Let me just read some of the things being proposed back in 1996. *'In 2025, US aerospace forces can "own the weather" by capitalizing on emerging technologies and focusing development of those technologies to war-fighting applications. Such a capability offers the warfighter tools to shape the battlespace in ways never before possible. It provides opportunities to impact operations across the full spectrum of conflict and is pertinent to all possible futures. The purpose of this paper is to outline a strategy for the use of a future weather-modification system to achieve military objectives rather than to provide a detailed technical road map.'*"

He ran his finger down the page. "Here we go. *'Weather-modification technologies might involve techniques that would increase latent heat release in the atmosphere, provide additional water vapor for cloud cell development, and provide additional surface and lower atmospheric heating to increase atmospheric instability. Critical to the success of any attempt to trigger a storm cell is the pre-existing atmospheric conditions locally and regionally. The atmosphere must already be conditionally unstable and the large-scale dynamics must be supportive of vertical cloud development. The focus of the weather-modification effort would be to provide additional "conditions" that would make the atmosphere unstable*

enough to generate cloud and eventually storm cell development. The path of storm cells once developed or enhanced is dependent not only on the mesoscale dynamics of the storm but the regional and synoptic (global) scale atmospheric wind flow patterns in the area which are currently not subject to human control.”

He continued to scan the page. “Ahh yes, and here’s how they plan to do it. ‘A number of methods have been explored or proposed to modify the ionosphere, including injection of chemical vapors and heating or charging via electromagnetic radiation or particle beams (such as ions, neutral particles, x-rays, MeV particles, and energetic electrons). It is important to note that many techniques to modify the upper atmosphere have been successfully demonstrated experimentally.’”

“Any of that sound familiar?” he asked.

“I heard ‘injection of chemical vapors,’ and I’m guessing those are the streaks across the sky, but the rest of it doesn’t mean a thing to me.”

“You are quite right about the vapors, but those chemicals are only half of the equation. Have you ever heard of HAARP?”

Of course, I had not.

He thumbed through the book again. “HAARP is a research station in Gakona, Alaska. It is funded by the Air Force, the Navy, the University of Alaska and DARPA, the Defense Advanced Projects Agency. Let me read a description of the facility to you. *‘It’s the largest ionospheric heater in the world. Capable of heating a 1000 square kilometer area of the ionosphere to over 50,000 degrees. It’s also a phased array. Which means it’s steer-able and those waves can be directed to a selected target area. What they have found is that by sending radio frequency energy up and focusing it, as they do with these kinds of instruments, it causes a heating effect. And that heating literally lifts the ionosphere within a 30 mile diameter area therein changing localized pressure systems or perhaps the route of jet streams. Moving a jet stream is a phenomenal event in terms of man being able to do this. The problem is we cannot model the system adequately. Long term consequences of atmospheric heating are unknown. Changing weather in one place can have a devastating downstream effect. And HAARP has already been accused of modifying the weather.’*”

“Here’s a photo of it,” he said, handing me the book.



“So you think the government is altering the weather with this thing?”

“It would certainly seem so, and with disastrous results, I might add.”

He reached into a newspaper rack beside his chair. “*The Kansas City Star*, Sunday, May 31st, 2015,” he said opening the paper. “The headline reads *Worldwide, the weather is weird*. It talks about the drought in California, the floods in Texas, the 91 degree heat in Alaska, and the record snowfall in Boston. They talk about global warming and El Nino, but the real culprits are the blasts from HAARP which heat a 1000 square kilometer area of the ionosphere to over 50,000 degrees. The jet stream controls our weather, that’s an undisputable fact, and the jet stream is undoubtedly altered by HAARP. Storms that would have normally dropped rain on the west coast have been diverted north, over the Arctic Circle and down onto the east coast.”

“Okay, I think I understand about the weather aspect, but what about the military part. Why are the Navy and Air Force so invested in these projects?”

"A very good question and one which is out of my area of expertise. If you want to know more about the military's involvement, let me refer you to a colleague of mine at the university, Dr. Frank Katz. He's done extensive research on the subject."

I thanked the Professor and as I headed out the door, I paused. "Tell me, Professor, if all of this is going on, why aren't more people up in arms about it?"

He shrugged. "Apathy, the curse of modern society. Why do only fifty percent of the voting population cast their votes in the presidential election? Frustration, as in, you can't fight city hall. The government is just too big and powerful. Complacency, as in, I'm doing all right, why rock the boat. As I recall, the last time we discussed this subject, you didn't give a damn either."

He was right. I didn't give a damn then, but I certainly did now.



CHAPTER 5

I left the Professor's apartment and was heading to my own on the third floor when I met Jerry on the second floor landing.

"Hey Walt, do you know what you get when you cross a chicken and a ghost?"

Jerry fancied himself to be the second coming of Rodney Dangerfield and was constantly trying out new material for his weekly act on amateur night at the local comedy club.

I just wasn't in the mood for levity, so I snapped back, "Not today, Jerry!"

I saw the crestfallen look on his face and realized I was being an ass. "Sorry, I just have a lot on my mind. Please tell me what you get when you cross a chicken and a ghost."

He brightened immediately. "A poultry-geist, of course. So what's got you all bent out of shape?"

I wasn't about to go into detail regarding the conspiracy theory with a stand-up comic, so I simply said, "The Professor and I were discussing the jet trails across the sky."

"Beautiful, aren't they?" he said wistfully. "Did you see the ones last night right at sunset? They looked like a big Tic-Tac-Toe game in the sky. Then they turned all pink and gold from the rays of the setting sun. It was just gorgeous."

"I'm sure it was," I replied, climbing the last flight of stairs.

So there it was. The reaction of the average man on the street, totally awed by the phenomenon and totally unaware the brilliant colors were being reflected from poisons sprayed into the sky. One more example of wolves disguised in sheep's clothing.

The Professor had used that analogy one other time when describing the wonders of modern technology like cell phones, computers and On Star, which on the surface make our lives so much easier but which also open portals into our private lives so Big Brother can keep tabs on us. I really didn't believe him until it was revealed the NSA was monitoring our phone conversations and email.

Wolves in sheep's clothing.

That's what was on my mind when I opened the door to my apartment.

Maggie must have heard me chatting in the hall. She greeted me with a big hug and a smooch.

"I see you made it through the Jerry gauntlet."

"Yes, but not unscathed. Poultry-geist."

"Yeah, I got that too when I went for the mail. You seem tense. What's bothering you?"

Maggie can read me like a book. We had only been married six years, but I learned early on I might as well come clean with her because somehow, she gets to the bottom of everything that's going on in my life.

"It's a long story."

"Well, I've got all night. How about I get you a glass of Arbor Mist and you can tell me all about it?"

It actually took two glasses of Arbor Mist to get through the entire tale of the alleged government conspiracy. When I finished, I could see the concern on her face and I knew what was coming.

During my five years on the police force, I had placed not only myself, but my family and friends in harm's way. It took a bullet in my buttocks to make me realize I had escaped the clutches of the grim reaper one too many times. That's when I made the decision to turn in my badge and open my own detective agency where I could choose cases which wouldn't put myself and my loved ones in peril.

"Walt, if what you're saying is true and this Falcon was silenced to prevent him from talking, it sounds like these people, whoever they are, wouldn't hesitate to take out anyone threatening to reveal their secrets."

I nodded. "You're probably right."

"So then, exactly what are you planning to do? I hope you're not going to get mixed up in this thing."

"No, of course not. I'm smart enough to know challenging the government is like Don Quixote tilting at windmills. The last thing I want is to put you and my friends in danger, but ---."

"But what?" she asked, and I saw the look I always get when I'm about to do something stupid.

"I'm not going to get involved, but I'm certain Jack Carson is. All I'm going to do is feed him as much background information as I can find and then I'm done --- out of it completely, and he can do what he wants with it. As a reporter for a major newspaper, he is certainly in a better position to get the truth out to the public."

I could see she was skeptical. "Somehow you're going to get sucked into this thing. I just know it."

"I won't. I promise."



The next morning, I parked my car on Cherry Street and walked the few blocks to the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus. After asking a few passing students, I was directed to the teacher's lounge in the Arts and Sciences building.

Seated at one of the tables was an elderly gentleman with a full beard who reminded me of the stand-up comedian, Foster Brooks.

He waved me over. "Frank Katz," he said, extending his hand. "You must be Walt Williams. My old friend, Professor Skinner, told me you'd be dropping by. How can I help you?"

"Well, this may sound a bit off the wall, but I'd like to know what you know about the chemtrails. The Professor said you were somewhat of an expert on the military aspects of the trails."

"I don't know if 'expert' is the correct term," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "but I have done a bit of research on the subject. Ever heard of Project Cloverleaf?"

I shook my head.

"I'm not surprised. Very few have, and yet it's one of our most sophisticated defense systems. Cloverleaf involves a combination of chemtrails for creating an atmosphere which will support electromagnetic waves, ground-based electromagnetic field oscillators called gyrotrons and ionospheric heaters."

"The Professor told me about the ionospheric heater. I think it's called HAARP."

"Very good! Here's how it works. They spray barium powders and let them photo-ionize from the ultraviolet light of the sun. Then, they make an aluminum-plasma generated by 'zapping' the metal cations which are in the spray with either electromagnetics from HAARP, the gyrotron system on the ground called GWEN, or space-based lasers. The barium makes the aluminum plasma more particulate dense."

"Ummm, I don't want to appear stupid, but what's a cation?"

"That's certainly not a stupid question. Cations are atoms which have lost an electron to become positively charged. In short, chemtrails are the medium and directed energy is the method. Spray and zap!"

"But why? What are they trying to accomplish?"

"It all goes back to the Cold War with Russia. Surely you remember the days when the Soviet Union was stockpiling intercontinental ballistic missiles and aiming them at the United States."

"I certainly do. People were building underground bomb shelters and socking away food and water in case of a nuclear attack. It was a scary time."

"Indeed it was, and that's why this technology was invented. By deploying the HAARP system, no missiles from Russia would reach the US. None. Zero. And that was pretty effective! Most people think of an ICBM as a kind of big rock or arrow. You just lob it from here and it sorta lands on the target over there. Not so. An ICBM is a space vehicle. It must take off using a large booster rocket, travel at near orbital speed in the vacuum of space until it is over the target, then it must re-enter the atmosphere.

"To survive re-entry the missile must use one of several schemes, like retro rockets, or deploying an ablative heat shield to protect the warhead from simply burning up in the atmosphere. If the missile's computer controls are destroyed when passing through the magnetosphere then the missile will not survive re-entry and will simply burn up like a piece of space junk or a meteor. There's a good chance the missile's control systems are destroyed even before the second stage separates from the booster, thus the missile never even arrives over the target."

"So let me get this straight. The planes we see in the sky are spraying chemicals into the atmosphere which are zapped by installations like HAARP to produce a layer of gunk which will neutralize the controls of any missile launched at the United States."

"That's it exactly and it works! This system was most likely what brought the cold war to an end and may have even led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991."

"Here's what I don't understand. If this program is so wonderful, why all the hush-hush? I would think the politicians would be scrambling to take credit for the very thing that ended the nuclear threat."

He sighed. "That would be true except everything comes with a price. Like the ads for medications on TV, sometimes the side effects of something are far worse than the benefits and I'm afraid that's the case here."

"Are you talking about the screwed up weather patterns?"

"Among other things. Once this technology became known, the U.S. didn't have an exclusive on it. Today, not only the United States but also Russia, Canada and many European countries have installations similar to HAARP. With every major superpower bombarding and super heating the ionosphere to protect themselves from nuclear attack, there is no question it is altering the earth's weather patterns.

"Then there's the fallout. Whatever is sprayed up there, if it's heavier than air, will eventually fall to earth. That's another whole field of study.

"Unfortunately, that's not the end of it. Once directed spray into the atmosphere became an accepted practice, there have been a multitude of experiments, including the deployment of aerial vaccines."

"Holy crap! No wonder the government wants to keep this under wraps."

"Just curious," Katz said. "Why are you so interested in all this?"

I figured, *why not*, and told him what had transpired up to that moment. When I mentioned the photos, his eyes lit up.

"Really! May I see them?"

I pulled out my cell phone and flipped to the photos I had taken of the planes and the storage containers inside.

He clapped his hands like a little kid. "These are perfect! This is the final piece of the puzzle!"

"What puzzle?"

His eyes got a far-off look. "I've been collecting data on the chemtrail conspiracy for years. My intention was to publish a paper bringing the whole sordid affair out into the open, but there was always something missing, and now, here it is. Would you be willing to email those to me?"

"Of course!" He gave me his email address and it took just a few seconds to send them his way.

"Thank you so much! I'm eighty-five years old and I know my time on this old earth is limited, but I think I've got enough gas left in the old tank to put this paper together. This will be my parting shot --- my legacy!"

He glanced at his watch. "My goodness! I'm late for class. I must run. Thanks again!"

He gathered a stack of books and was out the door.

I was about to leave when a man I had seen at another table across the room approached.

He stuck out his hand. "I'm Dr. Evan Daniels, a professor here, and I don't mean to intrude but I couldn't help overhearing bits and pieces of your conversation. I hope you don't put too much stock in what my elderly colleague was telling you."

"Excuse me!"

"Dr. Katz. He's known around campus as Conspiracy Katz. He's been trying for years to get someone to listen to his wild theories about a covert government conspiracy which is filling our skies with poison."

I was immediately defensive. "Seems to me he had some pretty convincing evidence."

"What evidence? The thin, wispy clouds left behind by high-flying aircraft are known as contrails, short for condensation trails. These clouds are left behind as a result of the warm, moist exhaust of the plane's engines meeting the extremely cold temperatures of the upper atmosphere. It's a similar principle behind why you can see your breath on cold mornings. Contrails appear and disappear based on the moisture content of the air through which the plane is passing. If the upper atmospheric air is moist, the plane will leave a contrail which could last hours and spread out into a deck of cirrus. If the air is extremely dry, it might not leave a contrail at all.

"The year 1958 was a watershed year in commercial aviation. Boeing introduced the 707 and Douglas the DC-8, while a year later Convair debuted the 880. The turbojet engines on these airliners thrived in the cold thin air found above 30,000 feet and they were routinely operated in these flight levels. In the 1960's, contrails became commonplace across the United States, especially along designated jet airways between ground based navigation aids. When the temperature is low enough and the humidity high enough, the 1,500 gallons of water produced every hour by these jetliners was transformed into four cirrus clouds. When the humidity is very high, the contrails will remain for hours. In moderate humidity the contrails may last only a few seconds as the ice is absorbed into the atmosphere in a process known as sublimation. If the humidity is very low, the water vapor will immediately be absorbed into the atmosphere leaving the sky clear of contrails. Although the engines are producing numerous chemical compounds from the combustion of jet fuel, the only one which can be seen at altitude is H₂O in a frozen state. It's all really quite simple."

"Really! What about these?" I asked, showing him the photos on my phone.

"Ahhh, yes! The infamous storage containers for the deadly chemicals. Those pictures are of ballast tanks used in flight testing of new airliner designs. The tubes simply allow water to be pumped from tank to tank, simulating passenger motion in the cabin for the aircraft test."

He seemed to have an answer for everything.

"Before you go spreading Katz's daydreams, consider this. Both the Air Force and the Environmental Protection Agency have stated unequivocally there are no chemical or biological agents being deliberately released into our atmosphere."

"Well, if a government agency says so, it must be true," I replied with a hint of sarcasm. "Thanks for the tip."

As I walked back to my car, I was more confused than ever.

Everything Jack Carson, the Professor and Frank Katz had told me, while wildly speculative, had the ring of truth, but so did Evan Daniels' rebuttal.

Was I really dealing with a government conspiracy or was the whole thing just a paranoid delusion?

I knew I had to learn more before I could let it go.



CHAPTER 6

I hadn't heard from Jack Carson for a few days, so I figured I should give him a call and tell him what I'd learned at UMKC, from both Frank Katz and Evan Daniels. He deserved to hear both sides of the story.

I tried his office at the *Star* first and was told he was not available. Next, I tried his cell phone.

"This is Jack Carson. Who is this?"

The reception was poor and I could hear traffic in the background. "Walt Williams. Where in the world are you, Jack?"

"Highway 54, heading back to Kansas City. I've been to the Pinal Air Park in Marana, Arizona, the place where Falcon took the photos which were in his drawer. You wouldn't believe what I found."

"Try me."

"Before I left, I dug up as much as I could about the base. Turns out, it was owned and operated by the CIA during the Cold War and Vietnam, and served as a base of operations for many of their covert missions. Then it was sold to the Evergreen Company. The cover story was the airbase was to be kind of a graveyard for jets which were to be scrapped and it's true, there are hundreds of them waiting to be dismantled for parts. Evergreen also has a few tankers which the Forest Service uses to fight fires."

"Sounds pretty benign to me."

"That's what I thought until I got into the place. I was free to roam around and look at the derelicts, but then I spotted a gravel road which led to another more remote part of the facility. I finally came to a guard hut out in the middle of nowhere. The road was blocked by a barrier. A guard appeared out of the hut. I figured I must have stumbled onto some military installation, but the guard wasn't wearing a regular uniform. He was dressed in all-black para-military garb and carried an M4/M, M16 rifle. He told me in no uncertain terms this was a secured area, that I should turn around and never come back."

"I assume you did just that."

"You bet I did, but before I left, I saw the array of planes Falcon photographed in the distance."

"So did you get more photos?"

"Not then. The guard made me vamoose, so I got out of there and found a private aviation company and rented a helicopter for a couple of hours. The pilot didn't want to fly over the airbase, but finally relented when I opened my wallet. It cost me a bundle, but it was worth it."

"What did you see?"

"When we got over the part of the base which was restricted, I spotted a building that was built into the ground. The flat roof was camouflaged to look exactly like the surrounding desert, so it was very difficult to spot. I had just snapped a couple of photos when a black helicopter which looked exactly like the photos of the ones operated by the CIA was on our tail. The moment the pilot spotted it, he turned and high-tailed it out of there. The black chopper followed us until we were far away from the base."

"I'll bet that was pretty intense."

"No kidding! Anyway, after we landed, I decided to ----. Hey! What the hell! Oh shit!"

Then the line went dead.

I tried to call him back but the call went straight to voice mail.

I sat for several minutes trying to decide what to do. Since I really had no idea where he was, I had just decided there wasn't much I could do when the phone rang.

"Walt, it's Jack again."

"Are you all right?"

"I guess so. Just shaken up. I'm out here in the middle of nowhere and some asshole runs me off the road. I was pretty lucky I guess. There was a real steep drop-off which went down to a dry creek bed. I was able to get stopped before I went over, otherwise, it would have been a long, bumpy ride to the bottom."

"I don't suppose the offending vehicle was a black SUV?"

"How did you ---? Oh, crap! Surely you're not thinking someone from the Air Base was trying to take me out."

"Think about it. You confronted an armed guard, then flew over restricted air space, and after that I'm guessing you stopped and tried to talk to people who lived near the base. Am I right?"

"Sure did, but nobody was talking. As soon as I mentioned the Air Base, people started slamming doors. Wow! I don't know why I'm surprised. Look what they did to Falcon."

"Allegedly did to Falcon."

"Yeah, right! Anything happening on your end?"

Carson got back on the road and while he was making his way back to Kansas City, I filled him in on my conversations with the Professor and Frank Katz as well as the rebuttal from Evan Daniels.

Carson was as excited as a kid on Christmas morning. "With everything we've got, how can anyone honestly deny the existence and purpose of the chemtrails?"

"What we have are a lot of opinions and no empirical evidence to back them up. I'm betting at this point anything you bring up can be explained away by someone like Evan Daniels. Without proof, your conspiracy theory is no more believable than sightings of Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster."

"Maybe so," he replied, "but I think I'm on to something big and I'm going to keep digging."

"Dig away, but just in case you're right, watch your back."



After hanging up from Carson, I was torn.

I knew I definitely wanted to know more about the wispy trails in the sky, but I also remembered the promise I'd made to Maggie. It wasn't a stretch to believe that if Carson was right, the SUV running him off the road probably wasn't an accident. The last thing in the world I wanted was to be the target of some black ops assassin.

I was pondering how I could get more information without drawing attention or ruffling feathers when it hit me --- Arnold Goldblume and Nicholas Thatcher.

I had met them several years earlier when I had been part of a Homeland Security team investigating people with terrorist ties in Kansas City.

Goldblume and Thatcher were part of a group known as the 'Watchers.' Their stated purpose was to be a watch dog organization keeping an eye on government shenanigans. They got Homeland Security's attention by sending emails which said things like, "I dropped my bomb pop and got it dirty." Since the emails contained the words 'bomb' and 'dirty', a covert program run by the government called Echelon, picked them up as terrorist threats for the deployment of a 'dirty bomb.'

Of course they weren't terrorists and Homeland Security agents had egg on their collective faces once it was discovered they were monitoring private citizen's emails.

The two met when they were part of a class action suit against the pharmaceutical company which made the drug Vioxx which had claimed the lives of both of their fathers.

The loss of their loved ones from a drug approved by the FDA fueled a suspicion of pretty much everything the government was up to, and the huge settlement they received funded their ongoing surveillance operations.

I figured if anyone had the inside skinny on the chemtrails, it would be them, and I could quiz them without worrying about reprisals from government assassins.

By the time our investigation was over, I had become friends with Arnie and Nick and an unofficial member of the Watchers, so when I called they were more than happy to have me drop by their office on Warwick Boulevard, a stone's throw away from the J.C. Nichols fountain where Arnie often held rallies to inform the public of the government's covert operations.

"Walt! So good to see you again," Arnie said as I walked in the door. "Nick, get your ass in here. We've got company."

When Nick joined his partner, I couldn't help wondering again at the remarkable resemblance they had to Simon and Garfunkle. Arnie was small and balding while Nick was gawky and gangly with a shock of unruly blonde hair.

They both gave me a hug and motioned me to a chair.

"So, to what do we owe the pleasure of your company?" Arnie asked.

"How much time to you have?" I replied.

"As much as you need, old friend. What's on your mind?"

I took a deep breath and told them everything. "So what's your take on all that?" I asked wrapping up my story. "Is there any truth to it or is this just another Elvis sighting?"

Nick and Arnie exchanged glances. "We've been preaching this for years, but nobody seems to give a damn. The trails in the sky have been there for so many years they're just a normal part of what most everyone has seen for their entire lives. They're so white and soft and fluffy. How could they possibly be dangerous? But make no mistake, those planes have been spewing poison into our atmosphere for years and now we're paying the price."

"Are you talking about the change in the weather patterns?"

"Absolutely! The droughts, the floods, the variations in the path of the jet stream --- they're all directly related to Project Cloverleaf and the bombardment of the ionosphere by HAARP, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. We're just now starting to feel the cumulative effects of the chemicals they've been spraying for years."

"What effects, exactly?"

Nick pulled a thick file folder from a cabinet. "It all started with the threat of global warming. The idea was to spray aluminum oxide into the atmosphere to reflect the sun's rays and reduce the steady rise in the earth's temperature.

"Once the technology for spraying the chemicals was perfected, the government think tank came up with the program we know as Operation Cloverleaf where ethylene dibromide, EDB, and barium are dispersed and then zapped by HAARP to make a defensive barrier to combat the threat of ICBM missiles."

Nick thumbed through some papers in the folder. "According to the Environmental Protection Agency, and I quote, 'Ethylene dibromide is a carcinogen and must be handled with extreme caution. A seven-page summary of this pesticide's extreme toxicity notes EDB may also damage the reproductive system. Exposure can irritate the lungs and repeated exposure may cause bronchitis, development of cough, and shortness of breath.'"

"But Evan Daniels said the EPA categorically denied chemicals are being sprayed into the atmosphere," I protested. "Surely the government wouldn't tell a bold-faced lie."

Arnie smiled ruefully. "You mean the same government that told us Agent Orange could defoliate a tropical jungle overnight but was harmless to humans? Just ask any Vietnam War vet how that turned out. The same government that told us nuclear power plants posed no danger? Ask anyone that lived within fifty miles of Chernobyl."

He wiped a tear from his eye. "The same government that told my father Vioxx was safe? Well, that was a lie, too, and now he's gone."

Nick quickly changed the subject. "Over the past decade, independent testing of the chemical fallout of atmospheric spraying around the country has shown a dangerous and extremely poisonous brew which includes nano sized aluminum particles, mercury, radioactive thorium, cadmium, chromium, nickel, desiccated blood, which may or may not contain a myriad of specific viruses, barium, mold spores, yellow fungal mycotoxins, ethylene dibromide, and other unidentified organic materials."

"Holy crap!"

"No kidding, and now all the stuff which has been sprayed over the years has accumulated on the ground, in the plants we eat and in all living organisms, and it's taking its toll."

"Have you heard about the disappearance of the bees?" Arnie asked, regaining his composure.

I nodded. I had read something about it in the Kansas City Star.

"It is estimated that one third of everything we eat was pollinated by bees, and now we discover the number of the little critters is declining by thirty percent in some areas and as much as eighty percent in other areas. Can you imagine the devastating effect this will have on our food supply in the future?"

"Then there's the bats. In the past four years more than a million bats have died from a disease called white-nose syndrome.

"Ever heard of chronic wasting disease? It's a disease of the nervous system in deer and elk which results in distinctive brain lesions and death. It's estimated that already 25% of the herds are affected.

"There are massive fish kills all over the world and whales and dolphins are washing up on our shores in increasing numbers.

"Why, all of a sudden are these things happening? It's the cumulative effect of years of spraying poison in our skies that's finally taking its toll."

"Why in the world isn't something being done about this?" I asked in disbelief.

"Oh, someone is," Arnie replied. "Monsanto! They have applied for and been granted a patent to produce aluminum resistant seeds. At some point in time, the earth will simply be too toxic for natural plants to grow, so where will we turn? To Monsanto, of course, to save the day and provide seeds which will grow in toxic soil. Can anyone smell profit here?"

"Monsanto isn't the only company getting their foot in the door with the chemtrails," Nick added. "The huge pharmaceutical companies are lobbying for aerial disbursement of vaccines. The day may come when you'll be medicated whether you like it or not."

"So what's the answer to all this?" I asked, bewildered. "Why aren't the American people up in arms?"

The answer Arnie gave me was the same as the one given by the Professor --- apathy, frustration and complacency.

"If you gave this information to the average guy on the street, his response would probably be, 'Maybe it's true, maybe it isn't, but even if it is true, what could I do about it?' We've all been conditioned to believe government is just too big to fight."

"You still haven't given me an answer," I replied.

"Maybe what we need is another Edward Snowden," Nick said. "Some call him a traitor, some call him a hero and a patriot, but however you feel about him, we really didn't know how far the NSA was reaching into our private lives until he blew the whistle."

"Yeah, and look how that turned out for him."

"Yes, there is that, but nothing's going to happen with these chemtrails until someone with first-hand knowledge comes forward to expose what's going on."

I silently wondered if Jack Carson would be that person.



CHAPTER 7

After my meeting with Arnie and Nick, I was totally confused.

What they had to say, added to what I had learned from the Professor, Frank Katz and Jack Carson, pointed to a covert government operation which affected every American.

I went to the Internet to get more information on the subject and discovered there were HUNDREDS of sites supporting the notion that the chemtrails were part of an ongoing government program.

What I also found were almost as many sites debunking the conspiracy theory and offering alternative theories to that hypothesis.

One site would say the streaks in the sky are chemicals being spewed into the atmosphere for clandestine purposes. Then another site would explain why they are nothing more than water condensation produced by the big jets which has turned to ice crystals in the frigid upper atmosphere.

One site would show photos like the one I found in Falcon's apartment, claiming the big tanks in the belly of the aircraft contain the chemicals, while another site would say what we are seeing are ballast tanks used in flight testing of new airliner designs.

One site would show photos of massive fish kills, saying the thousands of dead fish are caused by the cumulative effect of the chemicals which have been sprayed and fallen to earth over the years, while another site would claim the kills are caused by El Nino and global warming.

Are the trails in the sky a conspiracy or just paranoid delusions?

There were convincing arguments on both sides. The answer depended on who you wanted to believe.

I let my mind wander for a moment and examined the possibility that the chemtrail theorists were correct.

Just a few short years ago, it was unthinkable to believe our government was listening to our phone conversations and reading our emails, but it proved to be true.

When the NSA was caught with their hands in the cookie jar, they justified their action by citing the hundreds of terrorist attacks that were thwarted, and the many thousands of lives which were saved as a result of their snooping. A typical case of the ends justifying the means.

I can only imagine the discussion that might have taken place in some secluded room years ago.

"Shall we ask the people of our country for permission to invade their privacy or just go ahead and do it? After all it's for their own good."

We know what was ultimately decided and why. The chances were slim and none the average American wanted Big Brother snooping in their lives.

I could see a similar scenario with the chemtrails.

Years ago, our government was faced with two huge problems, global warming and the Russian ICBM's pointed at the U.S. If they believed spraying chemicals into the atmosphere was the answer to these threats, it was highly unlikely they would go to the American people and ask permission to spray poison into the air. The average guy on the street just wouldn't understand. Sure, there would be consequences, but certainly nothing as devastating as a nuclear bomb exploding in New York City or Los Angeles. The ends justified the means.

On a much more basic level, I could remember my parent's admonitions to not run with scissors, not stick beans up my nose or ride my bike with no hands, and I remember protesting, "WHY?"

The answer would always be, "Because I told you so! It's for your own good."

It's no secret those in positions of power often make authoritarian decisions because they believe it's for the greater good.

Or, on the other hand, maybe the fluffy trails in the sky are just ice crystals.

These were the thoughts running through my mind when I met my dad and Bernice, his significant other, returning to their respective apartments on the second floor of my building.

They didn't seem to be their chipper selves. "Why so glum?" I asked.

Dad just shrugged. "We went to see Doc Johnson. We've both been a bit under the weather. Stuffy noses, aches and pains, not much energy."

"So what did he say?"

"Not much. He said it wasn't the flu. He wondered if we had been around other people our age. I told him we go to the tea dance at the Senior Center every week. He said we might have caught something

there. He'd been seeing a lot of seniors lately with the same symptoms. Hell, maybe it's just old age. We're both ninety."

"So what did he tell you to do?"

"Go home, drink lots of fluids and get some rest, so that's what we're going to do."

Then I saw a twinkle in his eye. "I'm going to whip up a pitcher of margaritas, then Bernice and I are going to hop into bed."

"I'm not sure that's what Doc Johnson had in mind. What about rest?"

"We'll rest afterward," he replied, patting Bernice on the rear end.

As they headed off, I was reminded of my visit with Arnie and Nick. They had shown me an article by a Doctor Len Horowitz. The article stated exposure to ethylene dibromide, the stuff that was supposed to be a major component in the chemtrails, could result in general weakness, vomiting, diarrhea, chest pains, coughing, shortness of breath, upper respiratory tract irritation and respiratory failure caused by swelling of the lymph glands in the lungs. The article stated that the elderly and people with compromised immune systems were particularly vulnerable.

It was certainly something to consider, or maybe, it was just old age.

I had just settled into my recliner when the phone rang.

"Walt, it's Jack. I'm back in town and we need to talk. Can you meet me at Mel's Diner in a half hour?"

"Are you buying?"

A big sigh. "Yes, yes, I'll buy."

"See you there."



When I arrived, there were already two huge pieces of pie and two steaming cups of coffee on the table.

"A man of your word," I said, approvingly. Then I noticed a red knot on the side of his head. "What happened to you?"

"Bumped my head when that jackass ran me off the road. It could have been a lot worse."

"So no other incidents on your way home?"

"Nope. I'm hoping it was just some drunk or maybe someone texting while driving. It's just scary as hell thinking I might be the target of a government assassin."

"Yeah, I get that. Let me tell you about a meeting I had with a couple of friends."

I proceeded to tell him about the Watchers and my visit with Arnie and Nick.

Needless to say, he was enthusiastic. "Just another nail in their coffin. The more I hear, the more I smell Pulitzer Prize in this story."

If you live to write it, I thought. "So what's next?"

"Ever hear of Kristen Meghan?"

I shook my head. "Can't say I have."

"She worked for the Federal Government for twelve years, nine of which was with the Air Force as a bio-environmental engineer. Auditing chemicals used by the military was part of her responsibility. She found a hanger full of drums filled with the stuff we've been talking about, ethylene dibromide, and so on. The chemicals weren't tied to any known operation, so she started investigating.

"She had heard of the chemtrail conspiracy and started out with the goal of proving the chemicals weren't tied to any kind of covert operation, but instead, she discovered just the opposite. Soil testing in various locations were found to have significantly higher amounts of the chemicals which were in the drums. The only way they could have been dispersed that broadly was through the air.

"In 2012, she went public with what she knew. According to her, the military threatened to lock her up and take away her daughter if she didn't stop asking questions."

"Let me guess," I said. "You're going to pay her a visit."

"I am. I'm hoping she'll be willing to talk to me and maybe even share some of the test results from her studies. It would be one more bit of evidence to add to everything I've found so far."

"Well, good luck with that, and just in case you were wrong about the drunk driver, watch your back."

"Will do," he said, and was out the door.

When I first arrived at the diner, I spotted a man in another booth with a lap top computer. I didn't pay much attention to him at first, but after Jack and I had talked for over an hour, the guy was still sitting there.

When I got up to leave, he hadn't moved.

I got in my car and was halfway home when it struck me. I made a u-turn and headed back to the diner.

The guy with the computer was gone.

I went inside and flagged Mel who was busy scraping his huge flat, cast iron grill. I had been a regular customer for years and considered Mel a good friend.

"More pie?" he asked.

"No. That guy, the one sitting in that booth with the lap top. Was he one of your regular customers?"

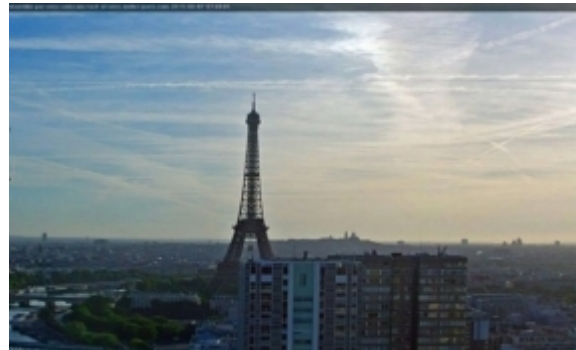
"Nope, never seen him before."

"He was certainly here a long time."

"He sure as hell was, and the piker didn't even leave a tip."

Could have been anybody, I thought, Maybe he was a student from the university.

Then again, maybe not.



CHAPTER 8

The next morning, I had a welcome respite from my stewing over the chemtrail dilemma --- my wife needed me.

Now that I'm seventy-two it's not often a woman, especially one as fetching as my wife, says she has need of my services, so I make it a point to be available.

For twenty-five years, I was a real estate agent. At age sixty-five, I traded my briefcase for a badge. Maggie and I both worked at City Wide Realty. In fact, that's where we met. Maggie's still an agent and a very good one. Because of her experience and her sterling work ethic, the broker, Dave Richards, often gives Maggie some of the trickier listings.

It was exactly that scenario that prompted her to ask if I had plans for the morning. Luckily, I did not.

The listing Dave had given her was a large estate on Sunset Drive just south of the Country Club Plaza. Hector Ramirez who was the Kansas City contact for a Columbian Drug cartel had owned it until the Drug Task Force shut down his operation.

As is often the case, the government confiscates property seized under these circumstances. Ramirez' trial had taken the better part of a year and the house had sat vacant until the guilty verdict was rendered.

One reason Dave gives these gems to Maggie is she has a team of workers ready to turn the neglected estate into a showplace. Consuela and her two daughters clean the place from top to bottom, Larry the Landscaper trims the shrubs and mows the lawn, and Jeff the Bugman exterminates the creepy crawlers lurking in the cracks and crevices. John, the licensed home inspector, goes through the entire home and gives Maggie a list of everything which needs repaired. The list is then given to Freddie the Fix-it guy, and before you know it, the place is ready for the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*.

This morning was to be Maggie's first visit to the vacant house to take measurements and to make notes to give to her crew.

Maggie and I have a rule that says she never EVER goes to a vacant house alone. Six years ago, she was abducted and barely escaped with her life. We never want that to happen again.

When we pulled up in front of the house, there was no doubt her crew would have their hands full.

The grass, having not been mowed for a year, was as high as an elephant's eye as Gordon MacRae used to sing in one my favorite musicals, *Oklahoma*.

As Maggie slipped the key into the door lock, I noticed a furry creature scramble for cover under the porch.

The stench which slapped us in the face when we stepped inside brought tears to our eyes. The dead rat at the foot of the second floor staircase probably didn't help. Jeff the Bugman, when stepping into such an odoriferous dwelling, often remarks that the place smells like ass-crack. I had never argued the point.

"Holy crap, Maggie. Can your crew really turn this into a saleable listing?"

She gave an involuntary shudder. "If anyone can, it's them. Well, we might as well get started. This place isn't going to measure itself."

I switched on my flashlight. All the utilities had been turned off and that was another reason we had to hang around the stinky place for a couple of hours. The utility companies were all scheduled to arrive at some point to turn things on.

Maggie had one of those electronic gizmos which she holds up to the wall and when a button is pushed, the distance to the other wall is displayed. Just another example of the technological advances since I started measuring houses years ago with a retractable tape.

My job was to hold the flashlight and then record the room's measurements as Maggie read the meter. We were making good time since the rooms were virtually empty, the Drug Task Force having removed and sold anything of value.

Things were proceeding nicely until we reached the kitchen. While I was waiting for Maggie to take the first reading, I made the huge mistake of opening the refrigerator door.

Whoever had cleaned out the place had neglected to remove the food items from the fridge and they had an entire year, sealed up in the hot interior, to morph into God only knew what. The fridge's innards were a veritable petri dish of fungus and black mold.

Trying to stifle my gag reflex, I slammed the door shut, but it was too late, the room filled with the fumes of rotting decay.

It was at that moment, the guy from Kansas City Power and Light made his appearance. He stepped into the room and coughed. "Crimeny! It smells like ass-crack in here!"

If two guys say it, it must be true.

He turned the power on, but of course after a year, the a/c didn't work, so we spent the next four hours sweating like pigs. At last, all the rooms had been measured and all the utilities had been turned on. Maggie hung a lock box on the door and we headed for home.

Once inside, I said jokingly, "I'll flip you to see who gets the shower first."

She thought for a moment, then said, "Tell you what. You went way beyond the call of duty today and I owe you. How about we take that shower together?"

"I don't know," I replied teasingly. "Will you wash my back?"

"I'll wash anything you want," she said demurely.

"You'll even wash my ---?"

"Oh, shut up and get in here," she said taking my hand.

On the way to the bathroom, I noticed the message light on the phone was blinking.

It'll wait, I thought, thinking of my sudsy reward for a job well done.

Forty-five minutes later, after the water had run cold, I was toweling dry, when I remembered the phone message.

I hit the 'play' button and an obviously excited voice came on the line.

"Walt, this is Frank Katz. I just wanted you to know I finished my thesis on the chemtrails and I'm not too modest to say it's brilliant. As soon as I add a few finishing touches, I'll be submitting it to several publications. I'm convinced that once this information is in print, the public will simply not be able to ignore the trails crisscrossing our sky. They're going to demand answers from our government. Soon, just like the snooping of the NSA, their dirty little secrets will be revealed for all to see. As soon as it's in print, I'll send you a copy. Thanks again for your input."

Frank Katz was about to hurl a stone at a hornet's nest. It would be interesting to see who got stung.





CHAPTER 9

At seven the next morning, I struggled out of bed and headed to the kitchen for my coffee and bowl of Wheaties, the breakfast of champions. After our exhausting day at Maggie's new listing, I had planned to just take it easy, stay at home and catch up on some paperwork. I was, after all, supposed to be retired.

But it wasn't to be.

I had just opened the morning paper when the phone rang. It was Mary, the housemother at my Three Trails Hotel.

"Mr. Walt, if you ain't busy I wonder if you could come over?"

"Problems?"

"Not exactly. I got a kid wanting to rent a room and, well, he's not like all the others."

"How so?"

"He seems like a sharp kid and it don't make no sense, him wanting to live in this dump."

A lot of folks would take offense at someone calling their property a dump, but not me. I had accepted that description years ago.

A charitable description of the Three Trails would be 'flop house.' There are twenty sleeping rooms which share four hall baths, not a good ratio if several of the tenants get the squirts at the same time.

I understood what Mary was saying. Most of the residents were old dudes on Social Security or high school dropouts working out of the day labor pool.

The last tenant who didn't fit the usual description was Lawrence Wingate. The poor fellow had gone into the hospital for a life threatening operation. Before doing so, he gave his wife full power of attorney in case he didn't make it off the table. By the time he woke up from the anesthesia, his wife had sold their home, cleaned out their bank accounts and run off to Hawaii with her secret lover. When the poor guy got out of the hospital, the Three Trails was all he could afford.

"Sure, I can come over," I said, folding up my paper. Best laid plans and all that.

"Bring Willie, too," she added. "I need some bulbs replaced and my old bones just don't feel like climbing a ladder today."

Mary was tough as nails. She had to be to keep the guys at the hotel in line, but she was seventy-something and old age was beginning to creep up on her.

"Will do. See you in twenty minutes."

I gave Willie a call and asked him to meet me on the front porch.

Before I retired from real estate, I owned over two hundred apartment units and Willie was in charge of maintenance. Over the years, we became fast friends and when I sold the buildings and got out of the rental business, Willie kind of retired with me. I give him a studio apartment in the basement of my building rent free for taking care of the odd jobs around our building and the hotel.

Willie beat me to the porch. "Trouble at de hotel?" he asked, getting slowly to his feet. Willie, like me, was seventy-two, and wasn't as spry as he used to be.

"No trouble. Mary just wants some light bulbs changed and wants me to meet a new tenant. It shouldn't take long."

"Dat's good, cause I'd planned to spend some time wif Emma today."

Although his body was feeling the effects of Father Time, apparently his libido was not.

When we arrived at the hotel, Mary and the young man she'd called about were sitting on the porch swing chatting.

"Walt, this is Billy Campbell. He wants to rent a room. I thought you'd like to meet him. Billy, this is Mr. Walt. He owns the place."

Campbell jumped to his feet and extended his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Sir."

I saw right away what Mary was talking about. The guy was clean shaven, his hair was trimmed and his clothes were spotless. As far as I could recall, he was the first prospective tenant to ever call me Sir.

"Nice to meet you too. If you don't mind me asking, this place isn't exactly the Ritz. You look like you could afford better."

"Oh, I could, but most places want me to sign a lease, and to be honest, I'm not sure how long I'll be in town. Mary said you rent by the week and that's perfect for me. I might be here one week, maybe two. It

depends on how things work out."

"Looking for work?"

He hesitated. "Uhhh, yes, work. If I find a job, I might stay longer."

I turned to Mary. "I don't see a problem. Why don't you get one of our applications and we'll get Mr. Campbell settled in."

I saw the confused look on her face. We actually did have an application form, but had quit using it years ago. Basically, if a guy was breathing and had the forty bucks for the first week, he was in.

"Just get the form, Mary. I have a pen."

Billy Campbell filled out the form and Mary gave him his key. "Number 6. Top of the stairs, third door on the right."

Billy took the key, picked up his duffel and headed up to his room.

Mary was about to ask me why I wanted the application, when the front door burst open and Oscar Biddle from #18 came stomping out.

"You've got to do something about him!" he bellowed.

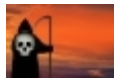
"Who?"

"Old man Feeney. He stopped up the #3 crapper again. Smells like ass-crack in there."

I had been hearing that a lot lately, but this actually made sense.

I saw Willie roll his eyes. "I'll take care of it, but if I was actually gettin' paid for dis job, I'd be wantin' me some hazardous duty pay."

I tucked the application and the pen in my pocket and waited for Willie on the porch swing.



I tried to time my arrival at the crime lab between shifts. I was going to ask for a favor and the fewer people who knew, the better.

Bernie Morton was hunched over a microscope, feverishly making notes. He looked up when he heard me at the door.

"Well, well, it's the aged half of the dynamic duo," he said, referring to the moniker the squad had bestowed on Ox and me. "How's retirement?"

"I wouldn't know. I can't quite get a handle on sitting around doing nothing."

"So I've heard. Got your own P.I. business. What brings you by?"

"I need a favor."

I saw him roll his eyes. "Walt, as much as I like you, you know I can't ---."

"Not even for a date with a special young lady?"

He looked at me skeptically. "Who, exactly?"

"Little Debbie," I replied, pulling a box of the snack cakes out of a grocery bag. It was common knowledge around the precinct that he was a sucker for the tasty treats.

"What would I have to do?"

"Nothing earth shattering. I've got a fingerprint I'd like you to run." I said, pulling the pen I'd wrapped in a sandwich bag out of my pocket.

"That's all?" he asked, glancing around to see if anyone was looking.

"That's it," I replied.

He grabbed Little Debbie out of my hand. "Give me the pen."

A few moments later, he had a clean print. "This could take a while," he said.

"Then let me save us both some time," I replied. "Start with the military database."

The 'Sir' and the military buzz cut made it a good bet my new tenant had been in one of the branches of the armed services.

He punched some keys and five minutes later, he pumped his fist. "Bingo! We've got a match."

I looked at the screen, and sure enough, there was my new tenant.

"The name's Charles Harris," he said, scrolling down the screen, "And guess what!"

"What?"

"The guy's AWOL."

"What branch of the service?"

"Air Force."

"Does it say where he's stationed?"

He scrolled some more. "Yep, Pinal Air Base in Marana, Arizona."

Suddenly, everything made sense.

"Thanks, Bernie," I said, hustling out the door. "Don't be too hard on Little Debbie."

I didn't understand his reply. His mouth was already full.



When I pulled up in front of the hotel, I wasn't exactly sure what I was going to do. I was about to confront a member of the armed services who was a hell of a lot younger and stronger than me.

I knew the prudent thing would be to call the local Air Force office and tell them what I knew, but something held me back. I had an idea, and if I was right, calling his superiors was the worst thing I could do. If I was wrong, I was probably in for the ass-whipping of my life.

I took a deep breath and headed up the stairs.

I knocked.

"Who's there?"

"Walt Williams, the landlord. We met earlier."

"Sure," he said, opening the door. "What can I do for you, Sir?"

"We need to talk, Charles."

The moment of truth had arrived.

I half expected a fist in the face, but instead, he stepped aside. "How did you know?"

"I used to be a cop," I replied. "Your cover story was good, but your 'Sir' and your buzz cut gave you away. It's not easy shedding years of military training. If my information is correct, you're AWOL and people are looking for you."

"Are you going to turn me in?"

"That depends on what you tell me in the next five minutes. You were stationed at Pinal Air Base in Arizona?"

He nodded.

"I don't suppose you knew a pilot named Dale Fox?"

I saw the look of astonishment register on his face. "How --- how did you know that?"

"Well, did you?"

"Hell yes I knew him. I was a member of his flight crew. If you knew Dale, then you know he's dead."

"Is that why you ran?"

He sighed and nodded. "We were doing some pretty weird stuff out there. We were told our missions were classified and we were not to talk about them to anyone. They said it was a matter of national security. Dale knew a lot more about the missions than I did.

"He told me one day he was going to talk to a reporter. I tried to talk him out of it. Our commanding officer had made it clear that doing something like that would have dire consequences."

"So why are you running? You didn't spill the beans."

"Because I knew he was going to do it and I didn't report it to my commanding officer. As far as they're concerned, I'm just as guilty. When I heard Dale was dead, I figured I was next."

"So what's your plan? I'm sure you know if they catch you, you'll be spending a lot of years in Leavenworth."

"I figure three things could happen. I could disappear and they never would find me, or they could catch me and I'd go to prison. Either of those two things would be better than the third alternative."

"What's that?"

"What they did to Dale."

He looked me in the eye. "So, are you going to turn me in?"

"I probably should, but I won't. Will you promise me one thing?"

"Anything."

"Wherever you wind up, if you see national headlines exposing the missions at Pinal Air Base, you'll call me so we can talk."

"I promise."

"Good luck and God speed," I said, leaving the distraught young airman sitting on a lumpy mattress in a fleabag hotel. I'm sure this wasn't the way he had pictured his military career ending.

The next morning, Mary called. "Mr. Walt, Billy Campbell, the young man you met yesterday, he moved out in the middle of the night. He paid for a full week and only stayed one night. He didn't even ask for a refund."

I probably wouldn't have either.



CHAPTER 10

A few days later, I was once again pouring over the *Kansas City Star* in between spoonfuls of Wheaties and sips of coffee. I'm very set in my ways and once I find something that suits me, I stick with it.

Maggie says I'm stuck in a rut, but doing the same thing over and over saves a lot of decision making. Once in a while I'll fool her and whip up a batch of hotcakes.

For some reason, maybe because I'm seventy-two, I always glance through the obituaries. Once in a while I'll spot the name of an old classmate or someone I knew years earlier. My tenant Jerry says he reads the obits and if his name isn't there, it's going to be a good day.

I was going down the list when a name jumped out and smacked me in the face.

Frank Katz was dead.

The listing gave his age as eighty-two and talked about his lengthy tenure at the university. He was survived by one granddaughter, Samantha Stewart.

I folded the paper under my arm and headed down to the Professor's apartment. I figured since he hadn't called me, he probably hadn't heard about the demise of his old friend. I didn't want to break the news over the phone.

As I expected, he hadn't heard and the news came as quite a shock.

"So sad," he said. "I talked to Frank just last week. He was so excited about finishing his thesis."

"Yes, he called me, too. I'd like to know more about how he died. The paper says he had one granddaughter, Samantha. By any chance do you know her, maybe have her phone number?"

"Yes, I believe I do. When I was still teaching, Sam would pop into the teacher's lounge every now and then, and I saw her at school functions. Let me see if I can find her number."

After a few minutes, he returned and handed me a slip of paper. "When you talk to Sam, please give her my condolences. Her father was a great teacher and an even greater friend."

I hadn't mentioned it to the Professor, but I had the nagging feeling there was more to Frank Katz' death than was reported in the paper. Was it just a coincidence Dale Fox was about to give hard evidence of the chemtrail conspiracy to Jack Carson, but died in a car wreck before he could deliver the goods, and now Frank Katz is dead after completing a thesis which would expose the government's dirty little chemtrail secrets? I was willing to bet he passed away before he could submit his thesis for publication. Unlucky coincidence? I didn't think so.

I desperately wanted to talk to Samantha Stewart, but I had another call to make first.

"Ox, this is Walt. Are you still at the precinct?"

"Hi Partner. We were just leaving."

"Can you do me a favor before you go?"

"Sure, name it."

"Two days ago, a Frank Katz passed away. The paper didn't say where he died. Could you find the report from the attending officers?"

"I'll take a look and call you back."

Ten minutes later, the phone rang.

"Walt, I've got it. It says a student at the university stopped by Frank Katz' office early that day and found him sitting at his desk, stone cold dead. There was no sign of foul play and Katz' doctor said the old guy had a bum ticker, so it was ruled a natural death, probably a heart attack, and the body was released to the next of kin."

"Thanks, that's just what I needed."

"Why the interest?"

"It's a long story. Maybe you and Judy can come over this weekend and I'll fill you in."

"Sounds like a plan. I'll have Judy give Maggie a call."

Heart attack. Pretty convenient.

I had just finished a case where a sadistic s.o.b. was murdering patients in the cardiac wing of one of the city's large hospitals. He would sneak in after hours and inject potassium chloride into their I.V. line while they were sleeping. The drug stops the heart and mimics the symptoms of a heart attack. Since the patients were all there because of heart problems, it was assumed they died of natural causes.

I needed to get to Samantha Stewart and persuade her to have an autopsy done on her father's body to look for injection marks and the presence of potassium chloride in his system.

After explaining I was a friend of the Professor, Samantha Stewart agreed to meet with me.

Her home on Brookside Boulevard was just a stone's throw from the university.

She greeted me warmly and invited me inside.

"So how do you know the Professor?"

"I'm a UMKC graduate and I took a number of his classes. He became somewhat of a mentor to me. When he retired, he rented an apartment in my building on Armour Boulevard. I live on the third floor, he lives on the first. He asked me to convey his condolences on the passing of your grandfather."

"Please give him my thanks. He and Granddad were such good friends."

"About your grandfather, I know he supposedly died of natural causes, but I just wonder if you considered asking for an autopsy."

I saw the confused look on her face. "Why in the world would I do that? Dr. Friedman said it was most likely a heart attack."

I didn't want to alarm her. "It probably was. By any chance did you know what your grandfather was working on?"

"Not for sure. I know he was really excited about some paper he had just finished. You know how people in academic circles are, the old 'publish or perish' rule. He was eighty-two. I don't know why he was so concerned about being published at his age."

"So he never told you what the paper was about?"

"Never, and even if he did, I probably wouldn't have understood a word of it."

"He actually called me a week or so ago. I had given him some information he used in his thesis and he was telling me he was getting ready to submit it for publication. It was really an important document. I don't suppose you'd know where it is?"

She thought for a moment. "It had to be either in his home office or his office at the university. Someone from the Arts and Sciences Department came by the day after his death and wanted to know if I would be willing to donate his paperwork and files to the university. They said something about cataloging them in the Linda Hall Library on the campus. Frankly, I was relieved. He had several file cabinets full of stuff and I had no idea what to do with all of it. So either way, the people at the university must have it."

"Back to the autopsy ---."

She held up her hand to stop me. "I still don't understand why you think an autopsy is necessary, but it's actually a moot point."

"Why is that?"

"Because Granddad was cremated. He wanted it that way."

My heart sunk. I would have bet anything an autopsy would have revealed potassium chloride in his system, but now we would never know.

I knew I wasn't going to get anything more from Samantha Stewart, so I thanked her for her time and left.

My next stop was at the Arts and Sciences building on the UMKC campus.

A secretary announced my presence to the head of the department, Arnold Gregory.

"I have a few moments before a staff meeting, Mr. Williams. How may I help you?"

"I have a few questions about Frank Katz."

"Ahh, yes. Poor Frank. Such a loss. He will be missed."

"I understand your department has collected his papers and files to be catalogued into the Linda Hall Library."

"Who told you that?"

"His granddaughter, Samantha Stewart."

"I can't imagine why she'd say such a thing. The only contact I've had with Mrs. Stewart was to offer our condolences."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

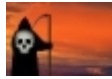
"How about his office here at the university?"

"There was not much there, not even a computer. He's done most of his work at his home office these past few years."

Another dead end.

Someone had contacted Samantha Stewart claiming to be from the university and cleaned out the old guy's office which undoubtedly held the damning manuscript.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to guess who had orchestrated the whole thing.



I was totally bummed.

Two men were gone, along with all the evidence they had collected to expose the government's poisoning of our skies.

It was becoming quite apparent the people behind these dastardly acts would stop at nothing to keep their program under wraps.

I had planned to go home, pour a glass of Arbor Mist and try to decide what I should do next.

I knew I had to contact Jack Carson and tell him of this latest development, but beyond that I should probably do nothing, because that's what I'd promised Maggie.

I stopped at the mailbox and found it stuffed full of bills. It was that time of the month. I had already decided my involvement in the chemtrail case should come to an end, so I resigned myself to an afternoon of bill paying.

Since retiring from real estate, I was rarely on the computer. Social media just wasn't my thing. I didn't have an account on Facebook, Twitter, or any of the other message sites. Every few days I would log on to check my email and I had learned to pay my bills online, saving me the agony of handwriting checks and paying for first class postage.

I fired up the old Toshiba and was about to log on to my bank account when the butler strolled across my screen and announced, "You have mail, Sir."

I figured I might as well look so he would go away.

There was the usual stuff, a message from a guy in Nigeria saying he needed to get twenty million dollars out of the country and he'd split it with me if I would just send him my bank account information. Then there was the ad for a product promising to add three inches to my penis. I thought about getting that and surprise Maggie, but decided against it. I'd have to buy bigger briefs and I don't like to shop.

The next email definitely caught my eye. It was from Frank Katz and it had a .pdf attachment.

The message read, "Walt, after our conversation the other day, I decided to send you a copy of my manuscript. Please take a look at it and if you have any suggestions, please let me know before I submit it for publication." The time stamp was the evening before he was found dead the next morning.

I opened the file and read the document. As promised, it was a scathing expose of everything Katz had collected about the chemtrail conspiracy. While lacking in actual physical evidence, there was certainly enough circumstantial evidence to raise some eyebrows. Apparently enough evidence someone had taken extraordinary measures to see it never saw the light of day.

Then the reality hit me like a thunderbolt. The original manuscript was long gone and I most likely had the only other copy.

If my theory was correct, Frank Katz had died because of the very thing which was staring at me from my computer screen.

I had promised Maggie I would steer clear of this thing so as not to endanger ourselves, our family and our friends, but no matter how hard I tried to distance myself, I kept getting sucked back in.

What was I to do with it? There was no way in hell I was going to try to get it published myself and bring the wrath of some assassin to our door. I thought about giving it to Jack Carson. He was, after all, a journalist and had the perfect venue to share the information with the world. Then I remembered the incident with the SUV when he was returning from Arizona. Undoubtedly, Carson was already on these people's radar. Sending him the document might just sign his death warrant. I wanted no part of that.

What I needed was a way to get the information out to the public in a non-threatening way which wouldn't put the writer at risk.

Then it hit me. If the information in Katz' thesis was published as a work of fiction, it would be out there for the world to see and people would be made aware of the possibility of a government conspiracy and it just might open some eyes.

What I needed was a successful novelist and I knew just the right guy, Robert Thornhill.

I had met him a few months ago at a craft fair. We had received information that terrorists had planted explosives at the event that put the lives of nearly a thousand people in danger. Using drug dogs from the K-9 Corps, we found the bombs. We subdued one of the bad guys immediately, but the second one broke for the door. His escape route took him right past the table where Thornhill was displaying his books. With perfect timing, Thornhill flipped the table on its side spewing a hundred slick paperback books in the terrorist's path. The perp was down just long enough for the cops to pounce and put him in cuffs.

After the incident we talked. Thornhill had published twenty mystery novels, a few of them based on cases which Ox and I had been involved in. Evidently he had a large fan base as eight of his works had hit #1 on Amazon during the previous year.

We found another common bond. We had both experienced open heart surgery and were actually on the cardiac floor of St. Luke's Hospital at the same time.

He autographed several of his books for me. I offered to pay him, but he declined and said I could pay him by sharing more stories to fuel his imagination.

I figured this might be the perfect time to repay my debt.

We had exchanged contact information and I had his number in my phone.

He picked up on the second ring.

"Mr. Thornhill, this is Walt Williams. Would you have a few minutes to talk?"

"Walt! Good to hear from you. Of course I'd love to chat with you, but let's not be formal. Please call me Bob."

"Well, Bob, I just might have a story that would pique your interest."

"You have my attention. What have you got?"

"Not on the phone. Could we meet somewhere?"

"Sure, how about lunch at Mel's Diner, say eleven-thirty?"

I was pleasantly surprised by his choice of eating establishments. "Sounds good to me. I'll see you there."

Bob was right on time. We met in the parking lot and entered together. Mel glanced up from his grill when we entered.

"Hi Bob. Hi Walt."

I was surprised again. "You two know each other?"

"Of course," Mel replied. "Bob's a regular. Hamburger patty, grilled onions and fries, and I suppose you'll want the chicken fried steak?"

We both nodded. Mel was amazing.

"I've been coming here for years," I said. "It's a wonder we've never bumped into each other before."

"Well, we're here now, and I can't wait to hear what you have for me."

I started at the beginning and told Bob everything I knew about the conspiracy and had just finished when Mel brought huge pieces of his chocolate cream pie. Bob had listened intently and taken notes, only interrupting sporadically to ask for clarification on some point.

When I finished, Bob just shook his head. "Holy crap, Walt! This is one ugly can of worms you've opened. Why, exactly, are you telling me all of this?"

"I'm telling you because I want this to be the subject of your next novel."

"Really! You've just told me two men are dead trying to expose this conspiracy and now you're dumping it in my lap?"

"But this is different. You write fiction. I've read all kinds of books about corrupt politicians, government conspiracies and secret spy missions, and to my knowledge, none of the authors have been whacked yet."

"*Yet*, being the operative word here."

Bob thought for a moment. "So far, I've written about vigilantism, euthanasia, and the collusion between the FDA and the pharmaceutical giants without reprisal. Maybe I could get by with one more. Although I often wonder if I'm on some CIA watch list. When I wrote about the Avenging Angels, I had to learn how to make a bomb just like the one Timothy McVeigh used to blow up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. It's all right there on the Internet, every detail. I could only imagine some government program set up to monitor the computers of people looking up that stuff."

"So are you in?" I asked expectantly.

He smiled. "Sure, why not? I'm just a retired seventy-two year old guy who writes mystery novels for the fun of it. What could possibly be the danger in that?"

That's probably what Frank Katz believed too, I thought, but I didn't say it out loud.

I handed Bob the manuscript which I had downloaded on a thumb drive. "Here it is. Good luck. I'll be anxious to read the finished product."



I headed back home, determined to finish my bill paying which was interrupted by Frank Katz' email.

I booted up the computer, but instead of my usual screensaver, there was nothing but squiggly lines. I turned the thing off and restarted it. That often cured the anomalies which sometimes popped up, but this time, it didn't work. No matter what I tried, all I could get was the same squiggly lines.

I was totally frustrated and had slumped back in my chair trying to figure out what to do when I noticed something strange. The stack of bills I was going to tackle was not where I had left them. They weren't moved much, but just enough so it got my attention.

I picked up the phone and dialed Maggie.

"Hi, Sweetie."

"Maggie, by any chance did you come home for lunch?"

"No, Anita and I had a salad at the Panera Bread Company. I haven't been home since I left this morning. Why do you ask?"

I didn't want to alarm her. "No reason, really. I was out myself and just wondered if I'd missed you. See you later."

I hung up before she could quiz me further.

I headed out the door and met Dad in the hall.

"Dad, have you seen any strangers in the halls today?"

He thought for a moment. "Strangers? No, not really. Just the guy from the gas company. He said they were checking all the buildings on the block for leaks. I sent him down to Willie. That's the last I saw of him."

I thanked him and headed to the basement.

"Willie, did you talk to a gas man today?"

"Sho did. De man said he was lookin' for de gas line an' I showed him where it was. He had one of those sniffer things with him. He poked around for a few minutes, den said everything was fine an' left."

I headed back to my apartment.

Gas man, my ass!

I unplugged my computer and headed to Arnie and Nick's place on Warwick.

Nick was the computer nerd and I knew if anyone could fix it, it would be him.

I brought the two of them up to date and handed Nick my laptop.

He booted it up, punched some keys and frowned. "Sorry, Walt. Your hard drive is corrupted, totally fried, probably a virus of some kind."

"But how? I've got virus protection software installed."

"It doesn't matter these days. The software companies can't begin to keep up with the hackers, especially if the hacker is some government spook."

I knew he was probably right. I had just finished watching the season finale of *CSI Cyber*, a new TV show about computer and electronic crime. If even half of the stuff depicted on the show was true, the average citizen was a sitting duck for hackers to steal their identity and their passwords. Computers, phones, pretty much anything electronic was vulnerable. After watching the show, I was almost afraid to plug in my toaster.

I thanked them and headed home.

As I drove, I played over in my mind the day's events.

I couldn't figure how someone knew I had the manuscript on my computer, then it hit me. Frank Katz' computer was missing. Whoever injected him with the potassium chloride had undoubtedly taken it. All the perp had to do was look in Katz' 'sent' folder to discover he'd sent me a copy, and now, even that was gone. I had no way of knowing whether they could figure out I had downloaded it on a thumb drive before they infected my computer with the virus.

For Bob's sake, I hoped not.

I felt violated. Some asshole had been in my apartment and in my computer.

I was suddenly in a panic. I stopped by a branch of my bank, identified myself, and asked a matronly lady behind a desk to take a look at my checking account. I had no doubt the guy was probably sophisticated enough to totally wipe me out. Thankfully, our funds were intact and I breathed a sigh of relief. I told the lady I had been hacked and she told me how to contact tech support to change my password.

Back in the car, I thought about the intruder and wondered what else he might have done. I picked up the phone and called Kevin, my brother-in-law and partner in Walt Williams Investigations. He had been a P.I. in Phoenix for thirty years and had all kinds of spy crap.

"Kevin, do you have one of those gizmos that can find electronic bugs which are hidden?"

"Does, Donald Trump have goofy hair?"

I took that as a 'yes' and had him meet me at the apartment.

I filled him in on what had transpired. He swept the entire apartment but found nothing.

"Any chance the thing can tell if my phone's been bugged?"

"Nope, that's something entirely different. There's no way to know exactly, but if I were you, I'd behave as though it was."

I thanked him, and as he was walking out the door, he turned, "Be careful, Bro. These guys play for keeps."

At that moment, I was frustrated and angry and I was really pissed that now I would have to pay all those bills by hand.

And to tell the truth, I was more than a little bit scared.



CHAPTER 11

True to his word, Ox had Judy call Maggie and the two of them cooked up an evening out for the four of us.

They had made reservations at Zio's Italian Kitchen which didn't exactly thrill me.

I'm not a big fan of ethnic foods except Mexican. I love tacos, burritos and margaritas, although food purists tell me the fare at Taco Bell has nothing in common with real Mexican food.

I'm more of a meat and potatoes kind of guy, nothing fancy, just the basics, as long as it contains one of the major food groups, gravy.

I see no reason to Kung Pao a poor chicken when you can fry it and have the resulting squeezings for a rich gravy.

Nevertheless, if Zio's Italian Kitchen made the girls happy, then I was willing to go along, because, as the old saying goes, 'if the girls aren't happy, nobody's happy.'

After we were seated, a server brought a loaf of warm bread, which I thought was a good start, but then he proceeded to pour some viscous liquid which looked like thirty weight motor oil into a dish of grass clippings.

After he had finished and proudly presented his concoction, I tapped him on the sleeve and asked if he might have a pat or two of butter in the kitchen.

That was definitely a faux pas. The poor fellow looked like I had beaten him with a stick.

"Just try it, Walt," Maggie urged.

Reluctantly, I tore off a hunk of bread, dipped it in the goo and took a bite. I was surprised. It was actually quite good. I said as much and the server brightened immediately. I had made his day.

While he was fetching our drinks, I checked out the menu. It was four pages double sided and there was not a single mention of gravy. I settled for a spicy chicken alfredo which turned out to be pretty good as well.

During the meal, I told my story from the beginning. Ox was my partner and for five years, we had shared everything. His wife, Judy, was also a cop and a very good one at that. I already mentioned hiding things from Maggie was not a good idea, so I figured good company over a good meal was as good a place as any to come clean.

To say Maggie was upset would be an understatement.

"Someone's been inside our apartment going through our things?"

"I'm afraid so. As far as I can tell he was just there to sabotage my computer."

"Walt, you promised you'd stay out of this. Now look what's happened."

"I'm trying my best to stay out --- really! That's why I handed the manuscript off to Thornhill."

Ox was still dubious. "Let me get this straight. You're saying there's this big government cover up going on and the conspirators have murdered two people to keep them from talking."

I nodded.

"And yet, you don't actually have proof either of them was murdered."

I nodded again.

"Walt, if what you're saying is true, that means our government, the people sworn to protect us, are murdering citizens to cover up their crimes. Do you know how crazy that sounds?"

"I know how it sounds, but what about B-613? I know you and Judy watched *Scandal*."

In the TV show about life in Washington, the writers depicted a black ops group of professional assassins whose job was to eliminate any and all threats to the United States by any means necessary. The organization was so covert, it was even beyond the control of the president.

"B-613! Come on, Walt! That was a TV show for chrissakes! Surely you don't think ---?"

"Think what? That if these chemtrails were really part of our national defense system against nuclear warheads the government would think twice about eliminating any threats to that system? Remember Spock's words in *The Wrath of Khan*, 'Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.' How does the life of an eighty-two year old man and one pilot stack up against the possibility of a nuke landing in Times Square?"

He thought for a moment. "I see your point, but I'm still not seeing any evidence."

"What about the bogus people who stole Frank Katz' papers? What about my computer? That's evidence enough for me that there's something very sinister going on."

At that moment, the server arrived with our checks and our discussion was put on hold.

The ride home was quiet. We all seemed to be lost in our thoughts, at least I was.

Ox was driving and I noticed he was checking his rear view mirror more than usual.

Finally, he said, "I think you might be right."

"About what?"

"Everything. On the way to the restaurant, I noticed a black SUV with government plates behind us. I didn't think much about it, but here we are, two hours later and it's back again."

"You sure it's the same vehicle?"

"The plates are the same, so yes, we're being followed."

I thought for a moment "Keystone Kops?"

"Sure, why not," Judy replied.

At the next stoplight, Ox came to a screeching halt and Judy and I bailed out on opposite sides of the car and headed straight for the SUV. If there had been traffic behind them, we would have had them cold, but there wasn't. The moment our feet hit the pavement, the SUV's tires squealed as the driver shifted into reverse. After a quick u-turn, they sped off in the opposite direction.

When we were back in the car, I turned to Ox. "How's that for proof?"



The next morning I got a call from Jack Carson.

I hadn't heard from him since he went on his pilgrimage to interview Kristen Meghan, the Air Force bioengineer who had turned whistleblower.

"Walt, Jack here. I thought we should touch base. Anything new on your end?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Same place? Eleven-thirty?"

"I'll be there."

After being seated at Mel's, he asked, expectantly, "Well, what have you got?"

Lots of things had happened since our last visit, but I didn't share everything I knew. I told him that Frank Katz had died before he could get his manuscript published, but I left out the part about him sending me a copy. I knew if I told him the whole story, he would pressure Thornhill for a copy of the manuscript and that's what I was trying to avoid.

I told him about the four of us being followed, but I omitted the part about someone being in our apartment.

When I finished, he was deep in thought. Finally he spoke. "So Dale Fox dies in a car wreck on his way to meet me with evidence and we can't prove the car was tampered with, and Frank Katz dies of a heart attack just before publishing his manuscript and we can't prove it was anything but natural causes. Quite a coincidence, don't you think?"

"Sorry, I'm not much of a coincidence fan."

"Me either."

"So how was your visit with Kristen Meghan?"

"Dead end. She wouldn't even talk to me. Someone's put the fear of God in her."

"Can't say I blame her. If they really threatened to take away her child, that's pretty powerful stuff. So you struck out?"

"Quite the contrary. I had a very enlightening visit with a pathologist who has been studying the effects of the chemtrail fallout. Sorry, I can't tell you his name. He would only talk to me if I promised to only refer to him as an anonymous source."

"Sounds like someone's put the fear of God in him, too. So what did he have to say?"

"Remember that long laundry list of stuff which is being sprayed, the barium, aluminum, ethylene bromide, and so on?"

I nodded.

"Well, they've been spraying the stuff for over fifteen years now, and it's contaminated the air we breathe and the food we eat.

"Take aluminum, for example. It's a major component in these aerosols. Although it is our planet's most abundant metal, our body has no biological need for it. The Pesticide Action Network North America lists it as toxic to humans and yet, aluminum is commonly found in vaccines, deodorants, anti-perspirants, over-the-counter medications, soft drink and beer cans, baking powder, cake mixes, processed cheeses, and other food products and additives. So we digest this stuff, rub it on our skin and get injected with it and add to that all we're breathing from the chemtrails. Over the years, aluminum accumulates in the brain, tissues, and to a lesser amount the bones. It causes brain degeneration, dysfunction and damage due to the blockage and reduced blood flow and oxygen. The brain shrinks as brain cells die. This causes dementia. Symptoms include emotional outbursts, paranoia, forgetfulness and memory loss, speech incoherence, irritability, diminished alertness, changes in personality, and poor or bad judgment. All these are on the rise, and more than 4 million Americans are afflicted.

"Apparently the West Coast has been more heavily sprayed than other parts of the country. Remember me talking about the California drought being caused by the jet stream being diverted by HAARP?"

I nodded again.

"Well listen to this." He pulled a sheet of paper from a folder he had carried into the diner. "Soil and water samples are being tested at the top of Mt. Shasta, California, and in Siskiyou County, and the aluminum levels are high enough to kill a moose. The levels are off the charts with the highest reading so far at [4,610 times](#) the maximum contaminate level for drinking water in the sunny state. A recent snow sample taken from Ski Bowl on Mt. Shasta showed 61 times the maximum contaminant level for aluminum in drinking water. Pretty scary stuff."

"No kidding!"

"Then there's the barium. It's been proven to adversely affect the heart. I suppose it's another coincidence heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. According to the CDC, it affects one out of every five Americans."

He looked at his notes again. "Then there's the rise in asthma and upper respiratory illnesses caused by breathing the particulate matter in the air. I could go on and on."

"No need. I get the picture. But if this is all true, how can the American people just stand idly by and let this continue? Why aren't people up in arms?"

"Good question, my friend. I could give you my answer, but I think the doctor I interviewed said it more eloquently than I ever could. Let me read you his words. *'It seems almost unbelievable that millions, maybe billions of people could look up at the sky and not notice the dramatic changes that have occurred from what it was in the mid-1990s. Then our sky was a gorgeous, deep blue. Clouds were a beautiful assortment of shapes. The sun was glorious. But people under 30 may not have a real sense of recollection about looking up every day and seeing this panoramic magnificence. Most of them are too busy texting or chatting on their cell phones. There are other issues to consider, as well. People are in their own comfort zones and denial is a very powerful human emotion. In the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives, how many people look up at the sky? It also takes huge courage, a very deep, internal willingness to examine politically motivated, corporate controlled media spin, and search for the real answers. Humans like their regular routines. To re-examine what we think we know, based on new evidence, takes a willingness to think outside the proverbial box --- to want to find out the truth not the pervasive Orwellian doublespeak that pervades our society. If everything in our daily routine belies what is truly going on, it requires fortitude to explore the unknown and to question the litany. Given these issues, since our collapsing society has so many different levels of deceit, the financial debacle, the lies and deceit of government, the emerging police state, the disasters which envelope our fragile environment, it becomes increasingly difficult just to maintain a daily routine and survive the economic depression and its daily fallout. Mainstream media does its supporting role and deceives us. Millions, like the proverbial lemmings, hasten to join the group demise.'*"

When he finished reading, I remembered the Professor's words when I asked why people weren't screaming for answers, "Apathy, the curse of modern society. Why do only fifty percent of the voting population cast their votes in the presidential election? Frustration, as in you can't fight city hall. The government is just too big and powerful. Complacency, as in I'm doing all right, why rock the boat."

I sighed. "Well now I'm officially depressed. Thanks a lot."

"See!" he said. "That's exactly the reaction most people would have. *'The problem's just too big! I don't want to even think about it.'* Then they go on with their pitiful lives, talking and texting on their phones, taking their kids to soccer practice and trying to stretch their paychecks to the end of the month, not realizing or caring they are being poisoned with every breath they take."

"Holy crap, Jack! You sound like you're on some kind of holy mission."

"Maybe I am. The more I learn about this conspiracy, the more I want to share it with the world --- to shout it from the rooftops until someone listens."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I'm not waiting any longer. I've got a few more sources to check out, then I'm going to run a series of articles in the *Star*. People may not like what I'll have to say. They may even be scared by what I have to say, but they won't be able to ignore what I have to say."

"Are you sure your editor will go along with this? The paper's owners may not want to poke the bear with your stick."

"We'll see. If the *Star* won't run with it, I have other sources. I'll get it in print one way or the other."

I had to admire Carson's zeal. He was a man on a mission, and unlike me and probably most Americans, he wasn't afraid to speak out for what he believed.

I just hoped someone would listen.



CHAPTER 12

The next morning I was practicing my usual daily ritual of Wheaties, coffee and newspaper when a headline jumped out at me.

WikiLeaks: U.S. spied on 3 French presidents.

The article revealed the NSA had been eavesdropping on confidential conversations of French President Francois Hollande and other French officials.

Ever since my first conversation with Jack Carson about the chemtrails, the same question kept nagging at me: *If everything I had read about this covert government program was true and it had been going on for at least a decade and a half, why, in heaven's name aren't people screaming for an explanation?*

It's not like some kind of high-tech listening device which has been secretly planted. All one has to do is look up and see the trails streaking across the sky on a daily basis.

I totally understood the explanation of Jack's anonymous pathologist. The average guy on the street is just too wrapped up in his daily struggles to give a damn, but not everyone is like that. Watchdogs like Arnie and Nick as well as experts in their field like the pathologist are constantly on the lookout for government shenanigans, so why haven't there been headlines exposing Operation Cloverleaf and the HAARP installation?

The other problem I had been struggling with was the magnitude of such a program. Again, if everything I had read thus far was true, such an undertaking would involve literally thousands of people. Chemical companies would have to manufacture and deliver the stuff which was being sprayed, ground crews would have to load the chemicals into the huge tanks in the bellies of the planes, and pilots and their flight crews would have to spread the stuff across our skies. Engineers of some kind would have to man the HAARP installation. Surely, over a fifteen year period, someone would come forward and say, *"This is what's going on and the world needs to know."*

Sure, there have been a few like Kristen Meghan, but her revelations were cut short by threats from her superiors. Dale Fox had told Carson any leaks about what he was doing would have dire consequences, and a week later he was dead. The young man I met at the hotel who served on Fox's flight crew feared for his life and all he was guilty of was not reporting what he knew to his superiors.

Given all these facts, there were really only two possibilities, the whole thing was just a hoax cooked up by conspiracy theorists with nothing better to do with their time, or the threat was real and the participants were afraid to speak out, intimidated by threats from the government.

The article in the morning paper gave me an idea.

If there was any organization not cowed by the federal government, it was WikiLeaks. They obviously had no qualms about exposing the NSA's snooping on French officials. The article even went on to say WikiLeaks had been associated with all the information leaked by Edward Snowden.

I fired up the new computer I had been forced to buy since the hard drive of my old one had been fried by an unknown intruder. Talk about intimidation.

I still hadn't got the hang of the new one. My old operating system was Windows XP. The new one was Windows 8, and I was totally lost. Jerry was more computer savvy than anyone else in the building, so I prevailed on him to give me a quick lesson. Naturally he had to add a bit of levity to my lesson, explaining that computers were like air conditioners. They worked fine until you started opening Windows.

I logged on to the WikiLeaks website. There were hundreds of articles on government activities, including one about a seaman on a United Kingdom submarine. The headline read, *Trident whistleblower: "nuclear disaster waiting to happen."*

Perfect! I thought. If they weren't afraid to run a story on a whistleblower warning of a nuclear disaster, surely there would be something from a chemtrail whistleblower.

I entered 'chemtrails' in their 'search' engine and only two obscure references popped up.

Sunday, December 20, 2009: Researcher Clifford Carnicorn, journalist William Thomas and Above Top Secret's Mark Allin will join George Knapp to try to get to the bottom of chemtrails. They'll address such questions as: Is the government spraying the population? What are the chemicals made out of? How are we being affected?

The second one read: *Weather modification efforts have been on the rise in countries like China and the United States. According to Thomas, the US Air Force is engaged in "weather warfare," using nanotech 'smart particles' to modify, steer, and target the direction of storms. In fact, emissions from Project HAARP were used during Hurricane Katrina to steer it away from facilities in Texas, he detailed.*

That was it. Nothing else. No in-depth expose from some guy making the chemical brew or a pilot who had sprayed tons of particulate into the atmosphere. Needless to say, I was disappointed, but at least there were references to chemtrails and HAARP.

While I was in a search mode, I did some more Internet digging and found references to GMACAG, Global March Against Chemtrails And Geoengineering.

What I discovered was this group had organized a march on April 25th of 2015 which was called World Chemtrail Awareness Day, and apparently there had been similar marches in preceding years.

According to the article, twenty-one countries had sponsored over a hundred events worldwide.

If this was such a big undertaking, I began to wonder why I had never heard of it. I read further and got a clue as to why.

We created a social media frenzy that exploded so fast, that Facebook intentionally started using their secret AI (Artificial Intelligence) auto script to block our posts, photos and event listings from circulating or being shared. This, along with a very long list of other broken features such as all forms of communication with fellow activists were magically not working at the most critical of times, just days before and leading right up until after the April 25, 2015 event.

Our GMACAG admin team even prepaid in full for advertising on Facebook to help with the promotions. After receiving payment in full, Facebook did not deliver on the agreed amount of advertising. Needless to say a legal law suit was immediately initiated against them.

We even had the weather network run propaganda smear campaigns of articles against us on every weather search page in most countries on the day of the April 25, 2015 GMACAG. Why would the weather network, and its shareholders, spend so much time, and add revenue space to what they called a theory by a small group of people?

If what they were saying was true, it smelled a lot like censorship.

Just for kicks, I logged onto the website of the *Kansas City Star* and entered *Chemtrail Awareness Day* into their search engine.

Since I read the paper every day, I knew they had run stories on every kind of march from police brutality to cruelty to animals. Anytime anyone got a group of people together to protest something or support something, the *Star* had a reporter there.

But there was not a single word on the worldwide event, Chemtrail Awareness Day.

As I was pondering all this, the phone rang.

A woman's voice came on the line. "Is this Walt Williams Investigations?"

"Yes, Ma'am," I replied. "This is Walt Williams. How may I help you?"

"My name is Genevieve Shipley and I'm calling about my daughter, Louise. See's gone missing."

"Have you talked to the police?"

"Let me start from the beginning. Louise actually lives in St. Louis. When I discovered she was missing, I contacted the missing persons unit there. When I told them my daughter had disappeared in Kansas City, they suggested I call the police here, which I did. They took her information, but said since she had no history here, there wasn't much they could do. The officer I talked to gave me your number. Can you help me?"

"How long has your daughter been in town?"

"She arrived the day before yesterday and checked into the Adams Mark Holiday Inn by the Sports Complex. We were supposed to meet at Denny's for breakfast the next morning, but she never showed. I've been trying to call her cell ever since but it goes straight to voice mail."

"Was she just in town for a family visit?"

"No, she said she had a business appointment. That's why she was staying at the hotel instead of with me."

"Do you know what the business appointment was about?"

"No, she said we'd talk about it at breakfast. Maybe it had something to do with the company she worked for."

"Which one is that?"

"Monsanto. Their world headquarters is in St. Louis --- on North Lindbergh Boulevard, I believe."

I had only been mildly interested in the case up to that point. Missing persons cases are notoriously difficult and rarely end well, but the moment she mentioned Monsanto, my ears perked up. The huge corporation had been mentioned frequently in the Internet searches I had done on chemtrails and geoengineering.

"Are you free to come to my office?"

"Certainly."

I gave her directions and asked her to bring a recent photo of her daughter if she had one.

As soon as I hung up from her, I dialed Kevin and told him to get his rear over here. We had a client.

An hour later, Genevieve Shipley had signed our retainer, paid our advance fee and given us a photo of Louise. I promised we'd keep her informed as our investigation proceeded.

When she was gone, I turned to Kevin. "Where do you want to start?"

"Her hotel room of course?"

"How do you propose we get in? Your picks are no good on those electronic locks."

"That's why I have this," he said, pulling an electronic gizmo out of a bag.

He never ceases to amaze me and that's why he's my partner.

On the way to the hotel, I filled Kevin in on what I had read about Monsanto.

The huge corporation was one of the primary beneficiaries of the chemtrail program. I read to him some of the stuff I printed off an organic food website.

Geo-engineering food companies such as Monsanto use the government's claim of slowing down global warming through chemtrails to justify the need for the GMO seeds. The problem with chemtrails is what goes up, must come down. These chemicals are seriously polluting our waterways and soil while seeping into crops and contaminating livestock, not to mention changing the weather patterns. Plants are especially sensitive to the soil degradation that occurs with chemtrail spraying, creating serious issues with our food supply.

Chemtrails are chemical or biological agents deliberately sprayed at high altitudes for purposes undisclosed to the general public in programs directed by various government officials. These sprays pollute the soil, water and air while compromising the health of humans, animals and plants. But wait – Monsanto has developed seeds that will weather the effect of the sprays, creating a tidy profit for the corporation while organics suffer.

Monsanto in cooperation with the government has designed genetically modified seeds which withstand the effects of chemtrails. The seeds are designed to survive extreme weather conditions, pollution, salt stress, heavy metals and chemtrails. Organic and natural crops will die from severe pollution and the chemtrails while Monsanto continues to profit. Further proof that the government and giant food corporations are controlling the food supply.

Take a look around your grocery store and realize that just about everything on the shelves contains something grown with Monsanto's patented gene splicing techniques and proprietary toxic pesticide concoctions. Then try to understand the scope of this complete takeover of our food production system.

Control the weather and you control food production. Get enough key players in the government, control American policy, control the weather through your connections or obtain inside information about that control, buy up all the major seed suppliers, and then you are in a position to force feed GMOs to America and every other nation that does business with America, your partner in one of the greatest crimes in history.

Kevin shook his head. "I had no idea it was so bad."

"Neither does your next door neighbor or the guy across the street. That's the way the players want it. As long as there's groceries on the shelf, the average Joe doesn't give a damn about what's in them or how they got that way."

We pulled into the parking lot of the Adams Mark Holiday Inn. Mrs. Shipley said her daughter was staying in room 518. We stopped at the front desk to make sure no one else was in the room. The last thing we wanted was to walk in on someone courtesy of Kevin's little electronic gizmo.

The clerk said the room was reserved for two more days, so we headed upstairs.

The hall was empty and I stood watch while Kevin hooked his machine to the door lock. A few minutes later, we were inside.

It was obvious Louise was not planning an extended stay. The one suitcase in the room was on the little folding thing and had not been unpacked.

"Nothing in the bathroom but some hairspray and the other gunk that women use," Kevin reported.

I spotted a piece of paper on the desk by the phone. It was a business card and the name on the front hit me like a brick. Louise Shipley had come to Kansas City to talk to Jack Carson.



CHAPTER 13

"Holy crap!" I said, picking up the card. "Dollars to donuts, Louise Shipley was a Monsanto whistleblower who had come to Kansas City to give Carson more dirt for his expose."

Then I noticed a thumb drive which had been hidden by the business card. "And I'd be willing to bet there's some juicy stuff on this thing," I said, holding up the drive.

"So what now?" Kevin asked.

"I think we'd better get Jack Carson over here. It's quite likely he's the reason she was in town and he may have some insight as to where she might be."

I started to dial Carson from my cell but then changed my mind and dialed from the hotel phone. I figured the less 'they' could tie me to Carson, the better.

"Jack Carson here."

"Jack, this is Walt. Does the name Louise Shipley mean anything to you?"

A long pause. "Maybe. Why do you ask?"

"Because she's missing and we're in her hotel room. I think you'd better get over here. Room 518, Adams Mark Holiday Inn at the Sports Complex. Oh yes, bring a lap top or iPad."

"Give me twenty minutes."

When Carson arrived, I held up his card. "Start talking."

He sighed, "It's a long story. A month or so ago, I was covering a series of home invasions and I took the time to interview several of the neighbors close to the homes that were hit. One of those interviews was with Genevieve Shipley. She was a nice lady, very cooperative and friendly. I ran the story and figured that was the end of it. Then one day, out of the blue, I got a call from her daughter, Louise. She said her mother had given her my number.

"Bottom line, she worked for Monsanto and was disturbed by some of the things she was seeing and figured the public should know what was going on. Naturally I was excited. According to everything I've found, Monsanto is right at the heart of this chemtrail thing, so I encouraged her to come to Kansas City and bring whatever information she had."

"That information is probably on this thumb drive," I said, holding up the device.

I could almost see Carson salivating. He reached for it, but I jerked it back.

"Not so fast. Louise is missing and we've been hired by her mother to find her. Have you had any contact with her since she arrived?"

"Yes and no. She called me and we made arrangements to meet for lunch, but she never showed. I've been trying to call, but everything goes straight to voice mail."

"Same as her mother," Kevin said. "She was supposed to meet her for breakfast, but didn't show there either."

"So that's my story. Can we see what's on the thumb drive?"

I handed him the device, he booted up his lap top and plugged it into the USB port.

One of the first things that popped up was a photo of a map.



Carson let out a low whistle. "This is a map of HAARP installations all across the globe. Every continent is affected."

I remembered one of the passages I had read from the organic farmer's website. *Control the weather and you control food production. Get enough key players in the government, control American policy, control the weather through your connections or obtain inside information about that control, buy up all the major seed suppliers, and then you are in a position to force feed GMOs to America and every other nation that does business with America, your partner in one of the greatest crimes in history.*

With the kind of global coverage pictured on the map, both the weather and food production could be influenced worldwide.

The next thing on the drive was an article about Monsanto partnering with the Weather Channel, supposedly so Monsanto could bundle more services to farmers who already buy their genetically modified seeds and herbicides.

I remembered the organizers of the Chemtrail Awareness Day wondering why the Weather Channel was running articles on their weather pages smearing the campaign and its organizers, and here was the answer. Monsanto and the Weather Channel were in bed together with the mutual goal of assuring the public the chemtrails were harmless because Monsanto had the resources and the products to save the world's food supply.

"Another nail in their coffin," Carson said, pocketing the thumb drive, "and it dovetails perfectly with the other information I've gathered."

He opened a file on his lap top.

"It gets worse. Do you remember when I gave you a partial list of all the things in our daily lives which contain aluminum: vaccines, deodorants, anti-perspirants, over-the-counter medications, soft drink and beer cans, baking powder, cake mixes, processed cheeses, and other food products and additives?"

I nodded.

"Then remember the data which confirms the metals such as mercury and aluminum aren't flushed from our bodies but collect in our brain cells and cause all kinds of neurological trauma such as dementia, Alzheimer's and even brain cancer?"

I nodded again.

"Well, guess what other chemical we're force fed, which facilitates the movement of soft metals across the blood/brain barrier to infiltrate our brain tissue. Fluoride! There have been over 34 human studies and 100 animal studies linking fluoride to brain damage, including lower IQ in children, and studies have shown fluoride toxicity can lead to a wide variety of health problems and yet over 67% of the nation's water supply is fluoridated. Today America is the sickest society on this planet ... made so in three short generations. Is it coincidence we are also the most Geo-engineered, vaccinated, GMOed, fluoridated and drugged society on the planet? America needs to wake up and smell the coffee before it's too late!"

"That's all well and good," Kevin, Mr. Practical, replied, "but we've got a missing girl to find. I say we flash her photo around downstairs and see if anyone saw her last night."

We started at the front desk. I showed the photo to the clerk.

"Oh, yes, Miss Shipley. Very pretty girl. The last time I remember seeing her was late yesterday afternoon. She was on her way to Casey's, our sports bar."

I thanked him and we headed into the bar. I showed the photo to the bartender.

"Yes, I remember her well. She sat at the bar, right over there," he said, pointing. "She ordered a cocktail and an appetizer. Her food had just arrived when her cell phone went off. After she read the message, she threw some bills on the counter and took off. Didn't take a bite or finish her drink."

Kevin tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the surveillance camera in the corner of the bar.

I thanked the bartender and we went back to the reception desk.

"We need to see your surveillance footage from last evening," Kevin said.

The previously friendly clerk became defensive. "I can't just show you that. I don't even know you guys. Besides, I think you need a warrant."

"I'm sorry," Kevin replied. "Let's start over. My friend here and I are private investigators." He handed the clerk a card. "One of your guests, Miss Shipley, is missing and we have reason to believe she's been abducted. We're trying to find her. Yes, technically we'd need a warrant if you weren't willing to share your footage with us, but it would mean involving the police and most likely, with all the commotion about someone being abducted from your hotel, a lot of your guests might check out and find some place safer. Is this what you really want?"

The clerk thought about it for a moment. "Okay, let's don't get people excited. Gina, come cover the desk, please."

He led us to the back office and started fumbling with dials. "What do you want to see?"

"Just Casey's during the time Miss Shipley was in the bar."

He fiddled some more and the images flashed across the screen. "There she is," Kevin said.

We watched, and the scene unfolded just as the bartender had said.

After she left the bar, Kevin said, "We'll need a copy of the footage. Now let's go to the camera which covers your parking lot."

The clerk shook his head. "Sorry, no can do. Some kids shot out the lens with a BB gun and we haven't got a replacement yet."

"Damn! Well, copy what you've got and we'll be out of your hair."

We thanked the clerk and gathered in the lobby.

"Time to get the cops involved," I said. "I'll make some calls."

I called Gino Ferelli at Missing Persons and we headed downtown.

We pulled into the parking lot just as Ox and his new partner, Amanda, were finishing their shift. I gave Ox a brief explanation why we were there and he asked if he could tag along.

After briefing Ferelli, he pulled the file. "Here it is. Genevieve Shipley called in and said her daughter was missing. Not much we could do at this point. Let's take a look at your surveillance footage."

I handed him the disk and he slipped it into the machine.

Just as Louise Shipley got up to leave the bar, Ox said, "Stop! Back up a few frames."

He looked closer at a man who had gotten up right after Louise and followed her out of the bar.

"I know that guy. That's Paulie Spiegel. We call him Paulie the Pervert. We arrested him about eight years ago. He was working at a gas station and had installed a camera in the women's bathroom. We arrested him in his apartment. He was watching some of his recorded videos and doing the hand jive, if you know what I mean."

"So you caught him red-handed?" Kevin quipped.

"Actually, if I remember correctly, I think he was right handed. I thought he was still in jail."

Ferelli punched a few keys on his computer. "Here he is. Paulie Spiegel, released three months ago. I'll put out an APB and we'll bring him in for questioning."



Two hours later, Spiegel was in an interrogation room.

"What am I doin' here? I didn't do nothin'."

"We'll see about that," Ferelli said, turning on the video screen. "See the chick heading out of the bar? Well guess what? She's missing, and here's you, Paulie the Pervert, going out right behind her. I don't suppose you'd know anything about that?"

Paulie swallowed hard. "Yeah, I saw the chick. She was a hottie all right. I had just decided to make a move on her when her phone went off. She read some message and took off like a bat out of hell. I looked around and there weren't no one else I was interested in, so I went up to Harvey's Tavern up on Highway Forty. You can check with Gus, the bartender. I was there for three hours and still didn't score."

"My heart's broken," Ferelli replied. "I'm going to check with Gus and if your story doesn't hold up, you're gonna be in a world of hurt. Now get your ass out of here."

"Too bad," Ferelli said after Paulie was gone. "I thought we might have a good lead."

"Let's run her cell phone," I suggested. "I've got her number."

Ferelli led us to one of the technicians who entered her phone into his computer. After a few minutes, he said, "I've got a location for you. It's on Blue Ridge Cutoff, just a couple of blocks from the hotel."

We piled into the car and headed back toward the Sports Complex.

We parked on a side street and split up, searching both sides of Blue Ridge.

"Got it" Ox said, picking up the phone. "Whoever grabbed her must have tossed it. They knew we would be tracing it."

"Let's see what that important text was all about," Ox said, punching some keys. "Here it is. It says, 'Plans changed. We must talk tonight. Very important. Meet me in the hotel parking lot.' It's signed Jack Carson."

We all looked at Carson who was dumbfounded. "I --- I didn't send that message. I swear! I was at home all evening, working on my story. You can check the time stamp on my computer."

"We believe you, Jack. But someone knew the two of you we're getting together. Maybe we can find out who. Ox, call in the number that sent the text. Maybe we'll get lucky."

A few moments later, his phone rang. "Okay, thanks anyway." He turned to us, disappointed, "No luck. Burner phone."

"Jack, who knew about your meeting with Louise?" I asked.

"No one. I told absolutely no one, and I've been really careful about making calls. I even got a burner phone of my own just in case my cell and my land line were tapped."

"Where were you when you set up the appointment with Louise?"

"At home. Why?"

I thought about going home and finding someone had been in my apartment. I hadn't told Jack because then I'd have to explain about my screwed up computer and Frank Katz' manuscript.

"Just an idea. Kevin, do you still have the gizmo in the trunk that tracks bugs?"

"Does Monsanto have aluminium resistant seeds?"

I took that as a yes, and we headed to Jack's apartment.

We quietly followed Kevin as he swept the entire apartment. He paused, tapped his device, and checked the screen, then he put his finger to his lips and pointed to the smoke detector.

We huddled outside his apartment.

"There's a listening device in your smoke detector. Even though you used your burner to set up your meeting with Louise, someone overheard it, sent her the text and when she went to the parking lot --- well who knows what might have happened. Whatever it is, it's not good."

"So what should I do with the damn thing?" Jack asked.

"I'd leave it right where it is," Kevin replied. "If you get rid of it, whoever planted it will know you're on to them. Knowing they're listening just might come in handy before this thing is over. Just don't forget it's there."

"I couldn't possibly," he said. "This thing's getting darker every minute. Now it looks like three people are dead all because of this damned conspiracy."

He was right. The prospects of finding Louise Shipley alive were slim and none and it was my job to deliver the bad news to her mother.



CHAPTER 14

An article in the *Kansas City Star* drew my attention. The headline read, *Mass extinction is on the way, scientists believe.*

It went on to say that a study published by biologists in the journal, *Science Advances*, found that the Earth is losing mammal species at 20 to 100 times the rate of the past. *"We can confidently conclude that modern extinction rates are exceptionally high, and they are increasing, and they suggest a mass extinction under way. If the currently elevated extinction pace is allowed to continue, humans will soon, in as little as three human lifetimes, be deprived of many biodiversity benefits. We have the potential of initiating a mass extinction episode which has been unparalleled for 65 million years."*

Given what I had learned over the past few weeks, assuming it was true, it was no wonder things were dying off at a record pace. If some sinister cabal was indeed spraying aluminium, barium, ethylene dibromide, and God knows what else into our atmosphere, all of it had to eventually come back to good old earth and seep into the ground and water supply, thus affecting the planet's vegetation. The animals eat the poisoned plants, drink the polluted water, and Bingo, things start dying off.

The thing which was puzzling to me was the article never once mentioned geoengineering, chemtrails or weather manipulation. Why not? Was it because those things simply don't exist or because the influence of the cabal was so far reaching the scientists feared for their lives?

I was pondering these weighty issues when the phone rang.

It was Mary Murphy.

"Mr. Walt, is everything still a go for our picnic?"

"Oh crap!" I muttered under my breath. With all the chemtrail drama going on in my life, I had totally forgotten we had planned a picnic at the hotel to celebrate the Fourth of July.

In years past, we had gone to one of the massive celebrations with fireworks displays like the one at Riverside Park, but as we have gotten older, hunting for a place to park and fighting the huge crowds had become less appealing. We decided this year to all meet at the hotel and include the twenty residents there as a good will gesture.

Mary volunteered to be in charge of the food and assigned each of us dishes to share in pot luck fashion. Jerry was to be the emcee and plan the program.

"Uhhh, sure. As far as I know, everything's a go."

"Great! Make sure you and Willie get the folding tables over here early so I can get the food and drink tables set up."

Swell! I had totally forgotten I was half of the table committee. "I'm on it," I lied. "We'll be there bright and early."

I had to quickly shift gears from conspiracy mode to party mode.

One doesn't want to get on Mary Murphy's bad side.



Thankfully, the day was bright and the sun was shining.

As promised, Willie and I had the folding tables at the hotel at eight o'clock. We had just finished unloading when Ox showed up with a huge grill. He was in charge of hot dog, brat and hamburger production.

Kevin and his squeeze, Veronica, arrived with coolers filled with ice and all kinds of soft drinks. We had considered the possibility of this being a BYOB party, then nixed the idea given the fact that most of the tenants were either recovering alcoholics or problem drinkers.

Dad and Bernice had stayed up late baking cookies and other treats. I saw Dad slip a Tupperware container to Ox and I suspected that, in spite of our 'no booze' policy, it contained Jell-O shots, one of Dad's specialties and one of Ox's vices. I just hoped he wouldn't overindulge and set himself on fire at the grill.

Throughout the morning, people drifted in, bearing their favourite dishes to share with the group.

Mary had brewed ice tea and whipped together a cooler of lemonade. Once she caught Benny Finkle from room 12 trying to slip some vodka into the lemonade.

"You try that again, I'll hit you so hard it'll wake up your dentist!"

Benny gave her a big toothless grin. "Somebody done beat you to it."

Not to be outdone, Mary retorted, "Then I'll just punch you so hard you'll have to put toothpaste up your ass to brush the few teeth you have left!"

Apparently that convinced Benny and he stalked off.

Finally, just after twelve, everything was ready.

Jerry assembled everyone together and asked the Professor to offer a word of prayer.

As I looked at the group, I marvelled at the diversity. A retired university professor, a private eye, an ex-hooker, a real estate agent, a stand-up comic, twenty guys clinging to the bottom rung of the social ladder and two cops who would likely be arresting them under different circumstances. Where else but in America?

After the prayer, everyone lined up next to Ox's grill where he had been labouring diligently to have a stack of everyone's favourite meat ready to go.

With plates filled, people drifted off to find a shady spot to enjoy their meal. For many of the tenants, I suspect this was the best they had eaten in months.

When everyone had finished and tossed their paper plates into the trash can, Jerry called us to the porch. It was entertainment time.

I held my breath. You never knew what Jerry the Joker might come up with. He once celebrated Mary Murphy's birthday with plastic dog poop on her front step and a plastic ice cube with a bug in her glass of punch.

He asked us all to stand, then nodded to Mr. Beasley who opened the door to the hotel.

I was shocked as old man Feeney came through the door proudly carrying the American flag. A white sailor hat sat jauntily on his head. Then I remembered the old guy was a World War II veteran and had served on a destroyer in the South Pacific. I also knew he had few possessions in his tiny sleeping room, so the hat he wore must have been very special for him to have kept it for so many years. Around the hotel, Feeney was the butt of so many jokes because of his ability to stop up the plumbing, and his aromatic deposits were legend. I suddenly saw Mr. Feeney in a new light, knowing he was one of the many who had given years of his life in service to his country, and we were standing here today because he and the men of his generation had fought to preserve our way of life.

Jerry asked us to join in the Pledge of Allegiance, and when we were finished, he asked us to take a seat.

He solemnly picked up a sheet of paper and began to read.

Tw'as on this date in '76
Many years ago
That five brave men told old King George
That he would have to go.

And thus was born our country
Free from tyranny.
A new land of prosperity
From sea to shining sea.

In years to come there would be others
Who'd take our freedom away.
But none could conquer this mighty nation
That was born this special day.

We cannot take for granted
The freedom won that day.
For evil men throughout the world
Would take our gift away.

So we must join together
With those who've served before
To keep those who'd do us harm
Away from our country's door.

We love our lives of freedom
But the cost is never free.
It's bought with the blood of heroes
Who've died for you and me.

So on this very special day
Let's pledge ourselves anew,
To fight the fight for freedom
For the red, the white and the blue.

So that those who follow in our steps
May someday stop and see
That we have given all we have
To preserve our legacy.

We must stand fast together
So that we might save
Those precious things that make us
The land of the free and the home of the brave.

I saw old man Feeney wipe a tear from his eye and he wasn't alone.

Jerry reached back, punched a button on his boom box and the air was filled with Lee Greenwood's beautiful, *God Bless the USA*.

We all sat in silence listening to the stirring words.

*And I'm proud to be an American
Where at least I know I'm free
And I won't forget the ones who died
Who gave that right to me*

*And I gladly stand up next to you
And defend her still today
Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land
God bless the USA*

It was the perfect ending to a perfect day. Good friends, good food, good fellowship.

I was feeling happy and proud to be with these people and enjoy the blessings of life that we have, then I looked up into the blue sky and I saw six white trails crisscrossing from one end of the horizon to the other, and dispersing into a hazy cloud.

Suddenly my euphoria turned into apprehension and I remembered the words of Wil Durant, "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within."

I didn't understand what was happening, and it scared me to death.



CHAPTER 15

With the holiday over, it was time to get back to work.

Although there was little chance we would find Louise Shipley, I had promised her mother I would try.

We knew from the time stamp on the video, the time Louise had left the sports bar, but because the parking lot camera had been damaged, we had no idea what kind of vehicle might have carried her away.

The spot we had found her cell phone led us to believe the vehicle, whatever it was, had travelled north on Blue Ridge Cutoff. Geno Ferelli at Missing Persons pulled up traffic cam footage of Blue Ridge for a thirty minute period starting from the time she left the hotel. Ox and I ran the footage in slow motion, looking for any sign of Louise.

"There!" Ox said, pausing the video. "See that black SUV? It's just like the one that followed us from the restaurant the other night."

"Can you get a plate?" I asked.

Ox twisted dials and viewed the SUV from every angle available on the video, but the license plate never came into view.

"Nope, can't get it. Without a plate, it could just be a soccer mom taking her kid to practice."

We continued scrolling and I spotted something. "Hold it right there. The old Chevy. Isn't that Paulie?"

Ox isolated the Chevy and adjusted for a close-up view of the driver. The picture was grainy, but there was no doubt it was Paulie the Pervert.

"So he's heading north, right by where the cell phone was tossed." Ox said.

"But it fits with his alibi," I replied. "He said he was going to Harvey's Tavern on Highway 40, and that's north."

"Pretty convenient," Ox observed. "Who was his alibi again?"

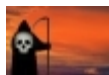
"Gus the bartender," Ferelli chimed in. "I gave him a call and he confirmed that Paulie was there."

"What's Gus's last name?" Ox asked, punching some computer keys.

"Grinder," Ferelli replied. "Gus Grinder."

"Well, whadda you know," Ox said, staring at the screen. "Mr. Grinder is on the state's sex offender list. Got busted for taking photos up women's dresses with a toe camera. Whadda you bet that Gus and Paulie are peeping buddies?"

"If Paulie nabbed Louise, it wouldn't be a stretch to think he might have shared his good fortune in exchange for an alibi," I said. "I think we should pay Mr. Grinder a visit."



Harvey's was the typical sports bar with TV screens tuned to the latest sporting events.

A huge guy was polishing glasses behind the bar.

Ox moved toward the bar. "Are you Gus Grinder?"

"Who's askin'?" Grinder replied.

"I am," Ox said, holding up his badge.

"Yeah, that's me. Whadda you want?"

"Paulie Spiegel. You said he was in here a few nights ago. That true?"

"Yep, Paulie was here. Stayed about three hours, then took off."

"And you both were here the whole time?"

"That's what I said. If you don't believe me, ask Junior. He was here too." Gus motioned to a guy already blitzed, slumping in a corner booth. "Junior! Me and Paulie was both here the other night. Right?"

Junior opened one eye and nodded, "Yeah, right."

"See!" Gus said, arrogantly. "Told you so."

I was pretty sure if Gus had asked Junior if he had seen the pink ponies in the bar, he would have answered 'yes.'

"Mind if we take a look around?" Ox asked.

"Look all you want," Gus replied. "I got nothin' to hide."

We poked around the back room of the bar and found nothing to suggest Louise Shipley had ever been there.

I had no doubt she had been abducted, but by whom? Was it by paid assassins to keep her from sharing secrets about Monsanto's involvement in the chemtrail conspiracy, or Paulie the Pervert, the twisted peeping Tom?

We might never know for sure.



When I got home, I checked my email. I hadn't done it for a few days because I had been totally wrapped up in getting things together for our Fourth of July bash.

There was a multitude of the usual, people wanting to give me money and notifications I had won this or that lottery, but the one which caught my eye was from Jack Carson.

It read, *"Hi Walt. I really wanted to meet with you in person to discuss some new developments in our case, but I knew you were tied up with family things. Hope you have a great time. FYI, I have been doing some digging online and I found sixteen Facebook groups with over 63,532 members, dedicated to getting the word out about chemtrails and geoengineering. It gave me a big lift to know I was not in this alone and that others have seen the handwriting on the wall, or to be more specific, in the sky. Once I get my story done, I'll post it on those sites. Think about it. If each of those people share my story with only 50 friends, over 3 million people will finally see the truth. Let's get together after the holiday. Jack."*

I definitely wanted to tell him what we had found, or rather what we hadn't found about Louise Shipley's disappearance, so I called his cell. It went straight to voicemail. I tried his home number and got an answering machine. Then, as a last resort, I called the number of his new burner phone. There was no answer.

I looked up the number, called the *Kansas City Star* and asked to speak to Jack.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carson isn't in." said a sweet young voice. She hesitated a moment. "Actually, he hasn't been in for two days. Have you tried his cell phone?"

I thanked her, hung up, and retrieved the last two days papers out of the recycle stack. I thumbed through both and discovered there were no bylines mentioning Jack's name. On a normal day, there would be at least a half dozen.

I put the papers away, climbed in my car and headed downtown to the *Star* building.

The city editor, Mike Gross, was a busy man, but took a few minutes to visit with me. I introduced myself and explained I had been working with Jack on a story, but couldn't reach him.

"Me either," he said, disgusted. "He's my #1 guy on the crime beat and he doesn't show for two days. I've had to send rookies out to get the stories. By the way, what story are working on with him?"

"The one about chemtrails and geoengineering."

"Holy crap!" he exploded. "Not that conspiracy thing again! He's come to me several times wanting to run the thing and I've nixed it both times. He's just wasting his time pissing up a rope and he's gonna get some very important people's panties in a wad. I told him to drop it and concentrate on the real stories. There's plenty of them out there, for Christ's sake."

It was obvious Mr. Gross didn't share Jack's enthusiasm about the story. I saw no need to press him further. "Do you mind if I look at Jack's desk?"

"Help yourself," he said, pointing to an empty cubicle, "but you aren't going to find anything. Jack worked on the run. Did everything on his laptop and sent his stories in by email."

I thanked him and strolled over to the cubicle. He was right. There was nothing there but a few pens, paper clips, a candy bar wrapper and a box with two stale donuts.

My next call was to Kevin. We had both been to Jack's apartment when Kevin found the listening device in the smoke alarm. I asked him to meet me there with his lock picks.

We knocked quietly, but there was no answer.

Kevin went to work with his picks and soon had the door unlocked. Pressing his finger to his lips to remind me someone was listening, we entered the apartment.

Everything was pretty much like we had seen it before. I suspected Jack didn't spend much time there. There were no signs of a struggle and no notes left for someone to find. We searched everywhere, but found no laptop. If it wasn't at his office at the *Star* and it wasn't here, it had to be with him, wherever that was.

We slipped out, pulling the door closed behind us.

Back in my car, I was overcome with a feeling of dread.

First, it was Dale Fox who had died in a mysterious car accident, then Frank Katz of a suspicious heart attack. Most recently, Louise Shipley had vanished, and the one thing they all had in common was that they were going to tell the world about a covert government operation spewing poisons into our sky.

Now it was beginning to look like Jack Carson was missing too.



CHAPTER 16

My next stop was back to Missing Persons.

Geno Ferelli looked up in amazement. "Jesus, Walt. What now? You're running me ragged."

"You're Missing Persons aren't you?"

"Yeah, so what?"

"So I've got another missing person, Jack Carson, a reporter at the *Kansas City Star*."

Ferelli smiled. "I'm way ahead of you. Took the report this morning from his city editor, a Mike Gross. He's really pissed. Wants Carson back on the job ASAP. I've already turned it over to Homicide."

"Homicide? Is Jack Carson dead?"

"Not that I know of, but it's probably a good bet considering what he'd been into lately."

I assumed Ferelli was talking about the conspiracy theory and said as much.

"Don't know nothing about that," he replied. "Talk to Blaylock. He'll give you the scoop."

Derek Blaylock was one of the best detectives in the Homicide Division. As I headed to Homicide, I thought about my five years on the force. He and I had worked numerous cases together and developed a mutual respect.

"Walt, good to see you. What brings you to Homicide?"

"Jack Carson. Ferelli said he sent the case to you. What's going on?"

"Ahhh, yes, Jack Carson. Good reporter, but he couldn't just report the news. He always had to dig a little deeper and often found himself in deep doodoo."

"Any particular case come to mind?"

"Absolutely! Carmine Marchetti, which is why Ferelli sent the case over to me. He figured if Carson had bought the big one, Marchetti probably had something to do with it."

"How so?"

"Marchetti has always been on our radar. Everyone in town knows he's one of the Dons in the Kansas City mafia, but we've never been able to pin anything on him. On the surface, he's clean, but we know his legitimate businesses are just a front for his illegal operations. Some snitch supposedly gave Carson a tip which would connect Carmine to the protection racket in Northeast, and he jumped on it like a duck on a June bug. Bottom line, the snitch mysteriously disappeared and Carson came up empty, except, of course, for the lovely Calinda."

"And who might that be?"

"That's Carmine Marchetti's little girl. Carson met her during his investigation, and rumour has it the two of them hit it off pretty well, if you know what I mean. You can imagine Carmine wasn't exactly pleased when he found out the guy who was trying to write a story about his illegal operations was banging his daughter."

"So you think Marchetti is responsible for Carson's disappearance?"

"That's the theory, unless you have something better."

"I might," I replied. "How much time do you have?"

"As much time as you need, my friend. Let's hear it."

I started at the beginning and told him everything I knew about the story Jack was working on and the three previous deaths we believed were connected to the plot.

When I was finished, he leaned back in his chair. "Walt, have you ever heard of Occam's Razor?"

I nodded knowing what was coming next. "Yes, of course I have. It says when you have two competing theories that make exactly the same predictions, the simpler one is the better."

"Very good. Now look at the situation from my point of view. The prediction is Jack Carson is dead. On the one hand, we have a mafia don who's really pissed because the guy has tried to out him and now he's doing the nasty with his daughter. On the other hand, we have a theory there is a clandestine government conspiracy involving the Navy, Air Force, the CIA, the NSA and God knows how many other alphabet organizations, who are intent on spraying poison into our atmosphere to control the weather, prevent the Russians from pelting us with ICBM's and allowing Monsanto to take control of the world's food supply. Is that about right?"

He was right. My story sounded ridiculous compared to his.

I just nodded.

"Good. Glad you understand. Dollars to donuts, poor old Jack is at the bottom of the Missouri River wearing concrete sneakers. We'll probably never know for sure, and Carmine Marchetti, if he's really involved, will get away scot free. That's just the way it works sometimes. Sorry, Walt."

"Yeah, me too. Any idea where I can find Marchetti?"

"Jesus, Walt! Surely you're not going to ---?"

"I've got to know for sure. I owe it to Jack. So are you going to tell me where Marchetti hangs out or do I have to dig it up myself?"

Blaylock just shook his head. "Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you. Most days he has lunch at Antonelli's on Baltimore."

"Thanks, I owe you."

"Walt, be careful. Marchetti doesn't mess around. I'd hate like hell to be dragging the river for your body, too."



I assumed Antonelli's was typical of the Italian restaurants in Kansas City. I didn't have much to compare to because I wasn't a big fan of Italian food.

The maître d' met me at the door. "One for lunch today, Sir?"

"Actually, no. I was supposed to meet Carmine Marchetti for lunch," I lied. "Has he arrived yet?"

He looked at me suspiciously. "No, Mr. Marchetti hasn't reserved a table today. Possibly you have the wrong day on your calendar."

"That must be it," I replied. "Thanks for your time."

It was almost noon and I was getting the munchies, so I headed to Mel's for a chicken fried steak.

I had just parked and was headed to the diner when a black van pulled up beside me and two men who looked like movie extras from *On the Waterfront*, hopped out. They came up beside me and one whispered in my ear, "Mr. Marchetti would like a word with you."

"Uhh, I was just going to have a bite of lunch, can I ---?"

He leaned in again and patted the bulge under his coat. "Mr. Marchetti wasn't asking."

"Got it," I replied.

He directed me to the van and I climbed inside.

The one driving turned and gave me a look. "Please buckle your seat belt."

I took his suggestion as a good sign. If I was on the way to the Missouri River, it probably wouldn't have mattered if I was buckled or not.

We headed downtown and pulled into an alley behind one of the multi-storied office buildings on Grand Avenue. The two goons escorted me to a freight elevator and punched the button for the penthouse.

As we headed to Marchetti's office, I was expecting to see a guy who looked like Marlon Brando's Vito Corleone character in the *Godfather* movie. Quite to the contrary, the man sitting behind the huge desk looked more like Frankie Laine, the old crooner from the 1950's.

I had expected a scowl, but he gave me a congenial smile and pointed to a chair directly in front of his desk. I sat, and the two goons, one on each side of me, took a step back.

"Mr. Williams, is it? So sorry I missed our luncheon date at Antonelli's. That's not like me."

Obviously news on the Italian grapevine travelled fast.

"About that," I stammered.

He held up his hand. "No need to make excuses. You wanted to talk to Carmine Marchetti, so here we are. Talk!"

I figured, *What the hell. I'm here. I might as well jump in with both feet.* "Thank you for seeing me. I'd like to talk to you about Jack Carson. He was a friend of mine and he seems to be missing. With all your connections, I just thought you might have some idea where he might be."

I wasn't sure what his response would be, but I was certainly unprepared for what followed. He looked at me for a moment like he couldn't believe what he was hearing, then burst into uncontrollable laughter.

When he finally composed himself, he gave me a sympathetic look.

"Very well said, Mr. Williams. Your friend is missing and you've come into my office to accuse me, in a very nice way, of course. What could possibly make you believe I had anything to do with his disappearance?"

I saw no reason to beat around the bush. "Rumor has it Carson was trying to get a story about your organization and in the course of his investigation, he met your daughter, Calinda, and there was, shall we say, a mutual attraction. I can't imagine you were pleased about such a turn of events."

This time his look was less amiable. "Mr. Williams, may I call you Walt?"

I nodded. What else could I do?

"Walt, this is not the roaring twenties and I'm not Al Capone in spite of what your friends at the precinct may have told you. I'm a businessman and I keep my nose clean. You probably already know there's not a single conviction on my record."

Obviously, Marchetti had done his homework and knew of my five years on the force. He undoubtedly knew way more about me than I knew about him.

I started to respond, but he raised his hand again.

"Walt, do you have children?"

I shook my head.

"Then it would be difficult for you to understand today's young people. They're so independent and they have so much technology at their fingertips. In answer to your question, yes, I knew about Carson and my daughter, and no, I was not pleased, but I was smart enough to know if I forbade her to see the man, it would only drive her away from me and into his arms. They would have found a way to communicate in spite of my wishes, so, as a father, I was hoping her infatuation would run its course. You came here wondering if I was responsible for your friend's disappearance, and here is my answer. I was not. My daughter is devastated and grieving horribly at this very moment. How do think she would feel about her father if she learned I had taken the life of the man she thought she loved?"

Marchetti was either a sincere father or the best liar I had ever seen, and given the circumstances, I wasn't about to question his veracity.

"Mr. Marchetti, thank you for seeing me and for your candor. Given what you've told me, I can now concentrate the search for my friend elsewhere."

"I'm so happy to hear that, Walt, and please give my regards to Detective Blaylock."

With that parting shot, he gestured to his henchmen who escorted me out of the room.

The black van returned me to Mel's parking lot, but somehow I no longer had the munchies. Being at the mercy of a mafia don can have an effect on one's appetite.

On the trip back to my car, I was thinking about what Marchetti had said, and if it was true, then I was back to the alternative theory of Jack's disappearance: a government assassin had taken him out so his story would never see the light of day. Blaylock could quote Occam's Razor all day long, but it didn't make the possibility less true.

As I headed back to my apartment, I racked my brain trying to figure out where to turn next. Jack Carson, along with the computer which held the story of the conspiracy, were both missing. With four people dead, all of whom were connected to the story, my better judgement told me to drop the case while I was still breathing, but I just couldn't let it go.

My cell phone buzzed, but knowing the accident statistics associated with talking or texting while driving, I ignored it until I pulled up in front of my building.

I reached for the phone and the message that flashed across the screen sent a chill up my spine. There was a picture of Maggie in front of the City Wide Realty office, and only two words, "STOP DIGGING!"

I was in shock, staring at my wife's photo, when the phone buzzed again. The next message had a picture of Maggie in front of our apartment, with the words, "BACK OFF!"

There was no question someone was sending me an ultimatum: forget about Jack Carson and forget about this stupid conspiracy theory or suffer the consequences. The consequences involved the person I loved more than anyone in the world. Whoever had sent the messages knew where Maggie worked and where she lived, and the implication was that I should drop the whole thing or Maggie, like the four others, could disappear at any time.

My breathing was labored and I had broken into a cold sweat. It took a good fifteen minutes for my heart to stop racing.

As soon as I had my emotions under control, I pulled back onto the street and headed to Arnie and Nick's place on Warwick.

I barged in and handed my phone to Nick. "I need to know who sent these. Can you help?"

He looked at the photos. "Jesus, Walt! This is serious stuff. Are you still working on the conspiracy thing?"

I nodded.

"Then if it's who I think it is, we're probably not going to find what you're looking for, but I'll try."

He examined my phone again, then punched some keys on his computer. A few minutes later, he looked up and shook his head. "Sorry, Walt. Burner phone. No way to trace it."

I had suspected that. "What if I hit 'reply' and sent a message back to them. Would they get it?"

"Maybe, maybe not. What usually happens is they'll use the phone once to deliver a message, then dump it so it can't be traced, but you can certainly try."

I grabbed the phone, hit 'reply' and typed the message, "I'm done! I'm out of it. Please don't hurt my wife."

I just hoped someone would see it.

On the way home, I had to consider two possibilities, neither of which gave me much comfort. If Carmine Marchetti was just feeding me a line of bullshit, and he had actually whacked Jack, the message could have come from him, or, it could have come from a black ops assassin who would have no problem adding one more body to keep the story buried.

Either way, I had already made up my mind I was through with the whole thing. I hadn't asked for this case and in fact, I had promised Maggie I wouldn't get involved, but then I did and she was the one whose life was in danger.

I vowed that as soon as she came home, I would tell her the whole story. Maybe we would even get out of town --- take a vacation --- until this whole ugly thing blew over.

That was my plan and I felt good about it.



CHAPTER 17

I was pleased with my plan and couldn't wait for Maggie to get home so we could plan our impromptu getaway. Maybe we would go to Branson and take in some shows, or even better, she had been bugging me about going on another cruise.

I wanted the evening to be perfect, so I chilled a bottle of Arbor Mist and whipped up my signature dish, tuna casserole. As soon as she got home, I would slip off her shoes, rub her feet and tell her how special she was to me.

I put some soft music on the CD player and waited for my sweetie to arrive.

Normally, unless she had a late showing, she was home by five, and like many old codgers our age, we had our supper between five-thirty and six. If she was going to be late, she would always call and let me know so I wouldn't worry.

At five-thirty, I was beginning to get a bit concerned and when I hadn't heard from her by six, I was in full blown worry mode.

I had the cell phone number of Doris, the receptionist at City Wide.

"Doris, Walt Williams here. I was just wondering if you'd seen Maggie this afternoon."

"Sure did. She got back from a showing about four-thirty and left right after that. Must have been just before five."

My next thought was she might have been in an accident, so I called dispatch at the precinct and asked about any accidents in Midtown between five and six. There had been none.

I was starting to panic, then it occurred to me, *Dumbass! Why don't you just call her cell phone?*

I dialled her number and it went straight to voice mail.

By this time it was six-thirty, and my worst fears were realized. Maggie wasn't coming home.

My mind began racing. I had sent the message saying I was out of the conspiracy business, but what if no one got it?

It was beginning to look like either Carmine Marchetti or some government assassin had taken Maggie and I had to consider both possibilities.

I thought about calling Ox, then I thought about calling Kevin, but the more I thought about it, it didn't make sense to get my best friend or my brother-in-law involved in something which might get both of them killed. I had gotten us into this mess, and it was up to me to get us out, or die trying.

Based on my visit earlier in the day, I figured my best bet was the government assassin.

Several times during our investigation, I had considered calling my half-brother, Mark Davenport. I didn't even know I had a half-brother until about five years ago when he arrived at our door unannounced. It turned out that he was the product of one of my father's dalliances in his younger days as an over-the-road trucker.

Back then, he was working with the FBI, but had since transferred to Homeland Security. We had worked on several cases together including the All Star game in 2012 when terrorists attempted to blow the place up.

I had his cell phone as well, so I made the call.

Looking back, my greeting probably wasn't the most pleasant, but I was beside myself with worry.

"Mark, this is Walt Williams and some of your goons have kidnapped Maggie and I want to know what the hell's going on!"

"Walt! Calm down. What in the world are you talking about?"

I hadn't called him before because the story sounded so far-fetched. I didn't want him to think I was a complete idiot.

I figured at this point it didn't really matter, so I laid out the whole story.

"Then this afternoon, I get these texts with Maggie's photo telling me to back off, and now she's gone. Level with me, Mark. You're in Homeland Security, for chrissake! Is there really any truth to these chemtrail theories?"

"I understand why you're so upset. I would be too if it were my wife. Let me make some calls and I'll get right back to you."

I hung up and paced the floor waiting for his call. A half hour later, the phone rang.

"Walt, Mark here. The stuff you're talking about is way above my pay grade, but I pulled some strings and called in some favours. The bottom line is that no one in the U.S. government is involved in Maggie's disappearance."

"You're absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely. I have it from the highest authority."

I couldn't help wondering exactly how high that was, and then remembered the B-613 group from the TV show *Scandal*, which operated independently, without government oversight.

"Thanks, Mark. I appreciate your help."

"Listen, Walt. If Maggie doesn't turn up, don't hesitate to give me a call. I'll do anything I can to help on this end."

After hanging up, it occurred to me Mark had never answered my question as to whether there was any truth to the chemtrail theories.

If Mark was to be believed, it must be Carmine Marchetti.

I loaded my revolver, stuck it in my belt and headed to Antonelli's restaurant.

I wasn't really sure what I was going to do when I got there, but I had to do something. I had no doubt that Carmine could have me squashed like a bug before I could get to him, but I really didn't care. If I couldn't find Maggie and get her back, it really didn't matter what happened to me.

I parked and barged into the restaurant. The maître d' tried to slow me down, but I pushed him aside and looked around the dining room.

I spotted Marchetti at a table in the back, a pretty girl on each arm, and the two goons I'd seen earlier were keeping an eye on the other customers.

I charged toward the table and was nabbed immediately by the two guards.

Marchetti waved his hand and I was brought to his table.

"Walt! Twice in one day. To what do I owe this rather rude intrusion?"

For the second time that day, I saw no point in beating around the bush.

"My wife, Maggie, is missing and I think you have something to with it."

I saw the confused look on his face. He motioned to the guards who pulled out a chair and shoved me onto the seat.

"Under normal circumstances," he said, wiping his mouth with a napkin, "I would be upset by what you have just done, but you've peaked my curiosity. Tell me more about this ridiculous accusation."

I told him everything that had occurred since I left his office and reached for my phone to show him the photos. The goons had me pinned to the chair immediately.

"Uhhh, just the phone," I stammered.

Carmine nodded and the goons released their grip which I suspected would leave bruises.

I handed Carmine the phone and he studied both photos.

"I can see why you would be upset. If this were my Calinda, I would be too."

Then he leaned forward. "Walt, look into my eyes."

I leaned forward and we were staring at one another just a few feet apart.

"Walt, listen to me carefully. I swear on my mother's grave I did not send these messages and I do not have your wife. Do you believe me?"

There was no question that he was sincere.

I considered my answer very carefully.

"Yes, I believe you --- for now, but if I find out you've lied to me, I'll be back."

"I can live with that," he replied, leaning back in his chair, "because I'm telling you the truth."

One of the goons whacked me on the head. "What shall we do with him, boss?"

"Let him go, of course. I like him. He's got one big pair of cojones for an old guy. I have to admire someone who would barge in here and disrupt the dinner of Carmine Marchetti. A man who would risk his life for the woman he loves deserves our respect. Good luck, Walt. I hope you find your wife."

He waved again and I was jerked to my feet and escorted to the front of the restaurant and shoved out onto the sidewalk.

I sat quietly in my car thinking about what had transpired.

Both Carmine and Mark swore they had nothing to do with Maggie's disappearance. Either one of them was lying, or there was another player in the game I was not aware of.

I headed back to my empty apartment. I had to drive very slowly because it was hard to see through the tears which wouldn't stop falling.



CHAPTER 18

Needless to say, it was a rough night.

I knew I needed to sleep because I would need my strength and my wits about me for whatever might happen the next day, but it just didn't happen. I tossed and turned, then finally gave up and just paced the floor, reviewing over and over what had transpired up to that point. I knew I was missing something, but I had no idea what it was.

As the first light of the morning came peeking through the window, I put on a pot of coffee. My stomach was too upset for my bowl of Wheaties, but I needed the caffeine jolt to wake me up.

I climbed into the shower and stood there until the water turned cold, hoping some detail would pop into my mind which would possibly give me a clue about Maggie's abductor, but nothing came.

I was drying off when the phone rang.

"Mr. Williams, undoubtedly you have been concerned about your wife. Let me assure you she is safe and unharmed --- for the moment."

"Who is this?"

"My name is not important. What is important is you do exactly what I ask if you want to see your wife again."

"Well, it's important to me. I need to know who I'm dealing with."

"Very well then. My name is Angel Alvarez. Now, shall we get down to the business of getting your wife back to you?"

"I have no idea who you are. What could you possibly want from me?"

"The computer, of course."

My first assumption was he was looking for Jack Carson's computer which contained all his chemtrail research.

"Look, I don't have Carson's computer. I never did. What makes you think I have it?"

Silence on the other end. "Who is this Carson person? I don't know him and I certainly don't want his computer. I want the one that your wife has hidden away."

"You want Maggie's laptop? If you have her, you must also have her computer. She always has it with her."

"Not her computer, you fool. The one that was given to her. Let's stop playing games. You will get that computer to me or you will never see her again."

"No, please! I honestly have no idea what you're talking about. Let me talk to Maggie. Maybe she can help me figure out what you're looking for."

I heard a disgusted sigh. "Bring the woman."

A moment later, I heard him whisper, "I will be listening to every word, so be very careful what you say."

A shaky voice came on the line. "Walt, is that you?"

"Maggie! Are you okay? Have they hurt you?"

"I --- I'm okay for now, but I'm so frightened."

"I know you must be. We'll get through this. We always have. Who is this Alvarez guy and what computer is he talking about?"

"Walt, this is all my fault. Remember my new listing --- Hector Ramirez' house which was seized by the DEU?"

"Yes, the Columbian drug guy. What about it?"

"If you'll recall, I had Consuela and her daughters clean the place from top to bottom. While they were cleaning, they found a secret compartment in one of the kitchen cabinets. There was a laptop computer inside. The drug guys just missed it. Anyway, Consuela brought it to me and I fully intended to turn it over to the DEU, but just got busy and it slipped my mind."

"So that's what he wants? Any idea what might be on the thing?"

"From what I've overheard, it has the record of all Ramirez' contacts, his suppliers and his dealers. Apparently Alvarez is planning to move into the Kansas City drug scene and needs that information."

"Enough!" Alvarez shouted in the background. "Tell him where you hid the computer."

"I --- I didn't hide it. Walt, the computer is in our office under my desk. It's in a brown paper bag --- just like it was when Consuela dropped it off."

I figured our conversation was about to be cut short. "Maggie, one more thing. Has Alvarez blindfolded you at all?"

"No, why do you ask?"

"Just curious. Maggie, I love you and I'll get you out of this --- somehow."

I heard Alvarez say, "Take her away!" Then he came back on the line. "So, Mr. Williams, now you know about the computer I want. It's very simple. I will exchange your wife for the computer. Bring the computer to a warehouse at --- ."

"Stop right there," I interrupted. "If you think I'm coming to a deserted warehouse, you're sadly mistaken. I'm more than willing to trade some stupid computer for my wife, but I need a show of good faith on your part. I need to know you're really going to let her go, so if you want this thing to go smoothly, I'll pick the spot for the exchange."

He thought for a moment. "Where do you suggest?"

"It has to be somewhere public --- somewhere with lots of people around --- the J.C. Nichols fountain on the Plaza. It's out in the open and there are plenty of witnesses. If you're on the up and up, we can make the exchange and no one will be the wiser."

"Very well," he conceded, "but remember this, those innocent bystanders you mentioned could easily turn into victims and I know you don't want that. If I even think I see a cop, you'll never see your wife again. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Good. I will expect you to arrive at noon, alone, no cops. Bring the computer, we'll make the exchange, and you and your lovely wife can have lunch on the Plaza."

"I'll be there."

When I hung up, I had a momentary sense of relief. At least I knew what I was dealing with. In a way, I was glad it was not a government assassin or a mafia hit man.

Then the feeling of relief turned into a feeling of dread. Alvarez had not been shy about telling me his name and he hadn't bothered to blindfold Maggie. I was sure Alvarez was not planning on leaving any witnesses who could identify him.

There was no way I was going to call the cops. I just couldn't risk it. I thought about calling Ox, but he's so huge, he doesn't exactly blend into the background, and if Alvarez had done his homework, he might even recognize him as an officer.

No, my best chance was with the old-timers I had used on many other occasions, Kevin, Willie and my dad. They were all old, but they were tough as nails and had been down this path before. I almost didn't call Mary Murphy, but I knew if she found out I had launched a rescue mission without her, she'd be pissed and not speak to me for a month. Actually, she was as formidable as any of the others on my team, having whacked an assassin with her baseball bat and shot an intruder who had threatened her with a switchblade.

I called Kevin first and asked him to meet at my apartment and bring a couple of extra guns from his stash. Then I called Dad and Willie. I told them to meet in my apartment as soon as I returned from the hotel with Mary in tow.

As I expected, she was almost giddy I had included her in our adventure. She grabbed her bat, took a couple of practice swings and declared she was ready for action.

When we were all gathered in my apartment, I shared what had transpired. Their first reaction was shock that Maggie had been abducted. Soon, the shock turned to anger and then to determination as we discussed how we were going to get Maggie safely away from the drug lord.

We decided Kevin would leave at eleven with Dad, Willie and Mary. That way they would already be at the fountain long before I arrived. They would fan out, blend into the crowd which was sure to be there, and have their weapons concealed, but ready if things went south.

When they were on their way, I checked under Maggie's desk, and sure enough, the laptop was there, wrapped in a brown paper bag.

I couldn't help but play the 'what if' game.

If the DEU guys had found the thing when they first searched --- if the Broker had given the listing to another agent --- if Maggie had turned it in the day Consuela brought it to our door --- none of this would have happened and Maggie would not be in the hands of a Columbian drug lord.

Then my mind switched gears and I did the same exercise with the chemtrail conspiracy. If Dale Fox hadn't contacted Jack Carson, both he and Jack would still be alive as well as Frank Katz and maybe even

Louise Shipley. But he did and now they were all gone, and for what? We were no closer to learning the truth about the chemtrails than when we started.

It is said that justice is blind, and indeed Lady Justice is depicted with a blindfold covering her eyes. It almost seemed in this situation, her eyes were covered to prevent her from seeing the truth, and yet, in spite of the blindfold, somehow she keeps the scale balanced. With the deaths of these four good people, the scale had been tipped in favor of the bad guys, and I couldn't help but wonder how she would balance things out.

I looked at the clock. It was eleven-thirty. I just had time to get to the Plaza for my date with destiny.

It's sometimes strange where the mind can wander. On my way to the Nichols fountain, I thought about Gary Cooper in the 1952 western classic, *High Noon*. His destiny was to face a gang of thugs at the very hour I was to face Angel Alvarez. Cooper was all alone. My comfort was knowing my people were there and would have my back.

I parked and walked a block to J.C. Nichols Park.

As usual, there were people all around, enjoying the fountain and the bright sunny day. There was a young couple with a baby in a stroller, a mom and dad trying desperately to keep their toddler from splashing in the water, and an older couple walking hand-in-hand. In the grassy park next to the fountain, a dozen men were engaged in a game of flag football.

Interspersed with this group were my four friends. Dad and Willie were huddled over a checker board, Kevin had set up an easel and pretended to paint, while Mary was just laying back in a lawn chair, catching some rays.

I had just entered the park when two vans pulled up to the curb on J.C. Nichols Parkway. Three men got out of each van. I assumed the one in the lead was Angel Alvarez. He came directly to me while his men fanned out around the fountain.

He looked at the package I was carrying. "That better be my computer."

"It is," I replied, "and it's all yours as soon as I have Maggie."

He motioned to one of the vans and a seventh man opened the cargo door. I could see Maggie inside. She looked frightened, but otherwise unharmed.

"Your wife," Alvarez said, pointing. "Give me the computer, then you may go to the van and take her."

I shook my head, "It's not going to happen that way. You bring her to me and we'll make the exchange right here."

"I don't believe you're in a position to negotiate, Mr. Williams," he replied, patting the bulge under his coat. "There are a lot of nice people here and I know you don't want to see any of them hurt. Now get to the van!"

"No, I certainly don't, and I'm sure you don't want any of your people hurt as well."

I looked around, assuming my little posse would spring into action, but to my dismay, each and every one of them were being held by one or more of Alvarez' men.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said with a sadistic smile. "I'm afraid your little ruse has failed. I knew you would try something and I've been following you all morning. Very clever idea, hiding your friends, but just not clever enough. Now give me that computer and we'll all just head to the vans and leave before some innocent bystander is injured."

Alvarez' men started pushing my friends toward the vans. Mary, of course, had no intention of going peacefully. She jerked her arm away from her captor.

"Your momma must be proud, you beatin' up on an old woman. If you didn't have your gun in my back, I'd show you a thing or two!"

The man just scoffed and gave her another shove.

I knew once we were in the vans, we were all dead meat. Alvarez had no intention of letting us go. I wasn't about to give him the satisfaction of a complete victory.

"Sure," I replied, "we'll go quietly, but there's something I have to do first."

"And what might that be?"

"This!" I replied, tossing the computer into the center of the fountain.

I saw the look of shock on his face and figured he would probably gun me down right where I stood, but after a moment, he composed himself.

"I had planned to make your demise as swift and painless as possible, but now you will die a slow and agonizing death as will your wife and friends. Now get to the van or I'll gun you all down right here, along

with these innocent people.”

Just as we all started moving away from the fountain, the twelve men playing flag football suddenly sprinted to our little group, and in an instant, Alvarez’ men were disarmed and their hands bound with plastic ties.

I heard a familiar voice. “I’m afraid, Senor Alvarez, that you’re not going anywhere but to jail.”

The voice was that of Carmine Marchetti.

“Good day, Walt. I hope I’m not intruding.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Quite the contrary. But how --- ?”

“Let’s just say you got my attention. I’m rather proud to say I have a reputation as a man not to be trifled with, and yet two times yesterday, you got in my face, first accusing me of murdering Jack Carson and then abducting your wife. Few men would have the audacity to do such a thing.”

“Sorry about that. I was at my wit’s end and audacity was about all I had left.”

“It served you well. After your last visit, I just had to know what you would do next, so just like Mr. Alvarez, I had you followed. Fortunately, my men spotted his men following you. ”

“You knew Alvarez?”

“I knew Hector Ruiz. He had come into my city with his Columbian drugs. I must say I was pleased when your Drug Enforcement Unit put him out of business. We had heard Alvarez was following in his footsteps. I simply put two and two together and surmised that your wife must have found something of value in her listing on Sunset Drive and that Alvarez had abducted her to get it back.”

“You don’t miss much, do you?”

“In my business, it’s important to be well informed.”

He looked at the bag in the fountain. “I suppose that’s what he was looking for.”

I nodded. “Laptop. It had all of Ramirez’ contacts, both his suppliers and his dealers.”

He looked at it wistfully. “Too bad it’s ruined. With that information, you could have put an end to the Columbian’s drug activity once and for all. It would have been good for my business”

“Probably still could,” I replied. “I might have copied the files on a thumb drive before I left the house.”

His face broke into a big smile and he clapped me on the back. “Well done! I knew I liked you.”

About that time, Maggie rushed to my side and threw her arms around me.

“Ahhh, yes,” Marchetti said, taking Maggie’s hand. “You must be Mrs. Williams, a very special lady indeed to have your man risk his life to save you.”

He bowed and planted a kiss on her hand.

Carmine was one suave Italian.

I gently removed Maggie’s hand. “Yes, she is special, and I want to thank you for what you did today. I owe you.”

“Nonsense! We both simply did what was right. Maybe someday the shoe will be on the other foot and I’ll need the assistance of a fine private investigator. Who knows?”

It wasn’t exactly comforting, knowing I was in debt to a mafia godfather, but at that moment, I was just happy we were all alive and in one piece. If Carmine wanted to call in my chit later on, I’d deal with it then.

I heard sirens in the distance.

“I took the liberty of calling your Detective Blaylock,” Marchetti said. “If you have things under control here, I think it might be best if my men and I were not here when he arrives. Too many questions, if you know what I mean.”

“I think we can handle it from here,” I replied, extending my hand. “Thanks again.”

“You’re most welcome,” he replied, giving my hand a firm shake.

After he was gone, Mary came huffing and puffing to where Alvarez was standing. She got right in his face. “This is for abducting my Maggie, you scumbag.”

Without another word, she planted her foot squarely between his legs.

He crumpled to the ground moaning and gasping for air.

Mary turned to the other seven and sneered, “Anyone else want a piece of this action?”

They all cowered in fear.

Just before Blaylock arrived, I pulled Alvarez into an upright position.

“I need you to answer a question for me.”

“Screw you,” he retorted.

“No problem. Mary, come over here. I think you need to have another conversation with Mr. Alvarez.”

"No! Keep that crazy woman away from me! What do you want to know?"
I showed him the photos of Maggie with the warnings to back off.
"Did you send these? Tell me the truth or I'll let Mary have her way with you."
He looked at the photos. "I've never seen those before. I swear!"
I almost wished that he had.
Someone had sent them, and I still had no clue as to who it might be.



EPILOGUE

I was out of the conspiracy business.

I had promised Maggie I would be, and I intended to keep that promise.

Someone out there had told me to back off with a not-so-veiled threat that if I didn't, something would happen to the one person I love more than anything else in this world. I had almost lost her to Angel Alvarez and I wasn't about to tempt fate again.

Even though I knew it was the right thing to do, I still felt a pang of guilt.

If the chemtrail thing was truly a conspiracy, the world needed to know about it.

A quote from Albert Einstein kept running through my mind. "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who stand by and do nothing."

I didn't want to be one of the ones standing by, but I couldn't help thinking about what happened to four others who tried to warn the world they are being poisoned.

One moment my rational self would say the conspiracy theory was nothing but a hoax, then I would look at the evidence again and have second thoughts.

Maybe the brake line on Dale Fox's car was worn and simply ruptured at an inopportune moment, preventing him from delivering hard evidence to Jack Carson.

Then again, maybe not.

Maybe Frank Katz' poor old heart just gave out on him before he could publish his revealing thesis. His doctor said he had a bum ticker.

Then again, maybe not.

Maybe poor Louise Shipley was done in by Paulie the Pervert and Gus Grinder just before she was to reveal Monsanto's connection to the chemtrails.

Then again, maybe not.

Maybe Jack Carson really is at the bottom of the Missouri River, compliments of mafia boss, Carmine Marchetti. After all, he was banging the godfather's daughter.

Then again, maybe not.

But even if we say all those maybes are true, there are still a lot of unanswered questions.

Who were the men who claimed they were from the university and took all of Frank Katz' papers, including his thesis?

Who broke into my home and planted a virus on my computer to destroy the copy of the thesis that Katz had emailed to me?

Who broke into Jack Carson's home and planted a listening device in his smoke detector?

Who were the men in the SUV who followed us home from the restaurant?

And most important to me, who sent the pictures of my wife, threatening her life?

Since I was out of the conspiracy business, I would probably never know the answers to these questions and they would haunt me for the rest of my life.

My one hope was the manuscript I had given to author Robert Thornhill.

He called one day, saying he was almost finished with the first draft of the novel he titled, *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy*.

I liked the name. I've always been a fan of Lady Justice, because somehow, she always finds a way, often quite an unorthodox way, to balance the scales of justice.

Maybe this work of fiction might be the very thing that would reach the masses with the truth. Few of us would take the time to read a boring scientific treatise on the subject or take seriously the rantings of a guy wearing a tin foil hat, but who doesn't like to lose themselves in a good mystery novel?

Thornhill claimed to have a broad fan base, and a marketing program that would put the novel in over forty thousand homes.

Surely there would be those who would glean the kernels of truth from the pages of his book.

He promised to send me an autographed copy when it was in print.

For me, the events of the past few weeks have changed my life forever.

Every now and then the verse from Lee Greenwood's song plays in my mind.

I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free.

When I think of what I've seen and heard, I wonder if that freedom is just an illusion. Are we really free when deadly toxins are forced upon us in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the vaccines that are injected into our bodies?

Every time I step outside I will look to the heavens for the white streaks that crisscross the sky from one horizon to the other, and wonder what witches potion is being sprayed that day.

Then I'll say to myself that the fluffy trails are simply water vapor frozen into ice crystals.

Then again, maybe not!



Conspiracy?

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Global Conspiracy?

What Do You Think?



Naarden, Holland



Canberra, Australia



Liverpool, England



Wales



Berlin, Germany



Amsterdam, Netherlands

LADY JUSTICE



AND THE CONSPIRACY TRIAL

A
WALT
WILLIAMS

MYSTERY
COMEDY
NOVEL

ROBERT
THORNHILL

LADY JUSTICE



**AND THE
CONSPIRACY
TRIAL**

A WALT WILLIAMS
MYSTERY/COMEDY NOVEL

ROBERT THORNHILL

Lady Justice and the Conspiracy Trial

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1. Fiction, Humorous
2. Fiction, Mystery & Detective, General

**LADY JUSTICE
AND THE
CONSPIRACY TRIAL**

CHAPTER 1

Jack Carson's mouth was dry, and beads of sweat dotted his forehead. Another look in the rear view mirror confirmed his worst fear --- they had found him.

Fifteen minutes earlier, he had spotted the black SUV trailing discreetly several cars back. He had taken a circuitous route through town hoping the SUV would continue on, but it hadn't. Its course had mirrored his own and now there was no doubt in his mind ---they had found him.

His nightmare had begun innocently enough several months ago when he had been contacted by a man who identified himself only as 'Falcon.' He claimed to be an Air Force pilot recruited for a program called 'Indigo Skyfold' whose purpose was to spray chemtrails of hazardous material into the atmosphere for both weather manipulation and defense purposes.

Falcon had chosen Carson, believing his status as the number one crime reporter for the *Kansas City Star* made him the perfect person to expose the government's covert agenda.

Like everyone else, Carson had seen the fluffy white ribbons crisscrossing the sky for years and thought nothing of it. Three clandestine meetings with Falcon changed his mind and ultimately, the course of his life.

The evidence presented by Falcon was so compelling, Carson could smell Pulitzer Prize and pursued every lead given by the pilot.

The last piece of evidence Carson needed for his story was a sample of the toxic chemical stew purported to contain aluminum oxide, ethylene dibromide and barium.

A fourth meeting was arranged where Falcon was to deliver a sample of the spray, but he never showed. Carson learned the next day that Falcon had died on the way to their meeting when his brakes conveniently failed resulting in a lethal accident.

Falcon had told Carson that he and the other pilots in the program had been admonished by superiors that their missions were a matter of national security and any breaches of confidentiality would have dire consequences.

There was no doubt in Carson's mind that Falcon's 'accident' was such a consequence, but there was no proof.

Falcon's demise wasn't the only suspicious death associated with the chemtrail conspiracy.

Carson had enlisted the aid of Walt Williams, a retired police officer who had opened his own private investigation service. Seeking further confirmation of the government's secret program, Williams had submitted their findings to Frank Katz, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, who was known to have an interest in the subject.

Katz was thrilled and proclaimed the new evidence offered by Falcon was the final piece of the puzzle he needed to finish a paper which he planned to submit for publication exposing the government's secret operation.

Frank Katz conveniently died of a heart attack before he could publish his final draft.

Equally perplexing was the disappearance of Louise Shipley, an employee of the chemical giant, Monsanto. This mega-corporation had been mentioned multiple times in the articles Carson had found, linking the company's development of aluminum resistant seeds to the poisons that had been sprayed and drifted to the earth over the years.

Shipley had come to Kansas City from Monsanto's office in St. Louis with information for Carson. Inexplicably, the young whistleblower disappeared the night before their meeting. Three people about to expose government secrets were dead or missing --- coincidence? Carson didn't think so.

After the disappearance of Louise Shipley, Carson had gone into hiding. He made one last stop at his apartment and never went back. He withdrew cash from his bank account and destroyed all his credit cards. He tossed his cell phone in a dumpster and bought a burner. He even abandoned his car in an underground garage and bought an old clunker, manufactured before the advent of GPS. He rented a cheap motel room under an assumed name and paid with cash.

He thought he had covered every possible contingency --- but they had found him.

As he checked the mirror again, his hand involuntarily went to the two manila envelopes in the seat beside him. One was addressed to Walt Williams and contained every scrap of evidence he had collected about the chemtrail conspiracy. He had decided that should he be caught, someone familiar with the investigation should have the information to continue the battle to expose one of the greatest deceptions ever perpetrated on the American people. The other was to Calinda Marchetti.

He wondered if he had acted too late.

Then, he saw his opportunity.

It was five in the afternoon and the going-home traffic had clogged the streets. The SUV was still two cars behind him. Just as he approached a busy intersection, the light turned yellow, then red. Before the cross traffic could pull into the intersection, he hit the accelerator and made an illegal left turn, barely missing an oncoming car.

He heard the horns of angry drivers, but he didn't care. The SUV was stuck until the light turned green, and would still have to make an illegal turn.

He swerved through the traffic and sped ahead until he spotted a multi-story parking garage. He drove inside and wound his way to the third level and pulled into a spot where he could see the traffic on the street below.

Carson breathed a sigh of relief, as minutes later, the SUV sped past.

When the SUV was out of sight, he relaxed for a moment and collected his thoughts.

Somehow, in spite of all his precautions, they were still on to him. He quickly concluded that his only course of action was to leave town, disappear completely, and start a new life somewhere far, far away from Kansas City.

But first, there was the matter of the two envelopes. He had done everything he could, and now it would be up to Walt Williams to carry on the investigation.

Looking both ways, he carefully ventured out of the garage and headed to the main post office on Pershing Road across from Union Station.

He pulled up to the curbside collection box, rolled down his window and slipped the envelopes into the slot.

Carson felt a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders as he drove back to his motel to collect what was left of his worldly possessions before heading out into the great unknown.

He took one last look around the room to make sure he was leaving nothing behind. Satisfied, he was about to close the lid to his lone piece of luggage when he heard car doors slam.

Peeking through the blinds, he saw the black SUV and heard footsteps outside in the hall. Quickly, he ran to the bathroom which faced the opposite side of the motel. He threw open the window hoping to escape, but two men with weapons drawn were covering the back.

His mind raced, hoping to find a way to freedom, but it only took a moment for him to realize it was over.

As he heard the door frame splinter, fear and panic turned to resignation.

He slumped down onto the commode to await his fate.

CHAPTER 2

"NO! Absolutely not! There's no way in hell I'm putting on a dress --- again!"

I couldn't believe that Ox, my former partner on the Kansas City Police Force for five years, and Kevin, my new partner in Walt Williams Investigations, would even suggest such a thing.

Five years ago, as part of an undercover operation, my captain 'volunteered' me to pose as a transvestite and frequent the Foxy Lady Lounge, a cross-dresser's haven that doubled as the headquarters for a nefarious cabal that was trying to take over Northeast Kansas City.

Although my brief venture into the world of cross dressing was a huge success, I was razed unmercifully by my fellow officers, and I'm told that embarrassing photos are still adorning the walls of the break room.

"But Walt," Ox pleaded, "Phil needs you."

"And it's good for business," Kevin added.

A series of muggings at the Foxy Lady had prompted Phil McCrevice, the owner, to seek help from the police.

The drag bar had been a fixture on Troost Avenue for years, and no one seemed to give a rip about the characters dressed in ladies garments who patronized the place --- until recently.

The incident that seemed to be responsible for the current attacks was the sensational story of the transitioning of Olympic athlete, Bruce Jenner to Caitlyn Jenner.

Apparently, the vision of Bruce, Olympic hero, on the Wheaties box, suddenly replaced by the photo of Caitlyn on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, was just too much to handle for some poor twisted soul.

After her gender identity was revealed in the *Vanity Fair* article, Jenner amassed over a million Twitter followers in four hours and three minutes, setting a new Guinness World Record. Four days later, Jenner was up to 2.37 million followers.

One of them, right here in Kansas City, was upset enough to take out his or her frustration on the patrons of the Foxy Lady.

Even though I had been retired from the force for almost a year, guess whose name came up when McCrevice asked for help.

Knowing we were still close friends, the captain had sent Ox as the department's emissary, hoping he could persuade me to participate in yet another humiliating undercover operation.

"You'll be absolutely safe," he said. "You'll be wearing a wire and we'll have eyes on you all the time."

"It's not my safety I'm worried about," I replied. "It's my dignity."

"Dignity be damned," Kevin interjected. "It's a job and a very lucrative one I might add. The department is offering a very handsome consulting fee, and if memory serves me, people aren't exactly busting down the door to hire two septuagenarian gumshoes."

"Easy for you to say," I replied. "You aren't the one trying to hobble around in high heels. Besides, it took me a week of shopping at every thrift store in town to find an outfit that didn't make me look like a bag lady."

At that moment, my wife, Maggie, poked her head into the room. Due to budgetary constraints, the office of Walt Williams Investigations was one room in our third floor apartment that also doubled as Maggie's real estate home office. Needless to say, privacy was practically non-existent.

"Not a problem. I have your 'Tina' outfit safely tucked away. You were so cute, I just couldn't part with it, so I boxed it up and had Willie store it in the basement. With a little freshening up, it should be good to go."

"Swell. Just swell."

It seemed that once again, my dignity was about to be sacrificed for the greater good.

Sometimes Lady Justice can be a cruel mistress.



The plan was pretty simple. When my transformation to 'Tina' was complete, I would simply drive to the bar, hang around for a while and leave. The mugger had attacked his previous victims on the way to their cars or to the bus stop a block away. I would be wearing a wire and both Ox and Kevin would be watching

my exit from the bar the whole time. The mugger's previous victims had been banged up and disparaged, but none were seriously hurt.

The metamorphosis of a seventy-two year old guy into a drag queen is not a simple process. We began the ordeal mid-day, knowing it would take all afternoon to get me looking halfway presentable.

Applying the makeup is always the most gruesome part.

Maggie has a box of cosmetic crap that she doesn't use anymore, but somehow it's perfect for me.

After I shave, the first thing she applies is some brown gunk she calls foundation. It's supposed to smooth out my complexion and cover any flaws in my skin. I noticed right away that it couldn't hide my waddle which had sagged significantly since my last transformation five years ago.

Next, she tackles my eyes. This is the really scary part.

She starts by ripping my eyebrow hairs out by the roots with a little tweezer thing, then she clamps my lashes with a pair of pliers. After my lashes are curly enough, she smears some blue stuff on my eyelids and comes at me with a sharpened pencil. I always cringe when she says, "Now don't wiggle or I'll poke your eye out."

Then she applies a dusting of powder so my nose won't shine. A girl certainly doesn't want that.

She finishes me off with a tube of lipstick called Dusty Rose.

"Here. Blot," she commands, handing me a tissue.

Grimacing, she stands back, surveying her work. "That's about as good as it's going to get."

Just what a girl wants to hear.

Makeup on, I'm ready to dress.

The undergarments are the biggest challenge.

It didn't take long for me to remember that Tina's silk undies and pantyhose are like cheap hotels --- no ball room. Mr. Winkie and the boys wasted no time informing me of their discomfort. I just hoped I wouldn't be singing soprano by the time this gig was over.

Bras can be tricky. Five years ago, I almost broke my arms trying to hook the damned thing behind my back. Then Maggie taught me the secret, hook in front, rotate to the back. Prior to that time, my experience with bras was primarily focused on unhooking. Now I have expertise in both installation and removal. Not many guys can say that I'll bet.

After stuffing the cups with pantyhose to fill out my 34B, I was ready to slip on my dress. I can still remember how difficult it was, picking out just the right dress. I recall standing in front of mirrors asking Maggie if certain dresses made my butt look big. I don't ever remember caring about how my butt looked when trying on trousers. I guess it's a girl thing.

I was pleasantly surprised that the dress still fit after five years. A testament to my healthy lifestyle.

Next to pantyhose, the shoes are the worst. After much shopping, we found a pair of women's shoes with two inch heels in my size. For most gals, I'm sure two-inch heels are no problem at all, but for me, it was like wearing ice skates. My ankles turned in and out and I staggered like a drunken sailor. I practiced for half a day before I could perambulate without crippling myself. I was surprised when I put them on this time and discovered I could actually walk. Maybe it's like riding a bike. Once you learn, it sort of sticks.

The crowning touch was my wig. Five years ago, I must have tried on a dozen until I found just the right one. Most made me look like Imogene Coca or Phyllis Diller, but I finally found one that gave me just a hint of Tina Turner, hence the name I adopted for my feminine persona.

The last thing to go on were my earrings. Maggie has pierced ears and there was absolutely no way I was getting my ears pierced. We finally found a pair of big dangly things that were screw on. I just had to be careful not to turn my head too quickly or I would poke out my eye.

At last, my transformation was complete.

At the risk of being called a male chauvinist pig, if this is what women must go through every day, I totally understand why they are often testy.

It was six o'clock when Maggie proclaimed that she had done all she could do. I was ready to roll.

I was to drive to the Foxy Lady, park a block or so away and just hang out, having a drink or two. If everything went as planned, the perp would accost me on the way to my car and we'd nab his sorry ass.

Maggie gave me a good-bye kiss and wished me well. As I stepped into the hall, I hoped with every fiber of my being that I could avoid a confrontation with the other residents of my three story building, but it wasn't to be.

My dad, John Williams, and his squeeze, Bernice, both 90, live in the two second floor apartments. Jerry the Joker and the Professor live in the two first floor units. Willie, my old friend and maintenance man lives in a studio apartment in the basement.

As fate would have it, I met Dad and Bernice on the second floor landing.

We all stopped and just stared at one another for a minute, then I saw a big smile spread across Dad's face.

"Holy crap!" he bellowed, falling into a laughing fit.

"John!" Bernice admonished. "You're being rude. Why are you laughing at this poor woman?"

"That's no woman," he gasped, trying to catch his breath. "That's Walt!"

Bernice came closer and squinted. "Oh my!" she exclaimed, clutching her chest. She grabbed Dad and the two of them laughed so hard they had to hold on to one another for support.

Naturally, the commotion brought everyone else into the foyer to see what was going on.

Dad couldn't wait to share his glee. "That's my kid," he giggled. "Thought I had a son, but looks like I've been wrong all these years."

Jerry and the Professor were about to add their two cents worth, but I raised my hand in protest.

"Go ahead and laugh, but for your information, I'm on an undercover operation in co-operation with the Kansas City Police Department. This is serious business."

For obvious reasons, they just weren't buying the 'serious' part.

"I love it," Jerry said. "I'm on my way to amateur night at the Comedy Club. I'm doing some Rodney Dangerfield stuff, so this fits perfectly."

He paused for a moment. "I knew a girl so ugly they used her in prisons to cure sex offenders. The last time I saw a mouth like that, it had a hook in it."

"Okay, enough! I'd love to hang around and continue to be humiliated, but I have important work to do at the Foxy Lady. I'm out of here."

"Ooooh," Jerry cooed. "The Foxy Lady, a drag bar. I've got some good icebreakers for you. What do you call a transvestite cow? A Dairy Queen, of course. What do you call a marathon where all the runners are transvestites? A drag race."

"Thanks for the support," I mumbled, hobbling down the stairs in my two inch heels.

Dad called out, "I'd say 'break a leg,' but you're probably going to do that anyway."

As I drove north on Troost, I recalled my previous encounters with the LGBT community. In addition to my previous dalliance at the Foxy Lady, Vince Spaulding, another member of the City Retiree Action Patrol, and I, were sent undercover at the Cozy Corner, a gay bar in midtown. We were completely out of our element, but fortunately, we met Larry and Mike who took us under their wings.

We became friends, and in fact, if it wasn't for them, Ox and I would have been blown to bits when the Avenging Angels bombed the Gay Pride Parade a few years ago.

I have always been a 'live and let live' kind of guy. I have never been judgmental of other people's lifestyles. Lord knows I have enough quirks of my own. I find it difficult to understand why I'm ridiculed because the only kind of wine I like is Arbor Mist. Maybe that's not quite in the same ballpark, so to speak, but you get the idea.

Those were the thoughts running through my head as I parked a block and a half from the Foxy Lady.

The dimly lit bar was pretty much as I had remembered it. On my first visit, I expected to see drag queens in sequin dresses and feather boas, but I soon learned that such extravagance was only found at the fancy clubs like the old Jewel Box Lounge.

I took a seat at the bar and ordered a margarita, one of the few alcoholic drinks I could tolerate, and on most occasions it was usually accompanied by a taco. I figured I should nurse it slowly. On the rare occasions when I've had two, Maggie had to drive home. To say I'm a lightweight would be an understatement.

Most of the patrons were couples huddled together at tables or occasionally on the dance floor. There were a few singles like myself scattered around the bar.

I had been there for about an hour when an old guy who looked like Marjorie Main from the old Ma & Pa Kettle movies slipped onto the bar stool beside me.

"Buy you a drink?" he asked.

Since I had been nursing my margarita, my glass was still half full.

"No thanks, I'm good," I replied trying to be polite.

"How about a dance?"

"Don't dance," I replied. "Two left feet."

Not to be deterred, he pressed on. "Do you believe in the hereafter?"

I recognized the line right away. It was from a Ruth Buzzi skit on Rowan and Martin's *Laugh-In* show from the late 1960's. He was definitely old enough to have seen it in person. I figured I should let him have his fun.

"Why, of course I believe in the hereafter."

He didn't skip a beat. "Then you probably know what I'm here after."

I tried to let guy down easy. "I'm sure you're a nice --- ahhh --- person, but I'm just not interested."

A look of disgust came over his face. "Really? I was trying to do you a favor. You're not exactly setting the bar real high you know."

I was through being nice. "Maybe not, but I'm not desperate enough to hook up with you. Now beat it!"

As he slid off the bar stool, he turned and gave me the finger.

"Is that your mental age or IQ?" I shot back. Real mature.

A moment later, I heard snickering in my earbud. I had forgotten that Ox and Kevin could hear everything being said. I just hoped they weren't recording it.

"Real smooth, Walt," Kevin quipped. "Playing hard to get, I see."

Evidently the other singles in the bar had seen my exchange with Ma Kettle and maybe figured it was my time of the month. No one else approached me the rest of the evening.

At nine-thirty, I whispered, "Maybe we should call it a night. There's nothing left of my margarita but melted ice and the bartender has asked me four times if I wanted another. I may be wearing out my welcome."

"Sounds good to me," Ox replied. "When you leave, don't be in a hurry to get to your car. Give the perp time to make his move."

"Will do."

My butt was asleep from sitting on the barstool for three hours and my legs were in a cramp. I'm sure I was a pathetic sight wobbling to the door in my two inch heels.

I stepped out into the night, yawned, stretched, and made my way slowly to my car. I tried to be oblivious to what was going on around me, but it was hard not to sneak a peek down the dark alleys I passed.

I just had to be confident that if I was accosted, Ox and Kevin would be Johnny on the spot.

Much to my disappointment, I reached my car without incident. I had hoped the perp would attack. I really didn't want to spend another night at the Foxy Lady.

I rummaged around in my purse as long as I could and actually dropped my keys, hoping to give the perp ample opportunity to strike, but no such luck.

Once safely in my car, Ox said, "Too bad. Let's pack it in for tonight. Maybe we'll have better luck tomorrow."

We said our good byes and headed for home.

I was fortunate to find a parking spot in front of our building. I was really pooped and my feet hurt from hobbling around in those ungodly shoes. I was anxious to wash all the gunk off my face in a hot shower and hit the hay.

I stepped out of my car and had just hit the lock button on my key fob when I felt something hard pressed against my back.

"Put your hands behind your back and don't move or this ends right here. Understand?"

The perp had changed his M.O. Instead of hitting me at the club, he had followed me home.

Not wanting to be found dead in a dress and wig, I readily complied. The perp bound my hands with a plastic tie and shoved me toward a car idling a half block away.

He opened the back door and shoved me inside.

"You're all mine, faggot, and now you're gonna pay."

My heart sank as he pulled away from the curb. Once I had said good night to Ox and Kevin, I disconnected my wire. The perp had me and nobody knew. I was on my own.



Jerry the Joker had just returned from his gig at the Comedy Club. All the spots in front of the building were taken, so he parked a block away.

He was halfway home when he saw Walt, still in drag, get out of his car. He was about to call out when he saw another figure accost Walt and press a shiny object against his back. He watched, horrified, as the man secured Walt's hands and pushed him in the opposite direction to a waiting car.

He knew immediately that something had gone terribly wrong with Walt's undercover operation.

He pulled out his cell. "John, something terrible has happened. Someone's taken Walt at gunpoint and they're about to drive away."

"Follow them, Jerry, and for God's sake, don't lose them. I'll get my pants on and be right behind you. As soon as I'm in my car, I'll call and get directions. In the meantime, call Ox and tell him to get his ass in gear."



The moment John Williams pulled away from the curb, he dialed Jerry. "Where are you?"

"Heading east on Armour, almost to Paseo."

"Did you get ahold of Ox?"

"He's coming, but he's at least fifteen minutes behind us."

"Shit! We've got to do something. Walt may not have fifteen minutes. Where are you now?"

"South on Paseo. The guy just pulled up in front of an apartment building at 4001 and they're going inside."

"Follow them, find out which apartment and wait for me. Oh, and call Ox and give him the address."

"What are you going to do?"

"No time. Just do as I say."



As we were driving, I thought about the perp's words, "You're gonna pay."

"You said that I'm going to pay for something. Do you mind telling me exactly what I'm paying for?"

"Are you kidding? Just look at yourself. You're a man, for chrissakes, and you're dressed like a two-bit hooker."

"I don't understand. Are you upset because you think I'm a hooker or because of my clothes?"

"The get-up, of course. I got nothin' against hookers."

That was good to know.

"So why is my outfit so offensive to you? I'm not hurting anyone."

"It hurts me. Barbara Walters' 'Most Fascinating Person of 2015,' *Time Magazine's* 'Person of the Year.' Give me a break."

Then it hit me, Bruce Jenner's transition to Caitlyn was definitely his hot button.

I was about to pursue the subject when we pulled up in front of an apartment building on Paseo.

"Okay, out," he ordered, "and no funny stuff or I'll ice you right where you stand."

Naturally, I complied.

Once inside, he bound me to a wooden chair and produced a straight-edge razor like barbers use.

"So, you guys want to be women? Well I'm going to help you with that. After all, you can't be a real gal with all that junk between your legs. I'm going to take care of that for you."

Seeing the sharp razor and hearing its intended use made my hiney pucker.

I tried to stall for time.

"I just don't get it. Why is this cross-dressing thing so difficult for you?"

"It's an abomination. It says so in the Bible."

After seeing the guy and his apartment, I seriously doubted he was a Bible-toting zealot.

"So you believe everything in the Bible."

"Well, sure."

"I think it says somewhere in there you're not supposed to eat pork, and I see a can of Spam on your counter."

He looked confused.

"The Good Book also says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Surely you know that if you do what you said, I'll bleed to death. So do you believe the Bible, or not?"

"I --- I don't know. You're messing with me and I don't like it."

"Look, uhhh, gee I don't even know your name."

"Jerome. It's Jerome."

"Look Jerome. I think I know what's bothering you. I'll bet Bruce Jenner, the Olympic athlete, was a hero of yours. I'll bet you even had the Wheaties box with his picture on it. Then he got hooked up with the Kardashians and ultimately wound up as Caitlyn. That had to be hard for you."

I saw a tear glisten in his eye. "Yeah, it was."

"You're not alone, Jerome. People are just people and sometimes our heroes let us down. Pete Rose was one of the greatest ballplayers of all time and he turned out to be a gambler. Does that mean we should start mugging ballplayers? Lance Armstrong won the Tour De France seven times and was stripped of his titles for doping. Should we start running all bikers off the road? It looks like our beloved Bill Cosby was a pervert. Should we start whacking all black men and comedians, or just black comedians? See what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, I see what you're doing, all right, but it don't change nothin'. I got a job to do and I'm gonna do it."

He came at me and lifted my skirt and I figured I was about to part ways with Mr. Winkie and the boys, when there was a knock on the door.

"Go away!" he shouted.

"It's the pizza guy," came the muffled reply.

"I didn't order no pizza. Now go away!"

"That's not what it says here. If I don't deliver this pizza I'm in big trouble. I might even get fired. Help me out here."

"Aww, shit," Jerome muttered. "You don't say a word or the pizza guy gets it too. Understand?"

I nodded.

Jerome opened the door and I distinctly heard my father's voice. "That'll be twelve dollars, please."

"But I didn't order no pizza."

"Isn't this 4001 Paseo, apartment 2B? Well somebody from here ordered a pizza. I guess it's the age old question, 2B or not 2B."

Leave it to my dad to quote *Hamlet* at a time like this.

"If I buy the damned pizza, will you go away?"

"Of course. I'm just a delivery guy trying to do my job."

"Hang on, I'll be right back."

Jerome went into another room and I heard him rummaging around.

Soon, he returned. "Here's twelve bucks. Now beat it!"

"What? No tip? Look, man, I'm just trying to earn a living. I got rent, a car payment. You know how it is. Can't you spring for a few bucks?"

I could see the steam coming from Jerome as he stomped back into his bedroom.

When he returned, he found himself staring down the barrel of Ox's .45.

My dad had stalled him just long enough.

After I had been freed and Jerome was in cuffs, Ox looked at the pizza box.

"Papa John's Pizza. Poetic justice. Walt's Papa, John, used a Papa John to save his kid. I love it!"

I was glad it was over and I vowed I'd never dress in drag again. Ox reminded me that was what I said the last time.

It wasn't what we had planned, but the good guys won again.

Lady Justice works in mysterious ways.

CHAPTER 3

Seeing a wacko come at your private parts with a straight razor can be quite unnerving, and having just endured such an experience, my plan was to lay low for a few days and decompress.

I didn't have that luxury when I was a cop. I was expected to be back on my beat the next day. Crime never takes a holiday.

That was one of the reasons I turned in my badge and opened my own P.I. business. No pressure. I am my own boss and if I want to take a few days off, well, who cares?

But it wasn't to be.

I had just crawled out of bed and was about to have my first cup of coffee and read the morning paper when the phone rang.

"Walt? Kevin here. Ox told me about your little adventure last night. Well done. Glad you're okay."

"Thanks, I ----."

"Listen," he interrupted, "if you're not doing anything today, let's hop up to the K.C. Expo Center. The Gun & Knife Show opens this morning and I need to stock up on some ammo. You probably do too."

"Well, actually ---."

"Good! I'll pick you up in a half hour."

The line went dead.

"Well, crap!" I muttered. "So much for a quiet day at home."

I put my paper aside, wolfed down a bowl of Wheaties and had just dressed and brushed my teeth when I heard him pull up in front of the building and toot.

As I slid into my seat, he said, "Should have called earlier. They're expecting a big crowd today."

The Expo Center is near the K.C. International Airport, about forty-five minutes north of the city. I had attended one other gun show there several years ago. It is a HUGE building and a hundred or more vendors have tables set up selling everything from pocket knives to military assault rifles.

"Thanks for coming," he said, fishtailing away from the curb. "It's a long ride up and back and I appreciate the company. Been needing to stock up on .45's for my Glock and .40's for my back-up. Are you needing ammo for that peashooter of yours?"

When I joined the force five years ago, I discovered that most of the officers carried the Glock .45. It was just too much gun for me. I had a nine shot .22 caliber revolver that I had hunted with since I was a kid. I was comfortable with the .22 and qualified easily with it. I was able to convince my captain that it would be much better to hit my target with a .22 than miss with a .45.

Needless to say, I was ribbed unmercifully by my fellow officers. They had been trained that if they had to shoot, they were to shoot to kill. They were quick to point out that if I was being attacked by some dope head high on PCP, my .22 would probably just piss him off, while a well-placed .45 would drop him in his tracks.

Fortunately, I only had to use my gun a few times during my five years.

The first time, I was in a dark basement being fired at by Lil' D, a black gangbanger. When he charged, I fired and hit him in the left nut. Now I don't care what the detractors say, if you shoot someone in the gonads with a .22 slug, it will get their attention.

Every so often, I go to the firing range and pop off a box of shells just to keep in practice. After my last session, I was definitely low on ammo. I called Walmart and two gun stores, but there wasn't a box to be found.

"Yeah, I could use a few rounds. I hope they have .22's. I haven't been able to find them anywhere."

"If anybody has them, they will."

We just chatted about guy stuff and were soon near the airport.

As we turned off the freeway onto the road that led to the Expo Center, Kevin let out a low whistle. "Holy crap!"

Not only was the huge parking lot adjacent to the Expo Center completely full, so was the grassy field across the street. Cars were lined up along the road from the Center all the way back to the freeway.

The show had opened at eight. It was just eight-thirty and hundreds of cars were scrambling for a place to park.

Fortunately, Kevin had a four-wheel drive. He pulled over the curb and parked on a grassy knoll a quarter of a mile away from the entrance.

"Looks like we hike."

At the entrance, a line had formed stretching fifty yards back. There was nothing to do but get in line and wait as it inched forward.

As we stood there, I looked at the people in the growing crowd. I had expected to see redneck types in flannel shirts and overalls, and militia types wearing camo, and, sure enough they were there. But at least half the crowd were women and ordinary folks you might see at the bank or the supermarket.

I had heard that the recent terrorist attacks and the administration's threats to make gun ownership more difficult had spurred gun sales, but I had no idea it was to the extent we were seeing here.

When we were finally inside, it was wall-to-wall people.

There were vendors selling knives, ammo, camping gear, rifles, shot guns and tasers, but the tables drawing the most attention were the ones selling handguns. People were lined up three deep looking at everything from tiny .22 Beretta's to Dirty Harry's huge .44 Magnum.

I chuckled when I saw a poster with a photo of the president and a caption that read, 'Gun salesman of the year.'

We were worming our way to an ammo table when Kevin tapped me on the arm.

"Isn't that your dad and Bernice?" he asked pointing down the aisle.

Sure enough it was.

We pushed our way through.

"Dad! What in the world are you two doing here?"

He was a surprised to see us as we were to see him.

"Hi Son. What are we doing here? Same as everybody else --- buying guns. Look what we got."

He opened a shopping bag. "Got me a Smith & Wesson M&P Shield, 9mm. Ain't she a beauty? Got Bernice a .32. Not as much recoil."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "But --- why?"

"Why? Do you really have to ask? San Bernardino. Does that ring a bell? Fourteen killed and twenty-two injured --- at a party, for chrissakes. Paris. Terrorists killed 130 people, including 89 at a theatre. It's getting scary as hell out there. If Bernice and I are at the supermarket, and some black gangbanger, or ISIS towelhead terrorist or some piece of white trash comes in shooting up the place, I don't intend to be standing there with my finger up my butt."

It was comforting to hear that Dad was an equal opportunity bigot. Profiling was no problem to him at all.

"And what about last night? My son was in trouble and all I had to help him was a pepperoni pizza and a prayer that I could stall the wacko until Ox got there. That's not going to happen again."

"But Dad, what do you and especially Bernice know about semi-automatic weapons?"

"Never too late to learn, Son. We're taking instruction at the shooting range and have signed up for the Conceal and Carry class next weekend. Just barely got in. Forty people signed up."

"Swell," Kevin whispered in my ear. "Just what we need. Two ninety-year-olds running around Walmart packing heat."

"Dad, we should talk about this."

"Nothing to talk about, unless you want to go to the range and practice with me and Bernice. Besides," he said, holding up his shopping bag, "no refunds. All sales are final."

I was about to protest more, but he cut me off.

"I'd love to stay and chat, but we've gotta run."

He walked a few feet, stopped and turned. "Oh, by the way. A manila envelope came for you the other day. It was too big for the mailbox so the postman left it on the floor. I picked it up and was going to give it to you the next time I saw you, but the next time was when you were in drag. You sorta blew my mind and I forgot. Sorry. Remind me and I'll give it to you when we're both home."

With that, he grabbed Bernice by the arm and they disappeared into the crowd.

"Well, I know I'll sleep better knowing Bonnie and Clyde are armed to the teeth," Kevin quipped.

I just shook my head, wondering how I was going to keep Dad and his moll from maiming each other.

We finally worked our way to the ammo table and made our selection.

The guy who came to ring up our purchase did a double take. "Kevin? Kevin McBride? Is that you?"

Kevin gave him the once over. "Mark? Mark Greenway. Well I'll be damned. How long has it been?"

"Too long, old buddy." He looked at his watch. "You guys got a few minutes? I need a break. Let me ring you up and let's go to the coffee shop and catch up."

As we headed to the coffee shop, Kevin filled me in. "I met Mark at a gun show in Phoenix and bought some stuff from him for my P.I. business out there. We hit it off and had a few good times together."

After the three of us were seated, I remarked, "I can't believe how busy it is. There must be a thousand people here."

"It's been gangbusters all year. In September alone, the FBI's National Instant Background Check System processed almost 1.8 million firearms related applications. That's a 23% increase over the highest September ever. It's estimated that twenty million guns were purchased in 2015."

"Holy crap! I wonder how many guns are out there all together."

"The *Washington Post* estimates as high as 360 million. Our citizens are better armed than those of any other country in the world."

"Yeah, but what good are guns if you can't get ammo," Kevin said. "You're in the business, Mark. Any truth to the rumor that the government is buying up big chunks of our ammo?"

"The *Denver Post* ran an Associated Press article confirming that the Department of Homeland Security has issued a purchase order for 1.6 billion rounds of ammunition. That's not the military, mind you, it's Homeland Security. Based on previous conflicts, that's enough ammo to fight a hot war for twenty years. It's estimated that Homeland Security has purchased 2.11 billion rounds since 2012. That's enough firepower to kill a third of the world's population. So the question is, why does a domestic agency need that many bullets?"

"I don't suppose it's to keep us from getting them," Kevin said.

"That's what fifteen congressmen wanted to know. Of course, Homeland Security denied it, but one congressman wrote that the extraordinary level of ammunition purchases seems to have created an extreme shortage of ammunition to the point where many gun owners are unable to purchase any. I've got connections with most of the big suppliers, and I've had difficulty getting enough stock for my gun shows."

Kevin and Mark shot the breeze for another twenty minutes before Mark declared he'd better get back to his booth.

As we were leaving, I looked at the swarms of citizens leaving with bags filled with guns and ammunition, fearing for their safety in light of the recent terrorist attacks, and fearing that their government was primed to take away their Second Amendment rights.

I remembered Dad's words when I asked him why he'd bought guns for himself and Bernice. "It's scary as hell out there."

I really couldn't argue the point.

CHAPTER 4

The next morning, I had just retrieved my newspaper when Dad stepped into the hallway.

"Morning Son. I figured that was you. Here's that envelope I picked up the other day. Sorry I forgot about it. Hope it wasn't important."

"I doubt it," I replied. "Probably just promotional crap from some advertiser. Listen, about those guns you bought ---"

"Save it, Sonny," he interrupted. "It's a done deal. Coincidentally, Bernice and I are heading to the shooting range to get the feel of the things. Care to come along?"

I could see I was wasting my breath. "Just promise me you'll be careful."

"Ohh, right! This coming from the senior citizen who has been abducted, thrown off a roof, nearly blown to bits and shot in the ass? You're a good one to give advice."

Then he softened a bit. "Don't worry. I haven't got ninety years under my belt by being stupid."

I wished them well and headed back to my apartment.

I poured a cup of coffee and took a closer look at the oversize manila envelope. I figured it was probably filled with laundry detergent or the latest feminine hygiene product. Then I noticed that there was no advertising on the backside or even a return address on the front.

My curiosity piqued, I found a pair of scissors in the drawer and snipped off the end.

A moment later my worst nightmare came pouring out on the table.

There were tapes, USB thumb drives, documents and photos. On top of it all was a handwritten note.

"If you're reading this, it means they have found me. There are only two possible outcomes. I will make every effort to disappear and start a new life far away, but there is a very good chance I won't make it out of town. Either way, I have done all that I can do. The contents of this envelope contain everything I have uncovered about the government's chemtrail conspiracy. I hate laying this burden at your feet, but now it's up to you to expose this horrendous program that is filling our skies with poison. Good luck! Jack Carson."

I sat back in shock and just stared at the stuff as if it were deadly poison, because in fact, that's exactly what it was.

A few months ago, I received a call from Jack. He called me hoping I could get some information from Ox, my former partner, on a vehicular accident he had worked the night before. The victim, Dale Fox, or Falcon, as Carson knew him, was an Air Force pilot who had supposedly been flying missions whose purpose was to spread deadly chemicals into the atmosphere for both weather manipulation and military defense. Falcon was ready to expose the government's clandestine program.

The whole thing sounded hokey to me until Carson shared the details of three previous meetings he had with Falcon. Dale Fox was on his way to a fourth meeting, supposedly bringing a sample of the stew being sprayed, when his car went off the road.

Naturally, Carson suspected foul play. I pressed Ox for more information and the CSI team determined that Falcon's brake line had ruptured, but there was not enough evidence to support that the line had been deliberately cut.

Carson was livid, believing that Falcon had been killed to prevent him from talking, and vowed to continue his probe.

I was curious enough to enlist Kevin's help to break into Falcon's apartment where we found photos of the planes used in the missions and the huge tanks in their bellies that held the chemical stew.

Naturally, I passed the information on to Carson.

The photos aroused my curiosity enough that I showed them to Frank Katz, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, who had been referred to me as someone deeply interested in the chemtrail phenomena.

Professor Katz was ecstatic when shown the photos and declared that they were the last piece of information he needed to finish a paper about the chemtrail conspiracy which he planned to publish in several scientific journals.

Like Falcon, Frank Katz conveniently died before his paper could be published.

Two people connected to the conspiracy were dead, but they weren't the last.

The chemical giant, Monsanto, had been mentioned often as a partner in the conspiracy. One of the agents supposedly being sprayed into the air was aluminum, and anything heavier than air eventually falls to earth. The accumulation of aluminum in the soil is a deterrent to normal crop seeds, so Monsanto applied for and was granted a patent for aluminum resistant seeds.

Louise Shipley, an employee at the Monsanto headquarters in St. Louis, contacted Carson and came to Kansas City with the intent of blowing the whistle on Monsanto.

Shipley disappeared the night before her meeting with Carson.

Soon after that, Carson himself disappeared. I was determined to find him and was vigorously pursuing leads until I received a text with a photo of Maggie going into her real estate office with a caption that read, "Stop digging!"

Later, I received another text with a photo of Maggie in front of our apartment building. That text read, "Back off!"

It didn't take a rocket scientist to interpret the sender's message. If I continued to hunt for Carson and pursue the chemtrail conspiracy, Maggie, the most important person in my life, would disappear just like the others.

That was enough for me. I knew I was in way over my head and I was through.

No one knew what had happened to Jack Carson or had even heard from him --- until today.

Since that day, every time I go outside and see the trails crisscrossing the sky, I think about the people that lost their lives trying to bring the truth to the American people.

I think about a quote from Dresden James, *"When a well-packaged lie has been sold gradually to the masses over generations, the truth will seem utterly preposterous and its speaker a raving lunatic."*

I hate the fact that I know the truth and am powerless to pursue it and share it with others, but for me, nothing has changed. There is absolutely no way anyone will listen to a seventy-two year old private investigator, and even if I thought there was a chance anyone would, there is no way in hell I'd risk the life of the person I love the most.

I stuffed everything back in the envelope, taped it shut and locked it in my safe. As I spun the dial, I muttered, "Sorry, Jack. I just hope you got away safely."



Needless to say, I was upset.

I tried to read, I flipped on the TV, but I couldn't get Jack's words out of my mind. *"Now it's up to you to expose this horrendous program that is filling our skies with poison."*

He had passed the baton, but I just couldn't run the final lap.

Then I thought of something. Before Frank Katz died, he emailed me a copy of the paper he had planned to publish.

Someone broke into our apartment and corrupted my hard drive, destroying the paper, but not before I copied it on a USB drive.

Knowing the document had most likely cost the professor his life, there was no way I was going to try to get it published myself.

Then a thought occurred to me. There are fictional novels published all the time with themes of government conspiracies and corrupt politicians. If there was some way the information in Frank Katz' paper could be published in a fictional format, maybe people would get the message without somebody else getting whacked.

I knew just the guy for the job, Robert Thornhill.

I had met the author at a craft show. He had a booth displaying his twenty volume mystery series. The craft show typically drew a crowd of several thousand, and we had learned that terrorists were planning on detonating bombs from one of the hundred or so booths in the show. Thankfully, members of our K-9 corps sniffed out the bombs, before they could be detonated. The terrorists made a run for the exit. One of them ran toward an exit that would take him right past Thornhill's table. Timing his move just right, Thornhill upset his table, sending a hundred slick paperbacks into the path of the fleeing terrorist. The perp went ass over elbows on the slick books and due to Thornhill's quick thinking, we got the guy in cuffs.

We became friends, and when I thought of the fictional novel idea, I contacted Thornhill.

We met and Thornhill agreed to get started on the book. Two months later, I received a signed copy of *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy* in the mail.

The fictional story contained every detail in Frank Katz' paper. All the programs that had been uncovered, Indigo Skyfold, Project Cloverleaf and the HAARP installation in Alaska, were woven throughout the book. Everything was there. All a person had to do was read it, then go outside and look up into the sky, and realize that sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.

I had called Robert to thank him, but I hadn't really had a chance to visit with him in person since the book was published.

This seemed like a good time.

I called Robert and we agreed to meet at Mel's Diner.

Since both of us were regular customers at the diner, Mel had our orders on the grill the minute we walked in the door.

We chatted briefly between mouthfuls of hamburger steak and chicken fried steak, and when our plates were empty, we got down to business.

"Robert, I loved the book. How have sales been?"

"Not too bad, actually. It hit #1 on Amazon a few weeks after it was published."

"Congratulations! The subject matter was pretty heavy. How has it been received?"

"I'll show you," he replied, opening his laptop.

He punched in his author page on Amazon and clicked on *Conspiracy*. I was surprised to see that readers had rated the book 4.8 out of 5 stars.

"That's fantastic. What are their comments?"

He scrolled down the page to the reviews.

One read, "*Robert Thornhill has no fear when it comes to tackling enormous issues. He once again took on a very delicate and controversial subject, tackled it from all sides, exposed the inner workings of a conspiracy, and escaped cleanly out the other side. If this book doesn't get you thinking about what is going on in our world, then you need to take off the blinders and look up.*"

Another read, "*Lady Justice and the Conspiracy may be the most controversial yet. It makes me wonder what is happening in our country and the world that we don't know about. A true five star read.*"

A third read, "*Outstanding! Very clever how the author weaved truth into a book of 'fiction.' Wake up, people. The truth is in this book.*"

"Wow! That person certainly got the idea," I said enthusiastically.

Then I had a sobering thought. "If people like the book so much and are seeing the truth, why isn't something happening? Why aren't people up in arms? I just don't get it."

Thornhill shook his head sadly. "I know you're disappointed and so am I, but honestly, we're not the first to try to sway public opinion with a book of fiction."

"Really?"

"Have you ever heard of Robin Cook?"

I shook my head.

He started tapping keys. "He's a medical doctor and author. He's written dozens of books with medical themes. Here's why he says he writes, 'Cook says he chose to write thrillers because the forum gives him an opportunity to get the public interested in things about medicine that they didn't seem to know about. He believes his books are actually teaching people.'

"You should read *Acceptable Risk*. It's about the dangers of taking anti-depressant and mind altering drugs. It's scary as hell, but people just don't care. It's estimated that one in ten Americans use anti-depressants regularly."

"I see what you're saying."

"Then there's Michael Crichton," he said, tapping again. "Another best-selling author trying to wake up the public with his fiction. In *State of Fear*, he takes on eco-terrorists and climate change and presents volumes of evidence that climate change is another government smoke screen to cover up what's really going on."

"Maybe chemtrails."

"Maybe so, but the point is, Walt, Robin Cook has sold over 400 million books and Crichton has sold over 200 million, way more than *Conspiracy* will ever sell, and what has that accomplished? Nothing really, as far as swaying the public is concerned. People just don't care."

That statement reminded me of the words of my first floor tenant, Professor Leopold Skinner, when I asked him why more people don't care. "Apathy, the curse of modern society. Why do only fifty percent of the voting population cast their votes in a presidential election? Frustration, as in you can't fight city hall. The government is just too big and powerful. Complacency, as in I'm doing all right, why rock the boat."

I thanked Robert for his time and hard work and promised we'd stay in touch.

Four people were dead or missing, our attempt to sway the masses with fiction had failed, and now Jack Carson had dumped the problem right in my lap, and I had no idea what I was going to do.

Actually, I did know what I was going to do --- nothing!

CHAPTER 5

I needed a break --- from crazy guys with razors, and more importantly, from the contents of the manila envelope locked away in my safe.

When Maggie got home, I asked her if she had any buyers or listing appointments for the weekend. Thankfully, she did not, and when I suggested a few days away, she was more than enthusiastic.

One of our favorite retreats is Branson, Missouri, the entertainment capital of the Midwest. Tucked away in the Ozark hills, Branson is the perfect place for old codgers like us who grew up in the 50's. Among the hundred or so shows available are tributes to Ritchie Valens, Chubby Checker, The Platters, The Drifters and of course, Elvis. For me, a trip down memory lane is the perfect balm to sooth my troubled soul, and I was anxious, as the old Ronnie Milsap tune suggests, to *Get Lost in the 50's Again*.

From Kansas City, it's a good four hour drive, and one of the things I enjoy along the way is stopping at one of the little towns along Highway 13 for lunch.

I particularly enjoy this because country restaurants add an additional category to the five major food groups, gravy.

I'd be willing to bet that not one restaurant on the Country Club Plaza has gravy on their menu, but every country restaurant has at least two kinds, brown and white.

Another big difference between city and country eateries is the green beans. Country green beans melt in your mouth because they have been simmering in a big pot with bacon or ham hocks for hours. City green beans crunch. I'm sorry, but beans just shouldn't crunch.

Every country restaurant has a daily special. It might be fried chicken, pot roast or ham and beans, and you can usually have two pieces of chicken, a whopping serving of mashed potatoes smothered in gravy and soft green beans for around five bucks.

Then there's the pie, the kind with three inches of scrumptious merengue on top. You don't find pies like that in most city restaurants because they're lovingly baked by someone's grandma.

You can always tell the best country restaurant, because the parking lot is filled with pick-up trucks.

Our first day in Branson, we did all the usual tourist stuff. Maggie likes to stroll through the dozens of stores that sell quilts and other authentic Ozark handmade crap, and what woman doesn't like hunting for bargains at the Outlet Mall?

That evening, we bought tickets to the Legends in Concert, and were treated to performances by The Blues Brothers, Johnny Cash, Tina Turner and Elvis. All in all, a good day.

We have a tradition that every time we come to Branson we take a side trip to Big Cedar Lodge, a resort about a half hour south of town. We were introduced to the place a few years ago when we attended a real estate retreat, and fell in love immediately.

Nestled in the hills next to a mountain stream, the accommodations are rustic and every room or building is adorned with stuffed creatures of every kind.

My favorite building is the Devil's Pool restaurant. They have a breakfast bar with biscuits and sausage gravy to die for.

The Devil's Pool was the first stop on our day's agenda.

We were stuffed to the gills, when our server presented us with the check.

"I hope you folks are going to stop by Top of the Rock while you're out this way."

Top of the Rock was a golf course along Highway 65 adjacent to Big Cedar Lodge.

"Probably not. Neither of us golf."

"Ohh, I guess you don't know about the additions Johnny has made."

She was referring to Johnny Morris, the Missouri billionaire, who owns the Bass Pro Shops, Big Cedar Lodge, Dogwood Nature Park, and Top of the Rock, among other things.

"No, we don't. So what's new?"

"A few months ago, The Lost Canyon Cave Nature Trail and the Ancient Ozarks Natural History Museum were opened. You really should check them out."

The Lost Canyon Trail wound around through the forested Ozark Hills and included a trip through an underground cave complete with waterfall. The best part was that it was taken in a golf cart that I could drive myself.

The trail was beautiful. As it wound around through the hills, squirrels chattered at us from their woody perches, cardinals flitted from tree to tree, and we even saw a red fox scamper for cover as we rounded a bend.

A gentle breeze whispered through the tall oaks and the gurgling of the mountain stream was just the tonic needed to sooth a troubled soul.

I was more relaxed than I had been for days --- until we emerged from the forest cover and the first thing I saw was a half dozen fluffy trails stretching from one horizon to the other.

In an instant, my euphoria turned to melancholy. It was like a punch in the gut, knowing that the planes were spewing a toxic stew of aluminum oxide, ethylene dibromide and barium that would eventually fall to earth polluting and changing forever, the natural beauty we had just enjoyed.

I was so disheartened, I was ready to call it a day, but thankfully, we did not.

At the end of the trail was the museum. It was huge, over 35,000 square feet.

I picked up a brochure and read, "*Created to celebrate the fascinating history and stunning natural beauty of the Ozarks, the Ancient Ozarks Natural History Museum features artifacts, images and interactive exhibits that chronologically walk you through the development of the Ozarks. As you explore the museum, you will learn about the people and animals that have inhabited the region for over 12,000 years. Bass Pro Shops and Top of the Rock founder Johnny Morris was so amazed by the exhibits at the Chicago Field Museum that he commissioned the same design team to help create the displays you'll find here. Featured attractions include carbon-dated skeletal remains of a woolly mammoth, a saber tooth cat, a giant ground sloth, and prehistoric cave bears.*"

Sure enough, there were all kinds of prehistoric creatures that once inhabited the Ozarks, but the exhibits that fascinated me most were of the Indians indigenous to the area. Room after room was filled with arrowheads, pottery, and artifacts of their daily lives.

Photos of the early tribes intrigued me most. Along with the photos, were words of wisdom attributed to famous Indian leaders.

As I read, I soon discovered that these so-called primitive people had a far greater understanding of our place in the world, than do the bureaucrats spewing poisons into our skies.

In 1854, Chief Seattle spoke these words, "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The perfumed flowers are our sisters: the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices of the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man --- all belong to the same family.

"The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath --- the beast, the tree, the man. They all share the same breath.

"What is man without the beasts? If all beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.

"Teach your children that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know: The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.

"Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Tears came to my eyes as I read the words of this ancient sage. A hundred and sixty years ago, he could not have envisioned huge silver birds flying from coast to coast spreading poison across the land, and yet he knew that the air was precious and not to be defiled. He understood that if men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves, and that is exactly what is happening as the poisons being spewed into the air fall to the ground.

I moved on to another saying of Black Elk of the Oglala Lakota tribe, "We can no longer rule over the beasts of the earth and seek dominion over our environment. We human beings are not privileged beings who are above or separate from the world. We are part of the landscape and everything and with this awareness comes humility and the gift of harmony. All beings are to be respected, for all have souls. In truth, we depend on all of the creatures of this world. For in order to survive, we humans must consume plants and animals and life must be taken so that we can live. It is only with this awareness that we learn humility and find balance."

The people behind the chemtrail conspiracy were pulling out all stops to harness Mother Nature and have dominion over our environment, and in the process, were destroying the very thing they were trying to harness. Their toxic brew of aluminum, barium and ethylene dibromide was affecting every living creature, causing irreparable damage by impairing brain, heart, and liver function. People curious about the increased incidence of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and a host of other disorders, need only to look up and see the dirty streaks across the sky.

On the next placard were the words of Sun Bear of the Chippewa Tribe. "I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow man."

Given the tensions in our country between the races, between the haves and have nots, between the gays and straights, and a host of other differences, and the pollution that our air, water and land is enduring, Sun Bear's words make our current state of affairs a mockery.

It was totally incredible to me, that these so-called savages had a far better understanding of man's place and role in the world than the schmucks that are running things today.

One last poem by Chief Dan George touched my heart.

The beauty of the trees,
the softness of the air,
the fragrance of the grass,
speaks to me.

The summit of the mountain,
the thunder of the sky,
the rhythm of the sea,
speaks to me.

The faintness of the stars,
the freshness of the morning,
the dew drop on the flower,
speaks to me.

The strength of fire,
the taste of salmon,
the trail of the sun,
and the life that never goes away,
they speak to me.
And my heart soars.

I wanted my heart to soar, but instead, it was heavy. I had come to the Ozark hills seeking refuge from the thoughts that were troubling me, but as we headed back to Kansas City, I knew in my heart that the contents of the manila envelope locked away in my safe, would continue to haunt me.

CHAPTER 6

The next day, I was still in a funk.

My brief commune with nature and reading the wisdom of the ancient ones had rekindled my desire to expose the government's clandestine program. I knew the means to that end were locked away a mere six feet from where I sat, but I also knew that once I started down that path, my life and the lives of everyone I loved would be in jeopardy.

The jingle of the phone interrupted my melancholy thoughts.

"Walt? Kevin here. We need to talk. I'll be there in a half hour."

I was about to protest, but the line was dead. It looked like I'd be speaking to my brother-in-law whether I wanted to or not.

True to his word, Kevin was sitting in my office thirty minutes later.

"Okay, what's so important? Do you have a new client for us?"

He paused for a moment. "Well, I hadn't thought of it that way, but yes."

"Great! Anyone I know?"

"Actually, you do. It's me."

Now I was really confused. "Okay, let's hear it."

He grinned sheepishly. "I asked Veronica to marry me. We're getting hitched."

I nearly fell out of my chair.

After not seeing him for fifty years, Maggie's brother, Kevin, appeared at our door dying of kidney failure. He was hoping that Maggie would be a match and donate a kidney, but when that didn't work out, Kevin figured his days were numbered.

At the top of his bucket list, was his intention to dip his wick a few more times before he was sprouting daisies. I wasn't much help in that department, but Willie still had contacts from his days on the street. After a few well-placed phone calls, Kevin and Veronica hooked up for his death bed tryst.

In a surprising, almost miraculous turn of events, a kidney became available and Kevin got a new lease on life.

To everyone's surprise, Kevin and Veronica became an item. I had heard about May-December romances, but Kevin was in his seventies and Veronica was a voluptuous blonde nearly half his age. It was no big secret why Kevin was attracted to Veronica, but her attraction to him was a mystery.

Our little circle of family and friends are not judgmental, and soon Veronica was an integral part of our little clique. She even did some undercover work with us on a couple of our cases.

"I --- I don't know what to say," I stammered.

"You could start with congratulations."

"Of course, congratulations! But I'm curious and if you don't mind me asking, why marriage? Not to be rude, but given your age ---."

"Actually, it is rude, but since you're my partner and brother-in-law, I'll tell you. Veronica's old man ran off when she was five. Her mom was a druggie and couldn't keep things together, so Veronica was in one foster home after another. She was on her own at seventeen. She's never had a real home or a stable relationship -- until now.

"What we have together, and all of you having taken her under your wings, are the only family she's ever known, and we want to make it a permanent thing. Yeah, I know I'm an old coot, but I figure I can give her another ten years before I'm in Depends and drinking Ensure, and that's good enough for her."

"I'm happy for you, Kevin. Maggie will be too."

"Thanks, but there is a problem. That's why I'm here. I need your help."

"I don't understand. Why do you need me?"

"There's one big cloud hanging over my head that has to be cleared up before we can get married."

"What's that?"

"Manny Sorveno."

I knew immediately what he was talking about.

When Kevin was a kid, he got mixed up with the wrong crowd and was riding along with Bugsy, one of the mob's enforcers, when a collection went bad and a shopkeeper was murdered. The cops weren't

interested in kids like them. They wanted to nail bigger fish, so they got Kevin and Bugsy to testify in exchange for witness protection.

As a result, Sammy 'Scarface' Sorveno was convicted and eventually died in prison.

Sammy's son, Manny, never forgot who had ratted out his father, and when Kevin came out of hiding looking for a kidney, Manny found him and was determined to settle the score.

Manny kidnapped Maggie, hoping to draw Kevin into a trap, but in the end, it was Manny who died in a hail of bullets.

"What in the world could I possibly do?"

"Come on, Walt. You know the mob. They don't forget things. Manny was looking for me for fifty years to get revenge. I was the one responsible for Manny getting whacked and I just don't want Veronica hurt if they come after me."

"It's been what --- a year and a half since Manny was gunned down? Don't you think they'd have knocked you off by now if that was their intent?"

"Maybe, maybe not, but I don't want to take the chance. If it was Maggie, would you?"

I saw his point. "So what do you want from me?"

"Carmine Marchetti. I want you to talk to him and see where I stand."

I couldn't believe what he was asking.

It was no secret that Marchetti was the godfather of the Kansas City mob.

Under normal circumstances, I would stay as far away as possible from guys like him, but not long ago, I had not one, but two encounters with the Don.

The first was right after Jack Carson disappeared. Rumor had it that Carson was working on a story about the mob's protection racket when he met Calinda, Marchetti's daughter, and much to Carmine's chagrin, they fell in love. For some reason, I threw caution to the wind and confronted Marchetti who vehemently denied having anything to do with Carson's disappearance.

Shortly after that, I received the two texts with Maggie's photo warning me to back off. When she was abducted, I confronted Marchetti a second time. He swore on his mother's grave that he had nothing to do with Maggie's abduction.

In retrospect, my bravado in confronting the mafia boss was probably not the smartest thing, but in the end, it worked out. Marchetti was amused by my audacity and curious as what I would do next.

Maggie had actually been abducted by Angel Alvarez, a Columbian drug lord. Maggie had taken a listing on a house seized by the Feds. The woman who had cleaned the place for Maggie found a computer with all the Columbian's drug contacts and information. Alvarez had taken Maggie and offered to trade her for the computer.

In the end, he had no plan to release Maggie and was in the process of taking both of us when Marchetti's men intervened, saving our lives.

I'll never forget Carmine's words when I thanked him. "Nonsense! We both simply did what was right. Maybe someday the shoe will be on the other foot and I'll need the assistance of a fine private investigator. Who knows?"

He was letting me know, in a not too subtle way, that I was indebted to him. Not a comforting thought.

"You want me to talk to Marchetti and ask him if you're on his hit list?"

"Something like that."

"Come on, Kevin. That's like picking at a scab. You just might be making an old wound bleed again. Like I said, if they wanted you dead, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"That may be true, but I just can't take the chance. Will you do it or not? Think of it as your wedding gift to me."

As much as I hated the idea, it looked like I'd be asking for another chat with the godfather of the Kansas City mafia.



In spite of our recent encounters, Marchetti and I weren't exactly best buds. He didn't share his personal cell number with me and we certainly weren't Facebook friends. Someone told me he often dined at Antonelli's Italian restaurant, and that's where I found him on my previous visits.

It's probably not a wise move to interrupt a gangster during his meal and try to have a conversation while his spaghetti is getting cold, but I didn't know what else to do.

The first time, I just barged in and soon found myself in a hammerlock, compliments of two of his ever-present bodyguards. I didn't want to make that mistake again.

As soon as I entered the restaurant, I asked the maitre d' if Mr. Marchetti was dining today. When he answered in the affirmative, I gave him my card and asked him to present it to the Don. He didn't seem exactly thrilled, but he complied.

A few moments later, one of Marchetti's goons appeared. "You've got two minutes," he growled.

As usual, Carmine had a drop-dead gorgeous girl on either side.

A big smile crossed his face when he saw me. "Walt Williams, my favorite gumshoe. Always glad to see you, even though it always seems to be while I'm trying to enjoy my meal."

I thought about suggesting we exchange email addresses, but then thought better of it.

"Thank you for seeing me. I appreciate it."

"So to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"Well, this may sound a bit strange, but I'd like to talk to you about Manny Sorveno."

"Ahh, the dear, departed Manny. What about him?"

"I'm sure you probably know that Manny was after Kevin McBride who testified against his father, and that Kevin was involved in the gunfight that killed Manny."

"And if my memory serves me correctly, you were involved in that gunfight as well," he said smiling.

I certainly hadn't expected that.

"Uhhh, yes, I might have been," I replied, suddenly apprehensive.

"You're probably wondering why you and your partner are still walking around, me knowing what you did. In a word, Manny was a punk. From what I hear, old Scarface was a stand-up guy, but Manny couldn't be trusted. I knew he wanted my job and I was always looking over my shoulder wondering when he was going to make his move. Frankly, you two knocking him off was a big load off my mind."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"So tell me again why you're here."

"Kevin wants to get married, but he wouldn't if he knew he had a price on his head."

Marchetti grinned, "I love you two guys. You're both willing to piss me off to protect the women you love. That's rare these days."

He whispered something to one of his goons who departed to the kitchen.

The goon returned a few moments later with a bottle of wine.

"Here," Carmine said, handing me the bottle. "This is a Chateau Montelena Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, 2010. Give it to Kevin and tell him congratulations for me. He has nothing to worry about."

I thanked him, and as I turned to leave I heard him say, "That's two, Walt. Don't ever forget."

It was a not so subtle reminder that I was in his debt twice over and that scared me more than the apes who escorted me out of the restaurant.

CHAPTER 7

Needless to say, Kevin was relieved that his name was not on some gangster's to-do list.

Once he had the green light to proceed, word of their impending nuptials spread through the building like a plague.

Maggie was on the phone to Veronica immediately, offering her services as a wedding planner. The Professor, a confirmed bachelor, reckoned that marriage was the high sea for which no compass had yet been invented. Jerry shared that getting married is like buying a dishwasher: You'll never have to do it by hand again. Bernice dropped some hints to Dad who quickly responded, "Don't even think about it!"

For me, this surprising turn of events proved to be a welcome distraction from the manila envelope in my safe. But once the hubbub died down, I was right back to my melancholy musing.

Finally, I gave in. I hadn't really examined the contents of the envelope closely. Once I determined what was in it, I tucked it away immediately hoping that if it was out of sight, it would be out of mind, but that certainly hadn't been the case. I reasoned that I owed it to Carson to at least see what evidence he had found.

Included in the envelope were mini-cassettes with recordings of his three interviews with Falcon where the Air Force pilot described his participation in the program known as Indigo Skyfold. Also on cassette was his

interview with Kristen Meghan, the military scientist whistleblower who was silenced by her superiors for finding and attempting to expose the chemical stew being spewed into our skies.

There were photos of the unmarked planes supposedly used to disperse the chemicals, parked in the Pinal Air Park at Marana, Arizona.

There were many articles on HAARP, the massive high frequency antenna array in Alaska that had been linked to not only weather modification, but also military deterrence.

None of this was new to me. I had discussed all of these things with Carson as well as Professor Katz. They were all part of Katz' paper that I turned over to Thornhill, who covered each one admirably in his novel, *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy*.

Then I spotted a document labeled 'Shield.' This was something I hadn't seen before.

The document was purported to be an interview with a scientist involved in Operation Shield, whose official capacity was in direct research of atmospheric issues in relation to pollutants.

The name of the scientist was not revealed to protect his identity which I totally understood. He was referred to only as 'Deep Shield,' obviously a play on 'Deep Throat,' from Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men*.

According to Deep Shield, scientists back in the 70's were concerned about the depletion of the ozone layer which protects us from the sun's damaging ultra-violet rays. They calculated that unless something was done, the ever-increasing damaging rays would eventually bring an end to civilization as they knew it.

Hence, Operation Shield was born. It was a global program whose purpose was to fill our skies with enough aluminum and barium to shield us from the damaging UV rays, but not enough to block the sunlight needed for warmth and photosynthesis.

This was exactly what Falcon described as Operation Indigo Skyfold.

Deep Shield said that while the USA and Russia were the primary contributors to the program, many European Union Nations and members of the United Nations contribute to one extent or another.

To insure that the spray is not used for purposes other than climate control, the spray canisters are distributed in a triple-blind operation, so no nation knows exactly where their particular batch was manufactured.

When asked, Deep Shield acknowledged that he had signed a non-disclosure agreement and had been warned that the program was a matter of national security and any breaches would have dire consequences.

A final entry indicated that Deep Shield had committed suicide. The method used was a hose run from his car's exhaust pipe into the closed car in his garage. His wife found his body and said that there was no suicide note.

Another whistleblower conveniently dead or missing along with Falcon, Frank Katz, Louise Shipley, and maybe Jack Carson.

The reference to all of the countries participating in Operation Shield made me think about the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris from November 30th through December 12th of 2015.

I Googled the conference and read that 196 representatives had attended. That represented pretty much every country in the world.

My first thought was that climate change due to the emission of greenhouse gasses must be real for so many countries to participate. Then I remembered Thornhill said Michael Crichton had written a book, *State of Fear*, in which he totally debunked the idea of global warming.

My curiosity was aroused, so I went online and ordered the book from Amazon.

In it, Crichton presented chart after chart showing annual temperatures from 1930 through 2000. While there were certainly changes from year-to-year, when taken as a whole, the charts did not support the notion that the temperature had increased over that seventy year span.

I loved his explanation that made a mockery of the whole global warming concept.

"You've all heard the claim that something called 'global warming' is occurring because of an increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. But what you haven't been told is that carbon dioxide has increased by only a tiny amount. They'll show you a graph of increasing carbon dioxide that looks like the slope of Mount Everest. But here's the reality. Carbon dioxide has increased from 316 parts per million to 376 parts per million. Sixty parts per million is the total increase. Now that's such a small change in our atmosphere that it is hard to imagine. How can we visualize that?"

"Imagine the composition of the earth's atmosphere as a football field. Most of the atmosphere is nitrogen. So, starting from the goal line, nitrogen takes you all the way to the seventy-eight yard line. And most of what's left is oxygen. Oxygen takes you to the ninety-nine yard line. Only one yard to go. But most of what remains is the inert gas argon. Argon brings you within three and a half inches of the goal line. That's pretty much the thickness of the chalk stripe, folks. And how much of that remaining three inches is carbon dioxide? One inch. That's how much CO2 we have in our atmosphere. One inch in a hundred-yard football field.

"You are told that carbon dioxide has increased in the last fifty years. Do you know how much it has increased, on our football field? It has increased by three-eighths of an inch – less than the thickness of a pencil. It's a lot more carbon dioxide, but it's a minuscule change in our total atmosphere. Yet, we are to believe that this tiny change has driven the entire planet into a dangerous warming pattern."

If what Crichton said was true, why in heaven's name would the whole world be up in arms and hold a two-week conference hammering out a strategy to limit the emission of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gasses?

Then a thought occurred to me.

What if this conference wasn't about carbon dioxide at all? What if it was just a cover for the real agenda -- geoengineering and weather manipulation?

I pulled out the photo of the HAARP installations worldwide that Louise Shipley had brought to Kansas City.



There were installations in every country that had participated in the Paris Conference, the US, the UK, Europe, Russia, China, and more.

I needed another set of eyes to see what I was seeing, and tell me whether I was on to something or way out in left field.

I knew just the people to talk to, Arnie Goldblume and Nicholas Thatcher.

To say that these two men were suspicious of the government would be an understatement. They were the founders of a group known as the 'Watchers.' Their stated purpose was to be a watchdog organization keeping an eye on government shenanigans.

When Jack Carson first approached me about the chemtrail conspiracy, I visited with the two of them in their office on Warwick Boulevard. They confirmed that they had been preaching against the trails of poison for years, but with no success. After all, the fluffy white streaks across the sky had become so commonplace over the years that the average guy on the street paid them no attention, and who in their right mind could ever consider the possibility that our government was poisoning our planet on purpose?

I gave them a call, and as usual, they were glad to have me stop by.

After exchanging pleasantries, I showed them what I found in Crichton's book debunking global climate change, and asked them their opinion of the Paris Conference.

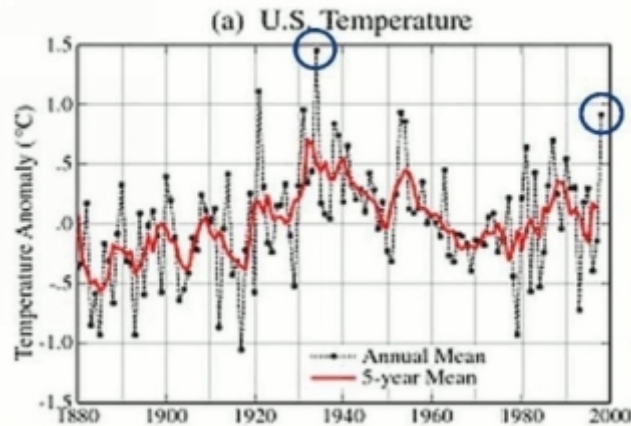
Arnie smiled, "As usual, Walt, you're right on target. In order to make sense of it all, let's look at the definitions of weather and climate."

He pulled out an old dictionary. "Weather is the state of the atmosphere at a given time and place, with respect to variables such as temperature, moisture, wind velocity and barometric pressure."

He flipped some pages. "Climate, on the other hand, is weather conditions prevailing in an area in general or over a long period. Nick, get me the NASA chart."

Nick rummaged through a file cabinet and handed Arnie a document.

"Take a look at this, Walt. It looks very similar to the charts in Crichton's book."



"This was published by NASA in 1999, and James Hansen, a top climate scientist wrote, 'Empirical evidence does not lend much support to the notion that climate is headed precipitately toward more extreme heat and drought.'"

"But I don't get it," I protested. "I listened to the State of the Union address, and the president bragged on the Paris Conference as one of his proudest achievements."

"Really?" Nick replied, pulling a newspaper from the file cabinet. "Listen to this. It's an article by Charles Krauthammer of the *Washington Post Writers Group*, reprinted in the *Kansas City Star* on December 22nd, 2015, ten days after the conference ended. 'Yet the climate deal brought back from Paris turns out to be no deal at all. It is, instead, a series of carbon-reducing promises made individually and unilaterally by the world's nations. No enforcement, no sanctions, nothing legally binding. What the climate change conference produced instead was hot air. China promises to **begin** reducing carbon emissions fifteen years from now. India announced it will be tripling its coal-fired electricity by 2030. Meanwhile, the president is effectively dismantling America's entire coal industry.'"

"So what do the both of you think the conference was really about?"

"We think the same as you," Arnie replied. "The real agenda of the conference was not climate, but weather. The climate of our planet is not changing appreciably, but the weather certainly is! Droughts in California, record snowfall in New England, a super-hot El Nino, tornadoes and hurricanes in the winter. And it's all happening because countries all over the world are seeding the sky with chemicals and heating thousand square kilometers of the ionosphere to over 50,000 degrees."

I shook my head. "It's unbelievable that our government can stand before the entire nation and tell bold-faced lies."

"Oh really?" Arnie sneered, "You mean the same government whose FDA said there was no cancer-causing arsenic in chicken, but now says there is, but it won't hurt you? The same government that switched the water supply in Flint, Michigan, from Lake Huron to the brackish Flint River to save a few bucks, and now the children are suffering from irreversible lead poisoning, dooming them to lower IQ levels, behavioral problems, growth delays and other neurological ailments? That government? And speaking of water, why after all these years and study after study showing that fluoride has no positive effects on our teeth, and is, in fact, a deadly poison, is it still injected into over 60% of the nation's water supply?"

Arnie had made his point.

"And did you also know," Nick interjected, "that this conference in Paris was the twenty-first time the nations had gotten together like this. Certainly enough time to co-ordinate a global geoengineering program."

"Speaking of that, what do you know about Operation Shield?"

Arnie breathed a long sigh. "Operation Shield. The poor goobers who conceived this operation really believed that 89% of all species would become extinct and humanity would struggle to last two more generations unless they could find a way to plug the growing hole in the ionosphere and shield the planet from the sun's ultraviolet rays. So they started spraying and zapping. Never mind that what they were spraying was dangerous. In fact, your 'Deep Shield' stated they knew that the heavy metals and polymers they were spraying could cause as many as two billion deaths worldwide, but given the supposition that the very future of humanity was at stake, two billion was an acceptable risk. The ends justified the means. So now, after years of global terraforming and geoengineering, they have created a monster. As the old saying goes, 'you shouldn't mess with Mother Nature,' and that's exactly what they have done, completely altering the earth's weather pattern. And to add insult to injury, they spew their propaganda about global warming due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gasses to cover their butts. Unbelievable!"

I could feel my blood starting to boil. "The American people need to know they're being duped and poisoned. Why isn't someone doing something? Why aren't people angry as hell?"

"Good question," Nick replied. "The information is certainly out there. The Internet is full of websites crammed with proof of what is going on, but no one seems to care. In fact, the Italians have just posted an hour-long video about chemtrails and geo-engineering. Unfortunately it's in Italian, but there are English subtitles. You should watch it."

He tapped his computer, scribbled an IP address on a slip of paper and handed it to me.

<http://www.theeventchronicle.com/study/italian-chemtrails-secret-war-free-film/#>

"The sad part," he continued, "is that some kid can take a video of himself lighting a fart, or someone can record a prank on a friend, or a cute kitten, and the thing will go viral with millions of hits, but no one pays attention to videos about one of the greatest lies ever perpetrated on humankind."

"Then there's the books. Crichton's *State of Fear*, and your friend Thornhill's *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy*, to name a few. People read them, but nothing happens."

"And that's not the worst of it," Arnie continued, continuing to beat one of his favorite drums. "People should be demanding that fluoride be removed from their drinking water. People should be furious that high fructose corn syrup is linked to diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and a host of other immunological problems, and yet it is in a high percentage of products on our grocery shelves. Instead, some whacko does some dastardly deed with a Confederate flag and the whole country rises up in indignation demanding that a hundred years of American history be erased. It just doesn't make sense."

Listening to them was disheartening, but true, and it brought back the Professor's words when I asked him why people don't care. "Apathy, frustration and complacency."

"So what's the answer?" I asked, knowing full well what their reply would be.

"We wish we knew," Arnie replied. "We just hope people wake up before it's too late."

"Speaking of that," I replied, "I read that 'Deep Shield' committed suicide. Do you find it strange that so many whistleblowers wind up dead under unusual circumstances?"

"Not strange at all," Arnie replied. "The government has them by the balls from the very beginning. Have you ever heard of Kevin Shipp?"

I shook my head.

"He was a former CIA officer and anti-terrorism expert. He wrote a book, *From the Company of Shadows*, where he exposed what was happening behind the curtain of government secrecy. In an interview with Dane Wigington of geoengineeringwatch.org, he described a bone-chilling account of what many government employees are subjected to, which explains why so few are bold enough to come forward. Nick, get that printout and read some of it for Walt."

Nick went back to the file cabinet. "We copied this directly off the [geoengineeringwatch](http://geoengineeringwatch.org) website."

Why don't more "whistle blowers" come out to expose illegal or unconstitutional secret government operations? If these activities are so illegal, why are people not coming forward to report them?

Over the last fifty years, US government intelligence agencies have perfected a complex, sequential system to systematically silence or destroy any employee, including his or her family, who attempts to reveal illegal or unconstitutional activities conducted as part of secret government operations.

As a condition of employment, military and intelligence employees recruited for secret operations are required to sign a "secrecy agreement" or "nondisclosure agreement" before being given access to the position, which offers high pay and status in the organization. This agreement threatens civil and criminal

penalties if the employee reveals ANY information regarding the program. Thinking the agreement will only be used for legal purposes and will get them the coveted job, all employees eagerly sign it.

This secrecy agreement was originally designed to protect legitimate classified information, to protect military personnel during wartime and protect legitimate national defense information and technology.

However, because of the binding power of the agreement, government agencies began using it as a powerful tool to silence federal employees who question the legality of certain government operations. It was the perfect tool to threaten, silence or jail any whistle blower who dared to challenge the secret operations of government.

Today, the secrecy agreement is routinely used as an efficient weapon to intimidate or silence employees. Annual refresher briefings are given to remind employees of the penalties for violating the agreement. These penalties include huge fines, termination, financial ruin and even prison – all of which mean the destruction of their lives and their families. Most will not reveal any wrongdoing, no matter how egregious, for fear of calculate, severe retribution.

When employees sign the secrecy agreement and are cleared for classified programs, they are not told they are giving up their right to a jury trial, or to sue the agency that hired them. If they try to do so as a whistle blower, they find they have no right to be heard in federal court. Many have found this out when their case was denied; then it was too late. That is part of the system.

If a courageous employee continues to proceed and blow the whistle, a system of personal and career destruction follows. This begins with promotions being denied, being turned down for sensitive or career enhancing assignments, and their files being flagged, ruining their reputation inside their agency. At this point their career is over. If they go quietly, the retribution stops.

When the employee still continues their effort to report the information, their travel records, personnel records, medical records and security records are searched for mistakes or damaging information that can be used to threaten them with termination. Their telephones and computers are monitored searching for incriminating information. If no substantive information can be found, it is fabricated and placed in their file.

Employees who refuse to back down are then subjected to internal "security investigations," multiple, hostile "interviews," attempting to get them to recant their information, and multiple polygraph interrogations.

If the employee contacts a member of the news media, they are immediately cited with violating their secrecy agreement and criminal penalties are filed against them. Several news media outlets are connected to the CIA and NSA and notify them of the employee's contact.

After termination or forced resignation, interest rates on their internal credit union loans are raised to make the payments unaffordable. The release of the employee's retirement funds needed to provide for their family are blocked (a felony). The agency black lists them from gaining employment with other government agencies or contractors, further ruining them financially.

Dehumanized, financially ruined and under severe emotional and mental pressure, the employee's family begins to break apart. If the family's foundation is not strong, this results in alcoholism, depression and divorce. In some cases, it has resulted in the employee committing suicide, the ultimate goal of the program of destruction. This silences the employee permanently, obscuring the agency's role in their destruction. It is the perfect crime.

When he was finished, I sat in stunned silence.

"So," Nick concluded, "you can see what happens when someone decides to spill the beans."

"Holy crap!" I replied. "That certainly explains why, out of the thousands of people who must be involved in this chemtrail thing, only a very few have come forward --- and many of them are dead or missing."

"Meanwhile," Arnie interjected, "like the old song says, 'the beat goes on.'"

While my visit with Arnie and Nick was less than comforting, it certainly helped make up my mind about the contents of the manila envelope.

There was no way in hell I was going to risk my life and the lives of my family and friends, to try and bring a message to people who probably wouldn't listen anyway.

CHAPTER 8

I arrived at our building the same time as Dad, who pulled into a parking spot one car ahead of me.

When he hopped out, I hardly recognized the old dude. He was wearing camo cargo pants and a baggy shirt with 'American Eagle' on the front. He looked like a geriatric Rambo. The passenger door opened, Bernice grabbed Dad's hand, and the two of them hailed me and waived.

"Walt! Hold up! We've got some exciting news."

Based on Dad's new wardrobe, I had a good idea of what was coming.

"We've passed our course and have our concealed carry permits --- both of us," he said proudly, patting Bernice on the butt.

Exciting wasn't exactly the adjective I would have used. Scary, maybe.

"Uhhh, congratulations, I think."

"Thanks," he replied, beaming. "I knew you'd be proud of us."

Again, 'proud' wasn't the word I was inclined to use.

"We've just come from the gun store. We've been trying on holsters all morning. Bernice wanted a shoulder holster, but it kept getting tangled in her saggy old boob."

Bernice punched him on the shoulder. "You didn't have to tell that!"

"Anyway," Dad continued unfazed, "she finally settled on an ankle holster."

Bernice coyly lifted her skirt revealing the .32 strapped to her scrawny calf.

"Now all we have to worry about is her tinkling on it and getting it rusty. Shouldn't be a problem as long as she wears her Depends."

Bernice punched him again. "John, you know that only happens when I sneeze or laugh too hard."

"None of them felt right for me, so I decided to just carry my 9mm here," he said, patting the bulge in the big square pocket of his cargo pants.

Sadly, it was beginning to look like Dad's new wardrobe was a permanent fixture.

"Well, I'm happy for you both. Just promise me you'll be careful."

"Of course we'll be careful. We took the eight hour training class. Most of it was about gun safety. Tell Walt the two basic rules, Bernice."

Without hesitation, she jumped right in. "Rule number 1. Always point the gun in a safe direction and never point it at something you don't want to shoot. Rule number 2. Keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot."

"See," Dad said, proudly, "we've got it covered. And look here," he said, pulling two targets out of a bag. "We had to qualify on the range. We had to get fifteen of twenty shots in the target. See for yourself how we did."

I was surprised to see that both of them put all twenty shots in the target.

"Impressive."

"Thanks. Well, we've gotta run. Our instructor gave us some YouTube videos on shooting and gun safety, so we'll be busy for a while. Catch you later."

With that, the two of them were off, acting like kids on Christmas morning with a new toy.

I was torn. For two people in their nineties, this new adventure was a two-edged sword. I was happy that they had found something to share that gave them joy. I just hoped they could handle the responsibility that comes with carrying a gun.



That evening, Maggie and I had just finished supper and were just about to settle in to watch the last season of American Idol, when the phone rang.

It was Kevin.

"If you and Maggie aren't too busy, Veronica and I would like to stop by for a few minutes."

What could I say but yes. Thankfully, we had a DVR to record Idol so we wouldn't miss a single note. The wonders of modern technology.

When we were all seated in our living room, Kevin began. "Veronica and I have been talking, and well, we just don't see any reason to put this off. There's really no reason for a long engagement and I'm not getting any younger over here. We want to be married as soon as possible."

Maggie and I had both figured this would be the case and were not surprised.

"Makes sense to us," I replied. "Do you have a date in mind?"

"Not yet. I guess it kind of depends on how we're going to proceed. We talked about just going to the courthouse and getting it over with, but that didn't seem quite right. This is a first for both of us, and for sure will be the last for me, so we thought we might want to have something a bit more memorable --- nothing fancy, mind you. Just a simple ceremony with our closest friends and family."

"Sounds perfect," Maggie replied. "How can we help?"

Kevin actually blushed. "It may sound corny, but we'd really like Pastor Bob to perform the ceremony. You know him a lot better than we do. Would the two of you mind going with us to talk to him?"

"Of course not," I replied. "I'm sure Pastor Bob would be honored. When would you like to do it?"

"How about tomorrow morning?"

Obviously Kevin wasn't kidding about wasting time.

I looked at Maggie and she nodded. "Sure, I'll call Bob and see if he's available tomorrow."

"One more thing," Kevin said, sheepishly, "Veronica and I would really like for the two of you to stand up with us --- you know, best man and matron of honor."

I looked at Maggie and she nodded again. "We'd love to."

Two years ago, Maggie didn't even know if her long-lost brother was alive, and here we were, planning to be part of his wedding.

Life is full of surprises.



Pastor Bob is my kind of guy. He is devout and totally committed to his ministry, but the sign on the placard outside his church bears the John Wesley quote, "Sour godliness is the devil's religion."

While I certainly believe in a Higher Power, organized religion has never been my cup of tea. Fortunately, Pastor Bob is more concerned with how a person lives his life than where he spends his Sunday mornings.

One day when I shared my concern over my lack of attendance at his services, he calmly replied, "Sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car."

Needless to say, when I'm in need of spiritual guidance, Pastor Bob is my guy.

The door to the church is open pretty much all the time, so the four of us made our way to Bob's office.

Bob had met Kevin and Veronica before and knew something of their backgrounds.

After greetings were exchanged, I explained why we were there, since I knew the pastor better than anyone else.

When I was finished, Bob turned to Kevin and Veronica. "I'm sure the two of you have thought this through and are not taking this union lightly, so I would be happy to officiate your ceremony. What exactly do you have in mind?"

"Uhhh, nothing fancy," Kevin stammered. "We just want to keep it simple. Close friends and family. We were thinking maybe Walt's dad could help us get the Teamster's lodge."

Bob was confused. "Teamster's lodge? Why not here at the church?"

"I --- I just thought it wouldn't be right," Veronica replied, hanging her head. "I know you know what I used to be --- what I used to do, and I just figured having the service in church would be some kind of sacrilege."

Bob reached out and took her hand. "My dear girl, have you ever heard of Mary Magdalene?"

Veronica shook her head.

"While there is some disagreement among scholars, it is believed that Mary Magdalene may have been in the same business as you used to be. It is, after all, called the world's oldest profession. In spite of her sordid past, Mary became one of our Savior's strongest disciples and was with him during his crucifixion and resurrection. The Lord doesn't look at people as they used to be, he looks at them as they are now, and I believe He would be proud to have the two of you joined together in holy matrimony in His church, if that's what you want."

Kevin and Veronica both nodded, tears glistening in their eyes.
Pastor Bob had come through again.



It seemed, for the moment at least, everything was right with the world.

We had been home just a few minutes when the phone rang, changing everything.

"Walt, this is Kevin. When we got home, someone had bashed out one of the headlights in Veronica's car and scratched 'WHORE' on the side in huge letters. She's beside herself."

I was stunned. "Any idea who could have done such a horrible thing? Maybe one of her old johns?"

"We don't think so. She hasn't been hookin' for over a year, and when she was, it was strictly business. She never had any kind of relationship with a client --- until I came along."

"What can we do?"

"I don't know what to do. Here I am, a P.I., and I don't have any idea where to begin."

"Have you called the police?"

"No, you think I should?"

"Absolutely! Let me give Ox a call. Maybe the CSI guys can find some prints."

"Thanks, I appreciate your help."

Ox and his partner, Amanda, took the vandalism report, but the CSI team came up empty.



Two days later, we were supposed to go with Kevin and Veronica to help pick out rings.

We were just leaving the apartment, when the phone rang.

"Walt, Kevin here. He's hit again."

"Who are you talking about? Hit what?"

"This morning we found a note someone had slipped under our door. It simply said, 'If you want Fred to live, get out of his life forever.'"

I was confused. "Who the hell is Fred?"

Then it hit me. When Kevin was in Phoenix in witness protection, the name the U.S. Marshalls gave him was Fred Fenton. He didn't start using his real name until he returned to Kansas City.

"Fred Fenton," I said. "It looks like this is a person from your past, not Veronica's. Can you think of any old enemies who might have tracked you down and are looking for some payback?"

"Are you kidding?" he replied. "I was a gumshoe for hire. I took pictures of cheating husbands and corrupt politicians. Of course I have enemies who would love to take a crack at me, but that really doesn't explain the message, does it? The note said for Veronica to get out of my life. It just doesn't make sense."

I had to agree. It didn't.

"You're not, by any chance, keeping another lady on the side, are you?"

"Walt, get real. At my age I'm lucky to keep one woman satisfied."

"So do you want to cancel our ring shopping?"

"Hell no! I don't know who this creep is, but I'm not going to let him spoil my wedding."



In spite of the disturbing letter, we had a lovely morning.

Kevin and Veronica both found rings they loved, and by noon we were finished shopping and famished.

"How about lunch at Mel's," I suggested.

Maggie and Veronica rolled their eyes, but grudgingly agreed.

When we entered the diner, we were surprised to see Dad and Bernice. They waived us to their table and asked us to join them. It wasn't exactly what we had in mind, but we didn't want to be rude.

After they oooh'd and ahhh'd over the wedding rings, we all ordered some of Mel's delicious comfort food.

We were about to order pie when Bernice announced she needed to make a trip to the ladies room.

She had just left the table when a woman I'd never seen before entered the diner and approached our table.

I felt Kevin tense as she came closer.

"Gloria! What in the world are you doing here?"

"I came to be with you, Fred," she replied.

We all looked at Kevin in surprise.

Victoria was the first to speak. "Who is this woman, Sweetie?"

"She's no one," Kevin replied. "Not now anyway. Gloria and I lived together in Phoenix --- until we discovered I had a fatal kidney disease. One morning I woke up and she was gone. Just vanished. Not a word of goodbye. I could only guess that she saw no future taking care of an old codger hooked to a dialysis machine. It just wasn't what she had signed on for."

"Well now I'm back," Gloria said. "I know I did you wrong and I'm here to make it up to you."

"Sorry, Gloria," Kevin replied, shaking his head. "That ship sailed the day you left me alone to die. So beat it. Just go back where you came from."

"Sorry you feel that way," she said, pulling a .357 Magnum from her purse. Then turning to Veronica, "I tried to warn you off, bitch, but you wouldn't listen. If I can't have Fred, nobody will."

As she pointed the .357 at Kevin's head, I heard a voice from behind her.

"Drop the gun, lady, or I'll fill you so full of lead they'll be able to use you as a trot-line weight."

We all looked and saw Bernice pointing her .32 at Gloria. I had no idea Bernice was a fisherman.

Gloria looked at the ninety-year old and snickered. "You're not going to pull that trigger. I doubt you've got the strength."

"Oh really?" Bernice replied. "Rule number 1. Never point a gun at anything you don't intend to shoot. In case you hadn't noticed, it's pointed right at you. Rule number 2. Never put your finger on the trigger unless you're ready to shoot. Well, guess what? That's exactly where it is. So what's it going to be? It's all up to you. Go ahead, bitch. Make my day!"

Bernice and Dad had obviously been watching some Dirty Harry movies.

Gloria waivered and set the gun on the table. It was a prudent move. There was no doubt in my mind that Bernice would have blown her away.

I called Ox and a half hour later, Gloria was in cuffs.

As Bernice was putting her gun back in her ankle holster, I heard her mutter, "Thank goodness I just peed or my holster would've been soaked."

After things calmed down, I said, "I hope this revelation doesn't change anything between the two of you."

Veronica looked lovingly at Kevin. "Like Pastor Bob said, the Lord doesn't look at people as they used to be. He looks at them as they are now. We both have done things in our lives we're not proud of, but that's all in the past. What's important is what we have now and what we'll have in the years ahead."

Another bump in the road, but thankfully things seemed to be smoothing out --- at least for now.

CHAPTER 9

I had just sat down at the breakfast table with my coffee and Wheaties, and had taken my first mouthful when I opened the newspaper.

I nearly choked when I read the headline.

Body of Kansas City Star Reporter Jack Carson Found.

The article went on to say that Carson had been reported missing by his editor at the *Star*. Carson's body was found in the Missouri River by a tugboat captain. Detective Derek Blaylock said the case was being treated as a homicide.

So there it was.

I knew from his note that Jack was trying to get away and start a new life, but obviously they had found him before he could make his escape. Sending me the envelope with all his work was most likely one of his last acts before being captured.

Knowing that Carson was now on the list of people who had died trying to expose the chemtrail conspiracy made me shudder, and it strengthened my resolve to never let anyone know about the evidence locked away in my safe.

My appetite gone, I flushed my soggy Wheaties down the disposal, gulped the rest of my coffee, dressed, and headed to the morgue.

Dr. Grimm, the medical examiner at the county morgue, and I aren't exactly close friends, but during my time on the force, I had frequented his domicile enough times that we were more than just acquaintances. I hoped that previous relationship would get me in the door.

I wasn't disappointed.

"Walt, the aged half of the former dynamic duo! What brings you to my humble abode?"

"Hi Doc. Good to see you again. I --- uh -- was wondering if you've had time to look at Jack Carson yet."

"Indeed I have," he replied, "but I haven't even had the opportunity to report my findings to Detective Blaylock. I probably shouldn't even be talking to you. What exactly is your interest in Mr. Carson?"

"Two things. First, we were friends, and second, we were working a case together when he disappeared. I understand what you're saying, but anything you could give me would be appreciated. Detective Blaylock doesn't even need to know I was here."

He thought for a moment, then whispered conspiratorially, "Okay, but mum's the word."

I nodded.

"Actually, I can't tell you much. The body had been in the water for some time and was in poor shape. It looked as if the denizens of the deep, most likely turtles and gar, munched a bit. There were ligature marks around the ankles. A good guess is they were made by a rope tied to something very heavy on the other end."

"So you think someone tossed him in the river with weights tied to his ankles?"

"It would seem so, but that's not the worst part. His lungs were filled with water. He was most definitely still alive when he was tossed into the deep. A horrible way to go."

I cringed as I thought about poor Jack's lungs bursting as he sunk deeper and deeper into the muddy river.

I thanked the Doc, who once again swore me to secrecy, and headed home.

My heart was heavy and I wanted desperately to avenge Jack Carson's death, but I didn't have a clue where to start.



Maggie and I have a ritual. Every night, we hop in bed and watch a rerun of *Two and a Half Men*, the ones with Charlie Sheen. Best writing and funniest series ever. Then we turn on the ten o'clock news before tucking in.

I had just switched channels when *'Breaking News'* scrolled across the screen. Immediately following was a video of a man in cuffs being shoved into a police cruiser.

The news anchor said that police had arrested Carmine Marchetti, the alleged head of the Kansas City crime syndicate, for the murder of reporter Jack Carson whose body was found floating in the Missouri River, and that his arraignment was scheduled for ten o'clock the next morning.

I couldn't believe what I had just seen.

When Jack went missing, Detective Blaylock had a hunch that Marchetti was involved. It was common knowledge that Carson was writing an exposé on the mob's protection racket in northeast Kansas City. During his investigation, Carson met the lovely Calinda Marchetti, and much to her father's chagrin, a romance blossomed. Blaylock figured that was sufficient motive to point the finger at the mob boss, but since there was no body, there was nothing he could do.

But now there was.

After that jolting news segment, I found it difficult to drift off to sleep. It was just as well, because a half hour later, the phone rang.

"Hello, Walt Williams here."

"Walt, this is Carmine Marchetti. You seen the news?"

"Uhhh, yes I have. Where are you?"

"Where do you think? I'm in the hoosegow. Remember when I saved you and your sweetie?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I told you then I might be needin' the services of a top notch private eye someday. Well, that day has come and I'm callin' in my chit. My arraignment is at ten tomorrow. Be there! We'll talk afterward."

The line went dead.

At the time, I was grateful that Marchetti and his men had saved our butts, but I hated the fact that I was indebted to a mob boss and that someday I would be asked to return the favor.

Apparently, that day had arrived.



The next morning, I left the house early so I could stop by the precinct for a chat with Detective Blaylock before Marchetti's arraignment.

I knew the brass had been after the crime boss for years, but just couldn't get the goods on the wily old Don. Since I was convinced Carson had been murdered to squash his investigation into the chemtrail conspiracy, I needed to know what they had that convinced them that Marchetti had done the deed.

I caught Blaylock just as he was leaving for the courthouse.

"Walt Williams! Carmine Marchetti's arraignment is this morning and here you are. What a surprise!"

"Derek, I think you have the wrong guy."

"Great! Here we go again. If I remember correctly from our conversation right after Carson disappeared, you were trying to convince me that he had been the victim of hired assassins sent by a government cabal involving the Navy, Air Force, the CIA, the NSA and God knows how many other alphabet organizations, to cover up his exposé of a clandestine conspiracy to spray poison into our atmosphere to control the weather, prevent the Russians from pelting us with ICBM's, and allow Monsanto to take control of the world's food supply. Did I forget anything?"

"No, that pretty much covers it, and I still believe it's true."

"Look, Walt. I really respect you. You and Ox did some fine work together, but you're way out in left field on this one."

"If I am, convince me. What have you got that ties Marchetti to Carson's murder?"

"Same as last time we talked. Carson was digging into the mob's protection racket. That's motive enough right there, but then add to that, Carson was boning his little girl, and you've got motive out the wazoo. I didn't have a body back then, but now I do, and guess what? A plunge in the Muddy Mo wearing cement shoes fits the mob perfectly."

"I certainly see where you're coming from, but it seems to me everything you've said sounds pretty circumstantial. Do you have any hard evidence, like maybe a witness --- anything?"

He looked around to see if anyone was listening. "Okay, I shouldn't even be talking to you, but I'll level with you. Everybody in this city, you included, knows that Marchetti is up to his neck in gambling, drugs,

prostitution and protection, but we just haven't been able to prove it. We may not have any hard evidence, but the brass is convinced that twelve solid citizens on a jury, presented with Marchetti's motive and opportunity, will jump at the chance to put away Kansas City's crime boss."

"Okay, I get it. Carpe diem. Seize the day. Take down the bad guy one way or the other. The ends justify the means. But there's one huge flaw in your plan."

"What would that be?"

"If Marchetti didn't kill Jack Carson, then the real killers are still out there and will get away scot free."

Blaylock nodded. "I see your point. Let me turn the tables and ask you the same question. You seem convinced the government assassinated Jack Carson. Now you convince me. Where is your evidence?"

I thought about the manila envelope in my safe, but there was no way I was giving that to Blaylock.

When I didn't respond, he shrugged his shoulders. "That's what I thought. Someone killed Jack Carson, and I still have to go with Occam's razor. When two competing theories make the same prediction, the simpler one is better, and in this case, my money has to be on Carmine Marchetti."



The courthouse was packed. News crews from every TV, radio station and newspaper in town were scrambling to get the best shot of Kansas City's crime boss being led into the courtroom in handcuffs.

I was barely able to squeeze inside before the doors were closed.

Marchetti was already seated at the defense table accompanied by his attorney, Martin Cheatum, of the law firm, Dewey, Cheatum & Howe. The firm had been successful thus far in keeping Marchetti out of jail, so I wasn't surprised to see them here this morning.

Seated at the prosecution table was the imposing figure of Grant Marshall, the DA's top prosecuting attorney. Marshall had the look and the air of an Atticus Finch, the storied attorney from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, played by Gregory Peck. With Marshall leading the charge, there was no doubt the city was pulling out all stops to get the crime boss behind bars.

The bailiff called out, "All rise for the Honorable Judge Milton Weathers."

Weathers was known around the courthouse as the 'Hanging Judge,' and as soon as I saw him take this place on the bench, I knew the deck had been stacked against Marchetti.

After everyone was seated, the bailiff read the charge, which to no one's surprise was first degree murder.

Judge Weathers turned to Grant Marshall. "Does the prosecution have a motion as to bail?"

Marshall rose, "Yes, Your Honor, given the serious nature of the charge and the financial status of the defendant as well as his reputation, we believe the defendant to be a flight risk, and ask that bail be denied and the defendant remanded to the county jail until his trial."

The judge turned to the defense table. "Mr. Cheatum."

"Your Honor, the defendant is a life-long resident of Kansas City. He is a successful businessman with ties to the community. He has a daughter in the home. If the prosecution feels Mr. Marchetti is a flight risk, he will gladly surrender his passport. We petition the court for reasonable bail."

Judge Weathers peered over his glasses at Marchetti. "Yes, counselor, the court is well aware of the defendant's business and his ties to the community, and so knowing, I must agree with Mr. Marshall. Bail denied! The defendant is hereby remanded to the county jail to await trial."

"Your Honor, please!" Cheatum pleaded, but to no avail.

The judge slammed his gavel. "My decision is final. Next case."

The courtroom emptied quickly as reporters rushed to get their stories finalized.

I had just stepped into the hall when a beefy hand grabbed my arm. "Mr. Marchetti will see you --- now!"

I had tried to imagine how Marchetti thought I could help his case, but I came up empty.

I was about to find out.

CHAPTER 10

Marchetti's stooge led me to a room reserved for defendants and their attorneys. I could see the look of surprise on Martin Cheatum's face when I entered.

"Carmine! What the hell is Williams doing here? He was a cop, for chrissakes. He plays for the other side."

"Actually, Mr. Cheatum," I replied indignantly, "I'm a private investigator, and for your information, I don't play sides."

"Calm down, Martin," Marchetti ordered. "Walt's here at my invitation. I think he could be helpful."

Given the fact that I had been escorted to the room by a musclebound Neanderthal, I thought 'invitation' was a bit misleading, but I kept my mouth shut.

Marchetti turned back to me. "Walt, can you believe it? They're trying to pin Carson's murder on me! It's a bum rap and you and I both know it. I didn't have that reporter iced."

"I believe you, Mr. Marchetti, but what I believe really doesn't matter. What does matter is that the prosecution thinks they can make a case."

"Okay, you knew the guy. If I didn't whack him, who did?"

I doubted Marchetti knew anything about Carson's pursuit of the chemtrail conspiracy, and I wasn't about to open that can of worms yet.

"Could be anybody," I replied evasively. "Carson was an investigative reporter. I'm sure he pissed off a lot of people over the years."

"Yeah, well, that's where you come in, Mr. Gumshoe. You need to find out who else had a hard on for the guy, and get me off the hook."

"I want to help. I really do. Could we talk privately for a moment?"

Marchetti nodded to Cheatum. "Give us a minute, Martin."

Reluctantly, Cheatum left the room.

"Now, what's so important my attorney couldn't be here?"

"I'm going to level with you Mr. Marchetti. You know I used to play for the other side and I know how they operate. I'm telling you the state's not pulling any punches. Grant Marshall is their best prosecutor and Milton Weathers is known as the hanging judge. No offense, but you need the best lawyer you can get."

"So what's wrong with Cheatum? His firm has kept my butt out of jail so far."

"It's one thing to beat a drug or prostitution rap, but this is murder one. If you're convicted, you could get life without parole or even the death penalty."

"So who do you suggest?"

"Suzanne Romero. She's the best defense attorney in the state."

"Yeah, I heard she's good, but I'm bettin' she wouldn't come close to me given my --- uh--- reputation and alleged ties to the mob."

"That could be, but I may have some influence there. Look, I want to be totally honest with you. I don't condone what you do, and I certainly don't want to work for you, but I also don't believe you killed Jack Carson. He was my friend, and if you're convicted, then the real killer is going to get away with murder. I just wanted that up front. Now do you want me to talk to Suzanne Romero or not?"

Marchetti smiled. "You've got big balls for an old dude. I respect that. Sure, talk to the lady and let's see where this goes."

As I left the room, I wondered if my big balls had written a check my big mouth couldn't cash. I now had to convince one of the city's most respected attorneys to represent the godfather of the Kansas City Mafia.



Suzanne Romero was the defense attorney most feared by the Kansas City police, not because she was ruthless or vicious, but because she was a stickler for the letter of the law. Many an officer who had not followed procedure in an arrest, or a prosecutor who had not dotted his I's or crossed his T's, found

themselves at her mercy in the courtroom, and many offenders had walked because law enforcement had not done their job properly.

Singlehandedly, she had done more to make officers in the field follow the book than anything their superiors could have said.

Knowing her reputation, we hired her on two separate occasions.

My good friend, and housemother at the Three Trails Hotel, Mary Murphy, shot and killed an intruder who had threatened her with a knife. An overzealous prosecutor, wanting to make an example of her because of a rash of vigilante murders, took her to court.

Later on, Ox and I were framed for the theft of valuable King Tut artifacts by a pair of dirty cops.

Both times, Suzanne prevailed.

A byproduct of these two cases was the development of a mutual respect, and when I retired and opened my P.I. firm, Suzanne hired Kevin and me to help clear one of her clients.

I wasn't at all convinced that our past association would be enough to persuade her to represent a crime boss.

At least, it was enough to get an interview.

"Walt, good to see you again. Please don't tell me Mary Murphy has struck again."

"No, nothing like that, thank goodness. I'm sure you've been following the news stories about Carmine Marchetti being arrested for the murder of Jack Carson."

"Of course. It's been on the front page every day. Too bad. Jack Carson was a gifted reporter. He came to me several times for background material on stories he was writing. I know the city has been after Marchetti for a long time. It's just a shame that Jack's death had to be the thing that brought him down."

This was the moment I had been dreading. "That's why I'm here Suzanne. Carmine Marchetti didn't kill Jack Carson and I know who did."

Suzanne sat in stunned silence. "You know this how?"

"Because Jack and I were working on a story so big it cost the lives of three people, and now Jack is the fourth."

She shook her head. "Walt, you never cease to amaze me. Start from the beginning. Let's hear it."

I knew if I was going to convince her to represent Marchetti, I would have to convince her that the chemtrail conspiracy was real, so I started with Jack's first call wanting me to get more information about Falcon's accident from Ox, right up to the time Carson disappeared. I did not tell her about the manila envelope in my safe.

The expression on her face as I was telling my story was probably the same face she would have made if I had been sharing an experience of being abducted by aliens.

When I was finished, her response was exactly like Derek Blaylock's. "So you're telling me Jack Carson was the victim of hired assassins sent by a government cabal involving the Navy, Air Force, the CIA, the NSA and God knows how many other alphabet organizations, to cover up his exposé of a clandestine conspiracy to spray poison into our atmosphere to control the weather, prevent the Russians from pelting us with ICBM's, and allow Monsanto to take control of the world's food supply."

At least, I was consistent.

"And you really believe this?"

"Tell me you've never noticed the trails in the sky stretching from one horizon to the other."

"Of course I've seen them. Everyone has, but --- my God --- this is way too much to process. Okay, let's put your incredible story aside for a moment. What makes you think Marchetti isn't involved? You have to admit it's a MUCH simpler explanation."

"That's exactly what the prosecution thinks. All they have is a possible motive, Carson digging into Marchetti's business and his relationship with his daughter and the way Carson met his death which looks like a mob hit. Other than that, they've got squat. Nothing. No hard evidence connecting Marchetti to Carson's murder. Blaylock told me in confidence they're counting on this being enough to persuade a jury to put away a really bad guy."

"Aside from your alternate theory, you really believe he's innocent?"

"When Carson first went missing, Blaylock convinced me that Marchetti was the most logical suspect, so like I told you, I confronted him. Probably not the smartest thing I've ever done, but he looked me in the eye and swore on his mother's grave he was not involved. He said no matter how much he disliked the guy, his daughter would never forgive him for killing the man she loved, and he couldn't bear that. I believed him."

"So what do you want from me?"

"I want you to represent him."

"Good Lord. If what I hear is true, Carmine Marchetti's organization is into drugs, prostitution, and God knows what else. He's a scumbag. Why would I want to help a man like that?"

"Because you believe in the letter of the law. Marchetti may be a creep, but he's being railroaded, and if he's convicted, then Jack Carson's real killer will get away with murder. Can you live with that?"

She smiled. "You're good, Walt, real good. You know just what buttons to push. I need to think about it. I mean, that story of yours --- well --- it's pretty hard to swallow."

I figured that might be the case, so I brought a copy of Thornhill's novel, *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy*. His story, while fiction, really hit home, and presented our case better than I ever could.

I handed her the book. "Promise me you'll read this before you make a decision. I know you'll do the right thing."

The next morning, the phone rang.

"Walt, Suzanne here. I'm in!"

CHAPTER 11

The first meeting with Marchetti and his new counsel was memorable.

"Ms. Romero, pleased to meet you. When I told Martin Cheatum what was going on, he freaked. Walked right out on me. Told me not to call him to bail me out when you screwed things up. I hope you're worth it."

"Oh, trust me, Carmine. I'm worth it."

"I'm counting on it. Here's what we're going to do ---."

Suzanne cut him off. "If I'm going to represent you, we're going to have to establish some ground rules. First of all, I don't like you even a little bit. I may represent you, but I'm not one of your lackeys. You're going to have to get used to the idea that I'm the boss and you'll do whatever I tell you to do. If that's not agreeable, then I'm out of here and you'll go to jail. Do we have an understanding?"

I'm quite sure no one, especially a woman, had ever spoken that way to Carmine Marchetti.

I saw him bristle, and was expecting a tirade, but the thought of spending the rest of his life in jail made him reconsider.

Still, he had to save face, so he turned to me. "Wow, Walt! She's a hot one for sure. I like that!"

Then to Suzanne. "Okay, Sweetie, I'll play ball. Let's see what you got."

"Never call me 'Sweetie' again," she shot back. "It's Ms. Romero or Counselor to you."

Once there was a mutual understanding, she got to work.

"I've looked at the prosecutor's evidence, and like Walt said, everything they have thus far is circumstantial. The problem is, Carmine, pretty much everyone in Kansas City knows you're a douche bag, and they're counting on that being enough to convince a jury to take you off the street."

"Great! Just great! My own attorney is calling me names. What chance have I got!"

"I'm just calling it like it is. My job, as distasteful as it is, is to make you look as good as possible to the jury and convince them that the state just doesn't have enough hard evidence to lock you away. Walt, I want to hire you as my investigator. In order to create reasonable doubt, we need to find someone else to point the finger at who had motive and means. That's your job. Bring me another viable suspect to throw at the jury."

We both knew she was talking about a government assassin. We just didn't know how yet.

"Okay, that's all for today. Jury selection starts tomorrow and I've got a lot of work to do. It's not going to be easy to find even one person, let alone twelve, who doesn't want to see your sorry ass in jail."

Marchetti threw up his hands. "Great! Just great!"



That evening, I figured I'd better have a family conference to bring everyone in my small circle up to speed. I invited Kevin and Veronica to supper and prepared my signature dish, tuna casserole.

I decided the best time to make my announcement was over big slices of key lime pie. Kevin had just shoveled a huge bite in his mouth when I dropped my bomb.

"Well, it looks like Walt Williams Investigations will be working to free Carmine Marchetti."

Kevin nearly choked. "You've got to be kidding! When word gets around that we're working with a creep like that, no respectable client will hire us."

Maggie was visibly upset. "Walt, have you thought this through?"

"Actually, I have. There's two reasons I took the job --- well --- maybe three. First we owe the guy. Remember when the Columbians were shoving the two of us into their van? If Carmine's men hadn't intervened, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. Second, Kevin, you know as well as I do, that Marchetti didn't kill Jack. He was killed by assassins to prevent him from exposing the chemtrail conspiracy. If Carmine goes down for this, that's the end of it and that will make four people they've killed with impunity. And third, Suzanne Romero is representing Marchetti and she asked me to help. If Suzanne is willing to risk her reputation to see that justice is served, then that's good enough for me."

Everyone sat in silence.

Finally, Maggie spoke. "It doesn't take a genius to figure out that somehow Suzanne is going to try to throw the blame in another direction. I'm guessing her target will be the conspiracy assassins, and your job is to give her credible information she can introduce at trial."

I nodded.

"I thought we talked about this and decided we were through with this conspiracy thing. I don't want you --- or me, to be their fifth victim."

"It's not like that. Everything I do will be behind the scenes. I'm not going to be out there digging up new evidence. I'll just be sharing what we already know. I won't do anything to put either of us in danger. I promise."

I could tell she wasn't convinced.

"So what do you need from me?" Kevin asked. "How can I help?"

"Not a thing. That's one reason I asked you to come tonight. I know you want to get married as soon as possible. You should concentrate on that. I just wanted you to know I'll be tied up with this trial and I don't want that to spoil your plans. You asked me to be your best man and I'm thrilled. I just don't know if I'll have the time to do the job justice."

Kevin grinned. "That's the least of my worries, Pal. Just make sure you'll be there when the time comes."

"So when is the big day?"

"That's what we wanted to tell you, tonight," Veronica replied. "It's a week from this Sunday. We got the details worked out with Pastor Bob today."

"Wow! That is quick."

At that moment there was a knock at the door. It was Dad and Bernice.

"Evening, Son," he said, barging into the room. Then he saw Kevin and Veronica. "Oops! Hope we're not interrupting."

"No, Dad. It's fine. What can we do for you?"

"Bernice and I were going to bake some brownies, but discovered we were out of tequila. You wouldn't happen to have a bottle laying around, would you?"

"I didn't realize tequila was an ingredient. Those must be some special brownies."

"Oh, don't be silly," Bernice replied. "The tequila is for margaritas. Baking is a lot more fun when you're drinking."

"Of course it is. I'll see if we have a bottle in the pantry."

"Before you inebriated chefs run off," Kevin said, "Veronica and I have some news. We're getting married a week from Sunday. Hope you didn't have any other plans."

"That's great!" Dad said. "Sunday, huh? That means the bachelor party will be Saturday night, right Walt?"

"Uhhhhh ---."

"What do you mean, uhhhh?" Dad replied indignantly. "You're the best man and it's your job to put on a big wing-ding the night before."

Kevin came to my rescue. "Walt's going to be tied up in a big trial, so there won't be a wing-ding."

"The hell there won't," he bellowed. "It ain't no wedding without a wing-ding. Not to worry. Ole Dad to the rescue. You're going to have the best party ever."

He took Bernice's hand and led her toward the door. "Come on, Babe. To hell with the brownies. We've got a party to plan."

Bernice clapped her hands. "Oh good! I love parties. What's it for?"

As the door closed behind them, I heard Kevin mutter, "Heaven help us!"



As I drove to the courthouse the next morning, I thought about the task in front of Suzanne Romero. This was the day the jurors would be selected to decide the fate of Carmine Marchetti. Recalling her words, "It's not going to be easy to find even one person, let alone twelve, who doesn't want to see your sorry ass in jail," I didn't envy her job.

Over the years, Marchetti's name had been in the *Star* and on the evening news dozens of times, linking him to any number of nefarious deeds allegedly perpetrated by the mob. A person would have to have lived

in a cave, cut off from pretty much everything, not to know he was the number one guy in the Kansas City crime syndicate. Finding an impartial juror was going to be a daunting task.

A huge pool of potential jurors had been selected for the process known as voir dire, where both attorneys may quiz each person to determine if any juror is biased and/or cannot deal with the issues fairly, or if there is cause not to allow a juror to serve such as knowledge of the facts, acquaintanceship with parties, witnesses or attorneys, or an occupation which might lead to bias or prejudice against the death penalty.

If, for example, the person is related to someone associated with the trial, they may be dismissed for cause. There are no limits as to how many may be dismissed for cause.

In addition, each attorney is allowed a fixed number of preemptory challenges where the juror is dismissed without having to state a reason.

As the morning continued, it became obvious that the prosecution was booting every juror with an Italian name. Every Accardo, Bellini and Capella was sent packing. Finally, Romero had seen enough.

"Your Honor, There is no doubt in my mind that Mr. Marshall is systematically excluding anyone with Italian heritage from the jury panel. I would remind the court that in *Edmondson vs Leesville Concrete Co., 1991*, the Supreme Court ruled that a juror could not be dismissed because of his or her ethnic background."

"As long as we're citing court cases," Marshall responded, "let's also cite *J.E.B. vs Alabama, 1994*. That ruling barred an attorney from dismissing a juror based on her gender. I think it is quite obvious that Ms. Romero is trying to exclude as many women as possible from the jury."

Marshall was right. Suzanne figured that Marchetti's ties to gambling and prostitution would undoubtedly come up in the trial and that men would more likely look the other way.

Judge Weathers agreed with them both and admonished each to follow the rules or be held in contempt.

So here it was, day one, and the gloves had come off. It was going to be a very interesting trial.

When it was all said and done, the jury was composed of six men and six women, one man was black and another's name was Giordano.

Neither side got exactly what they wanted, but I suppose that's the way it ought to be.

CHAPTER 12

After the jury had been impaneled, I headed to the john to drain the remains of my morning coffee.

I was met in the hall by Derek Blaylock.

"Morning, Walt. I hear you're playing for the other team on this one. After five years on the force, I can't believe you're in bed with this creep."

"Good morning to you, Detective. And for your information, I'm not in bed with anyone. I don't like the guy any more than you do, and I get it that you and the brass want to get Marchetti, but you're wrong on this one. He didn't do it. I'm only on board to see that justice is served."

"We'll see about that when you're on the stand," he said, slapping a subpoena in my hand.

"What the hell," I replied, shocked. "Why in the world would the prosecution want me to testify? What information could I possibly have to make their case?"

"I suppose we'll find out," he replied, smugly. "We've had Marchetti under surveillance for months, and guess what? You've been seen visiting the Don three times since Jack Carson disappeared. That can't be a coincidence."

"But ---"

"Save it for the stand," he said, walking away.

Totally bewildered, I stuffed the summons in my back pocket and headed for the can. I had to pee so bad my teeth were floating.

I had just unzipped and was in mid-stream when I heard the door open. I casually glanced over my shoulder and was shocked to see a matronly woman making her way to one of the stalls.

"Uhhh, excuse me! I think you might have taken a wrong turn."

"Nope, don't think so," she replied.

"Didn't you see the sign on the door? This is the men's rest room."

"Better look again, buster."

"I'm kind of busy here. I'd like some privacy."

"If you want privacy, then you'd better find another john. It's no big deal. I've seen a penis before."

Not mine, you haven't, I thought.

I finished, shook, and zipped, and as I headed out the door, I heard the tinkle coming from the stall. *This just isn't right!*

Back in the hall, I checked the sign on the door and was shocked to see the woman was correct.



All Gender Restroom. I was still mulling over the implications of this new development when I entered the attorney-client room.

"You look a bit perplexed," Suzanne observed.

"You could say that. I just had my first experience in an all gender restroom."

"It's a new world, Walt."

"I suppose that's one way of looking at it. By the way, I have some bad news," I said, pulling the subpoena from my pocket. "I've been served. Looks like I'll be testifying for the prosecution."

"You're not the only one," Marchetti grumbled.

"What do you mean?"

"I just received the list of witnesses the prosecution intends to call," Suzanne replied, handing me a document.

Sure enough, my name was on it. Then I saw the other names.

"Whoa! Calinda? They're going to have a daughter testify against her father?"

"Actually, that's not unexpected. They need to establish a motive, and Calinda's affair with Carson is a doosey."

I looked at the other names.

"So who is Nick Valenti, and Melina Abadondo?"

"Valenti manages The Rat Pack Lounge, one of Carmine's 'businesses,' and Ms. Abadondo works at Elite Escort Services. Another tactic of theirs will be to tie Carmine to these questionable ventures to disparage his reputation."

"That shouldn't be hard to do," I observed.

"Bite me, Williams!" Marchetti growled.

The trial was about to begin, and poor Suzanne had to convince a jury that Carmine wasn't such a bad guy.

A daunting task indeed.



Grant Marshall's opening statement was short and to the point.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the charge against the defendant, Carmine Marchetti, is murder in the first degree in the death of Jack Carson, a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*."

"I'm sure the defendant's name is not new to most of you. He has been indicted numerous times for prostitution, drug trafficking, and a host of other crimes. The defense will hasten to point out that he has never been convicted in any of these charges, but as the old saying goes, where there is smoke, there is fire."

"As this trial proceeds, the prosecution will establish two facts. Number one, Jack Carson was pursuing a story that would prove once and for all that Mr. Marchetti's organization was masterminding the protection racket in northeast Kansas City. Second, during the course of his investigation, Carson met Calinda, Marchetti's daughter, and the two became involved. Either of these events taken alone, could have provoked the defendant to take Jack Carson's life, but together, there can be no doubt about the motive that drove Carmine Marchetti to take the life of Jack Carson. Thank you."

Suzanne realized how ridiculous it would sound to stand up and try to convince the jury that Marchetti was really a good guy, falsely accused, so she elected to reserve her opening statement.

The first person called to the stand by Grant Marshall was Dr. Grimm, the Medical Examiner.

"Dr. Grimm, did you have the opportunity to autopsy the body of Jack Carson?"

"I did."

"And what did you find?"

"Mr. Carson's body had been found in the Missouri River. The exposure was such that time of death was difficult to pin down accurately, but I would estimate that he had been in the water at least two weeks."

"What was the condition of the body?"

"There were numerous bite marks and pieces of flesh had been torn away, most likely the result of river dwellers such as snapping turtles and gar."

I noticed several women on the jury cover their mouths and wince.

"There were ligature marks around the victim's ankles and his lungs were filled with river water," Grimm continued.

"So, Dr. Grimm, would such findings be consistent with the notion that some heavy object was tied to Jack Carson's feet and that he was thrown into the river to drown?"

"That would be a reasonable assumption. There's no doubt Mr. Carson was alive when he hit the water."

More wincing in the jury box. Marshall was painting a gruesome picture of Jack Carson's demise.

"Dr. Grimm," Marshall continued, "in your many years as Medical Examiner, have you seen other cases similar to this one?"

He thought for a moment. "Most definitely. Several years back I autopsied the body of Sven Marchand. If my memory serves me correctly, a man by the name of Tony 'Shoes' Gambini was convicted of his murder."

Suzanne leaped to her feet. "Objection, Your Honor. The death of Sven Marchand has absolutely nothing to do with this proceeding."

Judge Weathers turned to Marshall. "Counselor?"

"Actually, it does, Your Honor. I'm simply establishing a pattern of behavior here. It was established at that trial that Marchand was a shopkeeper who refused to pay protection money to the mob. Tony Gambini was convicted of murdering Marchand by tying weights to his feet and hurling him into the Missouri River."

Romero was incensed. "I'll restate my objection. I don't see the relevance of that case to this proceeding."

"The relevance, Ms. Romero," Marshall interjected, "is that Tony Gambini was a known associate of Carmine Marchetti."

Romero looked at Carmine and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Objection overruled!" Weathers barked. "You may continue, Mr. Marshall."

"Thank you, Judge. Dr. Grimm, do you recall from that trial how Tony Gambini got the nickname, 'shoes?'"

"As I recall," he replied, "Gambini would remove a shoe from each of his victims as a trophy before tossing them in the water. When the police searched his home, I understand they found a closet full."

More shudders from the jury panel.

If this first witness was any indication, Grant Marshall wasn't going to have any difficulty establishing Marchetti's credentials as a really bad egg, and it was equally obvious that Judge Weathers wasn't cutting Marchetti any slack.

When offered the opportunity to cross-examine, Romero declined. There was nothing to be gained by dragging out the horrible death that Carson had endured.

Marshall's second witness was Michael Gross, Carson's editor at the *Star*.

"Mr. Gross, please describe your relationship with Jack Carson."

"Sure. Jack Carson was the crime reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. He had been with the paper about ten years. I was his editor. Jack was the consummate news man, a real bulldog. Once he got his teeth into a story, he just wouldn't let go."

"Were you usually aware of the stories Mr. Carson was investigating?"

"Most of the time, yes. Often, his investigations involved public figures and the paper's attorneys were always concerned about any legal implications."

"And most recently, did one of his investigations involve the defendant, Carmine Marchetti?"

"It did. Jack was looking into the protection racket in northeast Kansas City and had contacted one of the men the mob would send to collect the weekly protection money from the shopkeepers. The collector was disgruntled because he felt he wasn't being treated fairly, and agreed to provide background information for Jack's story and testify against the mob in exchange for witness protection."

"Do you know the name of this informant?"

"His name was Salvatore Salucci."

"So, Mr. Gross, was Carson's story ever published? I don't recall seeing anything like it in the paper."

Gross shook his head. "No, it was a dead end."

"Why was that?"

"Salvatore Salucci disappeared. One day he was meeting with Carson feeding him information, the next day he was gone. Without Salucci to testify as to the accuracy of the information, the story was dead."

Marshall zeroed in for the kill. "Pretty convenient, Salucci disappearing like that. Did you ever wonder if maybe he too was at the bottom of the river with cement blocks tied to his legs?"

Suzanne leaped to her feet. "Objection! On so many counts. Leading the witness, presenting facts not in evidence. I could go on."

"Not necessary, Your Honor," Marshall said, smiling. "I'll withdraw the question. I have nothing further for this witness."

Marshall had made his point. There wasn't a person in the courtroom, myself included, who didn't believe that poor Salvatore was turtle food.

"Your witness, Ms. Romero."

"So sorry for your loss, Mr. Gross. I know Jack Carson was a valuable asset to your paper. I've seen his name in the byline many times. As an investigative reporter, I would imagine that over the years he has, for lack of a better word, pissed off a lot of people. Are you aware of any threats he may have received?"

"Oh, sure. We have a file full of letters and emails threatening everything from emasculation to mayhem, but nothing has ever come from them. They're just a lot of blustering and hot air."

"How can you be so sure? Isn't it possible that someone in that file might have made good on their threat?"

He thought for a moment. "I --- I guess that's possible, but ---."

Suzanne cut him off. "Thank you, Mr. Gross."

It was a small victory, but Suzanne had at least planted the possibility that someone other than Marchetti had an axe to grind with Carson.

"One more thing, Mr. Gross. I would think, with all the crime in Kansas City, Jack Carson would have been working on multiple stories at the same time."

"Yes, Jack was amazing that way."

"At the time of his disappearance, were you aware of any other major stories he was pursuing?"

"Ummm, I'm not sure what you're after. He was always on to something new."

"I'm referring specifically to the death of Dale Fox, an Air Force pilot. Wasn't he looking into that?"

"Oh, that thing. Yes, he came to me about it, but it was a dead end. The police ruled Fox's death an accident and that was the end of it."

"Did Jack tell you why he was so interested in a run-of-the-mill auto accident?"

Gross sighed, and glanced at Grant Marshall. It was obvious he was uncomfortable discussing the subject.

"Mr. Gross." Suzanne prodded.

"Jack was way out in left field on this one," Gross replied, reluctantly. "Supposedly, this Dale Fox had given Jack information about some government program that involved spraying chemicals into the atmosphere. I knew Jack wouldn't just let this go, so I contacted the Air Force and the Environmental Protection Agency. Both categorically denied that anything of that nature was taking place. I told Jack to drop the story."

"Hmmm," Suzanne replied, pensively. "When Jack was working on the protection racket story, did you call Carmine Marchetti and ask him if he was breaking the law?"

"No, of course not. There was no way he would have admitted he was involved in illegal activity."

"And yet, isn't that exactly what you did when you called the Air Force and the EPA?"

Gross knew he'd been had. "Well --- that was different. It was the government."

"And the government doesn't lie? Is that what you're telling me, Mr. Gross? It seems to me I read an article in your paper about the NSA lying about snooping into our emails and phone conversations. Come on, Mr. Gross. If what Dale Fox had told Carson was true, it would have been the story of the century, and yet you told him to drop it?"

You could see the beads of sweat popping out on Gross's forehead.

"It was no different than when Salvatore Salucci disappeared. With Dale Fox dead, there was no one to corroborate his information. End of story."

Now it was Suzanne's turn to move in for the kill.

"As I recall, Mr. Marshall characterized Salucci's disappearance as 'convenient' and alluded to the possibility that Carmine Marchetti had orchestrated his demise. The death of Dale Fox might also be thought of as convenient. I wonder if there's any possibility the government could have orchestrated Fox's death to prevent him from exposing any more of their dirty little secrets. Oh, wait! Like you said, it's the government and they'd never do anything wrong!"

Now it was Grant Marshall jumping to his feet. "Objection! Ms. Romero is testifying."

"Withdrawn," Suzanne replied, smiling. "No further questions."

It was a victory of sorts. She had gotten the chemtrail conspiracy in the door.



A big part of Grant Marshall's plan was to impugn Carmine Marchetti's character and reinforce in the jury's mind that he really was a bad apple and perfectly capable of murdering Jack Carson.

So far, he had done an admirable job and he wasn't through yet.

Nick Valenti was Marshall's next witness.

"Mr. Valenti, who is your employer?"

"I work for Mr. Marchetti."

"And what do you do for him?"

"I manage one of his clubs, The Rat Pack Lounge."

When I was on the force, I had been in the Rat Pack a few times. In keeping with its name, the walls were filled with photos of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford. *New York, New York, That's Amore* and all the other iconic classics were constantly being played in the background. Everyone on the force knew the place was a mob hangout, but there were relatively few trouble calls there. Carmine's hired muscle kept a lid on things so the cops would have no reason to come snooping around.

"Tell me about the lounge, Mr. Valenti."

He looked confused. "What's to tell? It's a bar. We serve liquor and a light menu. There's live music on the weekends."

"Tell me about the VIP room."

Nick glanced at Carmine. "Oh that. It's just a room we set aside for some of our regular customers."

"Why do they need a special room? What goes on in there?"

"Oh, just stuff. Sometimes they have a friendly card game."

"Card game? You mean like poker?"

"Uhh, sometimes. Penny-ante stuff. You know what I mean."

"Come on, Mr. Valenti. Isn't the VIP room used for high stakes gambling? Before you answer, remember that you're under oath and perjury is a criminal offense."

Nick looked at Carmine, obviously scared to death. The poor guy was between a rock and a hard place.

Carmine threw up his hands and nodded.

"Uhh, maybe sometimes, I guess."

"Thank you for your candor, Mr. Valenti. No further questions."

He turned to the jury. "Looks like we can add illegal gambling to Mr. Marchetti's résumé."

Suzanne declined to cross examine.



Marshall's next witness was Melina Abadondo.

A murmur went through the courtroom as she took the stand.

Melina was a gorgeous blonde. She was the closest thing I had ever seen to Marilyn Monroe. If her boobs weren't store bought, they should have been in the *Guinness Book of Natural Wonders*, and as the song from *South Pacific* states, "She was broad where a broad should be broad."

I looked at the jury. The women were shocked and I could see them mouthing the words, "Oh, my!" The men, on the other hand, were desperately trying to keep their eyes from popping out of their sockets.

Grant Marshall approached. "Ms. Abadondo. May I call you Melina?"

"Sure, Sweetie," she replied coyly. "You can call me anything that makes it work for you."

A snicker went through the courtroom.

"Order!" Judge Weathers barked, slamming his gavel.

"Melina," Marshall continued, red-faced. "Are you employed?"

"I'm a working girl, if that's what you mean."

Another snicker.

"Where do you work?"

"For Elite Escorts."

"And what do you do there?"

"Duh! I'm an escort!"

I wondered if Marshall was regretting calling Ms. Abadondo to the stand.

"And what exactly does an escort do?"

"We escort people, of course. That's why we're called escorts."

Marshall was getting nowhere fast.

"Who do you escort?"

"Men mostly, but sometimes we get a woman who's looking for something different, if you know what I mean."

"No, I don't know what you mean. What do you do when a woman calls?"

Melina looked puzzled. "Escort them! That's what we do."

"If I wanted to hire you as an escort, how much would it cost me?"

"How long do you want to be escorted?"

"Let's say two hours."

"That would be fifteen hundred dollars."

Another murmur went through the courtroom.

"How much of that do you get?"

"I get five hundred and the company gets a thousand."

"And who exactly is the company. Who do you work for?"

"Mr. Marchetti, of course. Hi Carmine," she said, giving the defendant a little finger wave.

"And what does the client get for his fifteen hundred?"

"Two hours! Isn't that what you asked for?"

Marshall was getting exasperated.

"During that two hours are you expected to offer your client sexual favors?"

Ms. Abadondo was shocked. "My goodness no! That would be illegal!"

"Melina, you're under oath. You swore to tell the truth."

"I did tell the truth," she replied indignantly. "It is illegal to take money for sex."

Marshall must have figured he was beating a dead horse.

"No further questions."

When Suzanne declined to cross, the judge banged his gavel. "Court adjourned until nine o'clock tomorrow."

It wasn't good, but the first day hadn't been a total loss.

CHAPTER 13

After the long day in court, I was beat. Since all I had done was sit on my butt all day, I wasn't physically tired, but the emotional strain of the trial had drained me.

Once again, Dad and I pulled up in front of our building at the same time.

"Hey, Sonny! I got it!" he called out cheerfully.

"Got what, Dad?"

"The Teamster's Hall --- for the big wing-ding --- you know --- the bachelor party that I'm doing because you're too busy."

"Oh, right. Exactly what do you have planned for the big event?" I was curious because sometimes Dad's ideas were suspect.

"Just the usual," he replied with a twinkle in his eye. "That ex-cop friend of yours is catering with his bar-b-cue, and one of Jerry's friends is going to DJ."

"That's it? Nothing wild and wooly?"

"Why would you even ask that?" he replied in mock surprise.

"Because I know you, that's why."

Then I noticed a new sticker on the bumper of his car. In bold letters it proclaimed, "This vehicle protected by Smith & Wesson."

"Dad, that sticker ---."

"It's a dandy, isn't it? I got it at the gun store where I bought my 9mm. Nobody will mess with my car now."

"Actually, Dad, just the opposite is true. Think about it. All that sticker does is announce the fact that the person who owns that car is a gun owner. If some mope sees it, and nobody's around, he's likely to bust out a window thinking there might be a gun under the seat or in the glove box. Ox and I had calls like that all the time."

That took the wind out of his sails. "Well crap! I hadn't thought about that."

I headed into the building leaving Dad rubbing his chin and staring at the sticker.

When I entered our apartment, I found Maggie, Veronica and Judy sitting around the table chatting and looking at magazines.

"What's all this," I inquired, noticing right away that there wasn't a hint of my supper lingering in the air.

"A meeting of Wedding Planners Anonymous," Maggie replied, throwing me a kiss. "We've been at it all afternoon. Still have a long way to go though."

That was a gentle clue that I was probably on my own for supper.

"Judy, what's Ox doing tonight?"

"Probably just moping around the house. Why don't you give him a call? Maybe the two of you can go do something."

Another gentle clue that my presence wasn't needed at Wedding Planners Anonymous.

Actually, it wasn't a bad idea. On the way home, I had been thinking about the trial. If we were going to use the hired assassin scenario, we needed more evidence, and I had thought of something I should check out, but to do it, I would need Ox.

"Good idea," I replied. Then, seeing Veronica reminded me of Melina Abadondo. "Veronica, since you used to be in the business, what do you know about Elite Escorts?"

"Elite, sure I know something about them. All the working girls do. It's a high class operation, big bucks, but it's run by the mob. Girls can make a lot of money, but the downside is that once you go to work for them, they own you. I knew one of the girls. She let me look at her little black book. It read like a who's who in Kansas City, politicians, CEO's, even clergy. Another downside is that you're expected to take care of the owner's needs, if you know what I mean, and from what I hear, Carmine can be pretty kinky."

That certainly made sense. Every time I met with Carmine, he had a gorgeous woman on each arm. One of the perks of being the godfather.

I called Ox and headed out the door. "I'm leaving."

To be fair, Maggie did reply, "Be safe. I love you," but her head, along with the other two girls, was glued to *Modern Bride*.

On the way to my car, I noticed that Dad was on his knees busily scraping Smith & Wesson off his bumper. I heard him mumble, "Seemed like a good idea at the time."

I picked Ox up and we headed to Denny's. I would have preferred Mel's, but Denny's is Ox's favorite and I needed a favor from him.

While we were waiting for our Grand Slams to be served, I ran my idea by Ox.

"You know, once Jack realized he was in danger and being pursued, he must have abandoned everything that could lead the assassins to him, his car, his apartment, credit cards, cell phone, everything. That's what I would have done."

"Makes sense," Ox replied. "The government has ways of tracking us we can't even comprehend."

"Since we know the feds caught up with him, it was most likely either in his car or where he was staying, probably a motel."

"Okay, so?"

"So let's go to the precinct and check out disturbance calls at motels around the time of Jack's disappearance."

Ox grimaced. "I don't know. The brass want Marchetti real bad. If they find out I'm helping you get him off, my butt's in a sling."

"Come on! We both know Marchetti didn't do this. I don't like the guy either, but we can't let those government thugs get away with four murders."

He sighed. "Okay, but if I get my ass fired, you have to hire me at Walt Williams Investigations."

"It's a deal!"



Thankfully, there were few people roaming around the precinct at that late hour.

Ox booted up the computer and after pouring through fifteen minutes of disturbance calls, he said, "I might have something. The Royale Inn, Independence Avenue and Paseo."

I remembered the place. It was a real dump and a crime magnet.

Ox continued, "Says here that a woman from the cleaning crew found the door of a unit bashed in. Apparently the tenant left nothing behind. The room was clean."

"Does it give the tenant's name?"

Ox scrolled further. "Yeah, it was registered to a Fred Fenton. That name sounds familiar."

"Of course it's familiar," I exclaimed. "That was the name Kevin used when he lived in Phoenix! That's Jack for sure. I remember him talking to Kevin, getting some back story for his article since Kevin was involved in our investigation. He used that name to let us know where he was hiding."

"Pretty clever!" Ox observed.

Then it hit me. "Not really. Kevin used that name when he was in witness protection. The US Marshall's gave it to him. The Feds had access to that information. That's how they found him."

"Holy crap! There's no hiding from those guys."

"I don't suppose there were security cameras?"

"At the Royale Inn? You've got to be kidding."

"Maybe not at the motel, but Independence and Paseo is a major intersection. Let's check the traffic cameras for the night of the break-in."

Ox pulled up another screen.

Fortunately, the camera's angle was wide enough to catch the entrance to the motel off Paseo. We started the morning before the break-in and fast-forwarded through the day.

"There! Back it up."

A new model black SUV was seen pulling into the hotel lot. Twenty minutes later, it left. It was too far away to get a license number or see the faces of its occupants.

"That's gotta be the feds," Ox said. "Nobody driving a rig like that would be caught dead in the Royale Inn." Then he thought about what he just said. "Sorry, not the best choice of words."

We knew without a doubt what we had, but it couldn't be used in court. There was no way to prove that Fred Fenton was really Jack Carson, and anybody could have been driving the SUV.
I was back to square one.

CHAPTER 14

We were on our way back to Ox's apartment when my cell phone rang.

"Walt, Suzanne here. Can you come by my office? It's important."

I looked at my watch and figured the girls would still be immersed in bridal stuff.

"Sure. Ox is with me. Is that okay?"

"Actually, that's perfect."

Twenty minutes later we were sitting in Suzanne's office being introduced to a middle-aged Latino woman.

"Walt, Ox," Suzanne said, "This is Maria Lopez. Maria is --- uhhh --- a working girl, and she has some very important information for us."

Once she said that, I recognized the tell-tale signs. It was obvious Maria had once been a beautiful young girl, but life on the street, and most likely drugs, had aged her beyond her years. Her eyes were dark and sunken and had that faraway look of a person wishing she could be anyone and anyplace else.

Suzanne continued. "Maria was with a customer at the Royale Inn the day Jack Carson disappeared. Maria, why don't you tell Walt and Ox what you told me. They're friends. It's okay."

"I --- I work Independence Avenue," she started in a halting voice. "I keep a room at the Royale Inn. On that day, I had just finished with a customer and we were about to leave when we heard the door of the room next to us bashed in. We were afraid, so we just waited to see what would happen next. Maybe ten minutes later, two men came out of the room pushing Jack in front of them. They took him to a black SUV where they were joined by two other men who must have been behind the building. A few minutes later, they drove off."

"I noticed you called Mr. Carson, Jack. It sounds like you know him."

"I do. Jack was a crime reporter for the paper. One night, a customer got really rough and I hit him on the head with a beer bottle. Somebody called the cops. Jack must have heard it on his scanner because he showed up about the same time. They sent both of us to the hospital and just left us there. Jack followed, and after we were treated, he offered to drive me home. I was a real mess. He wasn't a jerk like most guys are with hookers. He was kind. I never forgot that."

"So why did you wait to come forward?" Ox asked. "Why now?"

"Because I saw that Carmine Marchetti is being tried for his murder. Carmine didn't do it. I've been on the street long enough to know most of Marchetti's goons, and the men who took Jack did not work for him. I don't like Marchetti. He's a pig, but if they convict him, the men that are really responsible for Jack's death will get away."

"That's exactly what I've been saying all along," I replied. "Would you recognize the men if you saw them again?"

"The two that took him for sure. They passed right in front of our window. They were both white, middle-aged, well-dressed and very fit." She thought for a moment. "One of them had a scar on his cheek here," she said, running her finger from the bridge of her nose to her jaw.

"Let me show you something," I said, pulling out my cell phone. "Ox and I ran the traffic cam footage for the day Jack was taken and found this SUV leaving the Royale Inn parking lot. Is this the SUV you saw?"

"Yes, I'm sure it is."

"Would you be willing to testify to that in court?" Suzanne asked.

She thought for a moment, then nodded. "I would. I owe it to Jack."

"Fantastic!" I exclaimed. "Without corroboration, that SUV could have been anybody, but with your testimony, the jury can't ignore the possibility that someone else killed Jack. Reasonable doubt."

"Maria," Suzanne said. "The prosecution will be finished tomorrow and we'll begin our defense on Monday. That's when I'll need you in court. Would you like someone to pick you up?"

"Not necessary," she replied. "It's not like I've never been to court before, except this time I won't be the defendant."

Suzanne turned to me. "I'll get Maria's name on the witness list, and Walt, you'd better get some rest. You'll be on the stand tomorrow and Grant Marshall will be going for the jugular."

"Thanks, I'm sure I'll sleep well with that in mind."



Sure enough, I was the first person called to the witness stand.

After the preliminaries, establishing my five years as a cop and my current position as a private investigator, Marshall jumped right in.

"Mr. Williams, on the morning of January 12th, did you visit the office of Detective Derek Blaylock?"

"I did."

"And what was the purpose of that visit?"

"I had been working with Jack Carson on a case and he went missing. I was told by Missing Persons that I should talk to Detective Blaylock."

"What did the detective tell you?"

"He said if Jack was missing, Carmine Marchetti was the logical suspect. He said Jack had been investigating some of his business dealings and Jack had been having an affair with Marchetti's daughter."

"Business dealings? Come on, Mr. Williams. Wasn't Jack Carson digging into Marchetti's protection racket in the northeast neighborhood?"

"I suppose."

"After your conversation with Detective Blaylock, did you confront Mr. Marchetti at his office later that day?"

"I did, and he categorically denied having anything to do with Carson's disappearance."

"And you believed him? He certainly had the motive."

"He was very convincing, plus, I was pursuing another lead as to his disappearance."

I was hoping Marshall would quiz me about my other lead, but he was too sharp to fall into that trap. He totally ignored my comment and continued.

"A few days later, you had a second confrontation with Mr. Marchetti. What was that all about?"

"Someone had abducted my wife, Maggie. I was trying to find her."

"And you suspected Mr. Marchetti had taken your wife?"

"The thought crossed my mind, but I was mistaken. She had actually been abducted by Angel Alvarez, a Columbian drug dealer."

"Why did Alvarez abduct your wife?"

"Because she had a computer that Hector Ramirez left in a house Maggie listed. He wanted to trade Maggie for the computer."

"What was on this computer?"

"The names, contacts and details of the Columbians drug operation in Kansas City."

Marshall looked at a sheet of paper. "According to the police report, the exchange of the computer for your wife went badly. It seems you were both about to be abducted when Carmine Marchetti's men intervened and possibly saved your lives. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"My, my, you and Mr. Marchetti must have become best buds for him to come to your rescue like that. Oh, wait. Maybe it wasn't an act of altruism at all. With the information on that computer, wasn't the drug task force able to pretty much shut down the Columbian drug trade in Kansas City?"

"That's what I understood."

"And with the Columbians out of the way, that certainly left a void in the Kansas City drug market that Mr. Marchetti's organization was able to step in and fill."

Suzanne sprang to her feet. "Objection! Facts not in evidence."

"Withdrawn!" Marshall replied, smiling. "No further questions of this witness."

Grant Marshall had used my testimony to not only solidify Marchetti's motive for killing Carson, but to also add drugs to his resume which already included protection, gambling and prostitution. Carmine wasn't coming across as a very nice guy, but like the old saying goes, "You can't put a flower in an asshole and call it a vase."

Suzanne and I had discussed the possibility of her getting into the hired assassin theory on cross examination, but decided to wait until she was presenting her defense.



Marshall's next witness was Carmine's daughter, Calinda.

"Ms. Marchetti, may I call you Calinda?"

"Sure. I guess."

"Calinda, how did you first come in contact with Jack Carson?"

"Daddy owns twelve apartment buildings around the city. I'm his property manager. I take care of all of his rental units. One day, Jack came by my office at the Bel-Air Apartments and told me he was doing a story on my father and would like to interview me."

"Were you aware that his story was actually an exposé of your father's protection racket?"

"First of all, I don't even know what that is. The only thing I have to do with Daddy's business is manage his apartment buildings. I have an MBA from Baker University and I take my job very seriously. You or anyone else can audit my books any time you want. I have nothing to hide."

"I'm sure you don't, but surely you're not asking us to believe that you know nothing about your father's illegal activities."

"You can believe what you want. I know what people say, but Daddy never let me get involved in anything illegal."

"So what happened with Jack?"

"He realized right away that I had nothing to add to his story, but during that first visit, something just clicked. We enjoyed each other's company and began seeing each other on a regular basis."

"Your father wasn't aware of those first visits, was he?"

"No, I knew Jack was snooping around Daddy's business, so I didn't say anything. No need to upset him if things didn't work out."

"But they did work out, didn't they?"

"Yes, very much so. One of Daddy's people saw Jack and me at a restaurant. He confronted me and I told him everything."

"He must have been upset."

"He was at first. In fact, he asked me not to see him anymore, but when I told him how much I cared for Jack, he gave in."

"Was that about the time Jack gave up on his story about your father?"

"I don't know for sure. Maybe?"

"Did Jack ever tell you why he gave up on his story?"

"He said one of his sources had disappeared."

"And that didn't alarm you?"

"Like I said, Mr. Marshall, I don't get into all that stuff. All I knew was that I loved Jack, then one day he was gone."

"You try to come across as innocent Ms. Marchetti, but I can't believe you are so naïve to not wonder why your lover who had been investigating your father's illegal business, suddenly goes missing along with his informant. Surely you must have some questions about your father's involvement."

"Well, I don't!" she replied defiantly.

"No further questions."

Marshall was good. His questioning made Calinda look either unbelievably naïve or lying through her teeth.



Marshall's last witness was Detective Blaylock.

"Detective, once Jack Carson's body was found, what led you to arrest Carmine Marchetti for his murder?"

"Motive and means, Counselor. Carson was doing his best to expose Marchetti's dirty secrets, plus he was having an affair with the man's daughter. Everyone knows that Carmine Marchetti is the godfather of the

Kansas City mafia, and the way Carson died is consistent with previous murders attributed to the mob."

"Thank you detective. No further questions."

"Cross?" Ms. Romero, Judge Weathers asked.

Suzanne was ready for this one.

"Detective Blaylock, did your crime scene investigators or the Medical Examiner find any physical evidence tying Carmine Marchetti to Carson's death?"

"No."

"So really, everything you have against Carmine Marchetti is circumstantial."

"I suppose, but ---."

She cut him off. "Jack Carson's editor said they had a file folder full of threats against Mr. Carson. Did you investigate any of them?"

"We looked at them, but the most recent was two months old."

"So the answer is 'no.' In your estimation, no one could hold a grudge more than two months."

"Well, I ---."

"When Walt Williams came to you asking about Jack Carson's disappearance, did he not present you with another theory about his disappearance?"

"He had some cockamamie story about a government conspiracy and tried to get me to buy the idea that hired assassins had killed Carson. It was just too far-fetched and he had no concrete evidence."

"So let me get this straight. Your department failed to investigate written threats because you considered them too old, you dismissed Walt Williams' lead because he had no hard evidence, and yet you arrested Carmine Marchetti even though you had no hard evidence yourself. Is that about right?"

No response.

"I can't hear you, Detective."

"Yes."

"Sounds like a witch hunt to me!"

"Objection!" Marshall roared.

"Withdrawn," Romero replied, giving him a wink.

The prosecution's case was weak, but given Marchetti's reputation, it might be enough.

CHAPTER 15

I was so ready for the weekend and a break from the trial. Kevin and Veronica's wedding and spending time with my friends and family was just the tonic I needed to take my mind off gangsters and hired assassins.

I had just settled in with my morning paper, anticipating a quiet Saturday morning, when the phone rang.

"Walt, you ready to go?"

"Go where, Dad? I don't remember making any plans for this morning."

"Of course you do. You're the best man, aren't you?"

"Well yes, but ---."

"But nothin'," he interrupted. "Tonight is Kevin's bachelor party. I've been doing your best man chores all week, but now it's time for you to pitch in."

"So what do you need?" I sighed, visualizing my quiet Saturday morning going down the tubes.

"Tables and chairs, Sonny. We've got to get the Teamster's Hall set up for tonight. I borrowed a pick-up from a buddy and reserved what we need from a rental place. Meet me downstairs in ten minutes."

"But Dad!" I tried to tell him I didn't even have my pants on yet, but he had hung up.

Fifteen minutes later, I met him at the curb tapping his watch.

"You're late! Let's hit the road. We're burnin' daylight."

On the way to the rental place, I asked, "So what exactly do you have planned for the evening?"

"The usual," he replied. "A boys night out before old Kevin ties the knot."

"Just the boys? What are the girls going to do?"

"Maggie said something about having one of those bridal shower things for Veronica. That's all I know."

I thought it odd that we weren't all celebrating together, but since I left the planning to someone else, I really couldn't complain.

At the rental store, Dad signed for the table and chairs and the clerk handed our order to a kid who looked like an extra for a horror movie. His head was shaved and tattooed, his earlobes had those big hole things in the lobes and there were studs in his tongue and sticking out of every orifice on his face.

"Why don't you boys have a cup of coffee and a donut while Ritchie gets you loaded," the clerk suggested.

Since Dad had roused me out of the house before breakfast, it sounded like a good idea.

Fifteen minutes later, Ritchie stuck his head in the door. "Gotzths yuzz stutth luddded," he mumbled.

I took that to mean we were ready to go, so I gulped down the rest of my coffee and headed to the truck.

I wanted to check our load, but Dad was in a hurry. I should have insisted.

Seeing a break in the traffic, Dad put the pedal to the metal and merged onto Broadway. No sooner had we cleared the curb, when I heard a deafening crash. I looked back, and to my horror, tables and chairs littered the street. Cars behind us came to a screeching halt.

"Holy crap!" Dad muttered, bailing out of the driver's side.

As I joined him, I saw Ritchie, open mouthed, staring at the mess. Our eyes met and I saw the fear register on his face just before he fled into the bowels of the building.

I hoped Dad wasn't carrying his 9mm. He might have been tempted to give Ritchie another orifice in which to put a stud.

After fifteen minutes of utter embarrassment, amid jeers and other unsavory epithets flung our way by passing motorists, we were loaded and on our way.

I just hoped this wasn't a harbinger of things to come.

It was nearly four in the afternoon before Dad was through with me. I was bushed and looking forward to a hot shower and maybe a quick nap before the evening's festivities were to begin. But it wasn't to be.

Maggie greeted me at the door.

"Hi Sweetie," she said, giving me a peck on the cheek. "If you're not too busy, I'd really appreciate it if you would run by the hotel and pick up Mary. I'd do it myself, but I'm finishing things up for the bridal shower."

Mary Murphy was our dear friend and the housemother at my Three Trails Hotel, a twenty sleeping room abomination on Linwood Avenue. The twenty scruffy residents share four hall baths. Not ideal living

conditions, but when all you can afford is forty bucks a week, it's a roof over your head.

I figured I might as well give Mary a call to see when she'd be ready. If I was lucky, I still might have time to catch a few quick winks.

"Mr. Walt, I was just getting ready to call you. Maggie said you'd be picking me up. I need you to bring Willie with you. Tell him to bring his snake. Mr. Feeney stopped up the #3 crapper again."

"Swell."

Willie was my maintenance man when I owned a portfolio of apartments. When I sold them and became a cop, he retired --- sort of. He lives rent free in a studio apartment in our building in exchange for taking care of things around here and at the hotel. We became close friends over the years and he actually saved my bacon more times than I want to remember.

I called to give him the good news.

"Dis jus' ain't right," he moaned. "I'se done showered an' got all dressed up fo' de party, an' now I gotta go deal wif ole man Feeney's poop!"

"I feel your pain," I replied, trying to be supportive. "Meet me out front."

When we arrived, Mary was in good spirits.

"Ohhh, I'm so excited! I just love wedding showers."

Willie stomped by without saying a word.

"What's his problem?" she asked.

"Well, he was excited too, until I told him about the number 2 in number 3. Now, not so much."

She giggled. "He'll get over it."

Fifteen minutes later, Mr. Feeney came busting out the door.

"Whoa! Slow down old-timer. What's the rush?"

"It's Willie," he replied looking furtively over his shoulder. "He told me if I did that again, he was gonna run that snake thing up my butt. He wouldn't really do that, would he?"

"I can't make any promises," I lied.

At that moment, Willie appeared, brandishing the snake. "Where is dat ole man?"

Wide-eyed, Mr. Feeney stared at the snake in shock. "Gotta go!" he muttered as he leaped off the porch and tore across the lawn.

Willie grinned as he watched him disappear around the corner. "Bet de ole dude hadn't run dat fast in years. Mebbe it was worth de trip after all."

I packed my charges in the car and headed home.

So much for a nap.



At six that evening, Dad was ready to launch Kevin's bachelor party.

In attendance were Dad, Kevin, Jerry, Ox, Willie, the Professor and myself.

Our mouths were watering as the aroma of bar-b-cue brisket and beans wafted through the big hall.

"I'm ready to tie on the old feed bag," Ox announced.

"Oh, no! Not yet!" Dad said. "We've got a few things to do before we feed our faces."

He brought out a chair and ordered Kevin to sit.

"The bachelor party is a time-honored tradition. It represents the groom's last evening of freedom before being hooked to the old ball and chain. His last opportunity to indulge in some activities that later on might be frowned upon as a violation of the marriage vows. So, without further ado, it's time to get this shindig started."

He left the room and returned pushing a big cake on a dolly.

When the cake was in front of the seated Kevin, Dad said, "Okay, old friend. Are you ready to lick a little icing, if you know what I mean?"

Kevin is not a man who flusters easily, but I could see he was very uncomfortable.

"Look, John, I really appreciate what you're trying to do, but I just don't feel right about it."

Dad was shocked. "I don't understand. Why not?"

He actually blushed. "Veronica trusts me and I just don't want to let her down. Not like this."

"Dad," I whispered, "Maggie specifically said 'no strippers.'"

"You guys need to loosen up," he replied. "Live a little."

With that, he tapped on the cake. "Okay Honey. Let's see what you got!"

The cake popped open and out stepped Kevin's beautiful bride-to-be. She was dressed, barely, in an itsy-bitsy-teeny-weenie yellow polka dot bikini. Needless to say, she filled it very well.

Kevin's mouth dropped open. "Veronica!"

Dad was beaming like he'd just won an Oscar. "You can't have a bachelor party without having a pretty girl pop out of a cake, and since Veronica used to do this for a living, well, I figured I ought to hire the best."

Veronica straddled Kevin's lap, and after burying his nose in her ample cleavage, I heard her whisper, "Thank you, Babe. You said just the right thing and I'm so proud of you, and tomorrow night I'll show you just how proud I really am."

Kevin definitely had something to look forward to.

Then it hit me. "Wait a minute. What about the bridal shower? Where's my wife?"

At that moment, Maggie, Judy and Mary burst into the room. "Surprise!"

I looked at Dad and he shrugged. "I figured since we couldn't have a *real* bachelor party, we might as well all be together."

Maggie pulled out another chair. "Sit down, John. As a reward for all your hard work, we have a surprise for you."

She and Judy left the hall, and a moment later returned pushing another cake.

"We knew how much you wanted a stripper, so here you go."

Maggie tapped the cake and a muffled voice came from inside. "Get me the hell out of here!"

Judy and Maggie popped open the cake and out stepped Bernice in a matching yellow bikini. Needless to say, her ninety-year-old body didn't quite fill it like Veronica's did.

"Jeeze Louise!" Dad muttered, as he took in the wrinkled apparition gyrating in front of him.

He recovered quickly. "Well, at least they got your bra size right --- 32 long."

Bernice punched him in the arm.

After everyone finished snapping photos of our two bikini models together, and on various laps, Dad proclaimed, "Okay, time to eat. How about you two bimbos getting dressed so we can chow down?"

The meal was delicious. We ate until we were stuffed. In addition to no strippers, the girls had insisted on no booze, but, as usual, Dad snuck in a few trays of his notorious Jello shots.

After the meal, Dad stood and clinked his glass. "Attention everyone. I know tomorrow's a big day, but before we call it a night, our friend Jerry has a few words for the bride and groom."

Everyone rolled their eyes. Our resident stand-up comic could be quite annoying, and what was coming was anybody's guess. He was also our resident poet-laureate, which sometimes was pretty good. I hoped it would be the latter.

He solemnly stood and faced his audience.

"Throughout history, great romances have captured the hearts and imaginations of millions. From Anthony and Cleopatra to Rhett Butler and Scarlet O'Hara. Across the ages, love has blossomed across stormy seas, between warring tribes and social classes, but few have bridged the formidable gap separating a woman in full bloom from an old geezer in his dotage. Yet, such is the love story we are celebrating tonight, which will certainly join George Burns and Gracie Allen as one of the most storied romances in history.

"I have written a little ditty for the occasion which I call *Ode to the Beauty and the Beast*.

The story started years ago
When he was just a lad.
He got in a car with some mafia thugs
And they were really bad.

They killed a guy and tried to run
The law caught them anyway.
Kevin talked and they sent him west
And told him he'd have to stay.

For fifty years, he lived this way
With no family, kids or wife.
Then one day, he got some news
That would really change his life.

If you don't get a kidney
A kindly doctor said.
It will only be a few months more
Before you wind up dead.

He searched and searched without success
But no kidney could be found.
So he faced the fact that very soon
He'd be planted in the ground.

But before he passed beyond the veil
He had one final wish.
To spend at least one steamy night
With some pretty little dish.

His friends came through and found her
Veronica was her name.
And to fill a dying man's last wish
She was the perfect dame.

Then out of the blue, a kidney came
To save the old dude's skin.
So Kevin devised a brand new plan
Veronica's heart to win.

Some said it would never happen
Cause he was just too old.
But Kevin never faltered
The nookie made him bold.

He professed his love and wooed her
And won the lady's heart.
Not at all an easy task
For such an aged fart.

The moral of this story
If you're inclined to look for one.
Is that without a doubt
He's a lucky son-of-a-gun!

He took a bow as everyone rose from their seats, applauding in appreciation.
This certainly hadn't been a typical bachelor party, but it ended well.
Given the quirkiness of our little group, it could have been a lot worse.

CHAPTER 16

Weddings and funerals are good for one thing --- bringing people together.

They are among the few times that people with diverse views and backgrounds and differing opinions can set aside the things that separate them and join together to share in a moment of joy or sorrow.

This was definitely such a day.

The colorful backgrounds of both the bride and groom were reflected in the guests who filled the pews.

In addition to the close friends and family who had attended the bachelor party the night before, there gathered a group of people as different as night and day.

Veronica was a foster home runaway who turned to prostitution to survive. One pew was filled with her friends from those days, attractive young women still actively involved in the world's oldest profession.

Across the aisle were cops in uniform, friends of Ox and Judy, and Kevin McBride, private investigator.

Just behind them were Willie and his main squeeze, Emma. Seated with them was Louie the Lip, a pal of Willie's from his days on the street as a con man. Louie still plied the trade but had become a valuable source of information and an informal confidential informant.

The Professor, with Doctorates in Psychology, Philosophy and Sociology, sat next to Jerry, a stand-up comic. Next to them were my Dad and his ninety-year-old bimbo, Bernice, probably both packing heat.

On a different day, the men in blue might be hauling Louie or one of the ladies of the night off to the pokey, but not today. Today was all about Kevin and Veronica.

The bride and groom had insisted on a very plain and simple no-frills ceremony, with one exception. Mary Murphy said there just couldn't be a wedding without a flower girl, and since she had experience, having filled that role at Ox and Judy's wedding, she was the logical choice. Not wanting to disappoint the old girl, Kevin and Veronica acquiesced. The only dissenter was Willie who made it quite clear that the crazy old bat could throw dead flowers all over the church if she wanted to, but he wasn't cleaning it up.

Finally, the magic moment arrived.

In place of the traditional wedding march, they selected *We've Only Just Begun* by The Carpenters.

As Karen Carpenter's sultry voice filled the sanctuary, Mary dutifully scattered her rose petals down the aisle.

Maggie and I were next, and as I heard the words of the song, I thought how perfect it was for the two of them.

*Sharing horizons that are new to us
Watching the signs along the way
Talkin' it over just the two of us
Workin' together day to day
Together*

Since Veronica had no father figure to give her away, the two of them decided to come down the aisle together, arm in arm.

The bride and groom appeared and the congregation rose as they came down the aisle and took their places in front of Pastor Bob.

When everyone was seated, he began.

"My responsibility today is to unite two people in holy matrimony, and in accordance with their wishes, there will be no 'dearly beloveds' or long scripture readings. We will get right to the task at hand.

"I asked the two of them to write their wedding vows and share them with me. To my surprise, they were almost identical, so today I am going to break from tradition and read their vows for them. Since most of you know the bride and groom, it is no big secret that their past lives have been, shall we delicately say, rocky. The vows they have written reflect the sentiment of the beautiful song we just heard, *we've only just begun*."

He read from a slip of paper. "The past is gone forever and means nothing to me. What matters, is the here and now and our future lives together. I will cherish whatever time is given to us, and I promise to love you and care for you until death do us part."

He looked at them "Do you so affirm?"

They both nodded. "We do."

Then he turned to Maggie and me. "Do you have the rings?"

"We do."

"The ring is a symbol of your commitment to each other," he continued, "and I think in your particular case the symbolism is quite fitting. The diamond was formed deep in the earth under tremendous pressure before it was brought to the surface and sculpted into the beautiful stone it is today. Likewise the gold was buried for centuries before being mined, melted, forged and polished. The two of you have felt life's relentless pressure and have passed through the fires of the worldly forge, and here you are today, two new souls coming together as one.

"Kevin, you may place the ring on the third finger of Veronica's left hand and repeat after me. Veronica, with this ring I thee wed and pledge my life to you."

When Kevin finished, Veronica placed her ring on his finger.

"With this ring I thee wed and pledge my life to you."

Pastor Bob smiled and raised his hand. "Then by the authority vested in me by the State of Missouri and God's holy church, I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride."

After a big smooch, he announced, "I present to you Mr. and Mrs. Kevin McBride."

Everyone cheered as the newlyweds made their way to the foyer to greet their friends.

It was a beautiful wedding and a day to be cherished, but there was a dark cloud looming on my horizon.

Tomorrow the trial would continue and I would be on the stand as a witness for the defense.

CHAPTER 17

Suzanne Romero's defense strategy was simple. There would only be three witnesses. Calinda would be first, to reinforce the notion that her father would never kill the man she loved. I would be second to introduce the alternate theory that Jack was murdered by government assassins, and Maria Lopez would put the icing on the cake with her narrative of Jack being abducted, reinforced by the webcam video of the SUV leaving the motel.

We would have to sell the conspiracy theory well enough to create reasonable doubt in the minds of the jurors.

Before the trial began, I was sitting with Calinda and I noticed a few new faces in the crowd. One of them was the spitting image of Carmine, just a few years younger and not quite as paunchy. I pointed him out to Calinda.

"That man in the third row. Do you know him?"

"Of course. That's Uncle Frank, Daddy's little brother. He takes care of the family business when Daddy's not available. He's been pretty busy since Daddy's been in jail."

I had heard of Frankie Marchetti, but this was the first time I'd laid eyes on him.

A few rows back were two other faces in the crowd I hadn't seen before. Two white guys, mid-thirties, fit and well-dressed. I had heard that description before, and suddenly I realized that was exactly how Maria Lopez described the men who had taken Jack.

After I thought about it for a moment, it wasn't much of a stretch to believe the government would have people in the courtroom today. They must know we will be suggesting that Jack was killed by government assassins and they would want to know exactly what proof we had.

The fact that I was the one who would be spilling the government's beans gave me an uneasy feeling.

I took another quick look around the courtroom and realized something was very wrong. Maria Lopez was nowhere to be seen.

Suzanne and Carmine had just taken their seats at the defense table. I slipped to the rail and whispered, "Suzanne, Maria's not in the gallery. Do you know something that I don't?"

I saw the concerned look register on her face. "I called her last night and she promised to be here. I even offered to pick her up again, but she said she'd be fine."

"Maybe she's just running late."

"Maybe, maybe not," she replied. "Without her testimony we don't have a chance. Call Ox and have him track her down."

I clicked on my cell and gave Ox the message. He said he'd do his best.

The bailiff's voice jarred me out of my funk.

"All rise for the Honorable Judge Milton Weathers."

When we were seated, the judge turned to Suzanne. "Ms. Romero, are you ready to proceed with your defense?"

"Yes, Your Honor. The defense calls Calinda Marchetti to the stand."

After she was seated on the stand, the judge reminded her she was still under oath.

"Calinda," Suzanne began, "I believe we've already established from your previous testimony that you were romantically involved with Jack Carson. You knew from the moment you met Mr. Carson that he was investigating your father. The prosecution has arrested him for Jack's murder and their entire case rests on proving that Carmine was so incensed with Jack's investigation and your affair that he had him killed. I'd like to explore that with you this morning. You testified earlier that when your father found out you were seeing Jack, he was upset. Is that true?"

"Of course he was upset. Jack was trying to prove Daddy was doing something illegal. He asked me not to see him, but when I told him how much I cared for Jack, he backed off. I remember him saying I was headstrong just like my mother, and if he forbade me to see him, I'd just do it behind his back."

"Didn't that make things pretty intense around your house?"

"It probably would have, but then something happened and Jack decided to drop his investigation."

I cringed when I heard her say that. Undoubtedly the thing that had put the skids on Jack's story was the disappearance of his inside source. Fortunately, Carmine wasn't on trial for that murder, just Jacks.

"So, did Jack continue to look into your father's affairs?"

"No, he told me that what we had together was more important than any story. In fact, after he dropped his investigation, I asked him to meet Daddy. They got along just fine. I remember Daddy patting him on the cheek and saying, 'It's a good thing my daughter loves you, Sonny.'"

I saw Carmine bury his face in his hands. Calinda probably didn't realize the message Carmine sent was that without Calinda, Jack would have been toast.

Suzanne hurriedly changed the subject. "Were you aware of any other stories Jack was pursuing?"

"Yes and no. He told me he was investigating something that involved the government. He said it was dangerous and that for my own safety he couldn't tell me anything about it."

"Once he started that investigation, did anything change in your relationship?"

"It did. He was gone a lot. He took several trips out of town. He had always been real calm and laid back, but after he started this investigation, he was real nervous and edgy. It just wasn't like him."

"Do you remember the last time you spoke with him?"

"I do. We were supposed to get together, but he called and cancelled. He said a woman from some chemical company came to town and he had to meet with her. He said it was really important for the story he was working on. That was the last time I heard his voice."

A tear rolled down her cheek and she quickly wiped it away.

"I'm so sorry for your loss," Suzanne said, sympathetically. "Please, one more time for the jury. The man you loved was murdered and you are confident that your father was not involved in his death."

"Absolutely positive."

"No further questions."

The judge turned to Grant Marshall. "Cross?"

"Yes, Your Honor. Ms. Marchetti, I too am sorry for your loss, but I'd like to clarify a few points. You said Mr. Carson was working on another story, but you have no idea what it was and no knowledge of any information or evidence he might have collected. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then just one more thing. I imagine you and your father are very close, and now that your lover is gone, he's probably the most important person in your life."

"I suppose so."

"With that in mind, you probably wouldn't hesitate to do anything that would save his life --- even lie."

Suzanne jumped to her feet. "Objection!"

Before the judge could rule, Calinda spoke. "No, I want to answer that. Do I believe my father killed Jack Carson? Absolutely not! There's no way in the world he would have murdered the father of his grandchild. I'm pregnant. I'm carrying Jack Carson's baby."

A hush fell over the courtroom.

The look on Suzanne's face told me she had no idea her witness was pregnant.

Whether by design or by accident, Calinda had saved the best for last.

The shocked prosecutor returned to his seat. "No further questions."

Suzanne rose. "The defense calls Walter Williams."

The moment I had been dreading had arrived.

After being reminded I was still under oath, Suzanne began. "Let's talk about your relationship with Jack Carson. How did it begin?"

"One morning, Jack called my home office. He told me he had been working on a story about chemtrails."

"Let me interrupt just one moment. What exactly are chemtrails?"

"Everyone has seen them," I replied. "All you have to do is go outside pretty much any day of the week. There will be fluffy trails crisscrossing the sky from horizon to horizon."

"But aren't those just condensation trails from the airplanes jet engines?"

"That's what we're supposed to believe, but an Air Force pilot, Dale Fox, contacted Jack and told him that the trails were actually part of an ongoing program called Indigo Skyfold and contained dangerous chemicals, aluminum, barium and ethylene dibromide to name a few. Jack told me he had three meetings with Fox, and a fourth was scheduled. Fox was to bring him a sample of the brew being sprayed into our skies, but on the way to their meeting, Fox was killed in an auto accident. He called me to ask George Wilson, my former partner on the force, to take a closer look. He suspected foul play."

"What did he find?"

"After closer examination of the vehicle, it was determined that the brake line ruptured. Evidence was inconclusive that someone had tampered with the line."

"Did Jack Carson ever share with you why the chemicals were being sprayed?"

Grant Marshall jumped to his feet. "Objection! This wild speculation has absolutely nothing to do with Carmine Marchetti's innocence or guilt."

"Quite the contrary, Your Honor," Suzanne replied. "Someone killed Jack Carson, but Carmine Marchetti wasn't the only one with a motive. Walt Williams went to Detective Blaylock as soon as Jack disappeared and gave him a lead to follow. It's not the defense's fault that the detective did not pursue that lead. The jury needs to know that there were other factors in play at the time of Jack's death."

After a moment's thought. "Objection overruled! I'll allow it."

"Thank you, Judge. Now Walt, did Jack Carson ever tell you why the chemicals were being sprayed?"

"According to Dale Fox, and I heard his words myself on a recording Jack made, the spraying was being done for two reasons, weather manipulation and defense. Fox had been warned by his superiors that the program was a matter of national security and any breaches of confidence would result in dire consequences. Fox talked and wound up dead."

Marshall was on his feet again. "Objection! The witness already testified there was no evidence that this Dale Fox died as a result of foul play."

"Objection sustained. The clerk will strike the witnesses' last statement."

"Mr. Williams, Calinda Marchetti testified that Jack took several trips out of town. Do you anything about those?"

"Yes, I know of two. His first was a trip to the Pinal Air Park in Arizona. According to Fox, this was a base of operations for Indigo Skyfold. Jack brought back photos of large tanker planes with no markings and aerial photos of a restricted command center. The second trip was a visit with Kristen Meghan, a former Air Force Bio-Environmental Engineer. She had found canisters of the chemicals being sprayed, but was silenced by her superiors who threatened to take her child away. That was a dead end. She refused to talk to Jack."

"Calinda also mentioned a meeting Jack had arranged with a woman from some chemical company. Did you know about that?"

"I certainly did. The woman's name was Louise Shipley. She worked for Monsanto at the company's headquarters in St. Louis. Jack had learned that the aluminum being sprayed was falling to earth and contaminating many of our row crops. Monsanto had applied for and was granted patents to produce aluminum resistant seeds. She was supposedly bringing evidence of Monsanto's complicity in the chemtrail conspiracy, but she disappeared before she could meet with Jack."

"So let me summarize, Jack Carson was working on a story that would expose a clandestine government program that had been going on for years. It was a program that involved the spraying of deadly chemicals into our atmosphere, and two people who were feeding information to Jack ended up dead or missing. Is that correct?"

I could have added a third, Frank Katz, but that would have opened another can of worms regarding his manuscript.

"Yes, it is."

"Then, in your opinion, Mr. Williams, is it possible that Jack Carson could have been silenced to keep him from exposing a secret government program?"

"I think it's not only possible, but very probable."

"Thank you, Mr. Williams. No further questions."

"Cross Mr. Marshall?"

"Yes, Your Honor. I have only one question for Mr. Williams. Sir, that's quite a story you just told. Something one might see on an episode of *X-Files*. My question is this --- do you have even one tiny bit of evidence to support your wild theory?"

So there it was. I had all kinds of evidence in the manila envelope in my safe, but to reveal its existence meant I was placing not only myself, but all those I love in danger. If I had to choose between them and Carmine Marchetti, it was a no brainer.

Then, I looked up and saw something that made my blood run cold. One of the men I had seen earlier had a scar on his cheek running from his nose to his jaw line. I couldn't see it from where I was sitting, but from the witness stand, it was as plain as day.

It didn't take a lot of thought to spit out my reply. "No, I don't have any physical evidence."

"No further questions."

"You may step down, Mr. Williams." He turned to Suzanne. "Any more witnesses for the defense, Ms. Romero?"

At that moment Ox stepped into the courtroom. Suzanne gave him a searching look and he shook his head.

I saw her shoulders droop. "No, Your Honor. The defense rests."

"Very well," he said, banging his gavel, "due to the lateness of the hour, we'll convene at nine tomorrow morning and hear closing arguments. Court dismissed!"

After the courtroom cleared, we all gathered in the attorney-client room.

Suzanne was obviously upset. "Ox, you found no sign of Maria Lopez?"

"I wish that were true," he sighed. "I looked everywhere, then finally remembered she said she kept a room at the Royale Inn. I twisted the clerk's arm and he gave me the room number. That's where I found her. She was dead."

We all sat in stunned silence.

"Dead? How?" Suzanne asked.

"Bludgeoned to death. I called it in and pretty soon the place was crawling with cops. The CSI guys checked the place with a black light and there were so many semen stains it looked like a sperm bank had exploded. The clerk admitted that Maria used the room to entertain her clients. The detective in charge chalked it up to a tete a tete gone bad. They're looking for some john she might have picked up."

"John, my ass!" I muttered. "Somehow the government goons found out she was going to testify, whacked her, and made it look like just another dead hooker. But how would they have known?"

"I guess that's on me," Suzanne replied. "I had to include her name on my witness list I turned over to the prosecution. They could have gotten the information from there."

"That's five." I said.

"Five what?"

"Five people murdered to keep the government's dirty little secret."

Carmine spoke for the first time. "They got my ass in a sling, don't they?"

Suzanne slumped in her chair. "It doesn't look good, Carmine. Not good at all."

CHAPTER 18

With Maria Lopez dead, our best shot at getting Carmine off the hook and laying the blame at the feet of government assassins was down the tubes.

We were just sitting there in a stupor, when I happened to notice the corner of a manila envelope sticking out of Calinda's bag. It could have been any old envelope, maybe an invitation to lower her insurance rates at Geico, but it got my attention.

"Calinda, that envelope in your bag. May I see it?"

She was obviously apprehensive. "I --- I don't think so. It's personal."

I could read between the lines. "It's from Jack, isn't it?"

When she didn't respond, Suzanne prodded, "Look, Calinda, we're grasping for straws here. If you have something from Jack, it just might help."

Reluctantly, she handed me the envelope. It was identical to the one I had received, except it was addressed to her.

I opened it and pulled out a single sheet of paper. The note read:

My Dear Calinda,

I'm so sorry I haven't contacted you. My life is in danger and if I had called, yours would be too. I must leave town and disappear for a while. When I feel it is safe, I will be in touch. Until then, know that I love you.
Jack

Suzanne was the first to speak. "Calinda, why in the world didn't you show me this earlier? It's certainly evidence that Jack feared for his life."

"But it doesn't say why he was afraid," she replied. "I thought the prosecution could turn it around and say that Jack was afraid of what Daddy might do."

"So can we still use it?" Carmine asked, grasping for straws.

"No," Suzanne replied, "I'm afraid it's too little, too late."

An idea had been forming in my mind. "Maybe not. If all of you can give me a half hour to run home and back, I think I might have something that will tip the scales our way."

"Anything," they all replied, and I was on my way to retrieve the manila envelope from my safe.



Thirty minutes later, I pulled the envelope from a grocery bag.

"I received an envelope from Jack too," I confessed, "but mine was certainly different from the one Calinda received. It contained every bit of evidence Jack collected on the chemtrail conspiracy."

I opened the envelope and poured the contents on the table. "Recorded interviews, photos, everything. Then there was this note."

If you're reading this, it means they have found me. There are only two possible outcomes. I will make every effort to disappear and start a new life far away, but there is a very good chance I won't make it out of town. Either way, I have done all that I can do. The contents of this envelope contain everything I have uncovered about the government's chemtrail conspiracy. I hate laying this burden at your feet, but now it's up to you to expose this horrendous program that is filling our skies with poison. Good luck! Jack Carson.

After reading the note, Carmine frowned, "Hold on a minute! When you were on the stand, the prosecutor asked if you had any evidence supporting this chemtrail thing and you said no. This stuff could have got me off the hook. What gives?"

"It's pretty simple, Carmine. At the time I received this envelope, three people who had come forward with information about the chemtrails were dead and Jack was missing. The people responsible for those deaths knew I was poking around as well, and I received these texts."

I showed them the texts with the photos of Maggie at our apartment and at work with the messages, 'Back off!' and 'Quit digging.'

"I'm so sorry, but there was no way in the world I was going to risk my wife for you or anyone else. I hope you understand."

He thought for a moment. "Yeah, I get it. I woulda done the same thing. So why show them to us now?"

"Because I have an idea how we can use the stuff to get you off without endangering anyone. Jack must have mailed the envelopes to me and Calinda at the same time, just before he was caught. No one knows about these envelopes but the people in this room. What if we take all the evidence and the note Jack wrote to me and put it in the envelope he sent to Calinda? Suzanne could present it into evidence tomorrow morning, saying Calinda had no idea what she had until she heard my testimony. Once the stuff is in the hands of the court, it will be public record and Calinda and I will be off the hook with the assassins."

Suzanne thought for a moment. "Walt, you realize you committed perjury and if we do what you are suggesting we're all guilty of tampering with evidence."

"All I know is that this chemtrail conspiracy is real and the government is willing to do anything to keep it a deep dark secret --- including killing five people. It's not like they're playing by the rules either."

Suzanne thought for a moment. "Sometimes you have to give Lady Justice a helping hand. I'm in!"



The next morning, I met Kevin on the courthouse steps.

"What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be on a honeymoon somewhere?"

"Plenty of time for that later. I was up to my neck in this case too. I just had to see how it turned out."

"You picked a good day," I replied, knowing what was coming.

Once the judge was seated, he turned to Grant Marshall. "Your closing statement Mr. Marshall."

Before he could reply, Suzanne rose, "Your Honor, before we begin closing statements, the defense has some additional evidence to present to the court."

Marshall was incensed. "Your Honor! The defense rested their case yesterday."

Judge Weathers turned to Suzanne. "This is highly irregular, Ms. Romero. Why was this evidence not presented yesterday and why should I allow it today?"

"Two reasons, Your Honor. As I'm sure you're aware, Maria Lopez was on our witness list and was prepared to testify that she had seen Jack Carson abducted. Ms. Lopez was killed yesterday, conveniently preventing her from sharing her testimony."

Marshall jumped to his feet again. "Objection! Maria Lopez was a prostitute and there was no evidence linking her death to these proceedings."

"That may be true, Mr. Marshall," Suzanne replied. "At least there was no evidence the police have found, but the point is that her testimony was a vital part of Mr. Marchetti's defense. A trial is all about arriving at the truth, and Mr. Marchetti deserves every chance to prove his innocence."

The judge thought a moment. "I'll take that into consideration. You said there were two reasons. Please continue."

"The evidence we wish to present to the court is an envelope Jack Carson mailed to Calinda Marchetti before he was killed. It contains everything Mr. Carson collected during his investigation of the chemtrail conspiracy, photos, recordings, everything."

Marshall started to rise again, but the judge raised his hand. "Obviously Ms. Marchetti has had this material in her possession for some time. Why is she just bringing it forward now?"

"Ms. Marchetti testified under oath that she knew nothing about Jack's investigation into the government's secret program. He purposely kept her in the dark for her own safety. Only after hearing Walt Williams' testimony yesterday, did she understand the significance of what Jack Carson had mailed to her."

After considering her plea for a moment, he ordered, "Counsel, approach the bench. Ms. Romero, let's take a look at this evidence."

Suzanne joined Grant Marshall at the bench and handed the manila envelope to Judge Weathers.

He opened the envelope spreading its contents on the bench. I watched him examine the photos and read the note Jack had written.

After a few moments, he announced, "The court will be in recess to give me an opportunity to examine this evidence further. The bailiff will notify all parties when it's time to reconvene. Court dismissed."

I had been watching the two men I had seen the day before. When the judge made his ruling, the one with the scar whispered to the other and they both made a bee line for the door, pushing people aside.

"Holy crap!" Kevin muttered. "So Calinda had Jack's stuff all the time. She was sitting on a powder keg and had no idea. If Carmine hadn't been arrested, all that information Jack collected might never have seen the light of day."

"Funny how things work out," I replied, smiling to myself.



It was three in the afternoon when we were notified that court would be in session.

When everyone was seated, a grim-faced judge turned to Grant Marshall. "I understand the prosecution has a motion to present to the court."

Marshall stood. "Yes, Your Honor, the prosecution moves to withdraw all charges against Carmine Marchetti in the death of Jack Carson."

Judge Weathers turned to the defense table. "Motion accepted. Mr. Marchetti, you are free to go."

And just like that, it was all over.

Someone in government, and I would have given my left nut to know how high, had enough clout to order the motion to acquit to keep the evidence of the chemtrail conspiracy from coming to light.

If there was ever doubt in anyone's mind that the conspiracy was real, this would certainly erase that doubt.

As soon as the judge banged his gavel, Carmine jumped to his feet and hugged Calinda, then Suzanne.

Then he turned to me and took my hand. "Thanks, Walt. I said I needed a good private eye and you came through for me." Then he patted me on the back. "That's one you owe me off the books, but don't forget, there's still one left."

"What the hell was that all about?" Kevin asked.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you sometime."

CHAPTER 19

I was feeling pretty good as we left the courthouse. Kevin kept yapping about the quirky turn of events at the trial. I wanted to tell him how we'd pulled it off, but I knew the less people who knew the truth, the better.

We were heading to the parking lot when I spotted Carmine and his brother, Frankie. My first thought was that they were heading to Antonelli's for a celebratory drink, but then I caught a glimpse of something shiny pressed into Carmine's back.

I pointed them out to Kevin. "What's that look like to you?"

He stared for a moment. "It looks to me like the Marchettis are going to have a not-so-brotherly chat."

"Looks that way to me, too. I say we follow them."

"Are you carrying?" Kevin asked.

Since no guns were allowed in the courthouse, I hadn't bothered to pack any hardware. "Uhhh, no, I'm not."

"Figures," he sighed. "Mine's under the front seat of the car. I'll drive."

Kevin idled in the lot until Frankie and Carmine were well under way. We followed them to I-29 North and soon they took the Front Street exit and headed northeast.

"Bet a buck Frankie's taking him to River Front Park," Kevin said.

Sure enough, Frankie turned left on Monroe to the park entrance.

This time of year and at this time of day, the park was deserted.

"If we follow him in, he'll see us sure as shootin'," Kevin said. "How would you feel about a little hike? I say we circle around and see what we can see."

"Works for me," I replied.

Kevin parked, retrieved his Glock from under the seat, and we headed across the grassy field, running from tree to tree for cover.

We crossed over a little knoll and saw Carmine on his knees and Frankie had a gun to the back of his head.

We inched closer on our bellies until we could hear bits and pieces of their conversation.

"You don't have to do this, Frankie," Carmine pleaded. "We can work something out."

"Too late for that, Big Brother. As long as you're alive I'll always be a second banana. I thought for sure they'd put you away on this one, but somehow you wiggled out of it again. You're one lucky son-of-a-bitch, but now your luck's run out."

"But Frankie! I'm your brother. We're blood!"

"That may be, but you've had your time. Now it's my turn to run the family business. If you got any last words, now's the time."

When Carmine didn't reply, Frankie pulled back the hammer of his revolver. "So long, Big Brother."

Kevin leaped to his feet. "Put the gun down, Frankie, or they'll be two dead Marchettis bleeding out in River Front Park."

"What the hell! Who are you guys?"

"Just a couple of concerned citizens," I replied. "Now put down that gun before my friend here gets trigger happy."

As soon as Frankie dropped the gun, Carmine snatched it up.

"Walt! You're a sight for sore eyes. Looks like you got here just in time. Sorry you had to see that."

"Yeah, me too, but at least you'll have witnesses to confirm your story this time."

"I don't think so," he replied.

"What do you mean? We saw everything."

"Right, but no cops."

"But Carmine, he was going to bust a cap in the back of your head."

"Sure he was, but it don't matter. If the cops come sniffin' around, it will just open a whole can of worms. After what happened in court today, they'd like nothin' better than to take another crack at me."

"Carmine!" I protested. "We can't just ---."

He held up his hand cutting me off. "Walk away, Walt. This is family business. Please do us both a favor and just walk away."

I looked at Kevin, and we both looked at the .357 Magnum in Carmine's hand.

He nodded. "Let's go, Walt."

As we turned to walk away, Carmine shouted, "That's two, Gumshoe. We're even. All square. I won't forget this."

I'm sure I'll never forget that moment either.

There wasn't a doubt in my mind that before the evening was over, Frankie Marchetti would be wearing the concrete shoes he had brought for his brother.

A few short months ago, I was a cop, sworn to uphold the law, and yet, in the last twenty-four hours, I had committed perjury, tampered with evidence, and walked away from a gangland murder.

Maybe I was just trying to rationalize things I wouldn't have considered doing back then, but when I thought about the possible consequences of what might have happened had I not done those things, somehow I felt that justice had been served.

I had been warned that working for the Lady Justice wearing the high heels and fishnet stockings would be vastly different from serving the Lady in the white flowing robe wearing a blindfold.

I just didn't realize how different it would actually be.



EPILOGUE

The next morning, the headline in the *Star* read, *Carmine Marchetti Acquitted in the Death of Reporter Jack Carson*.

I couldn't help but marvel at the paradox. On the very day Marchetti had been rightfully cleared of one murder, he had most likely committed another.

As I reflected on the events of the past few weeks, I really couldn't fault Detective Blaylock. It was certainly more reasonable to believe Jack had been killed by an incensed mobster than government agents protecting a clandestine program hidden from the public for decades. While Occam's razor may apply in the long run, it certainly didn't in this case.

One positive outcome was that I was no longer obligated to Carmine Marchetti. It felt like a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders knowing I was no longer beholden to the godfather of the Kansas City mafia.

I was actually feeling pretty good and had a positive outlook on life until I stepped outside and saw a half dozen trails crisscrossing the sky from one horizon to the other.

Sadly, it occurred to me that in spite of all that had been done and all the lives that were lost, the deadly trails were still with us.

I remembered the days of my youth, when I would lay in the pasture after helping Grandpa with his chores, or in the outfield grass after a game, staring at the fluffy white clouds, my imagination running wild.

Even though he gave his life to prevent it, Jack Carson's unborn child would never have that opportunity. Instead, he would look into the sky and see gritty streaks that would dissipate into a dirty grey haze that would block the rays of the sun.

I thought about how much had changed in the hundred and sixty years since Chief Seattle spoke those words of wisdom, "Teach your children that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves."

And yet, those who govern us do exactly that --- they spit upon the earth. The aluminum, barium and ethylene dibromide fall from the sky poisoning the earth, so that today our crops cannot be grown as Mother Nature intended, but only from genetically modified seeds created to thrive in the polluted soil.

The air we breathe fills our lungs with toxins and pollutes our bodies just as it does the soil, weakening our immune system and enabling crippling disease.

The leaders of the world gather at an international conference, pompously declaring they are seeking solutions to climate change caused by greenhouse gasses, while the real agenda is climate manipulation through global spraying and the use of ionospheric heaters such as the HAARP installation, scattered throughout the world.

The saddest part of this whole scenario is that the people who are involved in this program and actually know the truth, fear for their very lives and dare not come forward, and the rest of us, the millions who go about our daily lives, are seemingly oblivious to the trails that have been crossing the skies for decades.

I know that every time I look up and see those abominable trails, I will name each one, Jack Carson, Frank Katz, Louise Shipley, Dale Fox and Maria Lopez. I will remember the sacrifice they made, and hope that someday the truth will be revealed and their sacrifice will not have been in vain.

I thought about the manila envelope that had been sequestered in my safe, and the five people who died trying to bring its contents to light. I could only imagine where it was at that moment. I had no doubts that it had been snatched from the hands of Judge Weathers and most likely destroyed.

Coincidentally, before turning the evidence over to the court, I copied every piece, and like its predecessor, it is hidden away in my safe. I will never tell a living soul that it exists, but who knows, it just might come in handy someday.

Sometimes Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction

While *Lady Justice and the Conspiracy Trial* is a work of fiction, the fundamental elements of the story are based in truth.

Is the chemtrail conspiracy real?

Check out the following references and decide for yourself!

Are chemtrails real?



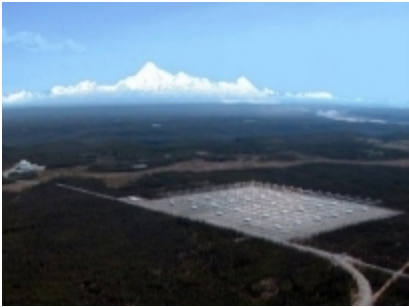
<http://www.collective-evolution.com/2014/04/18/nasa-admits-to-chemtrails-as-they-propose-spraying-stratospheric-aerosols-into-earths-atmosphere/>

Read the words of a military pilot like Dale Fox, who actually flew missions for the Indigo Skyfold program.



<http://stateofthenation2012.com/?p=10890>

Learn the facts about the HAARP installation in Gakona, Alaska.



<http://www.harp.net/>

<http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/want-to-know-about-harp/>

How Operation Cloverleaf uses the HAARP installation for both weather modification and defense.



<http://www.disclose.tv/forum/project-cloverleaf-chemtrails-and-their-purpose-t72795.html>

Is the Pinal Air Park in Marana, Arizona, visited by Jack Carson really a base for chemtrail pilots?



<http://stopnortherncaliforniachemtrails.blogspot.com/2014/12/pinal-county-airpark.html>

Is the huge chemical giant, Monsanto linked to the chemtrail conspiracy?



<http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/chemtrails-killing-organic-crops-monsantos-gmo-seeds-thrive/>
<http://weatherpeace.blogspot.com/2013/08/connecting-dots-monsanto-and-weather.html>

Jack Carson tried to interview Kristen Meghan without success. Was she actually a military bio-environmental engineer turned whistleblower?



<http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/ex-military-bio-environmental-engineer-kristen-meghan-blows-whistle-on-air-force-chemtrails/>

Is the earth's climate really changing or is the weather being manipulated?



<http://theweathereffect.com/#Lucy%20in%20the%20Sky%20with%20Diamonds>

<https://www.rt.com/usa/320554-antarctica-gaining-ice-nasa/>

http://www.naturalnews.com/052333_COP21_global_warming_climate_quackery.html

http://www.naturalnews.com/045695_global_warming_fabricated_data_scientific_fraud.html

The recently released Italian documentary on chemtrails.



<http://www.theeventchronicle.com/study/italian-chemtrails-secret-war-free-film/>

CIA operative, Kevin Shipp, describes the government's enforcement of the 'secrecy agreement' used to silence whistleblowers.



<http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/former-prominent-cia-officer-shares-details-of-the-governments-all-out-war-against-whistleblowers-with-geoengineeringwatch-org/>

Details of Operation Shield revealed by a scientist involved with the program.



<http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/why-are-they-spraying-answers-from-an-insider/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Award-winning author, Robert Thornhill, began writing at the age of sixty-six and in six short years has penned twenty-two novels in the Lady Justice mystery/comedy series, the seven volume Rainbow Road series of chapter books for children, a cookbook and a mini-autobiography.

Lady Justice and the Sting, Lady Justice and Dr. Death, Lady Justice and the Vigilante, Lady Justice and the Candidate, Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders, Lady Justice and the Cruise Ship Murders, Lady Justice and the Vet and Lady Justice and the Pharaoh's Curse won the Pinnacle Award for the best new mystery novels of Fall 2011, Winter 2012, Summer 2012, Fall 2012, Spring of 2013, Summer 2014 and Fall 2014 from the National Association of Book Entrepreneurs.

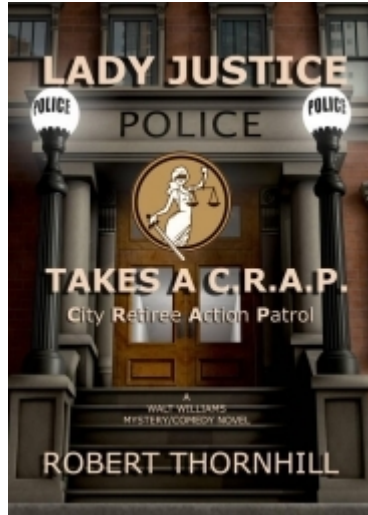
Many of Walt's adventures in the Lady Justice series are anecdotal and based on Robert's real life.

Although Robert holds a master's in psychology, he has never taken a course in writing and has never learned to type. All 32 of his published books were typed with one finger and a thumb!

His wit and insight come from his varied occupations, including thirty-three years as a real estate broker. He lives with his wife, Peg, in Independence, Missouri.

Visit him on the Web at: <http://BooksByBob.com>

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This is where it all began.

See how sixty-five year old Walt Williams became a cop and started the City Retiree Action Patrol.

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<http://amzn.to/16lfjnY>

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When corrupt politicians, the Italian mob and a dirty cop collude to take over a Northeast neighborhood, Walt is recruited for the most bizarre undercover assignments of his new career.

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In the process, the amazing discovery of a previously unknown session by a deceased rock 'n' roll idol stuns the music industry. What should be a joyous occasion soon turns dark as lives are threatened.

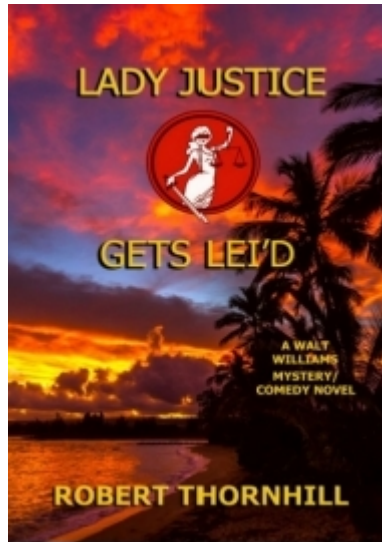
All of your favorite characters, along with two lovable additions are back to help Walt in his quest for justice.

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amzn.to/1twzOfq

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Lady Justice has unwittingly entered a religious war.

Who better to fight for her than Walt Williams?

The Avenging Angels believe that it's their job to rain fire and brimstone on Kansas City, their Sodom and Gomorrah.

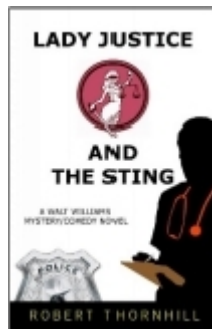
In this compelling addition to the Lady Justice series, Robert Thornhill brings back all the characters readers have come to love for more hilarity and higher stakes.

You'll laugh and be on the edge of your seat until the big finish.

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LADY JUSTICE AND THE STING



BEST NEW MYSTERY NOVEL ---WINTER 2012



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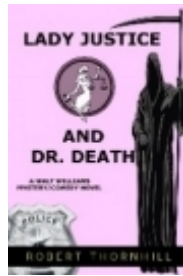
In *Lady Justice and the Sting*, a holistic physician is murdered and Walt becomes entangled in the high-powered world of pharmaceutical giants and corrupt politicians.

Maggie, Ox Willie, Mary and all your favorite characters are back to help Walt bring the criminals to justice in the most unorthodox ways.

A dead-serious mystery with hilarious twists!

<http://amzn.to/1gS4JMA>

LADY JUSTICE AND DR. DEATH



BEST NEW MYSTERY NOVEL --- FALL 2011



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In *Lady Justice and Dr. Death*, a series of terminally ill patients are found dead under circumstances that point to a new Dr. Death practicing euthanasia in the Kansas City area.

Walt and his entourage of scrappy seniors are dragged into the 'right-to-die-with-dignity' controversy.

The mystery provides a light-hearted look at this explosive topic and death in general.

You may see end-of-life issues in a whole new light after reading *Lady Justice and Dr. Death!*

<http://amzn.to/H20ErX>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE VIGILANTE



BEST NEW MYSTERY NOVEL – SUMMER 2012



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A vigilante is stalking the streets of Kansas City administering his own brand of justice when the justice system fails.

Criminals are being executed right under the noses of the police department.

A new recruit to the City Retiree Action Patrol steps up to help Walt and Ox bring an end to his reign of terror.

But not everyone wants the vigilante stopped. His bold reprisals against the criminal element have inspired the average citizen to take up arms and defend themselves.

As the body count mounts, public opinion is split.

Is it justice or is it murder?

A moral dilemma that will leave you laughing and weeping!

<http://amzn.to/1d3FLK6>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE WATCHERS



Suzanne Collins wrote *The Hunger Games*, Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* and George Orwell wrote *1984*.

All three novels were about dystopian societies of the future.

In *Lady Justice and the Watchers*, Walt sees the world we live in today through the eyes of a group who call themselves 'The Watchers.'

Oscar Levant said that there's a fine line between genius and insanity.

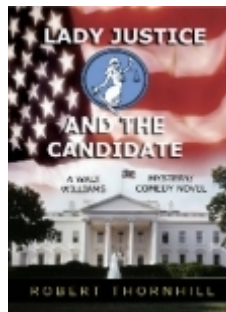
After reading *Lady Justice and the Watchers*, you may realize as Walt did that there's also a fine line separating the life of freedom that we enjoy today and the totalitarian society envisioned in these classic novels.

Quietly and without fanfare, powerful interests have instituted policies that have eroded our privacy, health and individual freedoms.

Is the dystopian society still a thing of the distant future or is it with us now disguised as a wolf in sheep's clothing?

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LADY JUSTICE AND THE CANDIDATE



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Will American politics always be dominated by the two major political parties or are voters longing for an Independent candidate to challenge the establishment?

Everyone thought that the slate of candidates for the presidential election had been set until Benjamin Franklin Foster came on the scene capturing the hearts of American voters with his message of change and reform.

Powerful interests intent on preserving the status quo with their bought-and-paid-for politicians were determined to take Ben Foster out of the race.

The Secret Service comes up with a quirky plan to protect the Candidate and strike a blow for Lady Justice.

Join Walt on the campaign trail for an adventure full of surprises, mystery, intrigue and laughs!

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LADY JUSTICE AND THE BOOK CLUB MURDERS



Best New Mystery Novel – Spring 2013



Members of the Midtown Book Club are found murdered.

It is just the beginning of a series of deaths that lead Walt and Ox into the twisted world of a serial killer.

In the late 1960's, the Zodiac Killer claimed to have killed 37 people and was never caught --- the perfect crime.

Oscar Roach, dreamed of being the next serial killer to commit the perfect crime.

He left a calling card with each of his victims --- a mystery novel, resting in their blood-soaked hands.

The media dubbed him 'The Librarian.'

Walt and the Kansas City Police are baffled by the cunning of this vicious killer and fear that he has indeed committed the perfect crime.

Or did he?

Walt and his wacky senior cohorts prove, once again, that life goes on in spite of the carnage around them.

The perfect blend of murder, mayhem and merriment.

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LADY JUSTICE AND THE CRUISE SHIP MURDERS



Best New Mystery Novel – Summer 2013



National Association of Book Entrepreneurs

Ox and Judy are off to Alaska on a honeymoon cruise and invite Walt and Maggie to tag along. Their peaceful plans are soon shipwrecked by the murder of two fellow passengers.

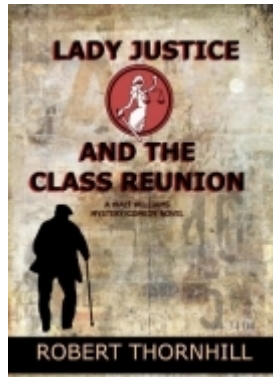
The murders appear to be linked to a century-old legend involving a cache of gold stolen from a prospector and buried by two thieves.

Their seven-day cruise is spent hunting for the gold and eluding the modern day thieves intent on possessing it at any cost.

Another nail-biting mystery that will have you on the edge of your seat one minute and laughing out loud the next.

<http://amzn.to/16VjURw>

LADY JUSTICE
AND THE
CLASS REUNION



For most people, a 50th class reunion is a time to party and renew old acquaintances, but Walt Williams isn't an ordinary guy --- he's a cop, and trouble seems to follow him everywhere he goes.

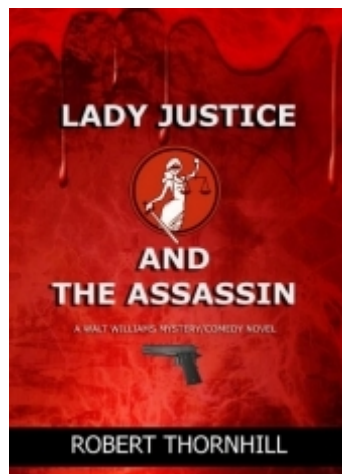
The Mexican drug cartel is recruiting young Latino girls as drug mules and the Kansas City Police have hit a brick wall until Walt is given a lead by an old classmate.

Even then, it takes three unlikely heroes from the Whispering Hills Retirement Village to help Walt and Ox end the cartel's reign of terror.

Join Walt in a class reunion filled with mystery, intrigue, jealousy and a belly-full of laughs!

<http://amzn.to/17S9YE0>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE ASSASSIN



Two radical groups have joined together for a common purpose --- to kill the President of the United States, and they're looking for the perfect person to do the job.

Not a cold-blooded killer or a vicious assassin, but a model citizen, far removed from the watchful eyes of Homeland Security.

When the president comes to Kansas City, the unlikely trio of Walt, Willie and Louie the Lip find themselves knee-deep in the planned assassination.

Join our heroes for another suspenseful mystery and lots of laughs!

<http://amzn.to/1bDdrKJ>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE LOTTERY



Two septuagenarians win the lottery's biggest prize, dragging Walt and Ox into the most bizarre cases of their career.

The two 'oldies' are determined to use their new found wealth to re-create the past but instead propel Walt into the future where he must use drones and Star Trek phasers to balance the scales of justice.

When an extortion plot turns into kidnapping, Walt must boldly go where no cop has gone before to save himself and the millionaire.

Come along for another hilarious ride with the world's oldest and most lovable cop!

<http://amzn.to/1exhji6>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE VET



Ben Singleton, a Marine veteran, had returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan and was having difficulty adjusting to civilian life.

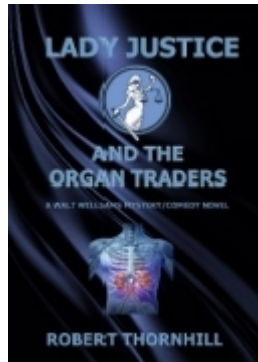
Fate, coincidence, or something else thrust him right into the heart of some of Walt and Ox's most difficult cases.

Our heroes find themselves knee-deep in trouble as they go undercover in a nursing home to smoke out practitioners of Medicaid fraud, meanwhile, Islamic terrorists with ties to the Taliban are plotting to attack one of Kansas City's most cherished institutions.

Join Walt and his band of senior sidekicks on another emotional roller coaster ride that will have you shedding tears of laughter one minute and sorrow the next.

<http://amzn.to/17GyE3n>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE ORGAN TRADERS



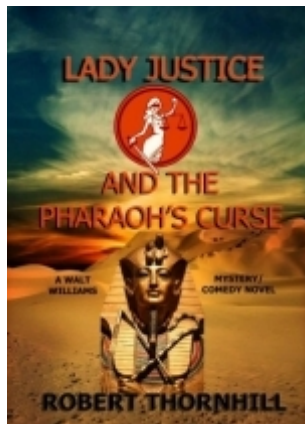
A badly burned body with a fresh incision and a missing kidney leads Walt into the clandestine world of an organ trader ring that has set up shop in Kansas City.

Walt is determined to bring to justice the bootleggers, who purchase body parts from the disadvantaged and sell them to people with means, until a relative from Maggie's past turns up needing a kidney to survive.

Once again, Walt discovers that very little in his world is black and white.

amzn.to/1jmde5S

LADY JUSTICE AND THE PHARAOH'S CURSE



An artifact is stolen from the King Tut exhibit, setting in motion a string of bizarre murders that baffle the Kansas City Police Department.

A local author simultaneously releases his novel, *The Curse of the Pharaohs*, attributing the deaths to an ancient prophesy, 'Death shall come on swift wings to him who disturbs the peace of the King.'

Are the deaths the result of an ancient curse or modern day mayhem?

Follow the clues with Walt and decide for yourself!

<http://amzn.to/1yHlnGE>

LADY JUSTICE
IN THE EYE OF THE STORM



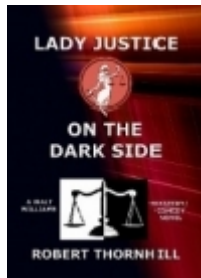
With the death of a young black man, Walt and Ox are dragged into the eye of a storm as Kansas City erupts in violence and demonstrations.

Fearing for their lives, Captain Short sends them on assignment to Cabo San Lucas where they find themselves in the eye of a very different and even more dangerous storm --- Hurricane Odile.

Surviving these ordeals pushes both men beyond the limits of anything they have experienced, and leaves Walt facing one of the most important decisions of his life.

amzn.to/1w6CthZ

LADY JUSTICE ON THE DARK SIDE



After five years on the police force, a bullet in the kiester from a vengeful gangbanger convinces Walt that it's time to turn in his badge.

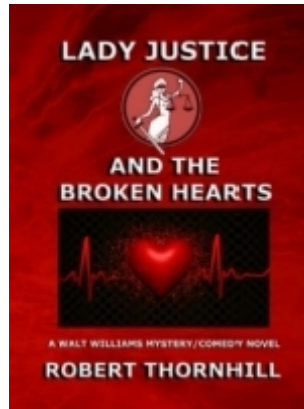
Walt realizes once again that retirement just isn't his cup of tea, and with a little urging from his brother-in-law, decides to become a private investigator.

For five years he had served the Lady Justice wearing a white robe and a blindfold and followed the rules, but he soon discovered that the P.I. business was leading him across the line into the dark side and a completely different set of rules.

When Walt comes face to face with the Lady Justice on the dark side, dressed in a tight skirt, fishnet stockings and high heels, he is faced with decisions that will change the course of his life.

amzn.to/1LFIDyS

**LADY JUSTICE
AND THE BROKEN HEARTS**



Walt goes under the knife for a heart operation and while in the hospital, stumbles upon a series of mysterious deaths that are certainly not from natural causes.

He solves that mystery only to discover that people on the transplant waiting list are suddenly dying as well.

Then, information about a terrorist plot is found on a heart attack victim who has been rushed to the ICU. Throughout it all, Walt discovers that there are many ways that a person may die of a broken heart.

<http://amzn.to/111xTIW>

LADY JUSTICE AND THE CONSPIRACY



Are we being poisoned?

Those fluffy white trails crisscrossing the sky --- some say they are simply water vapor frozen into crystals. Others say they are deadly chemicals, some of which are for military defense, and others to control the weather and the world's food supply.

Are the chemtrails really part of a clandestine government conspiracy? Four people believe so, and claim they have proof, but each of their lives comes to a tragic and mysterious end before they can offer their proof to the world.

Join Private Investigator, Walt Williams, as he searches for the truth and looks for clues to explain the untimely deaths.

<http://amzn.to/1Ms5KLR>

WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING



In August of 2011, I completed the fifth novel in the *Lady Justice* mystery/comedy series, *Lady Justice and the Sting*.

As I always do, I sent copies of the completed manuscript to several friends and acquaintances for their feedback and comments before sending the manuscript to the publisher.

Since the plot involved a holistic physician, I sent a copy to Dr. Edward Pearson in Florida.

Dr. Pearson loved the premise of the book and the style of writing, particularly as it related to alternative healthcare, natural products and Walt's transformation into a healthier lifestyle.

In subsequent conversations, Dr. Pearson shared that he had been looking for a book that he could share with his patients, colleagues and peers that would spread his message in a format that would capture their imagination and their hearts.

The Sting was very close to what he had been looking for and he made the suggestion that maybe we could work together to produce just the right book.

As I reflected on this idea, I realized that Walt's skirmishes with pharmaceutical companies, corrupt politicians, doctors, nurses, hospitals, bodily afflictions and a healthier lifestyle were not confined to just *The Sting*, but were scattered throughout all six of the *Lady Justice* mystery/comedy novels.

Using *The Sting* as the basis of the new book, I went through the manuscripts of the other five *Lady Justice* novels and pulled out chapters and vignettes that fleshed out the story of Walt's medical adventures.

Thus, *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing* was born.

Dr. Pearson is currently using *Wolves* in conjunction with his New Medicine Foundation to help spread the word about healthcare alternatives.



New Medicine Foundation
Dr. Edward W. Pearson, MD, ABIHM
<http://newmedicinefoundation.com>

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