

A non-stop violent roller coaster ride has non-conventional detective Seth Daniels head-to-head with the worst Chicago has to offer, jeopardizing his clandestine FBI mission to rid Chicago of the mob known as the LaSalle Street Crew.

Double Identity

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DOUBLE IDENTITY

A Mystery Novel by Charley Webb

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She resembled Julia Roberts, maybe a little more exotic; captivating facial features above a nice long neck. Fine, dark brown hair, high cheekbones, a generous mouth, and a delicate nose. Long, slim, tan legs; good legs.

The thinness of her body said she might have been just a teenager. The expertly applied makeup, the professionally painted and manicured nails, her expensive sandals, leather skirt and cashmere sweater said she was maybe in her mid twenties.

She was wearing seven earrings in her left ear, mostly studs, and all of them gold. Just one in her right, a small diamond. She was pierced in at least three other visible locations. Her bare mid-section revealed a small gold ring through her navel; another, a twin, in her nose, and the third was a smaller, ruby-studded hoop through her left eyebrow. There almost certainly had been a fourth through her right eyebrow, but a small, dark, round hole, probably a nine-millimeter, had unceremoniously replaced it. The exit wound had removed most of the back of her head.

Lying on the cold, deserted Chicago street, a pool of dark blood draining into the gutter; it was Sunday morning, four a.m., and the life was totally gone from Victoria Browning.

The streets were empty and quiet, except for the far off sound of an approaching street-cleaning truck back over on Ohio, or maybe Ontario Street. It was still and cool in the pre-dawn October air.

Sirens approached and soon the flashing lights began to bounce off the neighboring buildings on Grand Avenue.

Archie Sullivan stood silently in the shadows of the parking lot under the Kennedy Expressway on Kingsbury and Ohio. Looking directly south, the lights of the Holiday Inn and the Merchandise Mart were visible above the crowded inner city skyline in the background. He had concealed himself well in the shadows behind a concrete pillar, and watched as the police and rescue vehicles arrived. Someone, obviously, had heard the gunshot and called 911.

Now, Archie was shivering in the damp morning air, thinking about what he had witnessed, not knowing what course of action he should take. It wasn't supposed to end this way. His undercover job was invented for the collection of information, tape recordings, basic evidence that the feds could use to build their case. Now, he would have to testify, his cover would be blown, and his life would never be the same.

Now what? Archie thought, Can I risk exposing myself to this monstrous bastard, and blowing all my efforts? Or, do I just walk away, and keep working at it until the job is finished?

Archie needed time to think. He quietly stepped back deeper into the darkness of the parking lot, slipped through the small north gate, pulled his collar up and walked down Kingsbury to Ontario, then hastily jogged a block east to where he had parked his car, across from Reeza's. He got in, started the engine, and pulled out into the early morning darkness and headed north.

The Comfort Inn on Diversey Street became Archie's home for the rest of the night. Needing a secure place to hide and think, he'd driven quickly away from the murder scene, up LaSalle, over to Clark, wandering through Lincoln Park neighborhoods, not thinking about where he was going, just wanting to get as far away from the scene as possible.

When he had reached Diversey, he'd found the hotel, parked in the adjoining lot and checked in.

For the past eleven and a half months, Archie had occupied a dinky apartment on Morgan Street, north of 18th, a few blocks from the South Water Market, where he'd held a menial job on the docks of a warehouse while infiltrating the mob. Now, even at 5 a.m. and with not a wink of sleep, he was pacing the floor of his hotel room, his head spinning, running quickly, but thoroughly, through his options. The one that weighed heaviest on his mind, for the moment, was to continue to lay low, and be sure he'd thought it *all* the way through before doing anything else.

He walked across the room, grabbed a cold beer from the mini-bar, opened it, and paced some more. Within five minutes, he'd emptied the beer and fetched another, then sat on the edge of the bed, staring ahead into the mirror above the desk. He detested what he saw. He'd become a scruffy bum and was way beyond being tired of how it made him feel. Now, not only was he scruffy, lonely, and tired; he was also scared.

He continued to play over in his head the scene he'd witnessed: the car pulling up Kingsbury Street, as expected, at the entrance of Victoria's condo building, the River Loft Condos. Archie had thought to himself how out-of-sorts this scene had been, since he knew from past experience, as one of his lackeys, that Lucky Bottesini himself never picked Victoria up or dropped her off, preferring instead to have one of his boys chauffeur her to him whenever he wanted. Bottesini only came by her apartment personally on Saturday nights, or early Sunday mornings, for a quickie.

Archie had watched the too casual, drug-induced swagger as Lucky got out of the car, walked around and just like a gentleman, opened the passenger door. He had looked all around to be sure no one was in sight, took her by the arm as if

helping her to her feet, and as casually as scratching an itch, he'd reached inside his coat and brought out the Baretta nine millimeter Parabellum, placed it against Victoria's forehead, and before she could flinch, pulled the trigger. As he did, he let go of her, Victoria dropping like a sack of potatoes, her life evaporating before she hit the sidewalk.

Archie heard the words spill out of Lucky's mouth, "Stupid bitch, that's the last time you'll pull that shit on me."

Figuring he'd replayed that scene in his mind enough for the time being, Archie drained the last of his beer, stood up and started for the mini-bar, then again caught his reflection in the mirror. The sight of this bum he had come to despise once again reminded him of how he'd gotten involved in the undercover operation, through an old contact in the FBI.

Archie had become acquainted with Special Agent Ross Bingham while attending workshops at the FBI Academy in Quantico. Bingham had hired him for several simple contract assignments over the past few years. Then, just over twelve months ago, Bingham had called and recruited him onto the Chicago team. In his time since Quantico, Bingham had been elevated from "Special Agent" to that of "Special Agent in Charge" of the Chicago office of the FBI. He coordinated the organized crime unit and specifically, was personally heading up the operation code-named, *Crew Cut*.

Archie's thoughts wandered back to the discussions they'd shared about the operation. Bingham had said, "Your job has only one objective: to gather information about organized crime."

"How do I do that without getting myself whacked?"

"We create an identity for you."

"And?"

"We'll furnish everything you need, social security number, driver's license, the works. You just have to get used

to using a new name. We'll set up a contact who'll help you get a job near the neighborhood where you'll be working."

And that's how Archie Sullivan came to be.

"And what specifically do you expect me to do?"

"You'll keep a diary of contacts and conversations, places and times. Then, when the time is right, you may wear a wire to help gather incriminating evidence."

"And I can remain anonymous."

"Right, you're contracted in the capacity of a confidential informant only. You'll work as a sub-contractor to the Bureau, like you have in the past."

"I know that part, I've played that role before, but it was simpler. I've never had to testify."

"You shouldn't need to this time either, unless perhaps it's in front of a Grand Jury. But that would only be to verify authenticity of evidence, like the recordings."

"So I'll never have to be named publicly?"

"No. You should never have to fear retribution. We'll get you out before anyone suspects anything."

What really mattered to Archie at the moment was his awareness that he may have just become a "cooperating witness", rather than just a C.I. Now if he had to testify, he would be labeled "mole", or "informer", or "rat". At best, that could be disastrous, and at worst, deadly.

He looked at the bedside clock; it was five of five.

Sunday morning.

He picked up the phone and called Special Agent in Charge, Ross Bingham.

It was time to wake his ass up.

2

“Why in hell would he kill her?”

“I have no idea. Maybe she looked at him cross ways, shit, who knows.”

“What could he have been thinking, though, killing her right in front of her own condo?”

Though he was listening to Agent Bingham, Archie’s brain was working at “warp speed”, and the beer was getting in the way. He paced the hotel room, dragging the phone cord behind him, thinking of options, alternatives, and possibilities, all the while trying his best to concentrate on one item at a time; however, a thousand other potential problems kept interrupting his thought processes.

“He’s so arrogant,” Archie said, taking a moment before continuing. “He probably figured that if the cops connected her to him, they would think it was a hit, some kind of retribution. Somebody trying to get even with him.”

“Arrogant? I vote for ignorant,” Bingham quipped.

“What do you want me to do?” Archie asked. “Do we need to meet and write a report of what I saw?”

“I’m writing it as we speak,” Bingham replied. “I’ll include it in our file notes.”

“I’m freaked out over this whole mess, Ross.”

“Relax, take it easy. As long as no one saw you, there’s no problem.”

Archie’s mind raced through each scene back on the street, wondering if there was any possibility that he had been seen. There had been only a handful of people out at that hour,

and he was sure he had not been spotted by anyone he knew from the time he'd left his car parked on Ontario Street until he'd returned after the shooting. Bingham remarked, "So what, even if you had been spotted, you haven't squealed on Lucky, and as long as he hasn't been arrested, then no one's going to be the wiser."

"This is just too scary for me to deal with. I wish I hadn't even been there."

"What *were* you doing there, anyway?"

"I was waiting for Lucky. He usually shows up there sometime late on Saturdays, Sunday mornings."

"And then what?"

"My plan was to wait and see if he showed like he usually does. He usually only stays maybe an hour. Then, when he came out of the condo, I would be waiting beside his car. I wanted to report to him on the delivery."

"What delivery?" Bingham asked.

"That's right, I haven't talked to you. I dropped twenty-five g's for him."

"How did that come about?"

"I guess Lucky had decided he was going to test me. He gave me twenty-five grand to deliver to the local precinct captain for this month's protection."

Bingham whistled. "Progress," he said, referring to Archie's having earned more trust rapidly as a loyal member of the LaSalle Street Crew.

"If I was ever going to become a made guy, I needed Lucky to take me to see his old man."

"You figure this was going to do it?"

"That's what I inferred from what Lucky said when he gave me the delivery. He kinda' hinted at it."

Within the Crew, Archie's client list had grown to over a hundred "juice loan" borrowers in little more than seven months. He was now the crew's top producer, and Lucky, along

with his father, the crew boss, loved him for his productivity. If they were to bestow on him the title, “Made Member”, it would give him the right to participate in mob profits over and above the income he’d been earning from the street loans and bets he carried. This would also give him even more opportunity to gather evidence for the FBI on an even higher level.

“If anyone asked what you were doing there,” Bingham said, “tell the truth. Tell them that you were waiting to talk to Lucky about the money drop.”

“But if they know I saw it . . .” Archie said, letting it trail off, while he paced the length of the hotel room once again.

“Why would they care?” Bingham said. “They trust you, right?”

“Sure they trust me. As much as they trust anyone, but that isn’t much.”

“First of all, you’re worrying about something that probably won’t happen.”

“Yeah, but if it does . . .”

“Relax, Archie.”

“Whether they like me or not, I’m a witness. And, they don’t like witnesses when they whack someone.”

“Two more weeks, *max*, and hopefully we’ll have all we need,” Bingham said.

“You’re not listening to me! What about this . . . this murder I witnessed tonight?!” Archie demanded, sounding off at Bingham. “Can’t *that* help shorten the process?”

“Of course it could. In fact, more than we could ever have hoped for, but you’re so close to having what we need on Israel. I hate to stop now.”

“Oh man,” Archie sighed, pissed at Bingham’s tenacity.

“Lay low for a couple of days. Then, once the dust settles and Lucky sobers up, you can make your move.”

“What if the Chicago cops pick him up? Sure as hell they can connect him to Victoria.”

“They won’t be able to hold him without evidence or a witness, and you said no one else was around.”

“Somebody called the cops.” Archie carried the phone across to the mini-bar and fished out another Budweiser.

“Sure, somebody had to have heard the shot. But witnesses?”

“No, it was dead quiet. There wasn’t a single light on in any of the condos.” He popped the top.

“You drinking? It’s five-thirty in the morning!”

Archie shrugged, gulped down several swallows of beer, but didn’t say anything.

Bingham continued. “Even if they pick him up, they won’t be able to hold him. He’s smart enough to ditch the gun and he’ll have an alibi.”

“You can count on that. He’ll have ten witnesses who’ll swear they were with him all night.”

“Okay, so then in a couple of days, you go see his old man, and see if you can finish it.”

Archie just listened, draining some more of his beer, thinking it all through.

“You told me that once you reported back to Lucky about the drop, you thought he’d take you to see Israel, right?”

“Yeah, but . . .”

“But what?” Bingham asked.

“If they suspect anything at all, they might start patting me down. If they find the wire, I’m toast. They’d kill me on the spot.”

“So, leave it off, see what happens. When you feel like things are cooling down, then wear it. All you have to do is get through the next week or so.”

“It’s not about getting through the next week, Ross! It’s about getting a face-to-face with the old man. Now, with what just happened, that could take a lot longer. And if I can’t get him on tape, then I’d have to testify.”

“Archie?”

“Yeah?”

“Now that you’ve witnessed this murder, you *will* have to testify.”

Archie was quiet. Then he let out a low moan.

“I think you’re overreacting.”

“No!” he barked. “You don’t know these guys like I do! This is about staying alive! If I’m going to continue to do this, I’m gonna’ need somebody watching my back!”

“We don’t have time to get someone assigned to watch you. And, if we did, that could raise suspicions.”

“I don’t want to do this alone. There must be some way.”

“Listen, with all the terrorism and the budget issues, I’m fortunate that I have anyone left at all for this project. My manpower shortage is one reason we hired you, remember?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Is there anyone you know,” Bingham asked. “That you can get to shadow you, watch your tail?”

“Not here.” He thought about it for a moment. “I know somebody, . . . from Michigan.”

“Is he available?”

Archie stood silently for a minute . . . “Probably.”

“He’d need to blend in, look like he belonged.”

“Yeah, . . . he’d probably blend in better than anyone you could plant.”

“How’s that?”

“He’s just real.” Archie said confidently, draining the last of his Budweiser.

“Real?” Bingham asked.

“Street-smart like you can’t imagine. Put him on a barstool in the neighborhood and he looks like he’s always been there.”

"Sounds like what you need. Just remember, he works for you, not us."

"Yeah."

"He have a name?"

"Wolf, Johnny Wolf. Wise as the day is long. Old, old friend. Full-blooded Chippewa Indian."

"He's Indian, yet you say he'll blend in?"

"Trust me. He can blend in like no one you know."

"He a P.I.?"

"No, not a P.I."

"What *does* he do for a living?"

"Nothing," Archie said.

"Nothing?"

"Never has."

"How's he earn a living?"

"Oh, he makes a living. He's a *speculator*." Archie grinned as he intoned the word.

"Speculator?"

"Yeah," Archie repeated. "He could trade you out of your shorts, make a profit right in front of you, and make you feel good about it."

"Sounds like a character."

"You have no idea."

"You think you can get him to come."

"Most likely."

"Let me know. We can voucher expenses for him. Then, the minute you get to the old man, we'll take you out."

"Can you fix up a little I.D. for him?"

"Yeah. Tell me what you need."

Picking the phone back up, he dialed the number from memory. Johnny Wolf's hushed, suspicious voice answered, "Lo."

"Twenty after twelve," Archie responded. It was an old personal greeting, one that Johnny had invented, signifying that no matter the actual time, it was late enough in the day to imbibe.

"You can say that again!" boomed Johnny, immediately recognizing his friend's voice and the greeting. "What's up, Seth?"

"A lot, but no time to talk about it now. And by the way, the name's "Archie."

"Archie?" Johnny said, skeptically. "What's up with the alias?"

"Archie Sullivan," he responded. "The FBI gave it to me." His real name was Seth Aaron Daniels. Born in Ohio, educated at Ohio State and the University of Michigan, he was a veteran of both the Ohio and Michigan State Police forces. He'd been happily involved in private work until the FBI recruited him for this undercover assignment.

"Doin' some undercover work, I `spect?"

"Yeah, and I'm in a bind."

"Sounds serious, Seth."

"I'm in some deep shit."

"You need ole' Johnny's help."

"Yeah, I could use it, but this is real ugly stuff with some real bad people. You up for it?"

"Seth, when'd you ever know me that I wasn't up for it?"

Johnny seldom used more words than necessary, except names, which he generally used to excess. His speech was moderate to slow. His hair was gray and pulled into a small ponytail fastened with a rubber band. His size, voice, and mannerisms were strikingly similar to Chief Dan George, the old Hollywood actor.

During Seth's rookie year with the State Police, Johnny and Seth had met while Seth was investigating the theft of some

racehorse equipment from Johnny's barn. Seth had attempted to take the theft report from Johnny, though he had a hard time understanding his garbled speech. Johnny admitted he'd been pulling a good while on a bottle of ginger brandy that morning, something that Seth figured was a regular ritual with this fellow.

After surveying the alleged crime scene, Seth had noted that there were numerous items that common sense would say a thief should have taken, leading him to suspect that Johnny might have been into some less-than-honest dealings. So occasionally, Seth would stop by unannounced, on the premise that he was reporting on the progress of the investigation. The most serious thing Seth could ever catch Johnny doing was hiding half pints of peppermint schnapps or ginger brandy from his wife. Even though the investigation into the theft never turned up anything, Johnny was satisfied, since he had a police report to turn in to his insurance company.

"Where you at, Seth?"

"Chicago."

"Dandy. Close by Maywood Park, I hope."

"We won't have time for any horse races."

"You take all the fun out of it, Seth."

"Can you get down here right away?"

"Sure, Seth. Take me a little while to make some arrangements."

"Come as soon as you can."

"I'll crank up the old Dodge and head on down. We'll uncork one when I get there."

"Got a pencil? I'll tell you where I'm at."

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