

Chapter Three

The fool thinks he is wise—Shakespeare

"Christian! What in the hell is going on?"

"Honey, buttercup, . . . calm down. I just want you to go out front and meet my friend Janet who has money for my fine. She doesn't like to come into police stations."

"Janet? Fine? This started two hours ago with my giving you a ride to the store. Why the hell is this Janet giving you money? And / don't like police stations." Ginna, tired and confused, knew of Christian's activities to some small measure, and didn't care to be on the scene if he got arrested.

Christian regretted bringing her. While they were driving downtown, where he bought his heroin, a notion struck. He had Ginna stop at a pay phone, called Janet, told her he was in jail and that it would be in her best interests to bail him out. Janet, choked with apoplectic indignation, gloomily agreed to lend him five hundred dollars for bail, but refused to enter the police station; which is exactly what he wanted. He led a reluctant Ginna into the downtown police station, sat her in the waiting area and went to the front desk to report

a fictional stolen bicycle. Ginna wanted details but he ignored her, not wanting to lie any more than necessary.

"Janet's probably here by now. Look for a pink and black BMW. Get the money and tell her I'll call later."

"Who is this woman? Why is she giving you money?"

"Remember Butch? It's his girlfriend. They borrowed my bike . . . it's complicated."

"You said Butch was a criminal idiot. I don't like any of it."

"Yeah, he's off, but Janet's nice. The sooner I pay the fine, the sooner we get out of here."

"What fine?"

"My bicycle, it's embarrassing."

"You don't have a bicycle."

"Look, it's personal."

"I personally think that you are lying," Ginna said. Christian gently pushed her, still grumbling, towards the door. Desk Sergeant Munoz cast skeptical glances their way wishing he didn't have the night shift with its eccentrics.

Ginna walked slowly towards the street and though outside, felt claustrophobic. She planned to wait ten seconds for the BMW, then return to the station and give him the money herself, regardless of what was going on; but the BMW stood at the curb.

"Are you Janet? Hi. I'm Christian's friend," Ginna said, relieved. The woman looked normal and the car was nice. Janet destroyed the illusion immediately.

"What the fuck!?" she snarled. "Did he rat on me? Here's the money." Janet threw five one hundred dollar bills out the window.

Ginna bent and quickly gathered the cash. "Thank you. Christian said he'll call you later. "

"Fuck that. Is Butch in jail too? Do I have to bail him out?"

"I don't know," Ginna said curtly, backing away. "I'm going to go get Christian now." She turned and shambled back towards the station. It was hard to walk as she tried to keep her mind a blank. Christian, hands and face pressed against the glass, peered through the door, and in her haste she nearly knocked him down.

"Here's your *bail* money." Ginna stuffed the bills in Christian's pocket.

"Are you okay? You look weird."

"*Bail* money?"

"Fine, bail, same thing, what's in a word?"

"I'm going home now if you want a ride." She turned on her heel and marched back out the door with Christian trailing behind. Ginna stormed past Janet, lurking on the path. Christian saw Janet, did an about-face, and had almost made it back into the station, when Janet started to yell.

"You stupid motherfucker. I can't believe you fucked everything up so bad. Where's my money? Where's Butch? Did you rat on me? Why oh why me?" Janet had more, but Christian gently covered her mouth with his hand.

"I was doing you a favor. The cops came, you left. Do the math."

A few yards down the walkway Ginna, trying to leave the scene of what looked to her like a failed grifter's scheme, bumped into a black police officer. They nearly fell, grabbed each other, and disengaged. The officer apologized, then regarded Christian and

Janet's adversarial stance.

"Is there a problem?"

Janet froze, thinking her guilt apparent.

"No, no problem," Christian said.

"You look familiar," the cop said.

"No, I'm not," Christian said.

Janet straightened up, briskly said, "I just got off work. I've got to get home," and walked away.

Christian, impressed with her unexpected resourcefulness and willing to incorporate any good strategy, said, "Me too," grabbed Ginna's hand and hastened down the walkway towards the street.

"You look familiar!" the cop shouted after them.

"Christian," Ginna said, casting his hand aside.

"Yeah, I know."

Ginna broke into a measured trot, wanting to get into her van and out of downtown. Christian hurried after her.

LAPD Officer Chester Burnett surreptitiously entered the police station and forgot all about Christian and Ginna. Compelled by the death of fellow officer, Johnny Bravo, earlier in the evening, Officer Burnett hoped to participate in the investigation, even though he was assigned to the Hollywood precinct. Dozens of angry, disoriented officers were already on the second floor, where the detectives congregated, waiting for information or leads. Chester melded with them.

Homicide Detective Casey Hardin, a fifteen-year veteran who already had nine unsolved murders on his caseload this month, headed the investigation into Johnny Bravo's death. After interviewing the various personalities surrounding his other nine murder cases, Detective Hardin couldn't understand why more of them hadn't been murdered as well. He believed an inordinately high percentage of the suspected killers had perfectly good reasons for indulging their lethal urges. Death was so common in Hardin's life that he often saw nuances that made a killing seem justifiable. He cracked cases with no assistance because his methods, though successful, were peculiar. After a number of partners vehemently disagreed with his investigative style, the department allowed him to work alone. With no one to argue otherwise he sometimes made the decision to file a case unsolved if he saw the murder as only fair.

A crowd of cops, detectives and well wishers all wanted to get involved with the Bravo case. Police at all levels resented one of their own joining the ranks of Los Angeles's hundreds of yearly murder victims. Detective Hardin didn't consider the shooting of a cop any more impressive than the slaying of an ordinary citizen. He could think of several cops whose demise would improve the police department in general and society as a whole; however, cognizant of the need to exist with the fraternity of law enforcement and most especially the upper hierarchy, Hardin vowed to be demonstrably offended and concerned. He had skills in this area which is how he made detective in the first place.

Apocryphal criminological lore states that if a murder isn't solved within twenty-four hours, it will likely remain unsolved. Detective Hardin thought it more like an hour. He was widely renowned for catching five murderers all in one day. One had inexplicably presented herself at Hardin's desk and confessed though she had neither been sought nor suspected.

Another had turned himself in when he found out who had been assigned to the case. The last three were brothers turned in by their mother during a door-to-door canvas by Detective Hardin. They'd killed a couple of crack dealers across the street from their home, a popular crime in the neighborhood, but the mother happened to be a steady customer of one of the dealers. She eventually attempted to recant and refused to testify, but it was too late, the brothers killed someone else while in a holding cell. Detective Hardin, walking by the cell at the time, solved the crime before the victim had even expired.

Casey sat at his desk and eyed the crowd of vengeful cops, all waiting for an update on the case. Bravo had been killed three hours earlier, making it hopeless in Hardin's eyes. Nevertheless, he stood to put on a display of diligence.

"All right people, here's what we've got: Officer Johnny Bravo was shot in the head with a large caliber handgun, downtown near Sixth and Los Angeles at 7p.m. or thereabouts. He probably died instantly. No word from ballistics yet. Forensics is about to issue a report regarding evidence from the body and the scene. Once this information is available it will be emailed or faxed to every station in Los Angeles County and posted on the downtown station's website. There were witnesses, but a melee was in progress at the time of the shooting and eyewitness accounts are contradictory, interrogations aren't going smoothly. At the scene we have reports of several different gangs including Crips and Normandie Locos. A shopkeeper mentioned Koreans, but we're not sure about that. Officer Bravo's gun and badge are missing. It's a .357 Magnum, the serial number will be with the other reports."

"Excuse me sir!" Burnett said overexcitedly. "I regularly patrol Normandie and I'm familiar with the Locos. So . . . I . . ."

"Okay, good, keep an eye out. See what you can come up with."

"Yes sir!" As far as Officer Burnett was concerned he'd been given the green light to do anything he could think of to track down the cop killer even though he'd been warned by superior officers citywide to never get involved in any cases, under penalty of suspension and censure. Censured, suspended and sworn at in the past, Chester couldn't help himself. He'd been busted for marijuana; accused of stealing evidence, documents and entire files; was the son-in-law of an ex-Black Panther; and, in the most humiliating episode, had his car stolen by prostitutes he was trying to arrest. Officer Chester Burnett had a long way to go before the department recognized him as anything besides a creative screw-up.

"There is one unusual clue," Hardin said, "and if you would all please follow me to forensics . . ." He guided the mob of cops towards the elevator.

Only nine people could fit in the elevator. Chester bulled his way in until face to face with Detective Hardin. "I really want to help with this case, sir."

Hardin nodded gravely, just then recognizing Chester Burnett as the infamous pot-smoking cop who tampered with evidence and compromised investigations. He knew Chester meant well, but his indiscretions had had him thrown out of the downtown station. Unflappable to a noteworthy degree, Hardin found Chester diverting.

The elevator reached its floor and Detective Hardin led everyone into a lab equipped with spectrographs, laser flanges, Osterizers and a tiny particle accelerator. Three forensic scientists stood around a small wooden table that supported an 18" by 18" wire cage. Inside the cage lay a small growling animal shivering with rage. The scientists, in dirty DNA

splattered lab coats, argued fervently and thrust a slender foot long stick with a cotton swab on the end, back and forth. They feinted and pretended to lunge at each other.

"Ladies, is there a problem?" Detective Hardin asked the men in lab coats.

The technicians pulled themselves together immediately.

"Well, yes," said Saul Weinberg, head technician. "We have a plethora of such things. I could go on and on. First, though: the autopsy revealed that Officer Bravo was, in fact, shot in the head, and this resulted in his death. If any of you gentlemen would like to go down to the morgue and view the body. . . "

"That won't be necessary," said Hardin. A muttered chorus of "no thank yous" and "not today's" came from the rest of the cops. A half dozen more policemen arrived on the elevator and crowded in to the lab. One of them volunteered that he'd like to see the body, thinking he could extrapolate clues that the Medical Examiner might have missed. They all stared at him as if he were a morbid dolt.

Detective Hardin pushed on. "What about the bullet?"

"Evidently the bullet exited the skull and landed somewhere in Los Angeles. At the scene CSI collected 37 bullets lying in the street, embedded in walls of the surrounding buildings, stuck in automobiles and just about anywhere they looked. They could have collected more, there certainly were more, but after a while it just seemed pointless."

Weinberg shrugged.

"All right. We're looking for a gun, but as of yet have no idea what kind," Hardin said.

"Right!" one of the techs replied brightly.

"Which brings us to . . . the evidence," Saul said. He pulled the sheet from a bench revealing an iron and a typewriter. "These were at the scene. Make of them what you will.

During my tenure here we've never found a typewriter at the scene of a street murder."

"Perhaps he left it as a clue," Chester said, thinking criminals were organized and did things on purpose.

"Has anyone checked the ribbon?" asked another nascent detective.

"Interesting," said Detective Hardin, though he had no interest in the evidence or anyone's dubious conclusions; yet fascinated that grown men could create hope from a broken typewriter found in the street.

"And here we have," announced Saul, grandly sardonic, "The Creature!" He poked the cotton swab towards the cage. "A clue." Literally choking with rage the thing lurched to its feet and awkwardly lunged at the bars. It tore the cotton swab from Saul's hand snapping it into shreds. All three technicians leapt back with practiced ease. The creature's origins were plainly enigmatic and possibly non-terrestrial; the entire body scarred, it had a stub of a tail, the eyes bulged and the ears were torn and ragged. Further obscuring the thing's ancestry, one side was covered with clotted blood, possibly Officer Johnny Bravo's. If from Earth, the animal could have been a hairless cat, a huge rat, or a small disfigured dog. Most baffling of all, the creature looked to have only three legs, giving credence to the idea of extraterrestrialism. Snapping, snarling, vibrating with fury, the little monster drove everyone in the lab back another foot from the cage.

"That isn't a clue!?" Chester said, his ambition to be a detective given pause by the creature and the broken typewriter. Agitated, he looked to Hardin, who liked to look serene and all knowing.

Detective Casey Hardin's serenity came from his unwavering refusal to allow evidence or witnesses to have any bearing on his investigations. Besides CSI's habit of

collecting every piece of debris within 100 yards of a crime scene, forensics regularly mixed up or lost results. Early in his detecting career Casey relied on evidence that had miraculously run the gauntlet of technicians and laboratories unscathed. In court, wily defense attorneys attacked the forensic pathologists and evidence room custodians as foreigners and the brothers of drunks, thereby invalidating their testimony and results. Now Detective Hardin relied on nothing and no one but himself, and on confessions from people who were still alive.

"Maybe if we surround it . . ." Saul said, then withdrew to answer a ringing phone.

Officer Chester Burnett mournfully watched the creature throw a complicated seizure. "Detective Hardin, sir, how. . ." He gestured towards the cage. "What . . ."

"Do you want me to tell you how to solve a murder son?" Hardin asked.

"Please."

"Go to the scene of a crime or to the homes of likely suspects. You only need to ask two questions: Did you kill anybody? Do you know who did?"

"What about . . ."

"What about nothing."

"I thought . . ."

"Thinking leads to red herring evidence. A confession trumps evidence. A confession solves the case. Evidence is nothing next to a confession. Now, ask me the questions."

Chester felt awkward. "Did you kill anybody?"

"No."

"Do you know who did?"

"No." Hardin paused. "See? Now you've eliminated one person from your

investigation. Occasionally anomalies will surface during questioning. Only follow those up if you have absolutely nothing else."

Chester, relatively young and hardheaded, still wanted to see the reports and evidence, but was determined to put Hardin's technique into practice as soon as possible.

Saul put the phone down and thoughtfully swabbed his ear. "That was Lieutenant Golder from Hollywood division. He's on his way to review the . . . uh, evidence."

Chester blanched, then ran for the stairs.