

Domino Fire

By Chet Pointer

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At first, he really couldn't recall just how the events happened. It was an overwhelming situation. It came down to him being in a certain place at a particular time. Whether it was a good situation or bad had become irrelevant. It would probably take him a lifetime to figure out. As far as he was concerned, there was nothing good about it. The results said otherwise; but that didn't change his overall feelings about it. What he'd thought to be solved had once again come back to haunt him.

He lived in a modest apartment. He wasn't one of the affluent businessmen who paid five figures a month to live on a private floor downtown. But, he did all right. His name was James Costa. He was "Jimmie" to all of his friends and the old lady at the coffee shop; Costa to his boss at work. It was a rare night off, and he flopped and rolled across his sofa. On the floor beside the sofa lay his badge and his pistol's shoulder holster. Detective James "Jimmie" Costa, badge #24228, Chicago Police, had an actual day off. And, he wasn't taking any calls.

His application for the SWAT team had been rejected, because he had failed a stress test. In his own words, it was because he had stated how much he didn't like them. After that, they definitely didn't like him. He would, on the rare occasion that he ran into them, remind them of that fact. He also publicly stated that as far as he was concerned, they amounted to boy scouts on a weekend jaunt to the nearest amusement park. He told them that the choice of amusement park was at their discretion. That did not help with their working relationship.

Sometime after the nine o'clock news he heard an ominous rapping at his door. He ignored it at first. But the tapping was persistent and on the verge of becoming pounding on the door.

"Go away," he grumbled with ill intent.

"I heard that Jimmie." The reaction was belligerent. "Open up. It's Mike."

Costa opened his eyes. He rubbed his eyes with his left hand while he planted his right hand on the floor. It took genuine effort to prop himself up into a sitting position.

“Mike’s not here.” Costa rubbed his eyes with both hands.

“Knock it off.” Mike ordered. “I’ve got bad news and really bad news. Which do you want first?”

Costa stood and walked to the door. “I’ve already got the first part.” He opened the door. “You’re here.”

“So, what’s up, Jimmie?” Detective Mike McDaniel stood in the doorway.

“What could you possibly want?” Costa asked. “This is my first break in three weeks. I’m starting to feel like I’m in the damn infantry again.”

“Really bad news, part two.” McDaniel said as he stepped into the apartment. “You had better take a look at this,” he handed him a computer printout. Costa took the paper as McDaniel closed the door. He tipped the paper in the dim light; McDaniel flipped on his overhead light switch.

Costa stepped to the middle of the room and read the document.

“So what?” he handed it back to McDaniel. “There are five copies of that buried all over the Department.”

“This particular copy came from records and it is five years old.” McDaniel sighed. “The copy in question is from an autopsy that took place four hours ago.”

“What?” he walked into his kitchen, “No way, Mac.”

He opened the refrigerator, grabbed a beer, and a cold piece of pizza. “Want one?” he held up the beer.

“Jimmie, I’m not kidding around,” Mac responded.

Costa sat down at his kitchen table and cracked open the beer. "That," he pointed to the paper in Mac's hand, "is the chemical breakdown of one nasty designer drug."

"Right, so far," Mac took a seat across the table from him.

"The cook who manufactured that stuff was taken out during a bust five years ago." He emphasized.

"Jimmie," Mac sighed and shook his head. "El Diablo is back."

"I'm listening," he bit into his slice of pizza.

"The recipient of that autopsy was a seventeen year old kid," Mac scooted the chair up to the table. "He had an eighth of an ounce on him when they found him in an alley."

"Are they sure it's the same?" Costa asked as he leaned back in his chair. He slowly sipped the beer.

"It's the exact same stuff," Mac said.

"What am I missing here?" he asked, frustrated.

"El Diablo is back, Jimmie," Mac said alarmingly repeated himself.

"So, why come to me? Us?" he asked. "We're vice. Go to talk to the actual narcs."

"Our cases have been reassigned," Mac said. "It came down from way up top."

"So, that is the real bad news." Costa swallowed his last bite of pizza and gulped the beer. He glared at Mac.

"We're back in narcotics." Mac glared back at him. "It's part of the J.O.B., Jimmie. So, get your ass in gear and let's go." He stood up.

"What a waste of a perfectly good beer," Costa solidly placed in on the table.

"Well, drink it and then brush your teeth." Mac sat down in the living room. "I'm going to have a smoke. I'll drive."

“I thought you quit.” Costa finished the beer and dropped the empty can into the kitchen sink.

“I started, again.” Mac lit the cigarette. “*Something came up*.”

“Yeah, right,” Costa disappeared into the bathroom.

In five minutes, they were down on the street getting into Mac’s car. He didn’t waste any time starting the car. He drove away after he lit another cigarette.

“Where are we going now?” Costa asked. He was frustrated and angry. But, his mind was clear.

“More bad news,” Mac warned him.

“What now?” he asked.

“DEA is interested.” Mac replied.

“Oh man!” He tried to reach into Mac’s pocket and pull out the pack of cigarettes. Mac swatted his hand off and did it for him. Costa nodded a thank you.

“What the hell do they want?” Costa asked as he put the cigarette in his mouth and motioned for a light.

“I’ve never met this agent,” Mac handed him a lighter. “I don’t know and something tells me this is going to get nasty. And, it won’t matter if we bust anybody or not.”

Mac stared straight ahead, ignored a yellow light, and kept driving.

“It’s our lucky day,” Costa said. “We are going to take it on the jaw and like it.”

“Every time you say that,” Mac grimaced, “you never mention what kind of luck.”

Costa closed his eyes and began sifting through all of his mental notes regarding the five year old case; reborn.

“The kid in the morgue?” he started to ask.

“Overdose,” Mac didn’t look at him.

There was no need to go to the morgue. That had already been established. El Diablo had taken another life. Costa stayed focused on what he could remember from the case. It was months of investigation and all of his notes were in a file cabinet at narcotics. At least that’s where he had last seen them, he thought. He didn’t notice that Mac had pulled up in front of their old precinct. Mac tapped him on the shoulder and broke his train of thought.

“Game time,” Mac said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Costa sighed, “oh yeah.”

Once inside the station, they both put on their professional faces and nodded in acknowledgement of familiar faces.

“Jimmie, Mac,” Captain Myers met them at the front. “Good to see you, again.”

“Likewise, sir,” Mac said. Costa tipped his head in approval.

“Interrogation Room Two,” Myers guided them down a hallway. “It’s DEA,” he pointed a stern finger at them. “So, behave yourselves.”

Inside the small room, there were two people seated at the table. One of them Costa knew; he was a Fed and he was competent. He was comfortable with him, though he’d only met him a couple of times. The other was a problem waiting to happen. She was dark-haired, blue eyed, and a killer---and not necessarily with a gun. She was smartly dressed in a blue jacket and skirt.

“Detectives Costa and McDaniel,” the captain introduced them. “I believe you’ve met Special Agent Duncan.”

They both nodded and each shook his hand appropriately.

“And, this is Special Agent Sheridan,” the Captain bowed politely. “She has some questions for you.”

“This is Costa?” she asked in a businesslike tone.

“Yes,” Costa answered. “I’m going to ask the same question that I’ve been asking all night. What do you need?”

She said nothing.

“Jimmie,” Mac warningly nudged him.

“I’m being civil,” he said. “What can we do for you?”

“Special Agent Sheridan,” Mac extended his hand. She didn’t extend her hand.

Sheridan raised her hand and kept Captain Myers silent.

He patiently crossed his arms.

She opened her briefcase and slapped a brown jacketed file on the table. “Do you recognize that, Detective?” She was slim, held her stature well, and was totally fearsome.

Costa didn’t have to open it. It was his reports and the notes he thought to be in a file cabinet. It was his case record about El Diablo. “Sure, I know what it is,” he answered. “What’s your point?”

“Can we have a seat, gentlemen.” She remained calm despite being in a very defensive mood.

“Just listen to her, Jimmie.” Captain Myers warned him quietly.

They all seated themselves at a table that was too large for the room.

“Detective Costa,” she started.

“Try, Jimmie,” he was tired and left no doubt of that in their minds. “It works better.”

“Shut up, Costa.” Captain Myers commanded him.

“Detective Costa,” she remained professional. “Somewhere in that file is the key to El Diablo.” She pointed at the file on the table.

“Martinez and his crew were all killed in a gun battle over on Division Street. Everybody and their brother called it a closed case.” Costa replied calmly and reasonably.

“I don’t have a brother,” she responded.

“Well, excuse my cliché,” he said.

“Jimmie, shut up and listen.” Mac yelled at him this time. The Captain only fumed.

“Okay,” he whispered.

Everyone was silent and yielded the forum to Sheridan. She finally spoke after a moment. “That file was in the hands of another federal agent a month ago.” She sat back in her seat. “He was mortally wounded during a drug bust that went very badly. His dying words were: ‘It was El Diablo!’” Costa’s Chicago PD’s He was right! “

“I thought I was right about Martinez being dead and taking El Diablo with him.” Costa finally changed the tone of his voice. He was trying to sincerely reason with her.

“I was assigned this case this morning. I had to fight to get this case this morning. Can you explain to me the details of El Diablo?” She asked.

She sighed in frustration. “You are the reigning expert.”

Costa stared down at the table and at the file. He calmly clasped his hands together. “Special Agent Sheridan’s “

“Try, Marie’s it works better,” she said.

“Marie,” he iterated seriously. “El Diablo wasn’t necessarily a person; like Martinez for instance. It was an addiction.”

“And?” she asked.

“Marie, what we are talking about is a refinement process of cocaine. Before there was crack, they used to freebase coke,” he explained.

“I’ve read that,” she admitted.

“Freebased coke was purified with ammonia. El Diablo is freebased coke that is then candy-coated with an appetizer of heroin,” he said emphatically. “If a person smokes too much at once, the heroin brings their heart to a standstill. Meanwhile, the cocaine short circuits every synaptic connection in their brain. It is a mega-hotshot and it has a tendency to kill people very quickly. And, I’ve come to find out tonight, that it is out there again.”

“It has surfaced in four major cities in the last month,” she informed him. “That agent was killed here in Chicago. No one read about it in the papers, because he was undercover.”

“How could we not hear about that?” Costa asked the Captain.

“We did hear about it,” Captain Myers stood and began pacing around the limited space in the room. “The traffic bust down by the Chicago River last month. We were told they were gun runners. The story we heard was *edited*.”

“My God, what did they do that for?” Costa asked.

“He was close to finding the source,” Sheridan said. “And, that agent discovered something in your notes that led him to that point. Whether you like it or not, you have some sort of key to solving this case.”

“My lucky day,” Costa looked at Mac. “Give me a cigarette.”

Mac obliged by giving him the pack. He also gave him his lighter.

“Jimmie,” the Captain looked at him with obvious frustration.

“I’ll smoke it outside,” Costa stood up. “I’ll be right back. What I’m going to need is everything you’ve got so far; everything.”

“We can do that,” Special Agent Duncan broke his attentive silence.

Costa found himself outside the back of the precinct working on his second cigarette when he found her standing next to him.

“Spare one of those?” she asked.

“Sure,” he handed Sheridan the pack. He held up the lighter; she held her hair back as he flicked it.

“So you had to fight to get this case?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered. “My superior thought I was being overly zealous and too close to be effective. But, since I was already in town, it would save time.”

“How long have you been in law enforcement?” He put out his cigarette and waited for her.

“As long as you,” she said. “They gave me your credentials before you showed up tonight.”

“That was nice of them.” He contemplated on what she had said about being too close to the case. He said nothing as they both stared out over the downtown lights. Finally he turned to head back into the building. “Are you coming?”

She said nothing as she dropped the cigarette into an ash can.

Back inside the interrogation room they all circled the table to discuss the logistics of the case.

“I need the particulars on the most recent case,” Costa requested. “So, was it that last night that the kid died?”

“They put his time of death at forty eight hours ago,” Captain Myers answered. “But, now there’s another one, tonight.”

“Another one?” he asked. He leaned on the table.

“Yeah,” Mac answered. “Only this one is from another walk of life. She was a twenty-six year old flight attendant. A neighbor found her dead in the hallway outside of her apartment.”

“They link her to this?” How?” Costa asked.

“A substantial amount of El Diablo was found on her person.” Mac answered as he reached into his pocket. “It was seven grams in the patented package.”

“The little blue devil with a smile on his face,” Myers recalled.

“Is that finally all the bad news?” Costa sighed in frustration.

Mac unfolded a paper and laid the preliminary report on the table in front of Costa. “We were waiting on a toxicology test. They found her stash hidden inside her bra.”

“Right now,” Costa figured. “That is a lot more important aspect of this case than the kid in the alley. The street is one thing. The airlines are another matter.”

“Here’s the scant information that the deceased agent left behind in his motel room.” Duncan set a thin folder next to Costa’s thick one.

Sheridan opened the folder, shuffled through the few pages, and then pointed to name circled in red; Costa CPD. “That, links you to what he was doing.”

She looked at him inquisitively.

Costa looked at Captain Myers. “Why didn’t you tell me that the feds pulled my file on this case?”

“The agent had written orders. From the top,” Myers answered.

“From the top?” Costa nodded his head sarcastically. “A need to know order and you didn’t need to know?”

“Jimmie,” Myers looked at him apologetically. “We’ve got the information, now.”

Costa waved him off. "Right, let's deal with the now."

"The Medical Examiner said that when the kid got brought in," Mac brought them back to the subject. "They drew blood immediately because they told him what was on him when they found him. He remembers working with us when this surfaced, five years ago."

"Dr. Hendricks," Costa nodded. "I remember him well."

Costa looked at his scribbled name in the agent's notes. "We had five corpses before we finally linked Martinez to the distribution ring."

"He was the center hub," Mac added as he looked at Sheridan and Duncan. "He chose to shoot it out rather than surrender."

"Was a lab ever found?" Sheridan asked.

"Unfortunately, that information died with him." Costa thumbed through both files. "And, your agent said that I was right about something?"

Sheridan and Duncan nodded.

"I just have to figure out what I stumbled onto; that he figured out," Costa whispered to himself.

"What's your strategy for the investigation?" Captain Myers asked.

Costa looked at Mac. "Have we got a list of the flight attendant's neighbors, associates, boyfriends, or roommates?"

"Already started," Mac flipped open a small notebook. "She rented the apartment alone. The landlord says he'll meet us at the place in the morning."

"I'll also need to talk to Dr. Hendricks about the toxicology report." Costa closed the files and stacked them neatly in front of him. "Five years ago, we were finding junkies in alleyways dead from this stuff. But, now we have a flight attendant."

“Could it be she was a mule?” Sheridan suggested.

“Possibly,” Costa agreed. “Do we have a list of her flight routes?”

“I’m working on it,” Sheridan answered. “I was having trouble finding anyone with that knowledge at ten p.m.”

“Well, it’s almost midnight, now.” Costa looked at his watch. “We can cross-check the cities where it surfaced to the flight attendant’s routes. Maybe, we can find a connection there. No pun intended.”

“That sounds good,” Sheridan approved. “Needless to say, we are on this one with you. If we want our agent’s killer.”

“And, we want this stuff out of circulation.” Costa confirmed. “If El Diablo goes on another killing spree, it’s going to get really nasty.”

“I’m curious as to how it came to be called that,” Sheridan inquired, “El Diablo?”

“Out on the street, it came in a little package with a cartoon devil printed on it.” Costa explained.

“The little blue devil with a smile on his face,” Myers and Mac recited.

“The rumor was that Martinez got a kick out of it.” Costa finished.

“Well, gentlemen, ma’am,” Captain Myers crossed his arms. “Unless there’s anything else, I suggest we call it a night.”

“Here’s the hotel I’m staying at and my smartphone.” Sheridan handed the Captain a business card. “I’ll talk to both of you again, soon.”

“Sure thing,” Costa said. They both nodded politely.

After the federal agents left the room, Captain Myers leaned on the table and spoke to the detectives. “Don’t mess this up, gentlemen,” he said, “a lot of powerful people watching.”

“Our lucky day,” Costa joked grimly. “Can I get a lift home, Mac?”

“Get an early start tomorrow.” The Captain put his suit coat on. “And, remember what I said.”

“Yes, sir,” Costa picked up the folders and hit the light switch on their way out.

Eight a.m. in the narcotics squad room was the same chaotic uproar that Costa remembered.

“Hey, Jimmie!” one of the plainclothes cop said. “What brings you back?”

“I got volunteered.” He answered.

“We got volunteered,” Mac stepped up behind him. “Hey man.” He said hello to another familiar face.

“All right,” Myers shouted as he entered the room. “Knock it off.”

The room gradually quieted. Once he had everyone’s attention, he set his coffee cup down, and started the morning briefing. “As some of you may have noticed. We have some old friends back in the form and likeness of Detectives Costa and McDaniel.”

The chatter rose around the room.

“Knock it off,” Myers ordered.

“Hey Captain. What’s the story that El Diablo is back?” one detective asked. “I remember finding some of those refugee users; or what was left of them.”

“Listen up.” Myers ordered. “What I am about to say had better not leave this room. If I find a leak; you will be a meter maid by the end of the day. Do we have an understanding?”

A quiet murmur swept the room.

“Detectives Costa and McDaniel have been reassigned to work with DEA and yes small quantities of El Diablo have been found. At this time there are two victims.” The captain had

their undivided attention. "Though, it wasn't any kind of huge bust. The fact that it is back is of paramount importance. Check your sources, ladies and gentlemen. Give any information that you obtain *any* information to Costa or Mac. A DEA agent was killed during their investigation and they are in our ballpark for this one."

A somber atmosphere covered the room.

"I want all situation reports on pending investigations on my desk by ten a.m." Myers checked his clipboard. "Let's get on it."

As the room started to clear, Costa and Mac received and shared handshakes; or an occasional pat on the back.

"What's first on the agenda?" Mac asked.

"The Medical Examiner," Costa answered. "We've only got a preliminary report. Let's see how much more they've come up with since last night."

"Let's ride," Mac agreed.

Twenty minutes later; five of which were spent finding a parking place; they headed up the front steps of the county building. Inside, they found themselves waiting patiently for Dr. Hendricks. Finally, he met them in the hallway. He finished putting on a new white overcoat and greeted them. The slightly gray-haired and thin doctor smiled and extended his hand to Mac.

"Jimmie, Mac," he shook Mac's hand. "How are you both doing?"

"It's going as well as it can," Costa said as he shook the doctor's hand. "We're here about a couple of overdoses."

"Your Captain left me a voicemail," the doctor responded. "I've been waiting for you. We had better discuss this in my office."

They followed him down the hallway. Once they were inside the cluttered office, he closed the door firmly.

“So, what’s the story, Doc?” Mac asked.

They both stood across from him as he seated himself at his desk. His chair squeaked slightly as he sat.

“Long damn night,” he said. “It’s El Diablo, guys.”

“Is it the actual thing or a copycat?” Costa asked.

“The toxicology came back on the kid,” Doc started. “It is the same stuff.”

“The same drug from five years ago?” he asked.

“The same,” Mac asked, “as in the same?”

“Exactly, the same stuff, guys,” the doctor shook his head. “This could have been made five years ago.”

They looked at each other with growing frustration.

“Doc,” Costa asked squarely. “We never got rid of it?”

“This is very bad,” Mac spun in a half circle scratching his head.

“Jimmie, this is worse than you think,” the doctor said. “The kid looks like an accidental overdose. The female victim shows signs of a struggle.”

“What kind of signs?” Mac crossed his arms and stood firmly next to Costa.

“Let’s have it, Doc.” Costa reinforced his partner’s position.

“First, I found evidence of tourniquet bruises on her upper left arm,” he said. “And, a needle was definitely injected into her left arm.”

“El Diablo is smoked,” Costa said. “And, you saying she was injected with it?”

“This is where it gets bad,” the doctor interlaced his fingers and placed his elbows on his desk. “There were also bruise marks on her left wrist, the right side of her ribcage, and the upper right arm. She at one point took a blow to the right side of her face and there were bruises around her mouth.” The doctor looked at both of them bluntly. “She didn’t inject anything. She was held while somebody else did it.”

“They covered her mouth,” Mac concluded. “You’re talking about a homicide.”

“That’s my final report,” the doctor said. “I’ll keep this quiet. Go and find the bastards who did this to her.”

Mac looked at Costa. “Where do we go to next?”

“The apartment before somebody gets a chance to mess with it.” Costa answered. “Thanks Doc, we’ve got to go.”

They hurried out of the building. Mac didn’t waste any time. He drove determinedly; weaving through the heavy morning traffic.

When they got to the apartment building a squad car was parked outside the complex.

“Damn, we might be too late,” Costa kicked open the passenger door before Mac shifted the car into park.

“Pull your badge, Jimmie,” Mac shouted. “We don’t need to tangle with any uniforms.”

Costa stopped at the front door and turned back to Mac, “Second Floor?” He pulled his badge from underneath his shirt and let it hang from his neck.

“Yeah,” Mac slammed the car door and pulled out his badge.

Costa pulled open the glass door and they both bolted up the stairs.

They were met by a uniformed policeman. There was an elderly man with a key ring in his hand standing next to him.

“This is the crime scene.” The officer stopped them briefly but saw their badges. “Are you guys Burglary?”

It was obvious that the door had been forced open.

“Are you the landlord?” Mac held up his badge.

“Yes,” he said.

“I’m Detective McDaniel. I spoke with you last night.” Mac looked over Costa’s shoulder. “Stop him, Jimmie.” He pointed into the apartment.

“Officer,” Costa called into the apartment as he held out his badge. The uniformed officer stood about ten feet inside the front room. “Don’t touch anything and don’t go in any farther.”

The landlord stepped up to Mac. “I just got back about twenty minutes ago. This door was locked last night when I found her.” The landlord explained as he pointed out the damage. “I called the police. These officers have been here about five minutes.”

The officer stepped out of the apartment, “Mac? I thought you were in vice. This is a burglary as far as I can tell. I didn’t touch a thing.”

“Jonas,” Mac recognized him. “It’s a long story. I can’t tell you anything. Call your shift commander and have him call Captain Myers down at the Thirteenth.”

“Do it,” Jonas ordered the younger officer.

“Let us go in and do our investigation.” Mac directed him.

“We’ll keep the watch out here.” Jonas agreed.

“Good,” Costa carefully walked into the apartment. It had been ransacked.

“Somebody was looking for something,” Mac commented upon his first look into the apartment.

“Yeah,” Costa said, “But, what?”

“Do you have Burglary on the way?” Mac asked Jonas.

“I’m sure someone is,” Jonas said. “We thought it was you.”

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” Sheridan held up her badge and I.D. Today, she was dressed in jeans and a work shirt.

“DEA,” Jonas asked. “Is she for real?”

“That’s why we can’t tell you anything,” Mac answered.

“I just heard from our shift commander,” the younger officer returned to the group. “Our boss called your boss.”

“Who called me,” Sheridan interjected.

“Our orders.” Let them do what they’re going to do.” The younger officer finished.

“She’s with us,” Mac said. “When Burglary gets here, let them know we’re in here. I doubt they’ll find any helpful prints. But, tell them anyway.”

“You got it,” Jonas said.

Sheridan stepped inside the apartment. “What have you got?”

“We haven’t really searched, yet,” Mac said.

Costa waited until she was out of earshot of the two patrolmen, before he spoke to her.

“The flight attendant’s apartment,” he said as he looked around.

“What did you find out?” she asked.

“The Medical Examiner is calling this a homicide,” Costa informed her.

“Somebody held her while somebody else injected her with an armful of El Diablo,” Mac informed her.

“Okay,” she sighed and looked around the shambles of an apartment.

“As long as we’re cooperating,” she said. “All of the cities where El Diablo was found were on the flight attendant’s scheduled routes.”

“Well, that saves us one stop,” Mac concluded.

“I don’t think Captain Myers told you guys what this case means to me,” Sheridan spoke sincerely.

“Was this agent a fiancé or a longtime partner?” Costa asked. “You’re the one who said you had to fight to get this case.”

Mac and Costa stood in front of her and calmly waited for an answer.

Sheridan sighed and fended off her anger.

“He was my father,” she said flatly.

“We’re sorry to hear that,” Mac quietly turned away.

“Yes, we are,” Costa added.

Sheridan looked over her shoulder. “Officer, is there an evidence technician on the way?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he answered from the hall.

“What’s your preliminary assessment, gentlemen?” she asked. “Let me try that again. What have you got, guys?”

Costa sighed as Mac handled the question.

“It looks like a panic search for something,” he said. “They tore this place apart. There’s only one neighbor that I haven’t talked to, but I know where to find him. He’s the one with the landlord who found the body.”

“And, who’s that?” she asked.

“He’s a radio announcer for the Cubs,” Mac answered. “He’ll be at Wrigley Field. If not now, very soon.”

Costa interrupted them. "Can I get you two to take a look at something?"

They turned to him. "What have you got?" Mac asked.

"Well, like you said," Costa pointed out. "They panicked! tore this place apart." He indicated the total disarray of the room. "What's wrong with this picture?"

Both of them looked closely at different parts of the room. Sheridan stopped Mac and pointed.

"See it?" she asked.

"I sure do," Mac answered.

"My grandmother has four or five of these kinds of picture frame." She walked over to a small table in a corner. An undisturbed eight by ten brass picture frame stood undisturbed beside a lamp.

"The picture," Costa emphasized. "Granted, she was a flight attendant and met people from everywhere. But not those people. I saw that picture at the drugstore last week in a four by six frame."

"It's also too thick," Sheridan assessed.

"Open it," Costa nodded to Mac.

"Carefully," Sheridan instructed him.

Mac pulled a pair of linen gloves and a tiny multi-tool out of his jacket pocket. Sheridan looked surprised and impressed.

"He never leaves home without them," Costa explained.

They watched him work on the frame. Two minutes later they had their answer.

“Damn,” Mac said as he loosened the final screw plate and pulled the back plate off of the frame. He held up two bundles of hundred dollar bills and an address book. “There must be ten grand here.”

“Our lucky day,” Costa sighed. “Where do you suppose she got two bundles of Benjamins?”

“Well, have the technician bag them and the book when they get here.” Mac carefully laid the picture frame down with the items. “We can have them dust the book for prints and then see who’s in it.”

“What time is it?” Costa asked.

“I’ve have ten thirty,” Sheridan checked her watch.

“Do you want to get to Wrigley before game time?” Costa asked Mac.

“That would be advisable.” Mac responded. “Can you wait on the evidence technician to get here and see what they find?”

“Sure,” she said. “I’ll look around and see if there’s anything else that can be useful.”

“Then, I’ll leave the cash and the book there.” Mac pulled off his gloves.

“I’ll keep the chain of evidence intact,” she assured them. “I don’t want any screw-ups on this one.”

“Right,” Mac agreed. “We’ll meet you downtown.”

In the car, Costa seemed lost in deep contemplation.

“So, what are you thinking?” Mac asked as he maneuvered in busy traffic.

“We’ve got a homicide, drugs, a hidden address book, and a whole lot of cash.” He did a mental inventory. “I was reading my old case notes last night. I came across a question mark with a circle around it.”

“Was it yours?” Mac asked.

“It was mine.” Costa confirmed.

“What was it?” Mac asked.

“I couldn’t remember why I’d done that until a couple of minutes ago,” he answered.

“Martinez wasn’t the top of the pyramid. He was only the highest level that we uncovered.”

“So, do you think whoever was pulling his strings is back in business?” Mac speculated.

“I am leaning towards that,” Costa agreed. “That kid found in the alley; that could lead to a dozen different places.”

“It undoubtedly would,” Mac agreed.

“But, that could just be the tip of the iceberg.” Costa reminded him grimly.

Mac said nothing. He continued to drive.

They entered the stadium through the press gate and found the announcer in his booth.

“This is Detective Costa.” Mac introduced. “Hugh Johnson.”

“Jimmie,” Costa shook his hand.

“I’m Detective McDaniel,” he said. “Mac, I spoke with you last night.” He extended his hand and shook Johnson’s.

“Yes, terrible thing,” Johnson said. “She was young, pretty, the whole package. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Basically, we’d like to ask you a few questions,” Mac said. “Just about some of the people you might have seen coming or going with the young lady.”

“Well, Sheila, that was her name,” he said. “She seemed like a nice enough kid. Every once in a while I’d see her with other flight attendants. When they got back to town, they would go out together.”

“How about seeing any male friends or acquaintances?” Costa asked.

“There was one guy that I saw her with three or four times.” Johnson scratched his head.

“Do you think you would recognize him if you saw him again?” Costa asked.

“I only caught brief glimpses of him,” Johnson said. “I’ll save you the question. He was about six feet, black hair, mustache, mid-thirties, and I think she called him Charles. I clearly heard that name.”

“That’s a good start,” Mac said. “Here’s my card.”

“Here is mine,” Costa handed him a business card.

“If you think of anything,” Mac explained. “You know the drill.”

“This is my private number,” Johnson handed them each a card. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“And, we’ve got your business number,” Costa motioned around the booth.

“I’m sure we’ll talk to you again.” Mac shook his hand. “Thanks for your time.”

“No problem, guys,” he said.

Costa shook his hand on the way out of the broadcast booth.

Outside the stadium, Costa stopped and lit a cigarette. “Now, we’ve got a possible boyfriend or a connection.”

“Maybe she had pictures,” Mac continued to walk towards the car. “Why don’t you call Sheridan and see if she’s come up anything?”

They eventually found her in Myer’s office seated at his desk. She was thumbing through the address book. Mac closed the door behind them.

“Was there any usable prints on it?” Costa pulled up a chair across from her and took a seat.

“Only one set of prints,” she said, “probably the victim’s. The money is random serial numbers.”

“Was there anything interesting about the book?” Mac pulled up a chair.

“There wasn’t at first.” She sipped her coffee. “I found hotel numbers in various cities, cab companies, and a few pizza joints.”

“She didn’t hide a book over pizza joints,” Costa reasoned.

“It gets better,” Sheridan said. “There were also personal numbers— family members that have already checked out.”

“Are we getting to the better part?” Costa asked.

“Then, there are the co-workers-slash-friends that I’ve already cross-checked with the employee list. I got a hold of that this morning.” She responded calmly.

Costa and Mac sat back and waited patiently.

“Then, it gets very interesting.” Sheridan thumbed through the pages and stopped.

“And, then?” Mac asked.

Costa watched intently.

“There were credit card account numbers, pins and eight hundred numbers for the accounts,” she reported. “There were also bank account numbers with the same contact information. I’ve got agents checking those out.”

“Is there anything else?” Costa asked quietly. “Something tells me you’ve got something else.”

“The last page,” she turned to it. “It’s We have partial name and a number. The name is C. Thompson. I dialed the number.”

She closed the book and set it on the desk.

“Well, clue us in special agent,” Costa sighed. “You have a captive audience.”

“Would you believe the personal number of one Charles Thompson?”

“Charles Thompson?” Mac repeated. “That’s a hundred guys in the metro area.”

“That’s Senator Charles Thompson.” She folded her hands in front of her and leaned back in the chair.

“No way,” Mac whispered.

“Way,” she said. “The maid answered the phone.”

“Oh, my God,” Costa rubbed his forehead. “The press will chow on this like ants at a picnic. What did I tell you when you first told me?” He shouted at Mac. “What did I tell you?”

“I knew it was going to bad when Myers told me to go get you,” Mac recoiled.

“Guys, guys,” Sheridan calmed them down. “We can’t let this leak. If there is any connection it will get buried deep. We’ll spend years digging through the manure.”

“We have to tell Myers,” Mac said. “Otherwise, he’ll rip us a new anal tract. We don’t want a U.S. Senator carelessly dragged into this investigation.”

“We were also wondering if you found anything else at the apartment.” Costa adjusted the discussion. “We know there was at least one male visitor on a regular basis. We talked to the one neighbor this morning. He gave us a general description of a guy he thinks went by the name Charles.”

“Charles? Plausibility of the witness?” she calmly asked.

“He’s a well-known radio personality,” Mac pointed out. “Did you come across any real pictures or photo albums?”

“A photo album that was scattered all over the bedroom floor,” She recalled. “It was one of those wax page holders. It was obvious that some of the pictures were removed. And, get this, a smashed picture frame.”

“A real picture,” Costa noted.

“They were definitely in a panic,” Mac concluded. “It was a matter of getting in and getting out as fast as possible.”

“That worked to our advantage,” Costa said. “They overlooked the fake picture with the cash and the address book.”

“We know that someone didn’t want their face found in hardcopy,” Sheridan tapped the desk with her fingernail.

“What did the evidence technician find?” Costa asked.

“The only clear prints appear to be the victim’s,” Sheridan answered. “I’ve even got the lab going over the laundry in her hamper looking for DNA presence of somebody else.”

“So, just what do we know about her?” Mac asked. “She was murdered by overdose. Her body was found with a substantial amount of the drug hidden on her person.”

“She was a flight attendant,” Mac continued. “The cities on her flights match up with the cities where El Diablo has surfaced.”

“And, there’s an address book with account numbers of bank accounts and credit cards,” Sheridan added. “Then there’s the personal phone number of a U.S. Senator.”

“Finally,” Mac finished, “There’s ten grand in cash. All of that was found after her apartment was burglarized; posthumously.”

“I’m for lunch, gentlemen,” Sheridan looked at her watch. “After that, we can tell the news to Captain Myers.”

“Works for me,” Mac looked at Costa.

He silently agreed.

Sheridan placed the address book into her inner jacket pocket. “The cash is in the evidence lockup.”

“That’s good,” Costa said as he stood. “Does Mickey’s sound all right for lunch?”

“Is it?” Sheridan asked. “I’m new in town.”

“Sure,” Mac pushed his chair back against the wall. “It’s good.”

“Hey!” Captain Myers approached them as they exited his office. “Where are you off to?”

“Mickey’s for lunch,” Mac answered.

“Bring me back one of those Italian subs, no peppers,” Myers requested. “Then we need to have a major league pow-wow.”

“No problem, sir,” Costa said.

After they exited the front office, Mac spoke uneasily, “Why do I get the feeling that he has already received some big time phone calls this morning?”

“Likely,” Sheridan answered. “A federal agent was killed. Somebody could have leaked it in Washington and the political door opened.”

“Wait until we drop the bomb on him,” Costa held open the heavy door for her.

“Maybe he’s got one to drop on us,” she speculated.

“That would make this day complete.” Mac pointed down the street, “This way, Special Agent Sheridan.”

Halfway through lunch, they were caught off guard by a noon news report on the bar’s big screen.

“John, turn that up,” Mac pointed at the TV. “Isn’t that?”

“Yes,” Sheridan answered. “That’s our Senator.”

The bartender grabbed the remote and turned up the volume. They huddled together and listened closely.

“We know that Sheila Radcliffe, who was one of our most energetic campaign workers, has died.” The senator spoke into a microphone.

“Senator, is there any truth to Ms. Radcliffe dying from a drug overdose?” the reporter asked.

“My people heard it through a preliminary police report.”

“Bullshit!” Costa whispered angrily.

“Quiet!” Sheridan grabbed his arm.

“I have contacted the police commissioner, and he assured me that he has some of his best officers on the case.” Senator Thompson continued. “I’m sad to say that such a terrible accident has happened. My condolences go out to her family and friends. Please, no more!”

“Thank you, Senator Thompson,” the reporter closed.

“There’s the bomb on us,” Costa sipped his ice tea.

“It looks like the Senator’s damage control team has been hard at work.” Sheridan frowned.

“Only it wasn’t an accident.” Costa pulled out his phone. “I’ll give the Doc a call and tell him to keep the lid on this; tight.”

“It’s now in the public eye. The Senator has stepped forward,” Mac said. “We may be able to keep the killer or killers off balance with that as the official story.”

“Leave it as an accident,” Sheridan patted Costa on the arm.

He nodded and waved her off as he spoke into his cell. "Come on, put the good doctor on. All of his patients are definitely not in a hurry! Yes, I'll wait."

"Are we about ready to head back?" Sheridan asked. "Starting right now, we going to have to fight dirty."

"I think you're right," Mac picked up the bill. "Hey John, did you get the Captain's sandwich?" He stepped up to the bar to pay the tab.

"All right, Doc," Costa spoke into his phone. "Thanks." He hung up and put the phone back in his pocket.

"I just thought of something," Mac came back to the table with a paper bag in hand. "The announcer! I saw some possibilities that fit the description Hugh gave us on that news report."

"Good idea," Sheridan tapped the table with her nervous habit fingernails. "Let's get a copy of that news broadcast and show the neighbors. Maybe, something will click."

"Hold on," Mac touched his vibrating pocket. He pulled out his phone. "Hello?"

Mac held his hand in the air to hold their attention. "Yes, are you sure?"

Mac continued to listen. "Thanks Hugh. Let's keep it quiet, all right?"

Mac hung up the phone. He hovered over the table and Costa and Sheridan both closed in on him. "Our man at Wrigley was watching the news while the Cubs were doing batting practice. He definitely recognized one of the Senator's men."

"They're trying to build a circumstantial defense already," Sheridan said. "How is he going to explain his name in an address book that was hidden with a large amount of cash?"

"Did you ever stack dominoes when you were a kid?" Mac asked. "You know, knock one over and watch the others fall."

“That’s also how world wars can start,” Sheridan stood and grabbed her purse. “We just have to find the right one to knock over.”

“Let’s go,” Costa said.

They left the bar and grill.

“Come in and take a seat,” Myers opened his office door and invited them in. Costa handed him his sandwich as he passed by him.

“So, first off,” Myers said as they all settled into chairs, “I don’t normally get calls from the Commissioner. You do remember him don’t you? He is our boss, just in case that slipped your mind.” He panned his look between Costa and Mac.

“The Justice Department, that’s your boss I think,” Myers pointed at Sheridan. “Someone from their office called”

“I’ll handle that,” she assured him.

“Good,” Myers said. “And, of course we now have a U.S. Senator asking for updates on this case.” He held up his hand to keep them silent. “How can I update them when my detectives won’t even give me a call?”

“And, your our boss,” Mac said quietly.

“Very good,” Myers opened his sandwich. “Oh yes, the FAA returned your call Agent Sheridan. They are following up on your request for security scans at whatever airports it was that you told them about.”

The three of them looked at each other as he took a bite out of his sandwich.

“We have to ask,” Mac said.

“Ask what?” Myers said in between bites.

“What senator?” they all said in near unison.

“That guy from the Northside.” Myers answered, “Thompson.”

“It kind of makes you wonder if that guy is for real or putting up an elaborate front.” Costa said.

“I think it’s an elaborate blend of both,” Mac agreed.

“What are *we* talking about?” Myers pulled a napkin out of the paper bag and leaned back in his chair.

“Do you care to field that question, Special Agent?” Mac asked politely.

She sat up in her seat. “Not more than ten minutes ago on the news, the Senator made a statement. He acknowledged that the victim in this particular case was one of his campaign workers. He also said he regrets this terrible accident.” She said calmly. “Did he mention anything about the DEA agent?”

“He knew that there was a DEA agent killed investigating the source of the drug that killed the young lady he knew.” Myers answered. “But, that’s all over the grapevine.”

“In that young lady’s ransacked apartment,” Sheridan explained, “We found a hidden address book with his personal phone number in it.”

“It was a hidden address book?” Myers took another bite and chewed slowly.

“Yes,” she continued. “It also listed credit card and bank account numbers.”

“So, why do you think a book like this was hidden?” Myers finished his sandwich.

“There are two more things that you need to know.” She said.

“What would those two things be?” Myers asked.

“Hidden with the book was ten thousand dollars in cash,” she pointed at Costa. “And, the girl’s death was no accident.”

Costa continued the report. "The Medical Examiner is calling this a homicide." He said. "The physical evidence shows that she was violently restrained while the drug was forcibly injected into her system."

"Hello," Myers sighed.

"I've got the doctor keeping that information quiet," Costa said. "I just called him and he assured me he can stonewall the report. But, we have got to move quickly."

Myers rocked back and forth in his chair. He was ensnared in deep thought.

"What do you think, Captain?" Mac snapped him out of his trance.

"All right," he finally spoke. "We're making a deal with the devil, but I do see the logic." He pulled his chair up close to his desk and planted his elbows on it. "We'll keep the ME's report between us. I say again. Between us."

"We're already tracking the victim's finances," Sheridan said. "I tend to be skeptical about that avenue."

"Where's the money?" Myers asked.

"It's logged in and locked up in the evidence vault." She answered.

"Seal the case number," Myers said. "I don't want any leaks. A lot of people know about the drugs. But, they don't know about loose cash and little black books."

"Right," Mac agreed. He tapped Costa's arm. Costa nodded in agreement.

"What else do you have?" Myers leaned back.

"We're going to get a copy of the news report and make some hardcopy pictures to show to the victim's neighbors." Costa said. "We've got a general description. We've already got a possible match on one of the Senator's people who were at the new conference."

“Our moves on this have to be as quiet as possible,” Myers said, “if we’re checking out the Senator’s people.”

“No doubt,” Mac said.

“We might be stepping on a hornet’s nest if we don’t handle this right,” Myers warned them.

“I think that’s inevitable,” Costa said worriedly.

“Let’s just make sure the hornets aren’t stinging us in the ass,” Myers said. “Excuse my language, ma’am.”

“I’ve heard far worse from my superiors,” she sighed.

“All right, now,” Myers said. “I’ll run interference. Tell me your game plan.”

“We need a hardcopy of that group photo from the news broadcast,” Mac replied. “Then we can contact our witness at Wrigley Field.”

“Why, Wrigley Field?” Myers asked. “Am I’m going to get discouraged with this answer?”

“One of the neighbors is Hugh Johnson,” Costa answered. “That news crew can pull up that story at the station.” He looked at Mac.

“Yeah, they can,” Mac nodded. “Do you remember the reporter’s name?”

“Parker, Sheri Parker,” Sheridan answered.

“Okay,” Myers conceded and looked at Costa. “What’s that ridiculous and repetitive saying that you have?”

“Our lucky day,” Costa answered, “Sir?”

“Yeah, it’s our lucky day,” Myers said.

“This Hugh Johnson seems pretty level-headed,” Mac commented.

“Yes, I’ve met him,” Myers said. “With all of this media play involved, let’s hope we don’t need a roll of duct tape to shut people up.”

“Him, we’re probably going to need,” Mac defended the decision

“Okay,” Myers agreed. “What about your plans, Agent Sheridan?”

“I’ve got people running airport security checks to see if there were any unusual activities from the flight attendant,” Sheridan answered. “I’m also tracking her finances.”

Myers scratched his ear. “The Cubs won’t reach the seventh inning stretch for about two hours.” He looked at the clock. “Marie, you might as well give your people some more time. Go give the apartment one more search.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Mac said.

“Let’s meet back here,” Myers contemplated, “around five.”

“Let’s go,” Sheridan said.

Fifteen minutes later, they stood at the door of Sheila Radcliffe’s apartment. The door was new and it was not that when Sheridan had left that morning.

“What the hell happened here?” Sheridan asked. She looked at the door and was completely baffled.

“Which apartment does that landlord live in?” Costa asked angrily.

“It’s at the end of the hall,” Mac pointed. Costa stormed down the hallway and pounded on the door.

“Take it easy, Jimmie,” Mac called out with some restraint.

The door opened and the landlord appeared.

“Can I help you officer?” the gray-haired man asked.

“What the hell happened to that apartment?” he nearly shouted. “That was a sealed off crime scene this morning.”

“Lighten up, Jimmie.” Mac said as he and Sheridan approached them.

“Another officer showed up after you left,” the old man explained. “There was a crew of movers with him. He said it was all cleared through the relatives of the deceased. He also said the investigation was complete.”

“What cop?” Mac intervened.

“He said his name was Williams, I think.” He recalled blankly.

Costa looked at Mac. “Do you know how many Chicago cops are named Williams?” Costa was frustrated. “And, he’s not even sure of that.”

“I do remember his badge number,” the landlord said. “I always use the same numbers to play the lottery.”

“Really,” Costa tiredly laughed, “What are those numbers?”

“2860,” the landlord replied. “It’s coincidentally my son’s birthday.”

“We need to get in there,” Mac told him.

“There’s nothing in there,” the landlord looked at them with confusion. “But, I’ll get the key.”

He opened the apartment door for them. It was empty and clean. The three of them stepped into the vacated apartment.

“It looks like we have a cop to track down.” Mac said. “Come on.”

“I’m here most of the time,” the landlord continued to cooperate. “If you need anything else, just let me know.”

“We’ll be in touch, sir.” Mac said. “Thank you for your time.”

They made their way out of the building.

“I don’t believe this,” Costa shook his head.

“Let me make a phone call,” Mac stopped on the sidewalk.

“A new idea, perhaps?” she asked. The three of them formed a circle.

He punched in a number.

“Tony,” he said. “This is Mac. Yeah; good. I need a favor. Can you track down a badge number for me?”

He paused for a moment, “2860.” Mac covered the phone and told them what he was doing. “I have a buddy in records.”

“Let’s see who this Williams is,” Sheridan said. Costa stood by in silence.

A moment later, he spoke again. “Are you sure about that? All right, Tony. Thanks.”

Mac folded the phone shut and put it in his pocket.

“So, do we know who he is?” Costa asked.

“Yes,” Mac pulled out the car keys. “Badge number 2860, belongs to Detective Sergeant Ben Williams. He was killed in the line of duty, ten years ago.”

“I’ll be right back, gentlemen,” Sheridan turned to head back into the building.

“He’s deceased?” Costa asked Mac.

“Let’s get in the car, Jimmie,” Mac found the right key and walked towards the car.

Five minutes later, Sheridan returned and got in the back seat. “The landlord swears that was the badge number. His description is vague but he says he can probably recognize him if he sees him again.”

Mac started the car and pulled out. “Let’s try the TV station.”

“Maybe, Ms. Parker is in,” Sheridan replied.

“So, we have a fake cop running around,” Costa determined. “I’m pretty sure the Zombie theory is out.”

“Jimmie, don’t mess with my head,” Mac softly demanded. “This is getting more confusing the more we do manage to find out.”

“Let’s just see what we can come up with at the TV station,” Sheridan suggested.

In the chaotic newsroom, they were guided to the reporter’s cubicle. She was occupied on the telephone, so they waited patiently for her to finish.

“May I help you?” she asked. She cradled the phone and sat back in her seat.

“I’m Detective McDaniel,” Mac displayed his badge; as did Costa and Sheridan. “This is Detective Costa and Special Agent Sheridan, DEA. We were wondering if we could speak to you privately. It’s about the news story that you recently covered.”

“We must emphasize it’s private,” Sheridan added.

“Sure. I’m Sheri Parker,” she stood, “Sheri is fine. We can use a conference room downstairs.”

They followed her to an elevator down a hallway. “Now, can I ask which story? We’re away from other ears.” She pressed the elevator button.

“Please, ma’am,” Mac said. “Let’s get behind a closed door. It’s a very touchy situation.”

It was a good thing he suggested that; two more people appeared from around a corner. They also waited for the elevator.

“Of course,” she complied.

The elevator opened. After it emptied, they quickly got on it. She politely stopped the other people from boarding the elevator. When they reached their floor, she guided them into a quiet room.

“Please, take a seat,” she offered as she closed the door. She was the last to take a seat. “I must admit that I’m a bit confused. I don’t cover criminal stories. I work the political scene in City, state things like that.”

“This is only a preliminary investigation,” Mac explained. “We are not making any accusations or implying anything.”

“Okay,” she responded.

“We need a disc copy of the story that you did at noon about Senator Thompson.” Costa requested calmly. “Adding in some hardcopy stills would be even better.”

“As long as we’re not wasting any time,” she eyed Costa. “I can easily assume that it has to do with that woman’s death.”

“We really can’t go into details,” Sheridan said. “We just have to check all possibilities and avenues. Like Detective McDaniel said; it’s only a preliminary investigation.”

“I see,” she responded. “You also want it done quietly.”

The all silently nodded and confirmed that for her.

She continued. “If it gets out and nothing turns up; it’ll blow up in your face. If something does; the story will definitely explode. It’s just a matter of who’s going to get hit with the shrapnel.”

“Smart lady,” Costa whispered to Mac.

She smiled.

“We do realize that we can’t order or demand anything from you,” Mac pleaded quietly.

“First Amendment,” she confirmed.

“But, we do have the luxury of saying that we’re only doing our jobs,” Mac concluded his case.

“I also have the same luxury,” she agreed. “So, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll provide you with what you’ve requested. If nothing turns up; no one will ever know. If something comes out of it; I want the story.”

“Deal,” Costa slapped the table.

“You’ve got it,” Mac sat back.

Sheridan tentatively held up her hand to silence them. She looked at the reporter and spoke quietly. “It may involve the recent death of my father.”

Parker stood up. “Okay. That seals it.” She pushed in her chair.

“Please,” Sheridan emphasized.

“I’ll be right back,” she replied solemnly as she left the room. After she closed the door, Sheridan spoke up.

“I think we can trust her,” she said.

“You sure know how to play cards,” Costa gave her thumbs up.

“You guys aren’t so bad either.” She returned the gesture.

After five minutes, Parker entered the room with a concerned look on her face. She quietly sat down with a CD clutched in her hand.

“Is there a problem, Sheri?” Mac asked.

“I’m not sure,” she answered. She looked at Sheridan. “My father was a reporter. Needless to say, he was my mentor.”

“Yes,” Sheridan stepped onto the common ground with the reporter.

“I went to the production room where every story ends up,” she explained. “And, the broadcast recording was gone; it’s not in the archive pile or on the computer. It can’t be found.”

“Is that unusual?” Mac asked. “I imagine the place must be pretty hectic at times.”

“Go ahead,” Sheridan prompted her politely.

“It’s very unusual,” she answered Mac.

“So, if the broadcast files are missing,” Costa asked. “What’s that?”

He pointed to the disc in her hand.

“Well, the broadcast recordings are missing,” she had a look of concern on her face. “My father once told me that sometimes a hunch is only a hunch. It may not lead to anything. But, when you get a deep feeling in your gut; follow it.”

“And,” Sheridan also pointed at the disc in her hand.

“Well, the broadcast footage is missing,” Parker said. “So, I went down to editing and got one better. This is the cameraman’s copy.”

“This lady, rocks,” Costa smiled.

“This is the unedited footage,” she said. “And, it’s ten minutes long.”

“Here’s my business card for each of you,” she handed out the cards. “Don’t call the switchboard. My cell number is here” – she pointed, “– on the back is my home number.”

She handed the disc over to Mac. A knock on the door stopped them. “It’s okay,” Parker stood and went to the door.

“Here’s those stills you wanted.” a quiet voice was all they heard. A firm hand placed a folder in her hand.

“Thanks Eddie,” she said. “Remember, no one knows this” –

“You’ve got it boss,” the hand disappeared.

She turned and handed the folder to Costa. “Feel free to call, me.”

“We’ll definitely keep in touch” .Boss.” Mac stood and held the disc up in front of him.
“We’ll also tell Hugh Johnson to possibly expect a call from you. Thanks.”

“Yeah, thanks.” Costa held up the folder.

“Hugh is one of the good guys,” Parker acknowledged. “Remember, we have a deal.”

“Yes, we do,” Sheridan stood and shook her hand. “Thank you.”

When they were back in the car they held an impromptu strategy meeting.

“So, is Wrigley Field the next stop?” Sheridan asked.

“Tune in the game, Jimmie.” Mac said as he concentrated on his driving.

Costa turned on the radio and listened closely. At the commercial break, he spoke. “Top of the sixth! Maybe, forty five minutes to the seventh inning stretch,” he said.

“Just exactly what does that mean?” Sheridan asked.

“It means call the landlord and makes sure he’s there.” Mac answered.

“I’ll make the call,” she said. “I meant the seventh inning stretch. I’ve heard of it, but was never sure what it meant.”

“Well, there’s a story behind that,” Mac said as he made a left turn.

“Baseball owes that to President Teddy Roosevelt.” Mac continued. “He was attending a game and at the end of the sixth inning, he decided that two hours of sitting was enough. In the middle of the seventh he’d had it.”

“So,” Sheridan waited.

“He literally stood up and stretched his arms and legs.” Mac finished.

“Teddy Roosevelt did that?” Sheridan asked.

“It’s now a tradition,” Mac said. “We also have TR to thank for football.”

“Okay, I’m listening,” she said. “How did he do that?”

“In the early days football was extremely dangerous,” Mac explained. “Guys were getting killed playing the game. So, the President ordered everyone involved with the game, to clean it up or he would outlaw it.”

“True stories,” Costa said.

“Guess I’ve had my trivia lessons for the day,” she said.

“It’s a good stress reliever,” Costa said.

“I’ll make that call,” Sheridan pulled out her smartphone.

Ten minutes later, they reached the apartment building.

“Let’s hope turns up something,” Mac said as he pulled into a parking space.

“Amen,” Costa said, he handed Sheridan the folder of pictures. “It has been a long day.”

“That, it has,” she acknowledged. She got out of the car. She held the pictures and the CD in her hand; she led them into the building.

The landlord anxiously opened his door for them. “Come in. Please.”

He seemed exhausted. “I can’t believe how many reporters have been either by here or called me.”

“What kind of things have they been asking?” Mac accepted an invitation to have a seat. “We have a copy of a news report that we want you to take a look at.”

“I do have a DVD player,” he pointed to the television. “Have a seat.” He offered to Costa. “They’ve been asking all kinds of questions about Ms. Radcliffe and who she was hanging out with. I even caught people digging in the dumpster.” He was definitely frustrated. “They claimed to be licensed investigators.”

“Okay, calm down,” Mac said. “You know who we are and we just have some pictures and a DVD we want you to view.”

Sheridan handed him the disc. "Just put this in, play it, and see if you recognize anyone."

It only took about ten seconds before the old man grabbed his remote and hit the reverse button. He pressed play and pointed at the screen.

"Him!" he shouted and pressed the pause button.

"What about him?" she asked.

"That's the guy that I saw with Ms. Radcliffe," he said in excitement.

"Are you sure?" Sheridan asked.

"Absolutely," he said. "And him!" he pointed at the screen.

"Yes?" Sheridan asked.

"That's the policeman who told me it was okay to clear her apartment." He took the handful of pictures from Sheridan and began to look through them.

"Are you completely certain?"

"I'd bet on it," the landlord said, "and win." He handed back the photos.

"We need the disc back, please," she said. "You've really been a great help."

"Sure, no problem," he ejected the disc, put it back in the case, and handed it back to her.

Mac stood and held up his hand to pause Sheridan. Though the team had just formed, they knew how each other worked. Mac handed the landlord a business card. "Please, don't answer anyone's questions. Refer anyone, and I do mean *anyone*, to me."

"I'd be glad to help," he responded. "She was deserving of better than this crap."

"Well, you have my card," Mac said. "Just feel free to call if anything else comes up."

"I'd do that," he agreed. He guided them out of the apartment.

Wrigley Field was its normal rambunctious self on a sunny afternoon. The crowd was enjoying a close game. Outside the press box, the three of them waited patiently for Hugh Johnson to get a break. After five minutes or so, the door to the booth opened.

“Come on in, guys!” the announcer smiled. “What’s up?”

“This is Special Agent Sheridan,” Mac introduced.

Johnson shook her hand, “Ma’am.”

“Hugh, we’ve got a video for you to watch,” Mac explained. “Maybe, you might recognize some faces.”

“So, did you see the news at noon?” Costa asked.

“Just bits and pieces, I was wrapped up, here,” he said. “We can head down to WGN’s booth. I’m sure they’ve got a spare player.”

“Great,” Mac said. “We’ll try to be brief.”

Johnson turned to his broadcast partner. “Hey Bill, I’ll try and be back for the eighth. Cover for me.”

“No problem,” his partner answered.

“Follow me,” Johnson said. “Don’t worry, these guys are cool.”

“Sound good to me,” Costa said. He let Sheridan follow first, “After you.”

A short walk down the hall, Johnson stopped and knocked on a door. It was opened by a headphone wearing gentleman. He was chomping on a piece of pizza. “What’s up, Hugh?”

“I’m here with some of Chicago’s finest. And, the lady is courtesy of Uncle Sam,” Johnson said. “We need to use one of your DVD players.”

“If you could spare one,” Sheridan said as she held the disc up in front of Mac. “We’d appreciate it.”

“Sure,” he opened the door fully. “The auxiliary is free. Let me make sure that you have a monitor.”

“Come on in,” Johnson led them into the cramped booth.

They all followed. Mac took the disc from Sheridan and handed it to the technician. They gathered around the monitor. Hugh’s lighthearted mannerism disappeared as he concentrated on the video.

“Sheri Parker,” he said. “Nice lady.”

“Watch,” Mac prompted him. “Here,” he pointed.

“Senator Thompson,” Johnson recognized him immediately. “What’s going on here, guys? ma’am?”

“Watch,” Mac emphasized.

Johnson carefully studied the screen.

He then gasped. “Him!” he pointed at the screen. “That’s who I saw with Sheila. I saw them arguing outside on the sidewalk one night! A week ago, maybe!”

“Did you hear what they were arguing about?” Sheridan asked.

“No. Sorry,” he continued to watch the screen, “No, nothing else.”

“Thanks, that’s all we needed.” Mac stopped the disc player. “Give us a call if you think of anything else.” He handed Johnson his card.

“Hey, you guys have my card, right?” Johnson asked.

“I’ve got it,” Costa patted his pocket. “Thanks for your time.”

“Can I ask why you’re checking on these people?” Johnson asked discreetly.

“Don’t ask and don’t talk to anyone but us,” Mac said. “Please.”

“Sure,” Johnson looked at his watch. “I need to get back to my booth.”

“We’re done,” Mac said. “Thanks again.”

At five p.m. they entered Captain Myers’s office. He directed them to take a seat while he closed his office door and pulled the shades. After he took his seat, he calmly exhaled heavily.

“What have you got?” he asked.

Mac looked at Costa, “Your turn.”

“Special Agent Sheridan,” Costa looked to her.

“How long have you had these two?” She asked the captain.

“A while,” he went along with her.

“My people haven’t found anything out of the ordinary about her finances, other than the ten thousand in cash that we found.” Sheridan reported.

Myers turned to his detectives, “Costa?”

Costa grimaced slightly, “All right.”

Myers looked at him directly, “Detective?”

“Sir, let me reiterate what we’ve got so far; just to put things into the right perspective.”

Costa started.

“By all means, detective,” Myers said.

“Last night, I was awakened by”

“Detective,” Myers said irately.

“Okay, I’ll skip ahead,” he continued. “What we have is a flight attendant who is now a murder victim. She was found with a very dangerous drug that we thought was out of circulation. In her apartment, we found a large sum of unaccounted cash. Along with the cash, we found a hidden address book with bank and credit card information; along with a senator’s personal phone number.”

“The drug in question has resurfaced in several cities that coincide with the flight attendant routes. We also found that the apartment of the previously mentioned victim was burglarized. There were photographs missing, but whoever it was; missed the cash and address book that we found. We have the Senator in question making a statement acknowledging that he knew the victim. The victim’s cause of death has not been made public. Finally, we have a crime scene; the victim’s apartment; emptied by someone impersonating a police detective. That person has been identified as one of the Senator’s people.” Costa stopped. “I couldn’t say all of that again on a bet.”

Captain Myers looked at Mac, “Mac?”

“Like Jimmie said,” Mac began, “We have a witness pointing to one of the Senator’s men posing as a police officer. That makes two witnesses that can place some of the Senator’s people in the company of the murder victim.”

“So,” Myers thought out loud. “What would be our plan of action?” A sudden and urgent knocking on the Captain’s door turned all of their heads. Through the glass, another detective seemed determined to get their attention.

“We’re busy,” Myers shouted.

The frustrated officer scratched his head and knocked again.

“Open,” Myers shouted.

The detective opened the door and wiped sweat off of his brow.

“This had better be good, Wilson.” Myers threatened the officer.

“Sir, I’ve got this guy down in interrogation that’s got a wild story to tell you,” he said.

Myers looked at him sternly, “Such as?”

“He says ‘He knows where to find El Diablo.’ Wilson crossed his arms. “He’s one of my sources on the street. But, he says this is something personal to him.”

“He can join the club,” Sheridan gritted her teeth.

“Just, how reliable is this source?” Costa spoke quickly to settle down Sheridan.

“He got clean from the dope five years ago,” Wilson said. “This is his turf and he’s still trusted.”

They all contemplated the possibility, silently.

“I think you should at least listen to what this guy has to say,” Wilson urged them.

They all looked to Captain Myers.

“Is what we discussed earlier, still leak-proof?” Myers asked them all.

There was silent concurrence.

“As far as we all know,” Mac answered.

Even Wilson nodded in confirmation.

“Okay, Wilson,” Myers said. “We’ve been throwing dice all day. Let’s see what your source has got.”

“Right this way,” Wilson extended a guiding hand. They followed him down the hallway. He took them down a stairwell to what was nicknamed the “dungeon.” He opened a door for them and they entered a tiny carpeted room. Wilson closed the door behind them. Seated at the central table in the room was a young man. He was wearing jeans and a leather vest; he was heavily tattooed.

“All right, Jesse,” Wilson said. “I brought the audience. It’s time for you to take the stage.”

They all took various seats around the table. They carefully studied the young man.

“Him, I know,” Jesse pointed at Costa. “He’s the one who everyone thought brought down El Diablo. When was that? Five years ago?”

Costa said nothing.

“Explain,” Myers demanded. “And, spare us the editorial comments.”

“Yeah, no problem,” Jesse agreed. “Costa, you never really knew El Diablo’s true identity.”

Costa remained skeptically silent.

“Didn’t it seem strange to you,” Jesse said. “That no actual operation or lab was ever found?”

Costa still didn’t take the bait.

“There was barely any cash or drugs found on Martinez,” Jesse said. “But, he still decided to die with his boots on.”

“Okay, I’m game,” Costa said. “Why?”

“They spent two years manufacturing the stuff and they never sold it,” Jesse explained. “They built up a massive supply, stashed it, dismantled the lab, and then put small amounts; and I mean small amounts of it; on the street.”

“Interesting, I think we just figured out what your father found,” Costa said as he looked at Sheridan. He then looked back at Jesse. “How the hell do you know?”

“Unlike you,” Jesse pointed at him. “I never dropped the case. I kept looking until I found a way into the machine.”

“And now, you’re claiming that you did?” Sheridan relieved Costa.

Her approach was fierce.

“Oh, I did,” he responded defiantly. “I got in so deep; I helped move the stash —without a lab— I know who the gorillas are that dangled the carrot out in front of Martinez. They claimed to have some big political connections. They took in lots of front money to help finance their flow into the power structure.”

“Still interesting,” Costa said. “But, how do we know we’re not stepping on a landmine by trusting you.”

“You could arrest me for what I’m about to say” — Jesse whispered cautiously. “That flight attendant — That was no accident like that dumb ass on the news said today.”

“Did you see something? Did you hear any kind of admission to anything?” Mac took over the questioning.

“I heard them laugh about it,” he said. “One of them couldn’t stop giggling his silly ass off. He said, he thought her heart exploded when they drilled the needle into her arm.”

“Jesus Christ!” Myers shouted angrily. “You’ve got me convinced. Now, you need to give them to us. We’ve got you for just knowing that she was murdered.”

“I know where to find the gun that capped some fed about three weeks ago,” Jesse said confidently.

Sheridan jumped up and grabbed him by the leather lapels. “I’ll knock your fucking teeth out if you’re messing with us,” she shouted.

“Sheridan!” Myers restrained her. “Take it easy.” He got her to release him.

“What with her?” he straightened out his vest.

Sheridan turned away and leaned heavily against the wall.

“That —fed— was her father.” Costa leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. Mac stood and tried to calm Sheridan. She was enraged.

“All right,” Myers said. “You’ve proven that you can hit a raw nerve. Continue; we need the basics— Who, where and when?”

Sheridan reseated herself. She glared at Jesse.

“Like I said,” Jesse explained. “They claim to be rolling in political power. These guys really believe they’ve got a supply of invisible spray paint. They think they’re invincible.”

“I’ve got a question for you, that you still haven’t answered me,” Wilson said.

“Come on, man.” Jesse pleaded. “I’m not here to cross you.”

“Why are you so bent on taking these people out?” Wilson asked.

“Costa knows,” Jesse said, “Victim number five during the outbreak— Five years ago—”

“Yeah,” Costa nodded.

“She was my kid sister, man.” Jesse looked at all of them with anger of his own. “They’re trying to move and cover-up everything tonight— Somewhere in Oak Lawn...I can point the way— Nine p.m.”

“You made a reference to the news report today,” Sheridan said. “Them?”

“Are they the ones you’re talking about?” Mac asked. He stood behind Sheridan.

“Yes, the goons that I’m talking about were in that group with the Senator.” Jesse replied. “They’re part of his money machine. He knows.”

“Why did they kill the flight attendant?” Myers asked.

“Something about knowing too much, taking too many risks, and not enough money changing hands,” Jesse said. “The foolish girl got in too deep. She became a liability and made herself expendable.”

“We’ve got enough,” Costa said. “Okay, Jesse. How bad do you want to take out El Diablo?”

“I can’t kill them,” he said.

“Give us the location,” Mac said.

“While they’re handling that,” Myers stuck a finger into Jesse’s chest, “You and I are going after a murder weapon.”

“I can take you to the exact spot where they dumped it in the river,” Jesse said.

“Take a diving *team* with you, Captain.” Mac shook his head, “*A gun in the river?* You better figure out what kind of gun.”

“I swear that I know,” Jesse vowed.

Mac laid a pad of paper and a pen on the table. “All right, Jesse. Names, addresses, time, how many, and what kind of fire power do they have?”

“We want to know what we’re getting in to,” Costa said.

“You might run into some converted tech nines.” Jesse started writing. “I heard them talking about it.”

“Co-ordinate with a SWAT team, and any local law,” Myers ordered. “No one is to engage without wearing body armor. Is there any surveillance yet, Wilson?”

“My partner went to the location to see if there was anything to this,” Wilson answered. “I’ll get him support and a crew with parabolic microphones and video, right now.”

“All right,” Myers said. “Get the warrants. Marie, talk to your people.”

“I’m doing that now,” she held up her smartphone. “We’re not leaving anything to chance.”

“We shouldn’t run into any snags with federal warrants backing us,” Costa said as he looked at Sheridan. She nodded.

“By the book and by the numbers,” Myers ordered. “You, come with me.” Jesse stood and willingly followed the Captain.

“This is no bullshit,” Jesse said to them on his way out. “Take them down. Hard.”

“Let’s all stay in touch,” Myers said as he led Jesse out of the room.

“We’ve got a lot of maneuvering to do,” Sheridan said. “I suggest we get on it. My team is coordinating with your SWAT as we speak.” She held up her phone.

“Are you riding with us, Special Agent?” Mac asked.

“I wouldn’t miss it.” She confidently stood up.

“I’m going to meet my partner,” Wilson said. “I’ll meet you there.”

“Good,” Mac said, “Anything else?”

No one said anything. Costa turned out the light on the way out of the room.

At seven p.m. the teams set up their mousetrap around a quiet warehouse.

“Wilson’s confirmed this is the place,” Mac pointed to a gray building that seemed quiet and empty at the moment.

“Yeah,” Costa opened the glove compartment and pulled out a pack of cigarettes.

“Where’s team one?”

“That van tucked behind the blue dumpster,” Mac said. “Please, don’t smoke.”

“I see them,” Costa tossed the pack back into the glove compartment. “How many on the roof tops across the way?”

“Standard teams of six,” Mac answered. “The front and the back are covered.”

The back door of the car opened and Sheridan slipped into the car. “Myers just called me. Among several, they found a nine millimeter where Jesse saw one of the Senator’s men dump it. He’s sending them all to ballistics just to be sure.”

“Was there any bickering between the SWAT commander and your team?” Mac asked.

“It’ll be a coordinated effort,” Sheridan answered. “We all have the same goal.”

“Now, it’s just a waiting game,” Costa said.

“Hand me a cigarette,” Mac surrendered.

Costa obliged. He also lit one for himself. Twilight was just beginning to set in and the next half an hour was uneventful. As nightfall drew closer the tension grew tenfold. “Here we go,” Mac pointed to a rental truck that had just entered the compound. It circled around and backed up to the loading dock.

“Look who we have here,” Costa tightened his vest. “All of the Senator’s men.”

Sheridan checked her firearm and also pulled her vest tighter.

The two men who had been identified from the news report got out of the truck. They headed up steps to a side door on the dock’s landing.

When they entered the building, Mac put the call out.

“This is ‘escort’” he said over the radio. “We’re going in. All other teams standby.”

“Let’s go,” Costa opened his door and got out. Sheridan followed closely as they made it across the parking lot. They slid along the building’s wall. They quickly made their way to the same door used by the suspects. Wilson and his partner met them from the opposite direction. Mac tried the doorknob to no avail. That was not a surprise.

“Okay,” he ordered. “Pop it!”

Wilson’s partner held up the battering ram and then slammed the door open.

Mac was the first to enter the dim interior. Sheridan and Costa followed and covered him.

“Chicago P.D.” he shouted. “We have a warrant.”

They heard scrambling and shouting in the main bay of the warehouse. Costa pointed to a stairwell and Mac gave him the go ahead. Sheridan followed Mac to the main entrance. Wilson and his partner burst into the open bay and were met with automatic gunfire.

Mac dropped to one knee and aimed low around the corner. His fire halted the assault long enough for Sheridan to follow Wilson into the main warehouse. Their fire allowed Mac to roll into the main bay and take up a position behind some heavy crates. Mac's successive fire allowed them to take up covered positions. One round from the opposing fire bounced off the concrete and struck Wilson. He fell next to Marie.

"I'm down," he shouted. "My leg!"

"Go," his partner shouted at Sheridan. "I'll cover." He returned fire and she rushed across the floor to a position next to Mac.

The gunman who had clipped Wilson with the round was struck with a shot from high above the floor. Costa had the entire main bay at his total advantage.

"Put them down!" Costa shouted. The first SWAT team began to take up positions along an upper mezzanine with Costa.

Another gunman aimed up and tried to draw a bead on him. Mac and Sheridan felled him with simultaneous fire.

"You heard the man," Mac shouted, "Weapons on the ground, now!"

Upon realization that they were heavily outnumbered, the opposing gunfire ceased. The clatter of weapons hitting and sliding across the concrete echoed throughout the bay. One remaining gunman and the two associates of the Senator stepped into the open with their hands in the air.

“Scene secure, officer down,” Mac called through his microphone. “Secure the perimeter.”

Sheridan and Mac were fully covered from above and behind. So they stepped out into the open floor with their weapons firmly held in front of them.

“Face down. On the floor,” Mac commanded.

Sheridan began handcuffing them. They complied with little resistance. Costa appeared in the main entryway. He carried a crowbar with him across the floor. When he reached the small crates where the suspects had made their stand, he pried one open. He tipped the contents onto the floor. He held up a gallon size plastic bag filled with tiny packets. They all had the trademark smiling blue devil printed brightly on them.

“El Diablo!” he shouted victoriously as he showed them the bag.

At One p.m. the next day, Mac and Sheridan watched as Costa rang the doorbell of the Senator’s luxurious home. The intricately carved oak door opened and a maid wearing a crisp uniform greeted them.

“May I help you?” she asked.

They all held up their badges.

“Chicago Police,” Mac said. Costa remained silent.

“Drug Enforcement Agency,” Sheridan identified herself. “We need to have a word with the Senator.”

“Yes, of course.” She said nervously. “Please, come in and I’ll tell him that you’re here.”

They waited quietly in the spacious front room of the grand home. She didn't return. The Senator entered the room and took a seat on a paisley designed sofa. He set his coffee cup and saucer on a glass end table.

"My lawyer has already informed me about me how you broke up the drug ring last night." The senator spoke concisely. "I must applaud you. From what I've heard it was a surgical strike of an operation. Well done. You're Detective Costa, aren't you?"

"Yes, Senator," Costa stepped forward with Sheridan's smartphone. "We're just knocking down dominoes. So to speak."

"And, the operation went very well," the Senator continued to praise them.

"The people that we arrested, worked for you," Costa showed him the pictures on the smartphone.

"I resent any implications you are making," he spoke vehemently. "I knew nothing of any illegal activities in which those men were involved."

The three of them stood stoically in front of him.

"What I'd like to know. What I demand to know is. Have you found the people who murdered that young lady who worked for my campaign?" His face was flushed with anger.

"That information was never released," Mac said. "How did you know she was murdered?"

Costa held up the smartphone and it beeped when he pressed a button. He then pressed another button. "It's for you." He placed the smartphone on the table. The Senator remained silent and was shaking.

"Hey, Hugh," Costa spoke loudly. "How are we doing today?"

Through the speaker they could all hear him respond.

“Hey, troops!” Johnson’s voice boomed from the phone. “Hello, Senator Thompson. I’m here with your favorite reporter—Sheri Parker—with me!”

“Hi, Senator,” she chimed in the background.

“Do you care to make any more self-incriminating statements to an avid radio audience? I can get you the P.A. here at much storied Wrigley Field. If you’d like that!”

The Senator hung his head into his hands.

Costa picked up the smartphone. “Thanks, Hugh. See you ‘round!” He hung up the smartphone and handed it back to Sheridan. She stayed silent and stared at the Senator.