

Called back to Detroit to track down her mother's murderer, Detective Deanna Dopp uncovers long-kept secrets, a hidden illegitimate child, and political corruption in the racially tense city that leads straight to City Hall and the powerful Mayor Hank Jenkins.

Motor City Murder

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MOTOR CITY MURDER

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CHAPTER 1 – WELCOME TO DETROIT

“**T**his goddamned city,” Wanda Doppkowski whispered as she stared straight into the headlights of the jet black Lincoln Continental limousine speeding toward her. The limousine hit Wanda straight on. She let out a grunt as her body collided with the front grille then bounced into the windshield, over the hood, and onto the roof with a thud. Her body tumbled off the trunk and landed hard on a dimly lit city street on the east side of Detroit. Her watch broke as it hit the pavement. It read 12:52 a.m.

Wanda’s portly, fifty-five year old body dented the chrome grille badly and shattered the windshield, which had jolted the driver’s hands to his face as if her body was going to fly right into the limousine. The passenger in the backseat knew the body wouldn’t get through the reinforced glass and he didn’t flinch. Where the body ended up was of no worry to the passenger. Just that it was only a body now and not a living person was all the passenger was concerned about at this time.

Wanda’s body fluids cooled the hot pavement and sent a puff of white steam up into the air as if her spirit was rising up from the ground in the summer heat wave. Her white skin and blonde hair began to be surrounded in blood. Wanda’s body lay in the middle of Mack Avenue, lifeless, with the exception of her left eye—a beautiful green eye, which slowly opened—gazing in the direction of the bushes across the street where a shadow shivered.

Run, Wanda’s eye screamed to the quivering shadow. Run, child. Get out of this city before it kills you, too.

“Stop,” the passenger in the back of the limousine commanded.

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The driver hit the brakes. The engine idled on the street. The limousine was located fifty feet past Wanda. The driver looked into the rear view mirror to see the results of the order his boss had given him. Sweat ran down his forehead as he looked around the street that was void of pedestrians. He tasted vomit saliva in his mouth.

Joe Dempsey, the limousine driver, had never killed anyone. His mind raced. He could run out of the limousine right now. Go straight to the police station, confess and turn in his boss. But his legs didn't respond to these options. He waited for his next order.

"Back up," the passenger coolly commanded. "You haven't finished the job."

Joe wanted to flip his boss off and tell him to finish it himself but what he feared even more than killing the woman was the man that was sitting in the backseat. He was this man's dog. He owned him and Joe grasped that—now more than ever.

If Joe went to the police he would face jail time and there was no telling if his boss would ever serve one day. Better to just finish the job, as his boss told him. His boss was smart like that. The smartest man in the city, Joe and others believed. Not just book smart, which he was, but street smart. That was the smart that counted in Detroit.

Joe revved the engine.

He slammed the limousine into reverse and within three seconds flat he had made up the fifty feet. The two heavy bumps told him he had finished the job.

"Get us back to the mansion," said the passenger.

Joe shifted the car back into forward drive and swerved around Wanda's body, careful not to run over her a third time. This avoidance wasn't lost on the passenger in the back and he shook his head in disgust at his driver's weakness and sentimentality.

Joe hadn't even known this woman, the passenger reflected. Why should he be sentimental? The passenger had known her, known her deeply. In their younger days they were lovers for four months.

He had known her fears, her favorite movies, her favorite food, favorite sex, cologne, books and booze. He even had fathered a child with her. He turned the back air conditioner knob so that cool air flowed onto his face as the passing street lights flashed in his eyes. A

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light rain had started and the streets steamed as the limousine ran over them.

“Here we are, sir, the mansion,” announced Joe.

The passenger’s cell phone rang.

“Hello? That’s terrible. Sure, I can help. Call Commander Kavanaugh at the 7th Precinct. Tell him you are a friend of mine and you need two officers down at your bar. Okay...try to sleep Julius. Yes, she was special. Goodbye.”

The passenger turned his cell phone off. He pulled his gaze back from the street and saw his own reflection in the window. Grey mixed in with his dark black hair, thin face, long-broken slanted African-American nose and brown, almond eyes. He still had his looks as he matured and was careful to work out five days a week. He straightened his tie in the mirrored reflection. This is my city, love it or hate it, and no one is going to take that away.

Joe slowed and pulled the limousine into the Manoogian Mansion, the residence of the Mayor of Detroit, Hank Jenkins.

“We’re home Mayor,” whispered Joe.

“Thank you, Joe. For everything,” replied Hank.

Back in the dark of Mack Avenue, the shadow stepped out and revealed itself as a thirty-five year old light-skinned African American woman, Ginny Crawford. Her body shook in the soft rain. The sound of music from The Blue Monk, a blues and jazz bar, across the street was muffled in her ears. Ginny stared at Wanda’s dead eye that had previously screamed at her.

The screaming was now in Ginny’s head and she listened to it this time. She turned and ran. She didn’t know where she was running, it didn’t matter. The instinct for survival was in control and she let it be.

She wasn’t familiar with the Detroit streets she was running down, the street people that rushed past her and threw out obscene commentaries at her, or the burned out houses and buildings she passed in her marathon. Ginny had witnessed the murder of a woman she was about to meet for the first time—her biological mother, Wanda Doppkowski.

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Ginny had seen the fear in her mother's eyes, those same green eyes that they shared. Now, while running, she felt a craving to touch Wanda's skin. It was still a shock to see it—the skin. She knew her mother was white but to see Wanda, this blonde bombshell of a woman, walk toward her was still shocking.

Since finding her birth mother, Ginny had only two months to intellectualize that inside her ebony skin lived whiteness. Now the origin of her whiteness was dead.

The urge overcame her. Ginny had to touch her mother's skin. She stopped running, turned around and stared down the street panting hard. She took three cautious steps and then began a slow jog back to her mother. Within a minute, Ginny saw Wanda's body crumpled in the street. She stopped twenty feet from the body and stared at it.

On her twelfth birthday, Ginny was told that she was adopted. She spent countless nights dreaming of what her biological mother was like. She dreamed they would have a tearful reunion and it would be a kindred spirit connection. But this reunion resulting in a broken body bleeding on a putrid street in Detroit was leading Ginny into shock.

The lights started to blur and she began to see the body glow in her hazy vision. She shivered in the ninety-degree heat as she unsteadily stepped closer.

The doorman from The Blue Monk, Winston, walked out of the bar, saw a body on the ground and ran out into the street. He kneeled down and stopped Ginny just as she was about to reach down to touch Wanda's face. He held Ginny's hand and quickly surmised Wanda's fate.

"She's dead. You saw it?" Winston said.

Ginny nodded yes. She couldn't speak. The shock was in full control. Winston stood up, took his suit jacket off and swung it around Ginny's clammy skin.

A man with a drink in his hand looked out of the small front window in The Blue Monk and saw the body down in the street. He looked closer—he recognized the woman. He backed away quickly from the window unnoticed.

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Winston turned to the sound of a car speeding toward them. He scooted Ginny out of the way of the headlights. A black 2001 Camaro drove up and squealed to a stop. Gabe Flynn, off duty from his Detroit police detective shift, ran over to the scene. Gabe gave a familiar nod to Winston.

“Winston,” said Gabe. “You two witness this?”

“She did,” said Winston.

Ginny looked at Gabe blankly.

“Who is she?” asked Gabe, pointing at Ginny.

Winston shrugged his shoulders.

“Her daughter,” answered Ginny with careful articulation, the best she could muster at this point, and a slight southern accent.

“Wanda’s daughter?” questioned Winston as he stepped back.

“I came in from Nashville on a late flight,” said Ginny in a barely audible tone.

“Oh, fuck,” said Gabe as he walked in a circle around Wanda’s body.

Police lights swirled in the distance but their sirens were turned off.

“Did you call the police, Winston?” asked Gabe.

“Not me,” said Winston.

Gabe looked at Ginny, who shook her head no.

“Christ,” said Gabe. He grabbed Ginny’s shoulder and started leading her to his car. “Get lost, Winston, you know what I mean?”

“Got’cha, Gabe.” Winston ran back to The Blue Monk.

“Keep it to yourself. All of it!” yelled Gabe.

“I got that story down cold,” said Winston as he ran into the bar.

“Wait, where are you taking me?” asked Ginny weakly.

“To my place,” answered Gabe.

She jerked away from him.

“It’s not like that.” He took her arm and politely led her into the back seat. “Get down.”

“But the police are coming, we got to tell them about the limousine,” protested Ginny.

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“Sweetie, not this time. It’s hard to tell the good guys from the bad in this city. If you’re a stranger that is. Now get down. Put this blanket over you.”

Gabe jumped into the front seat and looked in his rear view mirror. *Shit, they’re here. Fuck. What are the odds I would be here tonight?* Gabe deliberated for a split second, and popped a peppermint Certs in his mouth before bolting out of the car.

A Detroit city police car pulled up behind Gabe. The blue and red police lights swirled, illuminating the street. No street pedestrians or patrons from the bar came out to see what the commotion was—they never did. This is a city where the inhabitants know better. Minding your own business will add years to your life.

Jackson Billings, a black, forty-year old police sergeant, got out of the passenger side. With him was a young black novice police patrolman, Burt Stevens, who was busy checking out the scene.

“What the hell are you doing here, Gabe?” spouted Billings.

“Did you hear our call?” asked Stevens.

“Nope,” said Gabe.

“Good, ‘cause there was none. Kavanaugh called this one in,” replied Billings.

“Kavanaugh? Why?”

“You think he’s going to tell us or we’re going to ask? Now, what’s your story?”

Billings walked up close to Gabe and smelled the peppermint. The sergeant enjoyed screwing with his reputation any chance that it was served up to him. Gabe had been on Billings’ shit list ever since his short career with the Internal Affairs department. In his third month with IA, Gabe brought up bribery charges against one of Billings’ best friends.

“Been drinking, Gabe? That’s a no-no since you got reinstated from your suspension.”

“Just one. I was inside the bar seeing some old friends. When I walked out I saw this mess. I was about to call it in from my car when I saw your bubble gum lights.”

Billings looked into Gabe’s brown eyes. Damn. He couldn’t read this guy. Any criminal he could read but a cop was tough. They study

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lying every day. They work and hunt liars. It could go either way on this one. Billings decided he had to drop it for now, and would come back to it later if this scene became a problem.

“You didn’t see anything?” asked Billings.

“Nothing.”

“Okay,” Billings said. “Any witnesses see it from the bar? A bouncer?”

“They have a doorman but he was inside and didn’t see anything. I already asked him.”

“What were you doing in your car?” asked Billings as he peered into the Camaro.

“I left my cell phone in it. I was about to call an ambulance and squad car,” replied Gabe. He started walking to Wanda’s body, hoping that Billings would follow, which he did.

Stevens tried in vain to feel a pulse on Wanda. Her body was losing its warmth. He found her purse nearby and rummaged through it. He pulled out a Michigan identification card from her wallet. The young officer smirked as he surmised she didn’t have a driver’s license due to possible DUI’s.

“Wanda Doppkowski,” yelled Stevens as he tossed her purse to Billings.

“Probably has relatives in Poletown with that name,” said Billings.

“She does,” said Gabe.

Billings threw the purse at his patrol car, irritated with Gabe’s familiarity with the crime scene and victim.

“You know her?” asked Billings.

Gabe ran his hands through his brown hair and nodded.

“Don’t tell me. Doppkowski. Any relation to Detective Deanna Dopp?”

“Her mother.”

“Oh, shit,” Billings muttered. “And you just happened to be here? This is quite a coincidence, Gabe.”

“She’s a singer. Been performing at The Blue Monk for years. She knew lots of people and a lot of people knew her.”

“This city is too small,” said Billings.

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“Damn, Billings. You think I’m thrilled about this? I’m the one that has to call Deanna.”

“Who’s Deanna Dopp?” asked Stevens.

Billings gave Gabe a nod to go ahead and tell him.

“My ex-partner,” said Gabe.

CHAPTER 2 – DETROIT RECALL

Ring! Ring! Ring! The sound of the phone by her ear made Deanna jump up from a dead sleep. She sat straight up in bed. Nerves tingled down her legs to her toes, which always happened when she was scared. It was just after midnight, west coast time.

There are only two types of calls that come in at this time of night, drunk dials from ex-boyfriends or the other bad news from hospitals, relatives or cops.

Deanna didn't have any ex-boyfriends that had this new phone number since she moved to Portland, Oregon nine months ago.

Ring! Ring! Ring!

Shit, she didn't want to pick up. She slowly grabbed the phone, hit the on button, and brought it to her ear.

"Hello?"

"Hey, kiddo," said Gabe.

She recognized the voice. It made a different kind of signal go through her body, warming her.

"Gabe?"

"Yeah. Hey, Deanna. Sorry for waking you."

"Wow, it only took nine months for you to call. What, are you drunk?"

Deanna leaned back in bed, glad that this was a drunk dial, not from an ex-boyfriend but an ex-partner from the Detroit police force. Her lonely heart needed a nice long conversation with a friend.

"You call to tell me that I got reinstated? Or did Commander Kavanaugh keel over from a stroke, that fat bastard," she said with a laugh.

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“No, no. It’s not Kavanaugh. Listen, I’ve got some bad news.”

Uh-oh. This phone call was turning into one of those bad ones.

One name entered Deanna’s head.

“Wanda?” she said.

“She’s...she’s dead, Deanna. I’m sorry kid.”

Deanna had expected these words since she was fifteen years old, but they still knocked a blow to her stomach. She doubled over in bed, holding her gut. She bit down hard on her lip. It started to bleed.

Gabe thought he heard her cry out but couldn’t verify it.

“Deanna?”

“I’m here.”

“You coming back home?”

Fuck. Detroit. Home.

Deanna straightened up and began to compose herself. A laugh came up from her chest as an emotional relief to the moment.

“Christ...Gabe, how did she die? Let me guess, she OD’d.”

“Hit and run.”

The words sent images into Deanna’s mind. The hit, the pain, a street, her mother’s body.

“Oh, God. Did you catch them?” she asked.

“No.”

“Witnesses?”

“You know Detroit,” he reminded her.

“Yeah, big surprise,” said Deanna.

“Maybe some clues will come from the autopsy. Shit, how I hate this,” said Gabe.

Deanna stopped talking. Her mind began to wander. Of course they were going to do an autopsy. The actual mention of it made Deanna double over again. She’d seen bodies after an autopsy and before the cosmetologists at the funeral homes could work their magic. Lord knows what her mother looked like after a hit and run. Deanna forced herself to lie down again.

“Where was she?”

“Outside The Blue Monk. She had a gig. She was walking out to her car, I suspect. Shit, Deanna, it’s been hotter than hell here the last

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two weeks. You know how this town gets in the heat. Everyone goes nuts. Weird shit happens.”

Deanna was trying to absorb the details as Gabe said them, but her mind uncontrollably started playing flashbacks of her and Wanda over the past twenty-eight years.

Picking a drunk Wanda up from their bathroom floor, making dinner for Wanda at the age of eight because that was the only way they were going to eat anything hot that night. At thirteen, driving an intoxicated Wanda home after a family party in their broken down Chevy. The fond memories went on and on.

“Were you working tonight?” Deanna asked.

“No, I was in the bar.”

Shit. Gabe was back drinking.

Deanna’s silence made Gabe feel guilty on the other end of the line.

“You know, I can call your Aunt Helen and Uncle Roman for you. I can even take care of the funeral arrangements if you can’t come back. It’s a long way from Portland. You must be really busy with your life,” he said.

Deanna rubbed her stomach. When she left Detroit she vowed never to go back. But in her heart she knew between funerals and the unlawful firing civil lawsuit her Uncle Roman, a third-rate, night-school lawyer, was trying to fight for her, she would have to fly back some day. Wanda didn’t just die from her own hands, but from someone else’s. A stranger, she reasoned, had killed her. Deanna stood up and looked out her window on the quiet Portland neighborhood. It was raining. Again.

“No, I’m coming home. I’m going to find the son of a bitch that was driving that car,” said Deanna.

“Damn, well, I assumed you would, so I booked you a flight with Northwest. It gets into the city at 4:45 this afternoon.”

“Thanks.”

“There’s something else,” Gabe said. He put down his whiskey and looked over at Ginny shivering on his living room couch.

“What?” said Deanna.

Gabe reconsidered and rubbed his unshaven face.

“Never mind. We’ll talk when you get here. Try to get some sleep, sweetie.”

Gabe hung up softly and looked over at his visitor on the couch. Deanna’s half-sister slept fitfully. He didn’t know how Deanna would take it. A black sister that she never knew existed. What other secrets did Wanda have that now would creep out of the closet? They always do. Every cop knew that. It’s hard to keep secrets because there are always two involved—unless the other one ends up dead. Lord knows Wanda wasn’t the smartest lady in the world, he remembered, but damn, she could sing.

3:15 in the morning, Detroit time. He needed sleep. He walked to his bedroom on the first floor and crashed down on the bed. No use in changing clothes, he had to be at work in four hours. He closed his eyes and blocked out the night.

Deanna paced in her bedroom. She tried to push away the painful memories of Wanda. The good times. Try to remember those. She tried hard. They all came with bittersweet endings. Wait, she had one. The time Wanda took her to Boblo Island, the amusement park on the Detroit River. Wanda had come ahead on her paycheck that month and since it was Deanna’s ninth birthday she decided on an outing. She was sober too—that was worth the memory right there.

Deanna shut her eyes tight, remembering going around the tilt-a-twirl with Wanda and then down the big hundred-foot slide. Wanda’s blonde hair blowing away from her face, showing off those Polish features. Deanna had her father’s hair, brown and straight. She loved looking at Wanda when she laughed, probably as much as the male admirers did walking by them that day.

All was well until Wanda drove them home. She stopped at The Blue Monk to pick up a sweater that she had left there the night before. Deanna waited in the car. And waited and waited, for two hours.

Finally, Deanna went into the bar, knowing she would find a loaded Wanda. But she was wrong, she didn’t find Wanda at the bar. She found her in the back office. Specifically in the back office cot, naked, sleeping with Julian Cassidy, the assistant manager, who was

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also passed out. Deanna walked home. Christ, her mom was a head case.

Deanna started packing. She didn't have to notify her employer because she had lost her last two jobs. Lack of enthusiasm was a resounding theme in her bosses' departure speeches. She only had a few thousand left from the severance package she was forced to take from the Detroit Police Department, after they canned her on a bogus charge of entering a premise without a warrant, her first and only violation that was a matter of interpretation on a timing technicality.

No one had ever heard of the police union not being able to defend, or at least lessen a punishment for a minor infraction. Her union steward, Lonnie Monroe, and her precinct leader, Commander Dan Kavanaugh, were often in her dreams as she took them both down with her Glock G21SF automatic pistol—the one they confiscated from her when she left the precinct building. Damn, she missed that gun.

Deanna looked around her apartment. She picked up the clothes that were lying on the floor and started a load of laundry. There were no animals she had to take care of in her life. Maybe she could get a dog when she returned. The idea made her feel good for about five minutes.

She walked down to her kitchen and looked at her dog calendar hanging on the refrigerator. Deanna never had a dog, but she felt by buying the calendar it got her one step closer to taking the step toward pet ownership.

Deanna opened the freezer, grabbed a pint of Haagen-Dazs coffee ice cream and a spoon and began to stress-eat. It was a coping mechanism she started when she was hired into the police force. It didn't do too much damage to her 5'4" petite frame, her daily run kept her body in balance.

She glanced at the date, July 23rd, and then glanced to Saturday, July 25th. From her experience as a cop, Deanna knew she had to optimize the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours to find the driver. Clues, evidence and memories fade after two days. Leads go cold, people move on and cars get repaired and fixed undercover.

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Deanna drove to the Portland International Airport, went through security uneventfully, and boarded a plane headed to Detroit. She took a window seat and put on her sunglasses. She didn't look forward to the five-hour flight. Too much time for thinking.

She ordered two Bloody Marys. By the time the flight attendant had swung around with the snack cart she had ordered two more drinks. As the plane crossed over the Continental Divide she was in a restless sleep. Any kind of sleep was okay with Deanna and all her sleeps were disturbed anyway.

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