

Joanna Bright

DUNGENESS BAY MYSTERIES

BOOK 2

DOUBLE EXPOSURE



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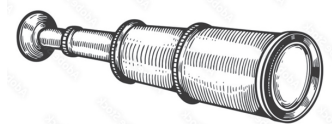


KIT CRUMB

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Joanna Bright Dungeness Bay Mysteries

BOOK 2



KIT CRUMB

Double Exposure
Joanna Bright Dungeness Bay Cozy Mysteries – Book 2

By Kit Crumb

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CONTENTS

Prologue.....	1
Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	9
Chapter 3	13
Chapter 4	17
Chapter 5	21
Chapter 6	25
Chapter 7	28
Chapter 8	32
Chapter 9	36
Chapter 10.....	40
Chapter 11.....	44
Chapter 12	47
Chapter 13	50
Chapter 14.....	53
Chapter 15	54
Chapter 16.....	58
Chapter 17.....	62
Chapter 18.....	66
Chapter19.....	70
Chapter 20	74
Chapter 21.....	78
 Free Chapter – The Misty Dawn	 85
Prologue.....	86
Chapter 1	89
Chapter 2	93
About Kit Crumb	97

PROLOGUE

Jake Harvey nervously cleaned up the gas station's office then moved to the garage, putting away tools that had strayed and wiping up oil spills. He looked around and gave his head a shake. Jupiter Discount Gas hadn't made him rich but had paid for his house and kept him comfortable. Now, with the right decision, it would keep him that way for years to come.

He wasn't surprised when Myron Allen stepped into the garage. Jake knew he'd have to face him, sooner than later.

"Hello, Jake. I brought the papers," Myron said.

"I changed my mind," Jake said. "I've pulled my gas station off the market."

Myron reached into his inside coat pocket and pulled out a check.

"Sign the papers, and this check for five hundred thousand dollars is yours, right now. Deposit it today."

Jake stepped over one of the arms of the auto lift to glance at the check, still considering the sale, then shook his head. "My mind's made up, Myron. I'm just not ready to sell the station."

Myron was desperate, he'd put a deposit down on the wrecking crew that would tear down the old service station and lined up a contractor who would begin work on the condominiums within the week. He stepped up and waved the check in Jake's face in frustration.

"Take the check, Jake. You agreed to make the sale last week and I've moved ahead with plans and promises based on your word."

Jake folded his arms. "My decision is final. Leave Myron. I've got a business to run."

Myron lunged forward and shoved the check into the breast pocket of Jake's work shirt. Jake yanked it out, tore it in half, and threw it on

the cement floor.

“Damn you!” Myron shouted as he closed the distance and straight-armed Jake, who stumbled backward, tripping over an arm of the hoist. Flailing his arms, Jake fell hard, butt-first, feeling his vertebrae pop. With nothing to grab onto, his right elbow struck the cement and shattered, then his back, then shoulders. Finally, his head collided with the cement. The skull fracture was instantly fatal.

Myron stood frozen, holding his breath. He’d just wanted to jar some sense into him; he had no idea the old man would trip. Then he gasped, ran to the side of the garage, and pulled the chain that closed the big garage door. In a fog of panic, he stumbled back, grabbed Jake by one leg, dragged him to the middle of the lift, and slammed the big red button that raised the lift, and Jake, to the ceiling.



Joanna got Rusty, her hundred-pound former service dog settled in the bed of the pickup, hooked his leash to a metal clip, then looked up at her apartment door. Still no Bud. She walked around, slid in behind the wheel, and honked the horn.

Bud suddenly appeared, slamming the apartment door shut and running down the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. Joanna leaned over and opened the passenger side door. Bud vaulted in and pulled the door shut. “Sorry, sorry.”

“I don’t mind dropping you off to get your tools, but I’ve got an appointment with the manager of the Austin Hayward Gallery. I may be there a while.”

Eighteen-year-old Bud Nickels was excited. Joanna had offered him her spare bedroom in exchange for working around the apothecary and repairing an old outbuilding she said he could use as a workshop.

“Do you really think you can turn the old apothecary living quarters into a darkroom?” Joanna asked.

Bud buckled his shoulder harness and Joanna started up the driveway.

"I'll get on it first thing, should—only take a couple days."

"Why exactly did Jake let you go?"

Bud lowered his voice. "He's selling the gas station to some real estate developer. But you can't tell anybody."

Joanna pulled onto Dungeness Bay's main drag and looked in her rearview mirror to check on Rusty.

"How can he do that?" Joanna said. "His is the only service station in town!"

"He told me Budget Gas and Diesel is going on the other side of Terry's Bar and Grill, just outside Dungeness Bay proper, so he feels like this might be the right time to sell and retire."

"Did he say what the developer plans on doing with the property?"

"Jake mentioned condominiums."

Joanna pulled into Jupiter Gas and touched Bud's arm. "I shouldn't be more than half an hour."

Bud slid out and turned to face her. "When you come back, pull up to the garage. Jake said he'd help me load the tool chest into your truck."

He shut the door, turned to Rusty, who was leaning over the side of the truck bed, scratched him behind the ears, then watched Joanna drive off.

At the sound of voices, Myron had moved into the office and pushed the glass front door open just enough to see a kid walk up to the garage door. When he stepped back, letting the door shut, he heard the kid pounding on the metal roll-down door.

"Jake, it's Bud."

Myron knew that when the kid didn't get an answer, he'd head for the office. Facing the big glass window, he watched in horror when a police cruiser pulled up to a pump. Heart pounding, adrenaline pumping through his veins, Myron Allen pushed through the office door.

"Officer, officer," Myron said as he pointed at Bud, "there's blood on the floor in the garage and I saw this kid closing the garage door."

Deputy Jerry Riggs pulled loose the leather strip that held his gun in place.

“Sir, I want you to go back into the office.” Riggs took a step toward Bud. “Son, I want you to come with me.”

Bud, at the officer’s insistence, walked ahead, through the office into the garage. “Sir, just stay put,” Riggs said to Allen. Then, he urged Bud into the garage.

“I don’t see anything.” Riggs said as he scanned the garage floor for blood.” He soon saw a puddle forming underneath the hoist.

“Do you know where the owner is, son?”

“No, sir.”

They walked to the hydraulic post that raised the lift. Without a word, Officer Riggs took three steps back and drew his gun. “Put your hands behind your back.”

“What?”

“Just do it.”

“Sir, I don’t understand?”

Riggs handcuffed Bud, then ran a hand across the teen’s shoulder and held it out for him to see.

“How did you get blood on your shirt?” He looked up. “Aw, shit.”

Bud looked up, gasped, and shuddered at the sight of Jake’s dead eyes. He looked away.

Riggs gave Bud a shake. “How do you lower the lift?”

“The red button by the door.”

CHAPTER 1

Joanna pulled around behind the Austin Hayward Gallery and got out of the truck. She hunched down and looked into the driver's side mirror, checking her hair and makeup. She straightened up and pressed a hand down each thigh, smoothing out the wrinkles in her slacks, then walked over to the back door, pushing it open.

Austin Hayward was the only photo gallery in Dungeness Bay. It was sandwiched between the Book Nook and the Outpouring Coffee House and Café.

When Joanna entered the gallery, she was immediately impressed by the quality of the photos, most of the ocean scenes. A heavy-set man who reminded her of the actor Raymond Burr, an actor who played a wheelchair-bound attorney in the old Ironside TV series, rolled out from behind a desk.

She extended a hand. "Mr. Sado?"

"Just Sado, please."

He had a very firm grip.

"I'm Joanna Bright. I got your text."

"Yes, of course, the Tai Chi instructor from Monterey. I heard about your adventures with the apothecary treasure and I'm so sad about Alex Jenner. I didn't know him well, but I liked him."

Joanna felt her face flush, and she stared at the floor, not knowing what to say.

"You must be wondering why I asked for this meeting."

Sado spun his wheelchair around and wheeled briskly to his desk, where he removed an envelope from a drawer.

Joanna stood, mesmerized by a photo of a tall ship with tattered rigging, a fractured mast that tilted to port. The ship listed to starboard,

seemingly adrift, with no one aboard.

"Photoshop," Sado noted, and rolled around to her side. "One of the patrons of this gallery apparently spotted some of your work in a Carmel studio and heard that you were in Dungeness Bay. I believe this envelope contains a check and the details of the commission."

She took the envelope and removed the contents, folding the check in half without looking at the amount. "Who's your benefactor? There's no name on the letter."

"Honestly, I don't know. His money appears in the gallery's account on a monthly basis. I traced it to a San Francisco bank, but they claimed that the identity of the sender was confidential. I received a letter along with the commission. When you finish the work, you're to bring it to the gallery. My letter provided a phone number I'm to call, and someone will be sent to pick it up. Very mysterious."

Joanna glanced at a giant clock on the wall. "I'm afraid I've got to run, but I'd like to learn more about this mystery man when you have more to share. Thank you, and I'll keep you posted on my progress."

"I'd like that. I'm always here, and my number is on my card."

Joanna climbed back into her pickup, pulled the check from her pocket, and unfolded it. "Ten thousand dollars," she mused aloud. "I hope Bud is as good as his word and can build a dark room for me."

Joanna was less than a mile out of downtown Dungeness Bay when Sheriff Chuck Cowdrey passed her in his cruiser, all lights and sirens. She pulled onto the shoulder of the road and brought an excited Rusty around from the bed of the truck to the passenger's side of the cab, where he immediately calmed down.

Joanna turned into the Jupiter Gas station and parked by the dumpster. Deputy Riggs jogged up to the side of the truck before she could get out.

"Joanna, what are you doing here?"

"I'm here to pick up Bud Nickels. Jake was going to help him load some tools into the back of my truck."

"I'm afraid that's not going to happen. Bud is under arrest for the murder of Jake Harvey."

"What? That's not possible! Can I talk to Bud?"

"I guess that can't hurt, but Deputy Riggs will have to sit in on the conversation. I've called for the medical examiner and a forensics team to come down from Lincoln City; they should be here in half an hour."

Bud was sitting in the back of Riggs's cruiser. The deputy followed Joanna over and opened the door. She turned to Riggs. "Do you mind if he gets out? The three of us could sit on the curb. I think it will be more comfortable than all of us crammed into the back seat?"

"Guess so."

They settled on the curb in front of the office, Bud sandwiched between Deputy Riggs and Joanna.

"Bud, what happened?"

Bud looked like he wanted to cry, but responded, "Nothing. You dropped me off, I walked over and pounded on the garage door, and the next thing I know this guy comes out of the office telling deputy Riggs here that there's a body in the garage, and that he saw me closing the garage door."

"What guy?" Joanna said.

Riggs leaned forward. "After I cuffed Bud and walked him back to the office where I told the man to wait, he was gone."

Sheriff Cowdrey heard the deputy and squatted down in front of the three. "First thing, Riggs: always get a name."

"Could I see where Jake was killed?" Joanna said.

"The scene's still pretty grizzly even though the ambulance has taken the body away, and I can't let you walk around messing up potential evidence. But you can take a look from the office door."

"Thank you."

When Joanna got to the front office door she stopped; there was no black powder on the door handle. "Sheriff Cowdrey, aren't you forgetting something?"

He walked up. "What?"

"Fingerprints, you haven't dusted for fingerprints. They could be Jake's or those of the man that killed him."

Cowdrey rolled his eyes. "I'll ignore your effort to tell me my business. But let's get one thing straight. You're saying that you don't think Bud killed Jake."

"Correct. They were friends. Jake was going to help load Bud's tools into my truck."

"Friends? I understand that Bud was fired."

"Jake was going to sell the gas station, and let Bud go."

"I haven't heard anything about Jake selling the station. Why would he do that?"

"Maybe someone made the right offer," Joanna said and walked into the office, where another door opened into the garage. What she saw on the floor engaged her memory. Near the lift were two pieces of paper that, in size and shape, reminded her of the check she had gotten from her mystery man.

"Hey, Joanna, you can't go in there," the sheriff protested.

Joanna picked up the two pieces of paper and walked back, handing them to Cowdrey, and said, "I would say someone made Jake a sizable offer, but it wasn't enough."

The sheriff put the two parts of the check together and whistled, "Five hundred thousand dollars."

Joanna went back to scanning the garage for more evidence but turned at the sound of Deputy Riggs slamming through the front office door.

"Dispatch just radioed that you need to call in on a landline ASAP."

Sheriff Cowdrey walked over to the office desk and picked up the handset, then turned and glared at Joanna.

She held both hands up, walked out of the office, and headed back to Bud, who had been placed back in Riggs Cruiser.

CHAPTER 2

Joanna had just reached the cruiser when Sheriff Cowdrey ran up, slightly out of breath, and stepped between her and the police car. “I need to have a word with Bud.”

When she took a step back, he smiled at her. “In private.”

Joanna walked back to the gas station’s office but stopped short when Deputy Riggs stepped in front of her and began dusting the door for fingerprints. He paused and looked over his shoulder at her. “Sheriff spotted some fingerprints.” Then he went back to dusting the door handle with the black powder.

Joanna wanted to leave but felt an obligation. Cowdrey was arresting Bud on the hearsay of a man that had left the scene of a murder.

“Joanna.”

She was watching intently as Riggs ran his powder-filled brush across the top of the handle when she heard Cowdrey call her name. She was surprised at his friendly tone.

Bud was out of the handcuffs and walking next to the sheriff, wearing a distinct look of relief.

“There’ve been a few changes and I’ve decided to place Bud under house arrest, but since he rents from you, I have to get your permission,” Cowdrey explained.

Joanna was taken aback by his change of heart.

“Yes, of course, you have my permission. What’s changed?”

“That’s need-to-know, police business. I’ll be sending Deputy Riggs up tomorrow to put a boot on his car. You understand that if Bud were to flee, you’d be held responsible and considered complicit.”

Without another word, Sheriff Cowdrey turned and joined Deputy Riggs at the front door of the office.

Joanna turned to Bud. "Any idea about the changes that convinced the sheriff to put you under house arrest?"

Bud shook his head. "Not a clue."

"Well, Let's get you back to your cell," Joanna said, giving a short, sharp laugh. Bud didn't smile.

She pulled Rusty out of the cab and got him settled in the bed of the truck, clipping his leash to the metal loop, then waited for Bud to buckle up before heading into town.

"You mentioned that Jake was going to sell. Well, I found a check, torn in half, for five hundred thousand dollars. Any idea why Jake would change his mind?" Joanna asked. "The gas station couldn't have made him anywhere near that much, and Jake was what, sixty-five or so?"

"Maybe he just didn't want beachfront condominiums to take the place of his garage," Bud said, and continued, "killing Jake doesn't make any sense. I mean, that wouldn't get anyone the gas station. Hey, where are we going?"

"I want to stop by the library and see if they have any books on the finer points of building a photographic darkroom. When I went to the gallery, I got a commission and a check for ten thousand dollars." Joanna paused and looked seriously at Bud. "Do you really think you can build that darkroom for me?"

Bud nodded earnestly.

Joanna pulled in front of a small brick building. Painted on the glass door were the words *Dungeness Bay Public Library*, and underneath, *a gift from Samuel Gun*.

Joanna had only gotten three feet into the library when she was stopped by a five-foot-high counter that ran at least six feet to the left and right of the young man behind it. He towered a foot above Joanna's five feet, eleven inches.

"Welcome, what can I help you with?" the young man asked.

"Do you have any books on building a photographic darkroom?"

"As a matter of fact, we have an entire section dedicated to photography."

“Really?”

“Yes, it’s sponsored by one of the patrons of the Austin Hayward Gallery.”

“I’d love to check it out,” Joanna enthused.

“You’d have to buy a library card. Do you live in Dungeness Bay?”

“I’m the caretaker for the apothecary.” An odd look appeared on the face of the young librarian after her mention of the apothecary and caught her off guard, but she continued, “You know, on China Bluff.”

“Oh, of course. You’re Joanna Bright.”

He reached under the counter, produced a card, and slid it across the desk. “Just fill this out.”

Minutes later, she slid the card back. The librarian stared at it and looked up at Joanna a bit sheepishly. “Sorry, we don’t get a lot of new residents.”

The young librarian slid off the stool he’d been sitting on. He was short enough that his head appeared to float just above the top of the counter.

“This way.”

The aisle smelled musty, and the deeper into the library they went, the darker it got. When they approached a doorway, the young man stepped to one side. “It’s a rather tight space.”

Bud leaned past Joanna and peered into the room. “Looks like a walk-in closet.”

Their guide smiled. “It was built especially for the books.” He looked at Bud and asked, “Do you have a library card?”

Joanna looked over at the two, who were about the same height and build. The older librarian had locked eyes with Bud.

“No,” Bud said.

“I didn’t think so.”

Bud ignored the snark and followed Joanna into the tiny space. After a couple of minutes, he walked into her. “Sorry. I don’t see anything on building a darkroom, but how hard can it be?”

Fifteen minutes later, it became obvious that there were no books on constructing a darkroom. When they walked back to the front of the library, the counter was unmanned.

Once outside, they took some time to talk to Rusty before climbing in the cab.

“That place gives me the creeps,” Bud said.

“Do you know anything about Samuel Gun?” Joanna asked.

“I think he was a timber baron that owned most of the land that Dungeness Bay was built on.”

“The building looks old enough. Think there are any descendants in the area?”

Bud turned in his seat to face Joanna. “I think Jake bought the gas station from Gerald Gun.”

Back at the apothecary, Joanna unclipped Rusty from the bed of the truck. “I’m going to take Rusty for a walk on the beach.” She grinned at Bud and said, “You’re grounded, mister.” Then, she turned serious. “You’re not going to pull any funny business, like taking off, are you?”

“Hey, I’m happy not to be sitting in a jail cell. Besides, I have a darkroom to build.”

Joanna took her time with Rusty’s leash, watching Bud from the corner of her eye until he entered the apartment.

Joanna eyed Rusty fondly. “Hey, big guy, what say you do your business in the woods, then I’ll take in the sea breeze from the deck with some Tai Chi.”

CHAPTER 3

Bud stepped onto the deck and waited for Joanna to finish her Tai Chi.

Joanna looked over at Bud when she noticed his presence. “Yes, Bud?”

“I wanted to thank you, you know, for the house arrest thing. I know you had to give permission and that means you have to remain on the premises throughout the night,” Bud said. and looked at the ground. “And that kind of...well, I know you and Terry have been sharing time.”

“Enough said, Bud. My relationship with Terry will survive. Is that a list I see?”

“Yeah, these are materials I’ll need for the darkroom,” he said and held out a piece of paper.

Joanna glanced at the list. “This seems like a lot of lumber.”

“I have to replace some of the planks; age and wood rot have taken their toll.”

“I’m going into town to have lunch with Terry. I’ll stop by the hardware store for the wood, then go out and set up my camera for my commission work. Think you can keep an eye on Rusty?”

“No problem,” Bud replied. “I’ve got some of the shelves stained and ready to go back up.”

They both turned at the sound of a car driving on the gravel parking area and walked around the side of the apothecary.

Deputy Riggs climbed out of the cruiser and walked around to the trunk. “Joanna, Bud.”

Bud walked up next to the deputy and watched him pull the orange boot out. “My car’s around the side of that old outbuilding. Want me to pull it out onto the gravel?”

“No, I’ll boot it where it sits.”

“Anything new on Jake’s murder? You match those fingerprints to a name yet?” Joanna asked.

“We should have results tonight. Sheriff Cowdrey had to sign into the National Crime Information Center. We lost access, with last year’s budget cuts.”

After Riggs drove off, Joanna joined Bud, who was staring at the orange boot on his Karmann Ghia’s left front wheel.

“Any idea when they’ll take it off?” Bud asked.

“I’d guess when they find Jake’s murderer. Otherwise, your guess is as good as mine. I’m going to lock you into the apothecary. You can take the dumbwaiter up to the apartment when you’re finished working. I should be back with your lumber in a couple of hours.”

Bud gave the boot a kick, then followed Joanna to the apothecary, stepped in, and gave her a wave as she closed and locked the doors.



Joanna parked behind the Dungeness Bay Bar and Grill. When she entered, it was dark enough that it took a minute for her eyes to adjust.

“Joanna Bright, as I live and breathe.”

Joanna could just make out the image of the Grill’s barfly.

“Hello, Jackson. Still holding up the end of the bar, I see.”

“Indeed, Terry’s best customer. I heard you were asking about the Guns,” Jackson slurred. “I know a secret about Roy Gun.”

“And what would you know about that?”

Terry pushed through the swinging door that led to the kitchen, stepped around the bar, and gave her a kiss. “I heard about Jake. How’s Bud taking it? I know they were friends.”

“Cowdrey thinks Bud’s somehow involved in the murder and has him under house arrest.”

Terry shook his head. “Chili’s on. Are you drinking the usual?”

She took a deep breath. “Got anything I can cut with scissors?”

“How about a Guinness Stout?”

"Perfect. Terry, what do you know about Samuel Gun?"

"Not a thing, but I bought this bar from his daughter."

"Wow, she must be in her eighties then."

He pushed a glass of the stout across the bar. "Nancy Harris Gun, eighty-eight. Why do you ask?"

"I'm not entirely sure. I went to the library and Samuel Gun's name was on the door. I also got a mystery commission through the Austin Hayward Gallery and am trying to figure out who it's from."

"Then you met Gun's grandson. What were you doing at the library?"

"Bud's building a darkroom for me and I was hoping to find a book to help him along. You're saying that Gun's grandson is the librarian?"

"Yeah. Any chance of you coming over for dinner tonight?" Terry asked. "I promise not to serve chili."

Joanna shook her head. "Can't. As long as Bud is under house arrest, I've got to remain at the apartment through the night. You actually meet Nancy Gun?"

"No, the business was carried out by her attorney, Ed Thomas. A while back, he came by and had a little too much to drink. Said Nancy Gun was one angry woman. You think there's a connection between your mystery commission and Nancy Gun?"

"I don't know, but somebody is paying me ten thousand dollars to shoot pictures of the beach."

Terry looked taken back. "Wow, how do I become a photographer?"

Joanna chuckled. "I hate to eat and run, but I've got to pick up some lumber for Bud and then set up my camera." She kissed Terry briefly on the lips and headed out.

Joanna pulled around to the back of the hardware store where the lumber was kept, got out of the truck, and greeted store owner Eric Ward as he walked out into the yard.

"I'm building a darkroom behind the apothecary, and I'm replacing some planks," she said and handed over Bud's list.

Once the lumber was loaded onto the bed of her truck, she followed

Eric back into the store and to the cash register.

“You’ve been here for a while, Eric. You know anything about Samuel Gun?”

Eric shrugged. “Been in Dungeness Bay twenty years. Bought the place from the daughter. All I really know is that he set up the town with a library.”

Eric walked Joanna back to the truck. “Good luck with the darkroom.”

She gave him a wave as she drove off and headed to the south end of town, to the Jupiter gas station.

CHAPTER 4

Joanna pulled up a ways behind Jupiter Discount Gas and got out. She looped the pack that contained her camera equipment over one shoulder, pulled her tripod out from behind the seat, and walked to where the ground descended to the beach.

She hiked down the short but steep embankment, found a stump to sit on, set the pack and tripod on the ground, and pulled out the commission letter, reading the instructions out loud.

“From the peak of Jupiter Discount Gas, align the camera west in such a manner that the beach is a sharply focused foreground and the ocean is a soft focus. Adjust the shutter to trip, exposing the film every twenty-five minutes for seventy-two hours, resulting in one hundred and seventy-two consecutive exposures. If any less result, the process must be started anew.”

Joanna found a red alder with a branch about six feet up that was parallel to the embankment. She grabbed it and pulled herself up until she could sit on it, then strapped the timer-mounted camera in place, and, with a final look through the viewfinder, swung down and dropped to the ground.

When she climbed back to the top of the embankment, she found Sheriff Cowdrey waiting for her.

“I wasn’t sure what you were doing, but I thought I’d let you finish.”

“I’ve been commissioned to photograph the beach and was setting up the camera. Any progress finding Jake’s murderer?”

Joanna retrieved her empty pack and the tripod and followed Cowdrey back around to the front of the gas station, where he stopped in front of the office door.

“Would you mind doing a little role-playing?”

“Wouldn’t Deputy Riggs be better suited for this?”

“Riggs is up in Lincoln City talking with the medical examiner about Jake’s body.”

“What are you thinking?” Joanna asked.

“I’ve scoured the office and garage and can’t find a murder weapon. I’m hoping that the M.E. will find some clues indicating the cause of death. I showed the signature on the check you found to a retired bank president that lives in town, who identified the signee as Myron Allen. I ran the fingerprints on the door. NCIC came up with nothing. So far, I’ve hit a wall.”

“Bud said Jake was going to sell the gas station,” Joanna commented. “That check was for half a million, torn in half. It would be safe to assume that Myron Allen was the developer trying to buy the gas station from Jake, and Jake turned him down.”

Cowdrey shook his head. “That doesn’t work. If Jake turns him down, he doesn’t get the gas station, and if he kills Jake, he still doesn’t get the station.”

“Still, finding something out about Myron Allen could add a piece to the puzzle.”

“I’ll take that into consideration. What I do know is that if Myron Allen—if that’s who killed Jake—was still in the garage, and if Bud pounded on the roll-down garage door as he said, then our killer was trapped. Because if Bud didn’t get a response from Jake, he probably would have come around to the office.”

“It sounds like you don’t think Bud is the killer,” Joanna said.

“Honestly, I don’t know, but I’m willing to give the kid the benefit of the doubt.” Cowdrey glared at Joanna. “If the killer felt trapped, it makes sense that he would try to create a scenario that pointed the finger at Bud, which would give him time to get away. Riggs said that when he pulled up for gas this guy ran out of the office and that he directed the man to go back in the office and wait for him. He also said that when he and Bud passed through the office to get to the garage, the guy was

sitting on the stool behind the counter. What I'd like you to do is go in and sit on the stool."

They pushed through the front office door and Joanna took a seat on the stool.

"Okay," Cowdrey said. "You're either nervous because you've seen a dead body, or fearful that you'll get caught."

"Deputy Riggs was busy with Bud and wouldn't have noticed Allen making his exit. Right?" Joanna asked.

"Yeah, I can go with that. Now make like you're nervous, slide off the stool, and go out the door."

Joanna had slid forward and touched the floor with her right foot when Cowdrey stopped her.

"Right there, next to your foot," Cowdrey pointed out. "What do you see?"

Joanna was careful to slide backward off the stool, then crouched down next to Cowdrey. "A greasy footprint," she said.

He lay a one-dollar bill next to the print and took several pictures with his cell phone, then stood. "Well, that's something," Cowdrey remarked. The M.E.'s report should contain Jake's shoe size; we'll then be able to compare the two."

"Let's go into the garage," Joanna suggested.

"I've already checked it out for clues."

"Role-playing, remember? Let's see if we can figure out where Jake and the killer were standing. Then, maybe we can figure out what happened."

Cowdrey shrugged. "Sure, lead on."

"First thing," Joanna said. "You found Jake on the lift, which was all the way up. So, it must have been down before he was killed."

Cowdrey hit the red button that lowered the lift. "All right, the lift is down."

Joanna looked around, stepping over one of the arms of the auto lift. "I found the check in two pieces here," she indicated, pointing to a spot on the ground. "If I were Jake and tore up the check, I'd be standing

here, just in front of this lift arm. Come around and face me.”

Cowdrey gave her a mock salute and stepped around to face her.
“Now what?”

“Did you see the body?”

“Riggs lowered the lift, and when I arrived on the scene, Jake was on his back, kind of draped over the lift.”

“Did you see any injuries to his face or chest?”

“He was kind of twisted, but I could see that he’d been hit on the back of the head.”

“No weapon so far. What if he fell?” Joanna surmised.

“Not likely. What are you saying? That Jake tore up the check and fell over backward? No, I don’t think so.”

CHAPTER 5

Joanna returned to the apothecary later than she thought she would, having been delayed when she helped Sheriff Cowdrey look for clues, and was hoping she wouldn't get an earful from Bud. When she got to the top of the stairs, the door to the apartment was hanging on two hinges.

"Bud?" Joanna called out worriedly.

When she stepped inside, she found nothing to have been disturbed.

She raced down the stairs and unlocked the doors to the apothecary. "Bud, Rusty!"

"Your friends are in the dumbwaiter."

Joanna turned to face the shimmering image of the ghost of Doc Hay.

"The young boy and your four-legged companion took refuge there."

"Thanks, Doc," Joanna said and ran to the back room, toward the door to the dumbwaiter.

"Bud, it's me. Open up."

The door slid away, and Rusty bounded out. "What's going on?" Joanna cried out. "What happened?"

Bud climbed out. "I thought you'd never get here."

"Who kicked in my door? And why were you and Rusty hiding in the dumbwaiter?"

"About an hour ago Deputy Riggs pounded on the door, said I'd murdered Jake and to come out with my hands up. When he started kicking at the door, yelling that he knew I was in here...well, I grabbed Rusty and climbed in the dumbwaiter."

"I just left Cowdrey not fifteen minutes ago. He admitted that it didn't look like you're the killer."

They turned as one at the sound of two vehicles driving across the gravel lot.

“Back in the dumbwaiter,” Joanna said. “Rusty, here boy, in, climb in. Bud, pull yourself halfway up.”

Joanna stepped out of the apothecary and marched up to Cowdrey, who had just exited his vehicle. “Somebody broke into my apartment and kicked in my door.”

“Stow it, Joanna. Where’s Bud Nickels?”

“I have no idea. I got home, and Bud and Rusty weren’t in the apartment, so I came down here. What the hell is going on?”

The sheriff pumped the air with one hand. “Calm down. Deputy Riggs came over to take Bud into custody. When Bud didn’t respond to his command to come out, he forced his way in.”

“Did you know about this?”

“Shortly after you left, I got a call from Riggs that he was just outside town and the medical examiner discovered evidence in the autopsy that implicated Bud as the killer. I instructed him to bring Bud in for questioning.”

“Real smart. You know I’m responsible for Bud, and you knew that I was probably five minutes away. What the hell were you thinking?” Joanna turned to face Riggs. “Kicking down my door—”

“Hey, hey. Deputy Riggs had every reason to believe that Bud was inside,” Cowdrey said.

“Why didn’t Riggs wait for you? Then the two of you could have gone in, guns blazing.”

“You’d just better show some respect. Riggs is a deputy, and I’m the sheriff of this town.”

Joanna turned and stormed across the gravel to the stairs.

“What are doing? I have questions. Answer them here or at the police station—your choice.”

“I’m calling the Bay County attorney to file a complaint. If any harm comes to that boy or my dog, our next conversation will be in court.”

Deputy Riggs turned to face the sheriff. "Can she do that?"

"Shut up Riggs. Get back to the station and fill out a report and wait for me."

"Joanna, I'm coming up the steps. I need to make sure Bud isn't in the apartment."

Cowdrey stomped around the apartment, moving from room to room, calling for Bud to come out. "I need you to pull up the dumbwaiter."

"You pull it up," Joanna retorted.

Cowdrey stepped over and pulled open the little door. The car was at the bottom of the shaft. He released the lock, and hand over hand, pulled up the car. When it was floor level, he locked it in place. It was empty.

Furious, Cowdrey faced Joanna. "If I find out that you're hiding the boy or the dog, I will consider you complicit and have Deputy Riggs arrest you. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you took over when Sheriff Collins resigned and are temporary. Therefore, I will cut you some slack. However, the county attorney may not do the same."

As soon as the sheriff was up the driveway and out of sight, Joanna ran down to the apothecary. "Bud, Rusty, quick! Come with me." The two emerged from the shadowy depths of a storeroom.

"This way." She walked into a storage room, Bud and Rusty on her heels. She grasped a small table that supported a lamp and slid it back, revealing steep, narrow stone steps. She grabbed a flashlight from the little table and urged them forward. "Come on. This basement was used as an opium den."

When they reached the bottom of the stairs, she shined the light on a table and several gallon containers of water. "This is where you're going to live until this gets resolved. There's a tunnel in the corner that leads to the old root cellar, and you'll find food there."

"Are you really going to call the county attorney?"

"Of course not. The last thing we need is a real law enforcement officer sniffing around. Bud, I've put myself in one hell of a position on your behalf. Keep your head down and stay put."

“God, I feel like a fugitive.”

“Bud, the minute you chose to hide from Riggs, you not only became a fugitive, but you also seared into their brains that you ran because you’re guilty. All I need to do is find Jake’s killer to prove your innocence. But promise me you’ll stay put.”

“I promise, but what about Rusty? I can’t keep him down here.”

“I’ll take him with me now. If Cowdrey says anything, I’ll say he just showed up,” Joanna said and ran a hand through her hair. “Now I’m lying,” she sighed.

CHAPTER 6

Terry walked out from behind the bar, took Joanna by the hand, and pulled her into a hug. “It’s a little early for lunch. What’s up?”

The only other occupant of the bar was Jackson, who was holding a conversation with his mug of beer.

“Sheriff Cowdrey wants to arrest Bud.” Joanna rubbed her temples.

Terry looked surprised. “I thought he was under house arrest.”

“Apparently Jake’s autopsy revealed some evidence that has the sheriff convinced of Bud’s guilt. Riggs came to my apartment to take Bud into custody; he pounded on the door. Scared the kid into hiding. The deputy even kicked down my door but couldn’t find Bud. Now they’re sure he’s guilty. Why else would he run, right?”

“Where’s Bud now?”

“I’m hiding him.”

Terry locked eyes with Joanna. “Where?”

Joanna ignored his question and said instead, “I need to find Jake’s killer.”

“Joanna, if you’re hiding him, and the sheriff finds out...”

“I know. That would make me complicit.”

Jackson slid off his stool and, sliding his beer up the bar, staggered up next to the two.

“I know who—”

“Not now, Jackson. Go back to your stool,” Terry interrupted tiredly.

“Roy Gun killed Jake Harvey,” Jackson blurted out.

“You’re drunk,” Terry said. “There is no Roy Gun.”

“I’m not that drunk. Roy is the love child of Samuel Gun and is blackmailing Nancy Harris Gun,” Jackson said. He kept trying to sit on a stool but slid off each time. “Maybe I am that drunk.”

Joanna grabbed Jackson's arm and guided him to a table at the back of the bar. Terry walked to the front door, turned the deadbolt, flipped around the "open" and joined them.

"All right," Terry said. "How do you know this?"

"I wasn't always a town drunk—"

Terry sliced a hand across his throat. "Cut with the sob story, Jackson. Tell us about Roy Gun."

Jackson tried pushing himself up to stand but fell drunkenly back into his seat.

Joanna put a hand on Jackson's arm. "Do you know Bud Nickels?"

"Kid with that monkey puke-yellow Karmann Ghia, yeah. So?"

"If I don't find out who killed Jake Harvey, Bud will be charged with murder."

Jackson shook his head a few times. Something like resolve seemed to light him up, and he locked eyes with Terry. "Coffee, black," he demanded before turning back to Joanna. "I heard you met Gerald at the library. Well, he isn't a Gun."

"You're not making any sense. Terry said he was Nancy Gun's son."

"Yeah, well, Terry is wrong."

Terry returned and sat the coffee on the table. "I'm wrong about what?"

"Gerald is Nancy's son all right, but not by her husband. He's her love child."

"You said Sam Gun had a love child, now you say Nancy had a love child," Terry said. "You've got about sixty seconds to get your story straight before I throw your ass out of here."

Jackson waved his hand back and forth as if to clear the air. "I was a wild child at eighteen and got mixed up with the wrong people. Not the mob or a gang, just a group that ran scams. I was brought into the fold because they needed young blood. I had no idea what was going on, only what they told me." Jackson wrapped his hands around the coffee mug and took a long drink.

“Everything fell apart. In 1971, I was sent to Washington state’s Monroe Correctional Complex, minimum security, for five years. That’s where I met Roy and Hugh Gary, Nancy Gun’s one night stand.”

Jackson looked from Terry to Joanna. “I mean, what are the chances? Hugh heard she’d had a baby and knew it was his. When Roy found out, he hatched a plan. He was released just before me. All I heard until the day he got out was how he was going to blackmail Nancy Harris Gun into the poor house.”

“That’s quite a story,” Terry said. “I can almost believe it.”

“Believe it,” Jackson said. “Nancy inherited half the town. Over the past fifty years, she’s sold building after building, including this bar.”

CHAPTER 7

Jackson took a long drink of coffee. He looked like he had done both Joanna and Terry a favor, as though his story about the Guns' relationships was somehow related to the murder of Jake Harvey.

"This has been a waste of time, Terry," Joanna said.

Jackson lurched to his feet and took a single step in Joanna's direction so quickly that Terry and Joanna exchanged looks of surprise.

"No, what I just told you is relevant, and I know who killed Jake."

Gone was the stagger, and the slurred speech.

"What's going on, Jackson?" Terry asked.

The sound of knuckles rapping on wood echoed through the bar.

"Open up, Chambers! I know Joanna is in there."

"Joanna, quick. Out the back door into the woods," Terry said, and turned to Jackson "And from you, not a word."

As Joanna rushed hurriedly away, Terry walked to the front door, turned the deadbolt, and opened it.

Sheriff Cowdrey pushed him aside. "Where's Joanna?"

"I don't know."

"Her truck is sitting in the parking lot."

"She was here," Terry said. "Came in all upset, wanted to talk, but nothing I could say calmed her down, and she marched out saying she'd be back later for her truck. What's going on?"

"I'll tell you what's going on. Everyone is lying to me. Joanna doesn't know where Bud is, now you tell me you don't know where Joanna is."

"Level with me," Terry said. "Why are you looking for Joanna?"

The sheriff looked over at Jackson. "Get that drunk out of here."

The stagger returned, along with the slurred speech, "Hey, I know when I'm not wanted."

Both the sheriff and Terry both watched Jackson walk out the door. Cowdrey followed him to the door, then turned the deadbolt.

"I've got a pot of coffee on," Terry offered.

"Thanks. I take it black," Cowdrey said, and took a seat at the closest table.

Terry joined him with two mugs.

"I'm trusting you, Terry. Don't make me regret it."

"Hey, I'm just a humble business owner."

"Right. Bud was never more than a person of interest. I put him under house arrest just to keep tabs on him, keep him from taking off. His role in Jake's murder became apparent when bruises appeared low on Jake's torso, finger, and partial palm. Jake was six feet and Bud is five feet. If the kid straight-armed Jake, that's right where the bruises would appear."

"That's pure supposition."

"Be that as it may, a tough interrogation could possibly have determined his innocence. His running off, if Joanna is telling the truth, doesn't mean he's guilty, only that he's scared."

"I understand that she was responsible for Bud and could be considered complicit if she's hiding him—" Terry began.

"Right. I won't know Bud's involvement until I track him down."

"So why go after Joanna?"

Sheriff Cowdrey took a long drink of his coffee. "I ran into her at Jake's station. She had just set her camera up; I got curious. She said she got commissioned to shoot pictures of the beach. I went back out there this morning, pulled the SDI card from her camera, and took a look at the photos. In them, there's someone pulling an obviously unconscious, or dead, male individual into the surf. I have no ID on either one, and no body has washed up. Terry, if you know where Joanna is, tell her I need to know who commissioned her, that's all. Because right now, I have no idea who killed Jake."

"Joanna mentioned a name on a check," Terry said. "What about that?"

“She suggested that the check may have come from a real estate developer. I’ve got Deputy Riggs calling every real estate office from the California Bay Area to Southern Oregon. A friend deciphered the signature on the check as Myron Allen. He didn’t show up on NCIC, so I know he’s not a criminal, but unless Riggs comes up with something, I’m stumped. Thanks for the coffee,” Cowdrey said and got up. “You’d better unlock your door. It’s almost lunchtime, and I understand you make a chili to die for.”

They both laughed and Terry walked the sheriff to the door, out into the empty parking lot, and watched him drive off. When he went back into the bar, he fully expected to find Jackson sitting at the corner of the bar, but his stool was vacant. On a hunch, he walked out the back door into the woods, where he picked up a trail that led to the beach. He was hoping to find Joanna somewhere along the way.

The woods ended several hundred feet from the edge of the bluff. Terry walked to the aging steps that led down to the beach and couldn’t believe his eyes. Joanna was pulling a body out of the surf. He moved as fast as he dared down the rickety steps, tripping several times and catching himself on the rail.

“Joanna!”

When she turned, a wave broke against her, and she lost her grip on the body.

“Terry, help me! It’s Jackson.”

He ran to her side and, together, they struggled to get him on the beach, beyond the reach of the incoming tide. When Jackson began to cough, Terry rolled him onto his side. Instead of coughing up seawater, blood flowed from the corner of his mouth. Terry gently rolled him on his back.

“Who shot you?”

Jackson was blinking and his lips were moving, but the words were coming out in a whisper. Terry leaned down, but there was nothing to hear. He rocked back.

“God, Joanna, what happened?”

“I stepped out of the woods and walked to the edge of the bluff, looking for the stairs, when I spotted Jackson wading into the surf. Then, I heard a gunshot. I thought he dove into the surf, but when he surfaced, I knew he was in trouble.”

Terry looked up at the bluff. “Where were you when you heard the shot?”

“The top of the steps. It sounded like the shot came from my right.”

“I think it’s time to talk to Sheriff Cowdrey,” Terry said.

CHAPTER 8

Terry walked to the table, holding a pot of coffee. He filled Sheriff Cowdrey's mug and then Joanna's, went back to the bar, and returned with a nonalcoholic drink for Bud.

"Let me start off," Sheriff Cowdrey began, "by saying that Joanna, Bud, I'm glad you've decided to come out of hiding. Terry, I'm not sure what your involvement was in getting these fugitives to come forward, but it's appreciated. Joanna, you mentioned the other day that I had taken over for Sheriff Collins after he resigned and that's true, but it's also true that I was thrust into a position I was not prepared for. I have jumped to conclusions, and as Terry pointed out, I have made suppositions that are unfounded. I can only say that I've wanted this murder of Jake Harvey to be resolved as quickly as possible. I'm sure that you've all noticed that Deputy Riggs is not present. Joanna, I want you to know that I placed him on a leave of absence for kicking in your door. Now, with all that out of the way, let's brainstorm the murder of Jake and Jackson."

"I think we have to look at the information we have and work our way backward," Terry said.

"Fine. Bud, what can you tell us?" Cowdrey said.

"Only that Jake was expecting me to come and collect my tools."

"Bud," Joanna said. "You told me that Jake mentioned he was selling his gas station."

"Yeah, that's why he let me go."

"You also said that he indicated that whoever bought his place was going to build condominiums along the beach."

"Right," Bud confirmed.

"What Jake confided in Bud, along with the check I found at the

scene of the murder, validates that someone was trying to buy Jake's property, and we have a name, Myron Allen." Joanna continued, "If we can find this Myron Allen, we can solve Jake's murder."

"The medical examiner found bruises on Jake's chest. As you all know, I initially believed those bruises came from you, Bud. If not Bud, then from Myron Allen. But I have to ask: does anyone think that Jackson's death is related to Jake's?"

"I'm not exactly sure who Jackson was," Terry said. "He had told us a story about the infidelity of Sam Gun and his daughter. When Joanna said she thought listening to the story was a waste of time, Jackson responded by jumping to his feet and speaking in a clear tone, saying his story was relevant to the murder. In the time that Jackson has been holing up at the far corner of the bar, I've never heard him speak without slurring his words or walk without a stagger."

"Terry, I agree with working the clues backward to the murder, but right now, we're all over the place. Joanna, I pulled the SDI card from your camera—"

"What?" Joanna cried out. "You had no right! I'm commissioned to have a certain number of frames in seventy-two hours!"

"I'm sorry, I had no idea. But when I viewed what was on the card, it showed somebody pulling a body into the surf. What I would like you to do is go back to the gallery and talk to Sado, find out who your mystery man is. Oh, and Bud, you're still under house arrest."

"I'd like to make a suggestion," Terry said

"I'm all ears." Ward said.

"I need a dish washer. I'll hire Bud, pick him up, and drop him off."

"I can go with that," Cowdrey said. "Bud, how does that sound?"

"Great, I need a job to pay my rent. Does this mean the boot stays on my Ghia?"

"For the duration of the investigation, at least," the sheriff responded. "Joanna, before you head off to talk with Sado, I want you to show me where you think the shot that killed Jackson came from. As for Jackson, I'll be working to find out who he really was."

“Terry, when did Jackson first show up, and is there anything in the bar that he handled that didn’t get wiped down?” Cowdrey said.

“He just kind of showed up, claimed the stool at the end of the bar, and never missed a night. Believe me when I say everything he touched got wiped down.”

Joanna and Cowdrey walked out the back door together, taking the same trail she’d taken when he first came looking for her. She stopped when she came to the edge of the wood.

“Why are we stopping?”

“This is where I was standing, trying to figure out where the stairs were that went down to the beach,” Joanna said and walked out to the edge of the bluff that overlooked the beach. “I was standing here when I heard the shot; it came from my right.”

“Did it seem far away or close?”

“It sounded like the shooter was right next to me.”

“That narrows it down. Let’s go back to the trail and head into the woods to look for a shell. You only heard one shot?”

Joanna turned around as if she had realized something. “No, that won’t work.”

“What do you mean?”

“The shooter couldn’t have seen Jackson from the woods. He must have stepped out onto the bluff.”

Cowdrey walked twenty feet parallel to Joanna, facing the forest. “Bingo. This is where the shooter stepped out of the woods. The sand’s churned up,” he said and dropped down to all fours. “I believe I’ve found a knee print.” He scanned the area. “But no shell.”

Cowdrey rotated to face the ocean and held up his arms like he was holding a rifle.

“Okay, I can see a portion of the beach and the surf. Can you see me?”

“No, but I was focused on the figure in the surf.”

“All right, we know where the shooter was, and we know that Jackson probably ran from the beach into the surf,” Cowdrey said.

Joanna walked next to the sheriff and looked out at the surf. “Question: what was Jackson doing on the beach and how did the shooter know he would be on the beach?”

“Right. Jackson must have known he was in the crosshairs of the shooter and felt his only escape was to put some distance between them by swimming out past the surf.”

CHAPTER 9

Cowdrey continued to kneel, closing one eye like he was sighting down the barrel of a rifle. “It would’ve been a rifle with a scope, and that would be quite a shot.”

“Anybody in Dungeness Bay a hunter?” Joanna asked.

“Not that I know of, but I’ll check around.”

“I’m going to take off and pay a visit to Sado,” Joanna said.

Cowdrey pushed himself up. “Thanks for the help. Stay in touch with what you find out.”

Joanna walked back up the trail and found the back door to the bar locked. She went around to the front and saw that the “open” sign had been flipped around. When she got into her truck, she decided to drive into town and visit Lisa Posey at the Chocolate Factory before going to the gallery to talk to Sado.

The Chocolate Factory was in one of the few stand-alone buildings on the main street, and it was also among the oldest. The bottom two feet of the front was made of stone, rather than brick, up to the wooden façade that made the entire affair appear bigger than it really was. It had been vacant for a year when Lisa bought it from the bank. She poured several thousand dollars into remodeling the interior, including adding a metal-framed front door with double-paned glass, as well as wiring and plumbing.

When Joanna pushed through the door, she stepped to the back of the room to accommodate the tourists who were lined up in front of the glass display case.

Lisa spotted her, raised a hand, and pointed to the swinging door that opened to the back room. Joanna nudged her way past several tourists and backed through the door. When she turned, she saw a young

teen hastily pulling on an apron with the Chocolate Factory logo—a facsimile of the building’s façade on the front.

“Excuse me, I’m late.”

Joanna stepped out of the way to let her pass. When the door swung back and forth, she could see that the crush of tourists had already thinned, before it finally stopped swinging Lisa pushed through.

Joanna smiled. “Business is good?”

“No,” Lisa said as she hustled across the room to a couch. “Business is great.” She patted a cushion. “Have a seat. What brings you here?”

“I need to put in an order for two dozen of the Chinese five-spice chocolate truffles.”

“When do you need them?”

“By next week’s Tuesday Tai Chi. Lisa, do you have a minute?”

“For the Dungeness Bay Museum curator, you bet.”

“I’m helping out with the investigation into the Jake Harvey murder, and there’s been another murder just now.”

“My God,” Lisa said. “Anyone, I know?”

“The man’s name was Jackson; he was a regular at Terry’s bar.”

“I didn’t know him. What can I do to help?”

“He was running into the surf just down from the bar. Somebody shot him from the bluff. The shooter had to have been a good shot, so I’m looking for a hunter.”

Lisa scratched at some chocolate on her apron. “The only person I can think of is Sado, the guy that runs the gallery.”

“But he’s in a wheelchair.”

“Yeah, and from some kind of accident is all I know. He was already in a wheelchair when I moved to Dungeness Bay ten years ago. But word is that he closed the gallery every year during hunting season.”

The swinging door pushed open again. “Lisa, someone’s here to pick up a special order.”

“I’ll let you get back to your customers. Thanks, Lisa,” Joanna said.

“Not a problem. Let me know how your investigation goes,” Lisa said,

and pushed through the door, immediately stepping behind the counter.

Joanna jostled her way through the chocolate-hungry crowd and made it back out onto the sidewalk. She decided it was time to pay Sado a visit. She was curious about the mysterious gallery manager, and she couldn't imagine a hunter going out alone.

When Joanna entered the gallery, she saw Sado seated behind his desk.

"Hello, Ms. Bright. How's the commission work going?"

"I recently suffered from a camera fail, so I've had to start the series again."

"I'm sorry to hear that, but I don't believe there was a time frame for the completed project. Is there something that I can help you with?"

"Yes, I'm helping Sheriff Cowdrey with a homicide investigation and thought of you."

"I'm afraid that I didn't know Jake at all," Sado responded gravely. "What were you thinking, exactly?"

"There's been another murder. The victim was running into the surf on the beach below Terry's bar and the shooter was up on the bluff. I hear you used to hunt so I wanted to pick your brain. You'd know the kind of rifle used, scope or no scope, that kind of thing."

"Oh lord, it's been years. An auto accident brought my hunting days to an end. You say the shooter was on the bluff. I'd say scope, for sure. A SIG CROSS would do the trick, though my choice would be a Ruger Hawkeye long-range target rifle. Did you find any shells?"

"The sheriff is scouring the area. I haven't heard any updates so far."

"I'd need to go out to the bluff," Sado said and slapped the side of his wheelchair. "But that would be impossible."

"Who was your hunting partner?" Joanna queried. "Maybe he could go out and take a look."

"You'd have to fly Dutch out from Montana. I haven't been in touch with him since my accident. I don't even know if he's still hunting. You didn't say who the victim was."

“He was known as Jackson and spent a lot of time hanging out at the bar.”

Sado shook his head. “Never met the man. I’m afraid I haven’t been much help.”

“Not so,” Joanna replied, smiling warmly. “I’ll let the sheriff know about the rifles. If he finds any shells, I’ll let you know. Thanks for your time.”

“It’s always good to see you, Ms. Bright.”



Joanna swung into the garage of the little brick police station, surprised that no one was managing the front desk. She found Cowdrey hunched over his computer.

“Deputy Riggs still on leave?”

The sheriff looked around his computer screen. “He resigned—said he was moving to Lincoln City. What did you find out about your mystery commission?”

“Only that there isn’t a time frame. I did find out that Sado was a hunter, and he had a couple of ideas as to what kind of rifle would have been used to make that shot.”

Cowdrey walked around and sat on the corner of his desk. “I’m glad you’re eager to help with the investigation, but I could have looked up the rifle used for such a long shot on the Internet. What you did was waste a lot of time getting the information I could have gotten in a couple of minutes.”

CHAPTER 10

Joanna could feel her ears burn and walked to the opposite corner of the desk from Cowdrey to hide the calming breath she took. She turned back to face him.

"I was working under the assumption that he might have a local hunting partner."

Cowdrey rubbed his chin. "Good hunch. Nobody local?"

"His buddy lives in Montana. What did you find out about Jackson?"

"He's an attorney, or was, at least. He was staying at Motel 2. I'm headed there now. You want to come with me?"

Joanna grinned. "Do I get to ride in your cruiser?"

He tilted his head. "Yeah, sure."

They parked, and Joanna followed Cowdrey into the motel office.

"Hey, June."

She looked past Cowdrey at Joanna. "Your regular?"

"Ah, no. This is business. You have a room for a Jackson?"

"Jackson Martin," June muttered, pulling out a little box filled with cards. "Here it is—Jackson Martin. Paid in advance for two weeks. Room one-oh-one."

She produced a key and slid it across the counter. "I haven't seen him in a couple of days, but if I see him pull into his slot, should I give you a ring?"

"He won't be pulling up. He's dead," the sheriff responded.

Room 101 was at the opposite end of the strip of rooms from the office. Based on the number of cars in the lot, the motel appeared to be only half full.

Joanna stood next to Cowdrey when he inserted the key and turned

the doorknob. The door was yanked open, and he would have fallen on his face if it hadn't met with a fist. Joanna stepped in front of the intruder and executed a roundhouse kick to his head. Shuffled in for a sun punch but was knocked to the ground when Cowdrey was pushed into her.

"Sheriff, Chuck, are you okay?" Joanna said.

Cowdrey pulled his gun, pivoted around, on his butt, and panned left, then right.

"He's long gone," Joanna said.

Cowdrey swiped at his nose and came away with bloody fingers. "What the hell was that?"

"I'm not sure," Joanna said.

"No. I'm talking about your karate stuff."

"Praying Mantis," Joanna replied.

"What?" Cowdrey shook his head. "Never mind."

He grabbed the door jamb and pulled himself up, reaching in to flip a switch that turned on the lights. "Wow, what a mess. Somebody was looking for something."

Joanna walked over and put the cushions back on the couch, slit side down, and sat. Cowdrey sat down beside her and dabbed at his nose with his sleeve. "Any thoughts?"

"More pieces to the puzzle, I guess."

"Enlighten me."

"Terry said that Jackson showed up at his bar about a week or so ago. Jackson only reserved this room for two weeks. Whatever he was going to do in Dungeness Bay was going to happen in two weeks, and I'd guess that, as an attorney, he had some papers."

"Okay, I can run with that. Still, what was he doing at the bar every night, and what was he doing on the beach?"

Joanna walked across the little room, picked up a chair, and placed it backrest-first before she sat down, facing Cowdrey. "I'd say he met with someone at the bar, they walked out into the woods to conduct

their business, something went south, and Jackson ran for his life. He just didn't run far or fast enough."

"What if Jackson reneged on something, showed up without the paperwork, or whatever, not expecting the reaction he got? Maybe whatever he didn't show up with was presumed by the shooter to be somewhere in this room."

"Then you're saying," Joanna continued, "that the shooter and the guy that punched you are one and the same."

"It would make sense, don't you think?" Cowdrey said.

"Would the person he was going to do business with show up armed with a rifle?"

"Yes. I think that the shooter saw Jackson as a loose cannon, though why a rifle as their choice of weapon, I couldn't say."

They spent the next half hour picking through the room but didn't find anything. Cowdrey tossed the key on the bed, locked and shut the door. Together, they crossed the parking lot to the cruiser.

"Shouldn't you tell June about the room? Also, do you want me to drive?"

"Very funny. I'll call her. Now get in."

"Where are we going?"

"I want to talk to Terry and see if he remembers Jackson walking out of the bar with anyone, meeting with anyone the day before he was shot. Then I want to go back to where I found the shooter's knee print and backtrack into the woods to see if we can figure out where they met. If there was a scuffle, there might be a clue."

They returned to the bar, Terry walked up when they entered.

"Sheriff, Joanna, Bud's in the back doing the lunch dishes. What's up?" Terry asked.

"We just had a run-in with the shooter," Cowdrey said.

Terry stepped up to the sheriff. "Judging from your nasal accent and the fact that I've had my nose broken numerous times, I'd say you've been punched in the nose."

“Yeah, and Joanna karate-kicked him, and he still got away.”

Cowdrey shook his head and headed for the bathroom.

Terry looked at Joanna. “So, why are you back here?”

“We figure that Jackson was meeting someone, and that’s why he was hanging out at the bar. Would you believe that he was an attorney?”

“He certainly had me fooled. But I never saw him talk with anyone. I never really saw him come in, either, but he always left alone at closing time.”

Cowdrey came out of the bathroom with a tiny twist of toilet paper coming out of each nostril. Joanna laughed, and Terry covered his mouth.

“Hey don’t laugh,” Cowdrey said indignantly. “I had to straighten my septum and I started bleeding again.”

Joanna sobered up. “No dice on Jackson talking with anyone.”

“A lot of my patrons use that back trail to get to the beach, or just walk in the woods to sober up.” Terry said

“I need to take a closer look,” Cowdrey said. “Lead the way, Terry.”

CHAPTER 11

Terry led the sheriff and Joanna out the back door of the bar and down to the trail.

“There are a half dozen places where people have stepped into the woods,” he said, indicating at various areas with a sweep of his hand.

Cowdrey scanned the area. “What we’re going to do is go down to where I found some prints in the sand and backtrack from there.”

“I’ll leave you to it,” Terry said. “I’ve got to get back to the bar. Let me know if you find anything.”

Joanna walked out to where she was standing when she heard the shot.

“Stay right there,” Cowdrey commanded. “I think I was about twenty feet out when I found the print.”

He paced around, scanning the ground. He finally pulled the tissue from his nose and stuffed it in a back pocket.

“Here, right here.”

Joanna joined him and, together, spaced an arm’s length apart, they slowly backtracked into the woods.

“Hold up. I’ve got something,” Cowdrey said.

Joanna jogged to his side.

“Look how the ground is all torn up.”

Joanna slowly circled around the disturbed area, trying to make out any footprints, while Cowdrey moved up the trail a little further.

Bending down, she pinched a corner of white that stuck up an inch out of the ground.

“Look at this. Jackson didn’t show up empty-handed after all.”

Cowdrey came back and she handed him the scrap.

“Judging from the clean-cut edge and thickness of the paper,” Joanna

surmised, “it looks like part of a letterhead.”

Cowdrey looked at her, then at the partial name—“ettle.” “This could only mean Seattle, and it looks like there’s part of a logo here. Maybe his office is in Seattle. I’m heading back to the police station to see if I can figure that out.”

“We’ve got Jackson Martin’s occupation as an attorney. That’s something to go on,” Joanna said.

“Yeah. Now all I have to do is locate his Seattle office if that’s what this piece of scrap is indicating.”

“You need me for anything else?”

“No, unless you want to help me locate Jackson’s office.”

“I can do that. Terry has a computer at the bar, and he always has something to eat, and coffee.”

They re-entered the bar through the back door. Terry served a few customers who were seated at the bar and met the two as they came up the short hall that ended at the back door.

“Find anything?”

“Yeah,” Cowdrey said, and waved the strip of letterhead. “Joanna said you have a computer, and maybe something to eat.”

“Go through the kitchen to the back room. Tell Bud to heat up lunch.”

“You got a phone back there?” Cowdrey said.

“It should be sitting on the desk next to the computer.”

Cowdrey couldn’t find anything with the computer but printed out a list of all the attorneys in the Seattle metro area.

“Holy crap. There are four thousand seven hundred and ten lawyers licensed to practice in Seattle. Talk about a needle in a haystack.”

Cowdrey handed the stack of printouts to Joanna. “I’ll go out and get us some coffee and see what Bud’s warmed up.”

Fifteen minutes later, he returned with a pot of coffee followed by Bud, who was carrying a tray and two plates piled high with macaroni casserole. Cowdrey sat down and filled two mugs with coffee. “You’re looking awfully smug,” he noted.

Joanna smiled. "I found Jackson's office and talked to his secretary. She balked at my questions until I told her I was investigating Jackson's murder. Once I got past all her personal recriminations and denials, she told me that all she knew is that he was going to a tiny burg on the Oregon coast to settle a dispute over the ownership of a large parcel of land. She said he told her that when he came back, they'd be moving into a bigger office, and she would get a raise."

Cowdrey sat down in front of the computer and twirled the chair around to face Joanna. "Nice work. Care to extrapolate on what you just told me?"

She took a long drink of coffee. "Jackson came down from Seattle, deed in hand. I'd guess that it was prearranged that he would meet, in the bar, with whoever hired him."

Cowdrey forked into the casserole and washed it down with a slurp of coffee.

"Good. What I can't figure out is the barfly act." Cowdrey said.

Joanna doodled on one of the printouts, thinking. "Okay, let's say that his identity was only known to the person who had hired him, but that person had threatened to bring down his attorney. Jackson didn't want to look the part."

"But if he had the deed," Cowdrey said, "was he hired or on a retainer?"

"You guys are missing it," Bud said.

"Missing what?" Cowdrey said.

CHAPTER 12

Sheriff Cowdrey drilled Bud with a look that dared the teen to tell him what they weren't getting.

Bud looked at Joanna, who gave him a wink and nodded for him to continue.

"Well," Bud said. "Let's assume that there were only two people involved in this dispute and only one knew Jackson's identity. It would make sense, to me anyway, that the other person found out, contacted Jackson, demanding to see the deed or whatever would settle the dispute. But there must have been some reason in the first place that it was decided that Jackson would hide his identity. Maybe a threat was made, and it wasn't a simple dispute, or the dispute meant a loss of millions. That amount alone could be a motive for murder."

Cowdrey laughed. "How would you like a job as a junior detective? That makes total sense. Let's run on the assumption that Jackson's sole purpose was to hand over a deed that would, once and for all, prove ownership of a large parcel of property. For someone to kill the guy, as you said, that could indicate that the mystery parcel of land is worth millions. The only problem with that is there are only a few homesites for sale in Dungeness Bay and none are at a value worth killing over."

"What about that beachfront property?" Bud asked. "Jake was going to sell his gas station to that developer who planned on mowing it down and using the lot as an access point for the condominiums he was going to build."

"That property is certainly worth a bundle," Joanna said.

"Right," Cowdrey responded. "That also makes a connection between the murders of Jake Harvey and Jackson Martin."

"What if this Myron Allen guy was the shooter?" Bud asked.

“Why would he have killed Jake? What did he have to gain?” Joanna said. “And why kill Jackson? It sounds to me like it could be a double-cross.”

“How so?” Cowdrey said.

“Jackson comes down from Seattle and plays the barfly while waiting for whoever hired him. The shooter, assuming he wasn’t hired, learns of Jackson’s real identity and says he’ll cut him a deal if he turned over the deed, and was probably planning to destroy it. At the last minute, Jackson has an attack of ethics, meets the shooter, and ends up running for his life.”

“All right, but there’s a hole in your theory,” Cowdrey said. “You’ve explained the barfly act but not why the shooter would show up with a weapon.”

Bud snapped his fingers. “I got it. The shooter expected Jackson to show up with the deed and knew he’d not only have to destroy the deed but also get rid of Jackson.”

Cowdrey gave a short sharp laugh. “You’ve been watching too many TV shows. What are you saying? That the shooter said ‘run down to the beach as a head start’? Come on, Bud.”

“Think about it.” Joanna said. “If Bud is right, the shooter was never going to let Jackson walk away. He certainly wouldn’t shoot him in the woods where the body would be easily found, especially since the sound of the shot could be heard so clearly back at the bar. Stepping out onto the bluff meant that the woods would mask the sound of the shot and the surf would carry the body out to sea.”

Cowdrey’s fingers danced across the bridge of his nose; he looked over at Joanna. “Did you get a look at the guy that did this, who’s probably the shooter?”

“The only thing I can tell you for sure is he’s short and will be walking around with the black eye that I gave him with my kick.”

“Okay,” Cowdrey said. “The shooter is probably short and sporting a black eye, he’s familiar with a rifle scope and was involved in a dispute

over a valuable parcel of land. Joanna, you have some rapport with Jackson's secretary. I want you to find out who hired Jackson or had him on a retainer—whatever. Bud, I want you to visit every business in town. Look for anyone with a black eye or who's wearing sunglasses. I'm going to pick up where Riggs left off, contacting every commercial real estate office from Northern California to Seattle.

"Am I really supposed to walk up one side of town and down the other?" Bud said.

"No, of course not. I'll come up and remove the boot from your car this evening."

"If I find someone that matches who we're looking for, do you want me to follow them?"

"If they're on foot, sure, but only after you call me. If they drive off, get a license plate number and the direction they're heading, then call me."

Bud went back to washing dishes. When Joanna and Sheriff Cowdrey had finished eating and walked out of the bar, they both noticed that Terry wasn't at his usual station behind the bar.

CHAPTER 13

“Do you think we have a chance of catching the murderer of Jake and Jackson?” Joanna asked.

Cowdrey walked Joanna to her truck. “As a rule of thumb, the odds of capturing a murderer decrease with every twenty-four hours that the homicide isn’t solved. But we have a double homicide. We’re a small town and have a lot of clues just waiting to be found.”

“Sheriff, Joanna!” Terry shouted. The two looked over at Terry, who was jogging over to them. “I just talked to a man who wanted to know if I’d been having a problem with a regular who was always three sheets into the wind. I think he was referring to Jackson.”

“What’d you tell him?” Cowdrey pressed.

“I said a new guy was closing down the bar every night for about a week and a half and that he should talk to the sheriff.”

Joanna touched Cowdrey on the arm. “Maybe it was Roy Gun, that hired Jackson.”

“What did he look like, Terry? I don’t suppose you got a license plate number?” Cowdrey asked.

“Better than that—I got his picture. Some tourists were taking a picture of the front of the bar as he was leaving. I convinced one of them to email me the photo. It should be waiting on my computer.”

The three walked back into the bar, to the back room. Terry sat at his desk and clicked around until he accessed his email. “There it is. From a Michael Sheldon, who said ‘love your chili.’” Terry clicked on the email, then on the attachment. The three of them scrutinized the photo.

“The guy does not look happy,” Cowdrey remarked.

Joanna stepped back from the computer. “We need to show this picture around town.”

“Or not,” Cowdrey said. “If the subject of that picture sees a photo of himself being passed around, he’ll probably take off. Let’s hold off on

showing it around until we see what Bud comes up with. Meanwhile, I'll find out who Myron Allen is. Joanna, get on the horn to Jackson's secretary and see if you can get the names on the deed, or who hired Jackson."



Back at her apartment above the apothecary, Joanna wrote down a few questions for Jackson's secretary, then smiled at her telephone like it was a living thing. It had cost an arm and a leg and taken nearly a month for her to get a phone line brought down the long driveway, then upstairs to her apartment. The mayor had tried to convince her to have a phone installed in the apothecary, but she had held her ground.

She'd left the door open so Rusty could come and go. She hadn't noticed his return but felt his soft fur rub against her ankle as he got settled.

She punched in the number on the handset and glanced at her notes as the phone rang. Someone picked up on the fourth ring.

"Jackson Martin, attorney at law, Jackson Martin speaking."

Joanna did a double take. "I'm sorry, who am I speaking with?"

"Jackson Martin. Whom may I say is calling?"

"This is Joanna Bright. I recently spoke with Grace; is she available?"

"She's out of the office until Monday. Is there something I can help you with?"

Joanna was mentally dancing as fast as she could; the gears in her head were working overtime.

"I'm working with the Dungeness Bay Sheriff's Department on a homicide."

"It's my son, isn't it? He's the victim."

Understanding dawned on Joanna. She responded, "Yes sir, but how did you know?"

"Grace told me. Do you know how he was killed?"

The voice that had initially answered the phone sounded a bit gruff

but professional. At the mention of his son, the elder Jackson's tone softened, and there was a tiny pause between each word.

"I'm very sorry to say that he was shot."

"Do you know anything about the circumstances?"

"He was apparently running from the shooter into the surf. I was the one who pulled him out."

There was a long pause.

"Sir, are you still there?"

"I'm here. I'd like to come down and help with the investigation. Bring my son's body home."

"You'd have to clear that with Sheriff Chuck Cowdrey. Honestly, as an attorney, I don't know what you could do."

"My son was the attorney. I worked as his investigator. What was it you were going to ask Grace?"

"It's my understanding that your son came to Dungeness Bay with a deed, intending to settle a dispute over a parcel of land. There is a name on the deed and, through the process of elimination, we're trying to determine who was disputing the individual named on the deed."

"I only know one name, Roy Gun. He retained my son regarding a variety of commercial landholdings. I need to talk with your sheriff."

"I'll have him call; will you be at this number?"

"I'll be waiting." After another pause, Jackson continued, "And, thank you."

"For what?"

"Being there, pulling my son out of the surf."

Then the line went dead. Joanna listened to the dial tone for a moment, then hung up.

She pushed back from the desk, leaned over, and looked at Rusty. "Hey, big guy, want to go for a ride?"

He crawled out from under the desk, gave a shake, and followed her down the stairs to the truck.

CHAPTER 14

The police cruiser wasn't in the big garage when Joanna drove by the station. She parked at the curb and walked up to the door to leave a note, but when she pushed the door, it opened, and she thought she heard a voice.

"Hello?"

"Here, in the back."

"Hey, Sheriff. Where's your cruiser?"

"Fifty-thousand-mile tune-up."

"I talked to Jackson Martin's father, the guy wants to come down and help with the investigation. Joanna said."

"I thought he was an attorney, Cowdrey said.

"He's an investigator, I told him not to come down until you called.

I don't know what he'd bring to the table. I think he just wants to be involved in apprehending his son's killer," Joanna said.

"You said Jackson, Junior told you Roy Gun was blackmailing Nancy Gun. Why would he say that if he was representing the guy?"

"I could visit Nancy Gun and find out if that's true, and she might have some insight on the parcel of land in dispute," Joanna said.

"I'd appreciate that. Have you heard anything from Bud?"

"No, I thought maybe you had. I'll stop by the bar and see if he's touched base with Terry."

"If you find Bud, let me know," the sheriff said.

"What would you think of gathering to brainstorm the clues when Jackson comes down?" Joanna said.

"It sounds like a good idea and a way to introduce him to the case. Hopefully, we'll have something new by the time he arrives."

CHAPTER 15

Joanna used the rear exit to enter Terry's bar.

Terry tossed a bar rag into a bin. "Hey, there, I didn't see you come in. Any sign of Bud?"

"Actually, I thought I might find him here. I've got my cell phone on in case he shows. I'm going to pay Nancy Gun a visit and see if there's any truth to what Jackson said about Roy blackmailing her. Does she live in town?"

"She's up Hill Road. Head north on the first road you can take after the 'Thanks for Visiting Dungeness Bay' sign. About two miles. She lives in the Gun mansion, built around the turn of the century. I've only seen pictures, but it looks like something out of a scary movie. It's got three stories, complete with turrets."

As she drove north out of town, Joanna watched for Bud, half expecting him to step out of any one of the shops that lined the road. By the time she turned onto Hill Road, she was busy organizing her questions, not sure how she'd be received.

The road made a sharp curve that ended in front of two stone pillars that supported a twelve-foot wrought iron gate that opened in the middle. Where the two halves came together, a length of heavy chain held them in place; the ends were padlocked.

Joanna stepped out of the truck. A barbed-wire fence, attached to each pillar, extended as far as she could see, disappearing into the surrounding forest.

She walked up to a little box attached to a keypad and pressed the "talk" button.

"Hello. My name is Joanna Bright. I'm here to speak with Nancy Gun."

A tinny-sounding voice responded after about a minute.

"What is the purpose of your visit?"

"I'd like to speak with her about a personal matter."

"Miss Gun is not receiving visitors today."

She turned at the sound of an approaching vehicle, surprised to see Sheriff Cowdrey pull up behind her truck in his AMC Gremlin.

"I gather you didn't find Bud?" Cowdrey asked.

"No, but Terry said he'd call if he shows up."

Cowdrey walked up and shook the gate, then stepped over to the box and pressed the talk button.

"This is Dungeness Bay Sheriff Chuck Cowdrey here to speak to Nancy Gun about the murder of Jackson Martin."

A different voice from the one that answered Joanna squawked out of the box.

"I'll be right down to unlock the gate."

After fifteen minutes, Cowdrey slapped the holstered gun on his hip. "I could probably shoot the lock off."

Joanna chuckled and pointed to a slightly bent figure crossing the gravel drive. "Maybe you won't have to."

When the figure neared the gate, it was apparent from his head of thinning white hair and gnarled hands that gripped a wooden cane, that the walk from the house to the gate—about three hundred feet—was a bit of a challenge. When he reached the gate, he hung his cane on an iron curl and clung to the wrought iron with both hands.

"You said you were the sheriff. I've met Sheriff Collins and you are not he."

"Collins retired eight months ago."

The man leaned a bit to look past Cowdrey. "Where's your police cruiser?"

"Hey, I don't dress like this for fun."

"Your belligerent tone is not endearing."

Joanna touched Cowdrey on the arm. "We believe that Miss Gun

may be able to shed some light on a dispute over a parcel of land.”

“That would be Beach Front Properties. I know something of that parcel. I’m Roy Gun. Perhaps I can answer your questions.”

Cowdrey bristled. “What you can do is open this gate and take us to Miss Gun.”

Gun pulled out a key and fumbled with the lock. “Miss Gun is not well, but I believe she is up.”

The lock was on the outside of the gate, which required Gun to reach through the ornate wrought iron design. Joanna reached over and gently took the key.

“Thank you. All delivery drivers are instructed to arrange the chain so that the lock is on the inside. Someone must have made an error recently.”

When she pulled the lock free of the chain, Cowdrey unraveled the chain.

“The gate opens in,” Gun said.

Joanna pushed through and handed Gun the key.

“Please tell me again about this dispute.”

Cowdrey pulled her close. “This isn’t the man from the picture Terry showed us.”

“Despite the years, my hearing has remained acute,” Ah, the picture, Gun said. I sent the Butler to Terry’s bar to pick up the deed, but he returned empty-handed, said he thought he was caught in a photo, but that Jackson was not there.”

“Jackson’s dead,” Cowdrey said.

Gun had retrieved his cane and was lumbering up the path but stopped at the news. He hung his head. “Does his father know?”

“Yes, he’ll be coming down to help with the investigation.”

Gun walked at a slow pace, which better enabled him to walk and talk at the same time.

“Jackson Martin senior, and I have a history.”

Joanna strolled up to Gun’s side. “You both served time at the same facility.”

He turned his head and looked at her without slowing.

“Yes. That was a long time ago and is no concern of yours.”

“So, your name is on the deed?” Cowdrey asked.

“No.”

“Then what name is on the deed and what’s your involvement?”
Cowdrey said.

“I’ll let Nancy explain.”

The three slowly made their way across a graveled drive and up thirteen steps. Joanna took advantage of Gun stopping to catch his breath to ask a question that she was curious about.

“Why do you chain the gate shut?”

“Nancy has been getting death threats.”

CHAPTER 16

Roy Gun pushed the oak door of the mansion open with some effort. Cowdrey and Joanna allowed themselves to be led into a foyer with plank flooring. It had a thirty-foot vaulted ceiling. The room was divided by a staircase with steps that were fifteen feet long and narrowed in a curve that led to the second floor, where the steps were shortened to just three feet. The walls were made of logs that had been tastefully plastered over.

“Don’t you think you should have called me about these death threats?” Sheriff Cowdrey asked.

“Roy wanted to, but I wouldn’t allow it.”

Cowdrey and Joanna turned to face an octogenarian leaning heavily on a cane.

“Nancy Gun?” Joanna asked.

“Yes, and I resent your intrusion.”

“Ma’am,” Cowdrey began. “I’m investigating a double homicide and it’s my belief that the murders are somehow connected by a parcel of land. One of the victims had brought the deed down from Seattle. Mr. Gun said he sent your butler to retrieve the deed from attorney Jackson Martin, Junior, who had already been murdered, and the deed has gone missing.”

Nancy glared at Roy. “Is this true?”

“Yes. The threats were becoming more frequent, the content more horrific than the ones before. It all had to stop.”

“I had no idea, beyond the first two threats. You had no right to keep this from me.”

“That’s enough,” Cowdrey said. “Mrs. Gun, am I correct in assuming that your name is on the deed, and the parcel of property in question

consists of the beach below the Jupiter gas station and north to Rocky point?”

“I believe so. Though I haven’t seen the deed. Daddy purchased that beach before Oregon tightened its grip on all its beaches. It became collateral for many of his land purchases.”

“Is there someplace where we would be more comfortable speaking?” Joanna asked.

“The library,” Nancy said and disappeared into a short hall.



The library was exquisite. Books were stacked on shelves fourteen-foot high. Nancy walked over to an overstuffed high wingback chair in the far corner.

“Please, make yourselves comfortable.”

Roy sat to Nancy’s right, Joanna to her left. Cowdrey moved to the center of the room and remained standing.

“Roy, tell me about these threats,” Cowdrey said.

“The first one came in the mail. The message was made up of letters obviously cut from a newspaper and pasted on an eight by eleven sheet of paper. It looked like child’s work, but the threat was serious.”

“What did it say?”

“The threats came in back-to-back,” Roy said and turned to face Nancy. “‘Sell or suffer the consequences.’ Then, the consequences became explicit, and that’s when I decided not to show them to you any longer.”

“Explicit in what way?” Cowdrey asked.

Roy repositioned himself to face Cowdrey. “The third and fourth threat described disemboweling. It’s not necessary to describe the others.”

“How many others? You said the first came in the mail. How else were they delivered?” Joanna queried.

“Five in all, one a day. Most were discovered tied to bricks, apparently thrown over the barbed wire fence that marks off the property. That’s when I started chaining the gate shut. They were coming so fast I was

afraid that whoever was making the threats might start acting on them.”

“Were they directed at Nancy? Joanna asked.

“Yes. Her name was always contained in the message.”

Cowdrey locked eyes with Joanna and continued the query. “When was the beachfront parcel of land mentioned?”

“It specified the land in the first threat. The theme of the threats always centered around the idea that Nancy was not the owner of the property and should relinquish the deed. I immediately contacted Jackson Martin, Junior, and asked that he bring the deed. Because of the threats, I told him my representative would meet him at Terry’s Bar and Grill, and to be careful not to reveal who he was, and to play the role of a drunk. I felt, in this way, he would not draw attention to himself.”

“Jackson told Terry and me that you were blackmailing Nancy, and that’s why she was selling the buildings that house many of the businesses in Dungeness Bay,” Joanna said.

Nancy cleared her throat. “Many of the buildings I sold were forty, fifty years old. Some much older. When Daddy passed, I inherited, in some cases, buildings that needed thousands of dollars of work. This would necessarily require me to raise the rent. I sold many for a song so the new owner could afford to remodel. I included a clause in the sale stipulating that the original structure be preserved. I wanted Dungeness Bay to remain the small town that I experienced as a child.”

Cowdrey pulled a chair to the center of the room and sat down hard. “Roy, exactly how were you planning on confronting the author of the threats with the deed?”

“Each message ended stating that violence could be avoided if the deed was delivered to a specific location at a specified time. The location changed every so often, but the time was always six o’clock. James would make the drop and I would be waiting in the wings, so to speak.”

“Please don’t take this the wrong way, Roy, but how in the world would *you* confront this person?” Joanna said.

Roy looked at the floor, then up at Joanna. “I am not without certain resources.”

Cowdrey rose from his chair. “Your plan sounds illegal and dangerous.”

“The last message ended with the words ‘Think about it. You’ve got until Friday next.’ It was my last opportunity to avoid violent consequences. The location was in that last message.”

“Then we’ve got three days to set up and execute your plan,” Joanna said, turning to face Sheriff Cowdrey, hopping for approval.

“Except that our version of your plan will be legal, and you won’t be involved,” Cowdrey replied, giving Roy a hard stare.

CHAPTER 17

Joanna climbed into her pickup and paused to take in the Gun mansion again. Terry was right; it did look like something out of a scary movie.

Cowdrey walked up to the driver's side window. "What do you think?"

"The death threats started around the time of Jake's murder. The fact that the notes were coming in daily and were death threats left me with the impression that someone was pretty anxious to get their hands on the deed in a hurry."

"Makes sense. Any thoughts on why Jackson, Junior would feed you and Terry that line about Roy blackmailing Nancy?"

"Not really. I'm headed back to the bar to see if Bud has shown up."

"Let me know if he has. I'll be at the station checking phone messages to see if I got a hit on Myron Allen."



Joanna rolled into the near-empty parking lot of the Dungeness Bay Bar and Grill, followed by a bright orange Karmann Ghia.

When Bud didn't immediately get out, she walked over and knocked on the driver's side window. He opened the door and unfurled himself as he climbed out.

"Hey, Joanna."

"Any suspects?"

Bud shook his head. "This must be the sunglasses capital of the world. The most suspicious turned out to be tourists. While I was out looking, my thoughts kept coming back to Gerald Gun."

"How so?"

"You described the guy that punched Sheriff Cowdrey as short, and

you figure your kick would have left him with a black eye. That describes Gerald to a tee. On a hunch, I stopped by the library and was told that he had taken a fall and would be taking some time off. But apparently, his injuries weren't that bad, because when I went back, he was at the front desk and sporting a real shiner. Plus, he's short—maybe five foot two." Bud leaned against the side of the Ghia and folded his arms. "I'd say Gerald is your man."

Joanna contemplated this. "I'm surprised. When we visited the library, he led us to the back room and seemed awkward. I would have pegged him more as a bookworm. The guy that I confronted at the motel readily recovered from my kick and was quick on his feet. But let's go inside and talk to Terry; you should also call Sheriff Cowdrey and tell him what you think."

When they entered the bar, they saw assistant manager Kerry Large behind the bar. Terry was at a table in the back sitting across from someone who looked like he could have been a linebacker for a pro football team.

Terry stood when he saw Joanna enter and waved her to the table. Bud wandered into the back room to use the phone.

"Joanna Bright, I'd like you to meet Jackson Martin, Senior."

He smiled and extended his hand. "Glad to finally meet you."

She shook the proffered hand and took a seat. "Sorry about your son."

"Jackie was always into something; I just didn't think he would end up, well, the victim of a shooting."

"Jackie," Joanna repeated.

"My nickname for him. After all, two Jacksons in the same office could be a little confusing."

"Mr. Martin was explaining his relationship to Roy Gun," Terry said.

"Yeah, well, the time we spent in Washington's minimum security was nothing I'm proud of. I was telling Terry that Roy Gun was a cell-mate and about fifteen years my senior. Our time there was short. We were released on the same day, and I thought that was the last I'd see

of him. I had a son who was testing for the bar. His mother was out of the picture, but we bonded. When he got his law degree and passed the bar, he brought me on board as an investigator. Of course, because of my jail time, I couldn't get a PI license, but that didn't keep me from playing the part. Jackie knew about my past and how Roy was part of the reason I did time, and he hated Roy for that."

Your son told us a different story, Terry said.

Yeah well, like I said he hated Roy and blamed him for my serving time. I think he would have told you anything.

"How did it work that Roy retained him?" Joanna asked.

"That was my idea. About four years after getting out, Roy contacted me, saying he had reconciled his differences with his half-sister Nancy and had been helping her manage some of her property. He said he was surprised to see that I was able to get a license to practice law. Of course, I told him that was Jackson Martin, Junior. I don't think Jackie ever got over his hate for Roy. I was the conduit between the two so that he never really had to do business with him."

"Yet he was willing to bring down the deed at Roy's request," Terry said.

"I talked to Grace," Jackson said, and looked at Terry. "The office secretary. She said that Jackie had told her that when he returned from Dungeness Bay they'd be moving into a new office, and she'd be getting a raise. I think that he was planning on double-crossing Roy by giving the deed not to him, but to the individual challenging the ownership of the property in question."

"Roy's instructions," Joanna began, "made it clear that he was supposed to pose as a barfly so as not to give away his identity. That begs the question of how Roy knew the person that was after the deed, or did he?"

Bud walked up to the table with a coffee pot in one hand and three mugs in the other. "Coffee," he said, by way of explanation.

Jackson looked relieved to have a break in the conversation. "Black for me."

“Joanna?” Terry said.

“No, thanks, but I’ll take a glass of ice water.”

Bud set down two mugs, filled them, and headed back to the bar. Moments later, Kelly, one of the bar’s servers, brought Joanna a tall glass of ice water. “Anyone care to order?” Kelly asked. “The chili is vegetarian today.”

Jackson gave a nod. “Sounds good.”

Terry held up two fingers. “Thanks, Kelly.”

Joanna continued, “The double cross would explain Jackie’s meeting in the woods, but your son must have had a change of heart and showed up empty-handed, and that’s why he was killed.”

“What makes you think he showed up to the meeting empty-handed?” Jackson asked.

“When I visited your son’s motel room with the sheriff, we were confronted by someone who had been looking for something that could only have been the deed. After our encounter, we entered the room and saw that the person had torn the apartment apart.”

“Any idea of this person’s identity?”

Joanna shook her head.

CHAPTER 18

Bud returned to the table carrying a tray with two bowls of chili and a side of onion, cheese, and crackers.

“Bud, did you call the sheriff?” Joanna asked.

“Yeah, he’s on his way. He said to tell you and Terry to sit tight until he arrives.”

“Pull up a chair, Bud,” Terry offered.

“Mind if I grab a bowl of chili? I’m starving.”

“Go for it.”

Cowdrey walked into the bar just as Bud was sitting down with his bowl of chili. He pulled up a chair and extended a hand to Jackson.

“Sheriff Cowdrey, you must be Jackson Martin.” The two men shook hands, and Cowdrey turned to Bud.

“Bud, you’re fired. I visited Gerald Gun and it was just as you said; he’s short and is sporting a black eye. But what you failed to notice was that his arm was in a sling. I confirmed his injury with the nurse practitioner that treated him. He was treated before our encounter at the motel.”

Bud looked apologetic. “Sorry. He was behind the front desk when I stopped by the library. I knew he was short, and kind of assumed from the black eye that he was our man.”

Cowdrey waved a hand through the air to dismiss his apology. “No matter. I got a hit on Myron Allen, and I owe you an apology, Bud. The finger and partial palm prints on Jake *were* low and could have been made by someone your height. Initially, of course, the evidence pointed to you, but it turns out that Myron Allen is just about your size. The real estate company he worked for, Humboldt Properties Inc., faxed me a headshot that’s used for ads, so we have facial recognition. I contacted

the head office and got a description. They described him as a fireplug with a black belt in karate.

“The home office received a large sum of money to send an agent experienced in the purchase of property and in the hiring of engineers and crews that would begin work on condominiums. They sent Myron Allen because he had helped set up several strip malls. He was authorized to purchase a half-acre of land at the south end of Dungeness Bay for up to a million dollars. That would have been Jake’s gas station.”

Joanna rapped the table with a knuckle. “Jake must have received the offer over the phone, or, perhaps, through the mail, and initially jumped at the chance to rake in that kind of money. But, at any rate, he had time to think about it, and when Myron showed up, he refused the offer.”

“I can roll with that,” Cowdrey said. “I checked with the Bay County planning office and the only way the construction of the proposed condos would be allowed is with an entrance and exit at either end of the site. The north end had been secured; Jake’s property represented the south end. Myron’s success in securing Jake’s property would give the green light for construction and represented a large bonus for both Humboldt Properties Inc. and Myron Allen.”

“But killing Jake doesn’t make any sense,” Joanna said.

“Maybe not, or maybe it does,” Cowdrey responded. “With the authorization of a million dollars to secure his property, Myron could probably buy it from whoever inherited the gas station after Jake’s death, and I believe that would be Jake’s nephew.”

“I know that when I added to the Dungeness Bay Bar and Grill, I had to go to Bay County planning and jump through a lot of hoops that included producing proof of ownership,” Terry said. “And that brings us to the question of the name on the deed for the beachfront parcel of property.”

Jackson stood. “So, Myron Allen killed my son.”

“Hold your horses. Joanna received a commission to shoot a series

of photos of the beach just below Jake's gas station. I pulled the card from her camera and the footage showed someone pulling a body from the surf. I had that image blown up. I don't know who was doing the heavy lifting, but the body fit the description of Myron Allen," Cowdrey said. He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. "Any thoughts?"

Joanna took a sip of her water. "Whoever is after the deed decided to take Myron Allen out of the equation. Perhaps it wouldn't be necessary to have an agent buy the gas station from Jake's nephew."

"That's a lot of extrapolation Joanna," Cowdrey said. "Theoretically, that would take care of Jake's and Myron Allen's murder. We could assume that our killer met with Jackson to secure the deed since the purchase of Jake's gas station was a forgone conclusion. So, that begs the question, who knew Jackson's identity?" Cowdrey looked at everyone around the table. "Only one person—Roy Gun."

Jackson sat back down. "That's impossible. I know Roy. My son held a grudge, that's true. But Roy held no animosity toward Jackie. Not to mention that he would have no reason to go through all this subterfuge. Roy's fifteen years my senior; that would put him in his early eighties. Could that really have been Roy captured in that photo pulling a body out of the surf? No. I don't think so."

Joanna raised a hand. "I agree, and Roy has been collecting all those death threats."

Cowdrey shook his head. "Well, technically, it was Nancy who was getting the death threats, but I can't argue with any of that. Still, it wouldn't be the first time a threat or crime was created in order to throw suspicion onto someone else."

"We need to set a trap using Roy's plan without Roy knowing what we're doing."

Cowdrey ran a hand through his hair. "After my and Joanna's visit, I had Roy send all the threatening notes he claimed to have received to the station. The last threat caught my eye since it mentions the final chance to avoid violent consequences and the location for the deed. I can

tell Roy that a patrol car will be at the front gate to provide protection and that I'll have an officer in the house waiting for the killer to make his move. We'll place a fake deed at the location and wait for the killer to reveal himself when he shows up to get the deed."

CHAPTER 19

Joanna followed Cowdrey to the police station and parked behind his cruiser. When she slid out of the truck, she saw him walking in her direction.

“What’s up?”

“We’ve got company.”

Jackson Martin parked his car on the curb and walked up to them.

“You need to wait at the bar with the others.”

“This man you plan on trapping killed my son. I’m going to be there when you catch him.”

“I’ve already run into the perp once, so I know it’s going to be dangerous. I can’t allow you to be present.”

“Oh, come on. I’ve worked as an investigator for decades and strong-arming when necessary. If I’m not mistaken, Joanna will be present.”

“She’s been with me on this investigation from the beginning and she’s trained in martial arts.”

“I’ve worked stings before and can help with the plan. What do you say, Sheriff?”

“Understand that I will make the arrest, and when that happens, you will stand down. I understand your wanting to be present, but you absolutely cannot interfere. That goes for you too, Joanna.”

The sheriff looked around at the sound of an approaching car and groaned. “Oh, shit.” Cowdrey stepped around Jackson. “This is turning into a circus.”

“Sheriff,” Terry shouted and waved as he, and Bud, climbed out of his Land Rover and walked up to the group.

Terry touched his nose, reminding Cowdrey of his encounter with

the murderer. "I thought you might need some muscle."

"Very funny. That punch to the nose was delivered by a karate expert who is now presumed dead. Currently, I really don't know who we'll be encountering."

"Which makes it that much more important that you have backup."

Cowdrey rolled his shoulders and ran a hand through his hair. "All right, but no guns. Mine is the only gun that will be present at the encounter. Is that understood?" All heads nodded. "Bud, you'll remain behind in my cruiser—no argument. Now, let's get inside and lay out the plan."

Cowdrey led the way into his office. While the others gathered and sat on chairs, he cleared his oak desk and searched his drawers until he found a map of Dungeness Bay. Once everyone had been seated around the desk, he explained his plan.

"It's a simple plan, but not an easy one to carry out, and things may go sideways. The deed is to be placed inside a watertight thermos that is to be placed at Rocky Point, across the bridge, and set prominently on figurehead rock. I said the plan would be simple because the murderer will have to cross the narrow bridge that connects the point to the figurehead, and because he'll be easy to spot and easier to catch. But it won't be easy, because we'll have to be out of sight as he approaches Rocky Point and crosses the bridge to the figurehead rock. Time is also a factor. The deed is to be in place at six o'clock, which means the tide will be coming in."

Cowdrey paused and looked at everyone seriously before continuing. "Everyone clear? I want your thoughts on this. Let's begin with you, Joanna."

"It will also be dusk. I think that, since hiding will be the biggest issue, our first concern should be placement."

Cowdrey nodded and looked at Terry. "Terry, do you agree? What do you think?"

"I agree, but I'm all for a contingency, assuming that the perp gets past you."

Cowdrey nodded again. "Okay. Jackson?"

"The end game is to stop the guy in such a way that you can make the arrest."

"All right." Cowdrey looked at Bud. "The way you're dancing from foot to foot indicates that you either have to pee or you've got some input."

"Thanks a lot, Sheriff. Since I'll be behind, I don't want to sit in your cruiser. I can hide in the trees by the end of the trail with a walkie-talkie. When I spot him, I can alert you,"

Cowdrey chuckled. "Bud, you know how I said you were fired? Well, consider this your official reinstatement."

"So, first things first—placement," Cowdrey said. "Joanna, I want you on the beach directly below the bridge, in the shadow of the rock that supports figurehead. It's about twenty feet. You should be able to see anyone crossing the bridge, but you'll be invisible to them. Jackson, I want you under the bridge too. Where the bridge leaves the bluff, there's a cement support; I want you next to it. You'll know the second the perp steps onto the bridge. I'll be underneath the bridge at the other end. Once he steps from the bridge onto the figurehead, I'll swing around and up onto the bridge to block his exit, and you'll be my immediate backup. When you see me move to block his retreat, I want you up on your end of the bridge. Terry, I want you on the ocean-side of figurehead in case he decides to climb down and make his escape along the beach."

"I think your placement covers my concern for a contingency," Terry said approvingly. "But whatever happens will take place quickly, so it's really important that everyone remember their role."

"Bud," Cowdrey said. "I'll be depending on you to sound the alarm. You up for this?"

"Not a problem. You can depend on me."

"Who's going to place the deed?" Joanna asked.

Cowdrey opened a side drawer and produced a thermos. "The perp wouldn't expect Roy to come out onto the figurehead; he must know that he walks with a cane. He'd expect that Roy would have me deliver

the deed. I'll make a big show of driving up in the cruiser and marching out to the figurehead with the thermos under my arm and then leaving. I want everyone in place by five-thirty. Wear black and be prepared for a long wait. I'm pretty sure that the pickup will be after the sun has set. I don't expect to see anyone when I cross the bridge."

"How will you get under the bridge?" Bud asked.

"I'll approach along the beach and climb up the rock."



The sun had set, and Joanna was beginning to feel the tide as it wrapped around the rock. She could just make out Jackson's occasional fidget under the bridge. Curiosity got the best of her, and she waded through ankle-deep tidewater to check on Terry, who was clinging to the rock like a spider.

By seven o'clock, she began to wonder if Cowdrey would call things off. When the tide eventually reached her upper thigh, she climbed up on a narrow ledge. Suddenly, she heard a splash and Terry sputtering.

CHAPTER 20

Joanna slid off the ledge she'd been sitting on and found herself waist-deep in the ebb and flow of the tide. When the tide flowed out, she let it pull her and stroked furiously to get around to the base of figurehead.

Terry was clinging to a barnacle-covered outcropping with one hand, his other hand hung loosely. When he saw Joanna, he snapped his head back and looked up. She followed his gaze to a wet suit-clad figure moving down the rock with the thermos tied to their waist.

The receding tide ripped Terry's grip from the rock, and Joanna could see that he was in trouble. She had to get to him before the force of the incoming tide smashed him into the giant barnacle-covered stone outcropping. Working her way around the base of figurehead, she pushed with her bootie-covered feet against the stone and stroked until she reached him, flipped him on his back with his chin planted in the crook of her elbow. They kicked in unison to get around the huge monolith. They were caught by a powerful, surf-like tide, but they made it onto the beach. Grasping his good arm with both hands, she dug in her heels so the tide wouldn't pull them out.

Her scream came out sounding more like a grunt. "Cowdrey."

A dark figure dropped down from the backside of figurehead and ran to her side.

"My God, Terry," Cowdrey said.

"He's getting away—swimming out to a raft!" Joanna said, pointing.

"Here," Cowdrey said and slapped the walkie-talkie into her hand before taking off in a sprint. He followed the edge of the base of figurehead, where he was greeted by belly-high tidewater. Leaning into the

rock, he pulled out his Glock 19 and scanned the roiling water until he spotted a raft and fired off three shots.

Cowdrey's right leg suddenly jerked out from under him. Initially, he thought it was a shark that had bumped him but soon saw a neoprene-hooded figure surface twelve feet away, raising what looked to be a speargun just above the water. Cowdrey instinctively dropped to his knees to submerge himself completely but couldn't get himself completely under in time. The spear creased the top of his head. Cowdrey managed to half stagger with the tide, half float toward the beach before passing out.

Terry raised his good arm and pointed. "Cowdrey," he whispered, horrified.

Joanna spun around and spotted the sheriff face up, bobbing with the movement of the water, and depressed the talk button on the walkie-talkie.

"Bud, you there?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I need you and Jackson down here on the beach below figurehead. Cowdrey and Terry have been shot. Right now, Bud—right now!—and get a hold of the clinic."

She pressed the walkie-talkie into Terry's hand and charged the surf. When she reached Cowdrey, she saw that he was in and out of consciousness. He raised an arm out of the water, hand still clutching his pistol.

"Hang in there, Cowdrey," Joanna encouraged him, prying the gun from his hand.

She scanned the water until she located the raft, but it was empty. A round black image came into view. It could have been a seal, except it was making a beeline for the raft.

"Wait, wait, wait," Joanna whispered, keeping the raft in her sights.

She emptied the clip when the seal-like image climbed over the side of the raft. When she turned, Jackson was pulling at Cowdrey and

fighting the surf. She grabbed an arm, and together, they dragged the sheriff out of the raging surf and onto the beach; they lay him next to Terry, who was unconscious.

Bud was pressing against the wound on Terry's shoulder to stem the flow of blood.

Jackson stood up and waved at the two women who appeared, running up the beach, each carrying a medical jump kit. He pushed Bud out of the way when one dropped to her knees, next to Terry.

Joanna hooked Bud by the arm and walked him into the surf. "Come on. You've got to wash the blood off."

Bud squatted until the surf hit him in the chest and rubbed his hands and arms. He turned to Joanna, tears running down his face. "There was so much blood. So, so much blood. I didn't know what to do."

"You did the right thing, Bud."

Jackson walked over. "You did all right, kid. Terry's going to survive." He pulled Joanna to one side and dropped his voice. "You hit the son of a bitch?"

"Not sure, but I think so."

"Cowdrey's out of it. Once the killer realizes that the deed is a fake, he's going to try and make good on his threats. The security the sheriff set up for Roy and Nancy are local security guards and not equipped to provide any real protection."

"What are you thinking?" Joanna asked.

"Cowdrey said you're trained in the martial arts. How trained?"

"I've been practicing for thirty-five years, and I'm trained for close combat."

"If this guy's acting alone, which he probably is, we can move Roy and Nancy to a defensible room with you as the last line of defense."

"I understand and agree, but with Sheriff Cowdrey out of the picture, we have no authority. I think Roy and Nancy are safe for the night, and that will give us some time to plan."

Jackson nodded reluctantly. "I'll check into Oregon's law on the defense of hearth and home. Can you take Bud with you?"

“Yeah, he’s been renting a room from me. I’ll check on Terry and Cowdrey early tomorrow morning. You want to meet at the gate in front of the Gun mansion around eight?”

“It’s a plan.”

CHAPTER 21

The Dungeness Bay Clinic was originally an aging motel. The office had been gutted and turned into a combination front office ER with a single exam room. The individual rooms had connecting walls that had been taken down and replaced with a long hall.

Joanna pulled into visitor parking and walked with Bud into the front office.

Del Johnson was manning the front desk and pulled out a clipboard when Joanna approached.

“Terrys in room two. Doc says the spear missed all bones and the rotator cuff. However, the sheriff wasn’t so lucky. The way the spear grazed the skull created the same effects as blunt force trauma. He remained unconscious and was taken to Lincoln City’s ICU.”

The owner of the hardware store, Eric Ward, had been hovering nearby. At the age of sixty-eight, Eric sported a full head of white hair, but stood six feet tall and was lean and fit.

After Del finished speaking, Eric stepped up next to Joanna.

“Earlier, Cowdrey had a lucid moment, and I was able to talk to him. He filled me in on the investigation.”

“I’m sorry, Eric. It’s been a long day and I’m not following,” Joanna said.

“Bobby Alvarez. I think you only know her from the city council, but she’s also a nurse. She was pulling a shift last night when they brought Terry and the sheriff in, and she was the one who signed off on sending Cowdrey to Lincoln City. I was contacted by Mayor Ritter this morning about becoming interim Sheriff.”

“What qualifies you?” Bud blurted out.

“Bud,” Joanna said.

"That's all right, son. I was military police during the Viet Nam conflict."

"Then you know about the failed attempt to trap the killer?"

"I know enough. Cowdrey said I should talk to you."

"Jackson Martin and I believe that once the killer discovers that the deed he got away with is a fake, he'll attempt to make good on his threats to Nancy and Roy. I'm supposed to meet Jackson at the Gun mansion," she paused, checking her watch, "in fifteen minutes."

"Cowdrey mentioned a security guard at the front gate and one in the house. You don't think that's enough?"

"One was a bouncer, and the other is just a security officer down from Lincoln City. So, no, I don't think that's enough."

"All right, Joanna. I've got the cruiser. You want to ride along?"

"No, thanks. I'll follow in the truck."

When they arrived at the mansion, Jackson was parked just inside the gate. Eric pulled up sideways to the gate with Joanna right behind him. Jackson walked through the gate, and Joanna made quick introductions.

"Sorry to hear about your son," Eric offered to Jackson.

"I appreciate that, thank you."

"How did you get through the gate?" Joanna asked, looking around.

"It was open. I just hope we're not too late. The squawk box and keypad have been smashed, and the chain cut."

"Bud," Eric said. "Follow me to the cruiser."

"Let me guess; you want me to wait out here."

Eric opened the driver's side door, "slide in behind the wheel. See the switch that says 'siren'?"

Bud nodded.

"If you see anyone come out of the mansion, flip that switch and lay on the horn."

Without another word, Eric joined Jackson and Joanna on the gravel drive, taking the lead up to the stairs.

"The front door is ajar. I'll go in first. If I draw fire, hightail it back

to the cruiser and contact the highway patrol,” Eric ordered.

Jackson pulled out Cowdrey’s Glock 19. “How about I provide backup?”

Eric’s voice became firm. “You wait here until I call out ‘clear.’ This may be the man that killed your son, but we will take him alive if at all possible.”

Joanna and Jackson watched Eric step into the threshold and disappear. They held their breaths.

“Clear.”

When they entered, Eric was standing at the foot of the staircase.

“How many rooms does this place have?” Joanna asked.

Eric looked up the steps, then back at Joanna. “Four chimneys and ten rooms; that’s what I’ve always heard.”

They moved through the kitchen and checked a bedroom under the staircase. Low voices met them as they moved down a short hall to the library.

Eric turned to Joanna and Jackson. “Wait.”

When they saw him put his gun away, they followed.

They saw a bald man with thinning eyebrows and tears running down his face. It was James the butler, Joanna realized from Terry’s photo. He sat on the floor and didn’t look up when Eric entered. Cradled in the old man’s arms, swaddled in a blood-stained blanket, was a younger version of himself. Nancy Gun was at his side and spoke in low tones, attempting to console him.

Roy was sitting in a chair next to James. When he saw the three appear, he stood and extended his hand in an ushering fashion. “Please, could we speak in the kitchen?”

When the four entered the kitchen, Eric, Jackson, and Joanna sat at a round table while Roy pulled up a chair so that he could face the three.

“Jimmy—James’s son—came into his father’s bedchamber early this morning, mortally wounded.” Roy looked directly at Jackson. “He confessed to killing your son and Myron Allen. I’m so sorry, Jackson.”

Roy scanned the three blank faces before continuing. "A long while ago, Jimmy had contacted me saying that his father's name, James Dugan, was on the deed for the beachfront property, not Nancy's. I brushed him off."

Roy looked like he was on the verge of breaking down. "When Ben died, he left all the land to Nancy. There were hundreds of small parcels, hundreds of deeds. James Dugan was Ben's friend and butler for fifty years. He was attached to the mansion and so continued as a butler for Nancy. Jimmy hated his father's occupation, claiming he was a servant. He somehow found out that, in gratitude for the years that James had served Ben, Ben had left James the beachfront property. He hired Myron Allen to acquire the land that would secure the south exit and entrance to the condos and appease the planning board's demands. All that remained was for Jimmy to get the deed. When I brushed him off, he became desperate. He had learned from his father that I'd sent for the deed and knew about the law office where the deeds were held. He followed Jackson Martin Junior, here to Dungeness Bay, and demanded the deed, and again was brushed off. He then attempted to buy the deed."

At this point, Roy looked again at Jackson. "When your son showed up empty-handed, Jimmy killed him and ransacked his motel room. He was the one that punched you, not Myron Allen. Myron had become a liability, so Jimmy eliminated him. Then came the death threats."

"He couldn't have thought he could still go forward with the condominiums," Eric said.

"The land is worth millions," Roy said. "I believe he was going to sell it to the highest bidder." He paused, "If he could've just gotten his hands on the deed."

"Where's the deed now?" Joanna asked.

"It was with your son," Roy said, looking at Jackson Martin. "Some-time just before he left for that fateful meeting with Jimmy, Jackie had mailed the deed to himself, care of the Gun mansion, twenty-five Hill Road. It arrived in yesterday's mail, but Nancy didn't sort through it

until this morning.”

Eric stood and spoke in low tones. “But who killed Jake?”

“Jimmy knew nothing of Jake’s death, so we may never know,” Ray replied.

“Is James going to go ahead with the condominiums?” Bud questioned.

“Jimmy was an only child. With no one to leave such a project to, it is my belief that James will give the property to the city of Dungeness Bay.”

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Book 3



PROLOGUE

Johnny Benoit listened for his father to come home. When he heard the Jeep come up the gravel drive, he put on his earphones and turned up the music. He hated that his father was a fisherman. He was always gone. When he finally came home, his parents would fight. When he was younger, he hid under the covers and cried. When he turned eleven, he had listened until he finally understood. His father would go fishing for three months. When the Misty Dawn pulled into the harbor with its catch, he would join the crew at a local pub. He'd come home drunk and beat on his mother, and she certainly didn't want a drunk for a husband, but what could she do? Johnny could remember when he first recognized his father's words. They were the same words he heard in certain circles at school, the ones you'd get suspended for if a teacher heard you using them. They had been the key to understanding the arguments. Now he just turned up his music and clamped his eyes shut.

When Johnny felt his bed shudder, he opened his eyes. The picture of the Titanic on the opposite wall was rhythmically tapping. Pencils rolled off his computer desk. He tore off his headset and couldn't believe the yells and groans he was hearing. The pounding against the opposite wall drove him out of bed. He ran down the hall and out the front of the house. He stumbled down the flagstone walk, blinked away tears, and tripped over his mountain bike. He picked it up by the handlebars and ran, finally putting a foot on the peddle and swinging a leg over the seat. He stood up on his bike and pushed hard with his legs. He shifted gears until he was pedaling down Beach Road as fast as he'd ever peddled.

Johnny's vision was blurred with the image of his father knocking his mother around, and he didn't see the divot in the asphalt. His front tire

dropped into the fracture and caused him to cartwheel head over heels.

He landed in a heap. It took him a full minute to figure out what had happened. His head hurt and his left palm stung, so he used his right to push himself up. The twilight had gone, and it was now dark. Johnny realized he was at the end of Beach Road and had crashed in front of old man Werner's house.

Johnny's friends called Gerhard Werner the old Nazi because of his thick German accent. Johnny didn't know if Werner had actually been a Nazi, but right now, he didn't care and walked up the path to the front door. He just wanted someone to call his parents to come to get him. His father would scold him for being so clumsy, but his mother would put peroxide and bandages on his cuts and scrapes. Halfway up the walk, he stopped. What if they were still fighting? How could he face his parents? He stepped off the walk and bent over, heaving up what was left of his dinner. He fell to his knees sobbing and gagging with the dry heaves.

The sound of voices made Johnny turn his head. He strained to hear, trying to understand what the voices were saying. He could only make out a single word—"Tassie." Then, there was a sudden crash that could only be the sound of glass breaking. Johnny crawled up under the window that faced the road and slowly rose to a low squat until he could peek between the curtains. All he could see was the shadow of the old man. The voice belonged to someone else.

The sound of three gunshots drove Johnny to his knees. Fearing someone was about to run out the front door and spot him, he glanced out to the street, hoping for a place to hide, but no such luck. He ran along the side of the house, hustled past the backyard, and tumbled down a sand dune, coming to a stop in the tall eelgrass just above the beach. He swiped at his nose, and the sand came away in moist clumps. He thought he was going to be sick again, but the sound of the back door slamming shut drove the thought out of his head. He peeked through the grass to see a man, bent at the waist, stumbling down the dune. The

dull light filtering out of the house illuminated the man as he staggered down the sand, across the short beach, toward a raft. The man's groans made Johnny want to cover his ears as the man pushed the black raft into the breakers and vanished into the total darkness of the ocean.

CHAPTER 1

Joanna was in bed writing in her journal when Rusty got up from the giant pillow he'd curled up on and walked to the door.

She slapped the side of the bed. "Rusty, here, it's just Bud."

Rusty had gotten used to Bud Nickels, the eighteen-year-old she rented her spare bedroom to. But the boy's midnight raids on the refrigerator still got Rusty up. She hadn't heard the front door open and close.

Joanna rose early that morning, knowing that Bud liked to sleep in, and made her way down the hall, past his bedroom to the bathroom. As she passed by his room, she heard voices and frowned slightly. While in the shower, she decided to have a talk with Bud about all-night visitors.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, she followed the voices, and the aroma of coffee, to the kitchen. She mentally girded herself for the firm tone she would use with Bud but stopped in her tracks at the entrance to the kitchen.

"Good morning, Bud. Who's your friend?"

"This is Johnny Benoit; he needed a place to stay last night."

Johnny was eleven years old but big for his age. His head was down, and his entire body shrieked of distress.

Joanna walked to the counter, poured a cup of coffee, and sat down across from Johnny.

"Have you guys had breakfast?"

"Not yet," Bud said.

"If you two take Rusty out for a short walk and feed him, I'll fix breakfast. Pancakes sound good?"

"Great. We'll be back in twenty minutes?" Bud offered.

"Perfect," Joanna said.

She figured whatever was going on with Bud's little friend might

seem less daunting on a full stomach.

Breakfast was a silent affair. Bud cleared the table and came back with the coffee pot, refilling Joanna's mug, then his own.

"I guess you're wondering why Johnny needed a place to stay for the night?"

"You guessed right," Joanna said, nodding. She reached across the table and turned over Johnny's right hand to see dried blood.

"What happened here?"

"I crashed my bike."

"Let's take care of this. I'll get a towel, some peroxide, and a couple of Band-Aids."

Johnny and Bud had been muttering to each other while Joanna retrieved the supplies. When she returned, they stopped talking.

"I heard gunshots coming from Mr. Werner's house last night," Johnny suddenly said.

She dabbed at his hand with a damp washcloth. "Did you tell your parents?"

"No."

"Did you call the police?" she asked, patting his palm dry and applying two Band-Aids. "Where were you when you heard the shots?"

Johnny retracted his hand, ran a finger over the Band-Aids, and looked at Bud, who frowned at his friend.

"I crashed my bike in front of old man Werner's house and was going to ask to use his phone to call my parents when I heard the shots."

"When you heard the shots, why didn't you ride home and tell your parents?"

"They were fighting, and I didn't want to go home."

"Your parents don't know you're here?"

"No, ma'am."

"How old are you, Johnny?"

"Eleven."

Johnny clouded up but didn't cry. "I saw the man that shot old man

Werner get in a raft and paddle away.”

Joanna got up and walked to the phone. “I have to call your parents. I’m sure they’re worried sick, wondering where you are.”

Fifteen minutes after the call, she walked out onto the landing and watched a motorcycle cross the gravel parking lot. “Mr. Benoit?”

Benoit hung his helmet on the motorcycle’s sissy bar and ran up the porch steps. Joanna stopped him before he was halfway up. “We need to talk.”

He looked past her. “Is my son here?”

“He is, but we need to have a conversation about him.”

He reached out to push her aside, but she sidestepped his hand. “Johnny mentioned some disturbing events that drove him out of the house. I need to get clear on what was going on.”

He balled a fist. “You’re standing between me and my son, lady.”

“I called you instead of child services. I need to know that wasn’t a mistake.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about your son’s welfare. Let’s continue this conversation in the parking lot.”

They descended the steps in silence. When they reached the graveled lot, Benoit turned around Joanna and stepped close, in an attempt to intimidate her.

“You can’t stop me from taking my son home.”

“I can, but that’s not the point. Johnny described banging and said he could hear his mother’s groans.”

Adam Benoit took a step back and locked eyes with Joanna.

“Johnny’s mother and I have been together for twelve years. I’m a fisherman. I’m gone for weeks and months at a time. She knew this when we got married. Johnny was born when I was at sea, and I guess that brought home the reality of me being away constantly due to my job.”

“I get the picture,” Joanna said.

“No, you don’t. As her discontent escalated, so did my drinking,

until every time I came home, I was drunk, and we fought. The night Johnny ran away, I swore off fishing and bought the Misty Dawn—”

“The fishing boat?”

“Right, the Misty Dawn. No more fishing. No more drinking. What Johnny heard was the celebration of a promise. You understand?”

“Not quite.”

“We were making love.”

Joanna exhaled a short, sharp laugh. “I guess that explains the groans. I appreciate your candor, but fishing was your livelihood. What are your plans now?”

“I’m having the Misty Dawn redressed as a dive boat.”

Joanna pondered that for a moment. “Okay, Mr. Benoit. Let’s go talk to your son.”

She walked him into the apartment. “Down the hall, second door on the right.”

Adam knocked twice and slowly opened the door.

“Johnny, can I come in? I’d like to talk.”

Johnny pushed into a sitting position on the edge of the bed, trying to hide his scuffed hand. His father sat next to him and gently pulled it out from beneath the covers. “It looks like Ms. Bright has taken care of your hand.”

He pulled his hand back and looked at the floor.

“I’m out of the fishing business, Johnny. No more being gone for weeks, and no more drinking. That’s a promise I made to your mother, and now, I’m making that promise to you.”

“I heard you fighting last night.”

“I bought the Misty Dawn, Johnny. I’m going to refit her as a charter for scuba divers.” Benoit looked at the floor, then up at his eleven-year-old son. “What you heard last night was a celebration, do you understand?”

Johnny flashed on the sound of his mother’s moans and groans and imagined his father hitting her.

“I know it’s hard for you to understand now, son; I can see your doubt,” Adam said, and stood. “Let’s go home and talk to your mother.”

CHAPTER 2

The Chinese five-spice chocolate truffles were set out with specialty teas. Satisfied with the displays, Joanna walked into the herb section of the apothecary in search of dust but found none. The sound of her first student driving across the gravel parking lot brought her out.

Four tai chi students had turned into seven and soon settled at twelve. She greeted each student as they arrived and headed around to the back of the apothecary and the deck. Dungeness Bay residents made up the majority of the group, but there were three business owners as well. Lisa Posey, owner of the Chocolate Factory, was the last to arrive. Joanna greeted her as she got out of her car.

“How’s business?”

“Busy,” Lisa said, then turned and looked up the drive. “Looks like you might have a new student.”

Joanna watched a familiar motorcycle pull into the lot next to a car.

“Oh, Mr. Benoit. How’s Johnny?”

“Call me Adam. And older.”

“What?”

Adam smiled. “Yesterday was his birthday, he turned twelve, and I came by to ask if you could do something for him as part of his present. But I’m also here for the tai chi.”

“You’ve got my curiosity, but whatever it is, it’ll have to wait,” she said, and looked at her watch. “I have a dozen students out on the deck.”

“Do you mind if I drop in?”

Joanna walked to the side of the apothecary. “Do you practice?”

“I do, as a matter of fact—Yang style.”

When they rounded the back corner her students, many of whom

knew each other, were chatting, a sure sign they were ready to begin.

“I’ll hang out in the back,” Adam said.

Joanna walked to the edge of the deck and faced the group. “Today we’ll limit our practice to the first thirteen forms of tai chi so that I’ll have time to introduce push hands.”

Joanna moved from student to student, watching their balance and adjusting a hand position here and there, always with a compliment.

After half an hour, she clapped her hands, a signal that brought the practice to a halt.

“You’re all progressing well. Now it’s time to take your quest for perfection to the next level. Tai chi push hands is an exercise performed by two people attempting to improve their tai chi skills. Practicing the tai chi solo form teaches one to remain balanced, focused, and relaxed while in motion. Only through the practice of tai chi push hands does one improve these abilities while in physical contact with another human being. To be balanced and relaxed while in contact with another person who is moving is a difficult task.

“During this exercise, two people face each other at an arm’s distance, both with the same foot forward. The forward hand of each participant is raised to approximately chest height with the palm facing in, and the back of the hand lightly touching the same part of the other player’s hand. The rear hand, the hand corresponding to the rear foot, is placed gently on the elbow of the other player’s lead elbow so that both players are in an equal starting position. The feet should be comfortably placed so that each player feels balanced and stable from the start.

“To initiate the exercise, each player cooperatively moves his or her arms, waist, and legs in a circular pattern for three rotations, after which the significant aspect of the drill begins. After the third rotation, each player attempts to remain in light contact with the other player’s arms while at the same time remaining in perfect balance. A loss of balance can be detected by observing the feet of each player. A player who is pushed or pulled off balance will usually stumble out of his or her stable position and reset his or her stance to resume play. Players are permitted

to put their hands on the other's body to attempt to unbalance him or her, while at the same time following certain guidelines established at the start. Examples of such guidelines might include keeping the feet in place, not using brute force to unbalance the other player, not grabbing the other player with both hands at one time, and not losing contact with the other player. Now, I'll need a partner to demonstrate. Any volunteers?"

Joanna was surprised when Adam stepped to the front, hand raised. She smiled. "Our newest student, Adam Benoit, has volunteered."

Adam had moved smoothly through the first thirteen forms, which got Joanna's attention.

Joanna assumed the position, placing her right foot forward and her right-hand chest-high, palm in. He shadowed her perfectly. Without any cue, he slowly extended his hand. She did the same until the back of their hands lightly touched. The class encircled them to get a better look.

The two began a slow circular motion, maintaining contact with the back of each other's hand. At the beginning of the fifth circle, Adam made his move, pressing Joanna out of her stance with a two-handed push.

They began again, and after the third circle, Adam was forced out of his stance. Joanna stepped back.

"This has been an excellent example of push hands. Mr. Benoit has obviously practiced this before," Joanna said and glanced at her watch. Next week we'll begin the class with push hands and conclude with our tai chi. Help yourself to the five-spice truffles and tea. I hope to see you all next week."

Joanna turned to Adam. "Your chi is strong, and your moves are clean. Thank you for sharing."

"I hope I didn't overstep any boundaries."

"Not at all. It's refreshing to practice with someone experienced in tai chi and push hands. You had mentioned something about a birthday present for Johnny that involved me?"

"He mentioned that while he stayed here with his friend, Bud Nickels,

they watched you practicing what he called kung fu, and he wanted me to ask if you would teach him.”

“That would have been close combat Kenpo with a little praying mantis thrown in. I taught martial arts in a small studio when I lived in Monterey. I was surprised enough when twelve people drove up here for tai chi lessons; I couldn’t imagine hosting a regular Kenpo class.”

“I told Johnny that you probably wouldn’t want to teach just one student.”

They walked around to his motorcycle, now the only vehicle in the lot.

“I’d be happy to give him an hour-long private lesson.”

“Great! Thank you; what do you charge?”

“Nothing. This would be a gift for Johnny.”

“When you lived on the Monterey peninsula, did you do any scuba diving?”

“I taught through a local dive shop for about three years and managed to get certified as a divemaster.”

“You know I was in the fishing business for twenty years. But the oceans are getting fished out and we had to go out further and stay out longer to bring in enough fish to make a profit. Being out for a couple of weeks was one thing, but staying away for months was taking a toll on my family, as you know. I needed to get out of the business, so I went to the bank, finagled a loan, and bought the Misty Dawn. I’m having her refit from fishing boat to dive boat. I guess I’m repeating myself, but it’s a big change, and exciting for Johnny.”

“How big is she?”

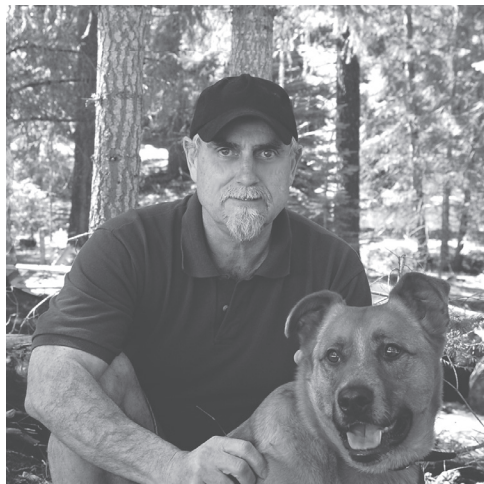
“The Misty Dawn is a true commercial fishing trawler, one hundred and twenty feet from bow to stern, with a medium-size house.”

“House?”

“The quarters for the crew, galley, and the head are all in the house. Below deck, you have the hole where your catch is stored, engine room generators, and the like. She’s in dry dock. I’m headed out there now. Would you like to tag along?”

“I’d love to. I’ll follow you in my truck.”

ABOUT KIT CRUMB



Kit's lifelong curiosity and interest in adventure, survival, and the natural world has inspired his adventure and mystery series—all set in the Pacific Northwest.

He lives with his wife, Chris in the Southern Oregon Cascades where he writes full-time and manages Owl Creek Cabin—a forest retreat on their property for writers seeking solitude and a private, creative space.

Contact Kit through his website at www.kitcrumb.com and sign up for the newsletter to be the first to hear about new books in his series and receive free monthly promos.

