

## Sample chapter from

### *Ro's Handle (Book One in The Ro Delahanty Series)*

#### **Chapter Thirty-Eight / 10-14 – Prowler**

*Wednesday, August 20, 2003, 10:58 p.m.*

Ro turned the patrol car right out of the gun range's parking lot westbound onto Fairgrounds Road, heading for her patrol area. She was just reaching for the car's microphone to make her 10-41 call – *beginning tour of duty* – having already logged in as “in service” on the MDT, when something on the periphery of her vision to the right caught her attention.

The not quite year-old regional shooting range was only the first phase of a new law enforcement campus being built on county-owned land next to the fairgrounds on the outskirts of Lee's Landing. Construction had started on the second phase, a new regional jail, and they were waiting for final approval of the plans for the third phase, a new sheriff's department headquarters.

The area just west of the shooting range was a large construction zone, surrounded by one of those temporary chain link fences held down by sandbags. A full moon easily illuminated parked heavy equipment and piles of building materials, but also cast deep shadows between.

What had caught Ro's notice was the gate into the construction zone appeared to be partway open, and there had been what seemed to be a brief red glow near the back of the shooting range building, almost like someone had briefly tapped on a vehicle's brake lights.

Slowing the patrol car, she twisted to her right to look more closely, scanning for any movement or another flash. There was none.

“Probably nothing,” Ro muttered to herself.

While not all change necessarily means trouble, for a cop, things out of place means stop and take a look, check it out...

Pulling over on the right shoulder, Ro swung the patrol car into a U-turn. When she got back to the driveway leading into the construction site, now on her left, she turned off the headlights.

*If some unauthorized person is on the site, no sense warning 'em I'm coming.*

Stopping in front of the gate, Ro picked up her microphone. “Armstrong One-Nine.”

“One-Nine go,” the dispatcher acknowledged. It was Lisa Jarvis; Gwen Teague apparently wasn't at the dispatcher's desk quite yet.

“Checking for a possible 10-14” – *prowler* – “behind the new shooting range off Fairgrounds Road. 10-78” – *send backup* – “10-40” – *silent, no siren*.

“One nine, 10-78 10-40,” Jarvis confirmed.

Sliding out of the patrol car, Ro pushed the gate open slowly, making sure it didn't squeal, then, getting back into the car and putting it in gear, let it roll forward slowly at idle speed.

Front, right, left, rearview side mirrors...

The completed shooting range was on the east side of the site, now to her right, and the still under-construction jail was on the western side, now on her left. The site for the future sheriff's headquarters was in between, which was where most of the building materials had been stacked and equipment parked, partially obscuring her view of the shooting range.

*What was that?*

She'd seen a tiny red glow through a space between a front-end loader and a stack of concrete blocks, ahead but off to the right, behind the shooting range. There it was again.

*Jesus, whoever's out there must be smoking a cigarette!*

In order to get to where the intruder was lurking, it meant driving the patrol car another hundred plus feet, then turning right for maybe another hundred feet behind the construction equipment. Knowing the car's crunching on the gravel drive, to say nothing of the rumble of its engine and its bright white panels and distinctive silhouette lit-up by a full moon, would alert the intruder to her presence, Ro stopped the car, turned it off, and decided to approach whatever might be out there on foot.

Ro left her mini-LED light in its pouch on her belt, as the moonlight threw more than enough light to see; she didn't draw her weapon.

Figuring hunching over and furtively dashing from cover to cover, military style, might only draw attention, Ro walked upright and slowly, keeping to the shadows as much as possible, moving silently through the grass and weeds, avoiding the gravel driveway itself.

Turning to her right behind the construction equipment, she could see what appeared to be a pair of light-colored cargo vans parked side-by-side maybe forty yards ahead at the back of the building, their rear double doors open wide.

*They would certainly account for the brake light glow...*

## Chapter Thirty-Nine / Bad Move, Buddy

*Wednesday, August 20, 2003, 11:04 p.m.*

Suddenly a shadowy figure emerged from in front of one of the vans. But his demeanor was not of someone on guard, on alert, but rather someone who was bored and not paying attention. There was a brief red glow from a cigarette, clearly illuminating a face hidden by some kind of mask. She could also see the distinct silhouette of a short, carbine-like rifle slung over his shoulder.

*Shit!*

Quickly and silently sliding into a shadowy area near an eight-foot-high stack of piping, Ro pressed the transmit button on the microphone clipped to her shoulder epaulet and whispered, “One-Nine. 10-32” – *man with a gun* – “I say again, 10-32.”

“10-04 One-Nine,” the dispatcher, now Gwen Teague, said into Ro’s earbud, her voice tense. Ro knew this new information would now be passed along to the back-up on the way to her location.

*What the hell’s going on here? Two vans... So, this guy can’t be alone. Where’re the others? What the hell are they after?*

Then Re knew. *Ah, the guns!*

Someday, when the new sheriff’s headquarters was done, the shooting range’s gun vault would stow all of the department’s weapons, including the deputies’ issue Sigs, shotguns and SWAT-style carbines. For now, it usually held only the retired Berettas and a dozen replica Western-style Colt 44s, leftovers from former Sheriff Lefty Struve’s “posse,” a showy, horse mounted group of volunteer deputies decked out in full Western get-up, complete with tie-down gunfighter-style holsters and Colts, that made appearances in parades and county fairs, hardly a worthwhile objective for a grab.

However, ever since the infamous shootout with a gang of bank robbers in North Hollywood six years ago, where the bad guys armed with assault rifles had completely outgunned local cops and their small-bore handguns, there had been lots of interest in equipping police officers with more potent firepower.

The Iowa State Police had recently arranged a series of demonstrations around the state for local law enforcement agencies to test a variety of such weapons; several types of assault rifles, some even with full auto capability, and sniper-type long guns. The eastern Iowa demonstration was scheduled for this coming Saturday at the Regional Firearms Facility.

*The guns for this weekend must’ve arrived today, Ro figured. Now those would be a valuable target.*

Deciding speed was now more critical than stealth, Ro stepped into the driveway and started walking quickly toward the vans, drawing her weapon, but still holding it down at her side. A part of her grasped she was supposed to be frightened, having been on the job barely eight weeks and now facing an armed perp. Most cops went years before ever having to unholster their weapon.

While keyed up and alert, adrenaline was certainly taking care of that, she was not frightened, or at least was not conscious of it. There was this armed stranger who wasn't supposed to be there, and there were probably others, *they* were her center of attention right now, not her own feelings.

Now a dozen feet behind but slightly to the right of one of the vans, the perp was out of sight, having wandered around in front of the vehicle. Ro moved to her right, closer to the building, to get a better angle to check if he had any companions but couldn't see any.

When he reemerged from in front of the van, she raised the Sig in a two-hand grip, and said in a commanding tone, "I am a Deputy Sheriff! Immediately but slowly raise your hands over your head!"

Taken completely by surprise, the intruder froze in place. Suddenly his casual body language tensed and there was a look of recognition in his eyes, then surprise and then something like contempt, like he was thinking, *Hell, I can take this stupid bitch cop!*

Ro also saw he was wearing a bullet resistant vest and that his right hand had twitched upward toward the automatic holstered on his right hip; it looked big enough to be a .45.

She raised the Sig so he could see the large dark and menacing hole at the end of the barrel, and said, rather quietly, "Don't!"

He let his hand drop back to his side.

Taking a couple of steps forward, now a dozen feet from the intruder, she said with distinct purpose, "Put your hands up where I can see them, very slowly drop to your knees, then lie face down with your arms out at your sides." Keeping the Sig's barrel pointed steadily at his face, she added, "Whatever you're doin' here ain't worth dying over."

He complied, sort of...

While Ro knew she should probably wait for backup, that taking this guy on single-handed was not smart police procedure, she also didn't know how many more there were or if they were in the building, or if Pops might be in trouble and if time was critical. In her thinking, that was too many "ifs" to excuse any delay.

Approaching the prone figure from his right, intending to first slide the rifle off his shoulder, then remove the pistol from his belt holster and finally cuff him, when she leaned over, he made his move, suddenly flipping over on his left side and swinging his right foot around, trying to kick her in the head.

Always good at spotting "tells" in her judo competitions – little moves people had telegraphing what they were going to do – out of the corner of her eye Ro had seen him ever so slightly cock his foot back and so was ready. Darting back a step, she let the foot fly past her face, then stepped in and kicked him in the groin, hard, figuring it was a more humane move than shooting him or cracking him over the head with her gun butt.

He doubled over in agony, grasping his crotch, a painful groan escaping his lips.

“Bad move, buddy,” she said, but without sympathy. It didn’t take long to disarm him and truss up his hands and feet with two plastic flex cuffs from a pouch on her kit belt. She pulled off his ski mask – *Jesus, this turkey’s my age!* – wadded it up, and stuffed it in his mouth. Then, patting him patronizingly on the head, whispered in his ear, “I’ll be back,” grinning to herself at the irony of the “tough guy” movie reference.

Looking around, Ro spotted a stack of what looked like forms for concrete walls some twenty feet away and dropped the perp’s carbine and handgun in the shadows behind it.

Wondering how this guy’s buddies might have gotten in, she found a fire door at the back of the building slightly ajar, with the doorframe and door itself having been chewed up, forced open by some sort of pry bar.

## Chapter Forty / Shootout

*Wednesday, August 20, 2003, 11:14 p.m.*

Just inside the fire door was a small landing, a door immediately on the left clearly leading into the main floor of the building. The front, street-side section of the first level housed a wide, glass-fronted entrance foyer, several classrooms, washrooms, and a small office complex. However, the major portion of the rear part of the main floor was a large, climate-controlled warehouse for old county records that had been transferred from the basement of the courthouse downtown. Ro recalled reading in the paper about the county seeking a grant to pay to have all the records digitized and eventually made available online.

Directly across the landing a set of stairs led downward to the shooting range level, which took up the entire below grade floor. She knew here at the back of the building was the heavy backstop apparatus for bullets, the firing line at the other end, some hundred and fifty feet away, it being a standard seventy-five-yard pistol range.

Descending the stairs carefully and not knowing exactly what was waiting ahead – how many of them there were and what kind of fire power they might be carrying – Ro again unholstered the Sig, holding it in the official two-handed, ready-to-fire position, but still pointed at the floor.

A long, narrow, tunnel-like hallway stretched out from the bottom of the stairs. Overhead there were lots of pipes and what looked like heavy duty electrical conduit. On the wall to her left, which was common with the shooting range itself, were big, fan-like structures, probably part of the ventilation system. Small light panels spaced every twenty feet or so high along the right wall provided dim, but sufficient light to see. At the far end was doorway slightly ajar, as there was a thin sliver of brightness on its left.

Fortunately, the hallway's bare concrete floor was clean swept, so her boots were virtually noiseless as she quickly and warily moved down the hall.

A little over halfway along the passage, she heard a loud voice. Though unable to make out the words, it clearly sounded angry.

Arriving a few feet from the doorway, there was what sounded like someone being punched or slapped, followed by a grunt of pain.

*Pops!*

Without hesitating, Ro kicked the door open, stepped through and, swinging the Sig up, in less than a second took in what was going on.

The spot in the shooting range's foyer where just a few minutes ago she and Pops had been working on the Berettas was twenty feet ahead and a little to her left, the firing line directly on her left. Pops was still behind his worktable, a couple of assembled guns and loaded magazines still laying on it; her table was cleared.

Pops was still in his chair, but his hands were now straight down at his sides, yellow flex cuffs holding his wrists to the chair's back support. There was a trickle of blood on his lower lip.

Standing in front of Pops was a perp with his right fist cocked back, his face hidden by a ski mask.

*You fucker!* Ro thought, and had to exercise every ounce of self-restraint to keep from taking the top of his head off right then with a .357 slug.

A second perp, also wearing a ski mask, was standing a little back from and to the left of Pops, looking on, almost straight in front of her. While his back was to her, she could still see the barrel of the assault rifle he was carrying across his chest poking out to the left.

To her left a third perp, also ski masked, was positioned more or less directly behind the first perp, also looking on. However, because he was half facing her, he was the first to see her explode through the door.

Even before she had a chance to shout, “Deputy sheriff! Raise your hands!” the perp shouted, “Fuck! A cop!”

*Crack-ack-ack!*

*Bang! Bang!*

The distinctively sharp reports of Ro’s Sig firing three times were so close together they sounded more like one unusually long shot. They were followed instantly by two shots from an assault rifle that sounded like a couple of cherry bombs going off. Since both the foyer and shooting range had been specially covered with sound absorbing material, there was no echo.

In the instant after the third perp had reacted to her presence, Ro saw him start to turn toward her and raise his assault rifle, which he was carrying across his chest hanging from a military-style shoulder harness. He was by far the most immediate threat.

Because the perp outside had been wearing a bullet resistant vest, Ro assumed these guys were as well. So, she went low with her shot, aiming just under the upswinging rifle, her slug slamming him right in the area of his solar plexus.

The massive power of the .357 magnum was as if a big-league hitter had whacked him across the belly with a full force home run swing. The perp doubled over, but was also thrown backward, falling on his butt and skidding some eight or ten feet down the length of the foyer, finally flopping on his side, clutching his belly, gasping for breath.

Meanwhile the second perp in front of her, surprised by his compatriot’s shout, at first twisted his head right and left to see what was going on behind him, but then started to turn counterclockwise in order to bring his rifle to bear. Since he had a fraction of a second more time, his finger found the trigger on the rifle and he got two shots off. But, because Ro’s shot got there at exactly the same time, his shots just punctured two holes in the foyer’s ceiling tile off to Ro’s left.

However, her bullet hit where she’d aimed it, smashing into his vest just inside his left shoulder. Because he’d already been turning in that direction and was off balance, the shot spun him around and slammed him face first into the heavy steel door of the closed gun vault just a couple of feet behind. He fell backward, stunned.

The third perp, in front of Pops, who was not carrying an assault rifle, instead reached for the automatic holstered on his right hip and started to twist clockwise toward Ro. With him it was a

tough choice. Because he hadn't turned very far, his vest was still at a right angle to her, so there was the real possibility a center mass shot she might try could just ricochet off the vest and hit Pops, who was only eighteen or twenty inches in front of him.

So, Ro chose to take out the perp's gun hand instead. Her slug slammed into the middle of his right hand, which had been wrapped around the butt of his partially drawn .45, first smashing the gun up against the side of his vest, then sending it crashing to the floor and throwing him across the table Pops had been working on. With arms and legs flailing, he finally tumbled off the table and on to the floor, clutching his bloodied hand, moaning.

It was all over in not quite two seconds.