

# **The Hunter**

**Robert Hunter, prequel**

**by Chris Carter, ...**

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, events or locales, is entirely coincidental.



## Chapter 1

'You have got to be kidding me,' Detective Scott Wilson of the LAPD Robbery Homicide Division said, as if he'd just heard the world's unfunniest joke.

Wilson was standing inside Captain William Bolter's office, staring at the piece of paper the captain had just handed him.

'You're dumping a suicide case on me, captain?' Wilson asked, still looking dumbfounded.

Captain Bolter was in his mid-fifties, but looked at least ten years younger. Tall, strong, and sporting a full head of peppery hair together with a thick mustache, the man was a menacing figure, respected by everyone in the force. He looked at his detective and shrugged matter-of-factly.

'What are you complaining about?' he said, returning to his seat behind his large and very messy desk. 'I thought you all liked easy cases.' He nodded at the piece of paper in Wilson's hands. 'They don't come much easier than that. The woman sliced her wrists and bled to death in her bed. It's an open-and-shut case.'

The law in the state of California stipulated that suicides had to be initially treated as homicides; therefore, a homicide detective would have to attend the site and commence investigative procedures to rule out foul play. Once that was done, the investigation, as far as the LAPD Robbery Homicide Division was concerned, could be closed and archived. It would be the work of twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

'Yeah,' Wilson said, placing the piece of paper back on the captain's desk. 'I love open-and-shut cases, but suicides are a hell of a lot of paperwork, captain, and you know it. Paperwork that needs to be done and filed ASAP.' He pointed to the main detectives' floor. 'I've got fourteen open homicide investigations sitting on my desk right now, captain. I'm up to my eyeballs in crap. I barely have time to take a piss, and you want me to throw one, maybe two days away because some rich bitch topped herself?'

'Well, somebody's got to do it.'

'Give it to Perez,' Wilson suggested. 'He loves paperwork.'

'Perez is in hospital. He took a bullet last week, remember?' Captain Bolter shook his head. 'Sorry, buddy. You're it. I've got no one else.'

A knock came to the captain's door.

‘Come in,’ the captain called out.

The door was pushed open by a young man in his mid-twenties, wearing a dark suit that looked rather uncomfortable on him. He was about six-feet tall with broad shoulders and a very powerful-looking physique. His youthful face had a certain serenity to it, the kind that suggested trustworthiness and determination. His eyes possessed a penetrating quality easily associated with self-confidence, but not the cocky kind.

‘And who the hell might you be?’ Captain Bolter asked, narrowing his eyes.

The young man stepped inside, closed the door behind him, and approached the captain’s desk. ‘My name is Robert Hunter, sir, I’m your new detective.’ He handed over several signed forms he had brought with him.

‘Wrong floor, kid,’ Wilson said, pointing at the door again. ‘This is the Robbery Homicide Division—the big boys. You’re probably looking for Commercial Crimes or Support. Both of those are two floors below.’

Hunter nodded. ‘Yes, I know, thank you, but I’m on the right floor, and in the right division.’

Wilson chuckled. ‘You’re joking right? You don’t even look old enough to shave.’

Hunter wasn’t surprised by Wilson’s skepticism. In average it took a LAPD officer at least six years of street-crime-fighting before he was allowed to put in a request for a detective’s position. If successful, it would then take a detective another four to five years, together with an impressive track record and a captain’s recommendation, before he’d even be considered for a position with the Robbery Homicide Division’s elite. And even then, very few were accepted into the RHD. The division was considered to be the top of the ladder when it came to being a LAPD Detective. Wilson had never heard of anyone younger than thirty-something reaching that position.

Hunter was also well aware of that fact. His main goal, once he’d joined the LAPD, was always to make Detective for the Robbery Homicide Division. Deep inside he had to admit that he was very proud of having scorched through the ranks at record speed.

Captain Bolter had forgotten all about the new detective who was supposed to be starting today. Some sort of prodigy kid with a PhD in Criminal Behavior Psychology, who, according to what the captain had been told, had turned down a position with the FBI to join the LAPD.

The captain quickly flipped through the forms. The young detective’s records sure looked impressive, and all the documentation seemed in order.

‘Is this for real, captain?’ Wilson asked, pointing at Hunter. ‘Baby-faced, pretty-boy, bible-salesman-looking kid-in-a-cheap-suit here is joining the division?’

Hunter frowned and looked at his suit. He liked that suit. It was his best suit. His only suit.

‘That’s what the paperwork says,’ the captain agreed, placing the forms down on his desk.

Hunter turned and faced Wilson. ‘Robert Hunter,’ he said, extending his hand. ‘It’s a pleasure to meet you, detective...?’

Wilson ignored the newbie’s hand. ‘Yeah, I’m sure it is.’ He was still looking at Captain Bolter. ‘Damn, are we recruiting out of kindergarten now, captain? Is the department that desper...’ He paused, his eyes settling on the piece of paper he

had placed on the captain's desk just moments ago. 'Problem solved,' he said, shrugging at Captain Bolter and reaching for the note.

The captain hesitated for a split second and then shrugged back as if saying 'why not?'

Wilson turned towards Hunter. 'I'm Detective Wilson, but you can call me *Sir*,' he said, handing the note to Hunter. 'Welcome to the Robbery Homicide Division, pretty boy. Enjoy your first easy case, because it will only get worse.' He paused before reaching the door. 'Oh, and do me a favor—get rid of that cheap suit, will you? You look like an idiot.'

## Chapter 2

The apartment was on the twenty-eighth floor of a towering block in Cypress Park, a working-class neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles.

Hunter exited the claustrophobic elevator and found himself at the end of a long corridor with brick walls, lined with doors on both sides—twenty-four in total. A strip of tube lights that ran down the center of the ceiling kept the hallway bright. The apartment he was looking for was number 2813, located about halfway down the corridor on the right-hand side. A uniformed officer was standing just outside the door. He looked bored. Hunter proudly flashed his new and shiny Detective's badge at him and pushed the door open.

The first thing he noticed was that the safety chain hung from the door, its wall mounting dangling from the chain's end. The doorframe had cracked and splintered where the four screws had once secured the metal mounting to the wood.

'We had to kick it open,' a senior police officer standing in the living room explained.

Hunter turned and looked at him.

'I'm Officer Travis,' the policeman said. 'My partner and I were patrolling just a block from here when we received a call from Central Bureau's dispatch to come knock on the victim's door. Her mother, who is confined to a wheelchair, had been unable to get in touch with her for three days, which I know, isn't that unusual, except for the fact that the daughter visited her mother every Monday without fail. Had done so for the past two years. According to the mother, if the daughter were going to be even a little late, she would always let her mother know in advance. If her car had broken down or something, she would've called. This afternoon the mother called the station worried sick. The daughter is bipolar, which can sometimes complicate things.'

Hunter's eyebrows arched.

'Anyway,' Travis moved on. 'We came by, knocked, but got no response. We called the building's superintendent, who unlocked the door for us, but the safety chain was on, and there was this faint smell of putrid meat coming from somewhere inside. Obviously something was wrong. That was when we rammed the door and broke in. We found the daughter in the bedroom.' He threw his thumb over his shoulder, pulling an *I'm sorry* face.

'Had she attempted suicide before?' Hunter asked.

'If she had, it wasn't mentioned.'

Hunter nodded and allowed his eyes to circle the living room for an instant. It was spacious enough, decorated on a budget but with plenty of style. A black leatherette sofa, positioned at the edge of a fluffy black and red rug, faced a shiny black and white TV module. There was also a glass and chrome four-seater dinner table, a chest of drawers that matched the TV module, a stylish black console by the window, and a very elegant bookcase with no books, just decorative artifacts like vases, glass bowls and candle holders.

Crossing to the other side of the room, Hunter slipped on a couple of blue, plastic shoe-covers, a pair of latex gloves, a mouth and nose mask, and pushed the bedroom door open. Officer Travis followed him in.

The air inside the bedroom was hot, stuffy, and heavy with the sickening smell of dead flesh as it entered rotting stage.

Hunter's attention was immediately drawn to the queen-size bed with its headboard pushed up against the north wall. Lying on the blood-soaked bed sheets was the naked body of a five-foot-six brunette woman. From the note Detective Wilson had handed him, Hunter knew that she was only thirty-three years old. Her name was Helen Webster, and she was a self-employed interior designer.

A Medical Examiner was standing by a dresser unit near the window, quietly speaking on his cellphone. He quickly terminated the call as he saw Hunter and the officer enter the room.

'Are you from Homicide?' he asked, looking a little dubious.

Hunter nodded and quickly introduced himself.

The doctor looked surprised but he refrained from asking the detective how old he was.

Hunter approached the bed, being careful to avoid the large pools of dried blood that had formed on the floor. The curtains on the window to the left of the bed were speckled with blood, and so were both bedside tables. Hunter noted the pattern, before his attention reverted back to the woman.

Blisters, caused by the release of gases from body tissues, had already started to form all over the woman's body. Her skin had taken on a greenish-blue color, but body bloating was still in its very early stages. That, together with a few blowflies buzzing around the bed, told Hunter that she'd been dead for at least thirty-six hours. She was lying on her back. Her legs were close together and stretched out. Her arms were wide open, as if she was ready to hug a long-lost relative, but her wrists had both been cut horizontally. Two large and deep incisions that had clearly severed the main blood vessels in the forearms.

'Rigor mortis has come and gone,' the ME said. 'From the state of the body I can tell you that she's been dead for no less than thirty-six hours, and no longer than seventy-two. We'll be able to get a better time frame after the autopsy.'

Hunter nodded, still studying the body. 'What did she use on her wrists?'

'This.' The doctor showed Hunter a clear plastic evidence bag. Inside it was a blood-covered utility knife. 'It was on the floor by the right side of the bed,' the doctor clarified.

Hunter bent down to get a better look at the woman's hands, wrists, and arms. 'She's been photographed, right?' he asked. 'Is it OK if I disturb the body a little, Doc?'

The doctor nodded before shrugging. 'Suit yourself. My work here is pretty much done.'

Hunter used his index finger to clear some of the dried blood from the woman's wrists, and took his time examining the cuts.

'The incisions were deep and precise,' the doctor offered. 'Even before the autopsy I can tell you that they have severed both the radial and the ulnar arteries. Blood loss was intense and fast. Over fifty percent, I'd say.' He indicated the pools of blood on the floor. 'Which would have caused her to go into hypovolemic shock, leading to heart failure.'

'Was there a suicide note?' Hunter asked.

'None that we have found,' Officer Travis replied.

Hunter found that peculiar but carried on studying the woman's hands and fingers.

'Now,' the doctor said, approaching the body. 'Let me show you something interesting.' From his coat pocket he produced a pen-sized Maglite and a small magnifying glass before using his thumb and index finger to pull open her eyelids. 'Have a look,' he said.

Hunter moved closer.

Travis followed.

Her corneas were cloudy and opaque, which was expected, but the eyes and their lids were dotted with tiny red specks.

Hunter frowned. 'Petechiae?'

The doctor looked back at him, impressed. He wasn't expecting a detective to recognize the condition he was looking at, especially such a young detective.

'Pâté... what?' Travis asked, trying to look over Hunter's shoulders.

'Petechiae,' the doctor repeated. 'They are tiny hemorrhages in blood vessels. They can occur anywhere in the body, and for a number of reasons, but when they occur on the eyes and eyelids like we have here, it is usually due to blockage of the respiratory system. In other words—suffocation.'

Hunter stood up again and started looking around the room.

'What?' The officer's gaze moved from the doctor to Hunter, and then back to the ME. 'But you just said that she died from severe loss of blood and heart failure. Are you now telling me she was strangled?'

'Not to death,' the doctor clarified. 'She did die from blood loss from her wrist wounds, which led to heart failure, but this indicates that she suffered some sort of severe blockage of the respiratory system prior to death.'

Travis chewed on his bottom lip and looked at Hunter once again, who was now having a look inside a shoebox on the floor by the dresser unit.

'So what are you saying?' Travis asked with a slight headshake. 'That she first tried strangling herself or something, gave up halfway through, and then went for *plan B*—slicing her wrists?'

'No,' Hunter replied, checking some drawers. 'Someone else knocked her unconscious by suffocating or strangling her, before slicing her wrists and staging the suicide scene. This...' He indicated the body on the bed. 'Was a homicide.'

The officer's eyes widened in disbelief. 'A homicide? But the only way in or out of this apartment is through the front door.' He threw his thumb over his shoulder again. 'It was locked from the inside, remember? The safety chain was securely in place. We had to kick the door in. The windows in here don't open due to safety regulations. This is the twenty-eighth floor, way too windy. If somebody killed her, how did he or she get out?'

'That's the part I still need to figure out,' Hunter said.

Travis rolled his eyes. 'Of course you do.'

Hunter could easily tell what Officer Travis was thinking: why did they have to send a rookie?

But Travis wasn't finished yet. 'And you are basing this homicide theory of yours simply on that pâté-whatever thing? Little blood dots on her eyes and eyelids due to oxygen restriction? Maybe it's a sexual thing—erotic asphyxiation. Have you heard of it? Some people are into that. It's supposed to heighten the ecstasy. Look, I'm sure that you would love to impress your captain, but I don't think this is the case... sir.' Travis put a lot of emphasis on that last word.

Hunter knew he didn't have to explain himself to anyone in that room. He was the lead detective in the investigation, and that gave him the right to call the shots as he saw fit, but since this was his first ever investigation as a RHD Detective he decided, just for the sake of clarity, to better explain his reasons.

'You said that there was no suicide note, right?' he said.

'That's right,' Travis confirmed.

'Well, that's problem number one—in ninety-nine percent of suicide cases, there's a note. It follows an overwhelming feeling of guilt that comes with every suicide act. Victims will, inevitably, feel the need to explain their decision to go down such a drastic road. That note is their last ever statement in this world and, believe me, they all want to make it, even if it's only an 'I love you mom, and I'm sorry' line. You said that the victim visited her wheelchair-bound mother every Monday. Had done so for the past two years. Trust me, she would've at least wanted her mother to know the reason why she decided to end her life.'

Travis stayed silent, considering Hunter's words.

'Problem number two is her fingernails and toenails,' Hunter said.

Both the officer and the Medical Examiner's gaze moved to the victim's hands and feet.

'What about them?' Travis asked after a couple of seconds.

'They've been recently manicured... professionally,' Hunter said, still looking around the room. 'Probably no more than three or four days ago. If she was depressed enough to consider suicide, I don't think she would bother grooming herself for it... or buying a new pair of shoes, do you?' He pointed to the shoebox by the dresser.

The officer and the doctor's gaze shifted again.

'There's a receipt in the box. She bought them three days ago.'

Silence.

'Now,' Hunter turned and faced Officer Travis. 'I need you and your partner to do a door-to-door on this floor. Get statements from everyone. Check if any of the neighbors were friendly with the victim, if anybody saw or heard anything... you know how it goes. Also, get the building's superintendent up here again.'

Travis scratched his chin, nodded, and left the apartment.

'You will still have to explain how the perp managed to escape through a locked and safety-chained door,' the Medical Examiner said, looking intrigued now.

'I know,' Hunter replied, reaching for his cellphone and requesting a forensics team to come to the scene. Maybe they could help.

Because of the skin discoloration, the blisters, and the initial rotting state of the body, Hunter knew that there was no way the Medical Examiner could tell if the victim had been sexually assaulted without the proper examination and a lab swab test. For now, that would have to wait.

Hunter returned to the living room to re-examine the door and the safety-chain lock. There was no gimmick. The chain and the wall mounting were made of strong metal, and the chain was still securely locked in place. The door's regular key lock hadn't been tampered with, neither had the door hinges, which were tarnished with age. Somebody had really locked that door from the inside.

Time to look around.

## Chapter 3

Hunter started searching through drawers and cupboards in the living room. The first thing he found were bank statements. They revealed that Helen Webster made a decent living from her Interior Designer business, and paid all her bills on time. She had been renting the apartment she lived in for two and a half years. Nothing indicated that she had ever fallen behind with any payments, but Hunter would check it with her landlord later. The finance on her five-year-old VW Golf had been paid off just a few months ago. Hunter later confirmed that the car was parked downstairs, and that it hadn't been broken into. Helen only had one credit card. The latest statement showed a balance of \$15.48 for a Chinese take-out five days ago. In short, Helen Webster didn't seem to be burdened by financial problems.

In a different drawer Hunter found a Valentine's card with a simple message—*To my beautiful girlfriend. With lots of love. Can't wait to be in bed with you tonight.*

Charming, Hunter thought.

The card was signed by someone called Jake. Valentine's Day had been three and a half weeks ago.

The answering machine on the TV module had fifteen messages. Nine were from her mother. Her messages escalated from a little concerned to panicking. Three were from possible clients requesting a callback, and perhaps a meeting. One was from a friend named Mary, asking Helen if she was in the mood for a drink that night. One was from a different and clearly unhappy client wondering what had happened, as it sounded like Helen Webster had missed their meeting two days ago and hadn't bothered calling to cancel or reschedule. The last message came from a holiday telesales team.

Hm... Hunter thought. Nothing from the boyfriend.

Hunter found Helen's handbag on the corner, by her leatherette sofa. Inside it he found her car keys, her wallet, her driving license, a makeup bag, and her cellphone. The battery was on its last legs, but it still had some juice. There were



several missed calls, mostly her mother's, but again, not a single call from the boyfriend. Hunter checked the phone's address book, where he found an entry for *Jake Goubeaux*. There was no address.

Next, Hunter opened the phone's call log. Jake Goubeaux had called forty-nine times in the past two weeks, but funnily enough, he hadn't called her once in the past three days. This was getting interesting. Hunter called the Operations office back at the RHD, requesting a file on Mr. Goubeaux.

Hunter moved on to the text messages—again, several from her mother, one from her friend, Mary, and one from a different friend, this one named Claudia.

No text messages from Jake Goubeaux.

On the black console by the window, Hunter found several photoframes neatly arranged. Many of the photographs showed Helen Webster with her mother, prior and post wheelchair. Helen had been a very attractive woman, with almost perfect skin, a petite nose and mouth, high cheekbones, a slim figure, and shiny raven-black hair that fell just past her shapely shoulders. The hazel eyes and the charming smile she had clearly inherited from her mother.

The other photographs showed Helen smiling, dancing, and having a good time with friends, all of them women.

Once again, no boyfriend.

Hunter paused and rubbed his eyes. Though a theory was starting to form in his head, he was also a little worried. Was he reading too much into this? Was it because, deep inside, he wanted his first ever case as a LAPD Robbery Homicide Division detective to be more than just an open-and-shut suicide case? Was Officer Travis right? Did he just want to impress his new captain?

Hunter thought about for a moment.

No, that wasn't what his gut feeling was telling him—there was more than just an open-and-shut suicide case here—he could sense it. And Hunter had always been able to trust his gut.

But he could be reading this all back to front, and he knew it. What if Helen had been the one madly in love with Jake Goubeaux, and for some reason he had decided to break it off? What if he had told her that he was in love with someone else? That could've easily triggered a severe bipolar episode and in a rash moment she could have decided to kill herself. That possibility was still alive.

'Study the scene,' Hunter told himself. 'Go with what it tells you.'

Hunter wasn't ready to bring Mr. Goubeaux in for questioning just yet. The apartment could still reveal more, and so could the forensics team, once they finally got there. Also, Hunter wanted to check if the door-to-door, or the file he'd requested on Jake Goubeaux would return any valuable information. For now, the best he could do was to continue searching the apartment.

Still in the living room, he paused in front of the TV module again. Something didn't seem right. The symmetry was wrong.

Frown.

Chin scratch.

Frown again.

*The mini stereo system.*

That was it.

One of its speakers was missing.

Hunter checked the cables at the back of the stereo. The speaker cable was still connected to the receiver.

‘Strange,’ Hunter said to himself, but left it at that, returning to the bedroom.

Helen had been a very organized woman. All her drawers and cupboards were impeccably stacked. Every item of clothing had been folded and placed in its designated location. Nothing looked to have been disturbed. The same could be said for the en-suite bathroom.

Her wardrobe held an ample variety of blouses, trousers, jeans, jackets, shoes, belts and handbags. Again, all neatly arranged in their specific places, except for a black silk blouse that had slipped off its hanger and fallen on top of some shoes.

Hunter closed the wardrobe door and turned to face the bed again.

Everything about that scene was wrong. Helen Webster was positioned with her legs fully extended and her arms wide open, in a human-crucifix shape. That would mean that she had sliced her wrists, lay perfectly still on the bed, and simply waited for death. One would need tremendous willpower to do something like that.

Also, suicide by slitting the wrists and bleeding out didn’t bring instant death. Many who attempted it, if they hadn’t numbed themselves with sleeping pills and alcohol first, ended up changing, or trying to change their minds once they saw and felt the blood fleeing their veins. There would usually be a lot of twitching and arm movement, which would create a very messy scene. Hunter had studied the photographs and attended enough wrist-slitting suicide scenes to know that. The scene in that room was messy, no question about it, but in the wrong way. Helen’s body was clear of blood. All the blood had pooled on the floor, or soaked into the bed sheets. That indicated that she hadn’t moved her arms at all once she had cut her wrists open.

The second problem with her body being so clean of blood was—as the doctor had said—the cut to both wrists had been deep enough to slice through both the radial and the ulnar arteries. That meant that, at first, blood would have squirted out of her wrists like a water gun. Since the mess of blood concentrated solely on and around the bed, Hunter knew that if he was really looking at a suicide scene, there were only two possible scenarios. One: Helen had cut her wrists while lying down on the bed. If that had been the case, her arms wouldn’t have been extended out in a human-crucifix shape at first. It was way too awkward a position for her to be able to achieve such precise cuts. She would have them close to her body, probably over her chest, with the wrists turned towards her. She should’ve been covered in blood. Two: Helen had cut her wrists in a standing or sitting position before sprawling herself on the bed. In that case, blood would’ve squirted up, hitting her face, hair, and torso. A blood-free body made no sense.

No, there was no doubt in Hunter’s mind. That suicide scene was all wrong.

‘Where the hell is my forensics team?’ he said to himself.

In the kitchen, Hunter checked the fridge. Nothing had gone bad. The sell-by-date on the milk carton was still valid. The apples and pears in the fruit bowl on the small kitchen table still looked fresh. There were a few dishes on the dish rack, and an open pack of cookies on the kitchen counter.

In a cupboard he also found several bottles of spirits, including an unopened bottle of Dalwhinnie 1973 29 Year Old single malt Scotch whisky. That made

Hunter pause. Not because there was anything peculiar about it, but because he'd given his father an identical bottle for Christmas just a few years back—their last ever Christmas together. Hunter's father had a passion for single malt Scotch whisky. A passion that, frankly, Hunter had never understood. He found whisky, any type of whisky, way too overwhelming for his palate.

Pushing the memories away, he pressed the pedal on the large chromed garbage can by the fridge, looked inside, and frowned.

At least the mystery of the missing stereo speaker was solved.

Hunter reached for it, or what was left of it. The small wood-encased box had been completely pulled apart. The tiny tweeter speaker was intact, but the subwoofer had been smashed to pieces, as if somebody had had a big beef with it.

'What the hell?' Hunter murmured, looking at it from all sides.

His cellphone rang in his pocket.

Hunter dropped the speaker pieces back into the garbage can before answering it.

'Robbery Homicide Detective Robert Hunter,' he said proudly.

'What the hell are you doing, rookie?'

## Chapter 4

Hunter immediately recognized Captain Bolter's voice.

'I send you on an easy, open-and-shut, zippidy-zip suicide case, and in no time you escalate it to first degree homicide and put in a call for a forensics team?'

'Captain...'

'That thing should've been wrapped up and sealed, and your ass should've been back here filling forms an hour ago. What the hell is going on?'

Hunter explained everything as quickly and as concisely as he could.

'Wait a second here,' the captain said when Hunter was done. 'Are you telling me that right on your first, easy-as-they-will-ever-come case you've had a *hunch*?'

'It's more than a hun...'

'No, it isn't, rookie,' the captain cut him short, his voice firm and authoritative. 'Don't even think about giving me that crap. If you've got absolutely no proof, it's called a *hunch*. Do you have anything to substantiate your allegation?'

'Not yet, but...'

'Then it's a *hunch*... on your first case. Just thinking about it is making my balls itch.'

'Proof is coming, Captain,' Hunter hit back, his voice just as firm. 'If you give me an hour, maybe two, I'll find proof.'

Hunter heard the captain breathe out heavily on the other side.

'I read your whole file again, rookie,' Captain Bolter said. 'And I can already tell that you're going to be trouble, aren't you?' He didn't give Hunter a chance to reply. 'With your, and I quote from the transcripts on your file, *off the scale IQ and outstanding reasoning test results*, you are going to want to prove yourself in every single damn case you are assigned to, aren't you?'

'I'm just trying to do my job, Captain.'

‘Oh, is that a fact? Well, let me let you in on a little secret that I want you to remember for the rest of your life, rookie. Are you listening?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Not every case is a goddamn, seven-headed monster mystery, you understand what I’m saying? The majority of criminals out there are thick as shit. Nine out of ten murders in this city are committed by someone who was too angry, too jealous, too drunk, too high, too desperate, too crazy, or a combination of the above. They aren’t criminal masterminds.’

Hunter was waiting for a pause so he could say something. It didn’t come. The captain simply steam-rolled on.

‘You already got the job, rookie. You don’t have to prove yourself to anyone anymore. I’ve checked, you are the youngest ever person to make RHD Detective in the history of the LAPD. Congratu-fucking-lations. That fact alone will already earn you the *pretentious little dick* look from every detective in this department. If you start trying to rub it in with that IQ crap and the Criminal Behavior Psychology bullshit in every case, including the simple suicide ones, I can assure you, you are not going to be a very popular guy around here, do you understand what I’m saying to you?’

‘I’m not trying to impress anyone, captain.’ Hunter was finally able to get a word in. ‘I’m not trying to prove myself to anybody either, but the scene here is all wrong. Nothing fits with a suicide motive. Trust me on this.’

‘Except for the fact that the only door that leads in or out of the apartment was locked from the inside, with a security chain firmly in place.’

Hunter said nothing.

‘We’re not the X-Files detectives’ division, rookie. Perps don’t walk through walls.’

‘I understand that, captain.’

‘Why did you join the LAPD, rookie?’

The question caught Hunter by surprise.

‘What?’

‘Why did you join the LAPD?’ Captain Bolter repeated it.

Hunter knew it was a rhetorical question, so he gave the captain the biggest bullshit answer he could think of. ‘To protect and to serve, captain.’

‘Of course it was,’ the captain shot back. ‘Nothing to do with your father’s death right?’

Hunter stayed quiet.

‘It’s not in your file, but I’ve checked. Exactly one week after your father died you joined the academy.’

Hunter still said nothing.

Two weeks after receiving his PhD in Criminal Behavior Analysis and Biopsychology, Hunter’s world was turned upside down. For the past three and a half years his father had been working as a security guard for the Bank of America branch in Avalon Boulevard. A robbery gone wrong turned into a Wild West gunfight and Hunter’s father took a bullet to the chest. He fought for twelve weeks in a coma, before his heart finally gave in. The person who shot him was never caught.

‘Anger and revenge is as good a reason as any, rookie,’ Captain Bolter said. ‘But you need to tread very carefully when that’s the main thing driving you. Do you understand what I’m saying?’

No reply.

‘Are you listening to me, rookie?’

‘Yes, captain,’ there was a harder edge to Hunter’s voice this time. ‘But you don’t have to worry. If I’m wrong about this case, I’ll put in a transfer request first thing tomorrow morning. You have my word. How does that sound?’

Captain Bolter was silent for a few moments. A rookie willing to put his whole career on the line straight off the blocks, based on something that he believed in—a hunch. The captain had to admit that he admired his conviction.

‘Above all, trust your gut.’ Captain Bolter had lived by that motto his whole life. And it had always served him well.

Hunter couldn’t see it, but a smile came to the captain’s lips.

‘Fair enough, rookie, I’ll give you some rope on this one. Let’s see if you hang yourself with it or not.’

He disconnected.

## Chapter 5

‘Are you the lead detective here?’ a forensics agent asked as he stepped into the living room, looking at Hunter a little askance. He was tall and slim, with a thick moustache and bushy sideburns. A second agent followed him in. This one was short and round, with a shaved head.

Hunter nodded and quickly introduced himself.

Both agents scrutinized Hunter’s credentials for a long while.

‘Something wrong?’ Hunter asked.

‘No, not at all.’ The tall agent shook his head. ‘You just look a lot younger than any other RHD Detective we’ve ever met.’

This was getting old in a hurry, Hunter thought.

‘I’m Keith.’ The tall agent extended his hand. ‘And this is Matt.’ He nodded at his colleague. ‘Is this your first case?’

‘With the RHD, yes,’ Hunter replied, shaking Keith and Matt’s hands.

‘I’m not sure if “welcome” is the appropriate word but... welcome to the toughest detectives’ division in Los Angeles. So what have we got here?’

‘In the bedroom,’ Hunter said, and proceeded to explain everything he knew so far.

‘You’re definitely right about one thing,’ Keith said, approaching the bed and studying the woman’s position for an instant. ‘This suicide scene looks all wrong.’

Hunter paused his apartment search for a moment to observe both forensics agents at work. They took their time examining the body, the bed, and everything around it.

‘I know that her skin color and elasticity have completely changed,’ Hunter said. ‘Which makes identifying marks and bruises a lot more difficult, but do you think

you would still be able to recognize any strangulation or ligatures marks... anything that could confirm that she suffocated prior to dying?’

Matt, the shorter of the two forensics agents nodded. ‘Using a UV light, probably. She’s been dead for three days, max. Decomposition hasn’t really started yet. As I’m sure you understand, death obviously interrupts processes like natural healing. So if she had any sort of bruise on her body when she died, it should still be there. Even with the skin color change, a high spectrum UV light should be able to detect it.’

He retrieved a hand-held, battery powered UV light from his case, switched it on, adjusted the intensity to a higher wavelength, and began studying the victim’s neck. After a few seconds, he lifted her head off the bed, and while Keith held her hair up, Matt shone the light on her nape.

Hunter waited patiently.

‘And here we have it,’ Matt finally said.

‘Have you got something?’ Hunter asked, feeling a tingle of excitement travel through his body.

Matt nodded. ‘Here, let me show you.’

Hunter moved closer.

‘See this long, darker mark here?’ Matt indicated the spot on the victim’s nape.

‘I see it,’ Hunter said.

‘OK, that would’ve been caused by something, or someone, applying strong pressure to the back of her neck.’

Matt lowered her head, returning it to its resting position on the bed.

‘And right here,’ he continued, now indicating a spot on her neck just about where a male’s Adam’s apple would’ve been. ‘We have the second mark.’

This one was oval in shape and much smaller—about half an inch in diameter.

Hunter had already put both bruise marks together in his head. The one on the front of the victim’s neck had probably come from a thumb. The longer one on her nape from the remaining four fingers in her attacker’s hand. While choking her, the attacker had kept the fingers close together, instead of spread apart.

‘I can tell you this right now,’ Keith said. ‘Whoever strangled her had pretty big hands. He only used one. There’s nothing here to indicate a double grip.’

Hunter nodded.

‘But she didn’t die from strangulation,’ Matt added.

‘Yes, I know,’ Hunter said. ‘But it could’ve rendered her unconscious.’

‘No question about that,’ Matt agreed. ‘All that was needed was a few seconds of the right amount of pressure and she’d be out like a light.’

Hunter left the two forensics agents to carry on in the bedroom and returned to the living room. Moments later, Officer Travis re-entered the apartment.

‘Anything from the door-to-door?’ Hunter asked.

The officer pulled out his pad and flipped it open. ‘OK, this apartment is sandwiched between apartments 2811 and 2815. The neighbor in 2815, Mrs. Peers, remembers some loud shouting coming from this apartment three days ago. She said the walls here are quite thin.’

‘Time?’

‘According to Mrs. Peers it was quite late, past ten in the evening.’

‘Is she sure about that?’

‘As sure as sure can be. She said she was already in bed, and she always goes to bed at ten.’ Travis shrugged and pulled a face.

‘Could it have been the TV?’ Hunter asked.

‘I did ask her that, and she said no. She recognized Helen Webster’s voice. There was also someone else here with her—a male.’

‘Sexual noises?’

‘I asked her that as well, and again, *no*. She said that they were pretty angry shouts from both parties.’

‘OK, how about apartment 2811?’ Hunter asked. ‘Did anyone hear anything?’

‘That apartment is empty at the moment. According to Mrs. Peers, it has been empty for some time,’ Travis explained.

Hunter nodded. ‘Anyone else?’

‘Yes, but it might mean nothing.’

‘I’m listening.’

‘Mr. Grant in apartment 2808 said that he saw a tall male leaving this floor late on Monday night, the same night Mrs. Peers heard the angry shouts.’

‘Time?’

‘Around a quarter past midnight. Mr. Grant, who looks like a professional bodybuilder, was returning home after dropping his girlfriend at her place. As the elevator doors opened on this floor, the male in question almost rammed into him. Mr. Grant said that whoever the man was, he was in a hurry, and he looked nervous.’

‘Would he recognize the subject if he saw a photo of him?’ Hunter asked.

‘He said he probably would.’

‘Good job, officer.’

There was a knock on the door.

Hunter pulled it open. Standing there was a short, plump man. He had a *bandido* moustache and slicked-back black hair with touches of gray. Hunter couldn’t help but think that if he were wearing a sombrero, he would’ve looked like a professional mariachi.

‘Detective,’ Travis said, joining Hunter by the door. ‘This is Mr. Valdez. He’s the building’s superintendent.’

Mr. Valdez extended his hand. ‘Miguel Valdez,’ he said.

Hunter introduced himself. ‘Thank you for coming up Mr. Valdez. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?’

‘Please, call me Miguel.’

‘OK, Miguel, did you know Ms. Webster well?’

Miguel bobbed his head from side to side.

‘Not very well,’ he said. ‘I know she was an interior designer. Very pretty and very nice – always polite. She always said “hello” whenever she saw me or my wife, and she always asked about my little girl. My little girl is five, you see? She has just started kindergarten.’

‘Congratulations,’ Hunter said with a warm smile.

‘Thank you. But that’s pretty much all I know about Ms. Webster,’ Miguel added. ‘There are thirty-five floors in this building, twenty-four apartments per floor, a lot of people, you know? And everyone is always very busy, rushing around to get somewhere or to do something.’ He shrugged. ‘Including me. There’s always

something to be fixed, or cleaned, or changed, or something. When I cross a resident in the hallway, or bump into them in the elevator or somewhere, the conversations are always very quick, you see?’

Hunter nodded.

‘But you should speak to Rashana Lewis,’ Miguel said. ‘She lives in apartment 1514 on the fifteenth floor. She’s a beautician. She and Ms. Webster were friends. Rashana has many clients here in the building, including my wife, and I know that Ms. Webster was one of them too.’

‘1514, you said?’ Hunter asked.

‘That’s right.’

Hunter made a mental note. ‘Does the building have a doorman at all?’

‘No, sorry.’

‘CCTV?’

‘No,’ Miguel shook his head, a little embarrassed. ‘We don’t have that either.’

‘OK,’ Hunter said, checking his watch. ‘Thanks for your help, Miguel. I might need to talk to you again later.’

‘That’s not a problem, you know where to find me.’

As the superintendent left, Hunter’s phone rang in his pocket again.

## Chapter 6

‘Robbery Homicide Detective, Robert Hunter,’ he answered it.

‘Detective, this is Daniel Figueroa from Operations. I have the information on the subject you’ve requested earlier, but I don’t seem to have an email address for you.’

‘I don’t think it has been set up yet,’ Hunter replied. Thinking about it, he probably didn’t even have a desk or a computer set up either. ‘Just tell me what you’ve got.’

‘OK,’ Daniel said. ‘Mr. Jake Goubeaux, thirty-five years old, residing in Hawthorne, number thirty-one, West 129th Street. He works as a soundman in a place called Rooster’s in West Hollywood. They have live music every night.’

‘Yes, I know the place,’ Hunter said.

‘Well,’ Daniel continued. ‘Mr. Goubeaux has been arrested five times in the past four years – twice for drunk and disorderly conduct, and three times for assault. He put an ex-girlfriend in hospital, and that cost him five months in the CSP in Lancaster. According to the judge who sentenced him, one more strike and Mr. Goubeaux is going to be gone for a long time.’

‘Great job, Daniel. Have we got a mug shot of him?’

Daniel chuckled. ‘Yeah, we’ve got about five of those. The most recent is only about a year old.’

‘Give me a sec,’ Hunter said, covering the phone’s mouthpiece with his palm. ‘Do you have a fax machine in your black and white?’ he asked Travis.

He nodded. ‘I do, yes.’



Hunter return to his phone. 'Daniel, can you fax the most recent one of those to squad car...' he looked at Travis, who mouthed the numbers eight, three, five, one, seven. Hunter repeated them down the line.

'On its way,' Daniel said.

'Thanks, Daniel.'

Hunter disconnected.

'Any developments?' the officer asked.

Hunter quickly ran him through the news.

'OK,' Hunter said. 'I need you to go down to your car, wait for the photo of Mr. Jake Goubeaux, and then return to apartment 2808 to talk to Mr. Grant again. Show him the photograph, and see if he can identify Mr. Goubeaux as the person he saw leaving this floor late on Monday night. I'm going to go down to apartment 1514 and see if I can speak with Rashana Lewis. I'll meet you back up here in about half an hour.'

## Chapter 7

The door to apartment 1514 was opened by a black woman in her mid-thirties. Her shoulder-length hair had been smoothed with a hair iron and whatever product she had applied to it, gave it a delicate shine. She was wearing a baby-pink bathrobe and flip-flops. Her toe and fingernails had been painted in a bright, lemon-yellow color. She looked distraught. In the background, a little girl of about four years old was playing with a plastic doll.

'Are you Ms. Lewis?' Hunter asked. 'Rashana Lewis?'

Her gaze dwelled on Hunter for a few moments before she nodded.

'I'm Detective Robert Hunter of the LAPD.' He displayed his credentials.

'Is this about what happened to Helen?' she asked. 'Miguel, the superintendent, told me she committed suicide.' Her voice carried total disbelief.

'Yes, it is about Ms. Webster,' Hunter replied.

Rashana nodded. 'Please come in,' she said.

The apartment smelled of recently cooked food—fried onions, bacon, a little hint of garlic, and various spices. The living room was small, much smaller than the one in Helen Webster's apartment, and lit by two table lamps at opposite ends of the room. They cast shadows just about everywhere. The two-seater sofa facing the small TV set was draped with a sheet that had once been red, but now, after so many washes, all that was left was a faded, pinkish tone. There was only one armchair, also draped with a faded red sheet.

'Please, have a seat,' Rashana said, indicating the sofa. She took the armchair.

The little girl stopped playing with her doll and looked up at the new visitor.

'Hello,' she said, waving her little hand.

'Hello there,' Hunter said, smiling.

'What's your name?' the girl asked.

'My name is Robert. What's yours?'

'I'm Rachelle, and this is Lenita.' The little girl showed Hunter her naked doll.

‘Rachelle, baby,’ Rashana said. ‘Why don’t you go play in your room for a little bit? Mummy has to talk to the nice policeman here for a few minutes.’

The little girl pulled a worried face. ‘He’s not a policeman, Mommy. He’s not wearing a uniform.’

‘I’m a different kind of policeman, Rachelle,’ Hunter said, before whispering. ‘Like... secret.’

The little girl’s eyes went wide. ‘A secret policeman. How coooool.’

Hunter brought a finger to his lip and continued whispering. ‘Yes, but remember, it’s a secret.’

Rachelle nodded vigorously before pausing and facing her mother with a stern look on her face. ‘Are you in trouble with the police, Mommy?’

Hunter smiled. ‘No, Rachelle, your mommy is helping the police.’

‘Oh, how coooool.’

‘OK, baby. Now, to your room.’ Rashana pointed to the bedroom door.

The little girl disappeared through the door, while whispering something to her doll.

When the bedroom door closed, Rashana turned to face Hunter again.

‘I won’t take much of your time,’ he said. ‘Mr. Valdez, the superintendent, told me that you and Ms. Webster were friends.’

‘Yes, we knew each other,’ Rashana replied. ‘You could say that we were friends. She was one of my clients, but we got along really well. I just can’t believe that she would kill herself.’

‘When was the last time you saw her?’

‘Three days ago. Monday afternoon. She came here for a full treatment—haircut, manicure and pedicure. She told me that she had a possible new client—someone quite rich, actually—that she was meeting on Tuesday, so she wanted to look her best. It makes no sense that she would kill herself.’

Hunter noted something down.

‘Did she seem depressed to you at all?’ he asked.

‘Depressed?’ Rashana breathed out. ‘Not even a little bit. I know that sometimes she would get depressed for no reason at all. She told me she was bipolar, but Monday wasn’t one of those days.’

‘Do you know if she was worried, or scared because of something... or someone?’

Rashana paused and pinched her bottom lip for a few seconds, clearly pondering something in her mind.

‘She was a little worried about her ex-boyfriend,’ she finally replied. ‘He was a good-for-nothing loser.’

‘Ex-boyfriend?’ *That’s interesting*, Hunter thought. ‘Why was she worried about him?’

‘Well, she dumped his ass about two weeks ago. Just after Valentine’s. And she did the right thing, if you ask me.’

‘Did Ms. Webster tell you what happened?’

‘Yeah.’ Rashana crossed her arms over her chest. ‘They were out one night and he got too drunk, *again*. Apparently he is one of those men who just can’t handle his liquor, you know what I’m saying? He gets too drunk, and then he starts being mean to everyone around. Helen told me that they were in this cocktail lounge

somewhere in Long Beach. She was chatting to an old friend—a guy. Well, Jake had one cocktail too many and that was it. He pushed the guy to the ground and dragged Helen out of the lounge like a caveman. He called her a *no-good whore*, a *dirty bitch* and worse.’ Rashana shook her head in disgust.

‘Do you know if that had happened before?’

‘It had,’ Rashana nodded. ‘Just before Valentine’s. You see, they hadn’t been going out for too long, and you know how it is, at first everyone is on their best behavior.’

‘The honeymoon phase,’ Hunter said.

‘That’s right,’ Rashana agreed. ‘And us women know that that phase lasts about three months before the real colors start to show. And Jake’s colors were ugly, let me tell you. But no matter, because after that day in Long Beach, Helen dumped his sorry ass for good.’

Hunter noted something else down. ‘You mentioned that she was worried about him?’

‘Yeah. After she dumped him, he never stopped calling her. She told me that he called about four or five times a day, saying that he was sorry, that that night was the liquor talking and acting, not him... you know, the same old bullshit. But Helen stood her ground. And she did the right thing. No man is worth having to put up with that kind of crap.’ Rashana pulled a sour face. ‘But what worried Helen was that she had given him a set of keys to her place.’

Hunter wrote that down.

‘I told her to change the locks,’ Rashana continued.

Hunter knew that Helen hadn’t followed Rashana’s advice. He had checked the door locks in Helen Webster’s apartment. They weren’t new.

‘Do you know if Ms. Webster’s ex-boyfriend had threatened her at all?’ Hunter asked.

‘If he did, Helen never mentioned it,’ Rashana said. ‘But the guy was a psycho. Give him a few drinks and God only knows what he would do. Trust me, I know the type.’

Hunter wrote a few more notes down and closed his pad.

‘Thank you very much, Ms. Lewis.’ He stood up. ‘You’ve been of great help.’

Rashana walked him to the door, but as they passed the door to the kitchen, something caught Hunter’s eyes and he paused for an instant.

Flashback.

His thought process skipped from A to Z in a fraction of a second.

‘Something wrong?’ Rashana asked.

‘Not at all.’ Hunter smiled.

## Chapter 8

Back on the twenty-eighth floor, Hunter met up with Officer Travis again.

‘Any luck?’ Hunter asked.

The officer nodded, handing Hunter the photo that was faxed to his car. Jake Goubeaux was an attractive-looking man, with short dark hair, a strong jaw,

expressive eyes, and a hint of a cleft on his squared chin. A thin scar sliced through his right eyebrow.

'It's a match,' Travis said. 'Mr. Grant confirmed it. This was the man he saw leaving this floor late on Monday night. He even remembers the scar.'

'That's what I thought,' Hunter said. He told officer Travis about his conversation with Rashana Lewis. 'And I now know how he did it. I know why the safety chain was securely in place when you and your partner got here.'

'Really, how?'

'Let me show you.'

They returned to Helen Webster's apartment. The two forensics agents were still working the bedroom, but they told Hunter that they had collected a buffet of fibers and hairs, together with several fingerprints coming from what looked like two different sources. They could already confirm that one of those sources was Helen Webster. The second was someone with relatively large hands.

Hunter had no doubts that those prints would match Jake Goubeaux's.

'OK,' officer Travis said, addressing Hunter. 'I can sort of picture the scene now. Boyfriend gets dumped just after Valentine's, doesn't take it too well, keeps on calling the victim asking for a new chance. The victim keeps on saying "no", but still he doesn't take the hint. So, on Monday evening he decides to drop by for a little face-to-face chat.' Travis shrugged. 'Maybe he knocked and she let him in, or maybe he used his own key, because now we know that he had a set.'

Hunter listened, nodding every now and then.

'He probably had a few drinks before turning up here,' Travis continued with his deduction. 'Which would only make matters worse. They argue, loudly. Some of it is overheard by Mrs. Peers from apartment 2815.' He pointed to the next-door apartment. 'The victim tells the ex-boyfriend that there's no getting back together and he loses it. He goes for her throat and starts choking her, maybe not with the intention to kill her, but she passes out anyway, and he freaks. He knows that when she comes to, she will probably report him. Given his track record, he also knows that that would be strike three. He will be put away for a long time.'

'So he comes up with a plan,' Hunter said.

Officer Travis agreed with a nod and took over once again. 'He knows that the victim is bipolar, going in and out of depressed states every now and then. Maybe she had even told him that, during one of those states she had considered suicide in the past.'

'Possible,' Hunter said.

'So he figured that staging a suicide scene was his ticket out, especially if he could make it so it looked like she had been alone, locked inside her apartment. He puts her in bed, undresses her, and slices her wrists.'

'Very good, Officer Travis,' Hunter said. 'I don't think I could've come up with a better theory myself.'

'Yes, but it still doesn't explain how he did it. How did he get out and lock the door from the inside?'

'Cleverly,' Hunter said, walking back into the bedroom. The officer followed him.

Hunter returned to Helen Webster's wardrobe and slid the door open.

'See how everything is precisely organized,' he said.

Travis nodded.

‘But look at this.’ Hunter indicated the black silk blouse that had fallen on top of some shoes.

‘OK...?’ Travis dragged the word out. ‘What about it?’

‘At first I thought that the blouse had just slipped off its hanger,’ Hunter explained. ‘But if you check the rack, there are no empty hangers, which means, there’s a hanger missing.’

Travis frowned.

Hunter reached for another blouse and slipped it off its hanger. ‘Then I realized that Helen Webster only used wire hangers.’ He exited the bedroom, taking the hanger with him. In the living room, he indicated the small stereo on the TV module.

‘Over here, we’re missing a speaker.’

‘Yes, I see that,’ Travis replied.

‘Well, Mr. Jake Goubeaux is a soundman, so I think it’s safe to assume that he knows a thing or two about musical equipment, including stereos like this.’

‘I’d agree.’

‘So he would know that these speakers are magnetic speakers, where strong magnets are part of the motor of the subwoofers.’

Travis chewed his bottom lip again. ‘I didn’t know that.’

Hunter quickly went into the kitchen, picked up the garbage can, and brought it into the living room.

‘I found the other speaker in here,’ he said. ‘Completely pulled apart.’ He dumped the garbage can contents onto the living-room floor. ‘The subwoofer, as you can see, has been smashed to pieces. And I bet that if we take our time collecting all the smashed-up magnet pieces and putting them back together like a jigsaw puzzle, we’ll find that there’s a small piece missing.’

‘Sonofabitch,’ Travis whispered. He was starting to get the picture.

Hunter gloved up, selected a small broken piece of the subwoofer’s magnet, approached the chest of drawers by the east wall, and opened the top drawer. It was full of stationery and office supplies. The topmost item inside the drawer was a tube of superglue.

‘And this is the last piece of our puzzle,’ he said, showing it to Travis.

Hunter reached for the wire hanger, unwound its hook, and unfolded it out. Thirty seconds later, he had a long, crooked piece of hard and strong wire in his hands. He re-twisted and reshaped the hanger until he had an L-shaped, foot-and-a-half-long piece of wire, with a small curved hook at the end of it. He then cautiously superglued the small magnet piece to the tip of the wire hook.

‘And here we have it,’ he said, walking over to the door. Holding the security chain’s wall mounting back in its original place, he tested his new device. The magnet at the tip of his wire hook firmly snapped itself to the circular metal piece at the end of the security chain. Using the wire device, Hunter then slowly and very easily slid the chain all the way across, until it was free from the lock.

‘He probably practiced a few times in here to get the hang of it before stepping out onto the corridor,’ Hunter said. ‘All he needed to do was to bring the door to. The original open-door gap that the security chain provides is more than enough for anyone to be able to push the wire device through, snap it onto the chain, drag the chain over to its lock, carefully prod around until it slots into its spot, and just

slide it across to lock it. I'm sure it took him a few tries to get it, but it wouldn't have taken him long. Once that was done, he closed the door, used his key to lock it, and got out of here. Luckily for us, he bumped into Mr. Grant as he returned home.'

'Clever sonofabitch,' Travis said, studying the wire device Hunter had created. 'When did you figure this out?'

'The idea came to me when I was leaving Ms. Lewis' apartment on the fifteenth floor,' Hunter said. 'The fridge in her kitchen is covered by fridge magnets. Suddenly everything made sense.'

Travis looked back at the detective. 'I'm sorry,' he said, extending his hand. 'I'm sorry to have given you such a hard time earlier on. I allowed all the superficial scene readings to guide my judgment. Everything indicated suicide, so I assumed it had to be suicide.'

Hunter shook the officer's hand.

'But I guess that's why you are a detective, and I'm not.' Travis smiled. 'So now what?'

'Now we get a warrant, go arrest Mr. Goubeaux, and take it from there,' Hunter said. 'I'm sure that some of the hairs and fingerprints found in Ms. Webster's room will have come from Jake Goubeaux. If we're lucky, something might give us a DNA match. But if not, once we put a person like him inside an interrogation room and present him with what we have, it doesn't take long for whatever bullshit story he had prepared to start showing its cracks. Trust me, Travis, we've got him.'

Hunter reached for his phone and called Captain Bolter.

## Chapter 9

The captain had listened to Hunter's entire report without interrupting once.

'I'll be Goddamned,' he said at last. A surprised but satisfied tone found its way into the captain's voice. 'I stand corrected, and I guess I owe you an apology, rookie.'

'No apology necessary, sir. Like I said, just doing my job.'

'Of course you are, rookie. But I do indeed owe you an apology. You did prove me wrong. And in time you will learn that that doesn't happen very often.'

Hunter said nothing. He heard the faint noise of pages turning coming from the captain's end.

'The warrant will be on its way to you soon,' Captain Bolter finally said. 'Now go arrest that piece of shit boyfriend... *Detective Hunter.*'

Hunter smiled. It was the first time the captain had called him by his proper title.

More pages turning.

'When you get back to the RHD, I've got something else lined up for you.'

'Another suicide case, captain?' Hunter half joked.

'Not this time, detective.' There was no play in the captain's voice anymore. 'This time we'll see how good a hunter you really are.'

