

THREE-WAYS

A DETECTIVES SEAGATE AND MINER MYSTERY
VOLUME 4

EVERY WOMAN IN TOWN WANTED

TO SLEEP WITH HIM.

ONE OF THEM WANTED TO KILL HIM.

MIKE
MARKEL

Three-Ways: A Detectives Seagate and Miner Mystery

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This is the Prologue and Chapter 1 of *Three-Ways*.

For more information on the other three books in the Detectives Seagate and Miner Mystery series and for ordering information, please visit MikeMarkel.com.

Prologue

She stood on the concrete pad outside his apartment, squinting as the headlights swept past every few seconds, even now, a few minutes before midnight. She shielded her eyes and peered through the picture window into his small, unlit living room. Then she glanced down the row at the other four apartments. One picture window was illuminated by a rectangle of light.

The apartment next door was dark. She knew the unit was occupied, but she didn't know who lived there or what hours they kept. Since his apartment was the end unit, there was only that one neighboring unit.

She stepped onto the pebbled black rubber mat, one side torn away so that it read Welcom, and put her ear to the door. She waited a moment, listening for any sounds from inside the shabby one-bedroom unit in the old flat-roofed, one-story brick building four blocks from campus.

She knocked, three taps on the battered wooden door. A few seconds later, she heard his muted footsteps. A light came on in the living room and the door opened. "I didn't expect you," he said. She did not reply. He adjusted the belt on his dark green terrycloth bathrobe.

"Please." He stepped back, sweeping his arm, gesturing for her to enter.

She walked in and placed her bag on the small pine table near the door. Her eyes scanned the humble furnishings: a threadbare blue couch, two mismatched upholstered chairs, a black plastic entertainment center with a TV, a pile of a dozen DVD cases, and a portable stereo system with small speakers built-in. A few books lay on the wooden coffee table, one of them open at the spine. Off in the corner was the tiny kitchen, just a small refrigerator, a narrow range, a white enamel sink chipped down to the black steel, and a few feet of speckled Formica countertop.

Her gaze settled on the three sets of dirty dishes and glasses on the small round kitchen table with its two matching dining chairs.

He said, "Is there something in particular you needed?"

She looked at him and began to unbutton her short cotton jacket. She watched him as his eyes were drawn to the blue and yellow silk scarf knotted loosely at the neck of her sheer silk cream blouse with its top two buttons open. Removing her jacket, she watched him stare at the outlines of her nipples shifting against the silk. Her jacket rustled as it slid off her shoulders and fell softly onto the carpet.

He smiled as she removed her clothing deliberately. First the blouse, and then the skirt and the panties. She left the blue and yellow scarf knotted at her throat. She slipped out of the low heels and followed him into the bedroom.

He untied the belt on his bathrobe and let it drop to the floor. He retrieved the two pillows, one on the floor, the other askew in the middle of the queen-size bed, and arranged them neatly, one on top of the other, centered at the head of the mattress. He tossed aside the rumpled top sheet.

She said, "Is there wine?"

When he turned to face her, she was pleased to see that he was already erect. "Out in the living room," he said. He followed her to the bedroom doorway so that he could see her glide through his apartment. Although she could feel his eyes on her, she moved confidently, her posture tall and straight.

She saw the half-empty bottle of white on the coffee table, surrounded by three glasses: one empty, two with a few sips left in the bottom. She walked into the kitchen, confident that he would watch her rise on her toes and stretch to get two clean glasses from the top shelf of the cabinet to the left of the sink.

He watched her come back toward him, the bottle in one hand, the two glasses, crossed at the stems, in the other. She kept her arms at her sides as she walked, knowing how much he appreciated the way her breasts swayed in rhythm with her gait.

By the time she was at the bed, he was already in position, on his back, his fingers interlaced behind his head on the stacked pillows. She glanced down at his penis to be sure he was ready.

She placed the two glasses next to each other on the night stand and half-filled each one. She put the bottle down next to the glasses.

Slowly she sank onto the mattress, swinging one leg over him and settling on her knees. "Are you sure you can—so soon?" she said, the question a casual compliment. She knew the answer.

Unlacing his fingers and resting his arms at his side, he said, "Come closer and we'll see."

She bent at the waist, lowering her trunk until her palms rested on the mattress on either side of the stacked pillows. She felt his erect penis touch the inside of her left thigh. She pulled the thigh away and watched him smile. Her breasts were three inches above his face.

He lifted his head, slowly, and she pulled her breasts away. He laughed gently, and she smiled a little bit.

His hands came up and grazed her hips, his fingers lightly running up her flank and tracing the undersides of her breasts. He heard her begin to sigh.

His fingers slid down her sides, slowly, across her hips, then inward, toward her sex. She gasped when the fingers began to caress the folds of her vagina. He raised his head and kissed one nipple, and then the other.

She closed her eyes and reached between his legs, taking his penis and guiding it to her sex. She heard him moan. She held it steady and lowered herself onto it, the both of them beginning to breathe deeply.

They moved slowly in rhythm for a minute.

"Now?" she said, opening her eyes to gauge his response. He nodded silently.

As she untied the loose knot in her yellow and blue silk scarf and removed it from her neck, his hands came up and lightly stroked the underside of each breast.

She rocked up and down gently, pausing at the top of the movement when only the tip of his penis was inside her. She reached behind her and let the scarf trail across his scrotum.

"Now." He opened his eyes and lifted his head off the pillows.

She stopped rocking to concentrate on the task. She slid the scarf under his neck and adjusted it so that each end was the same length. She noticed his eyes fixed on her breasts as they swayed above his face.

He moaned softly as she knotted the scarf at the front of his throat and began to tighten it. She started to rock again, feeling his penis get even harder as she tightened the scarf.

His eyes began to close, his moans of pleasure becoming longer and lower. Steadily she tightened the knot at his throat.

His moans turned to groans and his hands lifted off the mattress as she pulled at the knot. After a few moments his eyes opened wide, and his hands reached up toward his throat. He appeared to be trying to shout, but he couldn't produce a sound. His fingers grasped at the scarf, but it was too tight against his throat. His eyelids began to close, as if he were falling asleep. The skin on his cheeks began to pale, then turn a faint blue. His hands fluttered in the air for a moment before falling to the mattress. He was no longer breathing.

Her face contorted as she pulled hard on the knot one last time, increasing the pressure and maintaining it for several long moments. She felt the bulge of his penis increasing inside her, exciting her more, even though he was now lifeless. Beads of perspiration formed on her upper lip as she rose and fell on his erect penis for another minute, until she climaxed. She paused, the sensation flooding her body.

She let go of the scarf, placed her hands on the mattress, near his shoulders, and began to rock back and forth again, her breasts almost grazing his still face. She lifted her hips, exposing the tip of his penis, paused, and then fell onto it, violently. She knew this time it would take only a few thrusts. Then, when it was over, she paused, breathing deeply, her eyes closed, her head bowed, letting the pleasure radiate through her body.

"What you did was wrong, Austin."

Gently she lifted herself off him. Standing next to the bed, she looked down at his beautiful, motionless body, his muscular chest and arms, the slim waist, and that wonderful, hard penis.

She untied the knot in the scarf and removed it from around his neck. She stroked the silk, trying to remove its creases. She tied the scarf loosely around her neck and walked over to the dresser with the mirror on top, leaning against the wall. Looking at her image, she smoothed the scarf again and, satisfied, walked into the living room, where she put her clothes back on: the panties, the blouse, the skirt, and the shoes.

She walked over to the coffee table, bent down, and with her forearm swept all the glasses onto the soiled grey carpet. They didn't break. She crushed one of them under her heel. Then she walked into the kitchen and swept the soiled dishes off the counter and onto the linoleum floor, where they broke with a satisfyingly clatter.

She went back into the living room and kicked the coffee table over, then lifted a dinette chair and swung it, shattering the table's glass top. She worked her way methodically across the small living room, upending, knocking over, and breaking every object in her path.

She was breathing heavily now from her exertions. She picked up her jacket from the floor and put it on, retrieved her purse from the small table near the door, and paused. She walked back into the kitchen and grabbed a paper napkin from the counter. She went to the door and rubbed the napkin across the knob twice as she left the apartment. She pulled the door shut and wiped the knob on the outside, and then put the napkin in her purse. She glanced down at the four other units in the brick building. There were no lights on in the unit next door. She walked at a moderate pace toward her car, which she had parked a block away.

Chapter 1

I'd gotten the call from headquarters a little before seven, which was twenty minutes before I was hoping to wake up. According to the sergeant, the body of a young man was lying on a bed in a shitty little apartment in a rundown five-unit brick building on a mixed commercial/residential block near campus. He was on his back, completely nude, with a huge erection. The death looked suspicious, the sergeant reported. I was curious.

The yellow tape was already up when I got there at seven-twenty. The edge of the sun was just visible, a yellow-pink smudge in the east against a pale blue sky. It was forty-five degrees. By five this afternoon, it would climb another twenty degrees. Spring is my favorite time here in the middle of Montana. In late April, you'll still wake up to frost, but you get a definite feeling the worst is over, that the plants and trees had somehow made it through another ungodly winter, that things would start to grow, that life would go on.

Not for the poor bastard in the apartment, of course, him lying there nude, mast up.

I have mixed feelings about starting a new case. I don't like it that someone got killed, of course, especially a young person. I'm a cop, but I'm still a person. More cop than person at this particular stage of my life, but still technically a person. On the other hand, I didn't miss the presentations to junior-high kids about why they shouldn't pop Mommy's Percocet.

The cars in front of the brick building told me who was already at the crime scene. The blue Mitsubishi belongs to my partner, Ryan Miner. Ryan is a handsome, well-adjusted, happily married father of two point five kids. He's been my partner for more than a year, which here in Rawlings has worked out to four or five murders. I've tried as hard as I can to dislike Ryan because he represents everything that I hate. Not the Mormon part. I don't give a crap how you try to figure out the Big Picture, or if you even try. That's your business.

It's that he is a superb detective: smart, strong, cheerful, totally committed to the job. Earlier this year, this asshole took a shot at us. Ryan pushed me out of the way and took the bullet himself. It ripped up his intestine pretty bad, and for a few days he was pretty close to checking out because the rest of your body apparently doesn't like it when all the shit leaks out of your large intestine. But the doctors blasted him with weapons-grade antibiotics, removed the torn-up part of the intestine and sewed the two ends together, and hooked him up to a colostomy bag while the whole thing healed.

After a couple months they stitched his plumbing back together and he was healing pretty fast, being young and otherwise healthy, but then he screwed it up by pushing too hard. He used to be a big-

deal athlete in college, and he could Krav Maga a guy onto the ground before I could get my pistol out of the holster. I think he was surprised and a little offended when that bullet didn't just bounce off him, so he started back into training before his doc okayed it and ended up ripping his gut, which set him back a few weeks. Now he's got this cane that his doc makes him carry around to remind him he almost goddamn died, so maybe he should try harder not to be an idiot by re-injuring himself more often than necessary.

The first few weeks after he was shot, after they got his infection under control, the scary part was he couldn't remember people's names and had trouble thinking of the right word. But he's at about eighty percent of his old self now, which puts him at about a hundred-and-fifty percent of me. He sets the bar so high I just walk under it. Don't even have to bend.

The busted, rusted minivan belongs to Harold Breen, our Medical Examiner. I love Harold. He's morbidly obese, with a perpetually sweaty scalp, stubble in his chin folds, and a belly sticking out of his plaid K-Mart polyester sport shirt because the bottom button popped off the first time he put it on. Harold has been with the department almost twenty years, longer than me. I don't believe he's ever blown an autopsy, screwed-up a court appearance, or gotten pissed at an alcoholic detective because she contaminated a body. And he never forgets that the stiff on the steel table used to be limber.

The 1968 Beetle, hand-painted in swirls black and white like a Holstein cow, belongs to Robin, our Evidence Tech. She's been with us four or five years. Those years have transformed her from a tall, freckled, strong-boned athlete with baby fat to a tall, freckled, strong-boned athlete without baby fat. She wears all kinds of jeweled hardware on her face—in her nose, up and down her ears, in her eyebrows. She frequently changes the color of the streaks in her blond hair, the only rule being that the color must not appear in nature. She curses more than me, which requires significant effort, and effortlessly drops the word *pubes* into quite a few sentences that would have been perfectly fine without it.

"Enjoy," said Officer Truman, opening the cheap wooden door with a metal "5" screwed into it. Right away I was hit by a funky smell, equal parts cheap white wine and hard sex. My gaze swept the room. The dead guy was a worse housekeeper than me. Scattered across the floor were busted glasses, dishes, framed pictures, and all kinds of books, wooden drawers, throw pillows, lamps, chair cushions, and a stereo, a TV set, a pizza box, and a few broken wine bottles. A glass-topped coffee table was on its side, one of the four legs snapped off, the glass in a thousand pieces on the grey-brown carpet. To tidy up, you'd start with a snow shovel.

Robin or one of the uniforms had already laid down the metal plates that we walk across at a crime scene. You see them more outside than inside, but the living room was so full of busted crap that Robin hadn't had a chance to tag and bag it all. I hop-scotched across the plates toward the bedroom. From its doorway I saw Ryan's broad back and Harold's broad front.

Ryan was standing by the side of the bed, hands on his skinny hips, his cane hooked on his wrist, the tip dangling in the air. As usual, he was wearing a real nice suit, dark, with a bright white shirt, button down. Today's tie was striped, some reds and a blue. He turned when he heard me. "Good morning, Karen," he said.

I nodded. "Still a little early to call it that," I said, "but, okay, good morning."

Harold Breen was kneeling next to the bed, his big frame blocking my view of the stiff. "Hello, sweetheart," he said, without looking up.

"Good morning, handsome." I glanced around the tiny bedroom. There was a cheap dresser with an unframed mirror sitting on top, leaning against the wall, a small closet with accordion doors, and the queen bed covered in a plain white fitted sheet.

One of the uniforms had covered up the vic with the top sheet. Harold had pulled the sheet down to the vic's waist and was looking at him. On the night table to the left of the bed was an almost empty bottle of white wine next to two half-full glasses.

I bent down to look at the glasses. I could see faint prints. It didn't look like anyone had drunk anything from the glasses.

"Robin been in here yet?" I said.

"No," Ryan said. "No touching, please."

"How come this room's okay and the living room's all busted up?"

Ryan smiled. "We're going to have to devote some thought to that, Karen."

"Don't you hate that?"

"No, actually." Ryan treated my crankiness like caffeine: he was fine with others indulging, but it was against his religion.

I walked around to the other side of the bed, carefully avoiding two Trojan wrappers, a pair of sex handcuffs covered in phony fur, and a foot-long black dildo as thick as an oar handle. It was a deluxe model with a set of balls molded into it and a couple leather straps attached to it. In the world of dildos, black is a more common color than you would imagine, given the demographics, I mean. I've never discussed the issue with black guys, so I don't know whether they think it's racist or just a compliment. I could see both points of view.

Having worked Vice, I'm familiar with all kinds of weird-ass toys, but in the typical bedroom it's mostly vibrators. I crouched down next to the dildo. There was some dried sticky stuff covering the first six inches or so of it. So either the dead guy partied with lesbos or he used the strappy dildo on his girlfriend because he didn't have a strapless bargain model. Or he figured out how to strap it on his own ass so he could drill two girls at the same time, each back-and-forth doubling as a forth-and-back. I don't even know if that's possible. I made a mental note to ask my ex-husband.

I stood up and looked down at the vic's face. He was a good-looking guy. I put him in his early twenties, with a long, straight nose, full lips, and strong cheek bones. Dark hair, thick and wavy, swept back, not parted, like he was moving forward and his hair was blowing back in the breeze. He had a moustache and goatee, carefully trimmed. The whole look said, Yeah, I'm a handsome son of a bitch, and I'm willing to make the effort. You're welcome.

"Jesus," I said as my gaze landed on the sheet covering his tent pole a couple feet south. "That's all him?" I said.

Harold turned to me. "You want to see?"

I sighed. "I have so little in my life, Harold."

He knew my story. He nodded in agreement, then pulled back the sheet.

This was one significant dick. It was circumcised, sticking straight up in the air seven or eight inches, couple or three inches across. His balls were as big as a good-sized Golden Delicious.

I'm not that into size as a measure of anything important, but any woman who looked at that package and didn't think, "Oh, my Lord, you have outdone yourself"—well, that woman would be dead, blind, or ... no, there's no third possibility: dead or blind.

"You done, Karen?" Harold said.

I was somewhere else. "Excuse me?" I said after a moment.

He lifted an eyebrow. "I asked if you're done."

"I guess so."

Ryan said, "Did you notice anything interesting?"

I looked at him. "You're kidding, right?"

"No hair," he said.

"What?"

"I said, 'No hair.' He's got no hair on his chest or his stomach. And no pubic hair."

I hadn't noticed. "You mean like he's got some kind of disease or like he shaved it all off?"

"My guess, Karen," he said gently, seeing that I hadn't completely re-focused my attention, "since he's got hair on his head and his face and his legs, is he liked to shave."

"Guys shave down there?"

"Not most guys, at least guy cops and guys who go to my gym, but apparently some guys."

"This is very interesting," I said. "Maybe I should look again down there."

Ryan nodded. Harold ignored me.

"Okay," I said, shaking the images out of my head, "so who was this guy?"

"He was Austin Sulenka, age twenty-four, apparently some kind of student here at Central Montana. He has a Montana license, with this place listed as his home address."

"How did he die, Harold?"

The Medical Examiner looked up at me. Then he pointed to the vic's neck, which had a pink band about an inch wide, as well as a big red-speckled bruise over the Adam's apple. "My guess is asphyxia. He was strangled. Or he strangled himself."

"During sex?"

"I think he was having sex, what with him being nude and on his bed."

"Plus the rod," I said.

"The rod might be nothing." He shook his head. "Could be a death erection. We used to see that quite a bit at hangings."

"Well, I'll be. So someone could have staged the scene to look like he was getting laid?"

"I'm only a doc. That's for you two to figure out. I'm just saying it could be a death erection."

"Wait a second," I said. I leaned my head down toward it, studied it for a few seconds, then walked around to the other side of the bed to examine it from another angle.

Ryan was looking at me. "I could ask Robin to print you an extra set of pictures."

"Very funny," I said. "Just wanted to see if this dick's seen any action lately."

"And?"

"Yes." I was a couple inches away from it, and I didn't want to bother trying to find my glasses in my big shoulder bag. "I do believe it has."

"Yeah?"

"If he was just jerking off, there'd be some balled-up tissues around, or some sticky stuff on his crotch or his legs or on the ceiling or the windows or something, but it wouldn't be all over the shaft where his hand was. This dick's got a clear high-tide mark on it." I paused. "Ryan, did you find whatever it was strangled him? It wasn't a set of hands, right?"

"No, I didn't find a cord or a belt or anything on the bed. Harold, can you tell if it was a set of hands?"

Harold shook his head. "If it was just hands, we'd see a pattern, particularly where the thumbs pressed in. No, it wasn't hands. The petechiae in front says it was a cord or rope or something like that. It was knotted, broke the blood vessels."

"So," I said, looking at Ryan, "this wasn't auto-asphyxiation, like he was jerking off, right?"

"Unless he used a noose, so he could strangle himself with one hand and jerk off with the other, he would need three hands: two to tighten the cinch around his neck and one to jerk off."

I noticed a tiny smile on Ryan's face, which probably meant he was making fun of me. I didn't mind. It was early; the shift hadn't officially started. Anything dumb I say before eight AM doesn't count. "He probably wouldn't have trashed his own living room."

Ryan put on the mock-thoughtful expression he used when I was particularly slow-witted. "So you find the trashed-living-room anomaly more troubling than the three-hand-masturbation paradox?"

"I have no idea what the hell you just said."