



# Betrayal in Blue

*Mamba Mysteries*

By

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*Betrayal in Blue is a work of fiction. All characters and locations, certain procedures, and the ultimate ending of this story are fictional. With the exception of verified historical events and persons, all incidents, descriptions, dialog, and opinions expressed are the products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real.*

*Any resemblance to actual events, police officers, criminals, or other characters on either side of the legal system is entirely coincidental.*

*In the late 1970s, a police officer in a city in the western United States was part of a task force against a violent criminal gang. The summary report from that task force to the police department was five pages long. The first four pages were a narrative of the task force's actions and results. It was released to the media for their use.*

*The fifth page was a list of task force members with annotations of their specific contributions. It remained in-house, at least it was supposed to remain in-house.*

*Somehow, a copy of the fifth page found its way out of police headquarters. Several task force members and their families were targets of anonymous threats, vandalism, and drive-by shootings. One member of the task force was directed to leave the city and his career in law enforcement after his family home and personal vehicles were riddled with bullets. The police department could not guarantee his family's safety.*

*That incident is the inspiration for this story.*

Dedication  
*To Leanne*







# Chapter 1

“Hand me the bomb.” Sid Brewster’s voice was calm. He extended his hands without turning his head. The stocky man lay on his back under the front chassis of a Matador Red 1968 Camaro RS. His skill ensured detonation after the driver was inside before the Camaro pulled away from the curb.

“Don’t make me look at you.”

His helper flinched at each word before handing over the bomb. “You want the duct tape now?”

“I don’t need tape.”

“How you gonna keep the bomb where you want it?”

In answer, the bomber slid out from under the car, stood, and pointed into the front driver’s side wheel well.

“I don’t see it.”

“You’re not supposed to. These tires are big and wide. The bomb is on top of this tire.”

“What if it falls off?” The skinny man jumped back in anticipation of an explosion.

“It won’t fall off, at least, not until someone’s inside. Then, it’s supposed to fall off. That’s when it blows.”

\* \* \*

The two men waited in the lengthening late afternoon shadows in an alley across the street from the Camaro. With the bomb in place, their job was to confirm the hit. The target was a male cocky enough to deal his drugs personally on their boss’s turf.

“Look.” Brewster pointed across the street.

“That the guy?”

The bomber nodded.

The skinny man squinted to get a clear view of the target. What he saw was a lone figure weaving his way through the shadows over the uneven sidewalk in a rundown neighborhood of what was once the city center of Manzanita, California.

No one watching the mysterious man would connect him to the Camaro. The already classic vehicle had over 100,000 thousand miles on

it, but the exterior was pristine. The condition of the owner reflected the wear and tear of a drug-filled life.

Thanks to Brewster, this rogue dealer was on his boss's radar. The amateur supplied pills to students at the three junior high schools, two high schools, and one community college in Manzanita. Sales were down. They dropped on Ash Wednesday and stayed down through Lent.

It was April 16, 1984, the Monday after Easter. Brewster's sales should be up because students back from vacation had cash and a need for speed. However, speed was something the rogue dealer offered at the lowest prices on the streets. Brewster's highest boss ordered the irritating amateur eliminated, which is why the two men waited to close the book on the renegade.

The free-lancing dealer's product was cheaper because it was less potent than what his competition offered. Lower doses meant buyers consumed more pills to get the desired effects, which led to more sales. Inferior product notwithstanding, he cleared more than enough money to feed his own heroin addiction. His current mental and physical conditions were the result of a recent heroin hit.

The line between daylight and darkness edged into gray and made it difficult to see. The two observers stepped out of the alley to improve their view.

When the supplier reached the Camaro, he stopped, swaying from side to side.

"This is taking forever."

"Patience," the bomber advised. "The guy's a junkie. He'll be lucky to find the pocket with his car keys in it."

"When will the bomb explode?"

"Might blow when he slams the car door. Might blow when he starts the car. For sure it will blow when the tires roll. Whatever makes it fall to the ground, the car and the driver are toast."

"Explain—"

"Shh. Looks like show time. Get your skinny butt to that payphone." He pointed to a booth a block away. "Now!"

It took six attempts at getting the door key into the lock before the supplier unlocked the door, opened it part way, and yanked the key out of the lock. After a pause, he pulled the door completely open.

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He slid onto the driver's side bucket seat and slammed the door.

Nothing.

Sid Brewster raised his hand and gave the signal to make the call.

Brewster's assistant nodded and swiped at his comb over.

The supplier turned the key in the ignition.

Nothing.

The supplier pushed in the clutch and turned the key.

Nothing.

He stepped on the accelerator. His foot slid off the clutch pedal. The car lurched forward.

The bomb on the driver's side front wheel dropped to the ground.

A glass tube filled with Mercury broke on impact.

Mercury spread between two electrodes, one linked to a detonator, the other to the explosives.

Less than two seconds after the car lurched forward, the bomb exploded. Windows in the empty building behind the bomber crashed inward. The folding door on the phone booth rattled and shook.

Parts of the Camaro and pieces of human body rocketed away from the detonation. A tire bounced off the wall of the building sheltering Brewster. White smoke erupted from the vehicle. It reminded Brewster of photographs taken from airplanes flying over Alaska's Mt Augustine when she blew her top. He swelled with pride.

On the sidewalk side of the car, shrapnel forced its way into the diamond-shaped openings in a chain-link fence. Slabs of sidewalk lifted, shifted, and returned to earth as a pile of rubble.

"9-1-1. What is your emergency?"

"I don't know how to—" the man in the phone booth paused for dramatic effect.

A second explosion announced the obliteration of the Camaro's gas tank. Enormous tongues of blue flame lit the sky. Orange and green flames came and went as sodium and copper ignited and burned away. Brewster found the sight compelling.

Glass rained down on the sidewalk where the bomber stood. He backed into a doorway, mesmerized by the havoc he created.

The door to the phone booth slammed open trapping the skinny man's size 14 shoe behind it. He yelped and yanked his foot from its

impromptu trap. The heel of his left foot crashed into his right ankle. He winced in pain.

“Sir, are you still there? Are you hurt?”

“I think I just saw a man die!” the assistant choked out.

“Why do you think someone’s dead?”

“He was . . . The car he was in exploded. There’s fire everywhere!”

“Where are you calling from?”

“I don’t know,” he lied.

“Sir?”

“I’m not from around here. I turned onto this street from a street called Los Ojos.” The man mispronounced the Spanish words intentionally.

“Is that Los Ojos, sir?”

“I guess so. We don’t have words like that in Des Moines. I was going West and passed Legion Road. Then I turned left. I was trying to find Hillside Drive.”

The operator paused. Static crackled in the man’s ear.

“I’ve got two squad cars on the way. Please wait.”

The call ended with a resounding click as a gloved hand slammed the handset into the holder.

“You got all your gettin’ from me, sister.” He stepped out of the booth, winced, and gave a cursory wave toward his partner.

His partner waved back.

The skinny man limped away from Brewster, cursing every time his right foot hit the sidewalk and jolted his bruised ankle.

The bomber watched only long enough to ensure his partner was following the plan then turned and took several steps in the opposite direction. He stopped involuntarily when the charred metal frame of the Camaro was across from him. He felt goose bumps form under his jacket sleeves and hyperventilated with excitement at the view.

“I gotta go,” Brewster said to the Camaro after inhaling and exhaling a calming breath. “Don’t worry. I won’t forget you.”

He began a brisk walk toward the corner of his street and Los Ojos Road. He turned left on Los Ojos. He’d stop at the first pay phone he came to before he got to Hillside Drive.

He dialed a collect call to Chicago.

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“Collect call from Manzanita, California. Will you accept the charge?” The nasal tones of the long-distance operator recited Ma Bell’s required verbiage.

“I accept.”

“Go ahead, sir.”

“This is Sid, um, Sidney Brewster. I guarantee the target is dead, sir. I watched him blow up.”

Sid listened.

“Thank you, Mr. Garmel. Goodbye, sir.”

As Sid Brewster hung up the payphone, he visualized a successful future in Garmel’s operation in his mind’s eye.

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## Chapter 2

“How much longer?” Anthony Garmel asked the stewardess in a tone of voice that reflected only a small part of his negative feelings for his mode of transport.

“Not long, sir. We should begin our descent momentarily.”

Garmel knew not long could be another half an hour. He sighed and focused on the shapely female as she returned to the galley.

A jab in his rib by the seat partner to his right brought his attention back from the swiveling hips of the stewardess.

“How’s the view?” the female voice of that passenger inquired.

“Not as good as this one.” He patted the leg of Jana, his traveling secretary, and sometime paramour. “And those aren’t just empty words.”

She smiled and turned to look out the window.

He looked at the Estate Rolex Daytona Cosmograph that adorned his left wrist. With three dials and two push buttons, the bulky timepiece was more show than go for the drug lord. He hadn’t pushed either button since the day he picked up the watch at the high-end jewelry store in downtown Chicago. As he rotated his wrist and admired the reflected light coming off the synthetic sapphire crystal, he knew those around him were covetous of his \$25,000 adornment.

Most of the time, Garmel’s life as a drug lord was a life he loved. He lived in a penthouse in a high-rise along Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. His view of Lake Michigan was spectacular. His standing in an expanding illegal narcotics syndicate assured his lifestyle would get better, if it changed at all.

He tried to focus on the reasons for this trip to St. Louis. What he accomplished there should help him monopolize the fast-growing California market. He tried to remember the name of the man he was meeting and failed.

Garmel sighed again. The passenger in 2A gave him a raised-eyebrow look. He shrugged in response. Resigned to his situation, he reclined his seat and closed his eyes.

Once on the ground, Garmel gave a cursory wave to the man he knew was his driver. He stood in a common area between gates in the

terminal and, much to Garmel's satisfaction, blended into the crowd. He didn't know the man's name, and didn't care.

"Jana, you grab a cab and check into the hotel. I've got to check where we'll be working. I'll join you for dinner."

Jana shrugged. She was used to being dismissed. She walked out of the gate area without looking left or right, a porter trailing behind her. She waited while a cabbie opened her door and the porter loaded her suitcases into the trunk. She tipped the porter and gave the name of a new jewelry store getting rave reviews to the cabbie.

The cabbie nodded and started the meter running.

Garmel joined his driver. The two men walked to the livery section of the terminal's passenger pickup area. When they arrived at the correct Lincoln limousine, the driver opened the back door. Garmel climbed in and slid across the back seat. Without thinking, he reached for a bottle of wine and a glass.

"I have the address of one of our properties in the industrial district as your drop point, Mr. Garmel. Is that correct?" the driver asked.

"Sounds like what I remember. Just get there, quickly."

"Of course, Mr. Garmel."

The ride was smooth, quiet, and swift. Although the neighborhood was less than desirable, the self-appointed executive was glad he'd be out and about soon.

Despite his bubble of euphoria, Garmel merely nodded to his driver as he stepped out the back door of his limo into the already warm St. Louis morning. The sun played hide and seek behind the cumulus clouds. They were all that remained of the fast-moving, low-pressure system that was on its way out of town, leaving behind a hangover of humidity that brought beads of sweat to his upper lip.

He walked up the sidewalk towards the door to the remodeled industrial suite that the St. Louis branch of his drug syndicate called home. Garmel was glad he had the foresight to bring a second shirt with him. He could already feel the trailblazing drops of sweat traveling down the sides of his trim body.

He reached the suite. Before he could knock, the door swung open. A man stepped aside, allowing his boss full access to the doorway.

"Gene, right?" Garmel asked as he passed.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Garmel. Gene Marcotti."



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Now that he saw the man, Garmel remembered Gene from previous visits. He was what the locals called a lieutenant. The man could be brutal. Garmel witnessed what he'd done to a customer with an overdue payment. He knew the man was a dedicated employee who would take a bullet for him, if necessary.

Copper! The metallic smell of dried blood assaulted his nose. He scanned the room and saw the cause of the odor. Ten pairs of handcuffs were secured to rods in one wall. Each hung with one cuff open.

“What do you call this place?”

“The Confessional, Mr. Garmel.”

“What happens if someone's reluctant to confess?”

“We've anticipated that. Let's just say that only happens once to a customer.” Gene gestured to a drain in the concrete floor.

Garmel reflexively made the sign of the cross at those words. Although he held control over all branches of the drug trafficking syndicate from Chicago to New Orleans, he was devoted to the outward evidence of his religious affiliation.

“May God have mercy,” he mumbled when he concluded his demonstration of piety.

“I didn't catch that, sir.”

“It was nothing. I was just talking to myself.”

“That could be dangerous, sir. Think what might happen if you were to talk in your sleep.”

“You ready to see the copies?” Garmel asked, ignoring his lieutenant's cautionary statement and carefully sliding a stack of papers out of the envelope he carried. He placed the stack on the glass-covered top of one of the few flat surfaces in the room.

“I am.”

The syndicate boss motioned to Gene and stepped back from the table.

“Mind if I glove up?” the man asked as he pulled two latex gloves from his jacket pocket. “I thought I might be asked to check the forgeries, so I came prepared.”

“Good idea.”

After a bit of a challenge in pulling the reluctant gloves over sweaty fingers, the lieutenant lifted the papers and began his inspection.

Garmel watched the man he inherited as part of his takeover of the St. Louis branch. While he didn't particularly care for his tendency to speak his mind, Gene was an asset. Although the way he carried himself made him an imposing figure, the close look revealed something; the man was average height. He wondered what Marcotti wanted out of life.

"Take more than a look. I tell you, these are good, real good."

"I suspected as much, sir. The price we paid for them was steep."

"What stands out to you?" Garmel asked after the man stopped surveying and began scrutinizing the pages.

"Same paper. Same typewriter element style. Even the edges of the pages are beat up a little so they look like they've aged as the rest of a file has. These should fool anyone who's not looking for forgeries."

"I am certain that they'll fool any jerkwater cop in California who checks them out." Garmel knew that someone in the Manzanita Police Department would read the entire file, not just the pages he had before him. They were copies reproduced as originals—with modifications. He took the papers back and, as he turned to put them down on the large oak desk behind him, added, "I'll stake my life on that."

"You know, we may be doing just that," Gene muttered.

"What did you say?"

"It wasn't important. But, I was wondering about the delivery guy. These perfect forgeries of yours are of no value unless the courier's in our pocket."

"There's no problem there," the boss assured him. "His son has leukemia. He needs money for medical bills."

"A sick kid?" The man's face morphed into a sadistic smile at the thought of the deliveryman's misfortune. It wasn't much, but the grin was enough for Garmel to realize that the man before him was most likely in charge of all confessions held in the room.

"Sick kids are great for insurance."

Garmel's eyes narrowed as he glared at Marcotti.

He wasn't sympathetic to the plight of others, especially others that could be used by him. Gloating only perpetuated the traditional myth of the brainless, classless Mafia-type Garmel despised. Anthony Garmel considered himself anything but stereotypical. He considered himself as a Renaissance man among savages.

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The clandestine drug lord always dressed impeccably. Clean shaven and smelling like expensive men's cologne, he was not to be mistaken for one who wrestled in the trenches.

Casual linen slacks and expensive silk shirts were his preferences. Overall, Anthony, never Tony, Garmel, formerly Garmelli, looked like a model for an exclusive men's shop. He didn't dwell on the unsavory parts of the family business; the necessary evils were collateral damage.

He wasn't sorry for the things he did, but he disliked it when others spoke of him as a criminal. He preferred the title businessman. To Anthony Garmel, distributing drugs was no more than a profitable business. He provided a good living for his employees in exchange for unwavering loyalty.

"We have to swap out the forgeries before the package arrives." Garmel paused and checked the address on the envelope. "Arrives in Manzanita, California, wherever that is."

"Why do we need leverage on a cop that far out west?"

"We might not. Brewster seems to have things under control. But this file's for a cop that is leaving St. Louis. These pages go in his St. Louis file."

"Seems like you've got all bases covered, sir."

"I'm confident we do, for all I've gone over so far. But, we also have an exact replica of the envelope that the originals are in." Anthony hefted a large, padded manila envelope. "And I have every brand of tape, glue, staple, or fastener produced in America. Once we open the original envelope and insert our pages of enhanced information, we'll seal this envelope exactly like the one picked up at the 9th Precinct."

"When's the exchange going down?"

"Tomorrow morning. The delivery truck picks up the envelope from Precinct Headquarters on," Garmel pulled a folded paper from his shirt pocket, unfolded it, and read what was written on it. "The pickup's on Juniper Avenue at eleven o'clock. We intercept the truck six blocks later at the light on 48th Street. We bring the envelope here and switch out the papers. We send our envelope to an unscheduled pickup point where it's returned to the delivery truck. Next stop is the airport where the delivery man drops it off."

"How can you be sure that the plane won't leave without our package?"

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“I have it on good authority that the gyroscope on that plane needs repairs, and they will not be completed until this is on board.” He displayed the padded manila envelope.

“I’m not an expert on gyroscopes, but I know that all this work is of no value to Mr. Brewster and the others out on the coast if something happens and that envelope isn’t delivered.”

“Don’t worry,” Garmel patted his colleague on his broad shoulders. Fire with fire was Gene’s go to strategy. It made him an invaluable asset that needed boundaries.

He slid the papers back into the envelope. “Nothing’s going to go wrong.”

\* \* \*

Weyland Krebs pulled his Security Express van to the curb outside the brick façade of the St. Louis Police Department’s 9th Precinct Headquarters building. The place was alive with activity. He was glad that most of his downtown stops had designated parking spaces right in front for deliveries. Businesses that lacked those spaces destroyed his company-imposed timeline and extended his workday without paying him overtime.

He sat in the driver’s seat staring at the door to the building he was about to enter. He liked his job, but he hated what he was doing today. His head throbbed. He’d gone through four extra-strength headache pills in three hours, but his head still felt like he’d squeezed it in a vise. He dumped another tablet into his hand, tossed it into his mouth, and swallowed it with the last swig from a cup of cold coffee.

He inhaled deeply, and his resolve solidified. He opened the door of the van and slid out.

He smiled and nodded at each police officer he passed. The last thing he needed was some cop remembering him because he looked preoccupied or uptight.

As the glass door swung shut, Krebs shot a quick look at his watch. He could spare only five minutes or the whole plan was in jeopardy. He offered silent thanks for the designated parking space.

“Anything for me today, Charlie?” the driver asked the Desk Sergeant.

“Hey, Weyland. How goes it?”

“Pretty good.”

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“You sure? You don’t look so hot.”

“Headache. Probably sinuses acting up.” He rubbed his right temple with two fingers in a circular motion.

“You’re not contagious, are you?”

“Naw, nothing like that. So, you got something for me or not?”

“Well, there’s this.” The Sergeant handed a padded manila envelope down from his raised desk.

Krebs took the package and feigned an entry in his log. The envelope was what he was getting paid under the table by Anthony Garmel to deliver.

“You sure that’s all?”

“Yep. Nothing but one lonely envelope,” the Sergeant answered. He wiped his brow with a large handkerchief. “Not that I’d mind going where it’s headed.”

“Where’s that?” Krebs asked as his heart rate slowed with the news of only a single item to account for in his log. The question indicated good manners on his part; however, the tone of the delivery of that question suggested a lack of interest in the Sergeant’s answer.

This was not the first time Anthony Garmel swooped in from out of town and told him what to do to earn the money he needed to pay for his leukemic son’s treatments. But, it would be only two more months until he would be eligible for Security Express’s medical coverage. Then he would stop taking the money from Garmel—forever.

A sharp pain shot through the deliveryman’s head. A burst of light flashed like fireworks inside his brain. He prayed it wasn’t the start of a migraine.

“I figured you guys always checked out where the stuff you picked up was going.”

“Sometimes,” Krebs admitted with a weak smile, which was the best he could muster through his headache. “Today my route’s so tight that I’ve got to keep moving.”

“Too bad,” the Sergeant commiserated. “That baby’s going to Manzanita, California.”

“Sounds like a pretty nice place to visit.”

“Anyplace without humidity sounds like a pretty nice place to me, and I’ve heard California is one of those places.”

“Yeah. No humidity does sound inviting,” Krebs said with a hint of envy in his voice.

“Inviting is just the word.” The Sergeant closed his eyes as he visualized palm trees and cactus, swimming pools, and short-shorts.

“Hey, Sarge, wake up,” Krebs called over his shoulder as he left.

\* \* \*

At the spotlight on the corner of Juniper Avenue and 48th Street, a white pickup truck with Hal’s Handyman Service printed on the doors pulled up behind the stalled Security Express van in the right-hand lane.

“Need a hand, buddy?” the driver of the pickup called as he walked up to the driver’s window.

“Looks like it,” Weyland Krebs admitted. “You know trucks?”

“Enough to keep mine in top shape.”

“I’ve got some tools in the back,” Krebs offered. The pickup driver’s answer to the question about knowing trucks was the correct one. He was thankful for that small favor. He rummaged around in the back of his van until he found the tool pouch provided by the company.

He took a deep breath, reached up to a shelf for the padded manila envelope, and stuffed it inside the tool pouch.

“Hope you don’t mind,” the pickup driver said. “I got my toolbox out of my truck.”

“No problem.” Krebs’ sat his tool pouch beside the stranger’s toolbox.

“Hand me a flat blade screwdriver, will ya?” the pickup driver called from under the short hood of the van. “The yellow-handled one.”

Krebs complied and then rubbed both temples simultaneously.

“This one’s too long,” the handyman/mechanic complained. “Could you get the one with the yellow and black handle?”

“Sure thing.” Krebs’ hands were sweating as he reached not into the toolbox but into his pouch and removed the padded manila envelope. He slid it into the toolbox of the pickup driver. When his hand emerged, the envelope was gone and he held a screwdriver in its place.

“Here you go.”

The handyman took the offered tool and disappeared under the hood again. “Give it a try now,” he called less than a minute later.

With his head pounding harder than ever, Krebs climbed into the van and turned the engine over. The motor roared to life.

“Thanks,” he called.

“No problem,” the handyman called back as he slammed the hood of the van. “Here you go,” he picked up both sets of tools and handed the tool pouch through the window to Krebs.

“Thanks again,” Krebs said to the back of the man as he headed toward his pickup. The good Samaritan dismissed him with a perfunctory hand gesture.

Krebs took a deep breath and exhaled slowly as he pulled into traffic. That was one more obligation he could cross off the list.

\* \* \*

It was early afternoon and Anthony Garmel was back at The Confessional. Final delivery of the packet to the suite was by a man in a white sports car. That man picked it up from a young lady in a cab who plucked it from a trash bin where the handyman in the white pickup deposited it.

Garmel focused on the task at hand. He didn't notice the metallic smell that hung in the air, a fragrant reminder of the room's primary purpose.

His latex-gloved hands removed layers of tape from the back flap of the manila envelope. The tip of his tongue protruded from between his teeth in intense concentration.

He finished peeling back the fourth and last strip of tape. He spoke to Jana who wrote down his words verbatim as she had for each preceding step in the process.

“The fourth layer overlaps the flap edge by...” he used a ruler to measure the amount of overlap and reported, “Half an inch. Metal brad is folded under the flap not poking through the hole in the flap. The flap is glued only at the center.”

With the envelope open, Garmel's gloved hands removed the contents. After substituting his forged pages for their originals in the same locations in the files, he listened while Jana read aloud in reverse, the descriptions she had noted concerning the seal on the envelope. He duplicated the layers of tape exactly on his replacement envelope.

A forger brought in by the St. Louis branch reproduced the address from the first envelope before he arrived. Garmel held the package aloft. After careful scrutiny, he came to a conclusion.

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“Only the police officer in the 9th Precinct who stuffed the original envelope might be able to detect the switch.”

Gene, always ready to help the big boss, leaned over and stared hard at the envelope.

“It’s very good. Even a policeman with forensics training might miss this one. You think they have forensics cops in California?”

“Who’s the first courier?” Garmel asked Jana, ignoring the frivolous question.

Jana pointed in the direction of a fidgeting young man in jeans and t-shirt who’d raised a hand in answer to the boss’s question about the courier.

“Put your hand down,” Garmel snapped. “You know where the drop is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Get going,” Garmel directed as he handed over the envelope. “And, remember, this package is worth a whole lot more than you are.”

The young man shivered, nodded, and fled.

The forgery changed hands three more times on its route back to the Security Express van. A tan, long-legged blonde in tight, white short-shorts, who knew only that she was doing her roommate’s boyfriend a favor, delivered the duplicate envelope to Krebs. The driver logged in the parcel at 3:35 p.m. the next open time slot in his log.

Not coincidentally, the mechanic installing a new gyroscope in the Security Express jet scheduled for the Los Angeles run finished his repair seconds after all California-bound parcels from Krebs’s van were hustled into the hanger.



## Chapter 3

A bright orange Security Express Delivery van dropped Garmel's package within the guaranteed timeframe at Manzanita Police Department's central offices. Before the morning break mandated by the Police Officers of Manzanita contract, the sergeant in charge of the records division opened the package, scrutinized the contents, and determined the final resting place for the file.

She made a mental note about the origin of the file. The Manzanita Police Department didn't get many newbies from east of Colorado. This made two from the same city in the Midwest in around five years.

After paper-clipping a note to the envelope directing the document room clerk to file it in the appropriate location, she dropped it in the tray for interoffice delivery. She reached for the next item in her In box when she realized she'd skipped one step.

Grabbing a packet of Post-it notes and a Sharpie, she printed in bold letters, "Copy only when requested in writing!" on the sticky square and slapped it on the envelope just below her previous message.

Satisfied, she returned the envelope in the Out tray.

\* \* \*

The first time Becca heard about a speedy party was in the hallway at school. She opened her locker door on clean out day. A half-page flyer floated off the shelf and onto the corridor floor.

She read it aloud.

"This summer you'll feel the need for speed! Good friends. Good time. Good stuff. Drop in for some fast-paced action. We're partying at 1542 Coulter Street. The last Wednesday of June, the last Wednesday of July, and the last Wednesday of August. The speedy party starts when you get there and ends when you leave!"

Embarrassed by the content of the flyer, she looked left and right. After a sigh of relief when she saw no one close to her, she decided to toss the flyer into the trashcan at the end of the bank of lockers on her way to the Council Area, the official name of the school's open quad.

Manzanita High School's nickname was "The Judges." Someone named common areas of the school for places in a courtroom. Their mascot was a giant gavel.

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“Eloise, like wait up!” she called to a friend as she turned the last corner waving the flyer like a semaphore.

Seconds later the flyer was still in her hand but the party forgotten as the conversation turned to what Gerald, who sat two seats in front of Eloise in U.S. History, might be doing over summer vacation.

\* \* \*

“I need to leave my undercover assignment.”

“I’ll need more than that. You’ve gotten more leads than any five previous undercover officers together at the high school.”

That was a backhanded compliment from Sergeant Stallings. Although she was thirty-one years old, the female officer passed her undercover-self off as a seventeen-year-old Junior at Manzanita High.

“Thanks. I think.”

“I still haven’t heard a reason to end your assignment.”

“Some kids, but more teachers are noticing things.”

“Things?”

“I’m not up on the latest slang.”

“So? That’s fixable.”

“I use out of date references too often. My U.S. History teacher suspects something. I’m sure of it. And he teaches Civics, too. I’ll probably have him next year.”

“I’ll contact the Principal and have her talk with the history teacher. What’s your alias, again?”

“Eloise. Eloise Cooper. I’m sure I saw something suspicious today.”

“That’s better.”

“There is one girl, Becca, that’s bonded with me. She’s shy, kind of a loner.” The undercover cop pursed her lips and wrinkled her brow as she formed her next sentence. She wanted to say the relationship had potential, but wasn’t sure girl had the same outlook.

“I saw a flyer for a series of parties today.” She held out her hand in a stop gesture to keep the sergeant from interrupting her. “They’re called ‘speedy parties.’ I didn’t get a good look at the flyer, and there wasn’t time to ask for a look with locker clean out and all.”

“Good.” Stallings ignored the locker comment. “I’ll put you on a cushy parking enforcement assignment over the summer. That will protect your cover. Keep in touch with that girl. You’ve got a phone number for her, right?”

She nodded.

“Call me if you get something actionable.”

Stallings pointed to his office door with his thumb, swung his desk chair around, and opened one of dozens of manila folders on the desktop. Eloise learned early in her assignment in narcotics that the umpire’s “out” sign meant “get out” in the sergeant’s world.

“Yes, sir.”

\* \* \*

It was easy for the undercover policewoman to get her friend to share the party flyer. It started with a lie when she called her the next week.

“Hi, Becca. This is Eloise.”

“I’m totally surprised! I didn’t think you’d call me.”

“I’m so totally bored,” Eloise responded, fairly certain the slang was appropriate.

“Like, I know how you feel. We’ve got nothing but hot days. Dude, I’ve got to help my parents with gardening!”

“That’s bogus!”

“I know.”

Eloise heard a clunk, dead air, then a rustling sound.

“I, like, got this flyer in my locker on locker clean out!”

“No way!”

“Way!” She read it to Eloise and added, “We totally need to party!”

“My family’s on vacation the last week in June ‘til the almost the end of July. I mean it’s, like, we have a camper shell and we drive slow and we stop where there’s, like, nothing! Then we visit old people in, like, Nebraska!”

“Not even!”

“Even!” There was no camper shell. Eloise wanted time to scope out the party house. “But, I’m totally with you in August!”

“Righteous!”

\* \* \*

Petula Jacobs’ father, an Army Sergeant, spent his last deployment in the military police in Wiesbaden, Germany. He and his buddies spent their leave exploring various European cities. On a trip to London, England, Sergeant Jacobs first heard a singer named Petula Clark in a

popular club. He described her as having “less noise and more polish” than most singers of the time. That night in the club was the first of many trips to London to visit clubs where Petula sang.

The Sergeant returned to the United States in 1956. Nine months after his return to Northern California, a daughter was born. Of course, dozens of boy and girl names were considered before the birth. But, when it came time to decide, the baby’s father won her naming rights. She was named for his favorite singer, Petula Clark.

The name wasn’t a problem in early elementary school grades. But by fourth grade, although Petula Clark was a celebrity due to the influx of British Invasion singers, Petula Jacobs learned to endure being “petted” like a favorite dog or cat. Junior high added mild sexual overtones to the nicknames. “Petting you a lot” was the favored derivation of Petula among the adolescent males in her classes.

High school brought expanded vocabulary needling. “Petulant” and “Petty” joined the list of nicknames she hated. She considered legally changing her name. When she turned 18 and could have done that, she decided Petula helped mold her into who she was. She vetoed her own name change idea.

An above average high school swimmer, she shifted her athletic interests to a sport on top of the water in college. She was the coxswain for the 8+ crew as a freshman and sophomore while she majored in seismology.

The study of earthquakes brought with it a new set of innuendo-inspired jokes, “I bet you can rock my world” and “I felt the earth move” being the most common. Thanks to her Petula-trained psyche, she fended off all suitors she wanted nothing to do with.

Late spring of her sophomore year brought the biggest change to her life plan. An intruder raped her roommate while Petula was studying in the library. Incensed by the act and determined to help other rape victims, she dropped out of college and entered the regional police academy.

After three years as a beat cop, she passed the administrative assistant skills test the first time she took it. Now, she was a middle-grade officer on the Manzanita Police Department. Her duty assignment was Confidential Assistant to Chief of Police Dwight Rogers.

Confidentially, she was Rogers’ mistress.

## Betrayal in Blue

This morning, Petula awoke to an empty bed. It was far from the first time, and, as much as she hated this feeling, she hoped it would not be the last. Some times together were better than no times together, even though fraternization within the Manzanita Police Department hierarchy—particularly the kind between two people, in secret, in the dark—was a dismissible offense.

She didn't know that she loved Rogers. She looked forward to their trysts. But, deep down, she didn't think she could live with his aura of pompous arrogance day after day, and, he had a wife in St. Louis.

She stretched, threw the covers back, and headed toward the master bath. When she flipped on the light, she found a note taped to her mirror. "Call Andy from my private line. Message: Pressure's on my hire. It's time for you to make your move."

Petula sighed. In spite of the Police Chief's interest in her physically, mornings after his visits were far from amorous. It took almost an hour for her to remove or disguise evidence of the man's presence in her apartment.

She'd grown to hate the one-sidedness of the affair and the morning after a night with Dwight routine. After throwing a dirty pair of argyle socks into her clothes hamper, she slammed the top closed.

Satisfied with her clean-up, she climbed into her sports car and made the short commute to Manzanita's Central Police Complex. She parked her car in her labeled space and closed the convertible top. After a brief primping glance in the rear-view mirror, she slid out of the driver's seat. She closed and locked the car door before smoothing her uniform skirt. She made sure the tight skirt hugged her hips provocatively even though it was a uniform.

She vowed to take control of her relationship with the Chief. With that thought in mind, she paraded across the parking lot. Once inside the building, she made her way to Rogers' office suite, exuding confidence with every step.

The suite was a two-room design with a comfortable waiting area and reception desk in the first room. This was Petula's domain. Among the accouterments was a hotel room refrigerator—with Perrier and sodas—and a coffee maker. On days when appointment volume was high, she ordered pastries from the local bakery as a courtesy to the Chief's visitors.

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The inner sanctum, as everyone called the Chief's private office, was impressive. The desk, credenza, bookcase, and conference table were polished cherry wood. Two secure filing cabinets with five-digit combinations and a paper shredder built into the back of the credenza completed the furnishings.

Once inside her office, she made coffee and checked her message machine. After annotating each message, she listed them by time and topic on a cover sheet. She placed the list of messages in the tray mounted to the wall outside his door. No one entered the Chief's office when he was not inside. Not even the cleaning crew had a key.

On her way back to her desk, Petula locked the hallway door. What she was about to do was for her eyes and ears only.

She pulled the note from Rogers from her purse and read the message twice. Satisfied that she had all the information correctly added to her memory, she shredded the note. Then she made the call.

"Mr. Anderson, please."

"I'm sorry, he's on a long-distance call. Would you like to leave a message?"

"I have instructions only to leave messages on Mr. Anderson's private machine."

"Not a problem. I'll connect you."

There was a click, a brief period of silence, another click, and then the greeting began.

"This is William Anderson. I do regret missing your call. Please leave a detailed message. If you have a specific time you'd like me to return this call, include it in your message. I will do my best to accommodate your wishes. Thank you for calling Anderson Pharmaceuticals."

Well versed on the protocol involved in these calls, Petula repeated her boss's message verbatim and hung up. Her surreptitious task completed, she yanked the pages from the previous two weeks from her desk calendar.

Her tasks completed, she unlocked the office door and returned to her desk. Once again, she smoothed her uniform skirt before and sat down. She was ready to face the day.

## Chapter 4

Hope Mamba was not a fan of public transportation. She understood the need to conserve fuel, but she remembered the 70s, sitting with her parents in their Ford Galaxy waiting for their turn to buy gas on an “even” day. She was sure today’s circumstances were the cause of that memory.

She sighed and looked down at the mystery novel that lay open on her lap. *A is for Alibi* by Sue Grafton adorned the cover. She checked it out from the “Female Detectives” section at the library. Kinsey Millhone was a tough, smart private investigator. Since Millhone’s fictional hometown of Santa Teresa was in Southern California, it was fun to imagine what she might have accomplished had she become a female version of Phil Mamba, her private eye husband.

Today, the ride to the office of Mamba Investigations was taking far too long. The office housed her husband’s business. It was her place of employment as well.

She wished she had her car. However, her car was in the shop because she ignored a warning light on the dashboard. She had no idea when the light began glowing amber. That frustrated Phil.

All had been fine until he took her car to the grocery to get some Pedialyte for their son, Jimmy. He’d been running from both ends all day and needed hydration. Since it was a Saturday, Phil agreed to stay with Jimmy the entire afternoon while she went to the mall with two girlfriends.

She’d pulled into their driveway after shopping. Phil greeted her at the door.

“Hi, sweetie,” he said and gave her a kiss. “Jimmy’s sleeping. I’m taking your car, because it’s blocking the garage door, and running down to Thrifty Drugs. I think he can keep fluid down now, and we’re out of that Pedi-something his doctor recommends.”

“Pedialyte,” Hope finished the name of the liquid. “Get a half-gallon of chocolate malted crunch ice cream, too.”

“I knew I married you for more than your spectacularly good looks,” Phil grinned and patted her bottom as he passed by.

Chocolate malted crunch was her husband's favorite ice cream, bar none. She liked it mostly because it was chocolate ice cream. The malt balls infusing the confection were okay. But the chocolate malt was to die for. Besides, she'd heard that chocolate was an aphrodisiac, and she was ready, willing, and able to have another child.

Phil returned from his shopping trip. She heard the front door and turned from watching *Facts of Life*.

"How long's the warning light been on?"

"Ummm," was the best she could do.

He lectured her on the reason cars have warning lights. It was something about people never understanding the gauges in older cars.

Phil dropped her car off early Monday morning and rode the dealer's shuttle home. He transferred from the shuttle to his car and drove to work. She'd been riding the bus since then.

Hope exited the bus two blocks from Mamba Investigations. She strolled along the sidewalk, giving cursory glances to various window displays before arriving at the office.

She was proud of her husband, his work, and his office. She smiled a devilish smile as she finished her list of prideful things with, a long look at the logo adorning the front window.

She had to admit that the idea for the logo on the window was Phil's. But, the logo itself was all hers.

She met Phil while he was still a detective with the Manzanita Police. He'd been investigating the death of her first husband. She remembered his awkward attempts at neutral conversation. She knew her feelings and suspected his. She moved to her left until she could see herself in the office window.

As satisfied as she could be with her appearance, she unlocked the front door, stepped inside, and flipped on the lights. Her desk was the focal point of the reception area. She'd decided on that design element when she began working for him. Working for him was her idea.

At first it had been good mental therapy. She enjoyed the work of coordinating the loose ends for a private detective—and there were plenty of loose ends to coordinate. But, in retrospect, she realized that there was more to her offer than the work.

She was certain that Phil liked her. Not in the romantic way she hoped for, perhaps, but they developed into a good team. Their



## Betrayal in Blue

relationship continued to develop, until the bomb went off. Glass shards flew everywhere including her leg. She shuddered at the horrific memory.

After the explosion, she awakened in a panic unable to form coherent words. Finally, she'd managed to ask if her baby was all right.

Just after they handed her a baby boy, Phil arrived, and the horrific memory evaporated.

A smile replaced the shudder as she poured herself a cup of the coffee, added sugar and cream, and went back to her desk. It was time to get her official workday going.

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